



# County of Santa Cruz

## HUMAN RESOURCES AGENCY

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CECILIA ESPINOLA, ADMINISTRATOR

September 19, 2000

AGENDA: September 26, 2000

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HOMELESS 2000 CENSUS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Dear Members of the Board:

With financial support from the local jurisdictions and many community-based organizations, the Santa Cruz County Homeless 2000 Census and Needs Assessment was recently released. Your Board received the report on August 18. Along with others in the community, HRA is currently in the process of examining the report in detail. A copy of the Executive Summary is attached (Attachment A) and the full document is on file with the Clerk of the Board. The study, conducted by Applied Survey Research, represents a community-wide effort to better understand homelessness in Santa Cruz County. As your Board is aware, the report includes a street count of homeless persons and an updated needs assessment; it is the first such effort since the Short-Term Housing Coalition's survey in 1990. While we cannot accurately compare data from the two studies due to significant differences in their methodologies, the detailed information recently obtained is critical for developing policies and programs to help homeless individuals and families within our community and for competing successfully for federal and state funding for homeless services. All of the local jurisdictions and participating agencies are to be commended for making such an assessment a top priority.

The report has two separate components: a census, which presents both a point-in-time street count and an annualized estimate of the number of homeless individuals in the county, and a needs assessment, which profiles the characteristics of a smaller sample of homeless persons. The census, conducted by observation during the early morning hours, describes the number of people and where they were counted. The profile contains information obtained by interview, including demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, family composition, level of education, employment, income, aspects of residency, and veteran status; aspects of health and mental health; substance abuse; perceived reasons for becoming homeless; use of public assistance; and identified needs.

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Fortuitously, the study dovetails with work in the area of homelessness that the Santa Cruz County Continuum of Care (COC) initiated recently. As your Board is aware, the COC, staffed by HRA, was formed some years ago to meet HUD requirements for receiving federal dollars at the local level for homeless services and shelter programs. The group includes representation from key sectors of the community, including homeless services providers and advocacy groups; health, mental health and disability service providers; educators; nonprofit housing corporations; and government (see Attachment B for a full listing of members).

Due to the greatly increased level of competition for HUD funds, the County and the City of Santa Cruz jointly hired HomeBase, a public policy law firm on homelessness, this past year to work with COC members to develop the 2000/01 funding application. As part of this process, the COC began discussions regarding the need to develop a long-term strategic plan to address homelessness in the County. The Homeless 2000 report reaches a similar conclusion, recommending the formation of a committee representing government agencies and other organizations that provide services to the homeless. In order to avoid duplication, we suggest building on the existing Continuum of Care--broadening its scope of responsibility and expanding its membership to include other sectors of the community. Recent work the COC has done to analyze gaps in services, together with the Homeless 2000 report, can provide needed baseline data for the planning process. In addition, HomeBase, which has facilitated long-term strategic planning efforts in numerous counties, including Monterey, has expressed interest in assisting Santa Cruz County with this process.

IT IS THEREFORE RECOMMENDED that your Board:

1. Accept and file the Santa Cruz County Homeless 2000 Census and Needs Assessment.
2. Direct the HRA Administrator to work with the City of Santa Cruz and other jurisdictions toward expanding the scope and membership of the Continuum of Care and developing a long-term strategic plan to address homelessness in Santa Cruz County; and
3. Direct the HRA Administrator to report back to the Board of Supervisors on or before March 27, 2001, on the status of this effort.

Very truly yours,



CECILIA ESPINOLA  
Administrator

Attachments

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RECOMMENDED:



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SUSAN A. MAURIELLO  
County Administrative Officer

cc: County Administrative Office  
City of Santa Cruz

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## BACKGROUND

The United States, and particularly the central region of California, is in a period of economic boom. The nation's Gross Domestic Product, unemployment, and corporate productivity and profits paint a vivid portrait of a robust and growing economy. However, not all citizens are reaping rewards from this prosperity. In fact, in many areas of the country, including Santa Cruz County, people are experiencing a dramatic growth in income inequality and economic insecurity.

