WEEK 14: A Sense of Home & Homelessness

November 7, 2022 | Adjunct Lecturer: Erin Lilli | URBST 222: Introduction to Urban Housing /URBST 723: Dynamics of Housing & Homelessness

What is the meaning of home?

Ontological Security

- According to Dupuis and Thorns (1998), the **meaning of home is:**
  - **Context-specific**: concerning the ideological, economic, and political impoirtance of homeownership and the preoccupation with land and private property.
  - **Variable**: concerning age, gender, race, class, ethnicity etc.

Ontological Security: Definitions

- "...a sense of confidence and trust in the world as it appears to be. It is a security of being" (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27)
- "..the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of their social and material environments...sense of the reliability of persons and things" (Giddens, 1990 in Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27)
- "...the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time — as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency" (Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1969: 41–2 in Mitzen, 2006.

CONTINUITY

TRUST

ROUTINE

HABIT

RELATIONSHIPS

STABILITY

CONSTANCY

RELIABILITY

Ontological Security: Giddens vs Saunders

- Giddens believes ontological security (OS) is emotional, rather than cognitive, and rooted in unconscious.
  - OS must be regrounded through personal ties with others in the modern world.
  - Unlike in the premodern world, there is currently less face-to-face interaction and daily routine; instead, trust is developed via, "abstract tokens like money and expert systems like professional expertise. Modern trust mechanisms therefore, have more to do with technical effectiveness, than the moral worth they had in times past" (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27).
- Saunders disagrees with this.

Ontological Security: Giddens Vs Saunders

- Giddens takes an anti-urban tone in arguing that OS has been undermined in a rapidly modernizing world.
  - He stresses importance of nature, but Saunders disagrees arguing that OS though life routines do occur in the modern world in environments both natural and constructed environments (like homes).
- Saunders argues OS can be maintained in the built environment and from there we can argue that home is a key site where OS is sought and maintained.

Maintaining Ontological Security

Per Dupuis and Thorns (1998), OS in maintained when following conditions are met:

1. home is site of constancy in social and material environment
2. home is a spatial context in which the day to day routines of human existence are performed
3. home is a site where people feel most in control of their lives because they feel free from the surveillance that is part of the contemporary world
4. home is a secure base around which identities are contructed

Critiques in the use of the term "Ontological Security"

1. **OS has been misused and shifted far from its original intended meaning** as introduced by RD Laing in his 1960 book *The Divided Self* about his work with patients suffering from schizophrenia. Patients experience OS as "being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question".

   ➢ **OS then became adopted by housing advocates and decoupled from mental illness. But, simply having a home cannot inoculate one from mental illness.**

Critiques in the use of the term "Ontological Security"

➢ **Peter Saunders, drawing on Giddens' definition of OS, made it popular with housing scholars**. Saunders argued "that owning/renting was a key cleavage in a sociology of consumption whereby home ownership offered the psychological benefits of "niche and belonging" compared to the "alienation from home" felt by tenants.

➢ **Saunders tenure-specific, gender-neutral meaning of home was not well received among several housing scholars.**

Critiques in the use of the term "Ontological Security"

2. **OS has suffered a lack of critical reflection regarding its definition and operationalization.** "Ontological security has always been notoriously difficult to operationalize...fuelled by a reliance upon proxies [that] can be identified in much published work on the subject. The lack of a convincing and ongoing critique of how the term is operationalised and measured amongst housing researchers increases the risk that one generation's mistakes are reproduced by the next".

Critiques in the use of the term "Ontological Security"

3. **The literature on OS has largely overstated the role of home in providing such benefits.** "there is a dark-side of home which has been neglected in the meaning of home literature in favour of a series of relentlessly positive narratives of home or home-making... For many, home was revealed as a source of ontological insecurity. Beyond home, what of other sources of ontological security? Access to green or blue spaces, to job satisfaction, to social capital, to feelings of love, acceptance and belonging in a relationship or a community seem to offer many of the psycho-social benefits which have often been associated with home as a physical structure".

