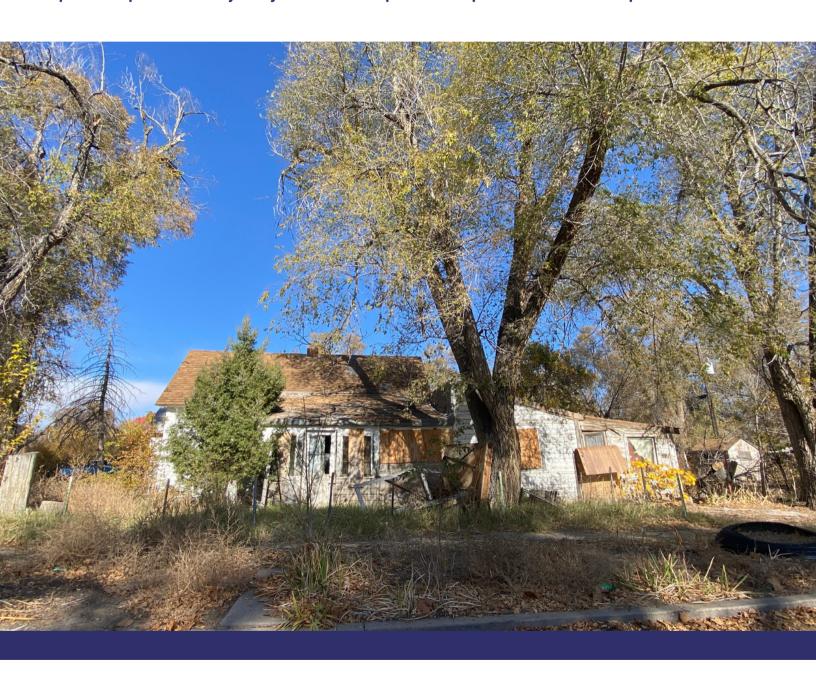
2021 SOUTHEAST COLORADO UNHOUSED COUNT

Prepared & presented by Project Moxie in partnership with Total Concept







BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

This project is in direct response to a growing number of persons experiencing housing instability and homelessness across the southeastern Colorado region.

Conversations with service providers beginning in early 2021 led us to identify a critical gap in this area of the state—namely, a coordinated effort to quantify how many individuals were experiencing homelessness in the region on any given night.

In order to more concisely grasp the true need within the area, a homeless count and needs assessment were conducted on November 10, 2021 between 3:30am and 8:30am local time. Along with the count, our team conducted a regional review focusing on dilapidated and/or abandoned homes, interviews with service providers, park rangers, police and fire departments, and direct surveying of the unhoused.

Finally, on the morning of November 10, we asked area service providers to provide a real-time number of how many unhoused neighbors were being served through their organization. This data included individuals who were in detoxification beds, motels, shelters, individuals sleeping in vehicles, and those identified as having nowhere other than uninhabitable or outdoor locations to live.

This report explains the methodology and design of the count and associated activities as well as training and deployment of volunteers. Data collected is presented alongside a brief overview of next-steps and recommendations for the broader community as it pertains to addressing the complex and persistent issue of rural homelessness.



DEFINITIONS

The following terms and concepts are used in this report and/or informed the research that generated this report. Establishing a shared understanding of common terms and their definitions is helpful whenever engaging the subject of homelessness.

Convenience sampling: A type of non-probability sample in which people are samples because they are convenient sources of data for researchers. For this project, the sample survey population was approached and engaged without a formal attempt at randomization. However, the survey sites were intentionally selected to capture a variety of segments of the unhoused population.

Unsheltered homelessness: When a person's primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned buildings, bus, train station, outside, etc.

Housing insecure: This term refers to the families identified by the school district as qualifying for McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act services. McKinney Vento services are for children and families who are homeless or who do not have a stable living situation (for example, a family residing in a low-cost hotel or automobile, or multiple families living in a single apartment).



Episodic homelessness: A state in which a person has experienced three episodes of homelessness within a single calendar year.

