

✓ Census Finds Santa Cruz County Has Declining Homeless Population

Homeless 2000
A 2009 survey found Santa Cruz County has fewer homeless people than it had two years ago, but numbers are rising in some categories as they fall in others.

The semi-annual census, required by the federal government to apply for program funding, was held Jan. 22, 2009, throughout Santa Cruz County. Participants identified 2,265 homeless people, with 32 percent of them in shelters or other temporary housing and 68 percent on the street.

Compared to the 2007 count, the overall homeless population decreased by 19 percent or 524 individuals. While overall numbers and those not in a shelter

decreased, the number of homeless in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs increased by 50 percent.

The populations in the cities also varied.

Scotts Valley had no homeless this time, compared to 78 two years ago. The Mid-County area also saw significant drops in overall numbers, with Soquel down to 26 from 222 and Aptos/Rio Del Mar from 86 to 15.

Watsonville's homeless population jumped by 240. Many of those homeless people were families.

The other increase came at the opposite end of the county on the North Coast, which had a nearly 50 percent jump to 148 homeless this year.

The census also included a survey of about 400 homeless people. The survey showed that the typical homeless person was 31 to 50 years old, was living in Santa Cruz County when he or she became homeless, had been homeless for more than one year and was receiving some form of government assistance.

A lack of money to pay rent remained the top reason given for homelessness.

Santa Cruz County's percentage of chronically homeless came in at 42 percent, more than twice the national average.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a chronically homeless person as an

individual with a disabling condition (such as mental illness and drug or alcohol abuse) who has been continu-

ally homeless for one year or more or has been homeless more than four times in the past three years. ■

Survey by the Numbers

- **54 percent** of survey respondents had been homeless for a year or more.
- **37 percent** of survey respondents indicated that they had children (either living with them or not).
- Caucasians comprised **50 percent** of survey respondents,
- Hispanics comprised **30 percent**, African Americans comprised **8 percent**, and **5 percent** identified themselves as American Indian.
- **48 percent** of all respondents were between ages 31 and 50.
- Nearly three of four respondents were male.
- **39 percent** of all survey respondents had a high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education.
- **62 percent** of respondents were living in Santa Cruz County when they most recently became homeless.

The Post 8-7-09