

Summary of 2007 Los Angeles Humanitarian Day Participant Surveys

I. Scope of the survey

On Humanitarian Day in October, 2007 our volunteers provided food, clothing, health care, blankets and other needed items to approximately 1,100 homeless and needy people in the Skid Row of Los Angeles, CA. This was down from about 1,600 served in 2006. The lower number is attributed to another event being held in the area on the same day and time.

Of those served, our volunteers surveyed 325 individuals, 30% of the total. We surveyed a larger number last year: 629 surveyed, or 40% of the 1,600 total in 2006. While we surveyed a smaller group than last year, the percentage is still quite high and the responses therefore continue to be significant.

	2006		2007	
Total individuals served	1,600		1,100	
Number surveyed / as % of total	629	40%	325	30%
Men surveyed / as a percent of those surveyed	389	62%	205	63%
Women surveyed / as a percent of those surveyed	152	24%	112	34%
Others & Gender not identified surveyed / %	88	14%	8	3%
		100%		100%

II Findings

Age

Last year, we noted that the element of age was the most striking finding of the surveys, as we found that: over one-third of those surveyed reported their age as 51 and over. More than another third reported their age as 41-50 years. Thus, 70% of respondents were over 40 years old in 2006. This was up from 68% over 40 years old in our 2005 survey.

Because of this, in our 2007 survey, we broke down our age categories differently. Instead of 41-50 and 50+, we used 41-54, 55-65 and over 65. In 2007, we found that 49% of respondents reported their age as 41-54, 18% reported as 55-65 and 4% (14 individuals) were over 65 years old. The total over 40 years old in 2007 was therefore 71%, just slightly above the 2006 figure.

The different breakdown of age categories by gender in 2007 provided a disheartening piece of information. In 2006, we found the age breakdown roughly similar between men and women, although slightly more men than women (36% of men compared with 30% of women) were in the over 51 years old category. However, with 2007's age categories, we found that of those over 65 years old, there were more women than men (8% of all women surveyed versus 2% of all men surveyed). There may be many reasons for this, which would require further research. Increased longevity of women may be a factor. However, the increasing number of homeless and needy elderly women is clearly an area of concern.

- ▶ As was the case in 2006, we found few very young respondents: just 1% of the total surveyed in both years. As was the case in 2006, however, young women outnumbered the young men: 2 females and 1 male in 2007 versus one 4 females and 1 male in 2006.

Origin

- ▶ As was the case in 2006, an overwhelming majority of those surveyed in 2007 (87%) were from the U.S. (compared with 89% in 2006). The next largest region of origin was Central America, at 6% of the total. No other region of origin was over 2% of the total.
- ▶ While the exact number was not compiled, it was noted that several respondents were displaced due to Hurricane Katrina.
- ▶ Of those originating in Central America, most were men (7% of men surveyed vs. 4% of women surveyed). This finding remained the same as last year.

Religion

- ▶ Unchanged from last year, the majority of respondents (56%) gave their religion as Christianity. We distinguished between Christians and Catholics this year. Catholics accounted for 15% of the total surveyed. In 2006, all Christians including Catholics represented 62% of the total, up from 45% in 2005.
- ▶ There were 16 Muslims surveyed (5% of total respondents), fairly unchanged from 6% of the total in 2006.

Race

- ▶ The majority of respondents continue to be African-American (197, or 61%). In last year's survey, 55% were African-American, versus 65% in 2005.
- ▶ The 10% of respondents that reported as White is the same as the last 2 years.
- ▶ The Hispanic/Latino population inched higher again, at 19% in 2007, up from 18% of the total in 2006 and 14% in 2005.

Family Status and Children

- ▶ Because answers to these sections were highly inconsistent and incomplete last year, the questions were reformulated. A majority of respondents (79%) were single, with a small number of families (11%) and couples (6%).
- ▶ 53 individuals (16% of the total surveyed) reported that they had children living with them. 12 people said they had one child with them, 17 people said they had two children with them, and 13 said they had 3 or more. This would indicate a total of 85 or more children. When asked whether these children were in school or not, 35 individuals responded. Of those, 25 said yes and 10 said no. Of those who said No, several noted that the children were of pre-school age.

How Humanitarian Day Rates with Those Served

- ▶ Once again, participants responded enthusiastically to the event, with 90% rating the day a “5” and 7% rating it a “4.” This is up from 85% rating us a “5” last year and 88% for “5” in 2005.

