Ravalli County
Needs and Gaps Analysis

Ravalli County: Large Geographic Area, Limited Tax Base.
With a 2014 population estimate of 41,030 (US Census), Ravalli County is one of only nine counties in the state of Montana that has more than 20,000 residents. Of the remaining eight counties, all but one other, Lake County, have the population base, and therefore the resources, of a large urban area. Ravalli County’s’ 40,000+ residents are spread throughout ten incorporated and unincorporated communities, comprising 2,394 square miles of valley, bordered by mostly road less mountains. 77% of the County is public land, thereby limiting the tax base. The median income in Ravalli County is $39,480. Approximately 12.2% of all families and 18% of all people in Ravalli County lived in poverty in the last 18 months.

In Ravalli County, the median mortgage is $1,301 and the median rent is $702. Approximately 41.2% of homeowners and 49.5% of renters pay more than 30% of their income for housing.

Bitterroot Task Force on Homelessness and Housing (BTFHH).
In March 2016, a group of service providers in Ravalli County convened to discuss what appeared to be an alarming increase in housing insecurity and homelessness among those using their services. On October 25, 2016, local service providers, church staff and concerned citizens formed the Bitterroot Task Force on Homeless and Housing (BTFHH). Meeting monthly with the mission to “alleviate homelessness and prevent housing insecurity by supporting and facilitating affordable and safe housing solutions – from emergency to permanent, for Ravalli County citizens of all ages, abilities, and circumstances”, BTFHH now includes members from 39 organizations representing city and county government, public and private sector, human service and housing providers, veterans advocates, faith organizations and interested citizens.

BTFHH /Ravalli County Needs Assessment.
Members of the BTFHH have engaged in a county-wide homeless and housing insecurity needs assessment since early 2017. In an effort to capture homeless needs and gaps BTFHH:

➢ Participated in the 2017 Point in Time Homeless Survey;
➢ Conducted focus groups with the staff and clients of:
  ▪ Ravalli Council on Aging, serving elderly persons;
  ▪ Ravalli Services Corporation, serving persons with disabilities;
  ▪ River Front Mental Health; low-income and homeless mental health services;
  ▪ Ravalli Head Start, serving low-income families;
  ▪ SAFE, serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.
➢ Analyzed 2-1-1- calls re: number and type of assistance requested;
➢ Surveyed Property Management companies re: unit type, cost and vacancy rates.
Gathered information from representatives of local housing and human service agencies such as Salvation Army, Bitterroot Family Shelter, Westhouse, and Human Resource Council;

Reviewed economic and demographic data for Ravalli County.


The Montana Continuum of Care Point in Time Homeless Survey is conducted annually by local communities throughout Montana. The Point in Time Survey (PIT) is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. In Ravalli County, surveys were distributed at the Darby Public Library, Corner Stone Church, St. Francis Parish, District XI Human Resource Council, Sapphire Health Center, Hamilton Salvation Army, SAFE, and the Stevensville United Methodist Church. These efforts helped to identify 41 adults and 53 children who were experiencing homelessness on the day of the survey.

41 surveys returned.
Total homeless households: 41
Total number of homeless persons: 94: 41 Adults, 53 Children

(NOTE: This is nearly a 300% increase from the 2016 PIT of 36. This significant increase is in part due to enhanced outreach. As the work of the BTFHH continues, community awareness around homelessness will likely increase the PIT count in 2018).

Respondents included individuals, couples and single and two parent families with children. They reported a variety of living situations such as camping, shelters for youth and domestic violence survivors, motels and couch surfing or doubling up with family and friends.

Adults Without Minor Children: There were 11 adults without minor children who reported being homeless in Ravalli County on January 26, 2017. Of these, five reported sleeping outside the previous (late January) night. Eight respondents were male and 4 were female.

Adults With Minor Children, One-parent households: A total of 18 families, with 36 children reported being homeless on January 26, 2017. Ten families were living at the local domestic violence transitional housing program, one was living in a motel, and 7 families were staying with family or friends. Thirteen respondents-72% of all one parent households reporting-indicated that domestic violence was the reason they left their last residents. Three families reported that an inability to pay rent was the reason for leaving their last residence.

Adults with Minor Children: Two-parent households: Three two parent households, with 6 adults and 10 children reported being homeless in Ravalli County on the day of the survey. Of those, two families (4 adults) were staying with family or friends and one
family (2 adults) was staying in a motel that they were paying for. Two of the three families indicated an inability to pay rent was the reason for leaving their last residence.

**Minors Reporting:** Five individuals under 18 and living at the youth shelter reported being homeless on the night of the survey.

**2. Focus Groups**

BTFHH sought to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges in Ravalli County concerning housing. BTFHH members held five focus group meetings with staff and clients of the Ravalli Council on Aging, Ravalli Services Corporation, River Front Mental Health, Ravalli Head Start and SAFE.

