

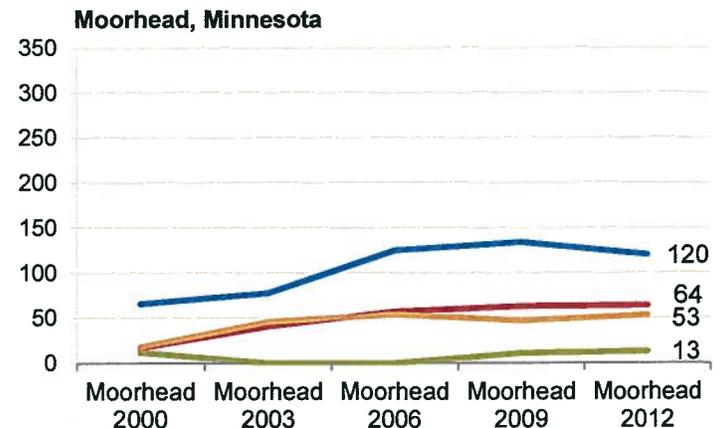
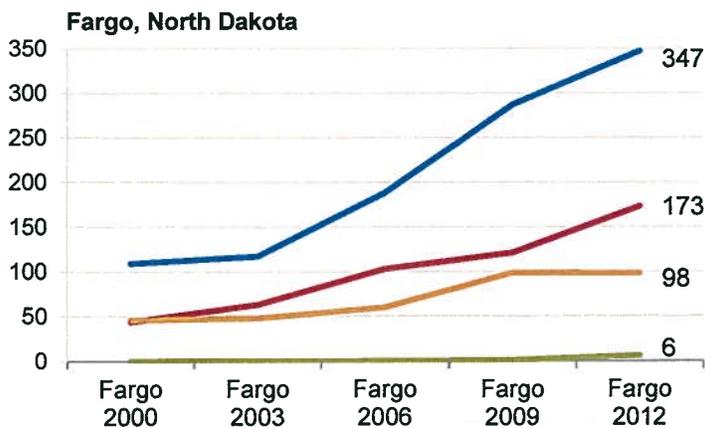
# Homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota

## Highlights from the October 2012 survey

*The purpose of this summary is to provide a current snapshot of people experiencing homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota. The information is intended as a resource for planners, policymakers, service providers, and others who are interested in addressing the problems associated with homelessness.*

The findings reported here are based on interviews with 369 men and 202 women in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs, as well as in non-shelter locations, on Thursday October 25, 2012. This includes 102 interviews with men and 49 interviews with women in Moorhead, Minnesota and 260 interviews with men and 143 interviews with women in Fargo, North Dakota.

As the graphics below indicate, homelessness has increased since 2000 in the Fargo-Moorhead area. This increase was especially dramatic in Fargo, with the number of homeless adults and children more than doubling between 2000 and 2012 (Men: 109 to 347; Women: 44 to 173; Children: 46 to 98). Moorhead also saw an increase in homelessness between 2000 and 2012 – doubling or more than doubling among most groups (Men: 66 to 120; Women: 17 to 64; Unaccompanied youth: 12 to 13; Children: 18 to 53); however, between 2009 and 2012 these numbers either slowed or decreased slightly.



- Men (18+)
- Women (18+)
- Unaccompanied youth <18
- Children

# Key findings

## One-night count of homeless up 15% from 2009

- On October 25, 2012, there were 458 people (211 men, 129 women, and 118 children) residing in temporary housing programs, including emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, in the Fargo-Moorhead area.
- The survey also identified 416 persons in informal and unsheltered locations, including the partners (43) and children (33) of survey respondents.
- The total homeless population identified in the Fargo-Moorhead area was 874 persons (624 in Fargo and 250 in Moorhead).
- The number of homeless in 2012 is 15 percent higher than the number found in 2009 (763) and more than double the number found in 2003 (393).

## The majority of homeless adults are men

- In 2012, men made up the majority of homeless adults in the Fargo-Moorhead area (68% in Fargo and 62% in Moorhead). The average age of homeless men was 44 in both cities. The average age of homeless women was 39 in Moorhead and 36 in Fargo. Just over half of those in both cities had never been married.
- About one-third of men using informal arrangements or staying outside of shelters met the federal definition for someone who is chronically homeless (homeless one year or more or four or more times in three years).

