

## **2003-2004 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

### **AN INQUIRY INTO THE HOMELESS SERVICES OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

#### **Summary**

Members of the 2003-2004 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inquired into the resources available to the homeless population in the county, and what, if any, is the level of coordination in the county among the various organizations involved with the homeless. Through interviews and a visit to a homeless shelter, the Grand Jury learned that the county's homeless program, *The Santa Clara Countywide Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan*, (Five-Year Plan), which began in June 2001, is run by the Santa Clara County Collaborative on Housing and Homeless Issues (Collaborative) which itself was formulated in 1992. The Collaborative is spearheaded and staffed by the Santa Clara County Homeless Services Coordinator (Homeless Services Coordinator). The Homeless Services Coordinator is the direct link between the Board of Supervisors, the city councils, and the Collaborative. Membership in the Collaborative is open to anyone interested in the community's response to homelessness. During the past year, the Collaborative membership consisted of over 250 representatives from mainstream, faith-based, and homeless-directed supportive services and housing providers, including the county, the county's cities and towns, all local housing providers, affordable housing developers, law enforcement, health care providers, educators, advocates, homeless and formerly homeless persons, advocacy groups, foundations and funders, businesses, educators, veterans' groups, legal services providers, concerned citizens, and elected officials. According to the Homeless Services Coordinator and documented in the *Santa Clara Countywide Consolidated Continuum of Care Application—Exhibit 1—2003* (2003 Application Summary) for federal funds, the county needs, first and foremost, much more transitional and permanent housing with supportive services. Support services such as case management, drug and alcohol programs, mental health care, medical care, and money management are critical for the at-risk and homeless individual populations, both of which are on the rise.

No reports of progress have been issued, nor updates of strategies for the 2001 Five-Year Plan.

#### **Background and Discussion**

The Grand Jury invited the CEO and President of the Emergency Housing Consortium to address its members. As a result of this presentation, an inquiry was initiated regarding the homeless issue in Santa Clara County.

The Grand Jury toured the Emergency Housing Consortium (EHC), located at 2011 Little Orchard Street, in San Jose. It is the largest provider of shelter, housing programs, and supportive services to homeless and at-risk individuals, families, and youth in the county. This facility also provides bus service nightly from the San Jose downtown core area to the shelter. It is a service that helps keep the downtown free of doorway sleepers.

The Homeless Services Coordinator was interviewed extensively. The Grand Jury reviewed the Five-Year Plan, which is the program utilized in the county to address the homeless issue. The 2003 Application Summary, which lists and describes all the participants and their contributions to the Continuum of Care Plan, was also reviewed.

The report that follows is intended to inform the public on the various services offered to the homeless population, with a focus on the most substantial and immediate need, which is housing. This report will also explain Santa Clara County's approach to dealing with the homeless population and how that approach is coordinated into a county-wide effort.

## **Definition of Homelessness**

In order to understand the homeless situation in Santa Clara County, one must first understand what exactly constitutes a homeless person. The following is the definition of homelessness provided by the McKinney Act, the federal law enacted in 1987 which provides for federal funding for the homeless in several areas, including emergency and transitional housing, building and land use, health care services, educational and job training, and veteran's job training assistance. This funding is distributed to the different localities. The definition states, "In general the term homeless includes...(1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings." Homelessness also includes individuals fleeing domestic violence, and those being discharged from an institution who do not have a place to live within one week.

## **Elements of Homelessness**

There are two types of homelessness: episodic and chronic. Episodic homelessness is often temporary and usually the result of some sort of short-term crisis, such as an illness, losing a job, or a divorce. Chronic homelessness is the long-term inability or disinclination to access and maintain housing. It is usually the result of a physical and/or mental disability. Episodic homelessness accounts for 80% and chronic homelessness for 20% of all incidences of homelessness. An individual or family could have more than one episode of homelessness in one year.

