

# Intersection of homeless outreach and River conservation

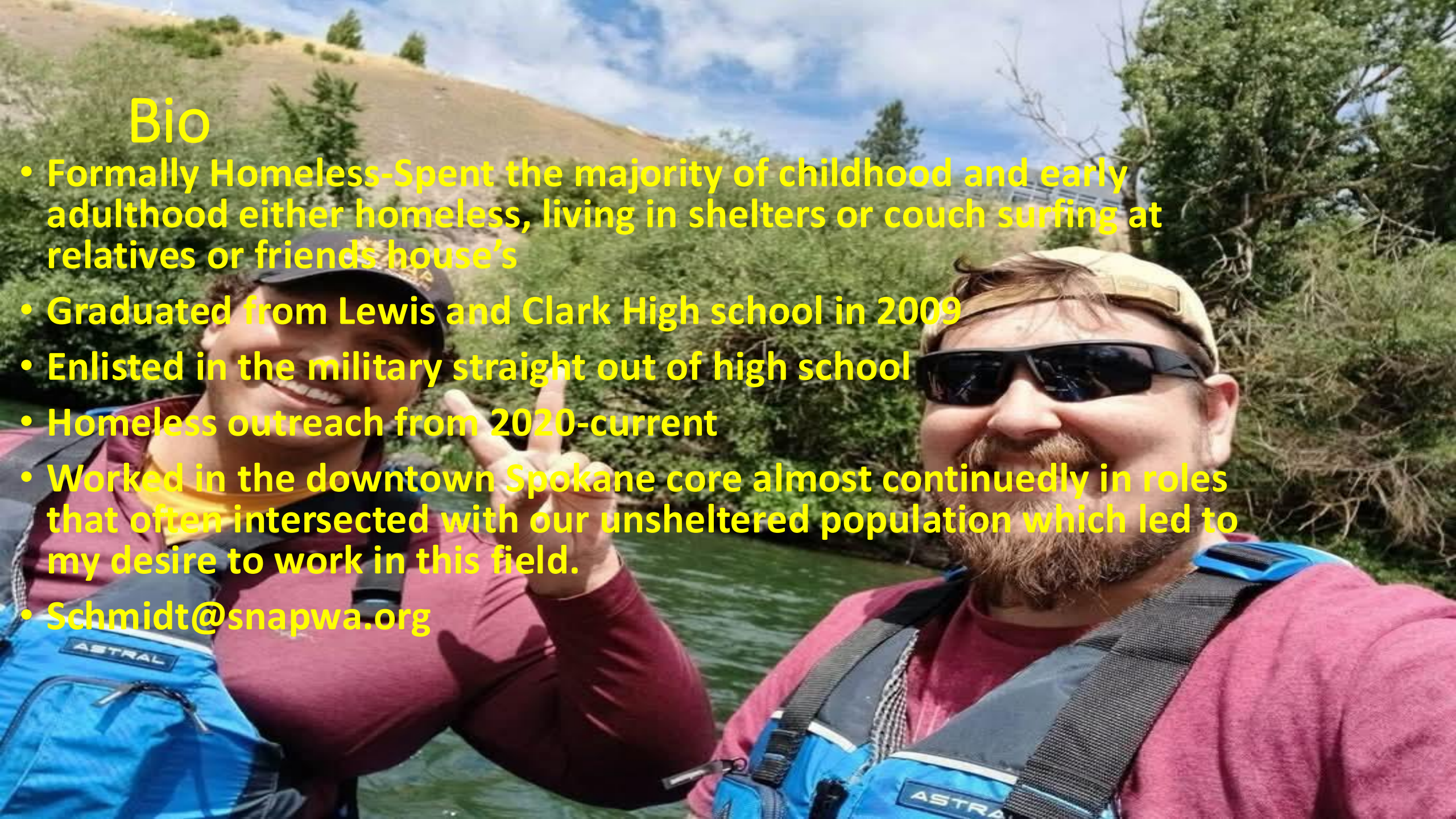
Presenter: Gary Schmidt-SNAP homeless outreach Lead





# Bio

- Formally Homeless-Spent the majority of childhood and early adulthood either homeless, living in shelters or couch surfing at relatives or friends house's
- Graduated from Lewis and Clark High school in 2009
- Enlisted in the military straight out of high school
- Homeless outreach from 2020-current
- Worked in the downtown Spokane core almost continually in roles that often intersected with our unsheltered population which led to my desire to work in this field.
- Schmidt@snapwa.org





# Why do the homeless camp along the river?

- Sanitation
- Cooking
- Seclusion/Privacy
- Summertime: Cooler
- Access to: Bus, lines, food, Medical, Social programs