By the year 2002, over half of the local jobs with the greatest projected growth will pay less than a livable wage. Santa Cruz is a community where the rental cost of a two-bedroom unit is more than what someone earning a livable wage can afford, and where only 14% of homes are affordable to median-income, (much less low income) households. Clearly, the impact of the county's growing income disparity and radically increasing housing costs are widespread. Indeed, numerous homeless service providers have maintained that because of rocketing housing costs; many residents are one paycheck away from homelessness.

Yet, determining the extent of homelessness and the characteristics of the homeless population is a challenging task. The last survey of homeless people in Santa Cruz County was completed in 1990, ten years ago. While this study generated important results, many of which have been used to garner federal and state funding for homeless services, a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of homelessness in the County was needed. For this reason, in March of 2000, an extensive study of the homeless in the County was completed. The study was done in conjunction with the Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project (CAP) that profiles status on a variety of quality of life issues, including housing and homelessness.

The study, conducted by Applied Survey Research (ASR), aimed to generate an accurate, empirical count of homeless individuals, as well as an assessment of who the homeless are, the reasons for their homelessness, and the services they perceive to be useful in ending their

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homelessness. The Homeless 2000 Report conveys the results of this effort and provides an accurate qualitative and quantitative profile of homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study was successfully implemented in Monterey County in 1999 and later touted as an example of “best practice” research by a regional homeless advocacy group and service provider organizations. The cornerstones of this methodology are a point-in-time Census of street and sheltered homeless and a detailed Needs Assessment Survey.

The Homeless 2000 Census was undertaken on March 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2000 using a systematic canvassing of census block grids throughout the County. Current and formerly homeless individuals were trained to act as census workers and were strategically integrated into enumeration teams.

The Homeless 2000 Needs Assessment effort surveyed 811 homeless individuals throughout the County. The research instrument was a GO-question survey, which was administered to homeless individuals. Surveys were conducted at service provider agencies including social service agencies, faith organizations and non-profits with homeless services focus, as well as at various street locations. Interviewers were predominantly homeless or formerly homeless which resulted in excellent response rates and meaningful and candid responses. ASR has found that this approach is superior to more formal survey administration by government workers or students due to the natural privacy concerns of most respondents. Many questions were very personal, and trust with the interviewer was critical.

The approach used in the Homeless 2000 Needs Assessment was very different from that of the 1990 approach. In 1990, homeless street and vehicle information was collected primarily through observation. More detailed questions were asked only at shelters or food distributions. Nevertheless, some trend data was able to be developed for inclusion in this report.

There are numerous definitions in use for homelessness and its related issues. For the purposes of this study, the McKinney Act definition of homelessness was used. (See Methodology section for more detail.) This definition is often problematic. Researchers struggle with one aspect of the definition, which includes the qualification of accommodations in places “not

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designed for, or usually used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings". Severe undercounting of this group is known to occur in any homeless enumeration, and posed a challenge for ASR as well. As a result, flexibility is needed in order to accommodate a count of homeless individuals that expands and contracts throughout any given time period.

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## CENSUS

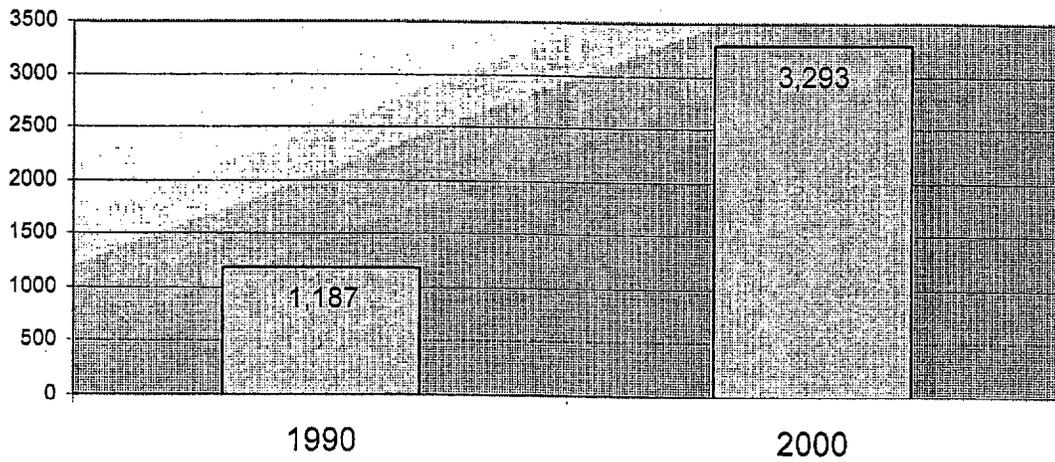
ASR and the Homeless 2000 Oversight Committee developed and implemented an empirical point-in-time homeless census in Santa Cruz County. This empirical approach is not common in homeless research due to the extreme challenges in accurately identifying a population that frequently does not want to be found. Most homeless census studies focus on shelter attendance and fail to accurately count the street homeless. Another approach to enumeration is to project the number of homeless through a calculation based on general population. Both approaches, though useful, have significant shortcomings and fail to accurately reflect some of the uniqueness of the city or county being studied. Santa Cruz County is fortunate that it had the foresight to conduct a homeless census in 1990. That study was undertaken in the wake of the 1989 earthquake, which undoubtedly affected the findings. Regardless, the 1990 study was able to produce a credible estimate of the scope of homelessness in Santa Cruz County, enabling comparisons to the Homeless 2000 findings.

