

Homelessness: What Sonoma County Can do Better

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Introduction

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into effect. Included in the thirty Articles of the Declaration, the first subsection of Article 25 states that:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Over the last 70 years, our society has increasingly ignored this universal standard to such a degree that communities would rather imprison people experiencing homelessness than provide them with assistance. This phenomenon can be seen not only on a global scale but in our own community. Sonoma County is arguably one of the most beautiful places in the United States. It boasts over 60,000 acres of vineyards that change colors with the seasons, stunning views of the Pacific Coast, and activities that appeal to every age group and activity level. While it appears on many “Top Places” lists regarding its beauty and abundance, Sonoma County was also ranked among the highest numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth, living in shelters or on the streets, and chronically homeless people. In a December 2018 article in the County’s local newspaper, The Press Democrat, Sonoma County’s adult homeless population currently ranks 2nd in California among largely suburban U.S. communities, beaten only by Orange County in Southern California. The basic explanation per Adrienne Lauby, founding member of advocacy group Homeless Action!, is high rents and low wages. Our interest lies in what Sonoma County, as the 11th richest county in California, can do to immediately reduce the number of its residents that are currently without shelter and to help them regain stability in our communities.

While abundant research has been done on homelessness, encompassing the causes behind it, the demographics of those that are currently experiencing it, what programs have proven effective at reducing the numbers of affected individuals, and more, our group makes the supposition that Sonoma County is a unique community that does not fall neatly into any category that would allow for a single, simple solution for our current homelessness crisis. California’s revolutionary No Place Like Home program, enacted in 2016 to develop permanent supportive housing for those who need mental health services and are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, promises to be life changing for California’s homeless population. One downside of the program though, is the years that it will take to see the funds supplied. Deadlines for applications for both Competitive and Non-Competitive funding aren’t until 2020 and 2021; we are looking at years until the money shows up, how much longer will these homeless population have to continue living on the streets or herded from shelter to shelter while they wait for adequate housing to become available? We propose to gather data from experts in the fields of Homeless Advocacy, those working with programs that are currently providing services to those without shelter, and those that have, or are currently experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. Our hope is to gain insight into what programs could be implemented immediately to alleviate the burden on this vulnerable population currently living in our community. These programs need not be permanent, though some may have long-term merit, but should be fairly self-sustaining and effective at increasing the quality of life for those individuals that use them.

Literature Review

World Perspective

An article by Cory Clark focuses on 10 debunked myths about homelessness. It discusses ten common misconceptions that people have towards homelessness in detail. Clark states that the most common misconception about homelessness is that people believe that it could never happen to them or to anyone in their family. This is not the case when “31% of people lose their housing due to a loss of employment by one or more members of a household, 20% lose their housing due to substance abuse, 15% lose housing due to divorce or separation, 13% lose housing because they got into an argument with a family member who asked them to leave.” These are just a few of the examples given. Cory Clark spent part of his life working on a photography documentary to try to capture the perspective of those that are homeless. During this time, he was able to meet people who shared their story with him. One of the people he met was a Harvard graduate, who was a lawyer, but unexpected tragedies forced him on the streets. Another misconception is that homeless people choose to be homeless or could get off the street on their own if they really wanted to. Every day is a struggle for survival and basic questions like where to use the bathroom? Or where is my next meal coming from? Become almost impossible to answer. Clark highlights that it is not the individuals’ fault that they are homeless, it is our society that is broken. He discusses two main causes to homelessness, which have been the rise of housing cost as well as stagnant wages. Redlining and gentrification help explain why African Americans make up more than 40% of the Homeless population meanwhile they make up only 13% of the general population. The article continues to go down a list of misconceptions giving examples as to why all these myths are simply untrue.

A preliminary report on Homelessness by Esteban Ortiz Ospina and Max Roser focuses specifically on how it affects people in high-income countries. It focuses primarily on homelessness in the United States as well as homelessness in the United Kingdom and compares the two. Their measure on the amount of homelessness is through “point in time” method which produce counts of people who are sleeping in shelters or sleeping on the streets. The sources used to produce these figures are from the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHARC) as well as registries from shelters and counts and estimates of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons provided by care organizations. Counts from care organizations come from active counts that are undertaken at the community level by walking around the streets using pre-established methods. This report is a compile list comparing two different countries, mainly the United States and the United Kingdom, by comparing counts by those who are ‘Sheltered Homelessness’ and those who are ‘Unsheltered Homelessness’. In the United Kingdom, head-counts for those who are Homeless, only consider those that are “sleeping rough”. They then had graphics explaining and comparing the number of homeless people per 100,000 people in the total population for France, the US, Chile, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. These countries were compared because they all had a similar definition of homelessness. Data here was gathered from a Homelessness and Precarious Housing study done in 2016 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD].

The Institute of Global Homelessness developed a framework for understanding homelessness on a global scale. The framework considers three domains of home that determine who may be understood as “lacking access to minimally adequate housing.” These domains are “security domain” which includes having the legal title to occupy housing, the practical likelihood

of eviction, the power to exclude others from the space, and the ability to meet rent or mortgage costs. The second domain is the “physical domain” which pertains to questions of quality like durability, protection from the weather, provision of basic amenities, freedom from infestation and pollutants, plus the safety of one’s self and possessions from external threats. The physical domain also pertains to the quantity of accommodation, i.e., the extent to which the dwelling is overcrowded. The final domain is the “social domain” and refers to opportunities to enjoy social relations as culturally appropriate, and the safety of one’s self and possessions from other occupants. If any of these domains are violated, a person may be considered as “lacking access to minimally adequate housing.” Other than outlining different definitions of homelessness, this article, completed by the Institute of Global Homelessness, covers the state of homelessness in countries with developed economies. This article goes into macro factors affecting homelessness, such as Housing, Cost of Living, Unemployment and Underemployment and others. They also focus on individual issues such as Substance Misuse, Mental Illness, and Health. They found that studies show that living on the streets can lead to “rapid health deterioration, increased hospitalization, and, in some cases, death”. (IGH, 2019). A study done by the National Healthcare for the Homeless council found that a chronically homeless individual is three or four times more likely to die than someone in the general population (O’Connell, 2005). This resource is great in terms of looking at all the factors that can contribute to homelessness, and raises possible solutions in order to fix the issue of homelessness.

Mariah Barajas' article focuses on how our perception of homelessness has changed because of it being distorted in social media. Technology has changed how we interact in everyday life. Although there are benefits like being able to keep in touch with family that lives far away through a quick text message or a phone call to bring people closer together, there are consequences that tend to drive us apart. For instance, the face to face interactions that people use to engage in with each other to build relationships have become obsolete. In Meriah Barajas' article “How Homeless Is Distorted in the Media” she talks about how we allow many of these social media platforms to “distance us from human aspects of everyday life.” This often leads to a negative view on homeless people that is almost always inaccurately depicted. This constant negative view makes it so that we are constantly exposed to the stereotypical portrayals of homelessness and we “fall prey to adopting these problematic perceptions of it, which distances us from the issues that most needs our attention and empathy.”(Barajas, 2015). We never look as a society about how this situation affects those individuals who are struggling with it. Rarely do we hear their voices and stories that make us feel connected to their struggle, which further perpetuates the problem. If there is no representation and we don’t see their stories, we are less likely to be able to empathize with them.

