

First report on Halifax Homeless released

One half to one percent of Haligonians homeless, says Community Action on Homelessness. The question is, why did we wait so long to study this?

Posted by [Tim Bousquet](#) on Wed, Mar 25, 2009 at 1:24 PM

The Community Action on Homelessness released its first report this week. (Read the full report [here](#)) The group found that last year 1,252 people stayed in a shelter at least once; that figure breaks down as 753 men, 340 women, 82 youth aged 16 to 19 and 77 children. The average length of stay in a shelter was 26 days.

The group stresses that those numbers aren't complete; they counted just 154 of a total of 194 shelter beds, and they didn't attempt to measure those living in vehicles or couch surfing. Nor does it count people sleeping outside, which is more than you might think—I recently met a guy sleeping on the Dartmouth waterfront, right through the winter, deep snowfalls and all.

Depending on how you count our population, a half to one percent of us are homeless.

A couple of points:

First, it's remarkable that this is the first time anyone has gotten around to counting the homeless. We've got detailed indicators going back decades for GDP, employment, tax revenue, investment, etc., but we haven't until now tried to track the state of the economy as it fundamentally plays out in the way people actually live their lives: can people afford a place to live? Like the good folks at [GPI Atlantic say](#), by counting the wrong things, or only certain things, we miss the real picture.

Second, as the economic climate worsens, homelessness will become even more of an issue. In tight times, we will have to decide what kind of society we are: do we help the most fragile, the down and out, those living on the edge, or do we prop up the wealthiest?