## The border between the two cities is fluid

- Of homeless persons interviewed in Fargo on the night of the survey, 50 percent lived in North Dakota for two years or less. Of those recent residents, 38 percent came to North Dakota from Minnesota, and 30 percent lived in North Dakota before. Of homeless persons interviewed in Moorhead on the night of the survey, 46 percent lived in Minnesota for two years or less. Of those recent residents, 37 percent came to Minnesota from North Dakota, and 37 percent had lived in Minnesota before.

## Area homeless are disproportionately people of color, especially American Indians

- The homeless population contains a disproportionate number of persons of color, particularly American Indians (18% for Fargo and 27% for Moorhead). While less than 15 percent of Minnesota's and 10 percent of North Dakota's overall population is made up of persons of color, over three in ten Fargo-Moorhead homeless adults are persons of color (35% in Fargo and 50% in Moorhead).

- American Indian women make up nearly one-third of the homeless women's population in Fargo (30%) and more than one-third in Moorhead (36%).
- Over one-quarter of those interviewed in informal or unsheltered locations were American Indian (Fargo, 28% and Moorhead, 31%).

### **Fargo has a larger population of homeless veterans than Moorhead and larger than most communities in Minnesota**

- On the date of the survey, military veterans made up one-quarter of all homeless persons in Fargo and about one-tenth (12%) in Moorhead. Veterans were 32 percent of homeless males in Fargo and 20 percent of homeless males in Moorhead.

### **Children represent 17% of the homeless population in Fargo and Moorhead**

- In Fargo, 46 homeless parents had children with them. Ten parents (22%) reported having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the 25 parents with school-age children, 14 (56%) reported that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem, 10 parents (40%) reported that their child was a victim of bullying, and four parents (16%) reported having a child that had to repeat a grade in school.
- In Moorhead, 30 homeless parents had children with them. Twelve parents (40%) reported having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the 22 parents with school-age children, 17 (77%) reported that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem, 11 parents (50%) reported that their child was a victim of bullying, and five parents (23%) reported having a child that had to repeat a grade in school.
- Of the women interviewed in Fargo, one-quarter (27%) had at least one child with them at the time of the survey. In Moorhead, one-third (33%) of women interviewed had at least one child with them on the night of the survey.
- In Fargo, 15 (33%) of the homeless parents reported they were unable to obtain needed child care. In Moorhead, three (10%) of the homeless parents reported they were unable to obtain needed child care.
- Five (11%) parents in Fargo and four (13%) in Moorhead reported their children had to skip meals in the last month because there was not enough money to buy food.
- Many parents were unable to obtain needed health care for their children. For example, eight (17%) homeless parents in Fargo and one homeless parent (3%) in Moorhead reported they were unable to obtain needed health care for their children in the last 12 months. Eight (17%) homeless parents in Fargo and six (20%) homeless parents in

Moorhead reported the same about dental care, and one (2%) homeless parent in Fargo and two (7%) homeless parents in Moorhead reported being unable to obtain needed mental health care for their children.

## **A majority of homeless adults have completed high school, about one-third have jobs**

- Over three-quarters of homeless adults had completed at least high school or obtained a GED (81% in Fargo and 77% in Moorhead). About one-third of those interviewed had attended at least some college (33% in Fargo and 36% in Moorhead). About one-quarter of homeless persons had received special education services while in school (26% in Fargo and 23% in Moorhead).
- In Fargo, 37 percent of homeless persons interviewed reported having a job, and 14 percent reported working full time. In Moorhead, 28 percent of homeless persons interviewed reported having a job, with 10 percent working full time.
- For those in Fargo who were not working, the most common barriers were transportation (33%), physical health problems (22%), a lack of resources needed to look for work (20%), and mental health problems (18%). For those in Moorhead who were not working, the most common barriers were physical health problems (40%), transportation (28%), mental health problems (25%), and the lack of housing (14%).
- Twenty-two percent of homeless persons interviewed in Fargo and 16 percent in Moorhead reported having no income sources in October. The main source of income for homeless persons in Fargo was steady employment (24%) or day labor (24%). In Moorhead it was General Assistance (19%), steady employment (17%), or day labor (16%).

