

Report on 2009 Employment Interest Survey

From June to September 2009, an Employment Interest Survey was conducted in Columbus, Ohio. This survey was given to unemployed homeless individuals who were staying in shelters, selling *Street Speech* or visiting meal and clothing sites. The survey was distributed with the assistance of Faith Mission shelters, Friends of the Homeless shelters, Columbus AIDs Task Force, New Life United Methodist Church, St. Sophia's Orthodox Cathedral and the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless. A total of 165 surveys were collected. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, there were 1,373 homeless individuals in Columbus in 2007.

The intent of the survey was to find barriers to employment for homeless persons as well as their education and employment history in relation to those barriers. The survey also investigated where homeless individuals have gone for employment assistance and if those places were helpful or not. With the results of this survey, the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless hopes to combine the barriers found with existing services to find gaps in the system that the Coalition and other organizations could fill in the future.

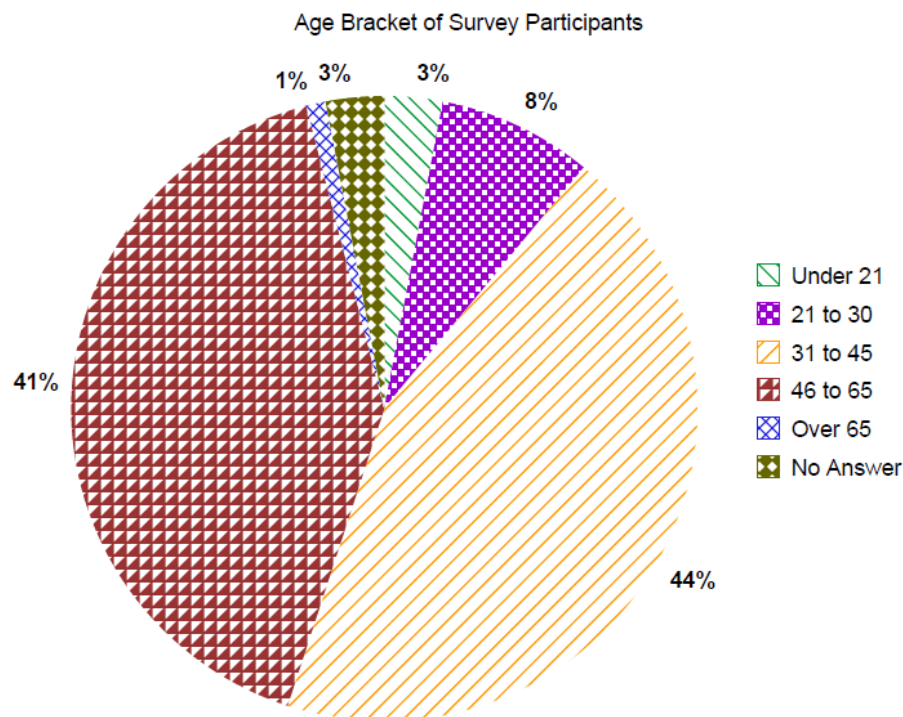
The survey found that a criminal record, disability, a mental health problem and transportation issues were some of the most common barriers to keeping employment. Construction, food service and janitorial work were the top three fields survey participants were interested in. The majority of the survey participants said that they were interested in finding employment and wanted to work at least 40 hours a week, full-time. A majority also said they were interested in help securing interviews and wanted on-the-job training.

The Coalition's *Street Speech* vendor program is a start to helping homeless persons get back on their feet but it is not intended to be the first and only step. The goal of the program is to eventually lead our vendors to more permanent employment. With the results of this survey, the Coalition can begin to create the next step of the vendor program. With the prevalence of felonies, disabilities, mental health and transportation issues among homeless individuals, the Coalition has a better idea of how to best serve the needs of their clients.

Thank you to all of the agencies and churches that assisted in the circulation of this survey. Your time and effort is greatly appreciated both by the Coalition and the homeless community.