Sonoma county’s homeless population is among one of the worst in the nation. The annual homeless assessment report, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, found when compared with similar-sized communities, Sonoma County has among the highest numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth, living in shelters or on the streets, and chronically homeless people (Press Democrat, 2018). This population lives without a home for a year or more. The article also mentions how California's homeless population is also becoming a statewide issue too. Stating that “California has the largest adult homeless population this year among the 50 states, 129,972, and the nation’s highest per-capita rate of homelessness — 33 adults without homes per 10,000 people.” Nearly half of the State’s homeless live on the streets rather than in shelters.

Homeless advocates have speculated that this report by HUD actually underscores the real reasons as to why there is a rise in homelessness within Sonoma County which can be due to the affordability crunch and lack of housing. Martin Espinoza of the Press Democrat also interviews Clemente Murrafo who has been homeless with his father and sister for the past four years. He talks about how he and other homeless people try to keep “out of sight, out of mind.” He said that many of those who experience chronic homelessness have given up, going on to say “No matter how hard I try, nothing changes.” Sonoma County ranks second among largely suburban US communities, following after Orange County, boasting a population of 2,657 homeless adults living outdoors or in shelters. Many have said that fixing this problem is going to take a community effort. It’s going to take people saying enough is enough. As well as a combination of policy, funding and housing.

Bay City News reported on the statistics on the rise of homelessness since the fires that occurred in 2017 (ABC 7 News). The Sonoma County Community Development Commission released a homeless count report that reflects the effects of the October 2017 wildfires. There was a 6 percent increase in the February 2018 homeless count compared to the 2017 count. The fires clearly contributed to the increase of overall homelessness as well as those experiencing homelessness for the first time increased from 24 to 35 percent. They referenced a telephone survey done by Applied Survey Research, in companion with a homeless count that showed that “21,400 Sonoma County residents, or 4 percent of the county's population, were living in unstable housing situations.” (ABC 7 News). The survey estimated that half of those people lost their housing as a direct result of the fires or due to the fires' economic impact. The survey also found that “43 percent of the people living in unstable conditions because of the fires were 55 years old and older.” This report was presented to the Board of Supervisors by the Community Development Commission.

International Rates

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2008) estimated that there were 105,000 homeless Australians. The number includes 16,375 experiencing primary homelessness, which includes those forced to sleep on the streets (ABS, 2008). In the State of Victoria, where this case is set, it is estimated that there are 20,511 homeless people, with 1,801 in the primary classification (ABS, 2008). A detailed report by Reynolds (2008) identifies that there are limited opportunities for homeless people and suggests a reconfiguration of government funding combined with linkages to affordable housing. Past attempts at addressing primary homelessness have been described as expensive and short-term (Reynolds, 2008). Even though these past solutions responded to the immediate needs of homeless people, the Commonwealth Government has declared that a long-term intervention is essential to end homelessness (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The Common Ground Model arises from the USA. This model uses a holistic approach to end homelessness and seeks to provide permanent housing for low income and homeless individuals (Common Ground, 2010). Under this model, disused buildings are converted into affordable and supportive housing.

The economic crisis of 2008 impacted all parts of the world and called on local-government municipalities to evaluate their approaches in interacting with these changes. This research will present a global perspective on the impact of the Recession on homelessness through demographics and statistics. Homelessness has a wide range of applicable concepts of who and how one can be defined as homeless. The following research study focuses on the population of

homeless people who are unsheltered. This article is a global analysis of 20 largest municipalities using data from the OECD, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development looking at data from 2005 until 2014. Due to the nature of the definition of homelessness as well as whether or not each municipality has counted for homelessness, we are unable to use this data as a comparison point between the 20 municipalities studied. The researchers were unable to report the relationship they expected between Homelessness and the Great Recession, citing that “the sharp rise is due in part to more comprehensive counting methods (i.e., London) or a slightly different definition of homelessness (Vienna and Berlin)” (Carrizales, and Bainbridge, 2017). In other cases, there was not enough data to draw sufficient conclusions about the trends of homelessness. This might have been due to the nature of how the collection of data works, in some cities, there are only voluntary homeless counts or the data was only collected once, as seen in Mexico City, Warsaw, Rome, Athens, and Prague (Carrizales and Bainbridge, 2017). This speaks to a larger trend of insufficient data within those countries, and a lack of comprehensive efforts to try to solve homelessness on a national scale. Overall, the researchers conclude that the relationship between the recession and homelessness cannot simply be measured, as other factors such as the economy, policies, migration, and culture influence it as well. They recognize that although they selected countries within the OECD, these countries might not be specific enough in capturing the overall trend of homelessness within those nations and that there could be other countries not considered that have a better track record of dealing with homelessness. They also state that the recession might not have had a direct impact on unsheltered homelessness since there was a lag on that population of homelessness prior to the recession. Some countries, like the United States, implemented rapid rehousing efforts in order to prevent a rise in homelessness after the great recession.

Researchers Ortiz-Ospina and Roser provide a composite place for empirical data on homelessness in the United States, using HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, which uses a point in time reference. It provides great graphics illustrating those who experience homelessness by counts provided by those in shelters as well as those who are experiencing homelessness that does not live in shelters. They follow up with the UK and illustrate the population of those who experience homelessness. Ortiz- Ospina and Roser make it clear that we are not able to compare the US population to this, because the measures and methodology are different. They go on to show data from OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, focusing on France, the United States, Chile, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. Researchers Ortiz-Ospina et al, later go into detail about correlational topics, consequences, and causes.

Minnery and Greenhalgh examine the ways in which we define homelessness, specifically focusing on how different countries in Europe, the US and Australia define it. Although there are different definitions of homelessness, ranging from sleeping rough, or “roofless-ness”, to houselessness, or inadequate housing, there seems to be a general understanding that those who experience homelessness are no longer only exclusively male, alcohol-dependent transients (Crinall, 2001). Many studies seem to define the growing population of the “new- homeless” to be families, women, and children, the elderly (Forrest, 1990; Wearing, 1996). Researchers realize that the policies needed in order to address the issue of homelessness need to be diverse enough in order to truly provide solutions that affect the growing population of homelessness. At the same time, they highlight that most countries in the European Union follow a definition of homelessness

that for the most part, only focuses on the population that is “sleeping rough” (Greenhalgh & Minnery, 2007). There does seem to be a growing awareness that this is not the only form of homelessness and does not adequately cover the complexity of the issue.

Researchers Piat, Polvere, Kirst, Voronka, Zabkiewicz, Plante, Isaak, Nolin, Nelson, and Goering examined how homeless individuals with mental illness experience pathways into homelessness. Study participants were enrolled in the At Home/Chez Soi project, a Pan-Canadian Randomized Controlled Trial Comparing the Housing First approach with Treatment as Usual for homeless individuals. This inquiry is grounded in a social-ecological perspective, which considers interactions between individual and structural factors. Piat et al. (2015) conducted consumer narrative interviews ($n = 219$) which revealed that individual factors, such as substance abuse, relationship conflicts, and mental health issues significantly contributed to homelessness, in addition to structural transitions from foster care and institutional settings into the community. Additional structural factors entrenched participants in unsafe communities, created obstacles to exiting homelessness and amplified individual risk factors. The study findings confirm the role of individual risk factors in pathways into homelessness but underscore the need for policies and interventions to address structural factors that worsen individual risks and create barriers to exiting homelessness.

