

Wide range of views on street people

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SANTA CRUZ — Researchers for a UC Santa Cruz city funded study of the street people population found there is a wide range of views on the street people population, according to a draft report issued Thursday on "Streetpeople and Straightpeople in Santa Cruz."

The report is based on interviews with residents, street people, merchants and others about their views on the street people who congregate on the Pacific Garden Mall, in Scribner Park and in San Lorenzo Park.

"While the citizenry is far from clear about exactly what can be done, there are several clear expressions," states the report.

Those "expressions" include:

- "Public opinion supports the idea positive action and public policies should be formed."
- "Public opinion looks upon some behaviors as acceptable on the Mall and others as unacceptable although, when confronted with some of these behaviors as real activities, people have less of a tendency to be unaccepting of them, and either accept them or feel indifferent."

The lowest degree of indifference was expressed about the smoking of marijuana and panhandling.

About 75 percent of respondents thought marijuana smoking unacceptable. About 85 percent view panhandling as unacceptable.

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- "Public opinion supports the use of city resources to provide services to street people in exchange for labor."

- "A significant segment of public opinion sees the street people problem as complex and requiring a variety of initiatives, whereas another segment sees the problem as homogeneous and would prefer it 'go away.'"

Although researchers say there was "overwhelming support" from those interviewed for providing services to street people in exchange for work, "the majority of straight citizenry" did not support free public shelters or showers.

However, researchers suggest "even in our relatively temperate climate the need for shelter is fundamental to a decent life and bathing facilities are essential to basic hygiene."

"If street people are sheltered from the elements and have regular access to showers, it is likely the physical appearance of many will improve, the result

may be that they will be perceived as less threatening and undesirable by some straight people."

Although not many older residents were interviewed who had had directed interaction with a street person, including panhandling, the report says older people were less accepting than younger people with the behavior of street people.

Only a small percentage of respondents felt music was unacceptable behavior, says the study.

About two-thirds of respondents stated playing music is acceptable behavior.

Four out of five respondents agreed that violence against the street people is a community problem.

A majority of respondents agreed police patrols "should be increased to deal with downtown transients," but 20 percent disagreed, and 25 percent were indifferent to the issue.

About 30 percent of respondents agreed public funds should be spent to provide shelter; 56 percent disagreed.

Just over two-fifths agreed city money should be spent to provide showers for street people. A "bare majority" said they were opposed to this.

Those interviewed were also asked whether city money should be used to provide services to street people in exchange for work. Seventy-seven percent agreed; 15 percent disagreed.



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There is a wide range of views on street people.