Situational homelessness: The status of being forced to live without housing due to a specific emergency such as a natural disaster, job loss, or death of a primary income earner. In the event of a disaster, temporary shelter may be set up for individuals to seek immediate refuge.

Chronic homelessness: Per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), this term refers to an adult with a disabling condition or a family with at least one adult member with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

Sheltered homeless: Individuals living in a supervised public or privately-operated shelter designated to provide a temporary living arrangement that includes congregate shelters, transitional housing and hotels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state or local governmental programs.

METHOD, DESIGN, & RATIONALE

The count and surveying activities were devised collaboratively with community stakeholders and service providers. In addition to quantifying the number of unhoused in the region, we sought to understand the underlying causes of homelessness, where the unhoused are living, what services are being accessed, what barriers exist regarding obtaining and retaining housing, and what resources people in the community need to become stably housed. For the purpose of this data collection, the HUD definition of unsheltered homelessness was utilized. According to its website, "HUD considers individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds) as 'unsheltered homeless.'"

Rural homelessness presents unique challenges when it comes to data collection. In this case, Rocky Ford and the surrounding area contain many abandoned buildings and houses that were identified as locations where unhoused reside, but are not safe enough to enter.

With limited data regarding homelessness in the area, a strategic tally count was conducted in order to obtain a basic quantitative data point to illustrate need, recognizing the inherent limitations of this method. Alongside the tally count, focused interviews and surveying were completed in order to provide qualitative data. A further discussion of the tally count methodology is included on page 6.

Planning and Discussions

The following individuals were present for planning meetings for this assessment:

- Steve Cordova (ED, Total Concept)
- Jim Collins (Adult Services, Otero County DHS)
- Nancy King (Director of Development, SEHG)
- Sarah Dillon (ED, Tri-County Family Care Center)
- Joey Krantz (Facilities Director, SEHG)
- Shannon Wallace (City Manager, Rocky Ford)
- Brooke Leonard (Arkansas Valley Resource Center)
- Rev. Marty Lee (Pastor, Rocky Ford First UMC)
- Sharon Barber (ED, Las Animas Helping Hands) via Zoom
- David Book (Dept. of Corrections) via Zoom
- Ray Gonzales (Rocky Ford Fire Chief) via Zoom

Through conversations with the above individuals, locations were defined where unhoused residents had been known to live. It should be noted that a regional count and needs assessment had not been completed prior to the data presented in this report.



It was clear to stakeholders that there was a need for assistance for those experiencing domestic violence, individuals coming out of jail, individuals aging out of foster care, individuals with disabilities, individuals struggling with mental health issues, individuals who found themselves unemployed, individuals who could not afford housing, individuals who need assistance with safety net obtainment, and individuals in need of basic living support outside of housing (food, water, clothing).

This group also identified that many individuals were living in remote areas, while others were taking shelter in crumbling and abandoned housing across the region. Many of the providers and leaders noted there was a significant impact from Fort Lyon, a supportive residential community, and that many unhoused individuals leave Fort Lyon for one reason or another and then find themselves in need of basic human needs within this rural area.

Outside of the main regional discussions, a discussion with Fort Lyon occurred on Thursday, November 2, 2021. The Fort Lyon representative stated that they did not believe that homelessness was an issue in and around the proximity of Fort Lyon.

Challenges Identified Prior to Assessment

There are many challenges in any homeless count, especially when implemented in a rural community. While homeless populations in urban areas tend to concentrate around homeless services, many homeless individuals and families reside in outlying county areas that are not easily accessible. For this tally count, multiple locations across the county were identified and thus multiple teams were deployed to these areas within a small window of time to avoid duplication.

We must also consider that homeless populations include numerous difficult-to-count subsets such as:

- Chronically homeless individuals who may or may not access shelter services
- Persons living in vehicles
- · Persons who are unhoused with children and fear having to turn their children over to CPS
- Homeless youth who tend to keep themselves less visible than homeless adults
- Homeless individuals who live in isolated rural and wilderness areas
- · Homeless individuals who sleep in unfit and unsafe structures
- Homeless individuals residing on private property

Assumptions Prior to Assessment

As with any study, research, or count of the unhoused population, there are assumptions that are made. For this tally count, we assumed:

- The information gathered by the count and survey will be indicative of responses that would have been given at any other time during the year and is representative of the general diversity of the study area's homeless population.
- The tally count is reasonably indicative of a count that would have been obtained at any other time during the year.

