

'Point-in-time' homeless population falls by 8 percent in San Bernardino County

By Joe Nelson , The Sun

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Sgt. Shauna Gates, center, gives instructions as hundreds of volunteers prepare to partake in San Bernardino's homeless count. Staff file photo by Micah Escamilla

San Bernardino County's homeless population has decreased by 8 percent since 2013, according to results released Wednesday from the county's biennial point-in-time homeless count in January.

More than 76 percent (1,626) of the counted homeless adults and children were clustered in six cities: San Bernardino, Victorville, Upland, Yucca Valley, Ontario, and Fontana, comprising more than two-thirds of the county's homeless population and nearly 100 percent of persons living in homeless shelters or transitional housing, according to the report released Wednesday.

Among the 1,302 counted homeless people living on the streets of San Bernardino County as of January there were 25 families with 58 children.

In 2013, there were a reported 36 families with 65 children living on the streets, prompting the county to declare a state of emergency and implement its No Child Left Unsheltered program. The program places homeless adults and their children in transitional housing facilities, and has thus far received \$50,000 from First 5 San Bernardino and \$236,605 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to the county Housing Authority.

"We were tasked to try and form a small pilot program to give priority to families and homeless children," said Ana Gamiz, spokeswoman for the county Housing Authority.

Gamiz said the recent count also revealed that 139 of the counted homeless were military veterans, who along with unsheltered families are at the top of the Housing Authority's list for finding housing. Through HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, the Housing Authority has assisted 282 veterans, and is on track to assist 75 more.

The plan is to ensure not one military veteran is without housing by the end of 2015, said Daniel Nackerman, executive director for the county Housing Authority.

The city of San Bernardino leads the county in the number of people living on the streets, in shelters and transitional housing, with 383 living on the streets, 200 in transitional housing and 184 in shelters. The High Desert cities of Victorville and Yucca Valley have the second

and third highest number of people living on the streets. Victorville had 107 people living in shelters and 27 in transitional housing, while Yucca Valley had 30 living in shelters and five in transitional housing, according to the report.

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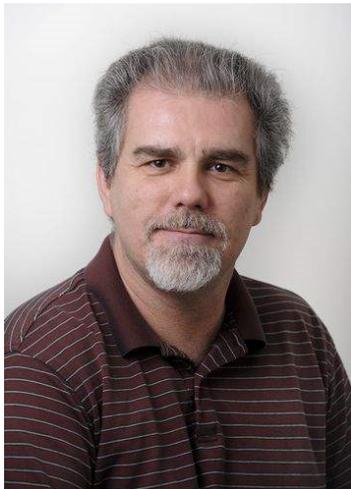
Though not an exact count given the nature of homelessness, the point-in-time counts provide a snapshot of the homeless population on any given day in the county and provides a baseline by which to measure whether the homeless population is growing or dwindling.

“The (point-in-time count) results are encouraging. However, the high need for continued state and federal investment to reduce homelessness, such as permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing, persists,” said San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzales, chairwoman of the county’s Interagency Council on Homelessness, in a statement Wednesday. “There is still much work to be done if we are going to reach our goal of ending homelessness in San Bernardino County.”

This year’s count occurred from 6 to 10 a.m. on Jan. 22, with about 400 volunteers fanning out across the county. They counted 2,140 homeless persons - 181 less than the 2,321 counted in 2013.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires biennial homeless counts from municipalities that receive HUD funding. The counts reflect the number of homeless persons in both unincorporated areas and cities.

Findings from the report will be used to help assess the progress of the county’s 10-year strategy to end homelessness.



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