The comprehensive enumeration strategy employed in the 2000 homeless census undoubtedly accounts for some of the differences from the 1990 study. However, the magnitude of the difference indicates that homelessness in Santa Cruz County has increased in the last 10 years despite the significant improvements in homeless infrastructure and homeless outreach services. The table below illustrates the dramatic increase in Santa Cruz County Homelessness in the last 10 years.

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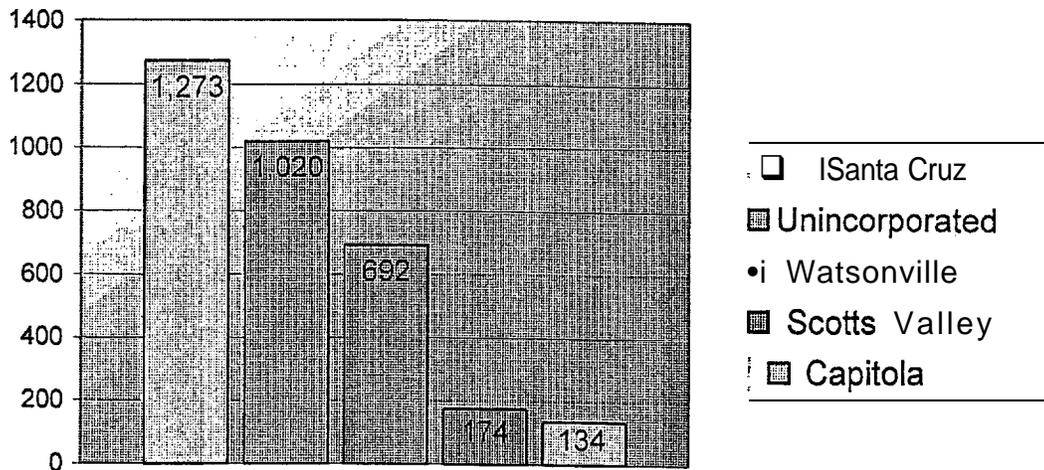
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**Table 1-1 – Point in Time Homeless Census Comparison**



The following table (Table 1-2) illustrates the distribution of homeless persons counted in each jurisdiction. It is important to note that there is much geographical movement within the homeless community. Where an individual was counted at a point in time does not necessarily indicate that individual's primary dwelling location.

**Table 1-2 – Point in Time Census Totals by Jurisdiction**



Another important and complimentary approach 'to better understanding the scope of homelessness in a target area is **to** look at annualizing the homeless population. This is effective because it better represents the number of people that the service community must serve annually, therefore helping local groups to evaluate their staffing and service delivery strategy.

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It has the secondary benefit of providing insight into the dynamics of the population and the rate at which homeless people cycle in and out of housing. By using the Needs Assessment findings to determine average lengths of homelessness combined with the point-in-time census figure, it can be projected that there are approximately 8,558 persons who experience homelessness in Santa Cruz County in a given year. The table below illustrates the calculation of an annualized homeless population from a point-in-time population.

