

Homeless

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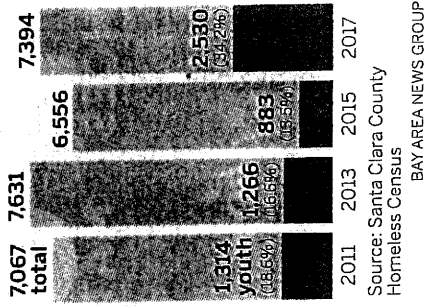
ing more than in previous years, but I was really surprised at how much it increased," said Hilary Barroga, who manages county systems aimed at ending homelessness. "It made me really angry that there are this many young people on the street. And it also made me very motivated."

The count is always an imperfect science, but Barroga said she believes it to be "as accurate a count as we can get." Officials worked closely with school districts to factor in known homeless students, and increased the number of counters on youth-specific street teams from 18 to 34.

Sparky Harlan, director of the Bill Wilson Center, which sends squads out to count youth, said that while she expected an increase, she was "taken aback" by the results, adding that she doesn't think the numbers are exaggerated.

"We're counting very

HOMELESS YOUTH
The number of kids and young adults living homeless in Silicon Valley skyrocketed in a biennial count, accounting for more than a third of the total homeless population.



similar to how other communities are counting," she said. "We may have been more thorough on the youth count than in the past, but I don't think the numbers are wildly off — our people aren't making them up."

This year's tally of young homeless will be used as a federal baseline for future counts, and many coun-

ties paid particular attention to that population. But Santa Clara County's numbers still stand out: San Francisco's youth population accounted for about a quarter of the homeless total in 2013 but are now less than 20 percent. Los Angeles' percentage is similar. Alameda County, where officials say a massive 40 percent jump in overall homelessness was due to more intensive count techniques, found 27 percent were youth.

Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, cautioned that such comparisons may not paint an accurate picture.

"The quality of the youth counts and methodologies is so all over the map, we don't really compare rates across communities," she said. "It's apples and oranges. But as a baseline, once it's established and done the same way, that's apples to apples."

Santa Clara County saw an overall 14 percent drop from 2013 to 2015, but this year's rebound to nearly

7,400 homeless people makes up for most of that dip. And the youth population more than accounts for the rise.

Shahera Hyatt, director of the California Homeless Youth Project, said there have been increases in the youth count across the state.

"In part, it's the better methodology, but there's also an organic reason that it's happening," she said. "A lot of it has to do with the lack of affordable housing and gentrification — it's really hard to afford market rate rent as an adult, much less someone who is transitioning into adulthood."

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors President Dave Cortese said times have drastically changed since the days when a young person could venture out on their own, get a job and find a place to live.

"I don't think people of my generation understand that it's just not doable anymore," he said. "A generation ago someone could literally find a room with a

roommate for \$75 a month. Now you can't find that for \$750 a month. They're just out of luck — that's the new reality."

Jennifer Loving of Destination: Home said there have been tremendous recent gains, with 1,700 people getting into permanent housing last year.

And on the horizon will be the homes created from the \$950 million Measure A, which will issue bonds starting this fall. The goal is to create 4,800 affordable units over the next decade.

The point-in-time count reflected continued improvement for groups that have been singled out in the past for assistance: Homelessness among veterans declined, as did chronic homelessness and the number of people living in encampments.

"The system for ending homelessness is stronger than ever," said Loving, "but rents continue to rise across the Bay Area, and the people becoming homeless, that's still an open spigot."

Counting youth is more difficult than adults. According to a 2013 report,

"Hidden in Plain Sight, An Assessment of Youth Inclusion in Point-in-Time Counts of California's Unsheltered Homeless Population," young people tend to move between locations on any given day and avoid services, particularly those oriented toward homeless adults.

"I do see they create their own little enclaves and hide in the midst of the larger group," said Pastor Scott Wagers of CHAM Deliverance Ministry. "Maybe there's a different stigma, maybe they're runaways or don't want to be visible. But yes, there's definitely more of them."

Barroga said the number of homeless minors is particularly troubling, with 500 on the streets at any given time.

"You never want anyone to be homeless," she said, "but especially not someone who hasn't even started their life yet. It seems like such an unfair shake for those kids."

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