Demographics

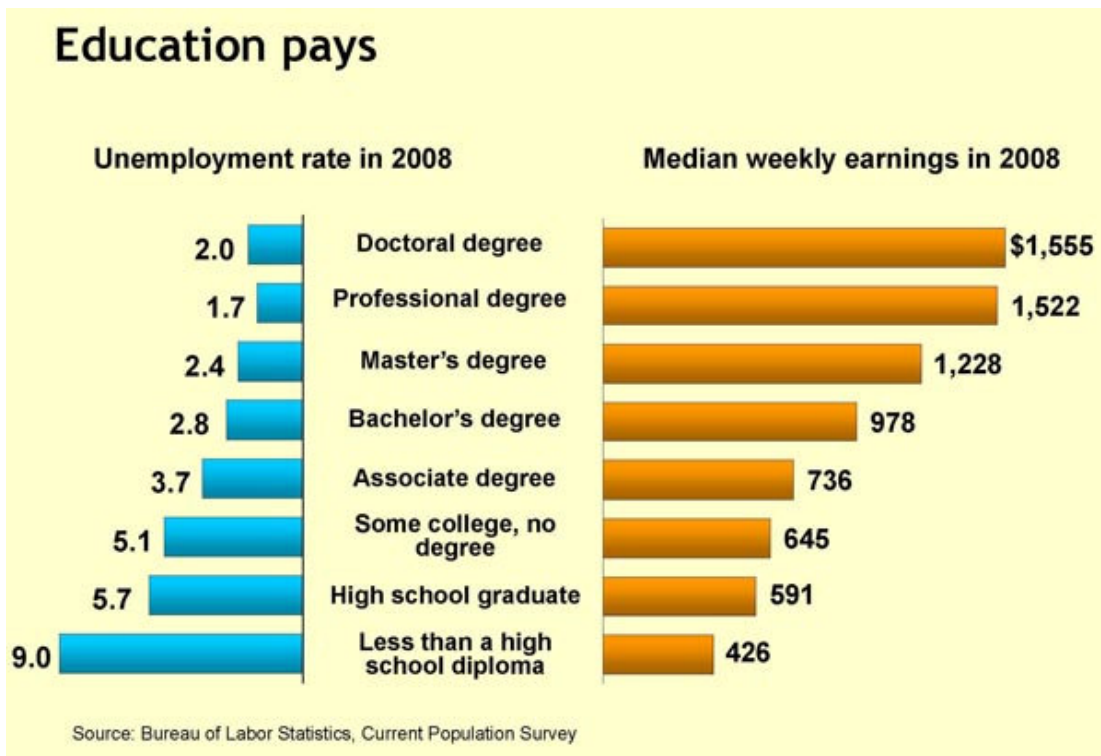
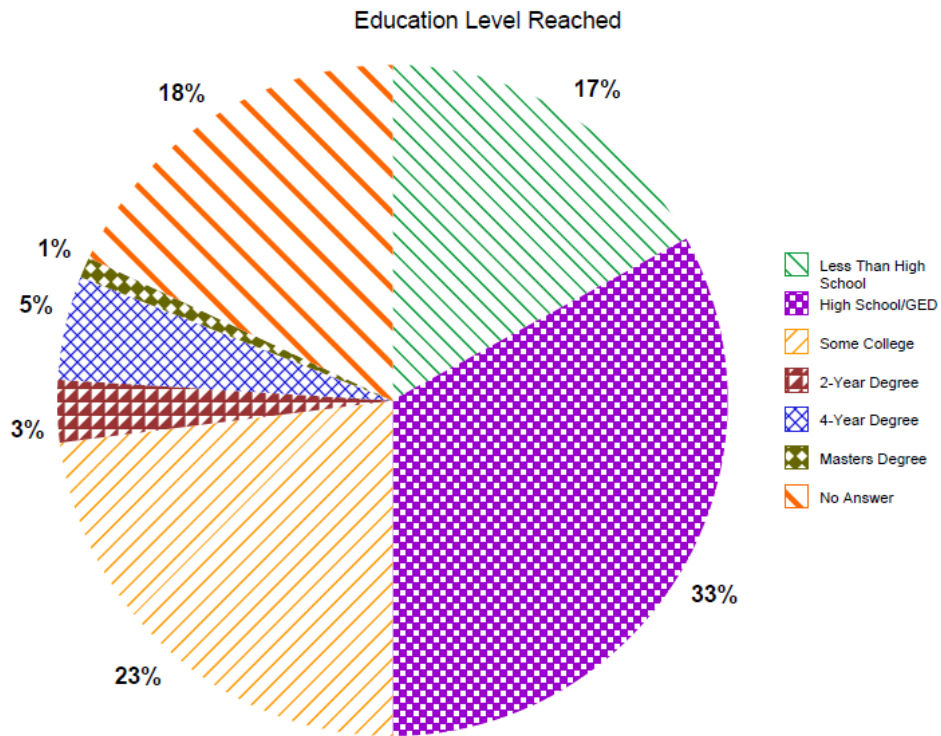
Age: The majority of the individuals surveyed were in the age groups 31-65 (85 percent). This differs from general unemployment statistics by age. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of September 2009, the largest population of unemployed persons is teenagers (25.9 percent) followed by African Americans (15.4 percent). This indicates the difference in the homeless population versus overall unemployed Americans.



