

# San Joaquin County 2015 Point-in-Time Unsheltered Homeless Count Report

## **Introduction**

San Joaquin County undertook a count of the unsheltered homeless persons within its borders during the final week of January 2015 as part of an overall assessment of homelessness within the jurisdiction. The count was conducted according to congressional direction given to the federal Housing and Urban Development Department — a contractual obligation on the part of the county incurred by receiving certain funds to assist homeless individuals and families.

To conduct the count, the county's Community Development Department and Central Valley Low Income Housing Corp. partnered with county-based nonprofit organizations that provide emergency shelter, housing, and other support services to homeless individuals and families. Public officials in Stockton, Tracy, Manteca, and Lodi, as well as private businesses and faith-based organizations, appreciatively contributed to the effort<sup>1</sup>.

The following report describes the method and results of the count, as well as the significance of the findings for San Joaquin County and its included cities.

## **Method**

Unsheltered homeless families and individuals were encouraged to gather at Homeless Connection events hosted in the major San Joaquin County cities — Stockton, Tracy, Lodi, and Manteca — to access support services and to be counted. Surveys were only conducted for those who self-identified as meeting the HUD definition of unsheltered homeless — those who were actively staying in a car, tent, condemned building, under an overpass, or in another place otherwise unfit for human habitation — the night before the count. Those staying in homeless shelters, transitional housing for the homeless, doubled-up with friends or family members, or those who are housed thanks to a government subsidy such as Section 8, VASH, or General Relief were not included in this count.

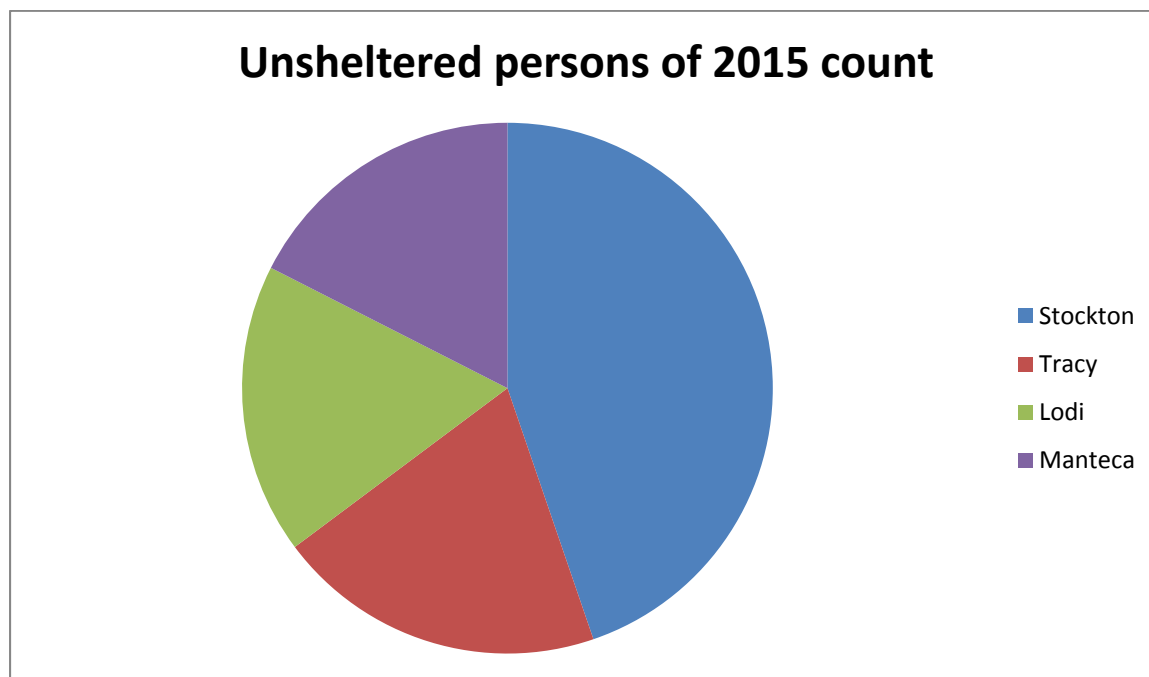
Those who attended the events and were identified as meeting the definition of unsheltered homeless were interviewed using a one-page survey seeking basic demographic information, including age, race, and veteran status. Individuals were also asked for identifying information such as a name and birth date to avoid duplication.