An interview conducted between Connor Friesen and Juha Kaakinen, CEO for a nonprofit and leader of the National program to reduce long term homelessness in Finland highlights Finland’s success with reducing homelessness. Finland recognized they were dealing with homelessness as a social issue and took steps to tackle this issue in the late 1980s. In 1987, Finland had a homeless population of about 20,000 individuals. Since they implemented those programs, they reduced their population to about 8,000 people in 2008. It was during this time that they realized they needed to implement something to address long term homelessness, seeing as that was the only group of individuals that were not considered during the implementation of the initial programs. Kaakinen attributes the program’s success largely in part of the, “wide partnership of state and local authorities and NGOs both locally and nationally based on a strong political consensus on this matter.” (Friesen, 2011). He goes on to say that because there was a strong coalition determined to end this issue, he saw the way that people’s attitudes changed regarding homelessness. It no longer seemed like an issue that they wouldn’t be able to solve, it became something that they needed to change. When they began looking into programs to solve homelessness, Kaakinen mentions that they were unaware that the Housing First model, first developed by Dr. Sam Tsemberis in NY in the 1990s, even existed. They knew they needed to radically change the way that they had been dealing with Homelessness, which had resembled a staircase model, with people moving from lower levels of housing up to their own housing once people were capable of taking care of their issues. The program they ended up finalizing was known now as the Housing First Model, which provides stable housing to individuals without needing any requirements to achieve it.

Current Policies

At this time, there are policies and bills in place to address the homeless epidemic we are facing as a country. Right now, there is a bill in the House, introduced by Maxine Waters, which has passed the House Financial Services Committee on a partisan vote. The Ending Homelessness Act of 2019 would include \$13.27 billion to be contributed to mandatory emergency funding over

the span of five years. This would be trickled down into providing 85,000 new permanent housing units, provide an additional 300,000 vouchers for Section 8 Housing, mandatory spending to the National Housing Trust Fund, outreach funding to the homeless to ensure connections and resources that they need and lastly, integrated health care and housing initiatives. There are 46 original cosponsors and no current schedule for it to have a floor vote in the House. Congress has found a decrease in veteran homelessness due to new federal funding started in 2008 but are trying to make progress to the larger homeless population. There are 552,830 people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. as of 2018. Under the Section 451, it is stated, “for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2024, \$1,000,000,000, to remain available until expended, for emergency relief grants under this section to address the unmet needs of homeless populations in jurisdictions with the highest need” (116th Congress:2018-2019). Section 453 addresses outreach funding, “for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2024, \$100,000,000, to remain available until expended, to the Secretary for Grants under this section to provide outreach and coordinate services for persons and households who are homeless or formerly homeless” (116th Congress:2018-2019). All together the bill would add \$2.65 billion for new projects over the five years, with the goal of adding 410,000 new units of housing for the homeless population.

There is another bill, Fighting Homelessness Through Services and Housing Act, in the Senate, which has been introduced, but still no progress on it. The bill mentioned earlier, will hopefully make this bill more likely to be voted on sooner, since it has been introduced in both houses of Congress. Under this program, “the Administrator shall award 5-year implementation grants to eligible entities to assist such entities in carrying out activities, and paying capital building costs, associated with the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families, including homeless children and youths (as defined by section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a)), or those at risk of becoming homeless” (116th Congress:2019-2020).

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, from the House of Representatives, is determined to tackle poverty, by using, “an anti-poverty package that would cap annual rent increases, confirm full access to social welfare programs for people who have been convicted and undocumented immigrants, pressure federal contractors to offer better wages and benefits, and update official poverty measurements by taking into account geographic cost-of-living variations and access to health insurance, child care, and “new necessities” such as internet access” (Lola Fadulu, New York Times). Ocasio-Cortez is implementing the Place to Prosper Act, providing tenant protections and regulating corporate landlords. This would cap rent increases at 3 percent a year and set restrictions on reasons why landlords would evict tenants. The act will pay more attention to mandating landlords to keep rental units in good repair and protecting the tenants. Along with these bills are two others, “The Embrace Act and The Mercy in Re-Entry Act, would outlaw the denial of any federal benefit because of immigration status or a past criminal conviction” (Lola Fadulu, New York Times).

Another great policy that started in New York in 1992 by Dr. Sam Tsemberis, is Housing First, which is also seen in other countries. The conducts research and helps influence policies that are related to Housing First. The goal of this model is to provide access to permanent housing for individuals who are homeless and those who have mental health and addiction problems. This approach has been extremely effective in reduction amongst the homeless population, mainly in

urban areas. There is a check list to be able to assess local Housing First programs to make sure it is implemented efficiently and effectively.

Reducing and Preventing Homelessness: A Review of the Evidence and Charting a Research Agenda, recognizes the fluctuation of homelessness and has seen a drift upward in major cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle and New York. Federal, state and local funding contribute billions of dollars to fight against homelessness and there has yet to be a major decrease in this population. New York City spends \$1.8 billion, with only about one third coming from federal dollars, on programs to help homelessness. There has been a rise in local resources amongst communities across the nation. In the 90's, homeless shelters were the most common resource, but now the focus has shifted to immediate housing. Evans, Phillips, and Ruffini explained, "This approach is guided by the belief that providing basic necessities such as housing and food are preconditions to solving other problems like finding employment or dealing with substance use issues" (pg. 4). Another, commonly seen factor through our sources is rent control to establish more boundaries for landlord behavior. Another major concern brought up was the that different services provided varied on location, rural or urban.

Sonoma County's progressive efforts to address the rise in homelessness. A majority of the five-member Rohnert Park City Council directed city employees to develop plans to spend as much as \$450,000 more this year on new and expanded programs. Rohnert Park Mayor, Gina Belforte, is aware and active towards combating this crisis and is recognizing the need for immediate action. It is mentioned, there will be more than \$300,000, which will go towards cleaning up homelessness encampments, including problem sites near the city's waterways. There has been an increase in motivational interviews in neighborhoods and in private or city-owned parking lots. To remove these cars can cost up to \$2,000, so why not put that money towards a positive reinforcement for this population? City employees recommend the initiatives to address a growing number of complaints from residents who want to see more done for the expanding homeless population in south county. From 2018 to 2019 the combined homeless population in Rohnert Park and its neighboring city, Cotati, jumped 24%, leaving now 173 people homeless.

Santa Rosa is working on preventing sweeps happening over illegal homeless camps. A U.S. district judge, Vince Chhabria, decided to require Santa Rosa to provide a bed and a place to store the personal belongings of homeless people. The mayor of Santa Rosa, Tom Schwedhelm, is hoping for Santa Rosa to be, "a model program" for the rest of the county. Adrienne Lauby, our advisor, was a part of this article stating, "Criminally punishing homeless individuals for sleeping on the street when they have nowhere else to go is inhumane." (Schmitt, 2019). Before Chhabria made his decision, he visited the largest homeless shelter in the county. The court ruled on homelessness, in reference to what is happening in Boise, Idaho, for criminalizing homeless people for sleeping outdoors on public property without offering them a space in a shelter. Sonoma County faces a population of 2,000 homeless people who are unprotected from these sweeps happening to them. There are approximately 3,000 homeless people, but 1,000 are in some kind of shelter or group homes, leaving 2,000 of that population to worry about sweeps. This ruling is enforcing Santa Rosa to offer storage of certain personal items for up to 90 days after a sweep. It is included the staff sweeping these encampments will be allowed to toss away mattresses but not tents, wheelchairs or bicycles. Santa Rosa officials are ordered to provide "adequate shelter," which depending on the disability, means a bed in a shelter available for a month may not be adequate.