## **Median income higher in Fargo than in Moorhead, still a significant gap between what one can pay for rent and the cost of housing**

- The average amount of income that homeless persons interviewed received in October was \$486 (\$499 in Fargo and \$446 in Moorhead) and the median income was \$300 in Fargo and \$203 in Moorhead.
- The average amount that homeless persons interviewed in Fargo could pay each month for their own place to live, including rent and utilities, was \$243, and in Moorhead the average amount was \$266. About one-third of study respondents reported they could not pay anything for their own place to live (32% in Fargo and 28% in Moorhead), and about one-third in both cities (31% in Fargo and 36% in Moorhead) said they could pay something for rent, but not more than \$300 a month.

## **Food stamps and medical assistance most common welfare benefits**

- Two percent in Fargo and 7 percent in Moorhead of homeless adults interviewed received family welfare benefits from either TANF (North Dakota's family welfare program) or MFIP (Minnesota's family welfare assistance) in October. Two percent in Fargo and 5 percent in Moorhead of homeless adults reported that TANF or MFIP was their main source of income in October. This was especially true for homeless women in the area (7% in Fargo and 11% in Moorhead).
- Over two-fifths (44%) of homeless adults interviewed in Fargo reported having some type of medical coverage in October. In Moorhead, over two-thirds (68%) reported the same.
- Seventeen percent of homeless adults interviewed in Fargo and 20 percent in Moorhead reported the loss of one or more public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months. Of those reporting a loss of benefits, the benefits most frequently mentioned were Food Stamps (66% in Fargo and 44% in Moorhead) and public medical benefits (43% in Fargo and 51% in Moorhead).

## **Services most used are those required to meet basic needs**

- When asked about which services they used in October, the services most frequently mentioned by homeless persons interviewed in Fargo were: clothing shelves (49%), food stamps (36%), hot meal programs (33%), transportation assistance (28%), free medical clinics (27%), food shelves (25%), and drop-in centers (25%). The services most frequently mentioned by those interviewed in Moorhead were: food stamps (56%), clothing shelves (52%), hot meal programs (41%), transportation assistance (41%), food shelves (39%), help getting financial benefits (23%), and drop-in centers (20%).
- Nearly one-third of homeless adults in Fargo and Moorhead (31% in both cities) had attended a Project Homeless Connect event in the previous 12 months.

## **One-quarter to one-third of homeless women are homeless because of domestic violence, childhood abuse is common**

- One common reason for women to seek temporary shelter is to flee an abusive partner. About one-quarter (23%) of homeless women interviewed in Fargo (26%) and over one-third (35%) in Moorhead indicated that one of the main reasons for leaving their last housing was to flee abuse.
- Over one-third (34%) of homeless adults in Fargo (30% of men and 44% of women) and 39 percent in Moorhead (27% of men and 57% of women) reported physical mistreatment as children. One-fifth (20%) in Fargo (11% of men and 40% of women) and over one-quarter (28%) in Moorhead (15% of men and 49% of women) reported that they were sexually mistreated as children.

## Nearly half of the homeless population impacted by mental illness

- Mental illness is a significant problem among those who are homeless in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Forty-six percent of homeless adults (44% in Fargo and 50% in Moorhead) were told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have schizophrenia, manic-depression or bipolar disorder, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Forty-three percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 30 percent in Moorhead reported that they consider themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent. Thirty-five percent of the homeless in Fargo and 22 percent of the homeless in Moorhead reported they have been told by a professional within the last two years that they have a chemical dependency problem. Twenty-seven percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 16 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported receiving inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the last two years, while 23 percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 13 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported receiving outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the last two years.
- Nineteen percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 16 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported having both a mental illness and a chemical dependency problem. This is based on the percent of persons who reported being told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have a major mental illness and alcohol or drug abuse disorder.