Gender: Two-thirds (66 percent) of those surveyed are male and one-third (34 percent) are female. 67.5 percent of the single homeless population in the U.S. is male (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007). The gender statistics of this survey are very close to those nationally.

Race: Over half (56 percent) of the survey respondents listed themselves as African American and about one-third (32 percent) as Caucasian. In 2006, 'the sheltered homeless population was estimated to be 42 percent African-American, 38 percent white, 20 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Native American and 2 percent Asian (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2006).' These statistics are also very similar to those nationally.

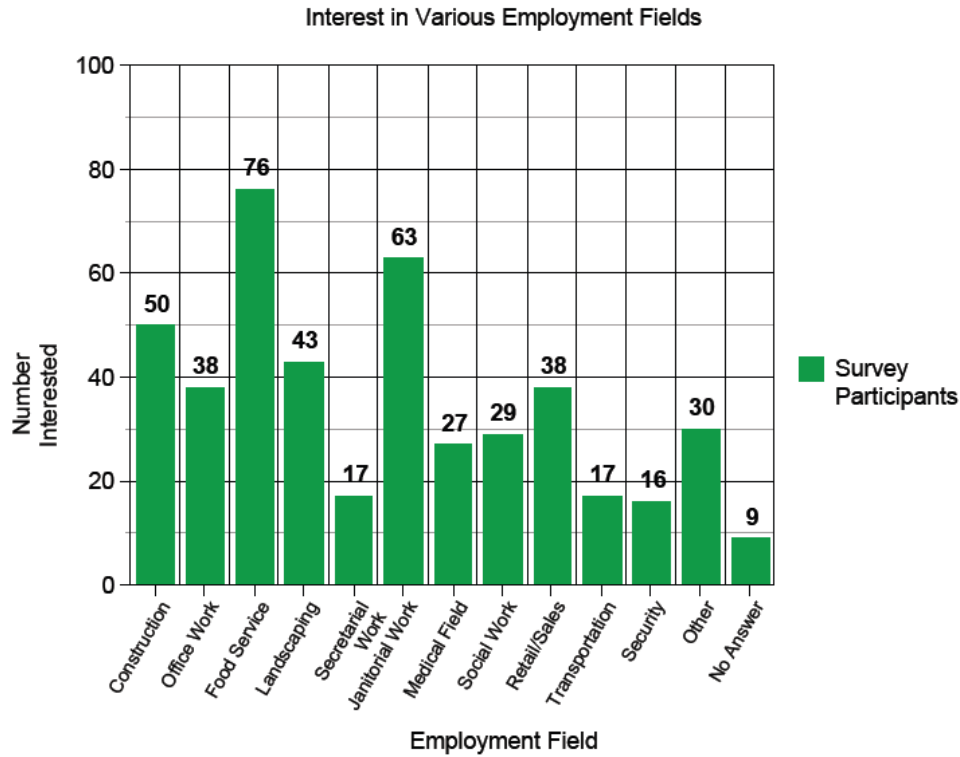
Education: 33% of the population surveyed said that High School/GED was the highest level of education reached. 23% have completed some college and 17% said they did not graduate from high school. Findings from a survey done by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2008 show that the lower the education level reached, the lower the pay and the higher the unemployment rates.