**Table 1-3 — Calculation of Annualized Projection**

Length of Homelessness	Percent of Respondents	Minimum Turnover Rate	Point in Time Population	Annualized Population
Less than 1 month	9.3%	12	3,293	3,675.0
1 – 3 months	15.4%	4	3,293	2,028.5
4 – 6 months	11.4%	2	3,293	750.8
7 – 12 months	14.0%	1	3,293	461.0
More than 1 year	49.9%	1	3,293	1,643.2
Total	100.0%	Weighted Average 2.59	3,293	8,558.5

While the annualized Santa Cruz County Homeless Census number is very large in comparison to the point-in-time figure, it is in line with other research findings across the country. The Santa Cruz turnover rate of 2.59 (explained in full in the census section) is very consistent with national and regional studies (In Monterey, a similar methodology yielded a turnover rate of 2.6). The year 2000 Community Assessment Report (CAP) indicated that 1.8% of Santa Cruz County survey respondents (generalized to 1.8% of the County’s population, or 4,665 people) had been homeless in the last year alone. Couple this statistic with the Homeless 2000 Needs Assessment finding that 50% of the Santa Cruz homeless had been homeless for over a year, and therefore not available for inclusion in the CAP findings, and the annual figure is further validated.

## CENSUS UNDERCOUNT

Despite efforts to accurately enumerate the County’s homeless population, it is clear that there are still many individuals not included in this study. For example, significant barriers were encountered in enumerating homeless youth. Homelessness among youth in the County is a significant issue, yet their inherent elusiveness as well as the many privacy issues that protect them, ensure that their numbers are an undercount. Additionally, it is believed that the

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homeless agricultural-worker population was also underrepresented. Firstly, agricultural-worker populations are seasonal and this study was conducted in a somewhat slow seasonal period. Secondly, agricultural-worker housing in Santa Cruz County is now almost exclusively provided by the agricultural-worker him/herself and many accommodations are substandard and fall within McKinney Act guidelines. Unfortunately, researchers were unable to quantify these accommodations and the people who live in them due to privacy issues and the safety concerns that many people within this population have relative to immigration and employment status. Further, homeless families who are not in transitional housing, shelters, or voucher programs are also difficult to enumerate, as they are less likely to be out in public in the pre-dawn hours.

The net result is that any census count will be an undercount of the homeless population and omit significant groups of individuals. Despite these limitations, an empirical census is still the most accurate approach to homeless enumeration.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Needs Assessment Survey was designed to profile the Santa Cruz County homeless population as well as to follow-up on the 1990 Needs Assessment Survey. While this survey is described as a needs assessment, it is more accurately a profile questionnaire. The results of the Homeless 2000 Needs Assessment Survey provide detailed qualitative profiles of the County's homeless population, which include demographics, opinions and behavior. The large number of respondents (811) enables the development and analysis of accurate information about the qualitative characteristics of the homeless in Santa Cruz County. This comprehensive data could not be collected during the Census effort because the requirements of an accurate point-in-time census enumeration mandate that information gathering is purely visual and done within a narrow time band to reduce the chances of count duplication.

## SELECTED FINDINGS

Some results of the Homeless 2000 Needs Assessment Survey are intuitive to the public and the service provider community and some are not. For example:

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**Table 1-4 – Selected Findings by Category**

Category	Selected Findings
Residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 28.4% of homeless respondents grew up in Santa Cruz County</li> <li>▪ 76.8% have lived here for more <sup>a</sup> than 5 years</li> <li>▪ 72.1% have no plans to leave the County</li> <li>▪ 17.1% live outdoors</li> <li>▪ 7.8% live in a vehicle</li> </ul>
Length of Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 50.1% of respondents have been homeless less than 1 year</li> <li>▪ long-term homelessness (greater than 2 years) is up — 12.6% in 1990 to 32.0% in 2000</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employed homeless persons are on the rise — 23.8% in 1990 to 32.6% in 2000</li> <li>▪ 32.6% are employed full or part-time or are self employed</li> <li>▪ 59.9% were actively looking for work</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 29.9% do not get enough to eat</li> <li>▪ 27.6% did not receive health care when they needed it in the last year</li> <li>▪ 49.8 would accept drug or alcohol counseling if it were made available</li> </ul>
Veterans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Homeless veterans are on the decline — 20.4% in 1990 to 13.0% in 2000</li> </ul>
Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 30.1% are on a waiting list for housing assistance</li> <li>▪ 38.4% do not receive any type of government assistance</li> <li>▪ 20.9% have been turned away from a shelter at least once</li> </ul>