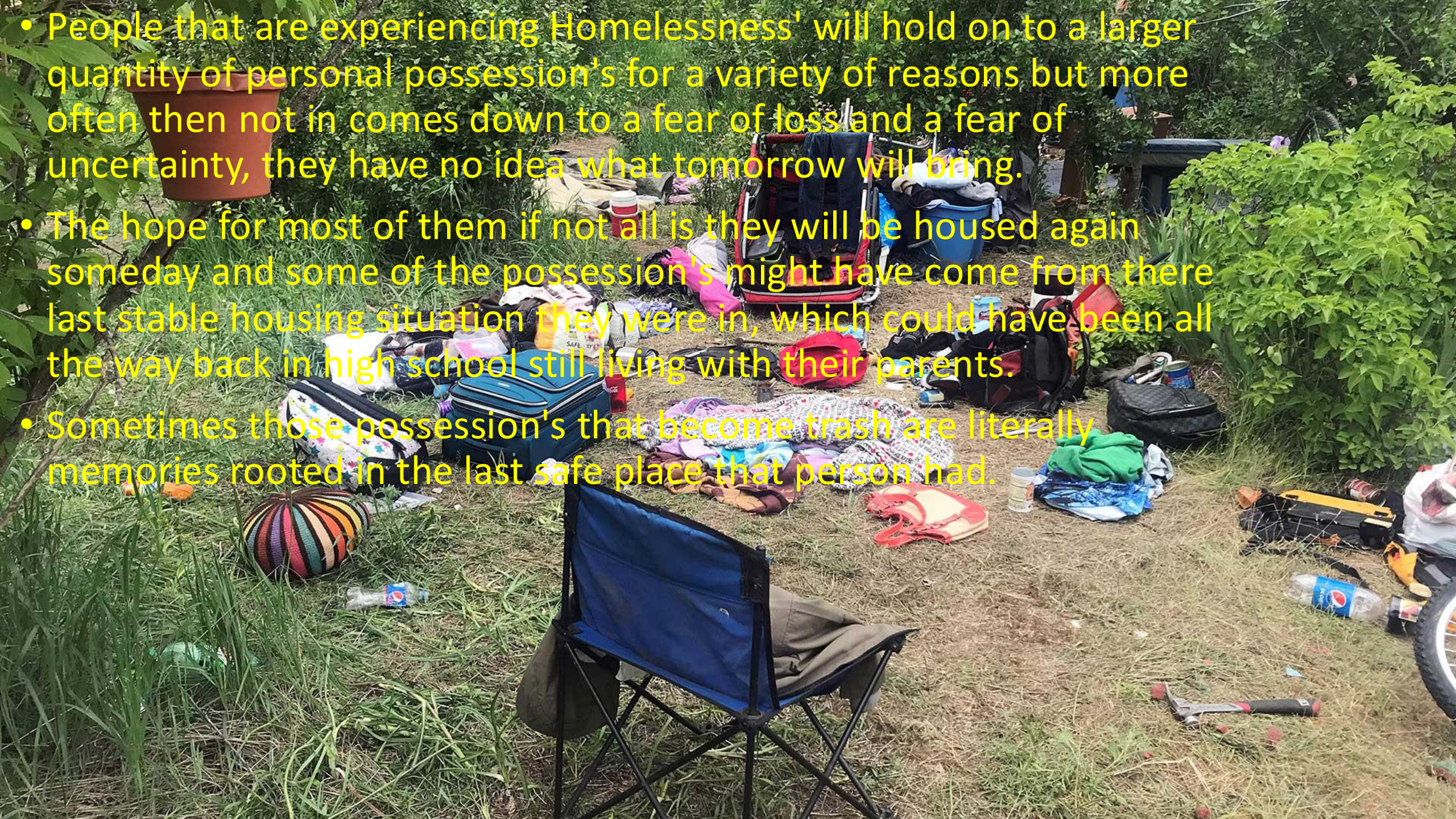


# WHY THE Garbage and why do some homeless have so much stuff!

- when people are camping along river ways they don't always have access to Trash bins or even trash bags sometimes.
- Often times when someone is camping in a location for an extended period of time they will set up their camp like their home but that can mean a large accumulation of possession's and not a good way to maintain those possession's, in combination with exposure to the elements, things can be destroyed very quickly and sometimes these items are left exactly where they were destroyed.



- People that are experiencing Homelessness' will hold on to a larger quantity of personal possession's for a variety of reasons but more often then not in comes down to a fear of loss and a fear of uncertainty, they have no idea what tomorrow will bring.
- The hope for most of them if not all is they will be housed again someday and some of the possession's might have come from there last stable housing situation they were in, which could have been all the way back in high school still living with their parents.
- Sometimes those possession's that become trash are literally memories rooted in the last safe place that person had.





# PIT Count DATA

- 2025- count took place from Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>-Jan 29 **Waiting on final data points**
- **2024 Approx. 2021 unsheltered people residing in Spokane county which is said to be a 15% decrease from 2023 where the unsheltered population totaled about 2390 individual's.**
- While this is a good SNAP shot for that week, I would not call this concrete data and estimates of the actual homeless population varies but I have heard numbers from just a few thousand and as high as 15,000