## Over 80% have a serious disability or health condition, more than one-third likely affected by traumatic brain injury

- Many homeless adults in Fargo and Moorhead reported serious or chronic disabilities, in addition to the mental illnesses, substance abuse problems, and chronic health problems already mentioned. These include physical, mental, or other health conditions that limit the kind or amount of work they can do (44% in Fargo and 54% in Moorhead) or that limit their daily activities (10% in Fargo and 16% in Moorhead), as well as conditions that interfere with memory or daily decision making (31% in Fargo and 41% in Moorhead).
- When mental illness, substance abuse disorders, chronic physical health problems, and the above disabilities are combined, over four-fifths of homeless persons (83% in Fargo and 84% in Moorhead) have at least one serious or chronic disability. In addition, 30 percent of homeless adults in Fargo, and 35 percent of homeless adults in Moorhead, have a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury.

## **Unaccompanied minors difficult to find, often have history of child abuse and mental health problems**

- Seventeen unaccompanied minors (7 males and 10 females) were interviewed. Two were 15 years old, four were 16 years old, and five were 17 years old. Six were white, four were Native American, five were of mixed racial backgrounds, and one was African Native.
- Nine unaccompanied minors grew up in Minnesota, two in Fargo, two in California, one in North Dakota, one in Cass or Clay counties but not Fargo or Moorhead, one in Minneapolis, one in Texas, and one grew up in Michigan.
- Over half of all unaccompanied minors (59%) had previously been in some type of out-of-home placement.
- Seven (41%) unaccompanied minors had been held in a juvenile detention center for more than a week.
- Twelve (71%) unaccompanied minors had received a diagnosis of a severe mental health problem in the previous two years. Two (12%) had received a dual diagnosis of both a mental health problem and chemical dependency problem.
- Seven (41%) unaccompanied minors had been physically mistreated as a child, five (29%) had been sexually mistreated, and eight (47%) had been either physically or sexually mistreated.
- Twelve (71%) had been either a victim of child abuse, been a parent before age 18, or lived in a foster home, detention facility, or some other institutional placement.

## **Unaccompanied minors and young adults make up about 8% of area's homeless population, but most likely an undercount**

- Combined, there were seven male and 10 female unaccompanied minors, ages 14 through 17, and 29 male and 38 female young adults, ages 18 through 21 interviewed in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Based on past surveys, it is known that this population is most difficult to find and least likely to be accurately represented in a survey of the homeless.
- The main reasons given for leaving home were: they were asked to leave (33%); frequent fighting with parents or guardians (21%); someone in the home that they could not stand to be around (19%); parents not attending to their basic needs (12%); not willing to live by parents' rules (10%); and delinquent activities by the unaccompanied minor or young adult (10%).

- Over half (54%) of homeless unaccompanied minors or young adults felt they could return home if they wanted to do so, although only slightly more than one-quarter (26%) thought they would ever live with their family again.
- Over one-third (38%) of homeless unaccompanied minors and young adults reported having a high school diploma or GED. Of those who do not have a high school diploma or GED, two-thirds (66%) are currently enrolled in school or an educational program.
- Over two-fifths (44%) of female homeless unaccompanied minors and young adults reported having been pregnant, and one-sixth (17%) of male homeless unaccompanied minors and young adults reported having fathered a child.
- Six percent of female and 8 percent of male homeless unaccompanied minors and young adults reported having been approached to work in the sex industry.
- Nearly nine in ten (88%) homeless unaccompanied minors and young adults reported having an adult in their life that they trusted and had regular contact with.

## Changes in homelessness from 2000 to 2012

Wilder Research compared survey information collected in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, and 2012 in order to identify trends and changes in the characteristics of people experiencing homelessness in the Fargo-Moorhead area, as well as differences observed between the two cities. The trend analysis is based on changes observed from 2000-2012.

