

S U M M A R Y

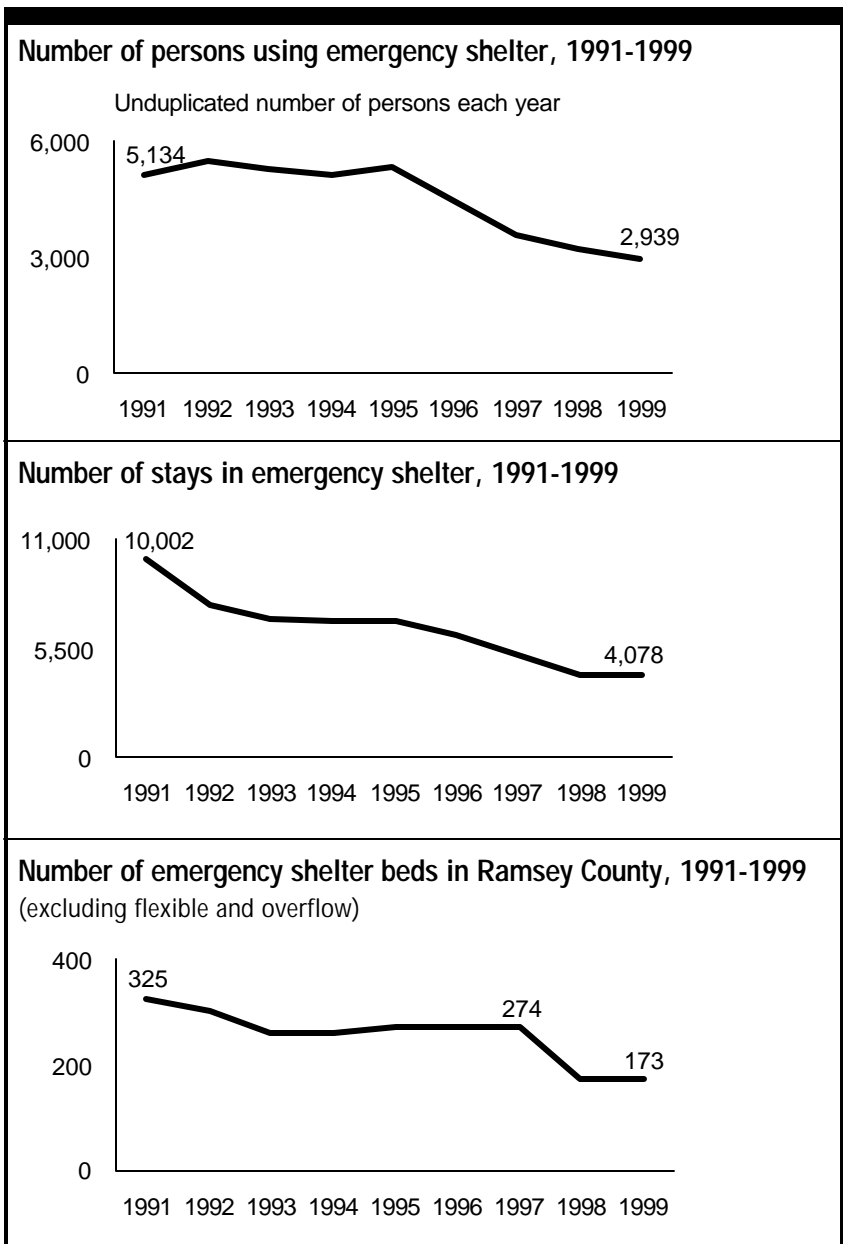
Shelter use in the '90s

Ten-year trends in Ramsey County emergency shelter and transitional housing

Since 1991, shelter providers have collected common data elements about single adults and families who use emergency shelters and transitional housing in Ramsey County, Minnesota.

This summary report puts the 1999 results in perspective by showing trends in shelter use and in the characteristics of shelter users over the past nine years.

Wilder Research Center maintains a database and prepares an annual report for program and policy planning. The annual reports also describe use of shelters for battered women, but these data are not part of the common database because of safety concerns.



