

MEMORANDUM

To: Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

From: HomeBase

Re: A Snapshot of Homelessness in the Bay Area

Date: January 15, 2010

Background

The Regional Steering Committee (RSC) has focused for over two decades on estimating the number of homeless people in each county and the region. We have often discussed the challenge of finding data to back the trends that providers see every day in shelters, housing and service centers. Early efforts centered on capturing a census of bed use and turn-aways. Statistical efforts using the AFDC-HAP program were done annually during the 1990's. With more wide-spread use of technology, and after substantial review of research methodologies, HUD began requiring that jurisdictions receiving federal funding for homeless assistance through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act conduct a point-in-time (PIT) homeless count every two years. But how much do these PIT counts reflect what we see in our communities? And how do they fit with the other data we see, from HMIS, national studies, and other sources?

The RSC has discussed completing the homeless census and evaluating the resulting data several times over the past few years. In June 2002, we discussed methodologies and the cost-effectiveness of counting the homeless. In May 2004, we looked into the value of HMIS in this effort. In November of the same year, HomeBase presented a Briefing Memo at the RSC meeting on HUD's suggested methodologies for conducting homeless counts. In March 2005, April 2007, and March 2009 the RSC discussed the homeless count results for those years and provided feedback and impressions of the counts conducted in members' communities. In July 2007, we discussed methodologies for enumerating the homeless population.

Homeless Census

HUD requires that jurisdictions that receive federal funding for homeless assistance through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to conduct a point-in-time homeless count every two years. Jurisdictions must count sheltered and

unsheltered homeless individuals and families within one 24-hour period during the last week of January.

HUD requires that communities count the number of homeless persons who meet the McKinney-Vento Act definition of “homeless,” which allows HUD to aggregate the data to understand national trends in homelessness. Some communities choose to count using a broader definition of homeless in order to inform community decisions and allocations of resources, and then parse the data for HUD reporting requirements.

HUD allows each community to determine its own enumeration technique within certain boundaries. Strategies differ across communities. Several communities, for the first time, used the same methodology in 2007 and 2009 and are now able to accurately compare the data they collected.

Below is a table with PIT count numbers as reported to HUD from a few nearby counties:

2009 Point in Time Count	Number of households with children	Number of persons in households with children	Number of individuals	Total persons	Total persons % change, 2007 - 09
Contra Costa	121 (↓)	394 (↓)	2,365 (↑)	2,759 (↑)	+ 17%
San Francisco	178 (↓)	514 (↓)	5,309 (↑)	5,823 (↑)	+ 11%
Santa Clara	285 (↓)	1,008 (↓)	6,078 (↑)	7,086 (↓)	- 2%
Napa	16 (↓)	53 (↓)	261 (↑)	314 (↓)	- 16%
Marin	85 (↑)	259 (↑)	767 (↑)	1,026 (↑)	+ 45%
Solano	157 (↓)	361 (↓)	468 (↓)	829 (↓)	- 135%
Alameda					
San Mateo					
Santa Cruz	145 (↑)	450 (↑)	1,815 (↓)	2,265 (↓)	- 19%
Sacramento	185 (↑)	543 (↑)	2,257 (↑)	2,800 (↑)	+ 14%
Monterey		498 (↑)	1,909 (↑)	2,407 (↑)	+ 71%
Los Angeles					
2007 Point in Time Count	Number of households with children	Number of persons in households with children	Number of individuals	Total persons	
Contra Costa	227	1,086	1,182	2,268	
San Francisco	194	532	4,639	5,171	
Santa Clara	366	1,257	5,945	7,202	
Napa	32	129	236	365	
Marin	52	156	846	1002	

Solano	475	1,138	818	1,956
Alameda	653	1,812	3,026	4,838
San Mateo	126	410	1,388	1,798
Santa Cruz	127	381	2,408	2,789
Sacramento	163	487	1,965	2,452
Monterey	79	253	887	1,402
Los Angeles	6,238	16,643	51,965	68,608

From the 2007 to 2009 PIT counts, the trend in most of these communities seems to be a decrease in the number of homeless families and an increase in the number of homeless individuals. However, after interviewing homeless service and housing providers throughout the Bay Area, the prevailing sentiment is that there has actually been an increase in the number of families (as well as individuals) seeking assistance. As one provider put it: "Homeless families are a stream and not a pool; as families are housed, new families come into the mix."

Questions for Discussion

What has been your experience with the PIT count numbers versus what you are seeing in your communities and programs?

What is your response when you are questioned by the press, funders, and other stakeholders about PIT data versus what you see day-to-day?

Other Data

In addition to the PIT counts, other data regarding homelessness in California includes:

- National Center on Family Homelessness' Campaign to End Child Homelessness--California ranks 49th in child homelessness with 292,624 homeless children (3% of all children in California are homeless).
- Swords to Plowshares reports that while veterans comprise only 11% of the civilian population, they represent 26% of the entire homeless population. Moreover, California has the highest number of homeless veterans in the country--nearly 50,000.

The National Center on Family Homelessness' study also collected data on factors pertinent to children:

- High school graduation rate for homeless children: < 25%
- Percentage uninsured children: 12.3%
- Percentage eligible children enrolled in food stamps: 46%
- 1 in 28 children in California do not know where they will get their next meal

Annual Homeless Assessment Report

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is a report by HUD to the U.S. Congress on the extent and nature of homelessness in America. It is based on data from Homeless Management Information Systems and on information from Continuum of Care (CoC) Exhibit 1s. The AHAR provides estimates of the number of homeless persons nationally, a descriptive profile of homeless persons, and an analysis of service use patterns. For CoCs gathering and submitting this data to HUD, the local AHAR report provides useful information on homelessness and service needs at the local level.

AHAR has four standard reporting categories: Emergency Shelter-Individuals, Emergency Shelter-Families, Transitional Housing-Individuals and Transitional Housing-Families.

Four Bay Area counties participated in the last published AHAR report, for year 2008. The data below are based on a point in time count from the HMIS in July, 2008, and include only persons in shelters and transitional housing.

	Number of persons (families and individuals) in shelter and transitional housing	Estimated bed utilization rate (range)
Santa Clara County	1,291	72% to 92%
San Francisco County	2,313	91% to 104%
Sonoma County	855	54% to 106%
Contra Costa County	469 (only 2 of 4 cells reporting data)	88% to 103%

Contextualizing Our Scale of Need

By adding up the 9 Bay Area counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma), the Bay Area is comparable to Los Angeles. LA and New York City are the highest impacted areas for homelessness in the US. Here’s how the Bay Area compares to these areas:

	2009	2007	% change, 2007-09
Bay Area Total	28,137	30,062	- 7%

Los Angeles	42,694	68,608	- 37.7%
New York City	50,261	50,372	- 0.2%

Historical Trends

To put this all in perspective, we can look at the historical trends of homelessness in the Bay Area and LA.

	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles County
Late 1980s	Estimated 160,000 over the course of a year	Estimated 100,000-160,000 over the course of a year
Early 1990s	Estimated 74,000 over the course of a year	Estimated 62,000 - 107,000 over the course of a year
Mid 2000s	24,950 at a point in time	83,347 at a point in time
Late 2000s	28,137 at a point in time	42,694 at a point in time

Questions for Discussion

Have you been contacted by your local Census workers? Some are looking for people experiencing homelessness to help with the 2010 Census.

How do you compare the many data sets around homelessness that are available?

What are your thoughts on the historical trends that we see for the Bay Area, LA and New York?

Do the historical trends represent incredible progress, in all the housing and services we have built and created? Or is the decrease just the result different methods yielding different results?

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