



2014-2015 Grand Jury Response Packet

Needs for Emergency Homeless Shelters

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

Findings

Finding 1: Local jurisdictions have not provided adequate emergency shelter to accommodate the vast majority (80%) of the more than 3,500 total homeless persons in Santa Cruz County (using 2013 PIT data).

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The County and the four cities work together under the auspices of the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP). The HAP's strategy is to prioritize permanently ending homelessness for people experiencing it through national best practice strategies such as permanent supportive housing and homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs. While we believe this is the right approach to end homelessness for individuals experiencing it, we recognize the ongoing need for emergency shelter and local jurisdictions have worked to fund and ensure the availability of emergency winter shelter each year in both north and South County. These programs together provide about 175 emergency shelter beds.

Finding 2: Despite persistent unmet needs, local jurisdictions have chosen not to fund or plan to increase the number of emergency shelter beds and services.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

Over the last several years there has been an increased number of emergency shelter beds and services in North County. Those projects include the Paul Lee Loft (48 beds) initiated in 2008, and the Recuperative Care Center (X beds) initiated in January 2014 serving medically vulnerable people who are homeless and being discharged from hospitals. In addition, while not the subject of this report, additional shelter beds in the Watsonville area have been or are being opened through the Pajaro Rescue Mission/Teen Challenge (X beds) and the Paget Center (X beds) serving homeless veterans, which opened in 2013.

Although as a region we are prioritizing permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing and prevention, considering additional emergency and interim services is a key action strategy under *All-In*, the recently adopted county-wide strategic plan, which states:

"Engage the community around developing additional emergency and interim services for unmet health and safety needs of persons living outdoors, including small shelters around the county, warming centers and improvements to existing shelters." (*All-In* page 28)

As long as people are sleeping outside more needs to be done to identify the resources needed to end homelessness and to shelter individuals who are experiencing it. The FY 2015/16 budget adopted by the Board of Supervisors includes a new Homeless/Housing Coordination staff person. This staff position will help coordinate the implementation of All-In and it will work with the Inter-agency Staff Coordinating Group.

Finding 3: Reliance on the National Guard Armory with its strict rules and regulations limits the effectiveness of the North County Emergency Winter Shelter.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

Use of the National Guard Armory is provided through a "License to Use State Military Facility" between the County of Santa Cruz and the Military Department, State of California. The License makes the armory facility available for use as an Emergency Shelter nightly between the hours of 6:00 PM through 7:00 AM October 15th through April 15th except "during any period that any organization of the State Militia or of the Armed Forces of the United States is conducting drills or other military training or activity at the armory". The License also prohibits the use of intoxicating beverages and tobacco, and stipulates daily cleaning requirements.

Use of the facility is in accordance with California Government Code §15301-15301.6 as an emergency response operation in order to prevent "the loss of life" of homeless persons during winter weather conditions. The State requires the operator to ensure basic safety and security.

Parameters set by the State Military Department do not limit the effectiveness of the Armory; it is likely that any site used for this purpose would have many of the same limitations. The primary issues are the number of beds and the costs associated with transporting clients.

Limited night time only access to shelter in a crowded facility not intended as a shelter is not a program that anyone would design to effectively end homelessness. The goal of the winter shelter program is to provide emergency night-time shelter. Cold weather emergency shelter does not solve homelessness for individuals but is a last resort humanitarian provision of shelter.

Finding 4: The absence of a back-up plan to replace the National Guard Armory threatens the continuing existence of the North County Emergency Winter Shelter program.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

As described above, the Armory is a facility that provides emergency winter shelter. The building is owned by the State Department of the Military and access to it for cold weather shelter is dependent on the State's ability to provide staffing at the facility. While the State's ability to provide access is assessed annually, the Military Department has demonstrated a commitment to continue the program.

The County and the four cities jointly provide funding to operate emergency winter shelter programs through the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP) and have demonstrated their commitment to emergency winter shelter by providing decades of funding for the programs.

On multiple occasions the jurisdictions have sought to identify alternative sites for winter shelter. There are very limited sites that can serve this purpose. Potential alternative sites have been ruled out for reasons ranging from neighborhood concerns, transportation requirements, access to services required to safely run an emergency program (meals, bathrooms, showers) and cost.

As stated above, emergency shelter does not end or shorten an individual's experience of homelessness and the significant reduction of homelessness (44% reduction since 2013 according to the 2015 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey) can be attributed, at least in part, to prioritizing effective programs proven to end homelessness. Programs that have proven to be most effective include permanent supportive housing, programs that prevent a person from losing their current housing, and rapid rehousing programs. Each of the jurisdictions participates in funding for programs that employ these strategies.

The jurisdictions appreciate the Grand Jury's concern with the issues of homelessness and the jurisdictions working together through the HAP Executive Committee will continue to seek alternatives to the current programs to support both long-term and short-term emergency shelter options.

Finding 5: Insufficient emergency shelter capacity limits access to coordinated entry services for the homeless population.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

Developing a coordinated entry system is a key strategy identified in *All-In* the county-wide strategic plan to address homelessness. A coordinated entry system streamlines and targets crisis response that quickly assess a household's needs and provides tailored resources for persons in crisis. Coordinated entry is required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for Continua of Care under the HEARTH Act. The HAP is in the process of developing and identifying funding to implement such a system.

