

A COUNT THAT COUNTS

HOMELESS NUMBERS: Teams fan out across county as part of census linked to federal money



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

A homeless man sits on a curb off Ocean Street drinking coffee and smoking Tuesday morning. He's one of thousands counted by tabulating teams that fanned out over the county to get a calculation of the homeless population.

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SANTA CRUZ — Workers in a homeless census fanned out in the predawn light Tuesday, tallying the homeless on the streets and in hidden campsites across Santa Cruz County.

The biannual census tries to provide a snapshot of the number of homeless in the county so programs and services can be geared toward them. The federal government requires the census for homeless service groups to be eligible for federal money.

This year, for the first time, census participants were asked to estimate age groups in three categories: 17 and younger, age 18 to 25, and age 26 and older.

SEE CENSUS ON A2



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Susan Brutschy, president of Applied Survey Research, gives instructions about tabulating results to teams of volunteers.

CENSUS

Continued from A1

"We're trying to get everyone out on the streets," said Susan Brutschy, president of Watsonville-based Applied Survey Research, which conducts the study.

Santa Cruz City Councilman Don Lane, who participated in Tuesday's census, added that the federal government has pushed recently for more services for homeless youths.

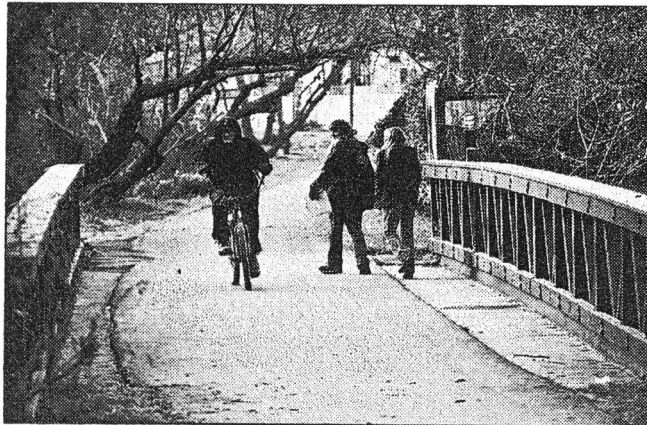
"I think there's a real interest in who's in that category," Lane said. He added that he appreciated the overall data. "Otherwise, it's so anecdotal," he said.

Full results of the census are expected to be released in spring. In the 2011 homeless census, about 2,700 homeless were counted in the county, down from roughly 3,370 homeless in 2005.

Workers in Tuesday's census met at the Homeless Services Center on Coral Street in Santa Cruz — as well as in Watsonville, Felton and Aptos. Groups typically included a volunteer and a guide who was homeless to help find sites with which they were familiar.

The groups were assigned areas and given maps before they headed out in cars.

Because there were fewer volunteers and workers this



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

A homeless man riding a cruiser bike passes Cheryl Ruby and a homeless woman acting as Ruby's guide as they search a wooded area in Santa Cruz.

BY THE NUMBERS

Number of homeless in Santa Cruz County according to a homeless census.

2000	3,329
2005	3,371
2007	2,789
2009	2,265
2011	2,771

SOURCE: Applied Survey Research

year than in previous censuses — about 50 — some groups were assigned two areas to cover before 10 a.m. Guides were paid \$10 an hour.

A 50-year-old homeless woman was paired as a guide with Cheryl Ruby, a counselor at the River Street Shelter in Santa Cruz.

In the 39-degree morning, the two women peered into wooded areas such as the greenbelt between Highway 1 and Plymouth Street in Santa Cruz. They both recognized people they knew who lived on the streets and rode bikes or carried sleeping bags.

"To count the ones camping, you have to be up at 6 a.m. because they're up," the woman said. She didn't want her name used because she has camped illegally.

Outside a fast-food restaurant, doughnut shop and gas station on Ocean Street, they spotted homeless men

headed to an 8 a.m. breakfast provided by the Homeless Services Center on Coral Street.

Census workers were told not to talk to their subjects or to rouse them if they were asleep. Safety was the first priority, Brutschy said.

"This is an observational count," she said. "And we have a lot of ground to cover."

Ruby and her guide counted about 30 homeless men and two women in their area by about 9:30 a.m. Another group that went to downtown Santa Cruz counted about 150 homeless.

The woman who acted as the guide said she understood why city and Santa Cruz County law enforcement had recently cleaned up the camps.

"I can see why the city's upset because they leave garbage everywhere," the homeless woman said. "I don't leave garbage."

The woman added that she recently stayed at a shelter and worked in its laundry room — but she was still finding her way. Finding a shower, clean clothes and transportation to appointments are daily challenges.

"It's hard to get a job when you're homeless," she said.

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