Support service providers, churches, police departments, and other charitable organizations that have routine contact with unsheltered homeless conducted extensive outreach in the months leading up to the count to ensure as many people as possible were made aware of the events. Teams that have experience working with homeless individuals also were sent into the community on the day of the event to gather information regarding those who did not attend the Homeless Connection

events. Churches and charitable organizations that have contact with the homeless during the time of the count were also provided surveys so they could interview those individuals and families.

All completed surveys were gathered by CVLIHC, which provides homeless housing services throughout the county. CVLIHC debriefed volunteers and volunteer organizations to ensure the count was conducted appropriately, and the surveys were tallied and cross-referenced to prevent duplicate counting of individuals.

## **Numbers**



**Stockton** = 218 adults, 12 children

**Tracy** = 122 adults, 12 children

**Lodi** = 87 adults, 4 children

**Manteca** = 88 adults, 2 children

**Total** = 515 adults, 26 children

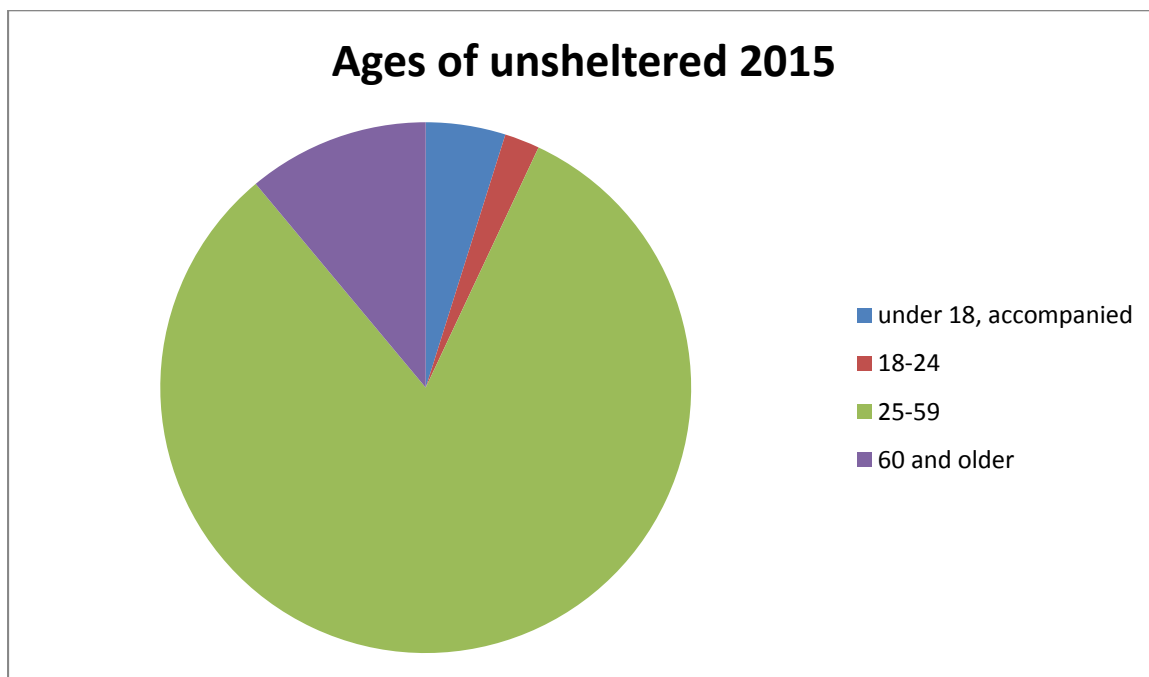
Overall, more unsheltered homeless individuals were counted in 2015 than in any previous year. In 2015, 541 people were counted, while those numbers were 263 in 2013 and 247 in 2011, years in which a similar method for the count was employed. While it is possible that the 2015 results reflect an increase in the number of people without shelter in San Joaquin County, it is much more plausible that the dramatic increase in unsheltered individuals is the result of a more robust, improved effort to count this population. Increased community participation as well as stronger outreach efforts are the likely primary causes of the rise.

The number of homeless sheltered individuals continues to demonstrate a continued downward trend. In January 2011, there were 1,516 people who were staying in emergency shelters or

transitional housing reserved for homeless individuals and families. In 2013, the total number of sheltered homeless individuals recorded the first week in January dropped to 1,278, and in 2015, the number declined to 1,209.

In 2015, the highest concentration of unsheltered homeless individuals was found in Stockton — a full 43 percent of the unsheltered persons counted in San Joaquin County were living within Stockton city limits. This is consistent with the findings of previous unsheltered homeless counts, which show Stockton as the center for the local unsheltered homeless population.

