

Department of  
Public Social Services  
Philip L. Browning, Director



*"To enrich lives through  
effective and caring service"*

apartments and 60% were mostly in places not meant for sleep (see Figure 1). An outdoor bench or covered area, a storage space, a car, and a kitchen are examples of atypical places used for sleep. If we use where a person sleeps as a proxy for homelessness, we would expect that at least 60% of the sample will identify themselves as homeless when asked. Although homeless was the

Figure 1

In 2005, DPSS completed its first report on homeless families in the CalWORKs program. It provided DPSS with unique information, ranging from frequency and duration of homelessness to reasons that lead to a housing crisis. The motivation for this report was to capture similar data not available from administrative records on participants in the County of Los Angeles General Relief (GR) Program for adults with little or no income and who are not eligible for federal and state cash aid.

GR Program participation requirements for each person are, in part, determined by their employability status. As a condition of cash aid, men and women deemed employable are obliged to engage in employment development activities through the GR Opportunities for Work (GROW). Those judged unemployable, either temporarily or permanently because of conditions such as physical health or mental health, are not required to participate in job development activities. In accordance with GR Program policies, describing people in terms of employability status is an effective indicator of the presence or absence of a host of barriers to the development of self-sufficiency. For the sake of brevity, reference is made to 'employables' and 'unemployables' throughout the report.

## HOMELESSNESS

We can tell a lot about a person's living situation if we ask them where they sleep. We found that about 40% of GR participants were in houses and

Which of the following best describes where you are most often sleeping at night?

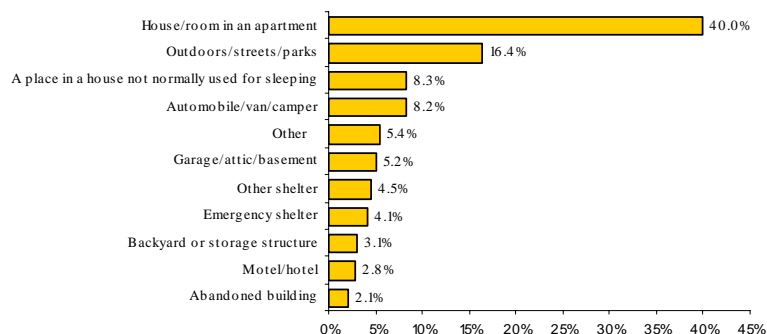
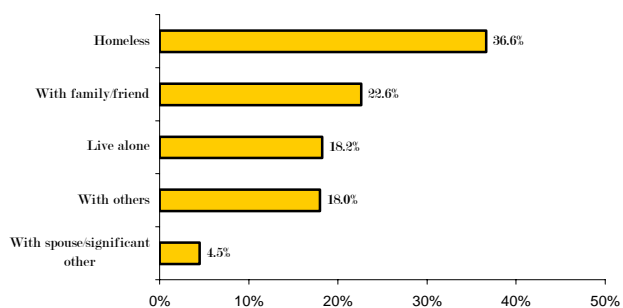


Figure 2

What is your current living situation?

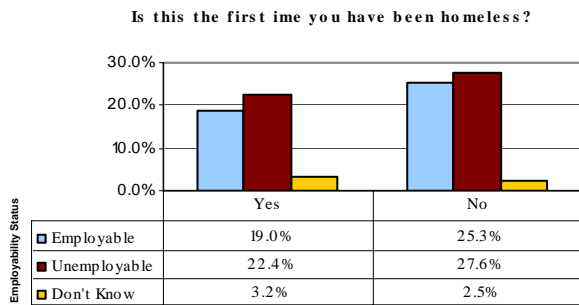


answer given most frequently (see Figure 2) for current living situation, it was not close to the 60% we might have expected knowing the atypical sleep situations reported by most. Looking at subsequent questions about homelessness we found that a slightly greater percentage (40%) answered these.

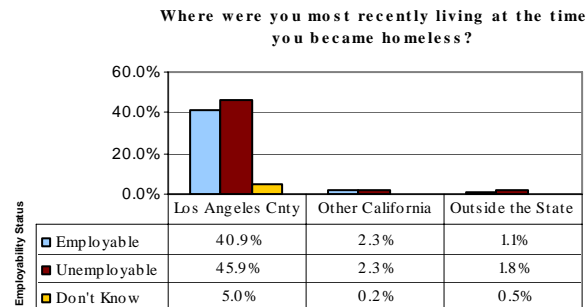
The remainder of the report will focus on responses of this group of 450 GR participants who responded to questions about homelessness. Employability status within this group broke out as follows: 45% were employable, 50% were unemployable, and the remaining 5% did not know. Demographic characteristics of the homeless were similar to those of the August 2006 GR caseload characteristics with the exception of 11% more men in the homeless group (62% male in caseload, 73% male in homeless group).