There are approximately 20,000 cases of homelessness in Santa Clara County per year, according to the Five-Year Plan. This number is the combined total of both types of homelessness in the county. In the City of San Jose alone, there are approximately 20,000 to 30,000 households that are at risk of homelessness. Based on data collected from various sources, including the *2003 Providers Survey* (self survey) which covers the period from April 1, 2002 through March 30, 2003, and the *Point-in-Time* data collection which was taken by the providers February 27, 2003, there is a shortage of approximately 1653 emergency beds, 2319 transitional housing units, and 1416 permanent housing units to accommodate the individual homeless, whose population is increasing. These numbers are documented in the 2003 Application Summary, which is submitted by the Homeless Coordinator. Due to factors such as unemployment, low wage jobs, rising housing costs, physical disabilities, reliance on fixed-income subsidy, substance abuse, mental handicaps, and a steady increase in the cost-of-living, there is a need for more beds, especially permanent affordable housing, to accommodate the growing number of homeless and at-risk people on a long-term basis.

In 1999, the fastest growing homeless population was children: 25% of newly homeless persons were children under the age of 18. This included children with or without their parents. Homelessness disrupts almost every aspect of children's lives: they struggle in school, they have more medical and mental health problems, and they suffer from malnutrition at more than twice the rate of other children. To compound their plight, homeless facilities can sometimes divide families by separating parents into single-sex shelters and placing the children in foster care. However, it is very promising to note that according to the most recent data from 2003, the number of homeless families is starting to decline.

There are several other sub-populations within the county's homeless community: 28% of the homeless surveyed stated that they have or have had a substance abuse problem, 23% were victims of domestic violence, 20% were veterans, and 10% of those surveyed were self-identified as suffering from severe mental illness. Some individuals belong to more than one of these sub groups.

## **Shelter Care**

The shelters are run by 27 private non-profit agencies and organizations. Shelters are found countywide, with the greatest concentration, by far, in San Jose. The county operates two cold weather shelters, from November through March. The operation of those two shelters is contracted out to The Emergency Housing Consortium. There is a large transitional housing facility in Gilroy to help accommodate the seasonal migrant farm workers.

Shelter care is divided into three main categories: emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing. Each type of housing serves as a stepping stone to the next, which ultimately should culminate with the homeless person living in permanent housing.

## Emergency Shelters

Each emergency shelter accommodates a specific homeless group in order to better meet the needs of that group. Emergency shelter stays can range from one day to six weeks, depending on the specific circumstances and the type of shelter. Domestic violence facilities tend to offer longer lengths of stay. While residing at these emergency shelters, clients are presented with a variety of services designed to assist the client in becoming more stable, self-supporting, and ready to move to transitional housing, if necessary. The following table illustrates the categories and number of emergency beds available. It also lists the name, location, and number of beds in the largest facility in each category.

### Emergency Shelter Beds

<b>Type of Facility</b>	<b>Number of Facilities</b>	<b>Number of Beds</b>	<b>Largest Facility</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of Beds</b>
Single Women	2	18	Commercial Street Inn	San Jose	15
Single Men	5	152	City Team Rescue Mission	San Jose	52
Single Men & Women	8	702	EHC – Reception Center	San Jose	175
Youth	4	76	Unity Care Group Homes	Location Varies	42
Families with Children	4	303	Concern for the Poor – San Jose Family Shelter	San Jose	143
Women with Children	1	40	Commercial Street Inn	San Jose	40
Domestic Violence	4	64	Next Door	San Jose	19
<b>Total Emergency Shelter Beds</b>			<b>1355</b>		

## **Transitional Housing**

Transitional housing is designed to help people move from homelessness to stable housing and self-sufficiency. Clients can stay in this housing for up to two years, depending on the type of facility and their particular circumstances. The average length of stay is nine months. Domestic violence victims can stay up to five years. Transitional housing serves as the stepping stone to permanent housing. Transition plans are developed and maintained so this goal can be achieved. The following table contains information on transitional housing beds available.

### **Transitional Housing Beds**

<b>Type of Facility</b>	<b>Number of</b>		<b>Location</b>
<b>Number of Facilities</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Largest Facility</b>	<b>Number of Beds</b>
Single Women 4	91	InnVision	San Jose 35
Single Men 7	207	City Team Rehab	San Jose 74
Single Men & Women 8	374	Alliance For Community Care	San Jose 123
Women with Children 5	131	InnVision Villa	San Jose 46
Families with Children 9	920	Ochoa Family Shelter	Gilroy 360
Youth 4	64	Bill Wilson Center	Santa Clara 25
Domestic Violence 3	236	ARIS	San Jose 86
<b>Total Transitional Housing Beds</b>		<b>2023</b>	

## **Permanent Housing**

The final step out of homelessness is permanent housing. Clients sometimes find permanent housing on their own, without working through the Collaborative. In these cases, the clients' rent is not subsidized in any way. Clients can also utilize subsidized housing. In these cases, the amount of rent and the level of eligibility are determined by income. There is no time limit on tenancy. Services available will vary depending on the needs of the client. The county also has a website, "Housing SCC", which lists all available subsidized housing in the county. It lists apartment complexes that are available to anyone, not just the homeless. The website provides eligibility criteria for subsidized housing. It also catalogs available housing, housing under construction, and information on waiting lists. The following table contains information on permanent housing units available.