What impact did COVID-19 have on our sense of home?

COVID 19: UK Government's 'Stay at Home' Rules

HOME

HEALTH

SECURITY

WELL-BEING

Staying (un)safe at home

- "They're the days that were really upsetting, where you've had to take time off work and sit down and wait for a repairman and stuff like that. It just feels like it's just magnified now, since we're home all the time…" Female renter, 36, family

- "Now, I feel quite stressed because I don't know, my job isn't secure and the issue with my boiler is still going to a point where if it breaks at the same time as I lose my job, I need to have a boiler, I need to have hot water". Female owner, 26, single

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jcop.22883

COVID 19: UK Government's 'Stay at Home' Rules

HOME

HEALTH

SECURITY

WELL-BEING

Disruptions to constancy and new daily routines

- "...like work is a constant, family is a constant and everything around it is just up and down, relationships, friendships. Whereas now, I feel like nothing is a constant. I don't feel secure in any aspect of my life anymore because we can just quite clearly see it can just change in an instant" Female owner, 26, single

- "The biggest thing we've had to do is almost try to force a little bit of routine and variety into what we do because things became quite stale and quite staid quite quickly.

COVID 19: UK Government's 'Stay at Home' Rules

Coping and the search for control

- "...spending more time in the home is making me force that reality even more, because obviously for my own mental health and everything—I didn't spend a lot of time in my home, my home was just somewhere where I watched a bit of TV in the evening and I went to bed" Female renter, 44, single

- "There is no coping strategies for being at home during lockdown. As I said, there is no outdoor space, there is no indoor space. Like all these people who've started to do exercise and everything else, and it's like, oh that's great, yes. I'm thinking that if I jump a little bit too hard I might go through the floorboard, so, you know, can't do any of that". Female renter, 44, family

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jcop.22883
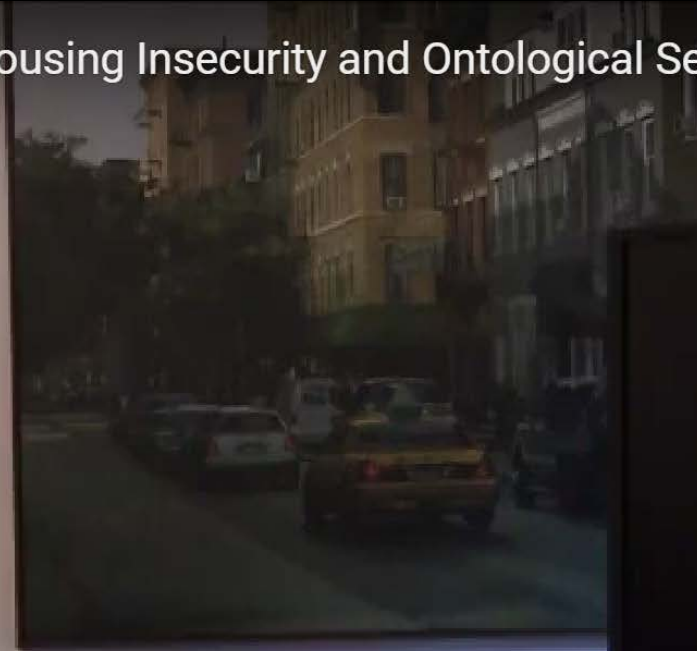
COVID 19: UK Government's 'Stay at Home' Rules

Coping and the search for control

- "Everything's just gone a bit pear-shaped to be honest. I lost my job through COVID-19, along with hundreds of other people and thousands of other people..." Female renter, 51, family

- "Rent takes a big chunk of what we earn, that's what stresses me the most...it's one thing that I want to pay first because I'm so scared of being evicted ...so I would rather find other ways to deal with the finances, like having two meals a day or just talking to the utility people to say if we could rearrange payment and stuff..." Female renter, 33, family