The number of people counted in Manteca and Lodi were nearly identical to each other, though a lack of community participation in the unsheltered homeless count in those two cities outside of the Homeless Connection events likely suppressed those numbers. Increased community participation in Tracy outside of the Homeless Connection events led to a larger-than-expected number of unsheltered homeless persons identified there.



**Under 18 = 25**

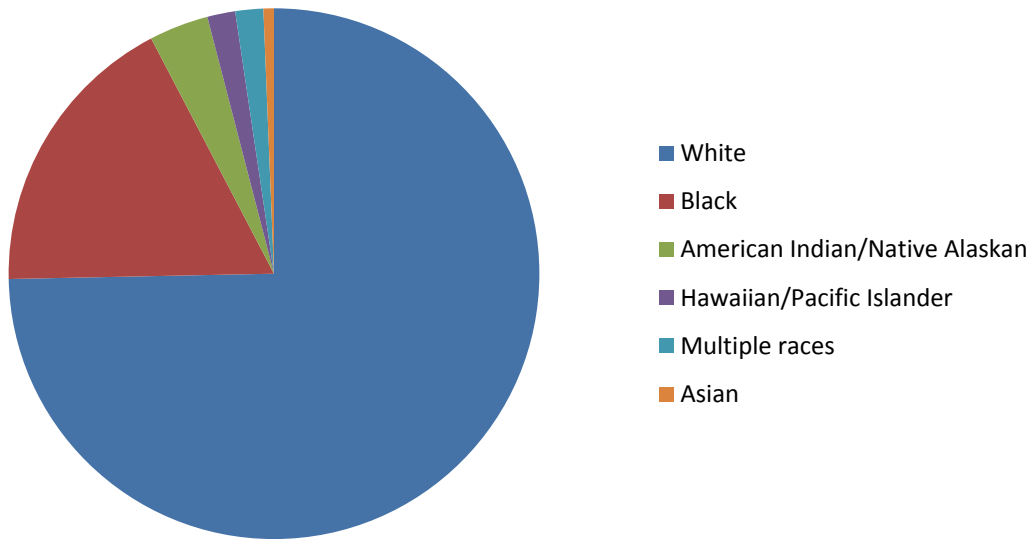
**18-24 = 11**

**25-59 = 422**

**60 and older = 57**

The vast majority of unsheltered individuals fall within the “middle age” category of 25 to 59 years of age. There were no unaccompanied minors recorded by the count. Of the 461 households that were counted in 2015, 16 included children younger than 18.

## Racial demographics of unsheltered 2015



**White** = 351

**Black** = 83

**American Indian/Native Alaskan** = 17

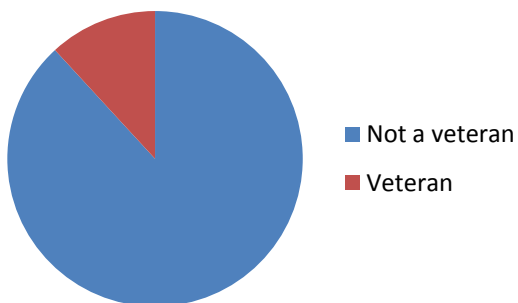
**Hawaiian/Pacific Islander** = 8

**Multiple Races** = 8

**Asian** = 3

**Ethnicity** = 130 of those counted — or 24 percent — identified as Hispanic.

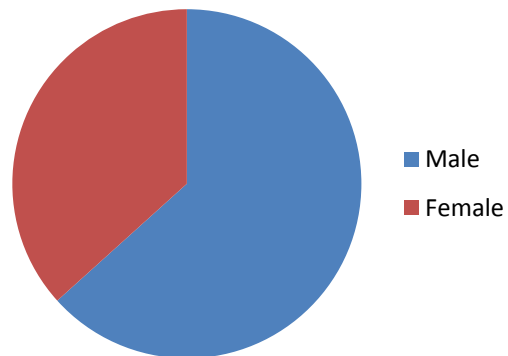
## Military veterans of unsheltered 2015