### **Permanent Housing Units**

<b>Type of Facility</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>	<b>Largest Facility</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Number of Facilities</b>			<b>Number of Units</b>
Single Adults	628	EHC – Markham Plaza	San Jose 300
Families with Children	606	Catholic Charities	County-wide 327
<b>Total Permanent Housing Units</b>		<b>1234</b>	

## **Support Services**

Homeless and at-risk support services, also known as wrap-around services, are administered through the county's Five-Year Plan. They are provided to individuals living in homeless shelters, living on the streets, and living in at-risk situations. The county operates multi-service centers located in key population areas that offer services designed specifically to meet the needs of the at-risk and homeless population. Some of the facilities offer referrals to other providers who supply different support services. These services include, but are not limited to, emergency food, clothing, transportation assistance (bus passes, paratransit, and shuttles), education and language skills, medical and dental care, mental health care, child care, parenting classes, money management, employment assistance, legal aid, drug and alcohol education and treatment, case management, and life skills.

Many of the services are provided by various non-profit organizations that rely on grants and private donations from corporations, foundations, and individuals. The county contributes approximately \$185,000 from the Santa Clara County (SCC) General Fund, the SCC Emergency Shelter Grant, and the SCC Service Agreement, and \$1.9 million annually in various services.

## **Administration**

During its visits and discussions, the Grand Jury was impressed with the dedication of those who worked with the homeless on a daily basis. The homeless are treated with patience, kindness, and respect. They are referred to as “clients”, and the expectation is that, with help, they can and will succeed in attaining not only permanent housing, but stable and productive employment and a renewed sense of self-worth.

The Grand Jury observed that for many county staff, working with the homeless is as much a calling as a job. Several administrators were, in prior lives, religious professionals. They, and others, bring to their current work a philosophy of treating all human beings as they themselves would want to be treated. Since homelessness is usually caused by some underlying issues, those who work with the homeless must be diligent and perceptive in order to both recognize their needs, and offer the correct services to assist them in moving from homelessness to the ability to maintain permanent housing.

## **Homeless Services Coordinator**

The Homeless Services Coordinator is a key figure, coordinating countywide efforts to provide services to individuals and families. The position was created by the Board of Supervisors in 1990 to ensure that homeless people have access to comprehensive services. The Homeless Services Coordinator is the lead person in the yearly federal grant application process, which results in an annual application summary. In December 2003, the county received a federal grant of \$8.7 million to be distributed among the 27 shelter care providers for transitional housing and permanent supportive housing and services. This is the second largest federal homeless grant the county has received since it began the collaborative application process in 1991. The Coordinator is responsible for the countywide survey of the homeless population, and works jointly with cities and towns to develop a comprehensive homeless continuum-of-care planning process. As stated earlier, the Coordinator takes the lead role in the operation of the Collaborative. Additionally, the Coordinator serves as project manager for the Shelter Plus Care Project, a federal rent subsidies program, and the Homeless Transit Pass Project, a program which offers free rides to the homeless on transit lines 22 and 57. She also assists in the management of the Cold Weather Shelter Program. She is currently working on the *2004 Continuum of Care Application Summary* and the Department of Housing Urban Development (HUD) federal grant which is due mid-July. The Grand Jury learned that the Homeless Coordinator is not required to submit an annual report to the Board of Supervisors, nor has one been issued.