A promising program for California seems to be the No Place Like Home program, signed into effect by Governor Gerry Brown in 2016. This is another program to invest in permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness and those who are homeless struggling with mental health issues. With \$2 billion bond proceeds in place, this program features mental health services, permanent housing utilizing low barrier selection practices, and counties will be eligible applicants. While promising, the timeline is long. The deadline for applications for funding are not until June 2020 and February 2021, meaning that it will still be potentially years before we see any positive effects from the increased funding.

Demographics

The societal image of a homeless man tends to be a white, slightly scruffy, cisgender male holding a sign asking for donations. We have it ingrained in our attitudes to assume them to be lazy, failures of the system, drug addicts, or have done something to belong in that position. With an average of 552,830 people sleeping on the street at a single point in time in the United States (National Alliance to End Homelessness), this image fails to portray an accurate representation of their demographics, lacking to show how youths who have been in either the foster care or justice system were 1.5 times more likely to become homeless (NAEH). The risk of homelessness doubles for those who have experienced housing insecurity or received housing assistance (NAEH). The National Alliance to End Homelessness also reported that African American youth are almost twice as likely to become homeless than white youth and that 42% of the homeless population is African American (National Coalition for the Homeless). Homelessness can be seen within every city within Sonoma County, where 2,951 individuals are without housing (Kate Williams, Sonoma Valley News). On trend with the national statistics, 38% of the Sonoma homeless population has been in the foster care system and 44% have been without housing for at least a year (Sonoma County Homeless Census). The majority, 87%, were residents within the county before homelessness, with 70% taking calling this county their home for at least ten years (Sonoma County Homeless Census).

Cost of Living

Renting versus owning a home has its pros and cons. In Rohnert Park, the difference in pricing is wide-ranging but is increasing in price for both renting and owning a home every year. Datausa.io is a website that uses reliable data sources to gain information and provides facts and statistics on the population/how society is doing in Rohnert Park. This website has categories (i.e. housing, health, economy, etc.) based on what the individual would like to look for in each city. On datausa.io the data that is given shows clear graphs on pricing for renting versus owning a home in Rohnert Park, California. This website also includes the median average household incomes in this city which is only about \$62,769 among 16,000 households (2017). The data shows only a little over half, only 51.6%, of people that live in this city are homeowners as of 2017. Having that small of a number compared to the total number of people living in the city of Rohnert Park could explain why there are many people living hopelessly. In addition, when owning a home, the individual would have to pay property taxes. In 2017 the property taxes in Rohnert Park were estimated to be about \$3,000 on average. Overall, this website is highly informational and gives quality graphs/tables to represent all the ins and outs of Rohnert Park, California. This website helps support our thesis because the information that is being shown provides statistics on renting versus owning a home and the extra costs that may apply when living under a roof. In addition,

these statistics show that citizens would have to be making a certain amount of money to be able to live on their own. In which is highly difficult for one that may or may not have the resources to do so. People that suffer from homelessness have a difficult time climbing up the ladder of poverty, and the statistics indicate that the living cost is not decreasing.

In the article “Here’s what the average American family of four spends on rent in every state” by Frank Olimo and Shayanne Gal (2019), the average rate of rent for a family of four differs from state to state. The five highest median rents in the nation are all coastal states, including Hawaii, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and California. The median California rent is \$1,358. In addition, it shows how difficult it can be for one that does not have a job nor money to meet this high of rent. The graph that I pulled from this article lists all fifty states and how much the (median) family of four spends on each month. These rates are increasing each year and are highly more expensive in more modern areas (i.e. California, Hawaii). This article supports our thesis by providing tables that clearly show how high the average rent a family or individual is spending on housing each month in California. Adding, this information gives us an estimate on how much people in need of shelter would have needed to spend in 2017.

The Press Democrat being the one the most read newsletters in Sonoma county, published the article, “What you can rent for \$2,027 – the median price in Sonoma County” by Janet Balicki, she states that in Sonoma County, the average rent that is paid is around \$2,027 each month in the year 2018. Being that is a high number, an individual living in Sonoma County would have to be making around \$45,000 a year to live fully comfortably.

This article supports our thesis because it provides data on how much an individual would have to make to live comfortably and provides information on monthly incomes that wouldn’t be able to make it. For example, “In California, where the base is around \$12 per hour, a two-bedroom apartment around \$1,150 would fall within that 30% affordability quotient for a family with two wage earners.”(Balicki, 2019) Therefore, people making minimum wage or even a little higher would not be able to live financially comfortable on their own.

The Economic Policy Institute provides a range of research and data on today's economics, it also provides a Family Budget Calculator that shows how much it would cost each month to live comfortably depending on household size. This website allows you to plug in how many adults and/or children living in the household, and in which city/ state and will calculate an estimate on how much money you would spend on each of the following: housing, food, childcare, transportation, health care, other necessities, and taxes of the year 2018. This information supports our thesis because it shows how much money an individual would need to make to support themselves and others if given the option to live on their own. Including, rent expenses are expensive and for someone trying to come out of poverty would have a hard time because it does not allow the individual and/or family a chance to save money or gain other basic materials. All of their earnings would just go right to rent rather than anything else. Now, this website does not provide how much it would cost for someone coming out of poverty, but it is valuable information.

Including more information from Salary.com, a website that provides data cost of living calculators in major cities. According to Salary.com the cost of living in Rohnert Park is “22.6% higher than the national average.” Now that is significantly more expensive compared to many places across the nation, making it difficult for those in need of shelter to provide that for

themselves. In addition, this website allows you to plug in numbers based on whatever financial role one would like to take and compare how much one would be spending in major cities. This website supports our thesis because it provides information on how much money one would need to make, to live financially stable.

Bestplaces.net provides a categorical graph based on how much one would spend on basic needs (cost of living) while living in Sonoma County. This website uses the U.S average cost of living and compares to Sonoma County, which is significantly higher. The U.S average estimating to be \$231,200 versus \$639,600 in Sonoma County. The graph is categorized by how much one would spend on groceries, health, housing, utilities, transportation, and miscellaneous. In addition, this website provides another graph to help people understand the cost of living in all areas, including the specifics on bedroom size. This website provides enough information to see the comparison in the cost of living in Sonoma County, Santa Rosa Metro, California, and the United States. By the information that this website has provided supports our thesis by showing how expensive it really can be for someone living in Sonoma County in comparison to the rest of the country and close by cities. According to the graph on website Sonoma County is paying more than the median average when it comes to buying a home. On the other hand, homeless people can sometimes be afraid of leaving the area they are familiar with, so if the rent is expensive in the city they're currently living in they (people that are homeless) would not want to move, so the changes would need to happen in those cities, the people in need are currently living in.

Crime Against People Experiencing Homelessness

Homeless crime tends to be more prevalent where there are larger cities/counties such as Los Angeles and Sonoma County. What we know about crime related to homelessness is that homeless people are an easy target (Leomporra, 2018). Through our research we have found that homeless people are usually victims of crime, rather than the offenders. One of the reasons why homeless people can't work is because they carry everything on their backs or on their bicycles. Homeless people get robbed frequently, and their bikes are always getting stolen. They are victims more often than not. Research has found that when a homeless person is a suspect/offender of a crime, normally it is a non-violent crime. Researchers found that when a homeless person is a suspect of a crime, normally it is a non-violent crime, such as loitering or petty theft. Although, research shows that it is rare for a homeless person to be a criminal.