What Respondents Needed Most

- ▶ Blankets continue to be the most popular item donated in 2007 than last year, with 107 (33%) mentioning it as the top most needed item, compared with 29% in 2006 and 38% in 2005. Men and women were equal in mentioning blankets.
- ▶ The next most needed item continues to be the hygiene kits, with 21% mentioning them versus 23% in 2006 and 39% in 2005.
- ▶ Jackets replaced food as the third most popular item in 2007, being mentioned by 17% of respondents.
- ▶ 15% said “Everything.”
- ▶ Clothing was mentioned by 7% of respondents.
- ▶ Food was mentioned as often as towels and feminine hygiene products (5% each). It is important to note that feminine hygiene products were mentioned by 5% of total respondents, and by 15% of women. This is clearly a very important need and we should make arrangements to increase the provision of these supplies for the next event.
- ▶ Health care and toothbrush/toothpaste were next, each 3% overall. See attachment for additional detail.

What Was Missing

- ▶ Over one-third of respondents (39%) said that nothing was missing from the event.
- ▶ **More respondents requested a jacket, shoes and more hygiene products than any other items** (25 responses, or 8% for jackets and 20 responses or 6% for shoes and for hygiene equally). Next were more cold water/soda (4%), underwear (4%), more/better food (3%), more clothing (2%) .
- ▶ As was the case last year, “more medical” includes such things as aspirin, cold medicines and deodorant. One person mentioned “Depends” undergarments. We should continue to focus on this area of need.

Medical Care and Health Issues

- ▶ Despite all the hardships faced by our respondents, a majority (93%) seem to have access to health care. Most (46%) use public health facilities. The VA provides care for 11% of respondents, primarily men (17% of the men). Hospital emergency rooms were cited by only 13% of respondents. Seven percent said “Nowhere” and 14% said “Other.”
- ▶ Most respondents (66%) said they have received care within the last month, and another 18% within the last 2-6 months. Only 6% said it has been over a year.
- ▶ There continues to be a great diversity of health issues faced by our respondents, with no one issue really predominating. High blood pressure is still the issue mentioned most often (by 30 individuals or 9% of those surveyed – roughly level with last year’s

percentage), followed by diabetes (6%), asthma (5%), dental needs (5%), heart problems (5%), mental health issues (5%), HIV/Aids (4%). There are people out on the street with cancer (9 people, or 3%). Due to the aging of the homeless, there is a lot of arthritis (3%), back problems (3%) and foot problems (2%).

- ▶ The surprising finding of a higher incidence of cancer among the women surveyed continued in 2007 (5% of women versus 1% of men). Blood pressure was cited much more often among men (11% versus 5% of women). Diabetes also appears to be a concern more among men than women (9% versus 2% of women).

Employment

- ▶ Not surprisingly, most homeless people are unemployed. As was the case in 2006, roughly equal percentages of men and women (only 13 and 11%) said they were employed.
- ▶ Of the 26 men that said they were employed, most (46%) were employed part time. 31% of men surveyed were employed full time. The remainder did not respond.
- ▶ Of the 12 women that responded they were employed, 25% were full time and 50% part time (remainder did not respond).

Homelessness

- ▶ The majority (71%) of respondents said they were homeless, up from 53% of last year's respondents. 23% said no (with 6% not responding).
- ▶ There continued to be a large variation in how long our respondents have been without a permanent living situation, with no one length of time predominating. Short term homelessness (under 6 months) was the case with 23% of respondents. From 6 months to a year was 21%. Those homeless from 3-5 years were 14% and 10% over 5 years.

Where Do the Homeless Sleep?

- ▶ Shelters provided space for 42% of the 2007 respondents, up from 26% in 2006. Among women respondents, shelters provided for 49% versus for 38% of the men.
- ▶ Among men, the next most common place to sleep was outdoors (20%), followed by motel/hotel (10%). These were level with last year's responses.
- ▶ Women were much less likely to sleep outside (13%, but up from 5% in 2006), with motel/hotel (4%) and Other (4%).
- ▶ Men as well as women were not too likely to be turned away from a shelter (14% said "Yes"). Not very many respondents answered the question about why they were turned away. However, of those that answered, the main reason given was "no beds available."