Steve Rice

*Housing Information Office,
City of Saint Paul*

The documented drop in shelter use does not square with the perception of those operating the shelters. The shelters are running full - often year around - not just seasonally. Part of the reason for the conflict between the documented drop in numbers and the anecdotal reports is that we have fewer shelter spaces than in past years, in spite of steady demand. Another component is that shelter guests cannot move out of the shelter at the same speed as in past years. They stay longer and fewer new people get into shelter. This second problem reflects the rental market. There are fewer units available at any price because of the influx of new job seekers in the past five years. Relative to the matter of fewer numbers of emergency shelter spaces, decisions have been made in the private and public sectors. Private emergency shelter providers voluntarily reduced their capacity to more manageable levels. Political leaders decided to limit the number of families served.

Emergency shelter use is declining

The total number of persons using emergency shelters was relatively stable during the first half of the decade but has dropped steadily in the past five years to a low of 2,939 in 1999. Moreover, the number of stays in emergency shelters has been dropping steadily throughout the decade. The decreases are largely attributable to fewer beds (reduced capacity) at the biggest men's shelter and a new 30-day Ramsey County residency requirement for families entering shelter.

In 1999, the number of persons using emergency shelters (2,939) was at the lowest level in the 1990s, and the number of stays in emergency shelter (4,078) was at the same low point reached in 1998.

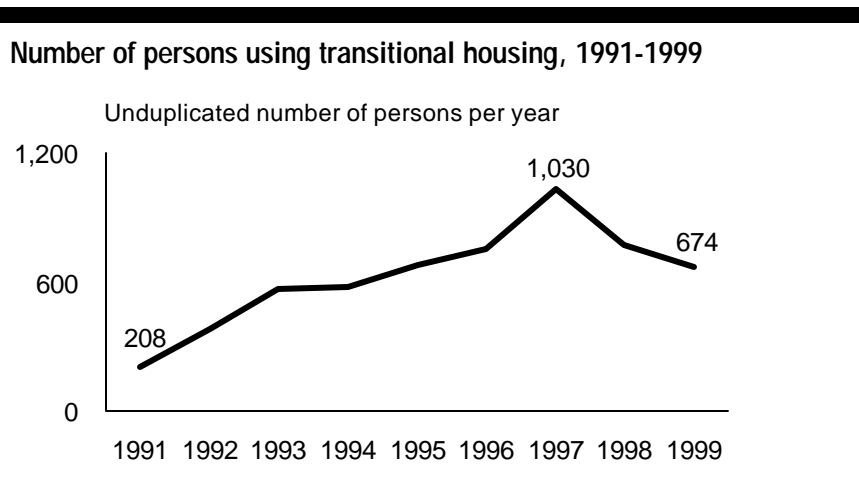
Transitional housing beginning to serve fewer persons

The total number of persons staying in transitional housing increased every year from 1991 to 1997, matching the increases in capacity, but then declined in the past two years.

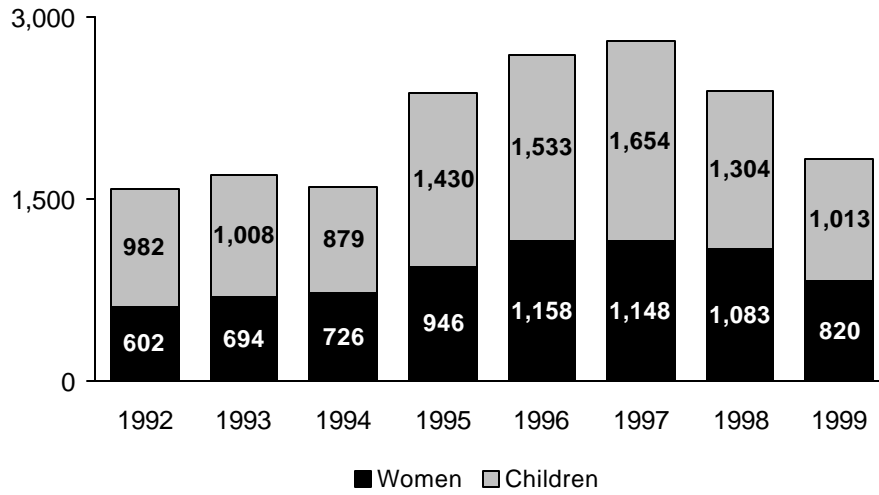
In 1999, 674 persons used transitional housing, down from a high of 1,030 in 1997. The number of women living alone had the biggest drop, from 210 in 1997 to 142 in 1999.