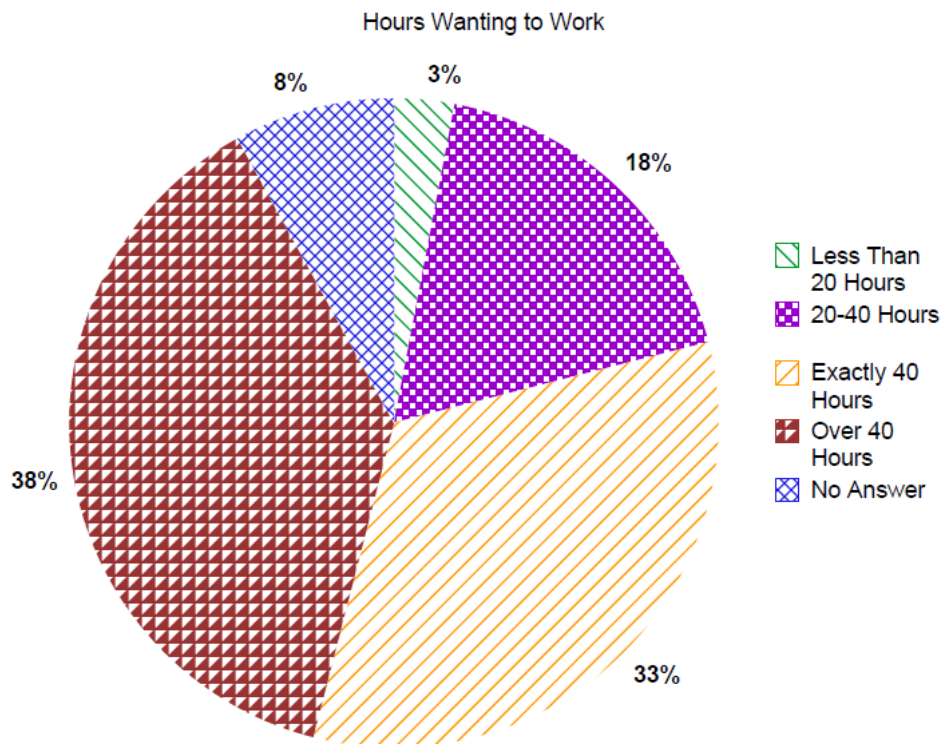
Employment Interest

General Interest: 89% of survey respondents said they were interested in working in general. 79% said they were interested in working full-time and 19% interested in working part-time. The remaining 2% preferred temporary and flexible work (such as selling *Street Speech*). This infers that the desire to work, and work full-time, exists and the problem lies in determination or availability of jobs or both.

Employment Fields: The following bar graph shows the interest in working in various employment fields. Construction, food service, janitorial work and landscaping were most popular. These results correlate with employment experience in that food service was the most popular field of interest as well as the most popular previous job field.

