Homelessness in Appleton is often described as invisible, but the struggle for steady housing and employment has been a challenge for many residents in the past and present.

Portrayed as outsiders or insignificant, the overlooked homeless in Appleton have a story to tell. What does homelessness look and feel like in our area?

In November 2015, area individuals who are homeless or on the edge of homelessness, were given cameras and journals to record snapshots of their lives. Told from the margins of society, these are their stories.

What stories would you tell if given the opportunity?
What do we know about the struggle for housing today?

Area agencies frequently conduct studies to learn more about homelessness. The data are shared throughout the exhibit.

**Point-In-Time:** Twice annually the Fox Cities Housing Coalition holds a Point-In-Time Count to identify the number of homeless individuals and families in the community. Recent counts produced an estimate that 26-30 individuals are currently struggling with homelessness in our area.

**Project RUSH (Research to Understand and Solve Homelessness):** This 2015 study focused on better understanding the current need and availability of affordable housing in the Fox Cities. The data were gathered from 500 people who struggle with stable housing.

**Each Experience is Different:** Project RUSH stressed that housing instability manifests itself in several ways, including these categories in the Fox Cities:

- **Unsheltered Homeless:** Living on the street, locations not intended for human habitation or hotels/motels.
- **Sheltered Homeless:** Staying in some type of temporary shelter or transitional housing program.
- **Doubled Up:** Living with other individuals or families due to economic reasons.
- **Precariously Housed:** Living in own home or apartment, but at risk of eviction, and/or paying such a high amount toward rent or mortgage that other basic needs are unaffordable.

**Historical Evidence and Terminology:**

Only glimpses of historical data about people who were homeless exist for Appleton. Sources like the census, police arrest logs, newspapers, and state records inform this history.

People in the 19th century used a variety of names to describe homeless persons. In addition, the terms used generically and were trapsdi (transient, hob, hobo, tramp, and vagrant). Often these terms were used as slurs, but sometimes the terms were also claimed by people who were homeless.

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Download the Project RUSH booklet.

**Spider**

"There are a lot of different places that will help people who are homeless."

"There are a lot of different places that will help people who are homeless."

"The city gives the homeless bus tickets but they are sold at a cheaper price so they can buy cigarettes and beer."

"When they are not sleeping at the shelters they are sleeping in the parking ramps around town."

"They also hang out at the parks around town drinking beer and getting into trouble."

"There are a lot of different places that will help people who are homeless."

"Some of them have an income but it is not enough to get a place to live. I feel that the city should find an abandoned building or hotel for just that reason."

"Some that do have income spend it on fancy clothes and shoes that cost a lot and believe that it doesn't matter because they can always go to the shelters."

"I feel like the shelters should be more strict on the people who spend their money foolishly on clothing and on motels."

"There are a lot of different places that will help people who are homeless."

"There are a lot of different places that will help people who are homeless."

"Our neighborhood is beside the library and transit center." - Anthony T.
Homelessness has many faces. Young or old? Married or single? New to the area, a longtime resident, or returning after being away? Housing instability affects people regardless of race, gender, or educational status.

When did homelessness become an issue in Appleton?

The struggle for permanent housing has been a problem from the beginning. An early group of laborers was indispensable to the local economy. In the 1840s, Irish and German transient workers built the canals and dams which led to the city’s growth. Every summer, seasonal laborers called “harvest hands” passed through the area to work on the local farms.

Oneida Indians from the neighboring reservation were among the earliest described on city streets as homeless and destitute. Loss of tribal lands and economic instability forced the Oneida to search for help off the reservation beginning around 1870.

When did homelessness become an issue in Appleton?

In the past, who was homeless in Appleton?

Historical demographic data is inconsistent, but the Appleton Police Department arrest ledgers provide some answers. Before 1960, over 95 percent of persons arrested for vagrancy were single men aged 25 to 60. The arrested persons claimed a variety of ethnicities and races.

What does homelessness and the precariously housed population look like today?

Ann

"I work all the time (I’m just under full-time); I just started school (I’m in the paralegal program at FVTC); I love to read and learn new languages."

"I miss my car. I miss the convenience. Most of all, I miss the freedom it gave me. There are so many places I want to go but can’t, because the bus doesn’t reach that far."