Tally Count

A tally count is being chosen over a traditional registry week due to the time and manpower needed to cover the hundreds of square miles in the region, as well as COVID-19 safety guidelines. This type of count, which has been widely used throughout the pandemic, involves utilization of teams deployed to areas known to have unhoused individuals living in them and conducting a headcount. This style of documentation allows for larger areas to be considered and for a less invasive, more trauma-informed understanding of how many individuals are sleeping outside in a given window of time. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the tally count form.

Interviews & Individual Surveying

Interviews of local service providers, safety officers, educational institutions, and local officials were all completed. These in-depth conversations allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges the region faced in supporting those in need, providing services, and ensuring safety and wellbeing. Interviews also allowed for a more in-depth understanding of what resources and programs direct service providers see a need for in order to continue to try and assist those in need within the area.

Individual surveying was utilized to assist in gaining more in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of those who are unhoused in the Southeastern region of Colorado, and to understand the barriers they face. Surveys were administered by the Project Moxie consulting team and local providers. These surveys were anonymous, but did collect basic demographic information.



TRAINING & DEPLOYMENT

Volunteer Training

Volunteers were required to attend a 1-hour information and training session on homelessness and the basics of a tally count, and this included a discussion on trauma informed care. These training sessions were held via Zoom for convenience of attendance. The techniques and methods that were to be utilized were reviewed during this training session.

Teams

Two-person teams were created to designated areas of the county for the tally count. Each team was color-coded, and was provided with surveys and tally sheets the morning of the count. Prior to deployment, all volunteers were provided with a brief reminder of how to enumerate thoroughly and accurately without disturbing or causing trauma to the unhoused individuals they encounter.

Safety

Every effort was made to minimize potentially hazardous situations. Precautions including the provision of PPE were in place. Law enforcement was notified of pending tally count activity to ensure awareness, and detailed locations and identification of all volunteers were on file.

Street Count Deployment

Deployment efforts occurred between 3:30am and 8:30am. While some urban areas utilize a double count effort, rural communities in Alaska have found that a longer and earlier count is more fruitful. This early morning enumeration strategy was selected in order to avoid a duplicate counting of sheltered homeless individuals. We asked local providers to provide a count from the early morning on the same day. Personal or agency vehicles were used to transport volunteers to and from tally count areas.

A separate tally sheet was used for each identified area. Volunteers were also asked for observational comments, which discuss the cleanliness of the area, safety, etc. Upon return, each team turned in their forms, surveys, and observation comments. A short debrief with each team occurred to gain feedback and input.

Due to significant safety concerns, the Project Moxie team deployed to all abandoned buildings and houses.

Provider Count

Goal

The goal of the shelter and institution count was to gain an accurate count of the number of homeless individuals temporarily housed in shelters and other institutions across the county. This data is vital to gaining an accurate overall count of the homeless population, to understanding where homeless individuals receive shelter, and the percentage of homeless served by local shelters versus the number of homeless not in shelter.

Data Collection

As noted previously, we asked that the count be completed first thing in the morning. In order to ensure an accurate count, the Project Moxie team identified and contacted as many agencies as possible that temporarily house homeless individuals. The support and participation of a broad range of agencies, both public and private, was needed to have a truly complete count. Providers were emailed requesting data from the morning of the count.

Survey Methodology

Surveys were conducted to ensure qualitative data about the homeless community in the County was collected along with the quantitative count. These data sets are usually used for the federal Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance funding application, and are important for future program development and planning. The survey elicited information such as gender, family status, military services, length of homelessness, recurrence of homelessness, usual nighttime accommodations, primary causation of homelessness, and access to services (Appendix B). These were asked as multiple response questions, but remained open ended allowing for surveyed individuals to be as forthcoming as they liked. This data allowed for greater perspective to current issues of homelessness and to the provision and delivery of services.