The essential premise of a coordinated entry system is to streamline access to services so that there is no "wrong door" for entry to services. While we agree with the Grand Jury's assessment that emergency shelter is a potential point for a homeless person to access a coordinated entry system, it is not the only access point for services and we are striving to provide a streamlined approach to access homeless services. We fully intend to have all County and City funded emergency shelters participate in the coordinated entry system.

Finding 6: Insufficient numbers of personnel and case managers at the emergency shelters limit the services that can be provided to homeless individuals.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

There is no question that case management services are a key component to end homelessness for many individuals. This need is recognized by local nonprofit agencies, jurisdictions, the Homeless Action Partnership and Smart Solutions to Homelessness. Case management support linked with access to housing is the solution to homelessness for a significant share of the people experiencing it and there are shelter programs focused specifically on pairing emergency shelter to case management to lead to permanent housing.

Services that are offered at the Armory are limited to those required to operate a safe cold weather shelter. Homeless individuals can and do form relationships and build trust with staff with the Homeless Services Center, the program operator, but case management is not specifically part of the program. Case management services provide more value and there is a larger need for these services for people who are on a path to permanent housing. Recognizing the role of year round shelter programs to resolve homelessness, HSC has recently adapted their program at the Pau Lee Loft to pair case management with housing resources for people on a pathway to permanent housing.

While resources are constrained, we are constantly looking for opportunities for additional case management funding. In the absence of sufficient funding the community has been providing volunteer resources such as the Wings and the Housing Navigator programs associated with the 180/2020 Initiative. Additional case management is supported through Community Grant programs and has been included in an application for CDBG funds submitted by the County.

Finding 7: Insufficient number of staff dedicated to grant writing results in missed grant funding opportunities.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The HAP has been very successful in raising funds for homeless services from federal and State sources, bringing in close to \$30,000,000 since 2001.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley should develop plans to provide increased emergency shelter on a priority basis to the most vulnerable populations first, including families, youth, women, and the elderly.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE

- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

Strategies to end homelessness for vulnerable populations are underway. These include the following:

- The County's Human Services Department is providing CalWorks housing support program through a partnership with the Homeless Services Center Rebele Shelter that is shortening the length of stay for homeless families and transitioning them to stable housing quickly;
- The County's Planning Department provides the maximum funding allowed for its former redevelopment funds in the Low and Moderate Income Housing Asset Fund for homeless prevention and rapid rehousing targeted to prevent and shorten family and individual experiences of homelessness;
- The Homeless Action Partnership is developing a Coordinated Entry system that will streamline access to services and end homelessness quickly.

- The Coordinated Entry system will implement the VI-SPDAT, a vulnerability index that ensures that the most vulnerable homeless individuals in our community access appropriate services;
- Community Programs funding across jurisdictions is focused on outcome based approaches;
- The opening of the Paul Lee Loft in 2008 provided 48 year round emergency shelter beds. This program is currently being revised to focus on vulnerable populations on a path to housing;
- The Recuperative Care Center was opened in 2014 providing medical respite for people who are homeless and are being discharged from the hospital but require follow up care and a safe and healthy environment;
- The County has established an Inter-agency Staff Coordinating Group to ensure that a system approach for care coordination is in place for vulnerable populations.

The jurisdictions believe that these and other strategies more quickly and effectively end homelessness among the most vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness than emergency shelter.

Recommendation 2: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley should seek a more permanent, accessible and expandable site for the North County Emergency Winter Shelter program.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE

- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

Jurisdictions have been and will continue to seek to identify an alternative site to the Armory for emergency winter shelter. Considerations include neighborhood impacts and competing priorities for funding.

During the next 6 months the following steps will be taken to identify an alternate site: the HAP Executive Committee will meet and will identify potential sites that include a building or buildings that could safely shelter a minimum of 75 people for emergency night time shelter, if any sites are found that appear potentially feasible, the HAP will performed a more detailed analysis and present such report to the Board of Supervisors and the relevant city councils.

Recommendation 3: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley should allocate more funds for additional case managers for the local emergency shelters.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE

- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

Additional funding for case management has been a priority of both local jurisdictions and nonprofit agencies. Funding has been provided by County Human Services CHAMP program, identified above, HSC has been awarded HUD funds through the HAP to provide case management and permanent housing for chronically homeless disabled individuals, a County application for CDBG funds has been submitted that, if successful, would provide three additional case managers for chronically homeless and medically vulnerable people. In addition, case management positions have been funded through Supportive Services for Veteran Families grants and the HUD VA Supportive Housing (VASH) program.

All jurisdictions have adopted *All-In* and are coordinating funding efforts for implementation based upon its principles.

Recommendation 4: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley should allocate additional staff to seek more grant funding for emergency shelters.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE

- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

The County's Fiscal Year 2015-16 Budget includes funding for a full time Homeless Coordinator working out of the County Administrative Office.

The HAP is providing funding to the Homeless Services Center for technical assistance to support the organization's competition for future State Emergency Solutions Grant program funding.