Unduplicated number of persons using emergency shelter and transitional housing

Over the past 10 years, about 30,000 men, women, and children have used shelter in Ramsey County.



Number of women and children using battered women's shelters, 1992-1999



19,434 adults (mostly single men) and 8,235 children have used emergency shelter.

1,885 adults (mostly women) and 1,023 children have used transitional housing.

Fewer people using shelters for battered women

The number of women and children using battered women's shelters also increased each year from 1992 to 1997, but began to decline in 1998.

In 1999, 1,833 women and children used shelters for battered women, down from a high of 2,802 in 1997. (Counts are taken as people exit their shelter stay.)

Since about half of the homeless women who are sheltered in Ramsey County stay in shelters for battered women, it would be helpful to know how many return to that setting, and how often, as well as how many also use emergency shelter or transitional housing. Data that would allow cross-referencing of records and data sets are not available at this time.

Longer average stays in shelter

While fewer persons are using shelters, on average, they are staying longer.

In emergency shelters the average stay in 1999 was 14 days for females alone and 18 days for families.

Helene Freint MPH, Director, Health Care for the Homeless

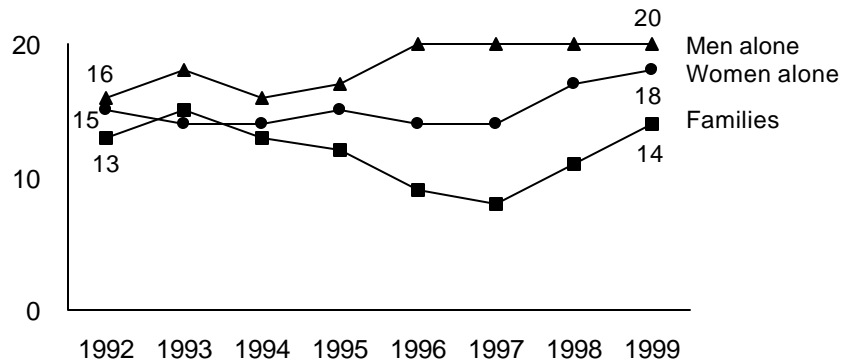
Health Care for the Homeless of Ramsey County has been serving the health care needs of the homeless in St. Paul for 13 years. Our experience indicates that the number of homeless people continues to increase. We visit eight different sites each week, including shelters and drop-in centers. The number of families and the large number of children seen in our clinics point to an increasing problem. It used to be that families would leave emergency shelter before the 30-day limit because they had found housing. But now, homeless advocates dread being asked for housing assistance because there is no housing to offer, and only a few agencies are accepting housing referrals.

Jim Anderson

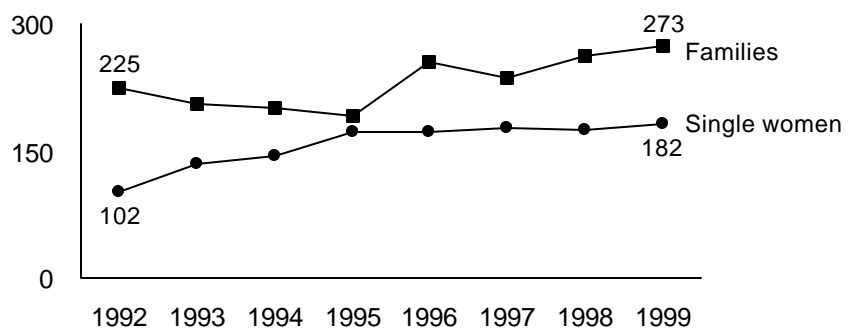
Low Income and Homeless Services Planner, Ramsey County Human Services