Studies have also shown that more often than not, women are victims of homeless crime. Women who are often trying to get away from an abuser, such as an ex-boyfriend or husband. According to the Press Democrat news article by Paul Payne, "...many are victims of assault and theft, but the vast number are women who have suffered abuse at the hands of ex-spouses or domestic partners." Payne goes onto write that, "Statistics show 89 percent of the participants are women, despite being 30 percent of the homeless population, and nearly 30 percent are between the ages of 31 and 40. Almost 70 percent are white. Domestic violence and physical and sexual assault are the most prevalent crimes." This helped us realize the demographics surrounding crime related to homelessness.

A newsletter article that talks about homelessness in shelters versus homelessness in the streets and which type of homeless people are more likely to commit more violent crimes versus non-violent crimes. Sean Fisher, NYU psychology graduate, along with colleagues Marybeth

Shinn, Patrick Shrout and Sam Tsemberis did a study in 2008 about mental illness and criminal activity among 207 NYC homeless people. We know from this article that many crimes committed by homeless people are non-violent; however, there are sometimes when homeless people do commit violent crimes. According to this piece, “Fischer and his team didn't find any difference between street homelessness and sheltered homelessness when it came to incidence of non-violent crime, but things were different for violent criminal activity. They found that homeless people bouncing from shelter to shelter were more likely than homeless people living on the street to commit violent crimes, such as robbery and assault.” (Fisher et al, 2008). They concluded that this was because the homeless people who have to move from shelter to shelter often are confined in a small space with many other people and there is bound to be conflict and violence in a stressful situation like that.

In our research, we have examined what policies or interventions that large cities/counties have implemented in order to help reduce homeless crime. To show this we have examined the Main Street project and how LAPD has implemented the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) in order to help reduce homeless crime/violence at homeless encampments such as LA’s “Skid Row” (Berk, 2009). From this piece, we find that these implementations effectively helped aid and gave direct benefits to the homeless. In the Press Democrat publication, Payne writes, “Members of the Homeless Outreach Team program go into encampments or meet the victims through referrals from social services agencies. They’ve handed out more than 300 vouchers for crucial needs such as food, temporary lodging in motels, new clothes or bus and cab fare.” This is one of the ways that advocates are trying to help the homeless. Through our research we have found that many of the resources offered are easily accessible for homeless people who have a car and can stay in Safe Parking. Another resource that’s offered here in Sonoma County is The Living Room, a place in Santa Rosa that offers a safe day time place for homeless and women and children at risk. People who receive vouchers can stay at places like this as well. We have also found that some homeless people have even connections to homeless advocates throughout the years and this is also a tremendous help. However, for homeless people on the street, it is much more difficult to access the resources that are being provided. There are also limitations/barriers that homeless victims face when trying to gain access to these resources. For example, Payne goes onto to explain that to qualify for the program mentioned in this article, “people must have a physical or emotional disability or drug or alcohol addiction, in addition to being a crime victim.” This is just one example of the restrictions that make some programs/resources accessible to some. Payne’s article helps provide insight on how the Sonoma County District Attorney’s Office is working with advocates from these programs to put in place policies and resources to help homeless people on the street reintegrate back into our community and this is a good start.

Lastly, we found, that many homeless victims of crime and homeless suspects of crime are also mentally unstable. Being homeless and mentally ill is challenging within itself due to the fact that some people may be too unstable to even ask for help. One specific news article that we found titled, “How homelessness, mental illness and crime converge,” written by Venkat, discusses homelessness and mental illness related to crime in Los Angeles. This article shows the first seven months of 2019, which observed 155 incidents involving either the suspect or the victim being both homeless and mentally ill. “Combining victims and suspects, this is a 355% increase from the first seven months of 2018...” (Venkat, 2019). Twenty-seven percent of the city’s homeless population suffers from serious mental health disorders. Almost a third of the LA homeless

population suffers from a “serious mental health disorder”. This helped us to understand the relation between homeless people, some of them with mental health issues, being victims or suspects of crimes reported in Los Angeles and how much it has increased in the last year.

Resources Available

The resources that are provided in Sonoma County can only do so much with the money they are given. The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance (HA) program offers two different assistance programs to help with “families pay the costs of temporary shelter, and permanent HA, which helps families pay the security deposit for permanent housing or prevent eviction.” The two types of homeless assistance provided are Temporary and Permanent. The Temporary Homeless assistance “provides a payment of \$85 per day for a family of four or fewer (not exceeding \$145 if adding more family members). This offer aids with “16 consecutive calendar days once in a 12-month period”. Oppose to Permanent Homeless Assistance “helps families secure housing by providing security deposits costs, including last month’s rent, or helps families maintain housing by providing up to two months of rent arrearages, but a permanent HA payment may not exceed two times the total rent amount and the monthly rent cannot exceed 80 percent of the total monthly household income and must be paid to a landlord in the business of renting property”. In this program there are exceptions depending on what is going on within one’s personal life (i.e. domestic abuse/ violence, mental illness, and/or natural disaster beyond the family’s control).

Now, the CalWORKs homeless assistance program is not the only program that is helping to finance families there is also the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP). The California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council created the program called HEAP. This program is funded through the block grant program (\$500 million) and is “designed to provide direct assistance to cities and countries to address the homelessness crisis throughout California” This program splits up the distribution in three ways: “Continuum of Care- Based on Point in Time Count Ranges, Continuum of Care- Based on Percent of Homeless Population, City/ City that is also a County- Based on Population” these three programs are funded up to \$250,000,000. In addition, HEAP provides “immediate emergency assistance to people experiencing homelessness or those at imminent risk of homelessness” including the activities that are provided “must directly benefit the target population.” HEAP does have deadlines, usually by the start of the year, followed by an application (separate application for youth).

Similar to the previous program COTS (Housing, Meals, and Medical) provides similar care, “All of our services are designed to give clients a chance at finding and keeping housing”. Not only that, but COTs is also funded by their popular sponsors (i.e. Clover, Reed’s, Century 21, etc.) This program is located in Petaluma, California and provides an on-site health center/ case management program that includes services for people who may need those services that cannot get them as easily as one should (i.e. primary care, therapy for stress/ depression/ mental illness). Adding on, this shelter provides healthy meals cooked in their kitchen allowing for people to get good nutrition.

Next, according to the California Department of Housing and Community Development, there is No Place Like Home Program that provides “funding for permanent supportive housing...mental health services and community-based supportive services.” not only that but the funding or “assistance type is “loans to countries* or their housing development sponsors.” within

this program the funds available are up to \$190 million for the noncompetitive allocation and up to \$1.8 billion for competitive allocation. The larger cities are offered more money than smaller cities, but they do provide the most they can. There are deadlines and applications to fill out when entering this program, including technical assistance and training pdf files to make the process easier.

Lastly, on the Santa Rosa Resource Guide is the Homeless Action! program. This program makes sure the person first knows their rights as an individual (through the Constitution) and offers contact numbers for shelter/housing through the coordinated entry, day centers, pet care, showers/laundry, and meals. In addition, there are emotional health centers and migrant/ legal services that are present to help individuals/ families that are struggling with homelessness. This resource guide provides many basic needs services and helps many homeless people across the county.