Seven hundred and eighty five homeless respondents provided insight about how they would prioritize help for the homeless. When asked about how they would like to see the County help the homeless they had clear opinions:

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**Table 1-5 – How homeless respondents would like to see the County help the homeless:**

Homeless Service	Response %
Job training	71.6
Public shelters	61.3
Health Care	59.1
Service acquisition assistance	58.1
Counseling -- drug or alcohol	58.0
Counseling -- mental health	51.1
Affordable housing	16.4

What emerges from the Needs Assessment is a complicated profile of a diverse population that ranges from individuals who are college educated and employed full time, to long-term homeless individuals who suffer from mental illness or substance abuse. The above findings provide a profile of the homeless in Santa Cruz County, which can be reviewed in more detail in the Needs Assessment analysis section. A review of the profiles (found in the Appendix) and 1990 comparisons gives further insight into Santa Cruz County homelessness. For additional data and profiles of homeless subpopulations, please consult the ASR Website at – [www.appliedsurveyresearch.org](http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org).

Both national and local data reflect the fact that homelessness is an economic and social systemic issue that defies a single solution. With a myriad of reasons why people become homeless, there is not a simple way to categorize the populations most at risk. In reviewing nationwide homeless data, a general profile of three distinct groups of homeless persons with distinct needs emerge:

**Table 1-G – Types of Homelessness**

Type of Homelessness	De
Habitually Homeless	This category describes individuals who have been homeless over 2 years.
Episodically Homeless	This group of homeless often struggles with drug use, alcohol use and / or other issues that can recur but do <b>not</b> typically last longer than a year.
Non-recurring, Acute Crisis Homeless	This type of homelessness is often the result of a personal or family <b>crisis</b> such as job loss, eviction, health issues or disability, or domestic violence and usually affects people for less than 2 years.

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In an ideal environment, each would require a customized homeless solution. In order to develop effective homeless management and prevention policies for Santa Cruz County, the qualitative difference among the three category populations must be considered. While this survey does much to profile the homeless of the County, it does not quantify the homeless into the categories described above. However, we can see very clearly from the survey findings how the needs of the homeless fall into these broad categories.

It is evident from the data that Santa Cruz County's homeless population is a large and diverse group. The differences within the homeless population require flexibility in service program development. While there has been significant growth in the number and quality of homeless services, there are opportunities to further coordinate services to the homeless. The results and analysis of the survey findings are intended to help guide this effort.

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<b>Santa Cruz County - Wide Continuum of Care Coordinating Group</b>		
<b>SECTOR</b>	<b>COMMITTEE MEMBER</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>
<b>Homeless Service Providers and Advocacy Groups</b>	Ann Pomper Lee Kanellis Ken Cole Jeremy Jilka Paul O'Brien Terry Moriarty Desiree Vierra Jane Wade Kathy Bernard Paul Brindel Christine Lyons Sam Storey	Above the Line The Salvation Army Homeless Services Center Homeless Services Center Santa Cruz Community Counseling Santa Cruz Community Counseling Families in Transition Pajaro Valley Shelter Services Pajaro Valley Shelter Services Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County Food and Nutrition Services
<b>Veteran Service Organization</b>	Cy Wannarka	Santa Cruz County Veterans Service Office
<b>Foundations and Private Sector</b>	Mary Lou Goeke Michael Schmidt	United Way Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce
<b>Local Government</b>	Nora Krantzler Richard Koch Mary James Amy Stewart Sue Hogue Gene Arner Tim Reynolds Jo Ann Allen Karen Lemon	County Human Resources Agency City of Watsonville Housing Authority Housing Authority Housing Authority City of Santa Cruz City of Santa Cruz Santa Cruz County Office of Education Santa Cruz County Office of Education
<b>Health, Mental Health, and Disability</b>	Chistine Sippl Paul Gendreau Yana Jacobs Laura Manley	Santa Cruz County Homeless Persons Health Project Santa Cruz County Homeless Persons Health Project Community Mental Health Santa Cruz AIDS Project
<b>Nonprofit Housing Corporations</b>	Elizabeth Vogel Kathy Bernard Jane Barr	Mercy Charities Housing California Pajaro Valley Housing Corporation Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition

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