



Winter Safe Shelter

FINAL REPORT April 19, 2023

Winter Safe Shelter is an effort of Trinity United Methodist Church, Grace Episcopal Church, Grace Covenant Presbyterian and Counterflow LLC. Winter Safe Shelter was intentionally set up to fill gaps in the current system of emergency shelter beds in Buncombe County, specifically providing space for intact families, BIPOC and LGBTQ. **Winter Safe Shelter served 32 people while open, from newborn to age 69, from December 21, 2022 until March 31, 2023.** We hope to secure funds to open again late Autumn of 2023.

We have seen very promising outcomes from a foundation in equity, hiring those with Lived Experience and prioritizing a population that is often unable to safely access other shelters. **66% of guests exited to permanent or transitional housing and 100% of exiting families are now permanently housed.**

THE NEED

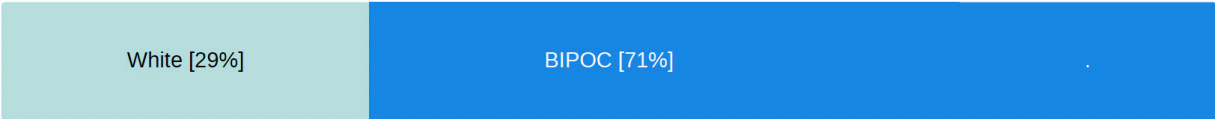
According to the recent National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), the amount of unsheltered homelessness in Asheville has risen 257% since 2020. **The Alliance specifically identified the need for 10 beds for families** (Figure 9,pg 45). We have both the will and the infrastructure to provide these ten beds year round, pending funds (for both seasonal and year round budgets, please send a request).

Safe Shelter also addresses the current racial inequities among the unhoused. NAEH reports: “Black residents represent only 6% of Buncombe County’s population, but make up 24% of those experiencing homelessness in the county (Within Reach, p10).” Despite making up 24% of the unhoused population, Black residents are typically underrepresented in emergency shelters, with only 19% of shelter residents identifying as Black. **Safe Shelter guests were 71% BIPOC, showing how effectively we were able to bring equity to the shelter system.**

Unsheltered homelessness in Buncombe County is exacerbated by staffing shortages at many traditional shelters. **Safe Shelter helped create a vibrant economy by hiring Peer Supports and those with Lived Experience and paying them a Living Wage**, another recommendation of the NAEH, as well as a benefit stipend. In all, 83% of our Peer Support staff were BIPOC and 50% had a criminal history, a status which limits other job opportunities.

GUEST RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

BIPOC representation (n=32)





UNIQUE FACTORS

Safe Shelter has a strong foundation in the NAEH recommendations, including a foundation of equity, transparency, collaboration, elevating the voice of those with lived experience, using evidence-based approaches and non-traditional partners like faith communities. Much of our inspiration comes from the past success of the Room of the Inn program and Trinity United Methodist Church's (UMC) emergency shelter in 2022. **We believe Safe Shelter can play a strategic role in helping Buncombe County cut homelessness by 50% in the next two years.**

Some of the unique factors that we attribute to our success are:

- Incredible staff with extensive experience in the field, both professionally and personally, with evidence-based qualifications including Peer Support Specialist. 83% of our staff are BIPOC, creating another level of trust to the BIPOC community we serve.
- Expand community networks to support staff work through dedicated volunteers and donations. 50+ volunteers donated their time at the Safe Shelter, many on a weekly basis, adding up to a \$17,000+ value.
- Honoring the dignity and agency of guests, connecting them to opportunities and resources and support that resulted in 66% of our guests exiting into housing.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Here are some quotes from Safe Shelter guests, as quoted by Sarah Honosky in the Asheville Citizen Times article: *What it's like to be homeless in Asheville, as described by those who are living it*, published March 17, 2023.

J: *"I had no idea what I would do before I came here. I had no time to dream, I was just hopeless. This place gave me the time to plan what my next step might be...Here, they met people where they are at. This is more like a family. People really, genuinely care."*

C: *"This place for me is like a hug."*

And a statement from a faithful volunteer: *"For me, a retired senior female living in south Asheville, it is a personal privilege to have the opportunity to volunteer at the 2023 Winter Safe Shelter. Gathering at the table and becoming acquainted with some of those living their daily lives without access to housing is an experience that quickly dispels pejorative stereotypes, which are too often used to characterize the homeless. The women, men and children (yes, children) I have met are not weak, lazy, shiftless, or dangerous."*

Quite the contrary. They are strong, resilient, creative people of every age and stage of life whose life journeys have been traumatic in various ways. Some have difficult family stories. Some have been victimized because of their gender identity. Some have debilitating health problems. Some have been harmed by racial injustice. Whatever their circumstances, they are people much like you and me, with skills and talents, hopes and dreams, sorrows and joys. **From them, we can learn powerful truths about what it really means to live together in an authentic human community.** Volunteering at the Winter Safe Shelter has been and continues to be revelatory and inspiring, an experience I deeply value and for which I am most grateful."

JOIN US AROUND THE TABLE

To paint a picture that the data below cannot do, we want to invite you to join us around the dinner table at Safe Shelter. At the head of the table is someone born and raised in Asheville who now supports his family as a **Community Health Worker**, small business owner and now, as a shelter staff. His path here wasn't straight forward: addiction, incarceration and homelessness shaped his early adulthood, experiences that empower his work today. Beside him is an elegant **older woman** who has unofficially adopted a portion of Haywood Road and regularly walks, welcomes and picks up litter along the stretch. Next we have an outgoing **trans female** making crafts, sitting beside a longtime Asheville local who is struggling with substance use. Across the table are some **local church pastors** passing the salad dressing to a **HIV+ person** whose health has taken a hit since they became homeless a few weeks ago. Squeezing in bites of their dinner as they bounce their **infant daughter**, are a homeless couple who would otherwise have had to split up in order to access shelter. After dinner, two volunteers, one from the neighborhood and one from a church, play a rousing game of Uno with **children** staying at the shelter with their parents and a young adult whose 18th birthday marked her exit from **foster care**, leaving her homeless. Arriving late from work, another man arrives grateful for a warm meal and a dry place to lay his head. A while later, a Peer Support Staff who recently completed serving **15 years in prison** arrives saying, "I just love this job!" along with one of our most regular volunteers, who was a guest at last year's emergency shelter and is now stably housed and giving back.