**Not a veteran** = 454 (of 515 adults)

**Veteran** = 61

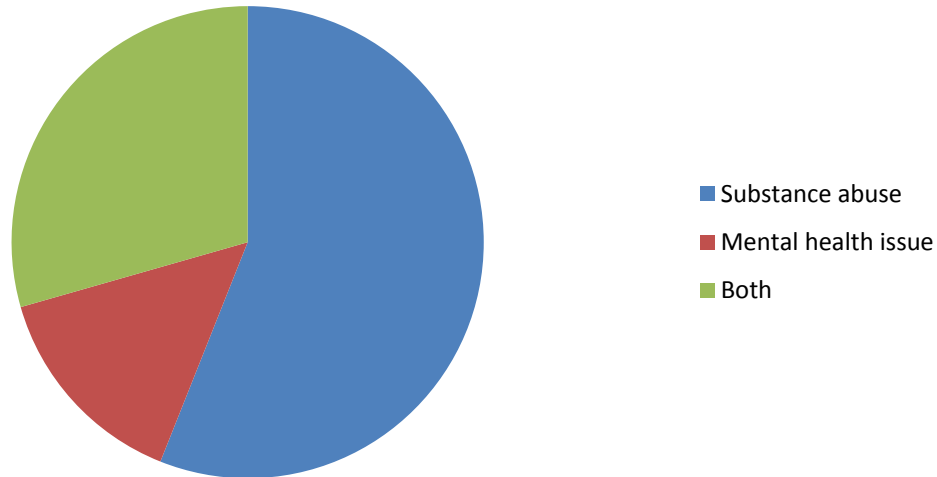
## Gender of unsheltered 2015



**Male** = 328

**Female** = 190

## Self-reported impairments of unsheltered 2015



**Substance abuse only = 158**

**Mental health issue only = 41**

**Substance abuse AND mental health issue = 83**

Nearly 40 percent of all adults surveyed in the unsheltered count reported dealing with a substance abuse problem, mental health issue, or both. It is likely that the number of homeless individuals dealing with these types of conditions is greater than what is reported here, as some individuals refused to answer this question, and it is typical that substance abuse and mental health issues are under-reported when gauged by self reporting. While this should serve to highlight the significant portion of the unsheltered homeless population that deals with either substance abuse or mental health issues, it is unknown if these issues rise to the level of being a “permanent disability” that would impact the estimates of the county’s chronically homeless population. (Chronic homelessness being defined as having a permanent disability AND experiencing homelessness for more than a year straight OR having four or more episodes of homelessness during a three-year period.<sup>ii</sup>)

### **Results**

According to the 2015 unsheltered homeless count, the typical unsheltered homeless individual in San Joaquin County is a single, white male between the ages of 25 and 59, lives somewhere in Stockton, and has a substance abuse and/or mental health issue. This is a trend that is consistent across the unsheltered counts conducted in 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013.

Other demographic trends that remain consistent across the point-in-time counts are the age of unsheltered homeless individuals — most are between the ages of 25 and 60 — and the general percentage of unsheltered homeless individuals identifying with a certain race or ethnicity.

The percentage of unsheltered homeless adults in San Joaquin County who are veterans is sizeable — 13 percent — but does not represent a significant departure from the national rate of 12 percent<sup>iii</sup>. The rates of substance abuse and mental health issues reported in the count are similar to the rates of those issues reported by chronically homeless individuals in national data reviews<sup>iv</sup>.

One surprising finding: 21 percent of those interviewed reported cash income of some type, including SSI, SSA, unemployment, earned income, and other cash aid. Another 14 percent reported that they receive food stamps.

The count conducted in January 2015 tallied far more unsheltered homeless individuals than previous surveys. This increase is most likely attributable to the improved outreach undertaken in advance of the Homeless Connection events, as well as increased participation of agencies and volunteers in the field. Despite the jump in numbers, it is a certainty that the 2015 effort undercounts the number of unsheltered homeless individuals who live in San Joaquin County.

Given the difficulty of contacting and reaching homeless individuals, the rural nature of San Joaquin County, the limits imposed on the count timeframe by HUD, and the limited number of participating agencies and volunteers, it is a certainty that there are more unsheltered homeless persons in the county than tallied through the 2015 survey. However, it is not possible to responsibly or accurately extrapolate how many truly homeless individuals there are in the county.

It should also be noted that this count does not include the vast number of people receiving some type of voucher or assistance who would likely be homeless if not for that assistance. The count also does not include migrant workers or laborers.

## **Analysis**

The data and results of the 2015 point-in-time unsheltered homeless count demonstrate there is a significant need for more resources in San Joaquin County to address the issue of homelessness. At any given time, hundreds of people are living on the streets, in cars, under freeway overpasses, and in other places not meant for human habitation.

