

# Monroe Park: Use and Perceptions of People at the Park

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**Purpose:** Learn more about the people providing services and those who receive them in the park. Some of the highlights of this data collection appear below and can be found at <http://homewardva.org/data/additional-research>

**Researchers:** Margot Ackermann, Ph.D., Homeward with the assistance and contributions of VCU staff: Valerie Holton, Ph.D., Jen Early, Tito Luna, Meghan Resler, and Ron Coleman

**Approach to gathering information:**

Point-in-time count survey questions on use of meals and services needs among people experiencing homelessness (July 2015)

Interviews with key informants on perceptions of the park and thoughts about how people will be impacted by the park closure (Nov. 2015)

Focus groups with people who access services at the park (Nov. 2015)

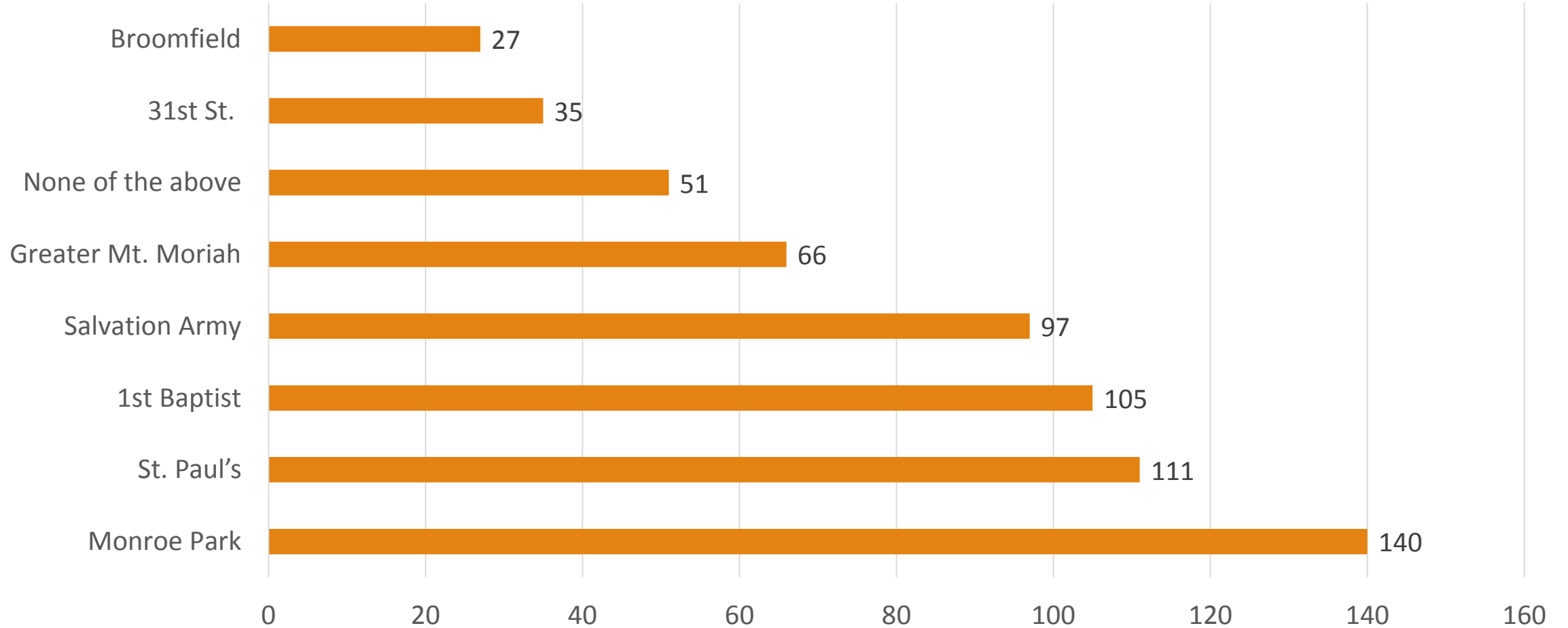
# July 2015 Point-in-time count

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**Background:** Counted 696 people experiencing homelessness (including 89 children and 124 people staying outdoors or in places not meant for habitation). Of the 607 adults counted, we surveyed 482. Below information is from the 482 adults experiencing homelessness surveyed.