The Homeless Crisis

STATIC SHELTER ALLOWANCES AND
INCREASING RENTS

Source: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html#history
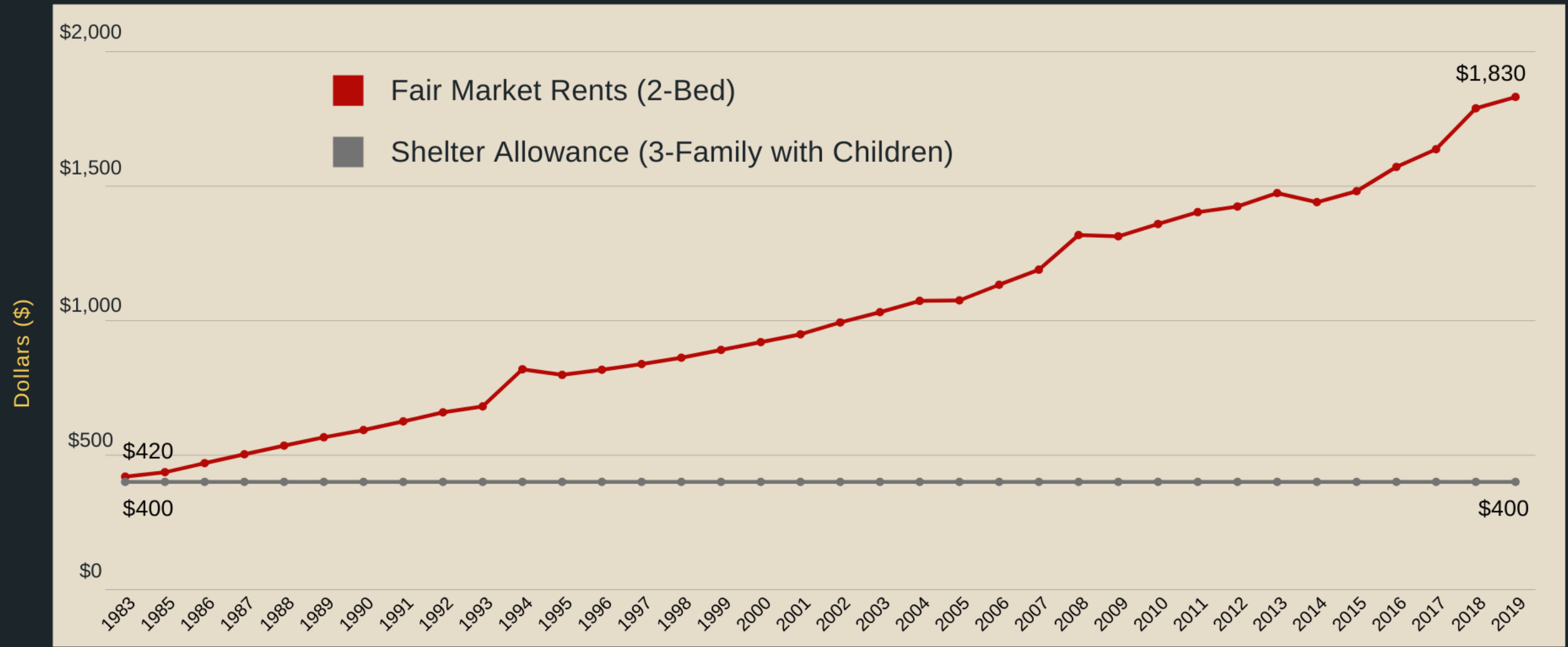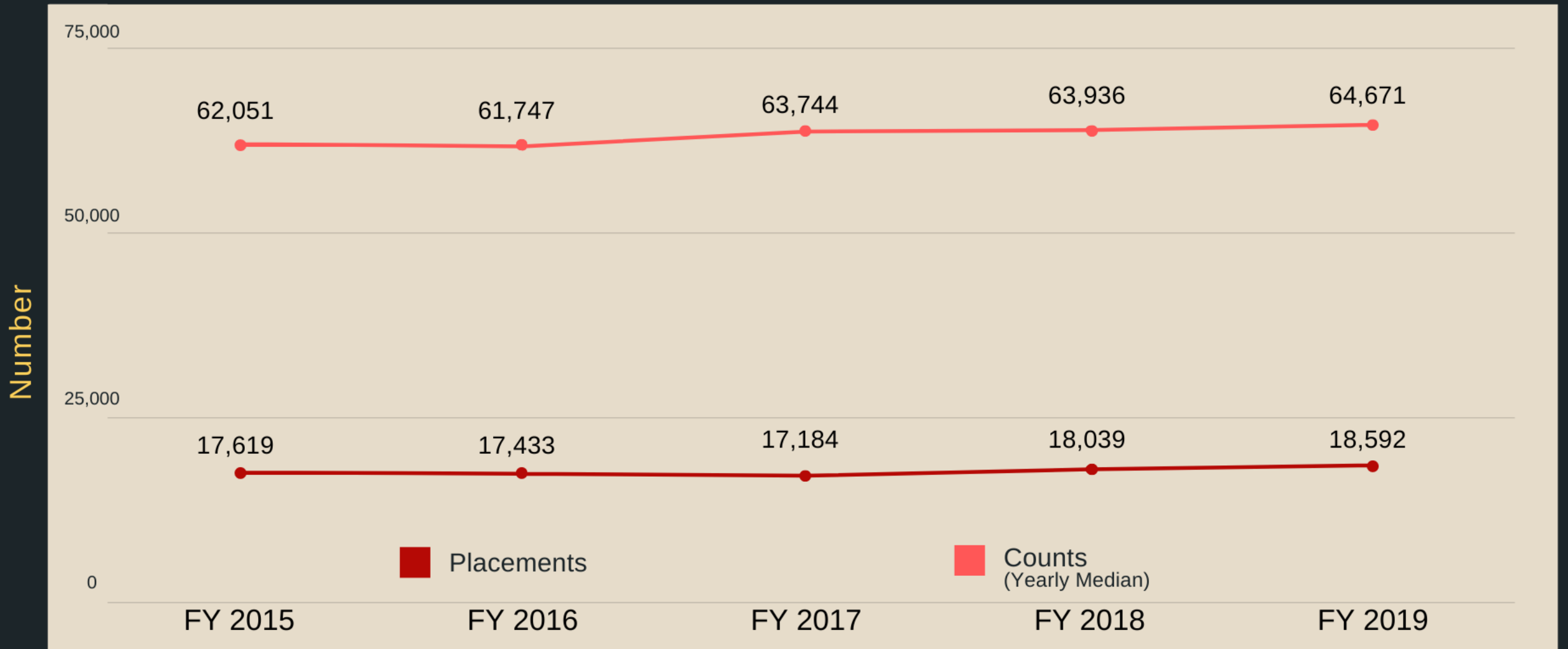
STREET HOMELESSNESS 2014-2019