**Focus Group Summary:** The lack of affordable housing coupled with the additional barriers of poverty, disability, and social supports makes permanent housing nearly impossible for many individuals and families to obtain. Once permanent housing is obtained, remaining in housing is precarious due to those barriers listed above. Supportive housing, such as that offered by Ravalli Services, provides a model for community support, creating access to permanent housing and assisting individuals to remain in permanent housing.

For those that can afford market rate rents, a limited number property management companies control most of the multi-family housing stock. Property management companies may require proof of income that prohibits individuals from being able to obtain housing. In the event of credit or other issues, the tenant is effectively foreclosed from further occupancy at any of the units managed by the few companies offering rental housing.

**3. Calls to 2-1-1**

For FY 2016 and 2017, 2-1-1 documented 384 calls originating in Ravalli County, seeking information, referral, advocacy and assistance with a variety of critical needs.

78% of Ravalli County calls regarded basic needs assistance:

- ✓ 41% were seeking help with housing or shelter
- ✓ 19% were seeking help with utility payments
- ✓ 18% were seeking transportation assistance (primarily gas for vehicles)
- ✓

FY 2016: 164 calls. Of these, 40 or about 25% were seeking help with housing and/or shelter
FY 2017: 220 calls. Of these 100, or almost 50% were seeking help with housing and/or shelter

**4. 2017 PIT Housing Inventory Count**

**Ravalli County Affordable Housing Supply and Demand**

The 2017 PIT Housing Inventory Count
Supply.

Emergency Shelter. Ravalli County does not have a dedicated shelter for homeless adults and/or families. Missoula Youth Homes operates an 8 bed youth shelter, and SAFE maintains eight beds for woman and children fleeing domestic violence. Last year, SAFE provided 3,011 bed nights for 61 adults and 51 children in their shelter- with half of those exiting to family or friends due to a lack of affordable housing options. The average length of stay at SAFE’s emergency shelter last year was 24 days and the shelter was at or over capacity on 53% of nights. Bitterroot Family shelter provides short (3 night) motel stays for those experiencing homelessness during the winter months. Faith based organizations, such as the Salvation Army and Sheriff’s Chaplain also provide limited emergency shelter stays in motels on an occasional basis.

Transitional Housing. There are currently two supportive transitional housing programs in Ravalli County, both serving focused populations. The first is operated by SAFE, which provides 9 units of transitional housing for those who are homeless due to domestic or sexual violence. The Eddy Meuchel and Riverfront Group Homes have 13 transitional housing beds combined. These programs are transitional housing for adults with mental illness.

Affordable Permanent Housing. There are 19 housing complexes providing 438 units of affordable housing in the county. Of those 190 are reserved for those who are 62 or older or adults with a disability, leaving the needs of families unmet. Vacancy rates are typically 0%.

Section 8 Rental Assistance: 100 vouchers are distributed by the Human Resource Council, however, 288 households are currently on the waiting list.

Demand.

A 2015 market study for rehabilitation of an existing 29 unit affordable family housing project found 375 eligible renter households in the market area with incomes below 30% and 644 renter households below 50% of the area median income demanding a need for an additional 192 units for the one and two bedroom rental assistance units just within the City of Hamilton, about 12% of the Ravalli county population. Nothing new has since been built to meet this need.

Vacancy rates for affordable units hover at zero and rental assistance waiting list is almost three times greater than all available vouchers. The gap is enormous and the homeless and those on limited incomes compete with the working poor, elderly and disabled for what is available.

Needs Assessment Summary

Understanding homelessness among rural populations requires a more flexible definition of homelessness. There are far fewer shelters in rural areas, so people experiencing homelessness are more likely to live in a car or camper or with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing. Defining homelessness to include only those who are literally
homeless—living in a shelter or on the streets—does not fit with the rural reality. Rural homelessness, like urban homelessness, is the result of poverty and lack of affordable housing.

Homelessness in Ravalli County is directly related to poverty and the lack of affordable housing resources, whether rental assistance, homeless prevention funds, or actual affordable units. The extent of unsheltered and invisible homeless is difficult to capture in the Bitterroot Valley, but with the increasing work of the BTFHH, the needs of the homeless will become increasingly quantified.

Housing needs for individuals and families are unmet. Individuals and families are experiencing homelessness at an increasing rate, with few social supports to alleviate the impact of homelessness. Housing services in the valley are few and those that do exist are consistently over-utilized. As a result, individuals, families and children go without housing. This lack of housing places a significant burden on all our community’s infrastructure.

Homeless prevention and diversion efforts can provide people with access to needed resources geared at keeping individuals and families in existing housing. Prevention and diversion efforts are a cost-effective way to assist families to remain in their housing, thus alleviating the impact of homelessness.