- 56.8% attend area meals programs. Typical number of meals was 2-7 a week, with many reporting even greater frequency.
- Of those who attend meals programs, the largest percentage (51.1%) go to Monroe Park for meals.
- 36.4% of people who frequent Monroe Park for meals reported being unsheltered. The median number of days homeless was one year.

## Attendance at Meal Programs among People Experiencing Homelessness



All programs listed above, with the exception of Monroe Park, participated in the point-in-time count.

# Comparisons: those who do not attend meal programs

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Compared to those who do not attend meal programs, those who frequent meals programs are

- more likely to have a long-term disability,
- be male,
- have a current alcohol or drug problem, and
- be receiving mental health treatment.

They are less likely to be veterans or employed.

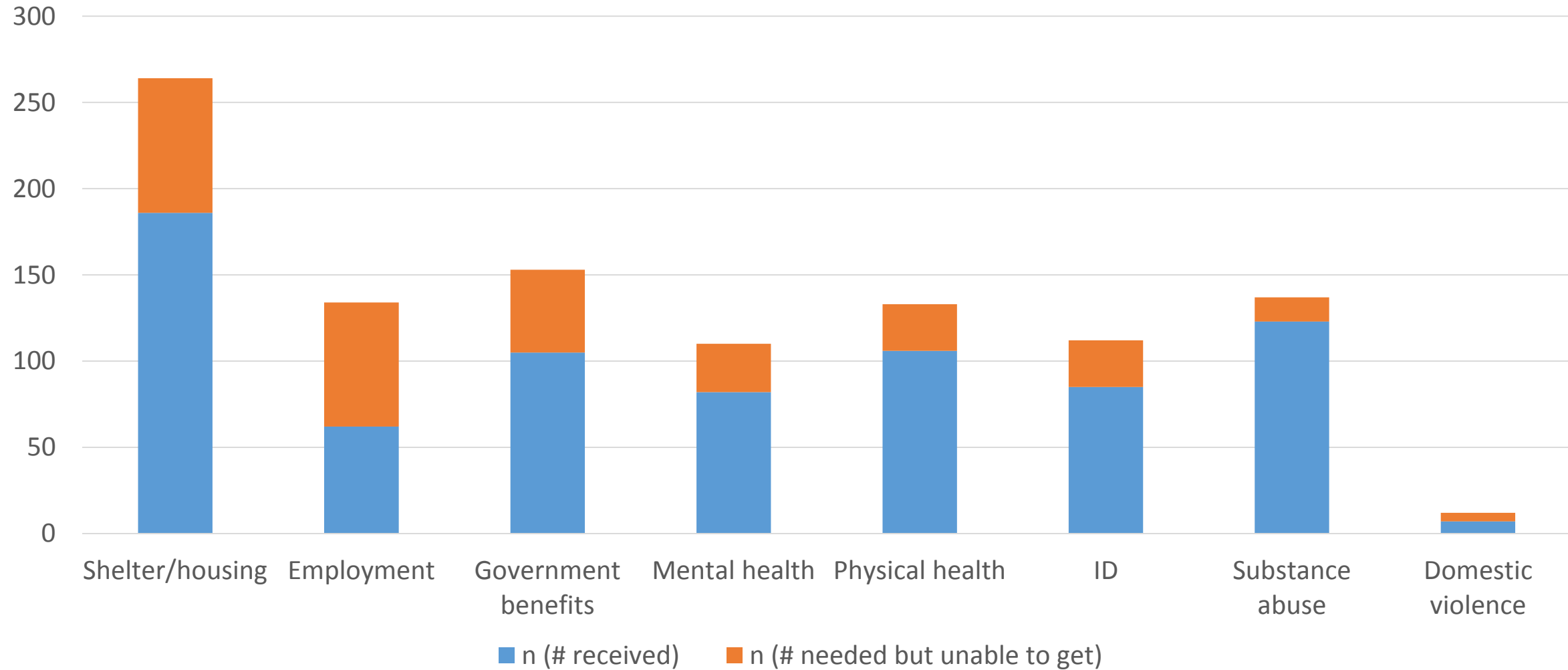
# Comparisons: attend meals programs but not Monroe Park

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Compared to who attend meals programs but don't frequent Monroe Park, those who attend meals programs at Monroe Park tended to be more like those who do not frequent meals programs.

They are less likely to have a long-term disability and current drug or alcohol programs, and were more likely to be female.

## Service Needs Among People Experiencing Homelessness Who Frequent Meals Programs



# Key informant interviews: **Wide range of opinions**

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Some believed that the closure of the park would be harmful to the homeless population and those who frequent the park.