VERY PROMISING DATA

Safe Shelters' person-centered, trauma-informed approach of offering nightly shelter shows many promising outcomes. **We have consistently provided 10 beds on a nightly basis for 101 days. During that time we served 32 guests, with an average length of stay of 24 days.** We have also worked to remain in a relationship with those housed so that their re-entry to housing is not coupled with isolation and challenge

OUTCOMES AT EXIT

66% of all guests housed at exit.

68% of BIPOC guests housed at exit.

100% of families transitioned into permanent housing at exit, with support furnishing and basic household goods

100% of children housed at exit.

100% of Latine guests were housed at exit.

WSS staff observed that when guests encountered a safe and consistent space to sleep and store their belongings it gave them an opportunity to move out of day-to-day survival mode and start to focus on goals such as securing longer term housing and other goals.

Examining how many people we served multiplied by how many nights they stayed equals 771 nights of safe shelter. Even compared to a Code Purple shelter with twice as many beds as Safe Shelter, Safe Shelter provides far more nights of shelter to more people since Code Purple Nights are only called on average 4 days per month. Using this preliminary data, we project serving 120 individuals over one full year. If our current rate of housing continues, that will translate to about 80 people housed upon exiting Safe Shelter, including 58 BIPOC.

GEOGRAPHICS

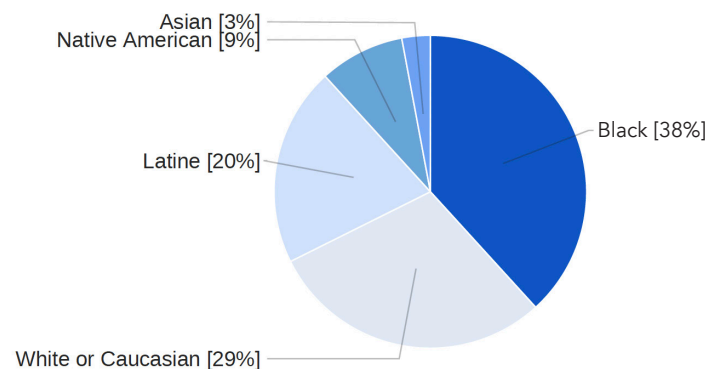
The emergency shelter was located at the former West Asheville Presbyterian Church at 690 Haywood Rd, Asheville. Utilizing existing underused space gave WSS significant cost savings. We received referrals from many service providers across the region, including: ABCCM, BC Community Paramedics, Umoja Health Wellness and Justice Collective, BeLoved, Homeward Bound, Mission Hospital, the Veterans Administration, Haywood Street Respite, HIAC, ADOACT, Our VOICE, JAMS and others. **66% of those served had been in the Asheville/Buncombe area for the last month or longer and 79% were living in North Carolina.** One family had recently moved to Buncombe County from Texas after the father was offered a job in Arden.

DEMOGRAPHICS

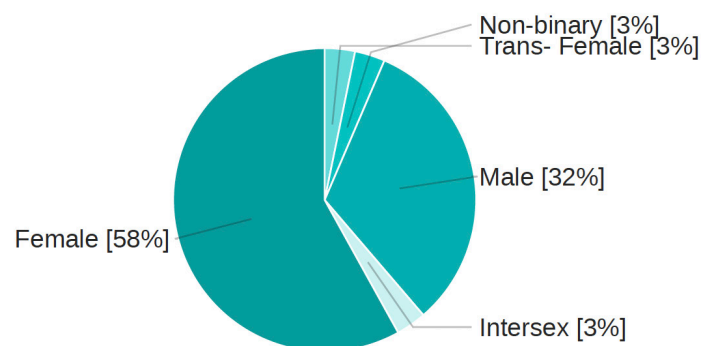
RACE/ETHNICITY - 71% of the guests Safe Shelter served were BIPOC, with the largest percentage identifying as Black (38%). Twenty percent were of Latino origin and 9% Native American. Thanks to bilingual staff and volunteers we were able to serve and permanently house a family who spoke no English.

GENDER - 68% identified as non-male, including 58% female and three individuals who identified as trans, non-binary and intersex respectively.

Race/ Ethnicity identification (Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



Identification (Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)

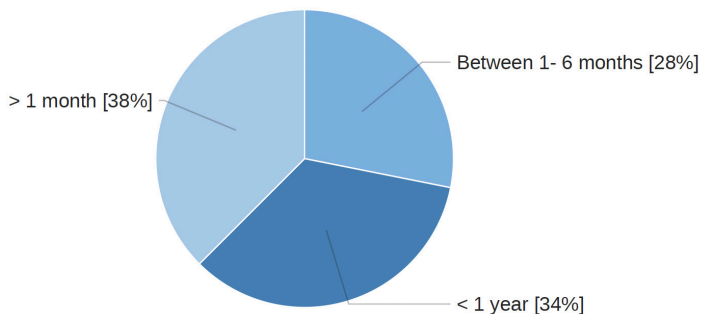


QUALIFYING CIRCUMSTANCES

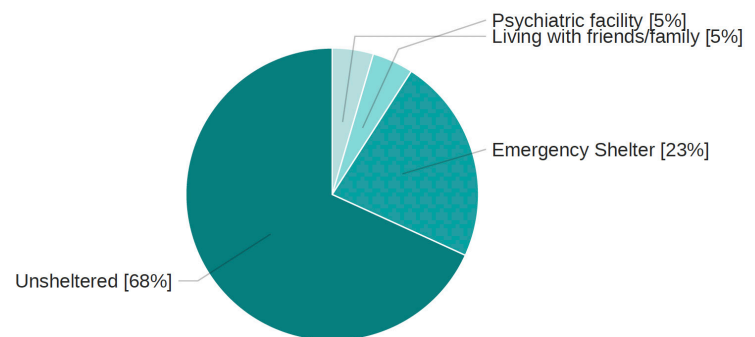
Intersectionality: about one third of our guests entered due to multiple qualifying circumstances, showing the overlap and interdependence of systems of discrimination and oppression.