## **The Collaborative**

The Santa Clara County Collaborative on Housing and Homeless Issues is the lead entity in the development and implementation of the Five-Year Plan, with support from the Homeless Services Coordinator. The plan is discussed in more detail below. The Collaborative consists of representatives from over 250 organizations. Representatives sit on several committees that meet monthly. It has an Executive Committee, a Steering Committee, a Planning Committee, and other topical committees to conduct its work. Six Collaborative committees oversee implementation of specific portions of the plan. These committees are: Housing and Community; Jobs and Income; Wellness and Life's Necessities; New Technology; Plan Administration, Coordination and Change; and Education, Legislation, and Public Relations. The Collaborative committees meet regularly and update one another on their progress toward their goals. The Collaborative is also planning to discuss modifying some of the elements of the Five-Year Plan due to the significant change in the economic condition of the county since the inception of the plan. It is noteworthy that the Collaborative does not submit an annual report to the Board of Supervisors. The Grand Jury could not determine how the Board is kept informed of the progress of a five-year plan that they approved almost three years ago.

## **Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan**

The Five-Year Plan was developed to administer housing and support services to the at-risk and homeless populations in the County. This Five-Year Plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 26, 2001. The vision of this plan is "a community without homeless, in which everyone's housing and life needs are met." The mission is "to realize this vision by developing a comprehensive and coordinated system of affordable and supportive services for the prevention, reduction, and eventual end of homelessness." The Plan is comprised of five areas of focus, called "chapters:"

- Make Connections Through Outreach, Engagement and Computer Technology
- Build Housing Now! For A Balanced Community
- Create A Successful Stable Workforce
- Generate Wellness and Provide Life's Necessities
- Maintain Vitality Of The Continuum Of Care Plan: Systems Administration, Coordination And Change

All of the chapters contain a countywide strategy, priorities, and action steps, many of which are geared towards prevention. The priorities and action steps are designated with the year in which they are to be implemented. For example, the main strategy for the chapter, "Build Housing Now! For A Balanced Community," is to increase housing stock for those who are homeless or have extremely low incomes. One priority is to sustain and enhance existing homeless and mainstream prevention services which provide emergency assistance to individuals and families at-risk of homelessness. The action steps for this priority are: 1) to identify additional funding sources for existing emergency assistance prevention services, giving priority to funding for programs which provide rental, mortgage and utilities assistance to those who are in imminent danger of losing their housing and to efforts that publicize the existence of these services to the

public; 2) to expand emergency services to include relocation assistance for those who need short-term assistance in order to change housing due to discontinued eligibility for public housing, domestic violence, or emancipation. Another priority is to prevent evictions of families and individuals that cause homelessness. The action steps associated with this priority are: 1) to coordinate among all homeless housing providers at different stages of housing entry and exit to determine where the populations they serve have been, and are going, to diminish any overlap of services; 2) to engage industry in the county in providing homelessness deterrent benefits to their workforces; 3) to conduct outreach and education to landlords and property managers about how to prevent evictions; 4) to expand the availability of neutral mediation services, and support mandatory mediation services, to resolve landlord tenant disputes instead of legal proceedings; and 5) to initiate and improve discharge planning services by major mainstream systems such as foster care, mental/public health and prison systems, in order to ensure that newly discharged individuals have necessary housing and supportive services. These are just some of the priority and action steps for that chapter.

## **Homeless Management Information System of Santa Clara County**

All communities presently receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are congressionally mandated to have a homeless management information system in place by October 2004 in order to continue that funding. To meet this mandate, the Homeless Services Coordinator and others developed the Homeless Management Information System of Santa Clara County (HMIS), a database of information based on the Five-Year Plan. This database, a result of collaboration between the county, Community Technology Alliance, and homeless care agencies in the county, will streamline the homeless care process and provide local agencies with a new way to effectively provide tailored services to individual clients from multiple agencies, identify gaps in services, and identify which combination of services work well together. The planning commenced in November 2001, and the implementation began in 2003. Agencies participating in the initial phase of implementation included Cupertino Community Services, Bill Wilson Center, County Shelter Plus Care Program, Innvision, and San Jose Family Shelter. A new agency will join HMIS on average once every two to three months, with a total of 17 agencies representing 64 different sites participating by the end of 2004.

The HMIS information is collected by volunteers and provides different types of homeless data which can be accessed through a computer. The goal of the county is to have all homeless beds included in its HMIS database by October 2004. Currently, overall, the county has approximately 50% of the beds in the database. The largest shelter provider, EHC, has entered data on all of its beds.