Others felt that with a plan, closure of the park wouldn't be a big deal.

Others felt that service provision in the park was inappropriate and that services should be more coordinated and strategic, as well as more solution-focused.

Some felt that a replacement site(s) could easily be managed; others suggested closing the park in sections or providing a day shelter.

Some brought up issues with illegal activities in the park, as well as concerns about safety and sanitation.



# Other points made about the park

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During the weekends the park becomes a distribution place for meals, clothing, and other donations.

No one sleeps in the park at night.

There are many more people in the park on Saturdays and Sundays than during the week.

Explanations for this differed:

- Churches serve meals during the weekends;

- Other service providers provide far fewer services on the weekends; and

- There is a sense of shared experience and community in the homeless population; people come to see their friends and network.

# Focus groups with individuals who access services in Monroe Park

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**Background:** Five focus groups of 8-10 participants ( $N = 38$ ). 94.6% male. Average age is 46.3. 79.4% have stayed in area shelters. 72.9% are currently homeless (45.9% unsheltered and 27.% in emergency shelter). At times, participants spoke on behalf of themselves and other utilizers of services within the park.

Use of the park varies – some come often, some infrequently. 59.5% come to Monroe Park every weekend.

Come to the park for a wide variety of reasons, many related to service provision (e.g., food, clothes, toiletries, health care, religious/spiritual services).

# Focus groups with individuals who access services in Monroe Park (cont'd)

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Many report coming to the park as a way of finding social support and combating isolation.

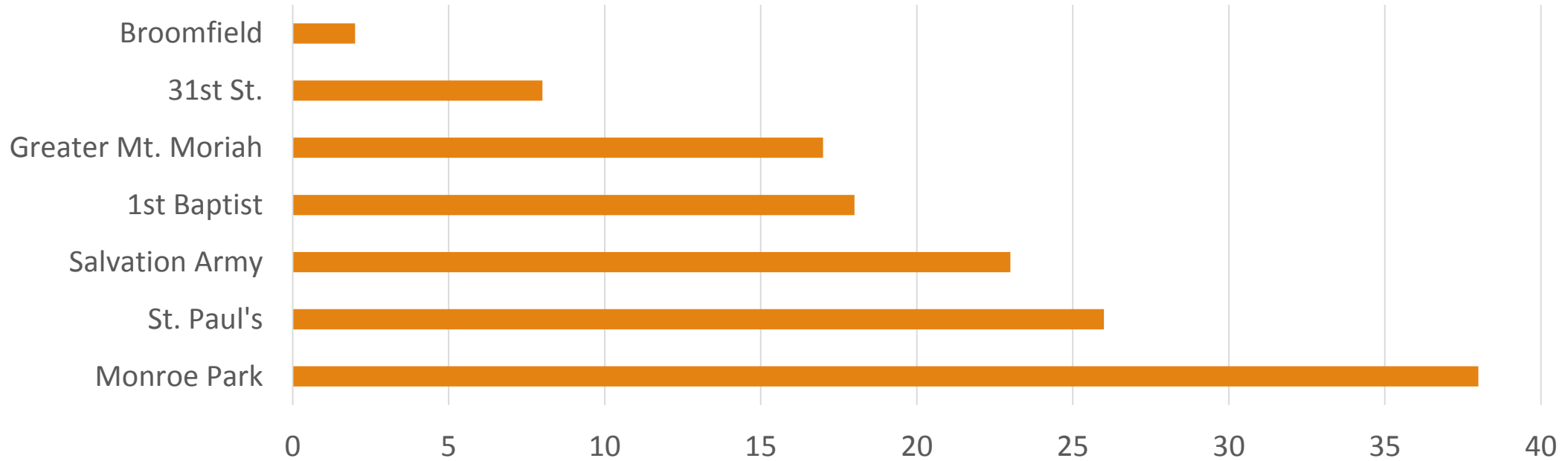
Vary in their perceptions of the park. Some find it somewhat unpleasant, while others view it as a place of refuge.

Heard rumors about the park closing and feel it would have a negative impact on those who frequent the park.

Feel VCU is driving the park closure and that VCU wants to “get rid of” the people hanging out in the park.