**71% entered due to feeling unsafe due to RACISM at traditional shelters &/or
28% entered due to feeling unsafe due to their GENDER/SEXUAL identity &
31% entered to remain together as a FAMILY**

How long have you been without housing? (n=32/32)



Where did you spend the last 3 nights? (n=32/32)



AGE - We served families with children ranging from newborn to seventeen. Upon entry, none of the school aged children were registered for school but with support from WSS all are now enrolled and attending school.

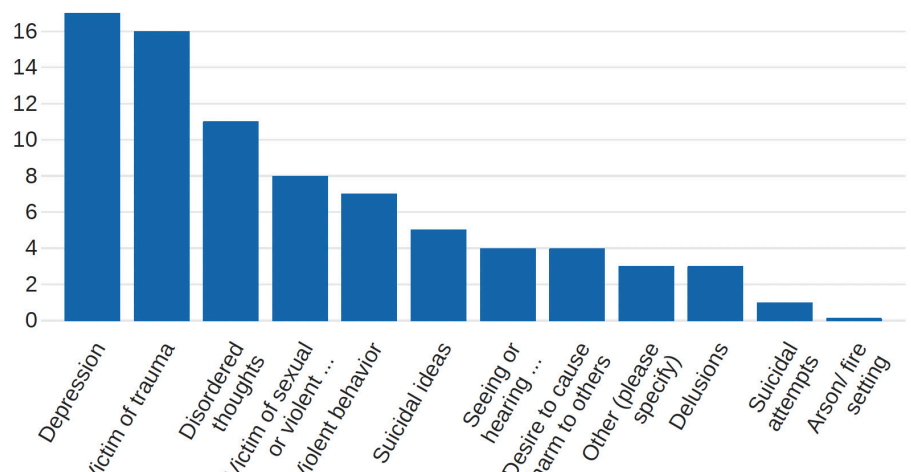
HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS - Some guests had been chronically homeless, however the majority, 56%, were experiencing homelessness for the first time. Most, 66%, had been homeless 6 months or less, among whom 38% had been homeless less than 30 days. 68% arrived at Safe Shelter from staying at a place not meant for human habitation (street, car, etc), emphasizing the lack of available shelters.

HEALTH

Over half of guests report having a mental health diagnosis. Among those who reported challenges with substance use, 82% had participated in some form of treatment, highlighting that access to treatment is sometimes more accessible than access to permanent or transitional substance free housing. Nine percent of guests exited WSS to enter a treatment facility, be it psychiatric, medical or SUD. Just over half of guests self report challenges regarding use of drugs and alcohol. Half of our population is without medical insurance.

Self-Reported Mental Wellness Challenges

(Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



HOUSING OUTCOMES

Out of the 66% that found housing upon exiting the WSS, 44% are permanently housed and 22% are in transitional housing. For BIPOC guests, the numbers were slightly higher, with 68% housed overall, including 45% permanently and 23% transitionally. As we worked to connect guests with housing resources another clear barrier was identified in addition to high cost of living and social determinants of health: housing for those with a history of justice involvement.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

This effort was inspired by Trinity UMC's Winter Shelter the prior year and welcomed two additional churches in 2022/2023. This model of sheltering poses the opportunity for healing across our community, amongst churches, between those who are housed and unhoused, and in spiritual and secular spaces. We envision inviting additional churches and faith communities to support our effort, creating fresh sources of funding, donations, and volunteers. This year WSS received funding from 12 different funding agencies including: local government, a managed-care organization, social justice and philanthropic organizations and faith-based groups. In addition, over \$20,000 was raised in primarily small individual donations.

If you are interested in becoming a funding partner we can make both Winter Season and Year Round Safe Shelter budgets available. An additional selection of visualizations from our comprehensive and WSS Program can be found in Appendix A.

Sincerely,



Rev. Nancy Dixon Walton
Pastor, Trinity United
Methodist Church



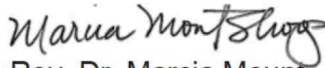
Rev. Mike Reardon
Associate Rector, Grace
Episcopal Church



Rev. Dr. Richard Coble
Associate Pastor, Grace
Covenant Presbyterian
Church



Rev. Dustin Mailman
Pastor of Family Ministries
and Mission, Trinity United
Methodist Church



Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount
Shoop, Pastor/Head of
Staff, Grace Covenant
Presbyterian Church



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[www.counterflowasheville.com/
safeshelter](http://www.counterflowasheville.com/safeshelter)

