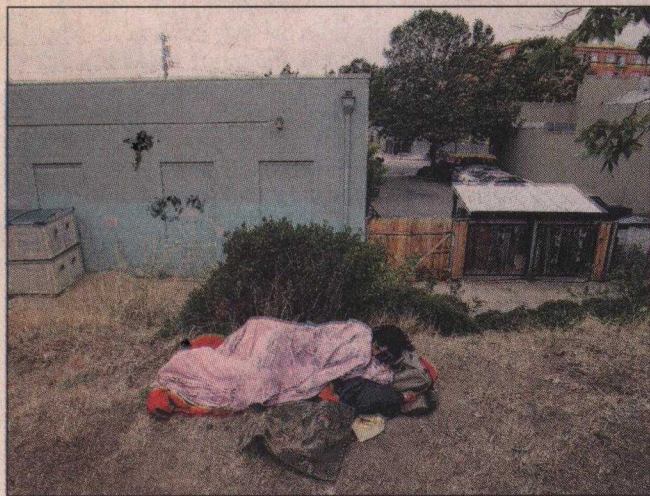


Survey: Most living in county before becoming homeless

By **KIMBERLY WHITE**
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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

A woman sleeps on the river levee behind downtown shops Wednesday morning. A survey released Wednesday shows 67 percent of the county's homeless population were living here before losing their homes.

APTOS — Catherine Martin spent six months sleeping in her car with her two children after losing her home to foreclosure. But thanks to homeless service programs, they're now living in a home in Live Oak, and she's training for a new job.

But she's an exception in Santa Cruz County. While she became homeless because she couldn't pay her mortgage, figures show few became homeless because of a foreclosure. And while Martin sought help to obtain rental assistance and counseling, most only receive food stamps.

But she does represent most of the homeless in other ways. Like most, it was her first time being homeless. And she was already living in Santa Cruz

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County at the time.

Richard Hofstetter of the United Way of Santa Cruz County said the fact that 67 percent of respondents to a homeless survey indicated they were already living here should dispel the myth that most homeless arrive here from elsewhere for public handouts.

"The data shows that the homeless population is our homeless population," he added. He was among several speakers — all of them from either the United Way or Applied Survey Research — who discussed the results of the 2011 Homeless Census and Survey on Wednesday

at Twin Lakes Church in Aptos.

A portion of the figures were gathered Jan. 25, when about 100 people spread out to the county's 52 census tracts to count people living in shelters and elsewhere. All told, 2,771 individuals were homeless that day, a 22 percent jump from 2009. But Peter Connery, vice president of Applied Survey Research, cautioned that the results aren't all-inclusive, and "there are more homeless than we noted in this study."

Based on the 2,771 figure, experts believe about 9,000 people here are homeless at any given time. Advocates say the homeless are at greater risk of violence, and what may look like a problem among one segment of society has a trickle-down effect that can be stemmed by increased services.

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HOMELESS

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"When any element of our population suffers, we all suffer to some degree," Hofstetter said.

The other data come from a survey distributed to nearly 500 individuals asking such questions as where they lived before becoming homeless, where they sleep and whether they receive government assistance. For example, 63 percent reported having disabling conditions, with more than one third of those alcohol- or drug-related.

Mary Lou Goeke, executive director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County, expressed surprise at the higher numbers of homeless who sleep unsheltered and who are experiencing homelessness for the first time, as well as a spike in homeless youth. Though

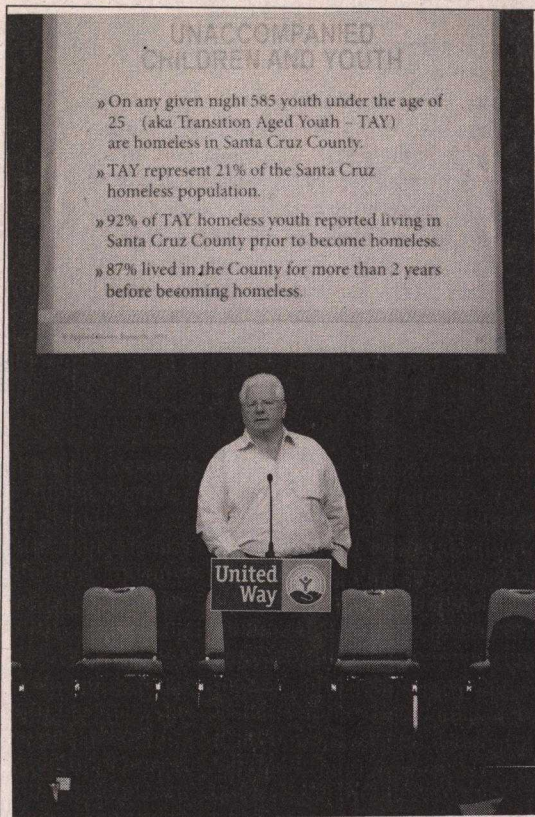
most youth cited drug or alcohol use as the main cause of their homelessness, others reported an argument with family or friends as the chief cause.