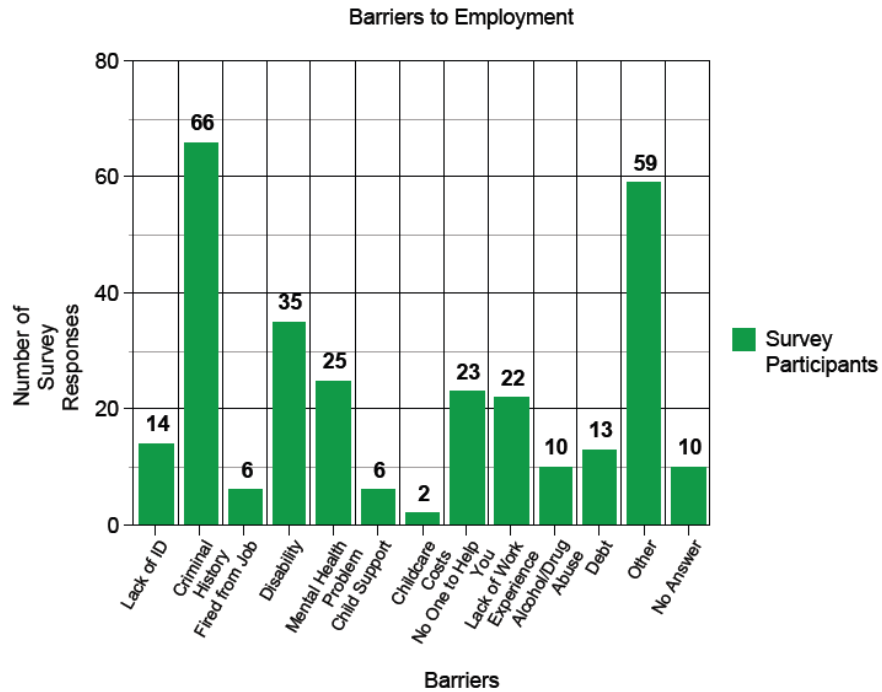


Hours a Week: 71% of the survey participants want to work at least 40 hours a week, if not more. 18% want to work 20-40 hours a week. This is similar to results from a previous question that showed 79% wanting to work full time and 19% wanting to work part-time.

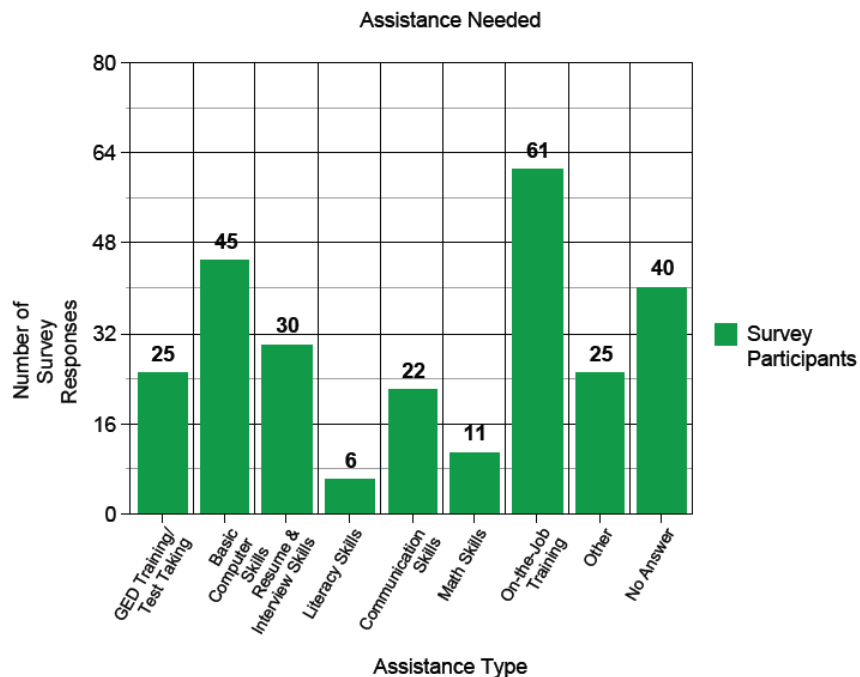


Barriers

Keeping you from Getting a Job: When asked ‘What do you think is keeping you from getting a job’, criminal history was the most common answer by a landslide. Within the ‘other’ category, 16 people wrote in that transportation issues was one of the factors keeping them from getting a job. Various ‘other’ answers include: a bad economy, not enough education, cannot find a job, gaps in employment, having a baby.