"Being without a car means walking in all kinds of conditions: heat and disgusting humidity, rain, sleet, ice, snow. It’s rare to find a clean and shoveled sidewalk."

"My paralegal class is bringing out a competitive streak in me that I didn’t realize existed."

"Being without my car is tough, though. I feel like I spend 98% of my life either waiting for the bus or riding in it."

"I took a picture of my Christmas tree. I’ve never had my own tree before. Never got to pick out my own decorations before. I bought the tree and decorations for about $20 on a night when I was so sad, I couldn’t see straight. It helped a bit, but the lights and ornaments were my favorite ornament when I was a little kid." -Ann

"If you lose your keys or phone, you’re sunk. The bus pass is pretty self-explanatory. Lord, how I miss my car. The nail polish instills a modicum of femininity - I am a girly girl." -Ann

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"I am a girly girl."

"I love to read and learn new languages; I’m having a d**n of time trying to quit smoking. I have my keys and cellphone with me at all times. If I lose one or the other, I’m sunk. The bus pass is pretty self-explanatory. Lord, how I miss my car. The nail polish instills a modicum of femininity - I am a girly girl." -Ann

"Also, like the literature and my textbook, the nail polish shows what I ultimately want to be: educated, cultured, elegant. It’s so easy to lose your femininity in a situation like this. It’s so easy to just give up. Screw that." -Ann

"In the immortal words of Admiral David Farragut, ‘Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead!’" -Ann

"I bought the tree and decorations for about $20 on a night when I was so sad, I couldn’t see straight. It helped a bit, but the lights and ornaments were my favorite ornament when I was a little kid.” -Ann

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"In the immortal words of Admiral David Farragut, ‘Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead!’" -Ann

"Whenever it snows I can count on my feet being cold and wet all day, even after changing shoes and socks."
Non-profits focusing on social services began to emerge in greater numbers in the 1960s. New organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Goodwill helped target root causes of instability.

Many of today’s recognizable agencies such as Homeless Connections (1981) and Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities (1984), started in the 1980s along with Habitat for Humanity (1993), COTS, Inc. (1998), Fox Valley Warming Shelter (2008) they form a continuum care system. Each agency plays a role in the pathway to housing stability.

### Aid for the Poor

Appleton followed national sentiments about aiding the poor. In the late 1800s, most people expected local government to help. Some residents received funds to house people who were poor or disabled as tenants in their home.

After the Civil War, the city considered ways to help select groups they considered to be “deserving poor”: young mothers, orphans, and the elderly. Other people who were homeless were largely overlooked.

Immigrant aid societies and churches also helped people within their faith and ethnic communities. St. Joseph Ladies Aid Society was formed in 1913 to help German Catholics who were poor. In 1966, Father Orville Janssen of St. Bernard Catholic Church pioneered efforts to house men who were homeless by offering shelter in his rectory. Soon after, Father Timon Costello and Tim Garvey created Villa Hope and Villa Phoenix. Both halfway houses are still in operation.

### Appleton Poorhouse

In 1868, the city established this small public facility as a temporary home for about 25 young pregnant women and elderly persons. Inspections from 1923 to 1938 indicate the facility was often in disrepair. Residents worked on a small farm at the home to fund their stay.

### Appleton Children’s Home

From 1888 to about 1924, 8 to 15 orphans at a time were clothed, fed, schooled, and housed at the home. Donations to the facility came from many individuals, churches, and businesses in the community.

"Anybody who lives or works for a time in Appleton, knows this is the Post Office drop-off and the view in the photo was once from only one street." - Anthony T.

"Many of us homeless would go to the Salvation Army for lunch. I know I appreciated it." - Todd

"A room with a view." - Anthony T.
Striking a Balance

Today, how do the police interact with people who are homeless?

Appleton’s police officers are often the first people in contact with individuals who are newly homeless. Being homeless is not a crime, but the police are frequently called to respond to illegal activities, such as sleeping in parking ramps. Every officer is aware of local resources for people who need assistance.

What can the police do to help people who have exhausted local resources and must remain on the street overnight? Officers creatively work to make sure people are protected from the elements. To properly support individuals struggling with mental illness or substance abuse, the police work with local human service agencies and interest in emergencies.

A Problem Made Invisible

Appleton’s police involvement in homelessness has evolved since the mid-20th century.