### Overall changes from 2000 to 2012

- Fargo showed about the same percentage of homeless people employed in 2012 as in 2000 (35% in 2000 vs. 37% in 2012); Moorhead showed a decline in the percentage of homeless employed (35% in 2000 vs. 28% in 2012).
- Fargo showed a decline in the percentage of homeless adults who have been unemployed for 12 months or longer in 2012 compared to 2000 (51% in 2000 vs. 42% in 2012). However, in Moorhead that figure increased (24% in 2000 to 58% in 2012).
- The average income for women in both Fargo and Moorhead remained about the same as in 2000 (Fargo: \$420 in 2000 vs. \$426 in 2012; Moorhead: \$457 in 2000 vs. \$451 in 2012).
- The average income for men in both Fargo and Moorhead remained about the same as in 2000 (Fargo: \$532 in 2000 vs. \$533 in 2012; Moorhead: \$449 in 2000 vs. \$443 in 2012).
- The percent of people who have been homeless longer than a year is up in both cities from 2000 to 2012 (Fargo: 34% in 2000 to 47% in 2012; Moorhead: 31% in 2000 to 57% in 2012).

- While Fargo shows a decrease in the percentage of women who are homeless because of abuse from 2000 to 2012 (37% in 2000 vs. 22% in 2012), Moorhead shows an increase (21% in 2000 vs. 35% in 2012).
- In Fargo, there was a slight percentage increase in those who had been through a residential treatment program for substance abuse from 2000 to 2012 (45% in 2000 to 49% in 2012). The percentage in Moorhead dropped by nearly half (60% in 2000 to 33% in 2012).
- The use of hot meals programs decreased from 2000 to 2012 in both Fargo and Moorhead (Fargo: 41% in 2000 to 33% in 2012; Moorhead: 68% in 2000 to 41% in 2012).
- The percent of people who have been incarcerated within the last two years who are among the homeless population is up in both cities (Fargo: 20% in 2000 to 24% in 2012; Moorhead: 27% in 2000 to 35% in 2012).
- The percentage of homeless adults who reported serious or persistent mental health problems was up in both cities (Fargo: 38% in 2000 to 44% in 2012; Moorhead: 35% in 2000 to 50% in 2012).

### **Differences between Fargo and Moorhead in 2012**

- Homeless women with children in Fargo were less likely to report that their main income is derived from family welfare benefits (7%) than women in Moorhead (11%).
- Homeless men in Fargo were less likely than homeless men in Moorhead to report that General Assistance was their main source of income (3% in Fargo vs. 19% in Moorhead).
- Homeless adults in Fargo were more likely to report their main source of income was from employment: a steady job (24%) or day labor (24%). In Moorhead, homeless adults reported that their main source of income was from General Assistance (19%), a steady job (17%), or day labor (16%).
- A higher percentage of homeless men in Fargo (32%) were military veterans, compared to Moorhead (20%).
- More homeless adults in Fargo (32%) than in Moorhead (28%) reported that they could not pay anything for rent.
- Homeless adults in Fargo were more likely to report that they were chemically dependent than in Moorhead (43% in Fargo vs. 30% in Moorhead).
- Slightly more homeless adults in Fargo reported that they had been hospitalized because of mental health problems (29% in Fargo and 25% in Moorhead).

# Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that homelessness is still a significant problem in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Despite many efforts to strengthen housing opportunities and services, the supply of affordable housing is not adequate to meet the need among the very poorest of the area's population. An increased percentage of homeless adults have been homeless for longer than one year and four out of five homeless adults report at least one serious or chronic disability.

The factors that characterize those who have been homeless for a year or more and those with multiple episodes of homelessness over multiple years (the official federal definition of chronic homelessness) are complex. They include previous abuse, chronic health issues, criminal convictions, evictions, chronic substance use, violence, and broken relationships.

Research shows, however, that those with connections and support, previous success in keeping a job, fewer health problems, and less time in desperate poverty are the most likely to get back on their feet in short order.

There is no way to know what the area's homeless numbers would be in the absence of the programs and services currently available. We do know that prior to the recession starting in 2007 we were beginning to see a few measurable declines in the numbers of children and families experiencing homelessness. But the recession appears to have a long tail, and those who are living at the margins are always among the last to recover. The problem of homelessness will require continued attention if we are to reverse the trends recorded in this latest study.