On the other hand, there are many potential resolutions/ for decreasing the homeless population within Sonoma county. For example, SAVS (Sonoma Applied Village Services) provided the idea of Tiny Home Villages. This program would provide shelter (tents, cars, R.V.s etc.) “Each village is secluded for the safety of the residents and each property is individually assessed for the best use.” These 8’X 10’ tiny homes have been a success in Seattle, Washington and many other cities across the nation. In addition, the homes provide a washer/dryer sets, hot water, propane, stovetop kitchen, community TV area, free WIFI, 5 free evening meals a week, shared portable bathrooms, and a donation tent. This program provides many services to people that need basic necessities and the programs are ran by the residents themselves. This is a great way for the community to come together to help one another and provide no barriers for individuals that are having a hard time getting back on their feet.

Another resource, on the sonomacounty.ca.gov website, is a list of coordinated entry system permanent supportive housing site programs that are available that are providing resources for people in need. This website lists Buckelew Programs, for example, Samaritan FACT which is located in East Santa Rosa. This program is for individuals (mainly people struggling with mental illness) and a criminal record is accepted. In addition, there are Catholic Charities that provide Burbank Set Aside Units which are scattered sites helping individuals and families find housing/ provide housing around the county. There is also a list of Committee on the Shelterless known as COTS, Social Advocates for Youth, and Sonoma County Housing Authority that are providing resources for certain individuals and families. These programs are all accepting a criminal record, but that does not deter one’s eligibility. This website helps support our thesis by listing many programs that people can go to when being at risk of homeless while living in Sonoma and what these programs are providing for their people. These programs are also for permanent support and will help as long as one is at risk of being homeless.

Included on the sonomacounty.ca.gov website is a Rapid-rehousing (RRH) Sites. This is an “intervention designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing.” On the other hand, rapid re-housing assistance is offered without preconditions. This RRH program is active in many programs throughout Sonoma County according to sonomacounty.ca.gov these programs being: COTs, North Bay Veterans Resource

Center, Reach for Home, and Committee on the Shelterless. Only COTs does not need a criminal record to proceed with the application process.

Lastly, according to sonomacounty.ca.gov “transitional housing is housing primarily designed to serve deinstitutionalized homeless individuals and other homeless individuals with mental or physical disabilities and homeless families with children.” The sonomacounty.ca.gov website includes the Coordinated Entry System Transitional Housing (TH) Sites. The facilities offering these programs in Sonoma County are Community Action Partnership of Sonoma, Interfaith Shelter Network, North Bay Veterans Resource Center, and Reach For Home. Even though these programs are not permanent for these people that are looking for security, these programs are still offering some type of resource to help the people in need of homes.

Effects of the 2017 Sonoma County Fires

The wildfires that charged Sonoma County and Northern California in October 2017 were monumental and historical events in this area. While the effects of these fires can be seen countywide via the empty lots and half-built houses, one of the biggest impacts was the overall price of a home afterwards. Adam Brinklow notes that in researching housing site Trulia after the fires “in February of 2017, Trulia recorded a median home price of \$699,000 in the county, based on 881 listings. In February of 2018 the median was up to \$780,750, across a spread of 676 homes.” (Brinklow, 2018). With that being said in that short one-year time frame these numbers were taken that the overall median home price surged almost \$80,000 across the board. Some still dispute that the costly home prices in the county have always been here, and that we cannot attribute it to the fires solely, and while that may hold some validity, it is impossible to deny the impact on housing that these fires did cause. With that being said, the cost of housing inevitably does hold an effect on those who are homeless or housing insecure.

A Sonoma County government website titled “Ending Homelessness” noted that there was indeed a 6% increase in homelessness within the years of 2017 to 2018, while prior, from the years of 2011 to 2017, there was a seemingly reversed effect. The cost of housing is one of the largest attributes for many who are on the verge, or already experiencing homelessness. Many residents are simply one lost paycheck or injury away from being homeless, no doubt in part to the cost of living versus living wages at hand. The “Ending Homelessness” board also directs those who are at risk to helpful links or programs that the county or state offers, however while it is great in the scheme of research to see these, it is also not necessarily accessible to all, as for many they may not have access to a phone or the internet. (Homeless Services).

Another issue among the fires is that when people who were never at risk of homelessness suddenly were without homes, naturally resources for those currently homeless were spread thin for some time to combat the new homeless population at hand, and many current renters were removed from their homes to create homes for their landlords, or their landlords friends or family who may have lost their home. For a long time many parts of the Bay Area were deemed as having a high homelessness population, and Sonoma County is now up there with not only one of the worst in the Bay Area or the state of California, but the country as a whole (Espinoza, 2018). According to Martin Espinoza for the Press Democrat, as of December 2018, we had a homeless population of 2,657 in Sonoma County, with 715 of these people being defined as “chronically homeless,” meaning without housing for a year or more. On top of this the county also has a high

population of “unaccompanied youth” living either in shelters or on the street. There has been a shortage of permanent housing for those who are already homeless, and after the 2017 wildfires there became a shortage of housing for just about anybody. Many activists and advocates in Sonoma County continue to attribute much of this to again, the high cost of homes and living, versus the “living” wages here at hand. Espinoza also noted the overall 6% increase in homelessness between 2017 and 2018, which helps validate our numbers, while Mary Callahan from the Press Democrat in a separate article notes the 6% increase once more (Callahan, 2018). Callahan reports on a survey done that 5% of homeless interviewees attributed the 2017 fires as their main cause of homelessness, and that 64% of the population was found to be living on the streets with only 36%, or just over a third living in shelters. This number is concerning as while we may technically have so many programs for those experiencing homelessness, it is evidently not enough, or they are not being utilized correctly. Many who have not experienced homelessness may not realize that helping the problem is much more than just putting a roof over one's head.

While notably homelessness has been an issue especially in the state of California for quite some time, the lack of housing, affordable housing, or simply in general housing, grew after Sonoma County lost approximately 5,300 homes in 2017. Doug Johnson, Fox News, interviewed a man who was living in his vehicle in Santa Rosa on a road where there are several others in the same situation as him, having a vehicle to sleep, in made him one of the “lucky” ones. Even as a homeless person, this man noted his own view of the fact that homelessness did blatantly increase after the fires that ravaged neighborhoods here (Johnson, 2018). Jennie Holmes from Catholic Charities in the area again noted this strong 6% increase we have seen in homelessness on the anniversary of the fires. Holmes noted that people who are now entering the rental market now are inevitably pushing those in the lower income sector out. Areas that maybe before these fires that could have been deemed undesirable by those living in areas such as Fountain grove, or Larkfield/Wikiup, now became the only options for some people in the city of Santa Rosa, unless they relocated to surrounding areas such as Windsor, Healdsburg, Rohnert Park, Petaluma.

While today just over 2 years later, we see a fair amount of progress with homes being rebuilt, but it is simply not enough. For every rebuilt home, we still see empty lots nearby, and costs of homes and rentals have not subsided much. Even recently we saw another area of Sonoma County burn, and while the amount of homes lost was minuscule in comparison to the Tubbs fire, the losses are nonetheless still removing more housing from the already short market that had been there. Even when we look at those needing to evacuate, where is someone who is already homeless free to go when there is a mass evacuation and fire around them yet again? While the Tubbs fire was declared at such a high emergency level that many insurance companies had to waive their deductibles for victims of the fires, or those who had to evacuate for quite some time, however this is something that has not yet been offered to those who were evacuees of the Kincade fire this last month in October 2019. With that being said, those homeless or not homeless who were forced to leave may not receive funds back if they did not hit that amount, and those without insurance are also in a loss for that. With yearly fires burning homes in the state, we have to come up with something better to combat the loss of housing at hand, and ways to help those who are already on the streets, as they are essentially put on the backburner after people are found newly homeless after a disaster and prioritized.