While many people felt sympathy for pregnant women, children, and elderly persons, homeless men were viewed as menaces who set bad examples for workers. Thus, the provided municipalities with authority to arrest and eject people who were homeless and having visible means to maintain themselves, live without employment.

The Police Department in Appleton, as in many cities, interpreted the law to also target new immigrants and people of color, who were viewed as nuisances who set bad examples for workers. Thus, the provided municipalities with authority to arrest and eject people who were homeless and having visible means to maintain themselves, live without employment.

The police made over 750 arrests of people who were suspected as being homeless, and their number remained steady through 1940. During “Hobo Round-Ups,” police officers patrolled the city for vagrants and often arrested groups of 10 to 15 people at a time. The Appleton Police Department’s “Tramp Book” recorded arrests for vagrancy from 1916 to 1928.

What happened to people who were arrested as vagrants? Sentences varied for each person:

1. Spend time in jail.
2. Crush rocks for up to 60 days at the county workhouse.
3. Dropped off at the city limits and told to never return.

Usually the arrested persons were fed before being removed from the city.

A People’s Work History

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INVISIBLE BARRIERS

Unstable employment is often a root cause of homelessness. Levels of education, emotional health, physical health, and mental health all contribute to employment success. Fifty-one percent of Project RUSH participants indicated a desire to pursue an advanced education despite significant barriers to their enrollment.

Project RUSH

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Peaks and Valleys

The local economy has followed national economic downturns. During the Panic of 1893, Wisconsin’s unemployment skyrocketed to 18%. The peak years of unemployment were 1929 to 1944 during the Great Depression, which gradually dropped with the National Recovery Act and the start of World War II.

During the recession that began in 2008, the Outagamie County unemployment rate peaked in February 2010 with 9.8% out-of-work people. Unemployment hovered around 3.9% in February 2016.

How can you help?

Learn how you can volunteer or donate.

Greg

“A Homeless Day in Appleton.”

“Peaks and Valleys.”

“Exploration. The city bus system is the best way to find out where things are and most bus drivers are a wealth of information.”

Anthony M.

“This is our city.”

Each economic panic forced many families into unstable housing or onto the streets.

How can we help?

Learn how you can volunteer or donate.

“Freedom.”

“Keeping up with my faith.”

“Freedom.”

“Keeping up with my faith.”

Anthony M.

“This is our city.”

“How can we help?”

Learn how you can volunteer or donate.

“Freedom.”

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UNAFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Fox Cities are one of the largest metropolitan areas in the state, but people are still challenged with finding affordable housing. There are over 94,000 households and that total is expected to increase by more than 700 households through 2020!

Project RUSH

Unaffordable Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Fox Cities Metropolitan Statistical Area</th>
<th>State of Wisconsin</th>
<th>U.S. Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Constant Struggle

Affordable housing has always been a struggle in Appleton. To make housing affordable, a common historical practice was for homeowners to rent a room to one person or a group of boarders. In 1900, about 468 boarders lived in Appleton comprising about 3% of the population. They worked in low-paying factory jobs or were day-laborers who sought short-term jobs. Other individuals who could not afford housing struggled to find shelter. Starting around 1941, some chose to live in a shanty community in Koehnke's Woods known as the "Hobo Jungle." In 1960, the Sheriff's Department destroyed ten shacks in the woods, and reported the location was popular because of the proximity to the railroad. This area continues to be used for unsheltered housing.

Historically, Appleton only had one low-income tenement for the working class. Shown in about 1900, this building was located in a portion of the ravine that would become Jones Park.

Allen

"This is where I awaken every morning and begin to start my day."

"This is the street where I live - North Division, Appleton, WI."

"This is Mission Church where I go to worship."

"This is one of my favorite hangouts. And not only a hangout, it's where I do most of my studying and researching, socializing, and reading."

"This is my main source of transportation since I have a car. Bus passes are provided free for me. Again, thank God for the people he placed in my life to help me."

"I stop here to have lunch, socialize, and join a bible study group on Tuesdays."

"This is the free laundry service where I live."

"This is my new / future home. Thank you Homeless Connections. You gave me the second chance that no one else would have given me!"

Thirty-one percent of households in the region are occupied renters.

In 1984, only 46% of the region's households were occupied by renters. Since then, the number of occupied renter households has increased to nearly 60%, and is expected to continue to increase.

"If you see me on the street, would you think that I am homeless (living in a shelter)?"