"There's not a huge amount of support in the community for youth," said Samantha Green, an analyst with the Applied Survey Research. "There's not an adult in the community that they can rely on for support."

The data also showed 23 percent of homeless youth reported at least one parent was or had been homeless. "Intervention now will pay huge dividends down the road," Connery said.

While this year's number is an increase from 2009, it's comparable to 2007, and the numbers show a 14 percent decline in homelessness since 2000.

The biannual census is required for the county to receive \$1.7 million in federal homeless assistance funding each year.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Applied Survey Research Vice President Peter Connery gives results of the 2011 Homeless Census.

State examines practices at charred Fairfield plastics plant

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — State regulators opened a workplace safety investigation on Wednesday at a Northern California plastics factory where a fire raged a day earlier.

Investigators with the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health will look into practices at Macro Plastics Inc. of Fairfield. Cal/OSHA wants to be sure workers were following safety regulations, said agency spokeswoman Erika Monterroza.

No serious injuries or building damage were reported from the six-alarm fire. An initial investigation suggested that Tuesday's inferno, which sent black smoke billowing into the sky, was caused by an employee working with an open flame in a storage area.

Inspectors tested water from storm drains around the fire site and air samples taken during the blaze, but early indications showed that the fire was no more hazardous than a typical summer wildfire in California, said Terry Schmidbauer, environmental health manager for Solano County.

WATER

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cialists put any transfers out of reach for several years.

"The truth of the matter is the reason this hasn't been done before — and we put good bit of effort into it in the late '80s — is because it seemed very doubtful the city could get anything out of this," said Bill Kocher, the city's water director. "It doesn't make it a bad idea."

Kocher recommended the council at least study it, even if he remains skeptical of its benefit to the city. In the face of projected increases in demand by 2030 and a possible reduction in diversions to bolster endangered fish, Kocher said the city needs desalination as a new and reliable water supply, as does Soquel Creek to restore its basin.

"For the last 25 years, I've been focused on our problem and this does nothing to address our problem," he said.

Still, Ricker is glad Kocher and the council have given him the chance to see how much swaps can help other agencies. "The city is critical to this whole thing," he said.

Ricker estimates transfers from Santa Cruz from December through March, when the city usually experiences excess, could provide an average of 800 acre-feet of water. The Scotts Valley Water District, a neighbor in the San Lorenzo River watershed, would get the first 480 acre feet, which would be enough to offset Scotts Valley's need to pump wells 31 out of 35 winters, based on Ricker's projections.

That would leave about 340 acre-feet each winter for Soquel Creek Water District, or about a third its winter demand of 1,150 acre feet. By comparison, the district is hoping for between 1,200 and 1,800 acre feet from the desalination plant.

But there are no estimates on what Santa Cruz, a surface water system that pulls from the river and North Coast streams, might get back. There's no guarantee how successful the swaps will be at helping to recover the basins that support Scotts Valley

and Soquel Creek Water District, Ricker said.

Even though the transfers wouldn't provide enough water to persuade the city to drop its push toward desalination, opponents nonetheless celebrated the transfer study, which they've been urging for some time along with stronger conservation.

Forcing city water customers to use less will help further reduce demand to the point where the plant is unnecessary, desal critics say.

"Demand is a matter of policy," said Rick Longinotti, a member of Santa Cruz Desal Alternatives.

In a letter to the council Wednesday, Longinotti urged city leaders to enter mediated fact finding with his group to weigh desalination and alternatives before either his organization or the city puts the matter before voters in a ballot measures.

The state Coastal Commission must also weigh in on the desalination proposal, if the council agrees to build the plant after an environmental review is complete next spring. Costs for the plant, to be built on the Westside, top \$100 million by some estimates.