At first glance, the data seem to indicate that the need for shelter space and transitional housing is decreasing. This impression is extremely misleading. The critical shortage of affordable rental housing throughout the metro area has created a serious logjam through-out the shelter and transitional housing system. An erosion in the number of emergency beds available, combined with longer stays, means that fewer people are getting served at a time when more and more low income families and single adults are unable to locate any form of permanent housing. The result is more people becoming chronically homeless or very precariously housed. We must continue to develop more emergency shelter capacity without losing sight of our long-term goal of increasing the supply of affordable permanent housing.

Average number of days per year in emergency shelter, 1992-1999



Average number of days in transitional housing, 1992-1999



In transitional housing, based on exits in 1999, adult women stayed about six months and families stayed about nine months. The longer stays also could help explain why fewer persons are being served by the transitional programs.

In shelters for battered women, the average stay was 21 days in 1999, up from 17 days in 1998 and 15 days in 1996 and 1997.

Repeat use of emergency shelter

Most adults who used emergency shelter in the 1990s stayed only once or twice, as the system intends. In 1999, 39 percent of single men, 14 percent of single women, and 15 percent of families returned to shelter in the same year. These proportions have been fairly steady throughout the 1990s.

Long-term programs such as supportive housing, which offers a permanent place to live combined with ongoing support services, might better serve the 100 or so chronic shelter users in Ramsey County.

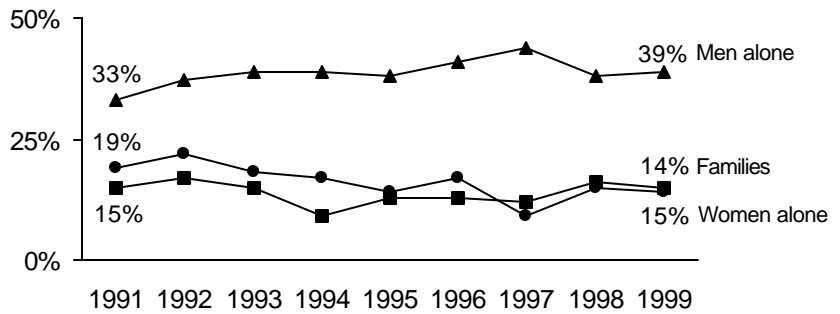
Children in shelters

The number of children in the three types of shelter is also dropping, from a high of 3,229 in 1995 to 2,037 in 1999. Nevertheless, children continue to make up a large proportion of shelter users. In 1999, children made up 55 percent of those in shelters for battered women, 46 percent in transitional housing, and 24 percent in emergency shelters.

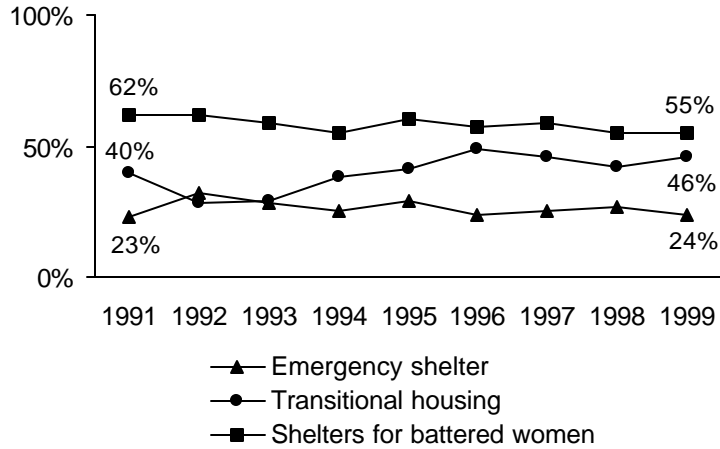
About half of the children in transitional housing and shelters for battered women are of school age (5 and older), a fairly steady proportion throughout the decade.