## **Wilder Research**

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### **For more information**

This summary presents highlights of the 2012 Homeless adults and their children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota. For more information about this report, contact Wilder Research at 651-280-2700 or to learn more about homelessness in Minnesota, go to [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org).  
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# Background

The Fargo-Moorhead Coalition for Homeless Persons (The Coalition) began in 1989 when a group of individuals, representing four emergency shelters and other homeless service providers, gathered to brainstorm ideas and support each other in matters affecting homeless men, women, and children in the Fargo-Moorhead community. From those initial gatherings, the FMCHP has evolved into a coalition of more than sixty community partners. The membership represents both concerned citizens and a broad array of public and nonprofit agencies and organizations serving homeless and at-risk individuals and families in the Fargo-Moorhead area. The mission of The Coalition is to work in partnership to achieve permanent solutions to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness.

In the mid-1990's, The Coalition envisioned conducting a research study that would clearly describe the extent and nature of homelessness across borders in Moorhead, Minnesota and Fargo, North Dakota. Due to lack of funding, the first proposal did not materialize. A study advisory committee was revived in March 2000. Contracting with Wilder Research was determined as the most effective and efficient way to complete a local study. Every three years, since 1991, Wilder Research has conducted a statewide study of homelessness in Minnesota. However, the information gathered in the statewide survey is compiled only by regions, so Moorhead (Clay County) data was grouped in with the nine-county West Central Minnesota regional report, and Fargo data was not collected.

The Study Committee proposed a research project that would expand the work of the Wilder homelessness study into Fargo, North Dakota and would result in detailed reports for both the communities (Moorhead and Fargo), as well as an aggregate report for the area. The project was timed to coincide with Wilder Research's 2000 statewide survey of persons without permanent shelter. On the evening of October 26, 2000, 59 trained volunteer interviewers conducted 184 surveys with adults and unaccompanied youth who were experiencing homelessness in the Fargo-Moorhead area. The data from the interviews were compiled and analyzed by Wilder Research staff members. The resulting report, *Homeless adults and their children in Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN*, helped local organizations working on homelessness move aggressively forward toward their ultimate goals of homes and self-sufficiency for all. The report became a valuable resource in helping document the needs of the area's homeless and in helping to secure funding to meet those needs. Regional Continuum of Care planning committees, the cities of Fargo and Moorhead, and innumerable local agencies used the information in the report for planning purposes and for successful grant applications.

Because of the success of the initial collaboration with Wilder Research, the Coalition has continued to partner with Wilder in 2003, 2006, 2009, and 2012 on an expanded version of the tri-annual study of persons without permanent shelter. The study is widely used and is one of a small handful of homelessness research projects that looks across geographical boundaries to build a united response.

Our thanks also go to other past funders who have continued to provide support this year including Becker, Clay, Otter Tail and Wilkin (BCOW) Adult Mental Health Initiative; Beyond Shelter, Bremer Bank, Cass County Social Services Board, Clay County Collaborative, Clay County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Fargo-Moorhead Coalition for Homeless Persons, North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People, Southeast North Dakota Community Action Agency, and the United Way of Cass Clay.

Special thanks also go to new funders this year including the Alex Stern Family Foundation for providing funds to support this study's successful efforts to reach and interview unaccompanied youth. Also, it is significant to note that the new funding from the Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation—secured through the efforts of program officer Cher Hersrud—came from the Dean and Maxine Workman Memorial Fund which was established by the late Dean and Maxine Workman many years ago to assist homeless individuals. We also wish to acknowledge and thank Sanford Health Systems, the third new study funder.

We also want to offer our very special thanks to Dakota Medical Foundation and president Pat Traynor for their crucial and ongoing support which includes once again sponsoring the community report session.

We, of course, want to thank all of the community volunteers who participated in the study process in various ways. Their individual efforts were vital to the success of the study. We also want to acknowledge those who volunteered, but were unable to be assigned because of scheduling conflicts and other reasons.

## Volunteers

Christopher Adams  
Gail Agnes  
Jane Alexander  
Olivia Altenburg  
Chris Althoff  
Chip Ammerman  
Amy Amundsen  
Valarie Andersen  
Kala Anderson  
Jessica Anderson  
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Nancy Austin  
Amber Bach-Gorman  
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Amy Baker  
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Meghan Bateman  
Sara Bauer  
Cathy Bauer-Kottenbrock  
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Sara Wiederholt  
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Amanda Zenk

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This report is dedicated to them.