Appendix A

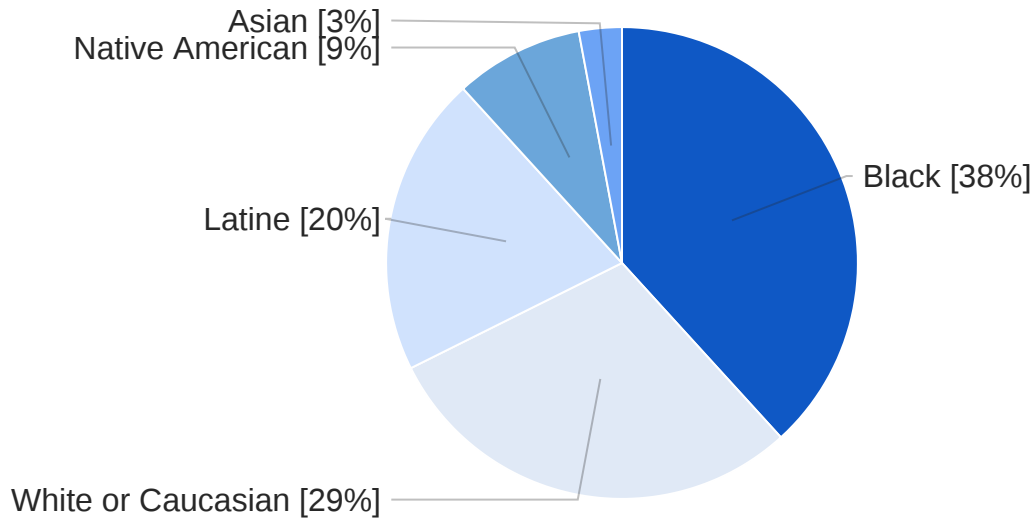
Intake Data Visualizations



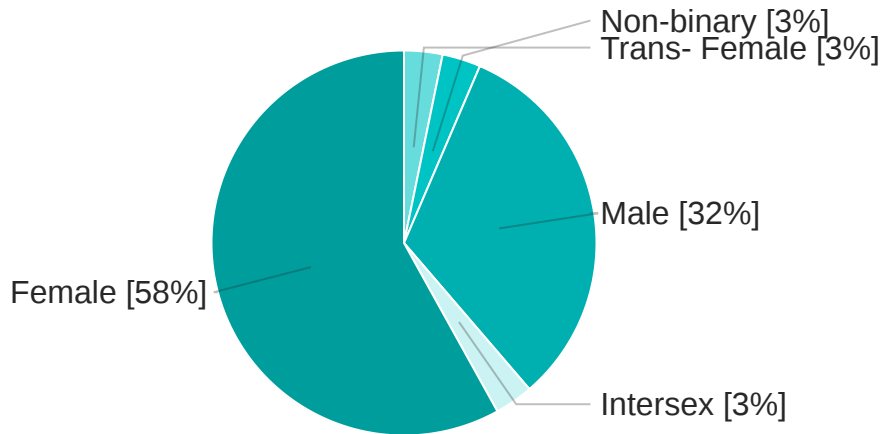
Counterflow

Guest Demographics

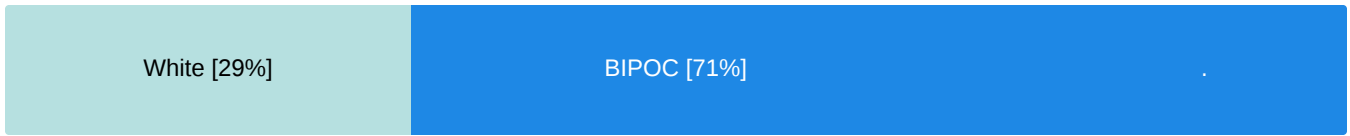
Race/ Ethnicity identification (Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



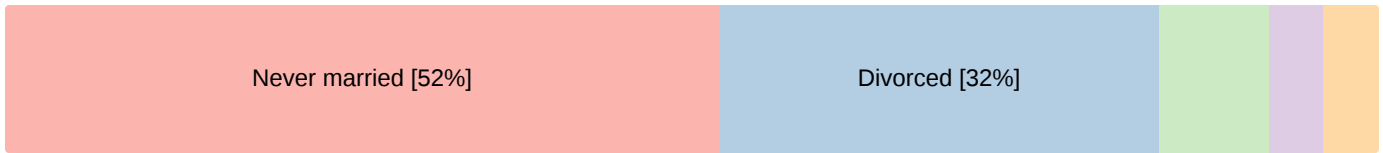
Gender Identification (Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



BIPOC representation (n=32)

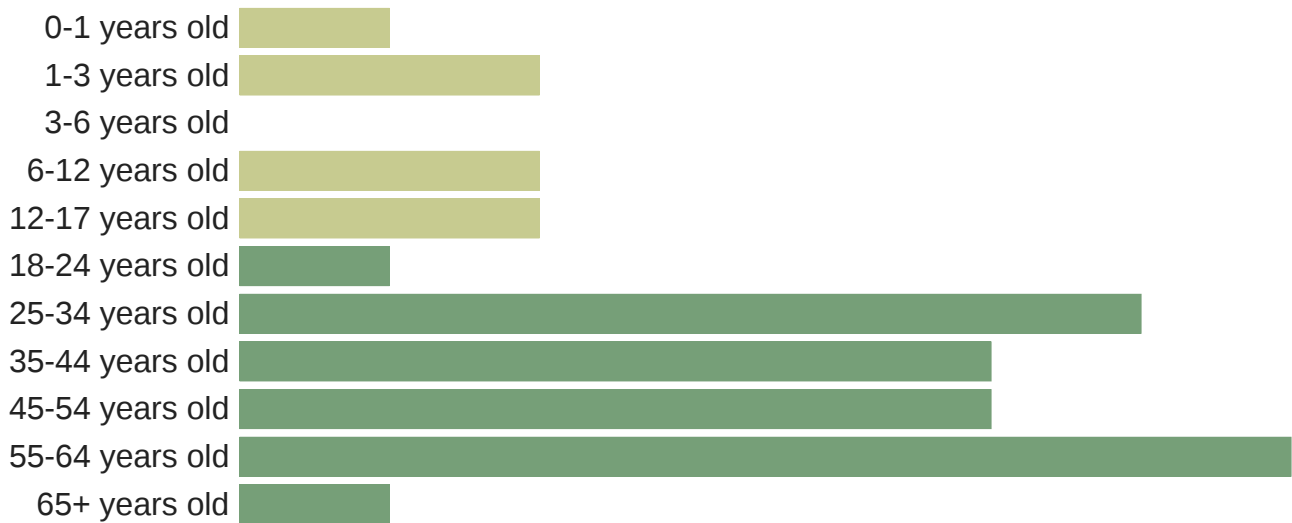


Marital Status (n=25/25 adults)