Majorities in both groups stated this was not the first time they were homeless and that they were living in the County of Los Angeles when they became homeless this time (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 3**

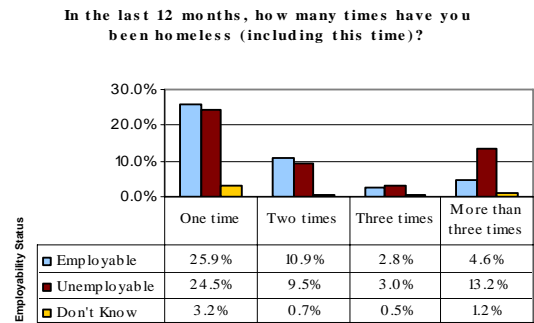


**Figure 4**



Looking at Figures 5 and 6 we see that a majority in both groups experienced homelessness once or twice. A difference emerged at the highest end of frequency in that unemployables (the tall brown bar on the right) were nearly three times more likely to have more than three spells of homelessness than employables. According to frequency criteria of three or more, between 25% – 34% of the 450 identified as homeless was chronically homeless.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

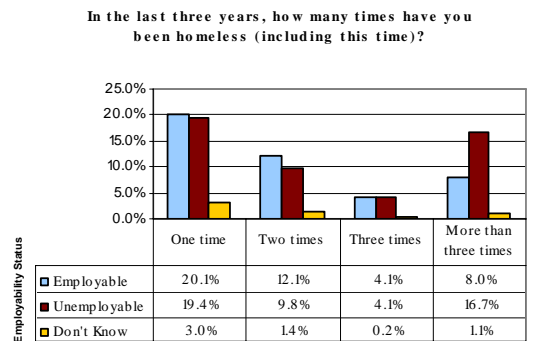
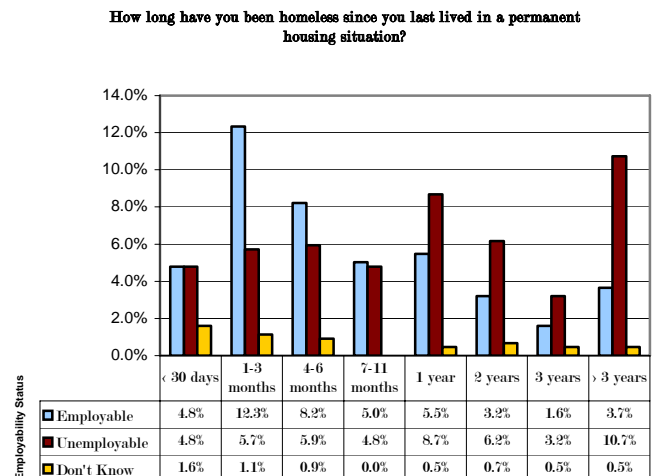


Figure 7 displays information about duration of homelessness. Again, looking at the colors of the bars we notice differences; the blue bars (for employables) are taller on the left and the brown bars (for unemployables) are taller on the right, especially the far right and suggest that employables experience less chronic homelessness than unemployables. We speculate that this makes sense because employables, though marginally attached to the labor force, are likely to have a better chance of

**Figure 7**

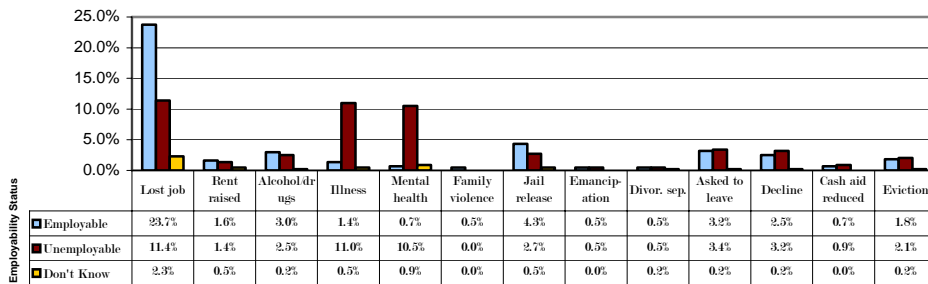


overcoming homelessness because of more opportunities to increase income. According to our duration criteria of 12 months or more, about 45% was chronically homeless. We conclude using both types of criteria that between 25% - 45% were chronically homeless.

Many reasons were endorsed by both groups of respondents to explain conditions that led to becoming homeless (see Figure 8). Chief among them were job loss and physical and mental disabilities. Unemployables reported physical illness and mental health issues about 10 times more than employables.

**Figure 8**

**What do you think is the main reason or condition that led to your current homelessness?**

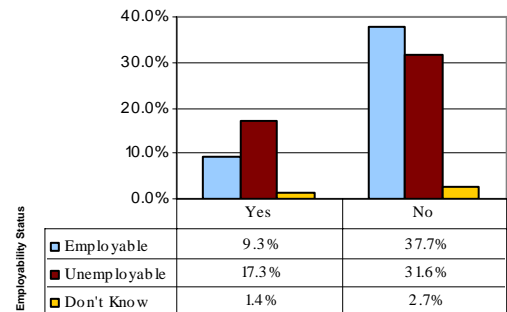


### HELP SEEKING BY THE 1123 RESPONDENTS

Given the greater occurrence of physical and mental disability among unemployable GR participants, we might expect them to seek help more often than employables because they have a greater need for assistance. This was the case for medical care, but not other forms of assistance. More help was requested from friends and family than social assistance agencies. Across all questions about help seeking, a minority of men and women reported they asked for help in the past six months (see Figures 9-13).