All surveys were conducted by the Project Moxie consultant team or direct service providers. No self-administered surveys were accepted. Strategic attempts were made to reach individuals in various geographic locations.





Overview of the Area

On November 9, 2021, the Project Moxie team drove around the region, and specifically visited identified locations of unhoused neighbors. In La Junta, 5 unhoused individuals were seen outside. Driving from Rocky Ford to Fort Lyon 2 individuals were seen on CR 85, and 9 unhoused neighbors were seen in Las Animas.

Fort Lyon

The Project Moxie team has heard from many providers and officials across the region that unhoused neighbors from Fort Lyon exit the program into the area. In contrast, a call with Fort Lyon detailed no known knowledge of homelessness in the area immediately surrounding Fort Lyon. When driving around Fort Lyon, no unhoused neighbors were seen directly surrounding Fort Lyon's property.

Park Rangers at the nearby John Martin Reservoir State Park stated that "as many as 15" unhoused neighbors were camping within the reservoir grounds. The park ranger informed us that prior to 2021, fishing area camping was free, and they saw many more unhoused individuals take up longer term stays in the area. It was also noted that while they did not try to disturb anyone at the campground, that they had heard from many that they either left Fort Lyon, or were passing through the area en route to La Junta.

Providers and gas station employees identified "multiple homeless" in the area near Fort Lyon. It was also noted that many utilized outside fixtures to charge phones, while others resided in abandoned homes.

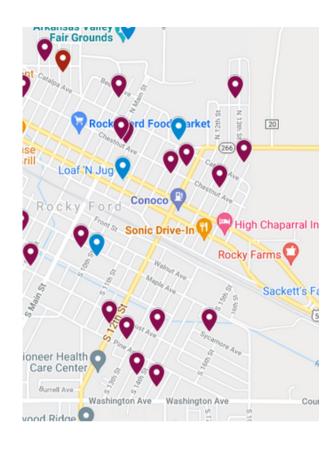
State of Housing

While surveying the region, it was clear that a majority of the households within these rural communities were in various states of disrepair. Many of the homes were clearly not fit for habitation, though t they were occupied. The Project Moxie team noted an average of 2 houses per block that were fully collapsing or abandoned. It was noted to our team that for many homeowners, abandonment is cheaper than selling due to the cost of repairs to simply pass safety inspections. For many of the unhoused throughout the region, these unsafe, collapsing, and dilapidated structures have become a break from the elements.

Unhoused Locations

The Project Moxie team drove each site identified by the providers and leaders within the community. In many of the locations, such as the library, our team was notified that unhoused neighbors were rarely around in the months prior. Multiple times, people identified abandoned buildings and houses as locations for unhoused neighbors. The Project Moxie team identified unhoused individuals, but none were located in the areas previously identified by the collaborative.

In order to ensure an accurate count, and to increase our knowledge of the locations in which unhoused neighbors were residing, the Project Moxie team assigned each volunteer group locations and areas, and asked them to drive their assigned areas. This expanded our reach, and ensured we could pull more accurate and up to date locations.



Tally Count

On November 10th at 3:30am seven volunteers and three Project Moxie team staff met at SouthEast Health Group's location at 400 N. Main in Rocky Ford, CO . Volunteers were each given color coded teams and folders. Folders included contact information, a copy of the tally count training, tally count sheets, and location assignments. Five teams of two deployed to these areas. The orange team and the blue team were the only teams to enter and search abandoned structures due to safety concerns.

Orange Team: La Junta and Rocky Ford-identified abandoned homes by Fire Department, abandoned homes within the area unidentified, abandoned elementary school

Blue Team: Rocky Ford South of Swink Ave, Library Park, Rocky Ford Cemetery, Play Park

Red Team: Rocky Ford North of Swink Ave, Ryan's Pond, Arkansas Valley Fair Grounds, Loaf N' Jug

Purple Team: Town of Swink, 212 Powers Ave, Swink United Methodist, Arkansas Valley SDA Church

Green Team: La Junta West of Colorado Ave & North of 10th, SE Health, Fairview Cemetery, Loaf N' Jug

Tally Totals

Orange Team: 17 identified individuals in abandoned homes, stores, and the elementary school. It is vital to note that abandoned buildings were not fully searched. Identified individuals were visible from porches and windows. This is significant, as this is only a count of what we saw looking in, meaning there are most likely many more in just the locations we observed. This number is probably significantly higher.