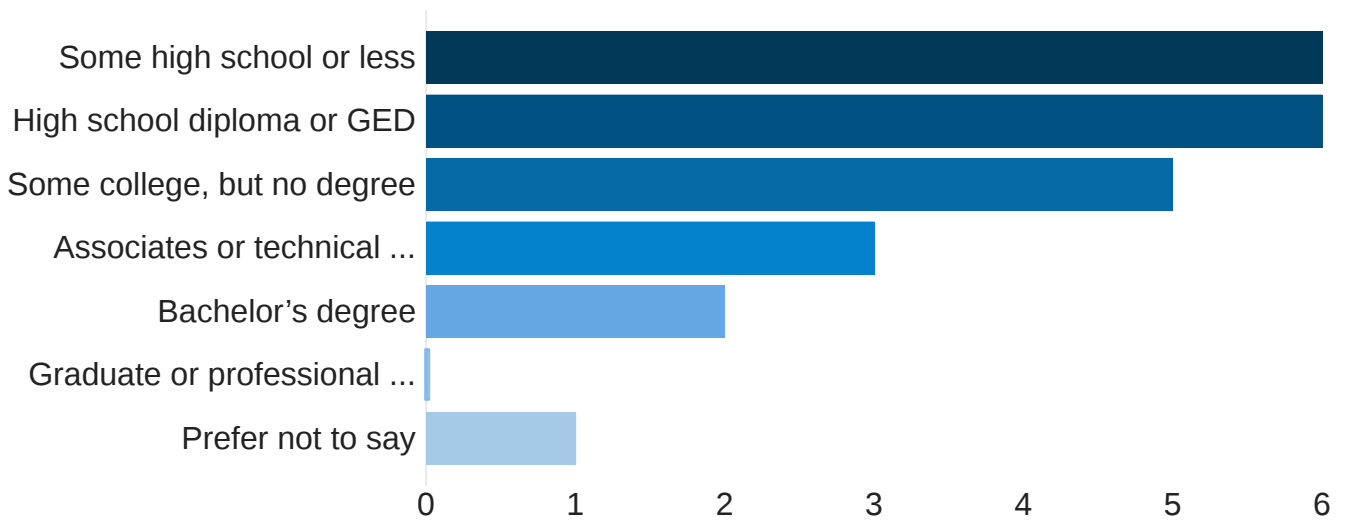


● Never married [52%] ● Divorced [32%] ● Married [8%] ● Separated [4%] ● Widowed [4%]

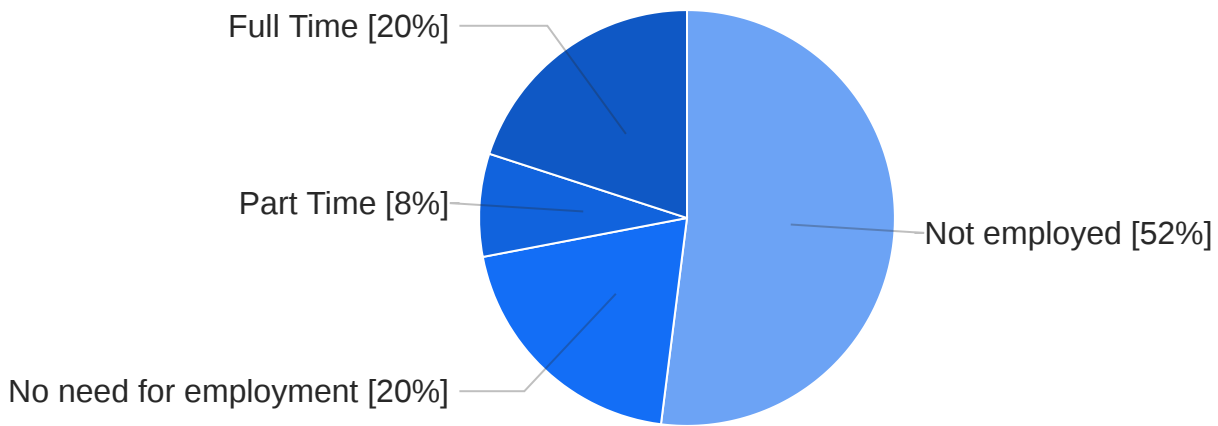
Guest age groups (n=32/32)



Educational completion for adults (n=21/25)



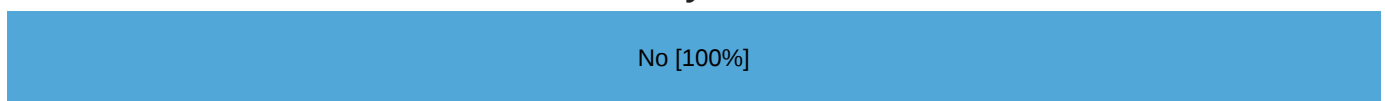
Employment (n=25/25 adults)



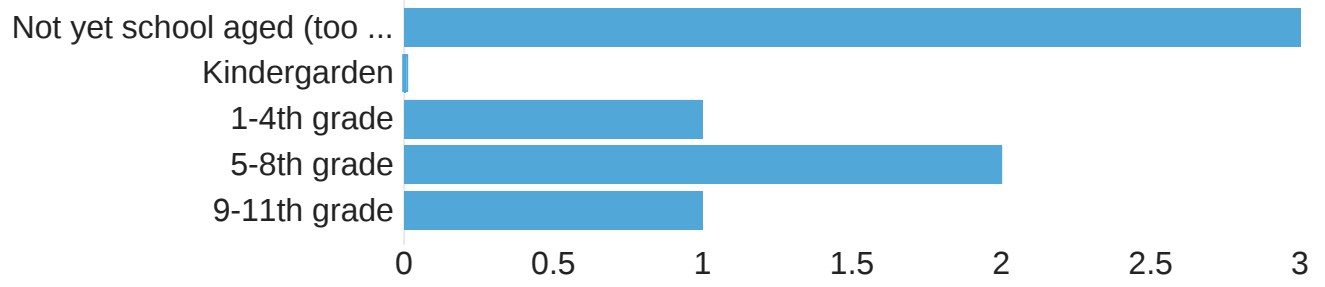
Individuals staying as part of a family group (n=32/32)



Guest children enrolled in school/day care? (n=7/7 minors)

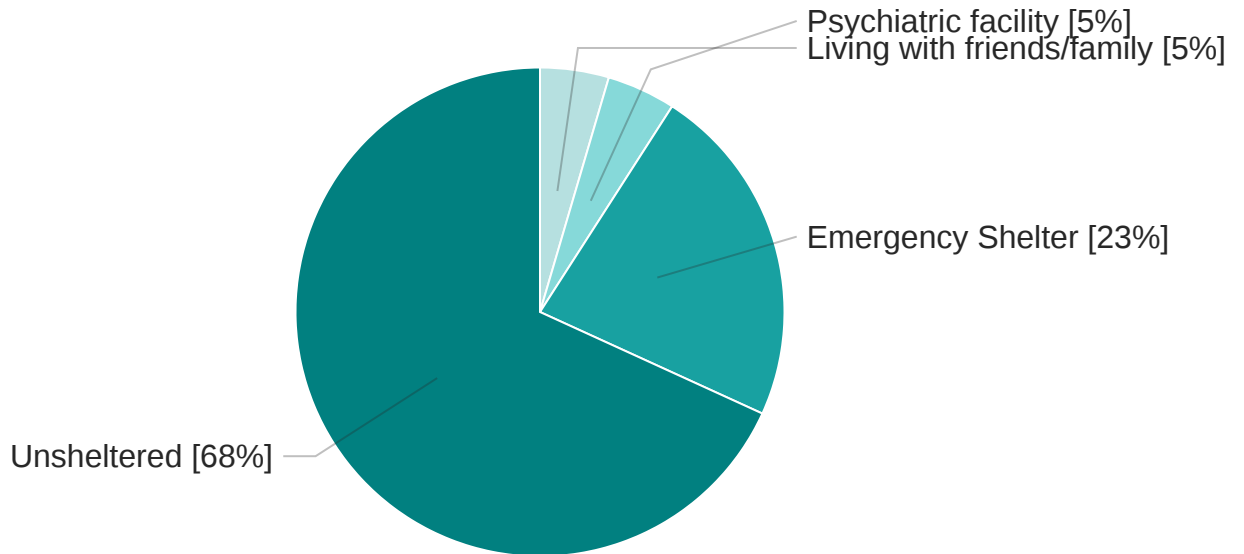


Under 18's grade in school (n=7/7 minors)