## **Prevention of Homelessness**

One of the foremost strategies utilized by the Collaborative is preventive measures. According to the County Homeless Coordinator, it is much less costly, both financially and emotionally, to prevent a person's homelessness than to re-house a person who is already homeless. This is accomplished by addressing those with legal, economical, or emotional factors which could

classify them as at-risk of becoming homeless. Various services are administered to clients who fit this category to help prevent them from becoming homeless. It is also important to have extensive discharge planning in order to prevent those who were homeless from returning to homelessness. As stated earlier in the report, many of the strategies of the Five-Year Plan are geared towards prevention. The large federal grant just received will enable the county to provide more assistance to at-risk and homeless individuals and families.

## **Summary of Facts**

Santa Clara County has a total of 4612 beds available to house the homeless. These range from one-day emergency shelter beds to no-time-limit permanent housing. Currently, there are additional permanent homes being built.

Santa Clara County has developed and implemented a comprehensive program, The Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan, to service the homeless population.

The Santa Clara County Collaborative on Housing and Homeless Issues is the official forum for planning and implementing the Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan.

The Santa Clara County Homeless Coordinator is the central figure coordinating countywide efforts among the various entities involved with the Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan. The Coordinator is also instrumental in the yearly federal grant applications process.

The Santa Clara County Homeless Coordinator stated that the county needed more permanent affordable housing to help not only the homeless, but the at-risk from becoming homeless.

## **Finding I**

Neither the Homeless Coordinator nor the Collaborative is required to, nor do they, submit an annual report to the Board of Supervisors.

## **Recommendation I**

The Board of Supervisors should require the Homeless Coordinator to issue an annual report, including input from the Collaborative, to the Board of Supervisors.

## **Finding II**

As of the date of this report, the Collaborative has not held a formal meeting to discuss any recommended updates to the Five-Year Plan since the plan was originally approved in 2001.

## **Recommendation II**

The Collaborative should hold an annual meeting to review the Five-Year Plan and submit any changes to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

**PASSED** and **ADOPTED** by the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury on this 20<sup>th</sup> day of May 2004.

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Richard H. Woodward  
Foreperson

## References

### Documents

- *1999 Santa Clara County Homeless Survey*, dated September 8, 2000, conducted by two San Jose State University students.
- County of Santa Clara, Office of the County Executive, Press Release dated December 22, 2003, “*County of Santa Clara receives \$8.7 Million for Homeless.*”
- County of Santa Clara, Office of the County Executive, Press Release dated January 22, 2004, “*County and Local Agencies Launch System to Streamline and Tailor Homeless Care Services.*”
- Department of Housing and Urban Development website: [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)
- Documentation from Emergency Housing Consortium, dated September 5, 2003.
- Homeless terms and definitions website: [www.co.monterey.ca.us/dss/affiliates/cap/downloads/hands/09AppendixA.pdf](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/dss/affiliates/cap/downloads/hands/09AppendixA.pdf)
- Homelessness in a progressive city website: [www.spur.org/documents/Homelessness.pdf](http://www.spur.org/documents/Homelessness.pdf)
- Homelessness in California website: [www.ppic.org/content/pubs/R\\_1001JQR.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/R_1001JQR.pdf)
- Housing SCC website : [www.housingscc.org](http://www.housingscc.org)
- Legislative homeless website: <http://homelessed.net/legislat/doubleup.htm>
- Santa Clara County homeless website: [www.endhomeless.org/localplans/santaclara.pdf](http://www.endhomeless.org/localplans/santaclara.pdf)
- *Santa Clara Countywide Consolidated Continuum of Care Plan Application – Exhibit 1 - 2003.*
- *Santa Clara Countywide Five-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan 2001-2006.*
- SCC gov website: [www.sccgov.org/content/0,4745,sid%3D10710%chid%3D48484%26ccid%3D98244,00.html](http://www.sccgov.org/content/0,4745,sid%3D10710%chid%3D48484%26ccid%3D98244,00.html)  
[www.sccvector.org/content/0,4745,ccid%3D61483,00.html](http://www.sccvector.org/content/0,4745,ccid%3D61483,00.html)
- The McKinney Act website: <http://nch.ari.net/mckinneyfacts.html>
- Valley Transportation Authority website: [www.vta.org](http://www.vta.org)

## **Interviews**

- CEO and President, Emergency Housing Consortium, and staff, August 27, 2003.
- Santa Clara County Homeless Services Coordinator, September 30, 2003 and multiple follow-up interviews.

## **Tours**

- The Emergency Housing Consortium 2011 Little Orchard Street, San Jose, CA. 95125, on August 27, 2003.