Outreach to these populations is difficult under the best of circumstances, and efforts to connect them with services such as mental health care, substance abuse treatment, medical care, food distribution, and emergency shelter are hampered by a lack of resources.

Addressing the needs of the homeless population will take a multifaceted approach. A successful strategy will include efforts that also benefit the global population, such as improving education and economic opportunities. Specific, immediate efforts to improve the chances that homeless individuals will become stably housed and self-sufficient also will require multiple avenues of

effort, including but not limited to improved medical care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, education, access to clothes and food, counseling, and transportation or in-the-field outreach so that the homeless can actually access these services.

However, the availability of emergency shelters and affordable housing remains the short-term key to getting unsheltered homeless individuals and families off the streets. It is also the key to self-sufficiency, as individuals are unlikely to succeed in the steps necessary to maintain mental wellness or sobriety, or hold a job, without some sort of stable housing situation. This is sometimes called the Housing First model, and it has been employed successfully by communities that have dedicated the resources to the approach.

Housing First seeks to reduce barriers homeless people often face when it comes to obtaining housing, such as lack of income, lack of sobriety, or a lack of connection with support services. Housing First-oriented programs help people achieve and sustain housing as quickly as possible without time limits, deliver a variety of services that promote housing stability, and employ a standard lease agreement between the property owner and tenants<sup>v</sup>.

Unfortunately, the current resources dedicated to housing the homeless in San Joaquin County are not sufficient to address the need. Emergency shelters are often full, or the clients do not meet the criteria for assistance. Furthermore, true emergency shelters do not exist in every city within San Joaquin County, resulting in massive gaps in resources in some areas. Transitional programs that help homeless people move from shelters into more stable housing operate with waiting lists. Permanent supportive housing programs for disabled and homeless people are also impacted, and operate with significant waiting lists. Expansion of these efforts to meet the documented need would require identifying additional resources, as would establishing a new Housing First project.

It is also extremely difficult for local unsheltered homeless individuals and families to find housing that is affordable without subsidies. Federal standards for affordable housing state that no more than 30 percent of a household's income should be spent on housing<sup>vi</sup>. By this measure, an individual or family relying on an individual's Social Security disability benefit for income should spend no more than \$267 a month on housing<sup>vii</sup>. A family of one adult and two children that depends on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (also known as welfare) should spend no more than \$205 a month on housing<sup>viii</sup>. Such housing options are either extremely difficult or impossible to find within San Joaquin County, and wait lists for housing assistance programs such as Section 8 stretch thousands of people long.

Local efforts to address homelessness should therefore be focused on expanding resources for programs that assist the homeless — specifically those related to providing truly affordable housing for those coming off the streets.

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<sup>i</sup> Participating agencies include: Central Valley Low Income Housing Corp., San Joaquin County Community Development Department, San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services, City of Stockton, Stockton Police Department, Stockton Unified School District, City of Tracy, Tracy Police Department, City of Lodi, City of Manteca, Manteca Police Department, California Highway Patrol, Veterans Services Office, Veterans Affairs, Department of Motor Vehicles, the office of Assemblywoman Susan Eggman, St. Mary's Dining Room, Stockton Shelter for the Homeless, PATH, Inner City Action, CareLink, Gleason House, New Directions, Gospel Center Rescue Mission, Westcare, Catholic Charities, Haven of Peace, Women's Center/Youth and Family Services, Tracy Interfaith Ministries, McHenry House Family Shelter, Healthy Connections, Love Inc., Salvation Army of Lodi, Calvary Church of Manteca, St. Vincent de Paul Society of Manteca, Grace Church of Tracy.

<sup>ii</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness — Chronic Homelessness:

[http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/chronic\\_homelessness](http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/chronic_homelessness)

<sup>iii</sup> National Coalition for Homeless Veterans — Background and Statistics:

[http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background\\_and\\_statistics/](http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/)

<sup>iv</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration — Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness in the United States:

[http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/hrc\\_factsheet.pdf](http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/hrc_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness — Housing First: [http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/housing\\_first](http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/housing_first)

<sup>vi</sup> Housing and Urban Development — Affordable Housing:

[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/affordablehousing/](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/affordablehousing/)

<sup>vii</sup> Calculation based on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in California: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11125.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Calculation based on CalWORKs Maximum Grant Levels: [http://ca.db101.org/glossary\\_item.aspx?item-id=6521](http://ca.db101.org/glossary_item.aspx?item-id=6521)