Point-in-Time Counts of Unsheltered Individuals for the Month of January

Legend:
- Subway Hope Count
- Streets Hope Count
- Hospital Count
- Youth Count

Y-axis: Number of Individuals (0, 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000)

X-axis: Jan-14, Jan-15, Jan-16, Jan-17, Jan-18, Jan-19

Jan-14: T: 3,419; NA; 62; 1,549; 1,808

Jan-19: T: 3,950; 36*; 326; 1,410; 2,178
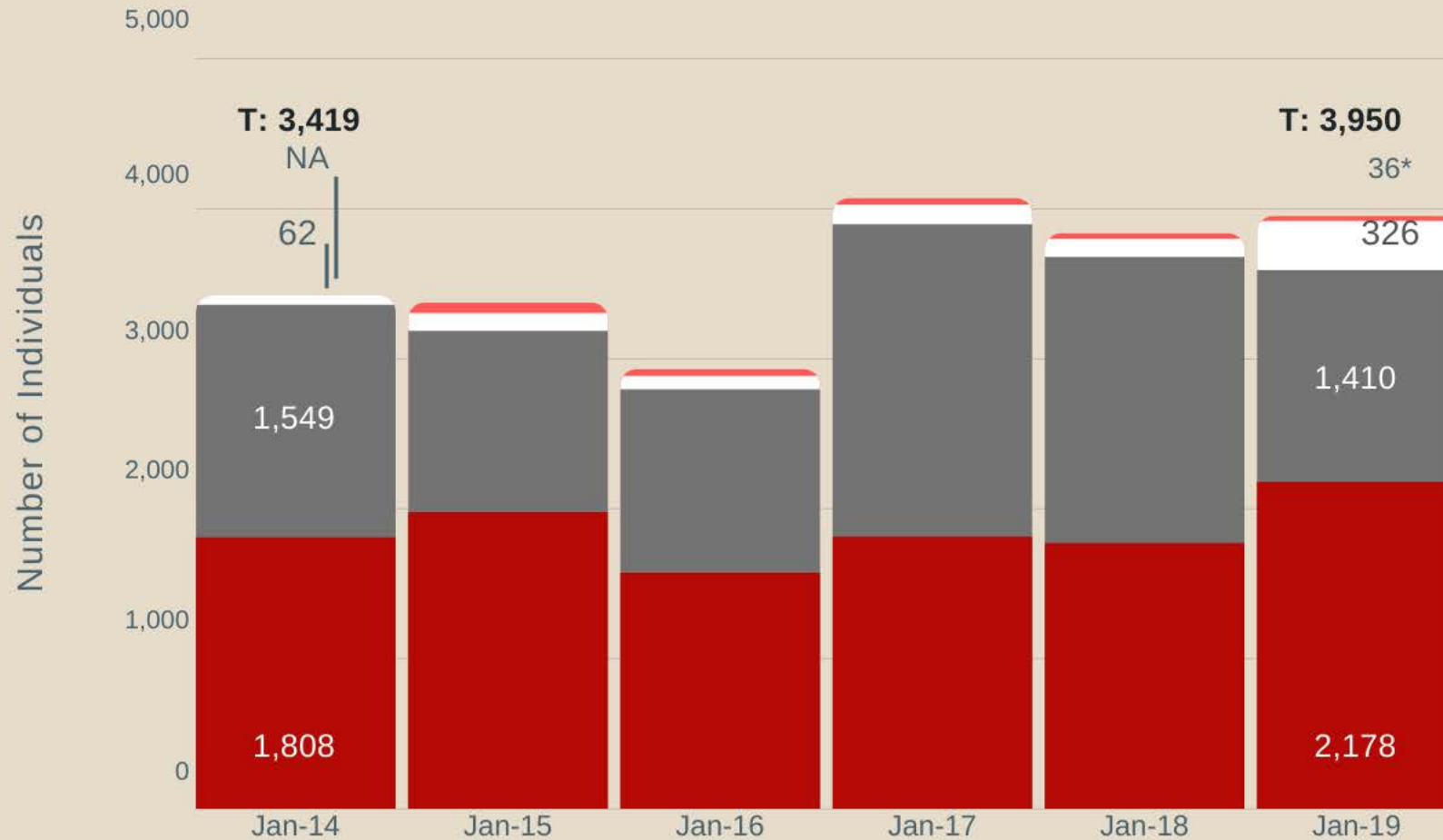
Source: NYC DHS HOPE Counts (2014-2019), Bronx Health & Housing Consortium Hospital Homeless Count, NYC DYCD & CIDI Homeless Youth Count
* Estimate based on 2018 Youth Count numbers.

Monthly Average DHS Shelter Entries, by Community District

Monthly Average DHS Shelter Entries

- 29 – 486
- 486 – 1,190
- 1,190 – 1,710
- 1,710 – 2,214
- 2,214 – 2,698

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Sources

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