Study Design

Method

We will be performing in-depth interviews with experts in the field of homeless advocacy and those that work for current housing resources. We will also interview those who have experienced homelessness personally to obtain first-person accounts of navigating the current resources available in Sonoma County. We will study and compare the expert responses and opinions on what policies are successful, cost-effective, and could be implemented immediately in Sonoma County to serve our homeless population. Using this method, we will be able to gather qualitative data from the in-depth interviews and analyze the expert opinions along with the personal experiences to extrapolate the best policies to recommend for implementation.

Sample Size and Demographics

The in-depth interview sampling will be done using snowball sampling. Our initial sampling population will be provided by our Research Advisor, Adrienne Lauby, who will also be an interview subject herself, due to her expertise on the topic of Homeless Advocacy. By gaining introductions through a respected member of the Advocacy community, we should garner the most responses from people who are willing to be interviewed. Our goal is to network with these initial interviews and complete 20 interviews by the time our deadline arrives. The interviewees are members of the target population whose opinions will determine our recommendations for which housing efforts should be implemented.

Procedure: In-Depth Interview

To gather qualitative data, we will perform 15 – 20 in-depth interviews with participants with advocacy backgrounds or that have experienced homelessness. We will sample them purposively, using the snowball sampling method. Our goal is to find respondents with wildly differing backgrounds to allow for data from multiple points of view on effective ways to reduce homelessness. Sample saturation would be unlikely with the limited sampling population, but the data gathered will be critical to determining which programs could be implemented immediately to help elevate the quality of life for our current homeless population. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, we will explore what motivations the advocates have, what they believe the main causes of homelessness in Sonoma County are, what programs they believe are effective and why, what program they would ultimately choose to implement, and whether or not they believe that the homeless population can be effectively reduced or eliminated. For those interviewees who have experienced homelessness, we will also use a semi-structured interview schedule to allow them to explain the circumstances that led to their homelessness, their demographics, what programs they found accessible and helpful, what they believe the causes of homelessness in Sonoma County are, and what program they would like to see implemented, among other topics. We will leave the schedule open to other topics depending on what input the interviewees would like to share.

Strengths and Limitations

The reasoning behind using in-depth interviews for this research study is due to the high external validity of interview data; the ability to ask follow-up questions and discover the motivations and opinions of experts and those who have experienced homelessness could not be

captured as effectively using survey data or ethnography. One limitation of this data collection method is the time cost of setting up interviews, interviewing respondents, transcribing the interview responses, and analyzing the findings. A second limitation, especially with the population we hope to interact with is seeking out respondents, and having enough respondents willing to answer truthfully. Our hope is that there is enough desire to draw more attention to this matter and that will be motivation enough to participate. Social desirability bias and the ability of different interviewers to elicit differing responses cause the reliability of interview data to be fairly low.

Data Analysis

Due to unavoidable circumstances and a natural disaster that led to the mandatory evacuation of over 180,000 Sonoma County residents, we were unable to complete the targeted 20 in-depth interviews in our available timeframe. We were able to complete 13 interviews; 10 with advocates and those working for businesses that serve the homeless community, as well as 3 currently or former homeless residents of Sonoma County. Over 10+ hours of interview data were transcribed and analyzed by our research group.

In a utopian society, it would take a single solution to eradicate homelessness; our research has shown that there is no one effective solution. Seven out of ten Advocate interviewees mentioned that they thought that a mixture of Tiny Houses or self-sanctioned Hut Villages could be an option for a temporary resolution, along with Safe RV and car parking lots. It is understood that none of these programs would necessarily be permanent, but they would be effective until more permanent housing programs can be implemented with the arrival of funding from California's No Place Like Home program.

We found that the Advocates were split on whether Housing First was an effective way to reduce Sonoma County's homeless population. Five of the Advocates recommended the Housing First as an effective way to create a significant reduction, three of the Advocates were skeptical or against it, and two believe that the resolution of homelessness is too complex to apply a single program. It seemed that the consensus among the group was that Housing First could not work as a standalone solution and half of the advocates believed that the Housing First model needed to use supportive housing, or housing given freely without requirements of sobriety or gainful employment as an expectation of continued shelter, while the other half of the advocates were of a mindset that there needed to be stipulations for continued housing. This is an emotionally charged, multi-faceted aspect of the homelessness discussion that would need to be discussed by advocates and those in legislation. Case studies from successful implementation of Housing First models would need to be compared to determine what would work best in Sonoma County.

In regard to who holds responsibility for providing for the homeless population, eleven out of the thirteen respondents agreed that it is a community's responsibility to come together and provide basic necessities for those experiencing insecure housing. Not one respondent said that they would implement the urban-style Housing First plan (every person gets a small brick and mortar room) in Sonoma County.

The biggest trend seen throughout the responses was the concerns towards the lack of continued transitional assistance from the life on the streets into permanent housing. Eleven out of

thirteen respondents stressed the importance of the needs of the individual. The reality is that you lose all sense of security and self while living on the streets. Restoring shelter is only the first step to reducing the homeless population. Without providing wraparound services like social assistance, case management, mental health services, childcare services, public transportation services, etc., it is simply applying a patch to the problem instead of the finding and treating root cause.

Recommendation/Conclusion

Based off of our in-depth research interviews and data analysis, we have come up with several viable options and suggestions to help reduce the homeless population in Sonoma County. First and foremost, we have acknowledged that to effectively reduce this vulnerable group it will not be a one step, one agency solution. It will require input and support from multiple local advocacy groups working with local city and county officials to create an integrated taskforce to address this humanitarian crisis. We, as a community, have to come together and work to solve this multi-faceted issue. There is no doubt that Sonoma County has the funding and manpower to implement effective strategies and practices to successfully reduce and serve those experiencing homelessness, but it will take compromise and a willingness to look beyond individual agendas and address the core issues. The need for effective collaboration is something most, if not all, of our interview respondents stressed. What we believe would be a successful way to achieve this goal would be to create an integrated council of representatives from local advocacy groups and city and county representatives to work together in the brainstorming and planning processes. By including representatives from the local advocacy groups as well as city and county officials, we hope to create an environment for successful collaboration towards a common goal instead of many different groups approaching these issues from different (and often opposing) angles. By making sure that everyone is approaching the issues in a coordinated way, redundancy and inefficient use of funds and manpower may be avoided.

It is a well-known fact that one of the largest contributing factors to homelessness is the high cost of living in Sonoma County. While we can't immediately change the economic face of Sonoma County, there are still ways to work towards changing the trend. Bringing up rent control measures in city council meetings and addressing the community's concerns about rising cost of living factors could start the proverbial ball rolling towards making life in Sonoma County affordable again.