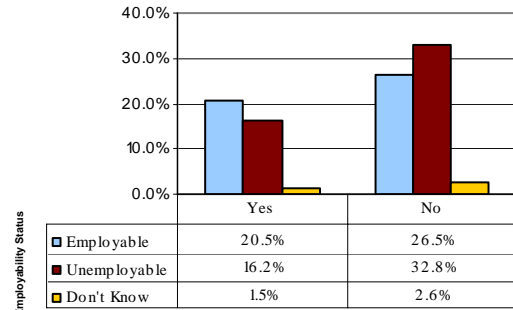
**Figure 9**

**During the last 6 months, did you ask for help from a free clinic?**



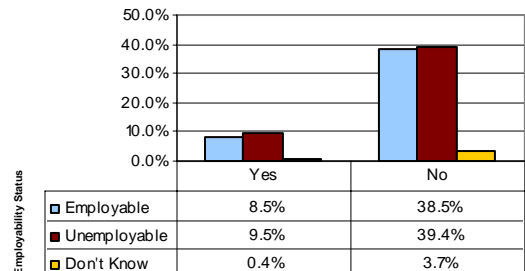
**Figure 10**

**During the past 6 months, did you receive money/food/housing/clothing/transportation from friends or relatives?**



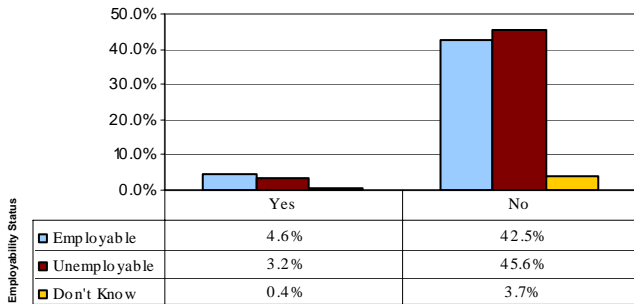
**Figure 11**

**During the past 6 months, did you ask for help from a religious group?**



**Figure 12**

**During the last 6 months did you ask for help from your landlord?**



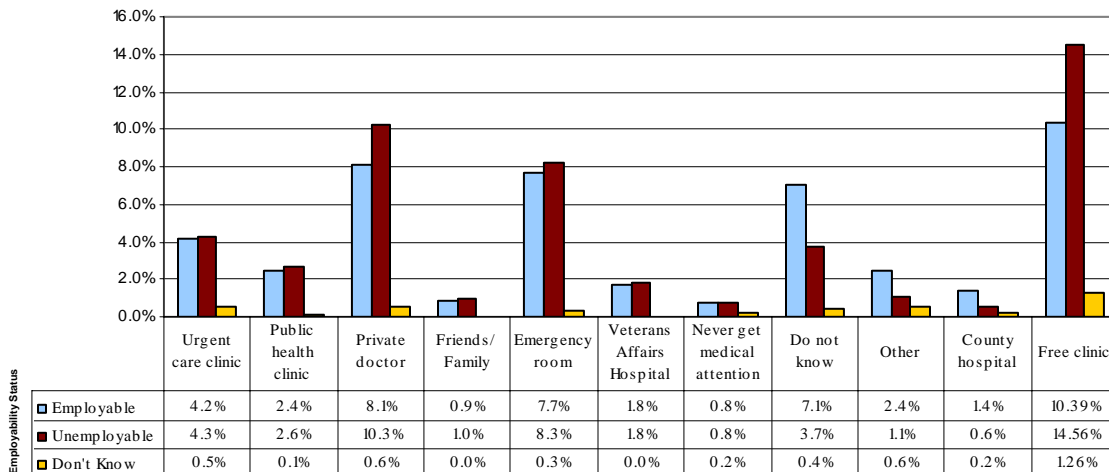
workers completed the survey with the participant to overcome either a language or literacy barrier. Two-hundred and ninety four participants refused to complete the survey and 83 surveys were never administered.

**LIMITATIONS**

Caution is urged in interpreting the results of this report. Although the demographic characteristics of respondents were representative of the GR caseload, the results should be interpreted as suggestive of trends within the greater GR population rather than precise estimates of occurrence for the population. Respondents may have been hesitant to disclose certain information.

**Figure 13**

**Where do you usually get medical attention?**



**DATA COLLECTION**

*Inclusion criteria:* Participants receiving General Relief cash assistance were asked to complete a survey while visiting a DPSS office between October 1, 2005 and January 31, 2006.

*Exclusion criteria:* Men and women submitting applications were not included in the survey for two reasons: First, not all of them were eligible for assistance and second, the department did not want to burden individuals with paperwork over and above what was required on the day of application.

*Administration:* One-thousand and five-hundred surveys were distributed and data was collected on 1123 participants across 13 office locations. DPSS

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Many people at DPSS and the Chief Administrative Office assisted in gathering data for this report. The author extends thanks to all involved. Photograph courtesy of © Arturo Delfin 2005.

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