

LOCAL NEWS

## Hundreds of San Bernardino County homeless surveyed as part of annual count



Frank Williams, a homeless man sleeping in a parking lot in downtown San Bernardino, rubs his eyes as he answers questions from volunteers on Thursday, Jan. 25, 2018 as they fill out a survey for the annual Point-In-Time Homeless Count throughout San Bernardino County. (Stan Lim, San Bernardino Sun/SCNG)

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SAN BERNARDINO – Katherine Hohmann is depressed, not because she lives here, alone along the Santa Ana River Trail, but because of the confluence of events that removed the roof over her head.

Once a business owner and 20-year employee of VA Loma Linda, Hohmann had the storybook suburban life: mother of three, longtime wife and successful family.

Then, the hazel-eyed 44-year-old said, a messy divorce and successive personal tragedies sent her into the tailspin from which she still hasn't recovered.

“Before I knew it,” she said, “just about everybody that was important to me was gone. I have depression because of my losses. I know I could get myself out of this situation, but do I want to? I don't see a bright tomorrow because I'm depressed.

“It's hard to deal with what's happened.”

Hohmann's story was one of dozens told Thursday during the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership's 2018 Point-In-Time Count, an annual tally of the region's homeless population.

Scores of volunteers joined city, county and state representatives for the morning count, which promotes government and private grant funding to eradicate homelessness.

Aimara Freeman, a San Bernardino County behavioral health spokeswoman, said 24 cities and unincorporated areas within the county were expected to be canvassed. Volunteers convened in Fontana, Upland, San Bernardino, Victorville and Redlands.

In San Bernardino, county Supervisor Josie Gonzales and Councilwoman Virginia Marquez were up and at'em, set to meet their most downtrodden constituents.

[This year, there was great focus on helping unaccompanied homeless women.](#)

Philip Mangano, a county advisor on homelessness, noted that 90 percent of such women encounter some sort of abuse as children. The rest – women like Hohmann – experience personal tragedy later in life.

Mangano is also CEO of the American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness and the former executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness under former President George W. Bush.

“We're working toward identifying the obstacle course, the challenges that take place being a single female and surviving in a homeless environment,” Gonzales told Hohmann. “That way we can learn how best to structure our resources and programs so that as women come on board and ask for help, we're prepared ... to offer that help.”

Though neither Crystal Lopez nor Karen Ickes live in San Bernardino, they frequent homeless encampments here to offer assistance in the form of food, encouragement and hugs.

Thursday, on a table at Meadowbrook Park, the pair found Demetre Peterson, a 38-year-old military veteran with a bagel in his pocket and a goal of finding an apartment by August. Nearby, Frank Williams answered questions in the shadow of the county courthouse.

“My heart goes out to them,” Lopez said.

Joining Gonzales and Mangano on their route were new county CEO Gary McBride and Greg Devereaux, his predecessor.

Norman Mikalsen, a 59-year-old Marine Corps veteran living near Hohmann in what’s called the Eagle’s Nest, welcomed the group into his humble abode.

Several years ago, Mikalsen moved to the Inland Empire from New York. His carpentry career went down with the housing industry so he built himself a home in the river’s wash area.

Mikalsen said he would gladly move into temporary housing so long as Dually, his 13-year-old bully mix, had a roof over his head too.

“He’s my buddy,” Mikalsen said of his dog.

[The Santa Ana River Trail, from Orange to San Bernardino counties, has been swept of homeless individuals in recent days](#), an eviction that could put hundreds on city streets.

Eric Gavin, who oversees [Upland’s Community Restoration Team](#), said Thursday’s volunteers included individuals who have been skeptical of the city’s actions to end homelessness.

According to Gavin, the event was an eye-opener for them.

“When you just see a pile of trash, you don’t see the humanity behind. When you spend time talking to someone, and gain an understanding of their ups and downs, you begin to see them as someone and not just a pile of trash,” he said.

Gavin said the city met with homeless advocates, the police department’s community resource officers and representatives from San Bernardino County to decide on the key areas in the city to visit for Thursday’s count.

The effort to [stop panhandling at the Campus Avenue exit on the 210 Freeway](#) may finally be seeing some progress. During Thursday's count, those involved in Upland were surprised that only one person was counted in the Colonies area, Gavin said.

In Redlands, a group of volunteers assisting with the count found Kimberly Young and her three young daughters sleeping overnight in the minivan that carried them from Maine to the West Coast.

Young told the group she suffers from bipolar disorder and supports her children on disability pay. She drove her family to California from Maine for the warmer weather and they found themselves in Redlands a few days ago, she said, without money for gas and needing services.

She said she only recently discovered the food pantry and clothing at Family Service Association of Redlands. Housing, however, had eluded them.

"We don't care in the whole world where we live," Young said, "we just want to live."

While Young did not qualify as an unaccompanied homeless woman, housing unsheltered children is the highest priority for the county, said Mangano, who was with Supervisor Gonzales and Maria Razo, the executive director of the county Housing Authority, at the time.

The trio assured everyone they would get Young and her children help immediately.

A preliminary report on Thursday's findings is expected in March.

San Bernardino County had 1,866 homeless individuals this time last year, according to the count.

Many, Hohmann being chief among them, believe they can return to their feet.

"We're just like everybody else," she said. "I've been at both ends of the social eye, and being homeless, people look at you like you're a disease or a plague.

"If we just had a few little pushes or helping steps, a lot of us probably could get off the streets."

*Staff writers Sandra Emerson and Liset Marquez contributed to this report.*

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## Brian Whitehead

Brian Whitehead covers San Bernardino for The Sun. Bred in Grand Terrace, he graduated from Riverside Notre Dame High and Cal State Fullerton. For seven years, he covered high school and college sports for The Orange County Register. Before landing at The Sun, he was the city beat reporter for Buena Park, Fullerton and La Palma.

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