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March 1, 2017

Protect and Serve

On January 1, 2015, the annual survey was connected at the 14th annual Thermal Underwear Party. A total of 277 people responded to the survey. It was conducted again two years later. The survey questions were the same with the addition of question 5a. Because the New Year fell on a Sunday, the good people at the First Baptist Church were returned their church, so they could worship in peace. As a result, we held our event on the previous Friday. This was a work day and may have affected attendance as a percentage of all people experiencing homelessness (52) are working at some time during the week. Also, the Mayor Steve Adler’s push to end homeless for Veterans coupled with that of ECHO may have positively affected the numbers.

	2015	2017	2015	2017	2015	2017
1) Male:	<u>228</u>	<u>192</u>	Female:	<u>46</u>	<u>59*</u>	Transgender: <u>3</u> <u>2</u>

*This is a 28% increase of women experiencing homelessness.

	2015	2017
2) Average Age:	<u>46</u>	<u>45</u>

Note – Eleven individuals did not provide their ages. On a separate note, there is a concept of that suggests that there is a phenomenon called “age acceleration” where people living on the streets 10 years or longer, are aged by as much as 12 additional years.

	2015	2017
3) How long have you been homeless all together?	<u>9.5 years</u>	<u>7.7 years</u>

	2015	2017
3b) How long have you been homeless in Austin, Texas?	<u>6.2 years</u>	<u>4.3 years</u>

House the Homeless! Inc. abhors the use of the word “**transient**” to describe people who are experiencing homelessness in as much as it infers that they are simply passing through our community and therefore, we, as a community, have no responsibility for them. However, there is a *transient* component to their situation as people do tend to follow talk of jobs when the opportunity arises.

4) Have you ever been told to move along by police without giving you an opportunity to comment?

2015	2017
<u>Yes: 170 61% No: 88 32%</u>	<u>Yes 153 60% No 100 39%</u>

The “yes” responses in terms of percentage to this question basically remains unchanged indicating that for the most part police *behavior* has remained unchanged as well. Note – In 2015, while the overall number of respondents rested at 277, there may have been an uptick in non-respondents to this particular question, which would account for the less than 100% count total.

5) Has a Police Officer ever given you a ticket for sitting or lying down even though you told them you were disabled or too sick to move?

2015		2017		
Yes: 120	43%	No	140	51%
		Yes: 112	44%	No 111 44% NA 29 11%

Note. The results to this question seem indicate a positive change in the response of police officers to being told by an individual that they are disabled by 7%. This is encouraging. This also reflects my impression in analyzing the data that indicated younger respondents and those newer to homelessness are relaying a different police experience. This may be reflected in the responses to question 10.

This outcome is in violation of the City of Austin No Sit/ No Lie law passed with the urging and assistance of House the Homeless! Inc. for which police procedures have been written. Every police officer in the downtown area has been trained in the proper enforcement of the No Sit/ No Lie Ordinance and its language that brings Austin's ordinance in compliance with the American's with Disabilities Act, ADA.

5a) Have your Class C misdemeanor tickets (No Sit/ No Lie, No Camping, etc.) ever been barriers to getting a job or housing?

2017		
Yes: 67	28%	No: 108 45% NA: 65 27%

This is the only question included on the survey that was not also on the 2015 survey.

Note- This question is an extremely important one. First when gauging the responses, it is important to also notice that many homeless individuals have become disheartened due to their extended stay in their homeless situation. As a result, many have found it fruitless to search at all.

Furthermore, it is well known that working a full 40 hour a week job at the Federal Minimum Wage, \$7.25 per hour, will not keep anyone in housing even if they could secure it. So again, many are disheartened and have simply stopped trying to work without living wage jobs being available.

Third, *housing supports* both federal and local, most often no longer base their supports on these minor criminal offenses; however, the general, non-tax supported job market does care about these tickets and will invariably choose a person without these criminal charges over someone who has them.

Due to the important implications of this question, it will be imperative that this question be better crafted to encompass these caveats before it is posed again.

Finally, the n/a response probably indicates that the respondents are disabled and unable to work. Therefore, the question is not applicable to their situation.

6) As a Disabled person, did you always get a 30 minute warning period, before being ticketed for sitting or lying down?