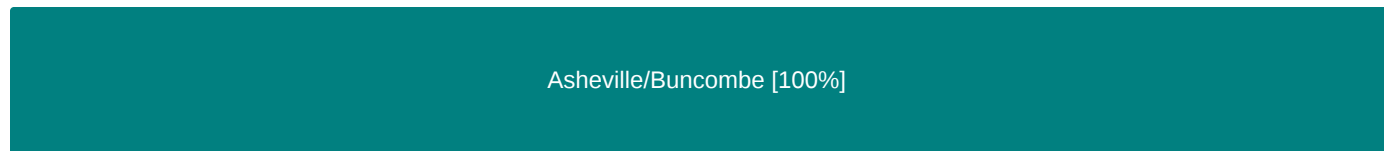


Housing History

Where did you spend the last three nights? (n=32/32)

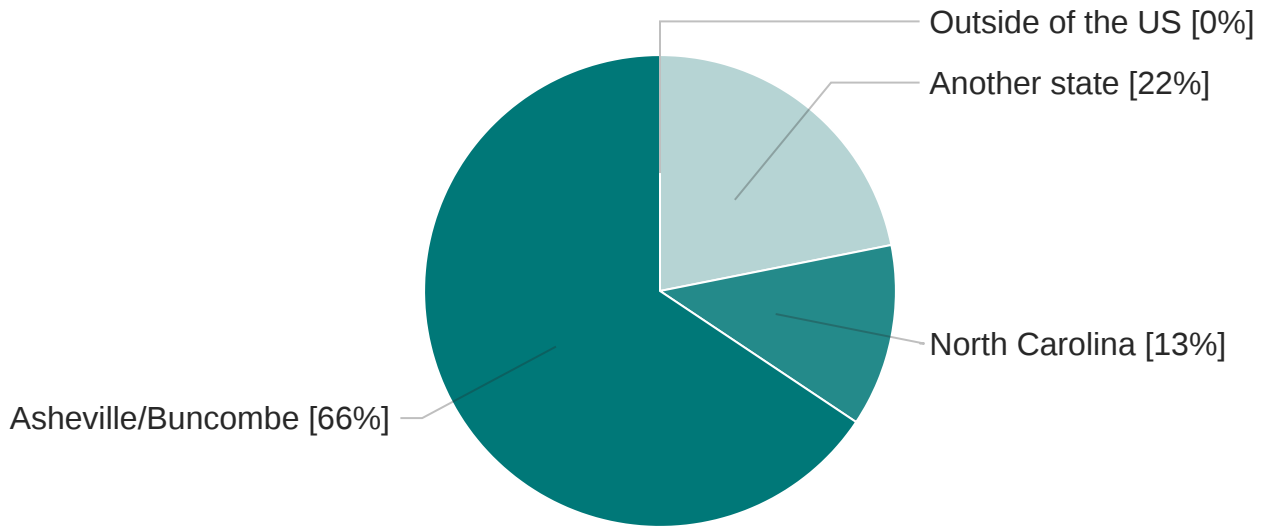


Location of last 3 nights before entry to Safe Shelter (n=32/32)