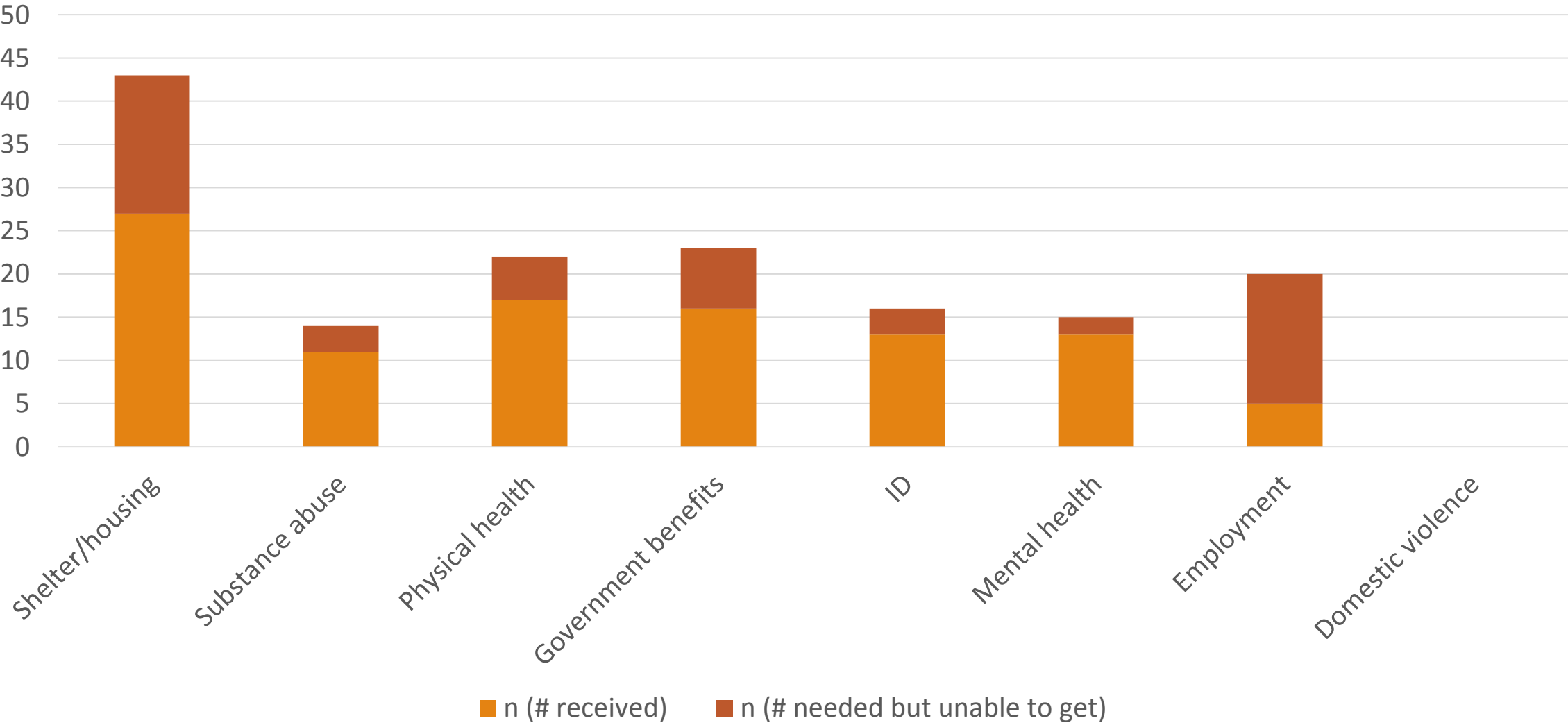
Offered suggestions to consider when the park closes, ranging from a new location (one-stop for services, centrally located) to the development of longer-term solutions to help park utilizers and others find jobs and end homelessness in Richmond.

## Percentage of Focus Group Participants Surveyed at Monroe Park who Attend Area Meal Programs



85.7% reported that they attend other meals programs. Above chart indicates the percentage of people who endorsed specific programs.

# Service Needs Among Focus Group Participants Surveyed at Monroe Park



# Summary:

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Great deal of interest in learning about the details of the park closure in order to be able to plan appropriately.

People come to the park for food on weekends

There is an ongoing need for housing, employment, and government benefits.

Need for community and socializing

People want the park to be an inclusive space for people to gather, build community, and feel safe.

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For more information about the survey conducted at Monroe Park, please visit:  
[http://homewardva.org/data/additional-research.](http://homewardva.org/data/additional-research)