In terms of immediate housing measure implementation, one of the most effective actions Sonoma County, as a whole, could do is to loosen permitting requirements and building codes for Tiny Homes and Huts. There are plenty of County-owned areas that could be utilized for small villages of huts or basic Tiny Homes, as well as private properties with owners willing to allow the placement of huts or Tiny Homes. The coding and permitting required for these types of dwellings need to be loosened or redefined to allow more people to be sheltered. Homeless Action! had built 8 basic huts, large enough for an adult to sleep in, to be protected from the elements, and had them on a private citizen's property. They were told by authorities (Firemen were the messengers) that they were not up to code and that it was better for people to be sleeping on the street than in a basic shelter. This is unacceptable. Something needs to be done immediately to allow for basic shelter, possibly a liability waiver or such, to loosen the requirements when it comes to protecting the homeless from the elements.

City- or county-sanctioned properties for Safe Tent areas, Safe Car Lots, and Safe Long-Term RV parking also need to be created. We propose that they are spread throughout all the voting districts to keep County Supervisors from fearing voter retribution and to keep the headcount lower at each location. Several of our advocates noted that communal living spaces should be kept at a maximum of about 30-40 people to be most effective to maintain. There should not be a single Sonoma County neighborhood that is not doing its part to care for this part of our population. There should also not be a single Sonoma County resident sleeping on the ground without the option of shelter; it is simply inexcusable. If someone has a vehicle that they are able to sleep or live in, there should be safe parking areas that have bathrooms and waste management services for them to use.

The main challenge in effectively reducing homelessness does not seem to be finding shelter for every person. The long-term challenge is understanding that putting someone in a brick and mortar home straight from living on the street or shelter and expecting them to figure out how to reintegrate into society successfully is not feasible. What we heard from many interview respondents is that those who have experienced chronic homelessness have a much harder time acclimating to accepted societal standards. For those living in non-permanent or transitional housing, we need to have supportive services at every site – restrooms and showers for the sanctioned tent cities or Safe Parking lots along with waste management; mental health services, addiction support, and case managers to help people navigate the social service system, apply for jobs, and secure permanent housing.

Our final proposal is, in addition to our current housing sites, funds are secured from city or county budgets to create additional group shelters similar to ones already created, but require that they, like the Safe Parking lots, are spread throughout all the voting districts. This will be to keep residents from complaining about the myth of “lowered property values” to County Supervisors and to keep the headcount lower at each location. The goal is to keep the residence at a maximum of about 30-40 people; this ensures that everyone is able to acclimate healthily and receive the treatment and resources they may need. Additionally, there should be more specialized housing; families, singles of the same sex, at-risk teens, and those with mental health or addiction issues should have safe housing with people in similar situations. This would also allow for efficiency in the provision of social services and create a sense of understanding from other residents and case managers.

Sonoma County and the individual cities therein own enough property to provide for all these housing options. It is a matter of getting policies and permitting adjusted so that we can create safe places for people without having to jump through the current permitting and building code rigmarole. While ideally, we would prefer to have more permanent housing such as tiny homes or actual homes for people to live in, the options of huts, tents, or vehicle encampments can address the first issue at hand – getting people off of the streets. Once the funding from Gerry Brown’s No Place Like Home program has been received and put into effect, hopefully we will see less need for these housing sites. Until then, we must provide basic shelter to those who need it.

We acknowledge that there is no one solution, nor is there any easy solution, but to take no immediate action is socially and morally unacceptable. It is up to the those in positions of power

to lead by example and to help change the public perception that has dehumanized these members of our community by proving that they are worth standing up for and providing the basic humanitarian rights of shelter, security, and basic social services.

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Addendum One

Homelessness Advocate Interview Guide

I am conducting research about homelessness in Sonoma County and the possible policies that could affect the current and future homeless population for my Investigative Sociology class with Dr. Peter Phillips at Sonoma State University. I am going to ask you questions about your experiences with homelessness and your opinions on policies and their potential implementation in Sonoma County. Your identity will be kept confidential unless you verbally authorize me to include it in my research; if a recording device is used, the recording will be disposed of after completion of the class. You can skip any questions or end the interview at any time. If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact my professor. Here is his contact information: (give interview subject Prof. Phillips's information). Are you comfortable with these guidelines? Would you prefer to be kept anonymous or may I use your name in my research paper?

2. How old are you, what is your ethnic background, and what gender do you identify as?
3. Have you had any personal experience with homelessness? Have you experienced it, observed it, or are you an advocate?
4. In your opinion, what are the main causes of homelessness in Sonoma County?
5. Who do you think should be responsible for those experiencing homelessness? Their family? Civic Groups? The cities in which they reside? The County? State? Federal government?
6. Do you think that there are adequate programs in place to serve the homeless population in Sonoma County? What would you consider the minimum that should be offered to those experiencing homelessness?
7. Finland has reduced homelessness incredibly by using a Housing First model; housing is provided without having to qualify or complete any programs first. By providing housing first, health and social problems can be solved much easier. Considering Finland's success with this model, do you believe that a similar program would be feasible to introduce in the United States on a State or Federal level? Why or why not?
8. Oakland, Ca has a city-sanctioned tent encampment that has shown promise in stabilizing homeless individuals by creating a self-governed environment with basic necessities like showers, bathrooms, mobile medical clinics, and other social services. What are your opinions on the efficacy of programs like this one? Do you believe that Tiny House Villages or RV parking lots would be more effective? Why or why not?
9. If you had the power to implement one program in Sonoma County to help those experiencing homelessness, what would it be? Why?
10. What are the best practices that have been implemented in other cities or countries are you aware of that have been successful in reducing homelessness?
11. Do you believe that homelessness in Sonoma County can be effectively reduced? What kind of involvement/commitment would it take from the general population?

Interview Guide for those Experiencing/Have Experienced Homelessness:

I am conducting research about homelessness in Sonoma County and the possible policies that could affect the current and future homeless population for my Investigative Sociology class with Dr. Peter Phillips at Sonoma State University. I am going to ask you questions about your experiences with homelessness and your opinions on policies and their potential implementation in Sonoma County. Your identity will be kept confidential unless you verbally authorize me to include it in my research; if a recording device is used, the recording will be disposed of after completion of the class. You can skip any questions or end the interview at any time. If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact my professor. Here is his contact information: (give interview subject Prof. Phillips's information). Are you comfortable with these guidelines? Would you prefer to be kept anonymous or may I use your name in my research paper?

2. How old are you, what is your ethnic background, and what gender do you identify as?
3. What is your personal experience with homelessness? Are you currently experiencing it? If you have experienced homelessness in the past, what were the circumstances and how did you overcome it?
4. What programs did you find easy to access and why? Which programs were difficult to navigate and why?
5. In your opinion, what are the main causes of homelessness in Sonoma County?
6. Who do you think should be responsible for those experiencing homelessness? Their family? Civic Groups? The cities in which they reside? The County? State? Federal government?
7. Do you think that there are adequate programs in place to serve the homeless population in Sonoma County? What would you consider the minimum that should be offered to those experiencing homelessness?
8. If you had the power to implement one program in Sonoma County to help those experiencing homelessness, what would it be? Why?
9. Do you know of any other cities or countries that have effectively reduced homelessness? If yes, what programs did they use?
10. Do you believe that homelessness in Sonoma County can be effectively diminished? What do you think it would take to achieve that goal?
11. Where you homeless during the 2017 Sonoma County Fires? If so, do you think there were enough resources provided to you and others during and after the fires?
12. How has your experiences with homelessness affected your worldview, and more specifically your view of Sonoma county?