Blue Team: 3 identified individuals (1 by the river, 1 person in a car, and 1 person walking in park)

Red Team: 0 identified individuals

Purple Team: 1 man North of Swink in tent (also noted 12 trailers)

Green Team: 0 identified individuals

The results of the tally count showed that with so many available empty structures, unhoused neighbors are choosing to live inside rather than be exposed to the elements. Individuals were found living and sleeping in extremely unsafe conditions. Most of the abandoned houses were full of glass, debris, trash, etc. In addition to abandoned homes and empty stores, there is an abandoned elementary school that was identified to have individuals living within it. The Project Moxie team identified individuals sleeping inside during the count, and then toured the facility after the formal count. It was clear that multiple individuals had been living in the building. In many areas, bins with burned books were visible next to pillows and torn blankets.





The abandoned elementary school in Rocky Ford showed signs of individuals sheltering overnight in multiple rooms throughout the property

Provider Count Total

33 unhoused individuals were identified by service providers. Of these, 6 were minors, 9 were put up in a hotel, and four were in a car. The others were logged as unhoused on the day of the count without a place to go. While we technically cannot count these alongside our 21 identified unhoused from the tally count, it shows that there are significantly higher numbers of people living on the street, and we can predict that they are finding abandoned areas to utilize for shelter.

PROVIDER COUNT TOTAL: 33





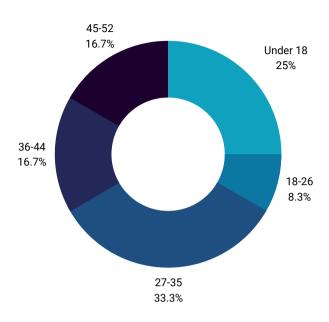
Abandoned and dilapidated houses like the ones pictured here are numerous throughout the region.

Survey Results

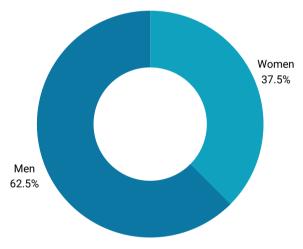
8 surveys were completed. As this region is remote, identifying individuals to complete the survey was incredibly difficult. Survey administration during the tally count was not conducted to avoid disturbing or causing trauma to individuals who were sleeping or who had sought shelter. Outreach for surveys is ongoing, and we hope to hold an event where we can collect more survey data in the coming months.

- 1 respondent served in the army previously
- · 0 respondents identified as transgender
- 4 respondents lived by themselves
- 1 respondent lived with a spouse
- 2 respondents lived with children
- All respondents found that assistance with housing navigation would be helpful, and noted their inability to afford housing in the region
- None of the respondents had accessed shelter in the last 30 days
- 50% of respondents had not previously experienced homelessness
- 5 respondents had been unhoused for less than a year
- 1 respondent had been unhoused for around 1 year
- 1 respondent had been unhoused for 2 years
- 1 respondent was unsure how long they had been unhoused
- · 6 respondents identified the loss of a job as a condition that led them to homelessness
- 3 respondents identifies eviction as a contributing factor to their homelessness
- 1 respondent identified drugs and alcohol use as a contributor
- 2 respondents attributed fleeing domestic violence as a contributor
- 1 respondent identified mental health struggles as a contributing factor
- 2 respondent identified jail as a contributing factor
- 2 respondents noted the cost of living contributed to their homelessness
- All respondents noted affordability was a significant barrier to them obtaining housing
- 4 respondents noted bad credit as a barrier to housing
- 5 respondents noted that low to no income was a barrier to housing
- 2 respondents noted that a conviction record was a barrier to them finding housing
- 5 respondents had accessed free meals in the last 30 days
- 3 respondents had accessed health services in the last 30 days
- 1 respondent was receiving safety net food programs
- 2 respondents did not know what services were available in the area
- All respondents identified housing assistance as a key service that they needed for stability
- 6 respondents identified work placement assistance as a service they needed for stability
- 7 respondents cited food resource assistance as a service they needed for stability
- 2 respondents worked at least 30 hours a week
- 6 respondents were unemployed
- 4 respondents had functioning cell phones that were charged either in a car or at gas stations

