



A "tent city" volunteers found in Bartholomew County (Region 11).

## Volunteers for the Point-in-Time Count: *Counting and Caring*

By **Teresa Turner**, Public Relations & Advocacy Manager

One night in January, volunteers across Indiana left the comfort of their homes and braved the cold to participate in the annual Point-in-Time count. The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons which is conducted on a single night in January. HUD began collecting PIT count data in the mid-2000s, and IHCD has been participating in the PIT count since 2009.

A training kickoff event was held in October for regional coordinators. A webinar-based training for all volunteers is held mid-January about one week before the count takes place. More than 200 people participated in the webinar training which covered a general overview of the point-in-time count, the process for completing surveys with people experiencing homelessness, safety considerations, tips for interacting with the media, and a heartfelt thank you for participating. The training was also recorded and placed on YouTube.

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*I have a home with heat and a car and a warm coat and boots, but I find there are many days when my face goes without a smile. Their struggle is real.*

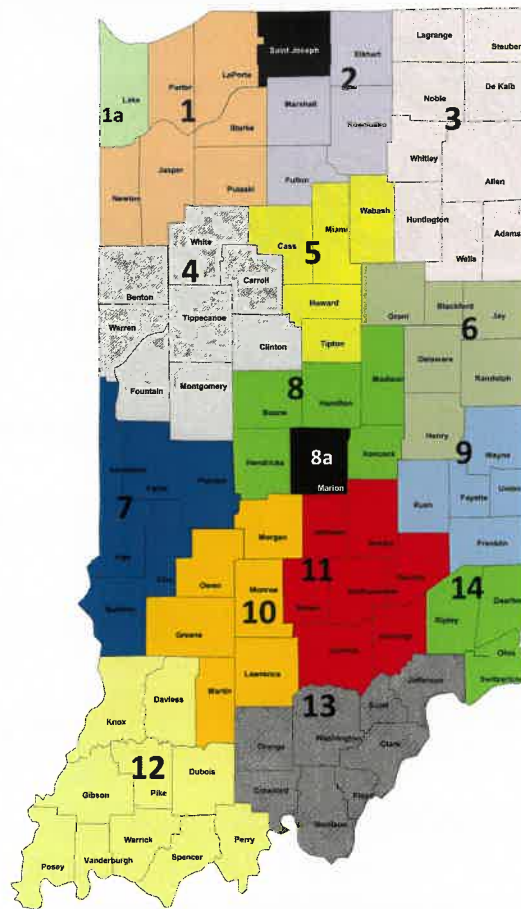
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– **Stacey Totten**, Volunteer, Region 7

Regions were varied in the number of volunteers participating, with one having as few as two volunteers and another having 85. Region 11 had a total of 35 volunteers and 30 formal locations where the count was conducted. The locations included food pantries, churches, social service agencies, libraries,

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*Indiana is divided into 15 regions for the PIT count, which uses the same regions as Continuum-of-Care (CoC). A regional chair is identified in each region to lead, find volunteers, and develop a plan. Although not scientific data, the PIT count does provide a snapshot of the number of homeless across the state.*



Helpline, 211, health clinics, Horizon House, Anchor House, and others, with meal sites set up especially for this event. Volunteers rode along the Access Johnson County buses and persons went out on foot throughout the region looking in places not meant for human habitation. This was done in addition to locations already in place for those to drop in and receive their care packages and talk with a volunteer.

Michele Lee, Director of Homeless Prevention at Human Services, Inc. talks about the experience in Region 11: "We as a region were able to engage individuals and Social Service Agencies who had not previously been a part of the Point-in-Time count. We are excited and looking forward to building our volunteer and location network as we move forward. Police officials have become more involved in the past two years. Jackson County, Johnson County and Bartholomew County had police officers with them during their counts. It is nice to have them take an interest as we can learn a lot from them as much they from us as to where to locate persons in need and where to send them for resources."

Stacey Totten, a volunteer in Region 7, summarized her experience participating in the PIT count this way: "My

experience was unexpected. Kelli, the lead from my area, held meetings and gave updates for how it could look and what to expect. You can't prepare someone for their own feelings. I was overwhelmed with emotion. There was a guy in his late 30s, around my age. He rode a bicycle with a basket that contained ALL of his belongings. His shelter at night is a friend's woodshed with no heat, and yet he smiled at me. Not an inappropriate smile, a genuine smile. It made me feel lost in my own world. I have a home with heat and a car and a warm coat and boots, but I find there are many days when my face goes without a smile. Their struggle is real."

Lori Dimick, Director of Community Services for IHCD, said, "By conducting the Point-in-Time count on an annual basis, we can track the number of people experiencing homelessness in Indiana. The data collected by our volunteers provides an important opportunity to strategize ways to provide the appropriate permanent housing solution for each community."

If you would like more information about the Point-in-time count or if you are interested in volunteering or donating supplies, visit [www.indianabos.org](http://www.indianabos.org). ■