

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Jacky Morales-Ferrand

**SUBJECT: RESULTS OF 2015 HOMELESS
CENSUS AND SURVEY**

DATE: June 22, 2015

Approved

D. D. S. L.

Date

6/22/15

INFORMATION

All jurisdictions that receive federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing and services for homeless persons are required to conduct a homeless census at least every two years. On January 27 and 28, 2015, the biennial census and survey of the homeless population in San José was conducted by Applied Survey Research under contract with the City. A parallel census and survey of homeless persons throughout the rest of Santa Clara County was performed at the same time. These censuses provide a “point-in-time” snapshot of the homeless population on those dates.

In the weeks following the homeless census, a survey was administered to over 600 sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons in the City. The survey used a peer-to-peer methodology and was administered by trained survey workers who had experienced or were experiencing homelessness. The survey data brings greater perspective to current issues of homelessness, to the provision of services to homeless persons in the community, and other characteristics of the homeless population. The survey findings also provide a measure of changes in the composition of the homeless population since the 2013 census and survey.

The final report of the results of this effort for San José has recently been finalized, and this informational memorandum provides highlights of the results. The full report for both the City and the County can be viewed at www.sjhousing.org.

SURVEY FINDINGS

During the two-day effort, census workers found 4,063 homeless individuals in San José. This point-in-time count represents a 15% decrease from the number identified in the 2013 census, when 4,770 individuals were counted. Out of the total 4,063 persons, 1,253 (31%) were living in shelters, transitional housing or safe havens, and 778 (19%) were living unsheltered in encampments. For the remaining unsheltered homeless individuals, 1,341 (33%) were living on the street, 569 (14%) in cars or other vehicles, or 122 (3%) in abandoned buildings.

The total two-day census count for Santa Clara County was 6,556 homeless individuals, a 14% decrease from the 2013 count, when 7,631 individuals were identified as being homeless.

This decrease in homelessness reflects the continued work of the City, the County, the Housing Authority, Destination: Home, and a number of local non-profit service providers focused on responding to encampments and the needs of unhoused populations in the community. Following direction from City Council, in 2013 the City embarked on a pilot project to provide housing and employment services to individuals living in a targeted homeless encampment, resulting in over 175 people housed to date. In addition, Housing 1000 – a local campaign led by Destination: Home designed to house the most vulnerable residents – ended in December 2014 and housed 865 chronically homeless participants. These combined efforts have led to a reduction in both the unsheltered and chronically homeless populations in the region.

Following the methodology employed in 2013, the survey also included a targeted effort to identify historically hard to reach populations by utilizing outreach professionals from partner nonprofit agencies to seek out people living in encampments and other less visible areas. In addition, Community Technology Alliance, a local non-profit partner, developed a mobile application for census workers. The application was used for the first time to record data for the encampment and youth count, bringing our community into alignment with HUD's requirement to use technology for the census. To improve the ability to identify homeless youth and families, staff deployed professional outreach workers for these counts, as well as partnering with other homeless youth, Homeless Student Liaisons, and the Santa Clara County Office of Education.

As has been the case in previous years, the majority of the homeless population resided in the local area when they lost their homes. Of the total San José homeless population, 84% of survey respondents reported having lived in Santa Clara County at the time they most recently became homeless, a very slight 1% decrease from 2013. The report also revealed 77% were living in Santa Clara County for more than 10 years.

The causes of homelessness varied widely, reflecting the complicated set of circumstances which can lead residents to the streets. Survey respondents stated that the primary event or condition that resulted in their current episode of homelessness in San José ranged from job loss (30%) a decrease from 42% in 2013, alcohol/ drug (21%), divorce/ separation/ break up (16%), an argument with family/ friends (15%) and incarceration (12%), an increase from 9% in 2013.

Obstacles to obtaining housing, however, were almost solely income related. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents in 2015 reported an inability to afford rent, followed by 57% reporting a lack of job or income. Respondents reporting there to be no housing available increased from 14% in 2013 to 35% in 2015. Other obstacles reported were lack of money for move in costs and no access to transportation.

A common misperception about homeless people is that they do not want housing and prefer to live outdoors. The 2015 survey continues to disprove this belief, as 92% of San José survey respondents said they would want permanent housing if it were available to them.

Highlights of the survey results for specific San José sub-populations are:

- Encampment Residents. As noted above, 778 homeless individuals were living in encampments at the end of January, which represents 19 % of the total homeless population on that date and a 37% decline from the 1,230 individuals counted in 2013. Females now comprise over 33% of encampment residents, which is similar to the percentage of the general homeless population but an increase from 20% in the encampments in 2013. Other demographic information is similar to the general homeless population. Extent of homelessness exceeding four years was reported by more than 80% of respondents, for those in other homelessness settings only 45% report being homeless over four years. Over 40% of encampment residents report having a pet, compared to 21% of the general homeless population. Finally, encampment residents report that they are much more likely to have been San José residents when they became homeless than the general homeless population (94% versus 84%).
- The Chronically Homeless. The number of chronically homeless individuals was 1,409, an 8% decrease over the 1,531 reported in 2013. This decrease is evidence of the efforts to place the most vulnerable chronically homeless individuals into permanent supportive housing.
- Veterans. There were 498 homeless individuals who had previously served in the armed forces. It is estimated that veterans comprise less than 5% of the adult population of San José, yet veterans represent 12% of those experiencing homelessness in the City. There were 30 female and 454 male homeless veterans. Overall, the average of these individuals was 52 years old. Of homeless veterans, 63% were experiencing one or more disabling conditions, as opposed to 51% of the overall homeless population.

This total represents only a nominal change from the 484 veterans recorded in 2013; however, while national trends tend to show homeless veterans are more likely to be unsheltered, 52% of the veteran population in San José was sheltered in 2015. This data reflects the construction of a new 150-bed Veterans Housing Facility, which was relocated from Menlo Park to San José in 2014.

- Families with Children. There were 388 homeless individuals residing in a total of 121 family units, or about 9% of the total homeless population. This represents a 7% decrease in this sub-population from the 417 individuals reported in 2013. Most of these families were sheltered, with 14 individuals (in 4 households, and including 7 children under the age of 18) living in unsheltered situations. Families are most likely to be doubled up or in motels. Only those literally on the streets, in vehicles, or motel programs paid for by another source are included per HUD definition.
- Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults. There were 32 unaccompanied children under 18 and 502 young adults between ages 18 and 24 identified in the Point-in-Time count. There were 21 parenting transition age youth with 30 minor children; this was the first time this category was counted as a distinct group. Together, these three groups comprise 14% of the total homeless population. The 61 children under 18 represent a

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63% decrease from the 165 reported in 2013. This data represents a decrease of 13% from the 690 youth counted in 2013. It should be noted, however, that youth and families continue to be difficult demographic sub-populations to accurately count due to their typical behavior to stay out of sight and avoid detection.

The biennial census and survey of San José's homeless population continues to be a valuable resource for tracking trends and shaping policy and program designs intended to move homeless persons into permanent housing and to prevent at-risk individuals from becoming homeless. With this in mind, however, the census is just one of the tools used for understanding homelessness in the community. In the coming months, staff will use the data gathered to compare with other local studies such as the recently released report "Home Not Found – the Cost of Homelessness in Silicon Valley" to inform strategies and develop initiatives to support the regional Community Plan to End Homelessness.

/s/

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For questions please contact Ray Bramson, Homelessness Response Manager, at 408-535-8234