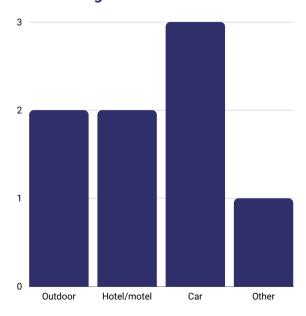
Age of surveyed unhoused

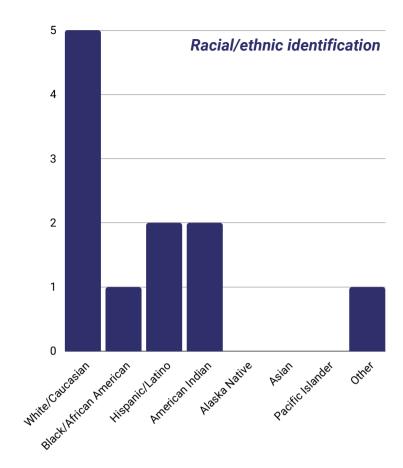


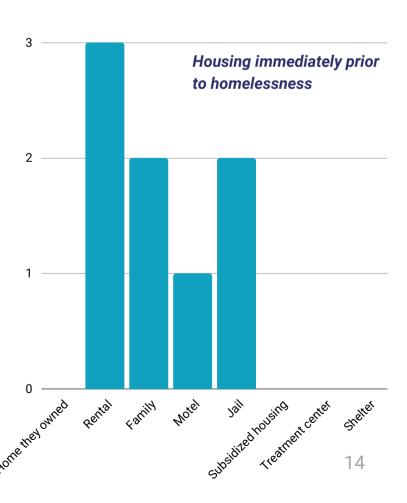
Gender of surveyed unhoused



Current living situation







SUGGESTIONS & NEXT STEPS

The Southeastern region of Colorado, including Las Animas, Rocky Ford, La Junta, and Fort Lyon face many of the struggles commonly associated with rural homelessness. Many households in these areas are faced with few job opportunities, low available incomes, lower educational attainment, high rates of childhood poverty, and overall poorer health compared to more inhabited areas of the state. Many individuals, families, and children throughout this region are faced with dilapidated housing and food deserts.

The results of the count and surveying lead us to recommend the following next steps for the community as well as potential resources needed to implement.

- 1. **Further tally counts in other areas of the region.** This effort required consultant support for five months and a budget of \$20,000. Tally counts provide critical data, but they also require dedicated resources.
- 2. **Group listening sessions on needs of the unhoused.** This would be best implemented in partnership with service providers, and is less onerous than a tally count initiative. This kind of input can be gathered frequently as part of a program's regular design and evaluation protocols.
- 3. Formation of a coalition of providers and leaders across the region to discuss needs, ideas, and case conferencing. Coalitions are effective when they have some dedicated staff. The region would benefit from a FTE position committed to managing a coalition and spearheading new initiatives based on resources available now.
- 4. Participate in how the region is involved in the Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoS CoC) moving forward to ensure future involvement in local homeless service planning and coordination efforts.
- 5. **Utilize an HMIS system.** A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness. Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards. If a position can be created for the coalition, that individual may also be able to support the region in trainings on use of HMIS data systems.
- 6. Once these basic community resources and additional program capacity are in place, the region should **revisit Built for Zero as a potential strategy** to increase the number of unhoused accessing housing. The solution to homelessness for many will be access to permanent supportive housing. As such, the region should continue to partner to create a pipeline of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) in the region.