Assistance: When asked what they would like assistance with, On-the-Job Training, Basic Computer Skills and Resume & Interview Skills were the most desired. ‘Other’ responses include: transportation, job leads, ID, expunging a record, connection with jobs that hire felons.



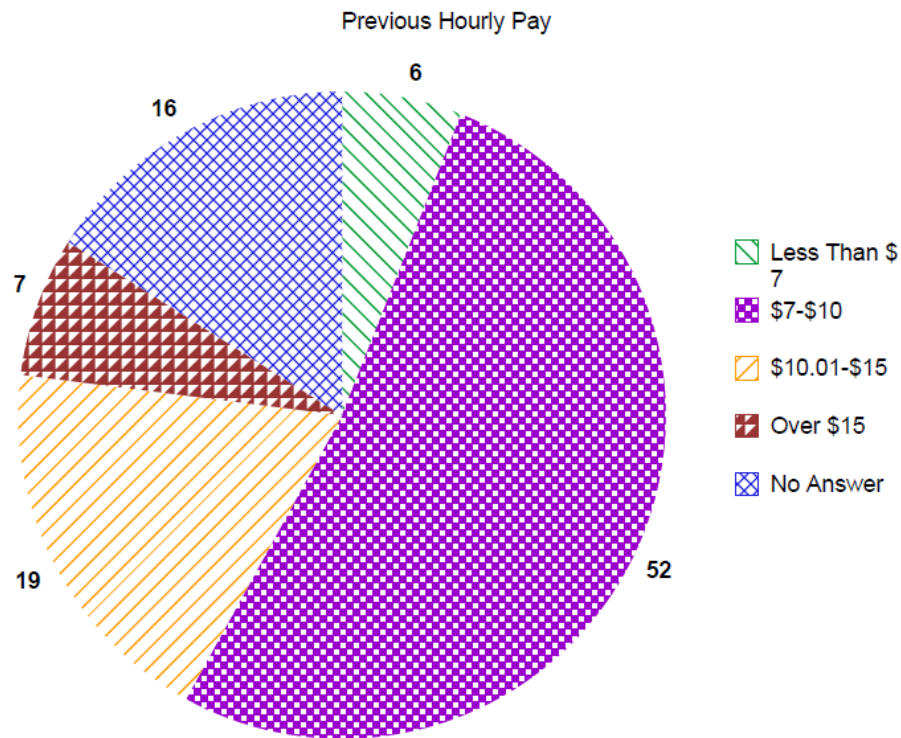
Securing Interviews: 53% of survey respondents said they need help securing interviews for jobs. 38% said they did not and 9% did not answer.

Not Allowing You to Keep a Job: Survey participants were asked ‘In your opinion, what has gotten in the way of allowing you to keep a job?’ This was a short answer question that received a variety of answers. The most common answer was Criminal Record (21 responses), Lack of Transportation (18 responses) and Drug/Alcohol Abuse (10 responses). Other common answers were medical situation, mental health problem, nothing, economy, temporary assignments, age and frequent moving.