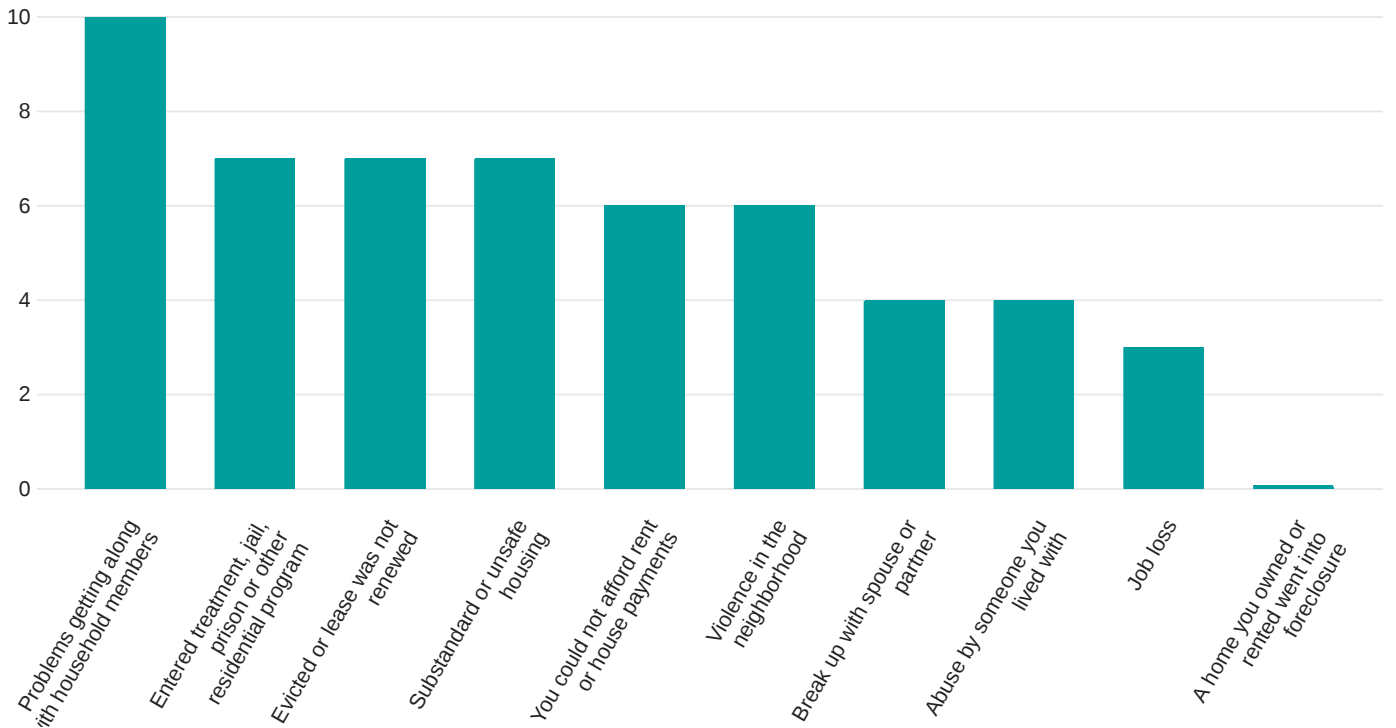


- Asheville/Buncombe [100%]
- North Carolina [0%]
- Another state [0%]
- Outside of the US [0%]

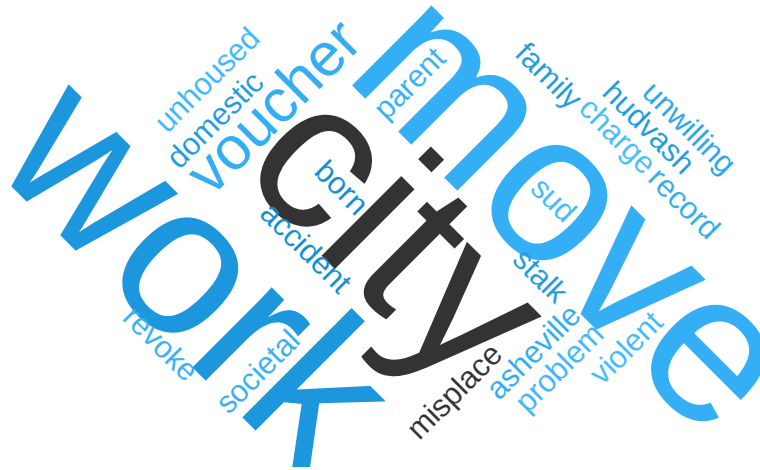
In what location did you spend the last 30 nights?



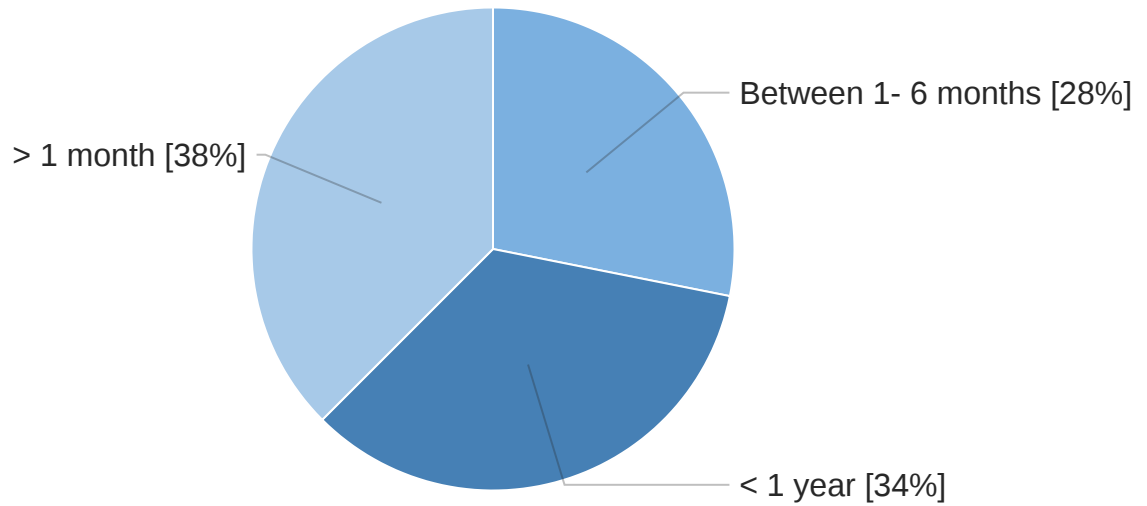
Reason for losing last housing situation. (Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



Word cloud for "other" as selected reason for losing housing

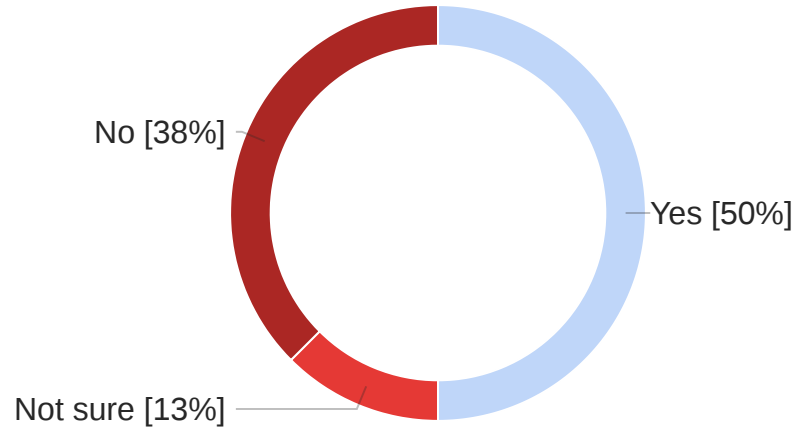


Q61 - How long have you been without housing? (n=32/32)