APPENDIX A: TALLY COUNT FORM

SE Colorado Tally Count November 10, 2021		
Full Legal Name: Email Address: Phone Number:		
Location:		
Time of Arrival: Time of Departure:		
TALLY CHARTS		
Men		
Women		
Undetermined		
Please total up your tally marks at the end of Men: Women: Undetermined Gender:	the count:	
Number of children on site		
Please total up your tally marks at the end of Children:	f the count:	
THIS FORM IS DOUBLE SIDED		

LOCATIONS	
Tent	
Exposed (sleeping bag, blankets, on ground, etc.)	
Car	
Other	
lease total up your tally marks at the end of th	e count:
ent: xposed: ar: ther:	
omments I the space below, please describe the area(s) you ext to a bank, in a park, at a gas station? Was the ems like tents, sleeping bags, coats, etc.? Were proposed to the proposed formulation of the proposed formulation o	area clean? Were people in need of basic

THIS FORM IS DOUBLE SIDED

APPENDIX B: UNHOUSED SURVEY TOOL

Survey Questions For SE Colorado Unhoused Tally Count

Location:_____

e) Street family

f) Other family members

1)	How old are you? (Please make written note if age is 17 and under)		
	a)	18-26	
	b)	27-35	
	c)	36-44	
	d)	45-52	
		53-61	
		62-70	
	g)	71-79	
	h)	80-89	
2)	Which	racial/ethnic group do you identify with the most?	
		White/Caucasian	
	b)	Black/African American	
	c)	Hispanic/Latino	
	d)	American Indian/Alaska Native	
	e)	Asian	
	f)	Pacific Islander	
	g)	Other	
3)	What	gender do you identify with?	
	a)	Man	
	b)	Woman	
	c)	Nonbinary	
	d)	Other	
4)	4) Do you identify as transgender?		
	a)	Yes	
	b)	No	
5)	Have you ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces?		
	a)	Yes	
	b)	No	
6)	Who d	o you live with? Check all that apply.	
		Self	
	b)	Spouse/significant other	
	c)	Children (Please note age of children)	
	d)	Parent/legal guardian	

- g) Friends
- h) Other

7) Immediately before you became homeless where were you living?

- a) In a home you owned
- b) In a home your partner owned
- c) In a rental home/apartment
- d) With relatives
- e) In a motel/hotel
- f) In subsidized housing
- g) In jail/prison
- h) In a hospital
- i) In a treatment facility
- j) Other

8) Where do you usually stay at night since you have been homeless?

- a) Outdoors
- b) Uncovered garage
- c) Storage structure
- d) Motel/hotel
- e) A place in a house not normally used for sleeping, like a friend's couch
- f) Emergency shelter
- g) Public facility
- h) Other

9) In the last 30 days have you accessed shelter and housing resources?

- a) Yes, a shelter
- b) Yes, a transitional program
- c) No

10) Is this the first time you have been without a permanent housing situation?

- a) Yes
- b) No

11) How long have you been homeless?

- 12) Where are you from?
- 13) How long have you lived in the area?

14) What do you think is the primary event or condition that led to your homlessness?

- a) Lost job
- b) Evicted
- c) Foreclosure
- d) Alcohol or drug use

- e) Medical problem
- f) Disability
- g) Mental health
- h) Domestic violence
- i) Incarceration
- j) Aging out of foster care
- k) Cost of living
- divorce/separation
- m) Natural disaster
- n) Other

15) What barriers are you facing in obtaining housing? Check all that apply.

- a) Affordability
- b) No income
- c) Inability to do deposit and first month
- d) No housing availability
- e) No transportation
- f) Bad credit
- g) Eviction record
- h) Criminal record
- i) Don't want to
- j) Other

16) What assistance services are you currently utilizing? Check all that apply.

- a) Emergency shelter
- b) Free meals
- c) Bus passes
- d) Job training
- e) Legal assistance
- f) Health services
- g) Shelter day services
- h) Food services (SNAP, WIC)
- i) Disability benefits (SSDI)
- j) VA disability compensation
- k) Veterans benefits
- Social security
- i) Social security
- m) General assistance
- n) Other
- 14) What services would you find helpful to you?
- 15) Are you employed? If so, how many hours a week do you work on average?
- 16) If you are unemployed what is keeping you from getting employment?
- 17) Do you have a working cell phone?
- 18) If you answered yes to the previous question, do you have a place to charge it?