2015
Yes: 29 10% No: 156* 56% N/A: 97 34%

2017
Yes: 31 12% No: 130 51% n/a: 36%

The trend is in the right direction (minimally); however, failure to provide a 30 minute warning period is in violation of the City of Austin, No Sit/No Lie ordinance and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Law. See #5 above.

7) Have you ever had your ID taken by police and not returned?

2015
Yes: 92 33% No: 183 67%

2017
Yes: 74 29% No: 179 71%

This is a positive decrease. 18 people or 4% who did not have their ID taken and not returned. However, this is still completely unacceptable as replacing photo ID is very costly in terms of both time and money. Remember these people are homeless. They are indigent. All social services in Austin require photo identification, so to be left without photo ID only acts as an additional barrier to escaping homelessness. How would the reader feel if upon a police stop, the police failed to return your driver's license?

8) Have you ever had your things taken by police without giving you a receipt and the name of a contact person to get your things back?

2015
Yes: 125 45% No: 152 55%

2017
Yes 90 36% No: 158 63%

This is a **major improvement** over the same survey conducted two years ago. It is an 8% improvement with 20 less people having their belongings taken and not returned. This is excellent! However, 36% of the people who had their belongings confiscated did not get a receipt or the name of a contact person to get their items back. The glaring inference is that people, of whom 47% are so disabled that they cannot work (see House the Homeless! Inc. 2010 Health Survey) are having all of their medications, prescriptions, and important papers taken and never returned. *This is totally unacceptable.*

9) Did you ever get a ticket, go to court, then be told your ticket is not in the system yet and you would have to return?

2015
Yes: 123 44% No: 118 42% N/A: 36 13%

2017
Yes: 93 37% No: 114 45% n/a 37 15%

This shows a 9% improvement in the police activity of turning tickets into the Community Court. This is significant improvement; otherwise, any action that causes people experiencing homelessness to make multiple trips to the court system to prevent a ticket from "going to warrant" that leads to their arrest is detrimental to their existence and simply an additional *barrier to their escaping homelessness.*

10) Do you feel that the police are there to help you or control you?

2015

Help: 47 17% Control: 190 70% Both: 38 14% (write in)

2017

Help: 23% Control 140 55% Both: 45 18% n/a 83% (write in)

There is an increase in the percentage of people who feel that the police are helping them by 5%. But most importantly. The percentage of times that the police were perceived to be there to *control them* **dropped by 15%**. This is a significant shift. This may be the result of newer and younger people entering homelessness recently. We find that there is less initial conflict when this is the case. It may be that there was a recent administrative change with former Police Chief, Art Acevedo, leaving and Chief Manley taking the reins. And in part, it may well be the new involvement of Mayor Steve Adler. Finally, it may well be a compilation of all of these factors and the direct action of individual police officers. Whatever the reason, we hope for this to become a trend even as we enter our most challenging environment yet, as the completion of the Waller Creek tunnel brings new money, new people, and new challenges to our city.

Additional Comments:

A total of 24 surveys were deemed nonresponsive for various reasons. As a result they were excluded from the tabulation.

The following comments were write-in comments to specific survey questions.

4- Yes, all the time; yes, 20+ times; yes, but...; yes, but...

5- No, took care of tickets; I don't know; not in Austin; not in Austin

6- No, move!

10- Harass; mostly help, some not; help 87% and Control 13%

Note- As can be seen on #10, we have a response entitled Help *and* Control. This was a complete write in category that we termed as "both." Had we added the category in the first place, people may have chosen this option even more. Again, we feel the implication is *positive* as it **reflects well on our police officers**.

Finally, if you have read this survey and are in an official position to make changes to improve these conditions, you are now tasked with that charge.

We can begin by **providing benches** that will get our citizens off the sidewalks and out of the gutters in front of the ARCH. We need to treat each and every one of our citizens with the dignity they deserve as human beings. And in an effort to create a more healthy and lawful environment, we need to immediately enact a **comprehensive rotational community policing program** at the site to enhance police/citizen relations and to prevent these people from becoming targets of drug pushers while they wait to be rescued and placed in housing.

Thank you,

Richard R. Troxell

Co-Founder/CEO/Board Chair

Author: **Looking Up at the Bottom Line: *The Struggle for the Living Wage***

Member of the Board of Directors of the National Coalition for the Homeless since 1997