In 1999, 68 percent of the children in emergency shelter were of school age, up from 61 percent the two previous years and 54 percent before that.

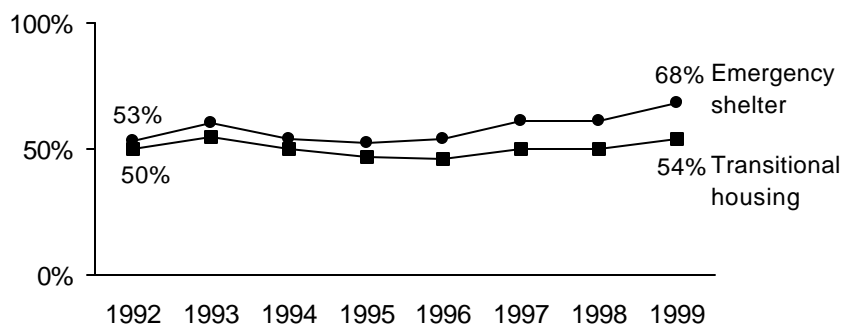
Percent of adults who re-entered Ramsey County shelter within the same year, 1991-1999



Children as a percentage of all people in shelters, 1991-1999



Percentage of children in shelter who were age 5 or older, 1992-1999



Men alone in shelter

Men living alone have been the largest group of shelter users throughout the 1990s, making up about three-quarters of the adults in emergency shelter and about half of all persons in emergency shelter. In transitional housing, men living alone make up about 10 percent of all persons each year. While single men represent the largest segment of emergency shelter users, data that describe their backgrounds, where they come from, and their reasons for seeking shelter are not routinely collected at this time.

Women alone in shelter

Females alone make up about 13 percent of the emergency shelter population and a quarter of the transitional housing population.

In 1999, 62 percent of women alone in emergency shelter were African-Americans, up from about 51 percent over the previous 5 years.

Females alone reporting a stay at a treatment facility within a month of entering transitional housing rose sharply from 3 percent in 1991 to about 40 percent in 1995-97, then dropped back to 33 percent in 1999.

Families in emergency shelter

The number of families in emergency shelter has dropped from a high of 642 in 1992 to 314 in 1999, largely due to a diversion program and residency requirements.

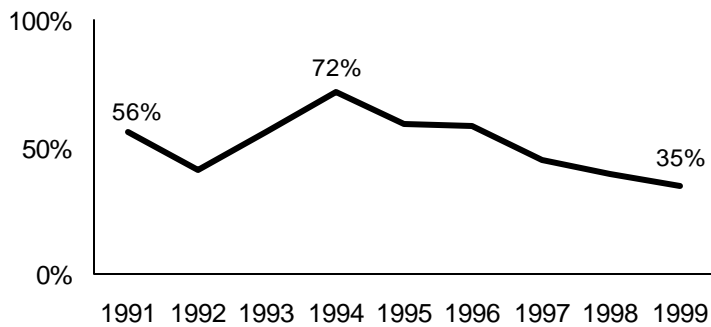
In 1999, 78 percent of adults in families in emergency shelter are African-Americans, up from about 73 percent over the past 5 years.

Some family advocates fear that the new five-year welfare limits and welfare-to-work policies will lead to increased homelessness for families.

Unduplicated count of persons using emergency shelter, 1991-1999						
Year	Total	Men alone	Women alone	Adults with children	Children	Families*
1991	5,134	2,990	451	523	1,170	479
1992	5,475	2,544	386	775	1,770	642
1993	5,253	2,711	316	773	1,453	627
1994	5,105	2,808	408	613	1,276	421
1995	5,284	2,678	415	671	1,520	520
1996	4,439	2,452	378	522	1,087	440
1997	3,599	2,022	238	427	912	358
1998	3,217	1,733	215	390	879	296
1999	2,939	1,654	194	379	712	314

* For this study, a family unit is defined as one or more adults plus one or more children.