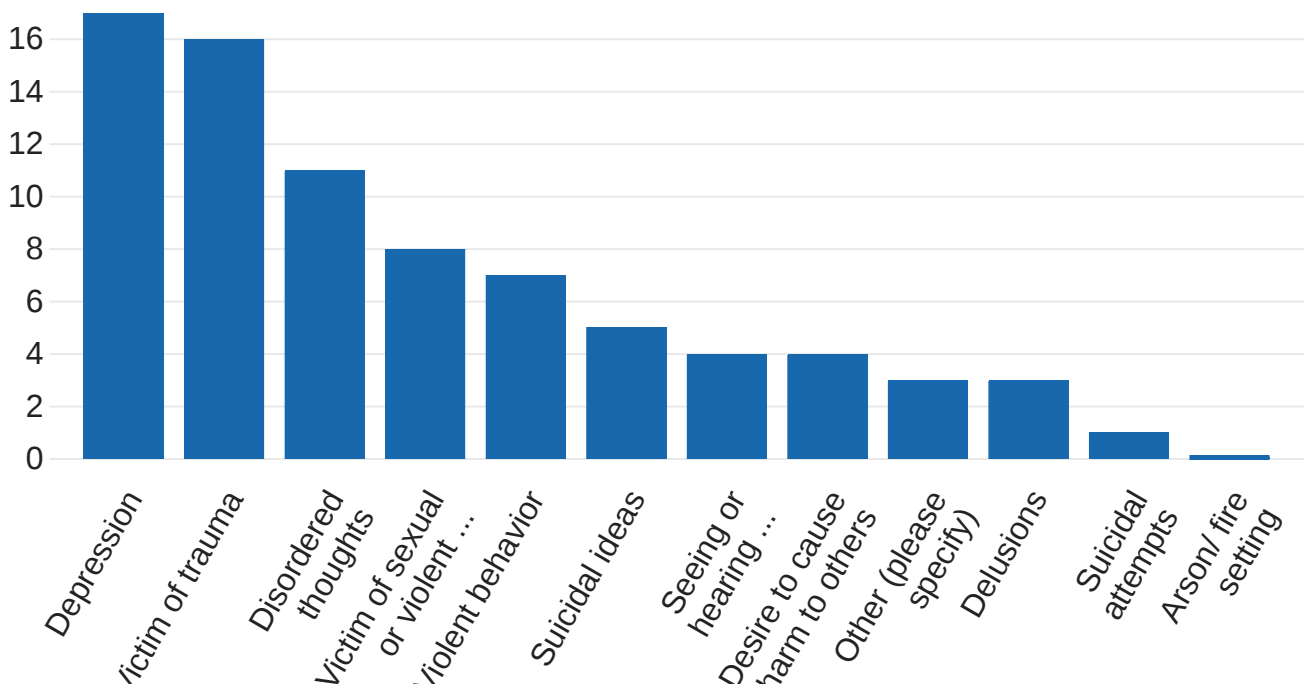
Health

Health Insurance Coverage (n=29/32)



Self-Reported Mental Wellness Challenges

(Guests could identify one or more n=32/32)



Diagnosis or self-reported issues

Mental illness (n=25/26 who were above 16 years)



● Yes [69%] ● Unsure [8%] ● No [23%]

Alcohol misuse (n=25/25 adults)



● Yes [35%] ● Unsure [4%] ● No [62%]

Drug misuse (n=25/25 adults)

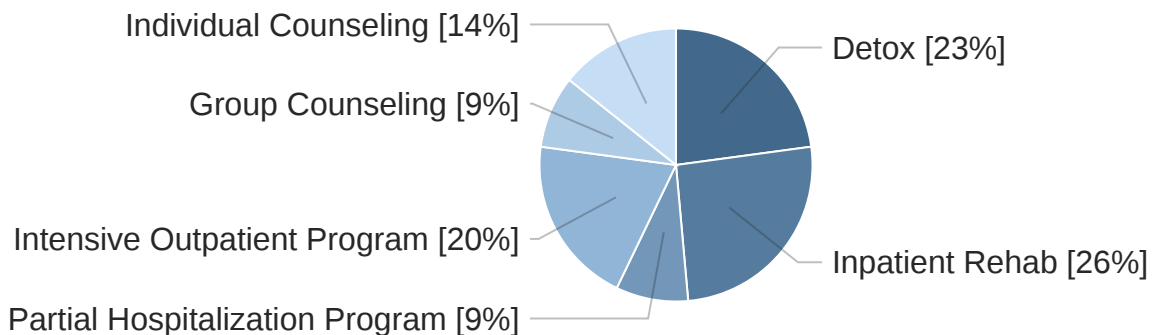


● Yes [68%] ● Unsure [4%] ● No [28%]

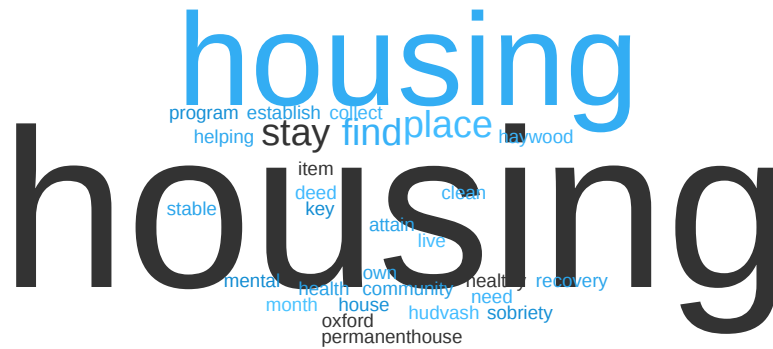
Percentage of individuals that self-reported substance use challenges that have participated in formal treatment (n=16):



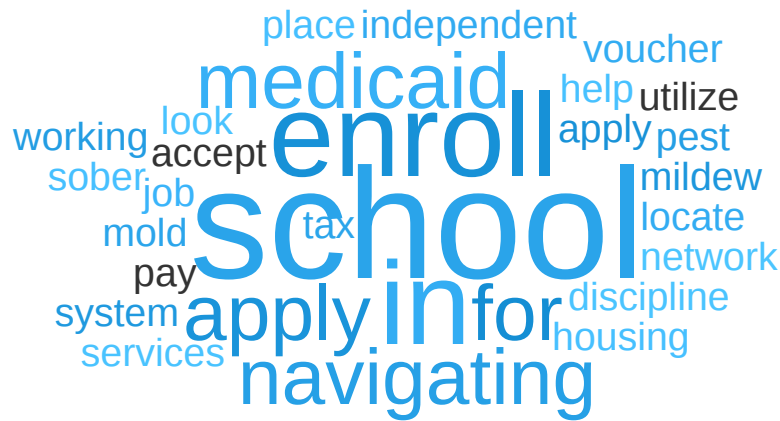
Types of Substance Use treatment received by those that reported having received professional treatment (n=16)



Highest Priority Goal- word cloud



Second Highest Priority Goal- word cloud



Third Highest Priority Goal- word cloud