Employment History

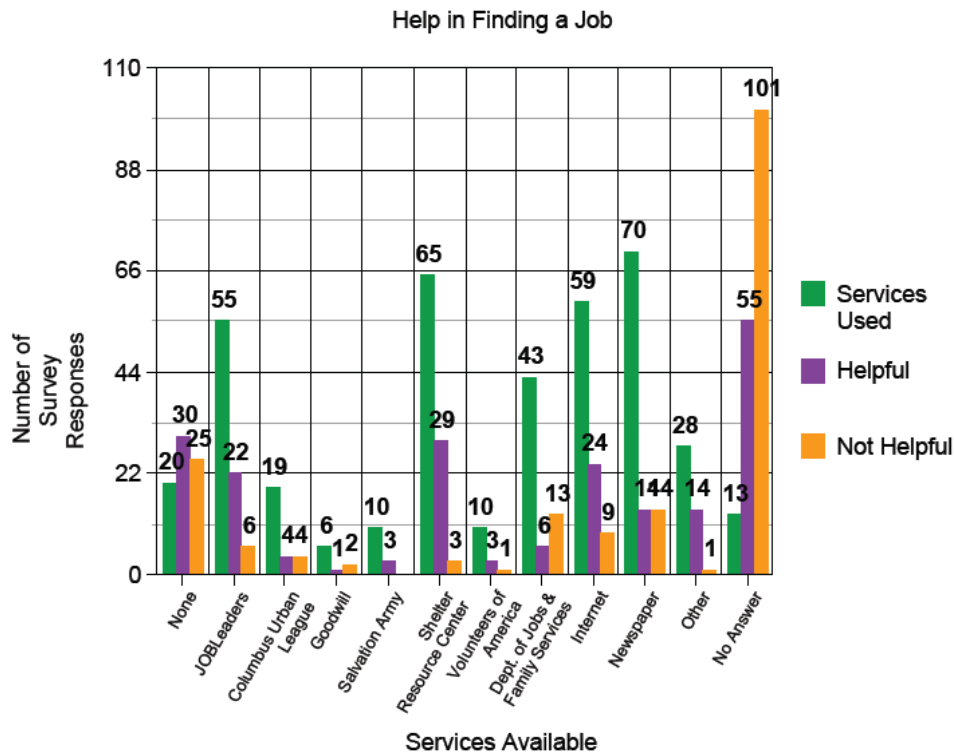
Last Job: When asked what their last job was, a large number said their last job was either in the fast food (18 responses) or restaurant (13 responses) industry. Other common answers were warehouse work, cleaning work (such as housekeeping, janitorial and dishwasher), cashier, auto work, construction and telemarketing.

Previous Pay: Survey respondents were asked how much money they made an hour at their previous jobs. The majority made \$7-\$10 (52 percent). According to COHHIO’s website (www.cohhio.org), ‘as many as 25-40 percent of homeless people work full- or part-time but cannot afford to pay rent.’ This might be because ‘in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2001).’



Employment Assistance

Where to Get Help: The most common places survey respondents have looked for employment assistance are JOBLeaders, Shelter Resource Centers, newspapers and the internet. The most helpful were JOBLeaders, Shelter Resource Centers and the internet. Newspapers and the Department of Jobs and Family Services were the most common to not be helpful according to survey responses. As seen in the chart below, many people did not answer the final question that asked which of the places were not helpful. This lack of response skewed the final results so that there is no real clear picture as to what agencies/job search methods are least beneficial.



Conclusion

According to the survey, there appears to be either a lack of knowledge of services or that the services used are not as helpful as they claim to be. While most of the survey respondents have made efforts to get help finding a job, a huge percentage of them still need resume & interview skills as well as on-the-job training. This is either because they are not fully utilizing the services that already exist or that they are unaware of the existence of these services. This is something that could be researched more thoroughly; are people aware of the existing services and are these services effective in clients obtaining employment?

From the survey results, it appears that the huge need right now is for employment assistance programs to have relationships with companies and organizations that are willing to hire felons. With the large percentage of homeless individuals that have a criminal record, there needs to be some kind of action taken to link these individuals to jobs instead of just making them a resume and sending them on their way. Another huge need is transportation to interviews, jobs, etc. Several job assistance programs provide relief such as bus passes but many do not. More funds need to be dedicated to this effort. Thirdly, personal attention is greatly needed in order for individuals to succeed. There is a strong desire for these individuals to work one-on-one with someone to assess their barriers, meet their needs and train them to enter the workforce.