"Lunch line at Mission Church. Every Thursday at 2:00pm."

"Do you see me on the street, would you know that I am homeless (living in a shelter)?"

"Thank God for his mercy and grace in providing for my life. Without those people he has sent me, I would have perished for sure."
There are many barriers to stable housing and some of the root causes are health concerns. Many people who struggle with housing cite a challenge in accessing and navigating health care and support services.

Project RUSH

Physical Health

About 49% of RUSH participants have a physical or other health condition that limits the kind and amount of work they can do. The national average for accessing emergency room services is 19% for the general population, but 36% of RUSH participants received emergency room care in the past six months. The cost of emergency care spirals out of control.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

A drastic contrast between people who are homeless and the general population is the prevalence of mental illness. About 6% of the general population report a significant mental health condition, but 57% of RUSH participants have formal mental diagnoses.

Traumatic and Adverse Experiences

For many, homelessness is the latest in a chain of traumatic experiences that began at childhood. Adverse experiences negatively impact a person’s ability to process, cope with, and overcome daily stressors.

How was mental health and homelessness dealt with in the past?

Unlike “vagrants,” if people were arrested for public “lunacy,” “insanity,” or extreme cases of substance abuse, officials sent them to an asylum. By 1889, this system was expanded locally with the opening of the Outagamie County Asylum for the Chronic Insane. The categories of vagrant and “insane” were unscientific, often only interpreted by the arresting police officer.

“Even though we’re down and out, we still have to keep a smile on our face.” - Del

“Alone...watching time go by.” - Del

“Homeless man on bench at a park.” - Keith

"Shedding Light on Barriers"
"I came back to the Valley in December 2013. My homelessness started in September 2009. I arrived at the Warming Shelter and resided there for two weeks."

"During my time I was homeless the bus station and library became hubs for me. It did for others as well. I don’t drive. Never had a license."

"For me the library was a source for online access. Others used it to be drunk in and also to sleep. That is offensive to me."

"A popular gathering place for the homeless in Appleton. The church provides coffee and pastries for anyone there. Certain days they provide luncheons."

"I was a resident here for 4 months. Longer than the average stay. My case manager used his connections to get me an application for a housing program called It Takes a Village."

"While a resident at Homeless Connections I joined this church. It is Family First Ministries. The Pastor is Alvin Dupree. A career Marine with a Ph.D. A great man!"

"I got enrolled in a housing program called It Takes a Village by Ryan Community. I moved into the second floor apartment on April 14, 2014. Thus ending my homelessness."

"My return to the Fox River Valley is a blessing to me. My return to the Valley in December 2013, homeless, to being a homeowner in October 2015 is amazing to me. I could not have done it without the caring, wonderful people and organizations of our great community the Fox River Valley. Thank you everybody!"

"I was born and raised in Neenah. I lived in Menasha for 13 years. My homeless journey took me to Oshkosh, Waupaca, and then my eventual return to the Fox River Valley in Appleton. I currently live in Little Chute, as you can see. I’ve seen a bit of the Valley. This is home to me."

"Thank you Todd Bergman and Ladene Gies, a committee to make this photo exhibit possible. This is to all Rotary good to Rotary."
In-Kind Support
Eagle Supply and Plastic
Festival Foods
Seth’s Coffee
Michelle Bachaus
Chad Brady
Deb Geenen
Rick Krauswede
Museum Staff
Dick Hank
Exhibit Research and Support
Appleton Police Department
Appleton Public Library
Daniel Brown
Kathy Brown
Erin DeNuynck
East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
Officer Todd Freeman
Abby Jankowski
Steven Kellett
Chris Lashock
Shang Li
Gabriel Losanno
Museum Staff
Antoinette Powell
Project RUSH
Point-In-Time
Matthew Reed
Monica Rico
University of Wisconsin – Green Bay Archives and Area Research Center
Annaliese Wilmsen
Mike Zuege

Partnering Organizations

Anita’s Family

**Anita’s Family**

"Being homeless has made me stronger. Being at Homeless Connections has taught me that there is a lot of help for people like us. I have learned a lot from being homeless. It has changed the way I think about life. It makes me appreciate everything so much more. I’m more determined and committed to doing what I have to for myself and for my family." - Anita

How can you help?

Learn how you can volunteer or donate.