What Prevents the Homeless From Living In Permanent Housing?

- ▶ Among men who responded, most (32%) said that lack of a job/income prevents them from finding permanent housing. 15% said they could not afford the rent. These were also the reason for the majority of women respondents (28% and 22%, respectively).

Perceived Causes of Homelessness

- ▶ This is one area where there were great differences between men and women respondents. Among men, 31% said loss of a job was the main factor that led to their current homelessness. The next most common factor at 25% was drug/alcohol use, followed by illness or disability (6%) and divorce or separation (5%). Other reasons were 21% and included getting released from prison (5 individuals), family problems (4), death of a spouse and being evicted.
- ▶ Among women, same as in 2006, “other” was the main factor (21%), with substance abuse (13%) and loss of a job (10%) and the landlord raising the rent (10%) as the next most common factors. Mental health was cited by 8% of women, followed by illness/disability (5%).
- ▶ For “what is keeping you homeless,” our respondents’ answers varied, although there was not much difference between the men’s and women’s responses. The reasons were mostly no job, no housing, and addiction. This was unchanged from last year.

What Could Help

- ▶ For men, 25% said getting a job or means of income was the most important help they could get, versus 21% giving this answer among women. For women, getting access to housing was the next most commonly cited help (9%).
- ▶ Among men, housing and spiritual guidance were equally mentioned (10%) as the second highest. Spiritual guidance included “God,” “Jesus,” “church,” “religion” and other related responses. See attachment for itemization of responses.

III. Conclusion

- a. Worthwhile. The event continues to be perceived as highly successful by those we served, and while we provided the service for the rewards of Allah alone, it is good to know that our work was appreciated.
- b. Aging of the homeless population. This continues to be very clear from our survey, with the added information that women over 65 years old are increasingly represented in the homeless population. Thought should be given to how to address the needs of both children and the elderly among the homeless first. .
- c. Addressing the sources of the problem. Not surprisingly, unemployment or underemployment, addiction and high rent in the problems of homelessness. Factors of race underlie these for a very high number of our respondents. Programs addressing these issues should be supported by the Muslim community and new programs developed that address them in ways that would please Allah al-Zawajil. In particular, ideas that have been considered at previous planning sessions include:
 - ▶ Raising funds for a small transitional living program to take people off the streets and provide intensive assistance in a variety of areas over 6 months to a year.
 - ▶ Working with existing programs such as AccessCal and Niswa to expand their existing services.

- d. Health Care. The various shelter clinics and public health clinics appear to be reaching most of the homeless and needy population. However, there are an unacceptably high number of mostly aged people with serious health problems who are living on the street. There is clearly a continuing need to address long-term care for these serious illnesses.
- e. Children.
- ▶ Using the numbers given by our respondents, they alone have 85 children living homeless on the streets. As our respondents were 30% of the total served, we could estimate 255 children total, although extrapolation may not be accurate in this case.
 - ▶ Children's items were not perceived as important to our respondents in comparison with more vital items such as blankets, jackets and hygiene.
- f. Spiritual nourishment. A large number of respondents cited a need for some variation of spiritual nourishment and guidance as the thing that would help them the most. God, religion, etc. was the second highest mentioned (tied with housing) for men after jobs. and women (after jobs and shelter). Perhaps we should create a circle of committed volunteers to make regular meetings in the area, holding prayer as well as faith discussions for all interested to attend. Establishing a greater presence, performing salat and having halaqa circles in the area would provide a great benefit.
- g. Shoes. In our planning meetings, there has been much discussion about the difficulty of providing shoes. These difficulties include proper sizing and the need to try them on, which would slow down the line. However, given the continuing high number of respondents requesting shoes and the number of barefooted homeless people that can be seen on the streets, it is urgent that we find some way to meet this need. Last year, suggestion was made of a shoe drive collecting new and used shoes from our community and distributing them to various shelters the day of the event (or the day before)? If we brainstorm, surely we can generate some good ideas of how this can be accomplished.
- h. Continue providing blankets, jackets, hygiene kits and health care. As these are clearly the most needed items, we should continue and expand our efforts to provide them. We ran out of these three vital items this year, and with the bitter cold this winter, it is clear this was a serious shortfall. We should also look into providing more hygiene items.
- i. Food. Perhaps we can find additional donors in order to provide more food next year.