Percent of families in emergency shelter receiving general welfare assistance (AFDC, MFIP, or TANF)



The percentage of families with children in emergency shelter reporting general welfare assistance as a source of income (AFDC, MFIP/TANF) dropped from 72 percent in 1994 to 35 percent in 1999.

Fewer people from outside Ramsey County

Another noteworthy shift is where emergency shelter users come from and where they last lived. In the early 1990s, Wilder's annual reports recommended a shift from an emergency focus to a resettlement focus for the increasing numbers of out-of-state persons in shelter, who apparently needed help getting stabilized in their new community. The county did enact a 30-day Ramsey County residency requirement for those entering emergency shelters.

Between 1993 and 1999 there was a gradual decrease in the proportion of adults from outside Minnesota (from 44% to 30%) and last living outside Minnesota (from 34% to 23%).

Affordable housing shortage

The Twin Cities has a severe shortage of lower-priced housing. According to the Family Housing Fund (www.fhfund.org/Research/need.htm), incomes have not kept pace with rent increases. Federal housing programs have been cut back, about 9,000 federally subsidized housing units are at risk of conversion to market-rate rents, and vacancy rates are just over 1 percent. The bottom line: "There are 68,900 renter households with

Margaret Lovejoy Project Home

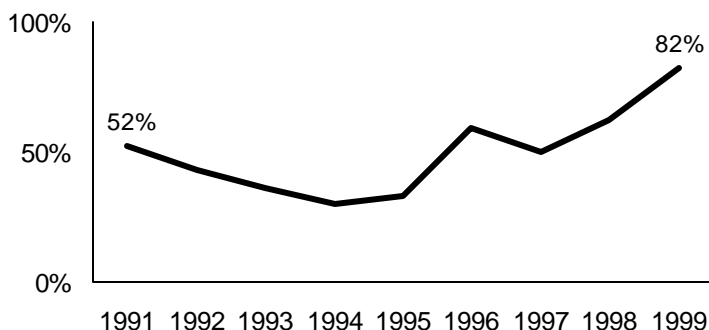
Through Project Home, a number of churches open their spaces for a month at a time to house the overflow from the Ramsey County Shelter. Families come into the church shelter tired, depressed, and angry - a normal reaction for anyone living without permanent housing. Where is affordable housing for a family of five in St. Paul? "Hi! I'm home!" These are the words of a child entering the church shelter for a third evening. Normal family activities occur in the unusual setting of the church overflow shelter. In the emergency overflow shelter program we are seeing larger families staying longer because they have nowhere else to go. In July the Project Home church shelter program, is adding 18 additional beds to the program - still, our community will need more.

annual incomes below \$10,000 in the metropolitan area, but only 31,200 housing units with rents affordable at this income level (rents no more than 30% of income).”

For perspective, to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment renting in St. Paul at about \$770 per month, a family needs a monthly income of at least \$2,566 (\$30,800 per year).

The signs of the affordable housing shortage began to show up in shelter trends in 1996, when the percentage of families reporting “lack of affordable housing” as a reason for seeking emergency shelter increased to 59 percent, up from 33 percent the year before.

Percentage of families in emergency shelter reporting lack of affordable housing as a reason for seeking shelter



Note: “Family” is defined as one or more adults with one or more children.

In 1999, 82 percent of families cited lack of affordable housing as reason for seeking emergency shelter, up from 62 percent last year.

Doubling-up (living with friends or relatives) has become more common among families with children in the past five years, both as the previous living arrangement before entering emergency

shelter (from 63% in 1995 to 81% in 1999) and as the next living arrangement after leaving emergency shelter (from 12% in 1995 to 25% in 1999).

The shortage in affordable housing may be contributing to longer stays in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and shelters for battered women.

For more information

This summary presents highlights from *Emergency Shelters, Transition Housing, and Battered Women Shelters*, a report prepared by Wilder Research Center in August 2000. For copies of this summary or the full report, contact Wilder Research Center or find both versions online at www.wilder.org/research.

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