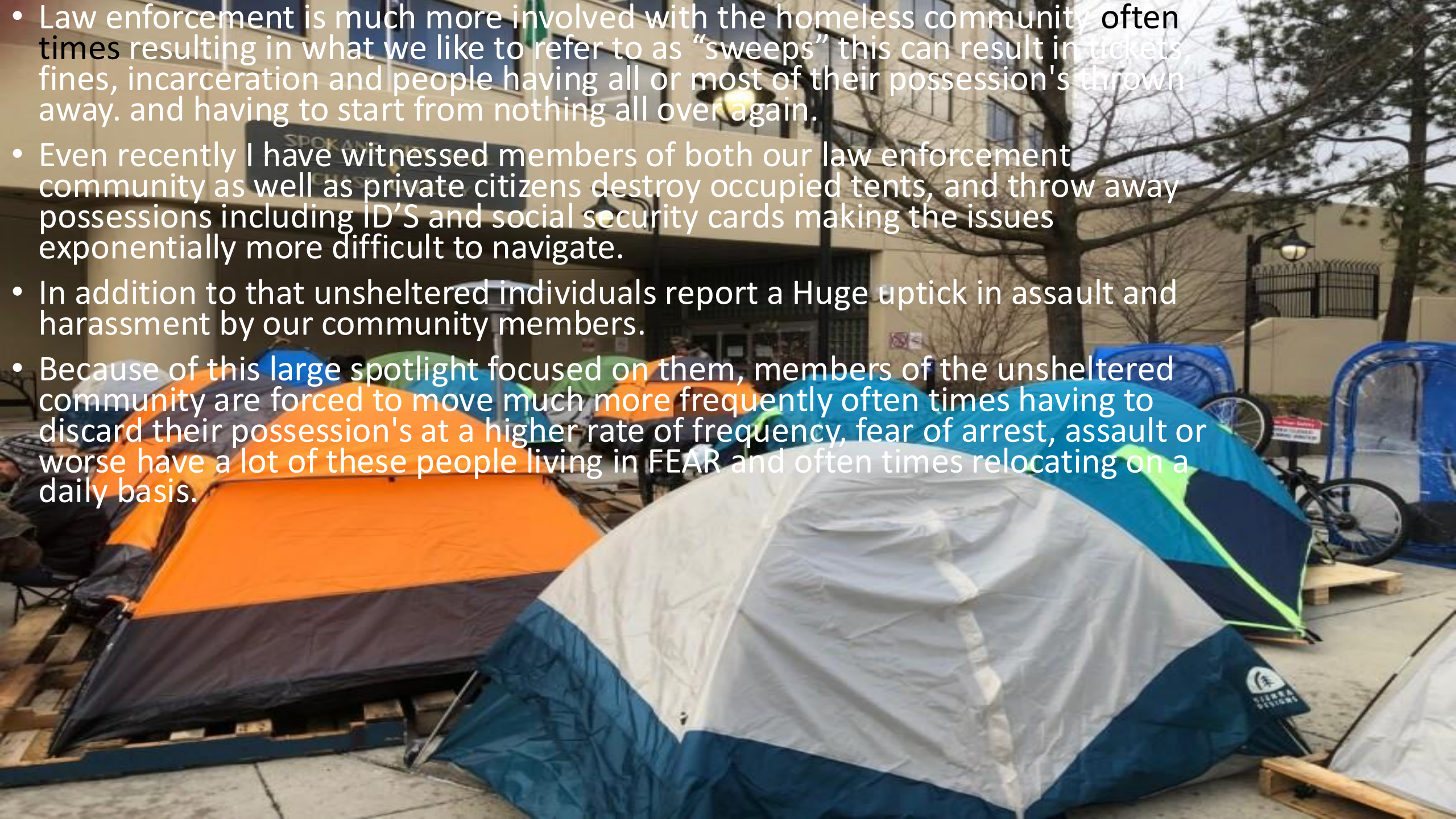
# Homeless Visibility

- Over the last few years homelessness has been a hot button topic nation wide
- On April 22nd 2024, the Supreme Court of the United States heard the case of *Johnson v. Grants Pass*. On June 28th, a decision was announced that cities and states can arrest people for sleeping outside, even when there are no safe alternatives.
- After this went into effect, cities and states immediately followed suit in what seems like large scale efforts to criminalize homelessness
- With these sweeping new laws and ordinances the homeless population tend to not stay in the same spot for very long anymore





- Law enforcement is much more involved with the homeless community often times resulting in what we like to refer to as “sweeps” this can result in tickets, fines, incarceration and people having all or most of their possession's thrown away. and having to start from nothing all over again.
- Even recently I have witnessed members of both our law enforcement community as well as private citizens destroy occupied tents, and throw away possessions including ID'S and social security cards making the issues exponentially more difficult to navigate.
- In addition to that unsheltered individuals report a Huge uptick in assault and harassment by our community members.
- Because of this large spotlight focused on them, members of the unsheltered community are forced to move much more frequently often times having to discard their possession's at a higher rate of frequency, fear of arrest, assault or worse have a lot of these people living in FEAR and often times relocating on a daily basis.





# Ways we can help

- Trash collection points including bins and bags
- Progressive engagement- this is a person centered approach to help end homelessness, a tailored approach unique to each individual.
- Education of local laws and ordinances
- Ongoing engagement with unsheltered population
- Providing materials directly to campers for clean up and sanitization
- Compassion and understanding



# QUESTIONS?

