

Surplus in county fund for poor

A dramatic drop in the general assistance (GA) rolls in recent months has led to charges that the county is cracking down in an attempt to drive poor people out of the area.

The reduced rolls have resulted in a projected \$130,000 surplus of unspent funds that were slated for payments to local people in need during the 1976-1977 budget year.

Under the GA program, people with no source of income, including other forms of public assistance, are granted food stamps and \$125 a month to cover all other living expenses.

The grant must be worked off if the recipient is able to work.

Currently about 130 people receive benefits under the program in Santa Cruz County, a drop of about 40 per cent in the last 18 months.

That trend has left the county with one of the lowest GA rates in the entire state.

The decreased rolls represent the denial and harassment of people in need, according to Ross Newport of the Welfare Legal Assistance Center (WELAC).

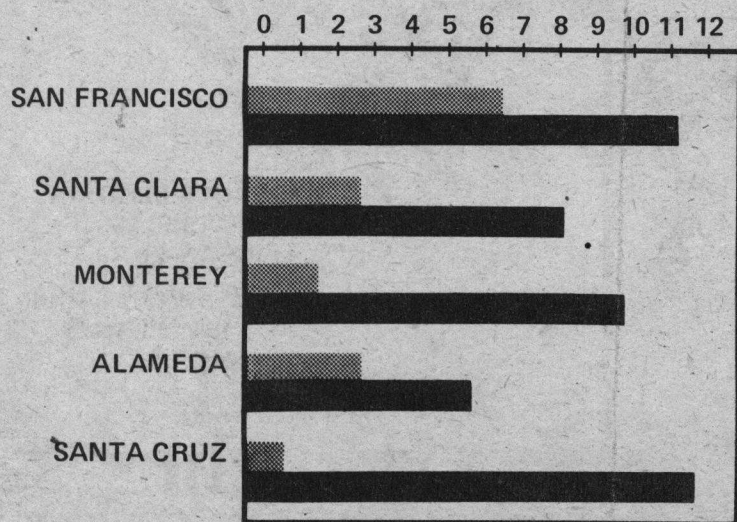
Last month, charges that the social services department is abusive rather

than helpful to applicants and recipients led to a demonstration of some 30 GA recipients at the office of David Singleton, the director of the department.

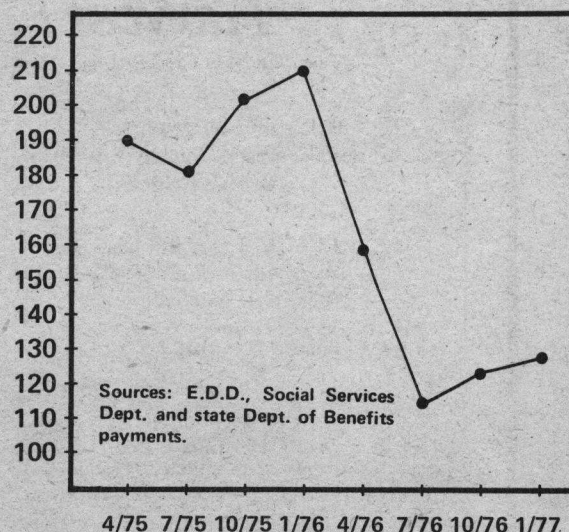
Although he does "not know who is ordering it," Newport believes that there has been a systematic crackdown in the GA program.

Despite the fact that he is visually and mentally handicapped, one local man was cut off GA for his inability to perform the work requirement, according to Newport.

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The grey bars show the number of general assistance recipients per thousand population. The black bars represent the unemployment rates for each county. The discrepancy between high unemployment and a low assistance rate has led to charges that Santa Cruz County is cracking down on poor people.



Sources: E.D.D., Social Services Dept. and state Dept. of Benefits payments.

This line charts the sharp decline in the number of general assistance recipients in Santa Cruz County.

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After six months with no funds, sleeping under one of the downtown bridges over the San Lorenzo River, the federal Social Security office confirmed that he is handicapped.

He is now receiving Supplemental Security Income for the disabled.

"Poor people are being cut off and indiscriminately driven from the county," Newport told the *Independent*, adding that it "seems like a pretty strange way to control growth."

A different explanation for the reduced rolls is offered by those in the social services department who administer the program.

Ernie Lopez, assistant director of the department, suggested that improvements in the economy have made it easier to find work in Santa Cruz County.

The supervisor of the department's GA unit told the *Independent* that "some increase in caseload had been projected" for the last year and that it was "unusual not to have one."

"The less depressed economic situation in Santa Cruz County" was also

cited by the supervisor as the main reason behind the reduced GA rolls.

But Monterey County GA supervisor Jim McKnew told the *Independent* that there has been "a big jump recently" in his county's rolls.

Despite a lower unemployment, there are twice as many GA recipients per capita in Monterey than in Santa Cruz County.

There are currently about 350 people receiving GA benefits in Monterey County, according to McKnew.

And a number of other counties show the same general trend. Santa Clara and Alameda have four times as

many and San Francisco more than ten times as many GA recipients per capita than Santa Cruz.

One reason for the wide variance in the GA rate is that it is the only public assistance program with local control over regulations.

The board of supervisors will be considering proposals for changes in the current Santa Cruz regulations at their May 31 meeting.

Those proposals are currently being discussed, argued and negotiated among the social services department, the social services commission and WELAC.

—Bob Johnson