



Sonoma County Community Development Commission
1440 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-4107

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Commission*

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Barbie Robinson,
MPP, JD, CHC
Executive Director

October 1, 2020

The Honorable Bradford J. DeMeo, Presiding Judge
Sonoma County Superior Court
Hall of Justice
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, California

RE: Response to the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury 2019-2020 Final Report

Dear Honorable Judge DeMeo:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Civil Grand Jury Report.

The following is the Community Development Commission's response to the Report titled: **"HOMELESS YOUTH, Sonoma County In Dubious First Place"**.

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 707-565-4777.

Sincerely,

Barbie Robinson, MPP, JD, CHC

Director, Department of Health Services

Interim Executive Director, Community Development Commission

707.565.4777

barbie.robinson@sonoma-county.org

cc: The Grand Jury Foreperson Ronald Chestnut
The Board of Supervisors
The County Administrator Bratton
The County Clerk Deva Marie Proto

Grand Jury Report: Homeless Youth

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Homeless Youth

Report Date: August 1, 2020

Response by: Barbie Robinson Title: Interim Executive Director

Agency/Department Name: Sonoma County Community Development Commission

FINDINGS: F1, F2, F8, F10

I (we) agree with the findings numbered _____

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F8, F10

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS: R2, R3, R9, R12

Recommendations numbered: R9 have been implemented.

(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

Recommendations numbered: R2, R12 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

Recommendations numbered: _____ Require(s) further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.)

Recommendations numbered: R3 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

(Attach an explanation.)

Date: September 30, 2020 Signed: Barbie L. Robinson

Number of pages attached: 6 total (cover letter, GJ Report form, Findings and Recommendations)

FINDINGS F1, F2, F8, F10

- F1. The critical shortage of emergency shelter beds for the homeless youth population limits the County's ability to serve this population adequately.**

Response: The Community Development Commission disagree partially with this finding.

Occupancy of all shelter beds varies throughout the year, but typically rests between 80-90% on a given night for a total of approximately 70 beds (prior to the pandemic). Data also shows that 172 youths spent nights in adult shelters in 2019 for short periods of time, and that County shelters continue to have available beds during the winter. There is capacity to serve this population, however, the CDC recognizes that best practice for successfully housing homeless youth is to shelter them with other youth populations rather than with adult populations and in non-shelter settings.

Our goal is to advocate for additional investments and appropriate housing solutions with a targeted focus on transitional aged youth.

- F2. Shelter beds for homeless youth are currently concentrated in Santa Rosa, leaving inadequate services in other parts of the County.**

Response: The Community Development Commission disagrees partially with this finding.

Over the years, our homeless count results have shown that homeless youth tend to congregate in County central, particularly in the City of Santa Rosa. This is due in part to service partners located in Santa Rosa and access to public transportation. We agree that there is a need for youth sheltering in other parts of the County. The Commission will work with youth homeless providers and other stakeholders to identify where youth are concentrated currently. The Commission will also utilize data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and the 2020 Homeless Count to identify youth hotspots. This will assist staff with mapping out where additional shelter beds are needed. Through the Governor's 100-Day Challenge, transition age youth (TAY) providers and other stakeholders will design a strategy to take bold action to house and shelter TAY in 100 days.

- F8. The share of funding for youth homeless programs is disproportionately smaller than the relative size of the homeless youth subpopulation.**

Response: The Community Development Commission disagrees wholly with this finding.

Over the past two years the County and the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council (LC) have made significant investments in youth homeless programs. In 2019 and 2020 the County and LC invested \$2 million in funding for services and nearly \$1 million in additional capital funding into the program. These represent the highest investments in youth homeless programs over the past ten years. Youth funding for both Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP) were both far higher than the minimum request to the State of California. Below is a breakdown of funding in the last two years.

In the 2019 Homeless Survey, 540 or approximately 18% of the homeless population were TAY. With input from the Homeless Youth Task Force, comprised of youth and youth providers, and approval from the Leadership Council, 18% of total homeless services funding was allocated to youth.

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Additionally, preliminary results for the 2020 Homeless Survey show that the TAY population is 47% lower; however, the Commission has still allocated 19% of the total homeless services budget to TAY in the Fiscal Year 20-21 budget.

Homeless Services Funding for Transition Age Youth

Service Category	FY 2019-2020 Dollars	% of total	FY 2020-2021 Dollars	% of total
Permanent Supportive Housing	\$159,778.00	13%	\$111,104.12	12%
Homelessness Prevention	105,000.00	9%	30,000.00	3%
Rapid Re-Housing	462,866.00	38%	369,587.62	41%
Street Outreach	304,217.00	25%	211,542.40	24%
Emergency Shelter	200,000.00	16%	169,215.46	19%
TAY Services Budget	1,231,861.00	100%	891,449.60	100%

Total Homeless Services Funding	6,704,845.00	100%	4,715,003.17	100%
TAY Services Funding percentage of total	Approx. 18%*		Approx. 19%**	

* **FY 2019-2020** Total Homeless Services Funding: \$6,704,845 – 18% dedicated to youth services.

** **FY 2020-2021** Total Homeless Services Funding: \$4,715,003.17 – 19% dedicated to youth services.

The current strategic plan being developed for Home Sonoma County Leadership Council incorporates youth feedback into the overall plan for funding, policy, and Coordinated Entry recommendations. Youth will also be critical in providing input into funding decisions by the Leadership Council in future funding allocations.

F10. The County's failure to fund a Youth Action Board has likely contributed to its lack of success in obtaining HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.

Response: The Community Development Commission disagrees wholly with this finding.

The lack of a Youth Action Board (YAB) may have contributed to the County not obtaining the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program grant, but this is not definitive. In fact, in the HUD debriefing document, the Continuum of Care (CoC) Scored 90.92 out of 100 points; in the Youth Collaboration section, it scored 9.08 out of 10 points and higher than the median score of 7.42 for all applications.

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RECOMMENDATIONS: R2, R3, R9, R12

- R2. Sonoma County Community Development Commission increase the number of shelter beds for homeless youth, keeping in mind the needs for safe space for young people, by February 28, 2021. (F1)**

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented by February 28, 2021.

New funds will need to be deployed for additional shelter beds for youth. This could include Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) CARES funds which would allow CDC to pay for additional shelter beds from local shelter providers. Unfortunately, Federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funds cannot be utilized for emergency shelter, however, our current Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention funds included a 5% set-aside for youth.

Data shows that 172 youths spent nights in adult shelters in 2019 for short periods of time and County shelters continue to have available beds during the winter. Occupancy of shelter beds varies throughout the year, but typically rests between 80-90% on a given night for a total of approximately 70 beds (prior to the pandemic). CoC staff will outreach to shelter providers to prioritize additional beds for youth in adult shelters.

Commission staff also propose engaging youth via the Youth Action Board (when operational) to advise the Leadership Council on ways to implement additional shelter beds.

- R3. Sonoma County Community Development Commission ensure that shelter beds for young people are available in all areas of the County with a homeless youth population, by February 28, 2021. (F2)**

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

By February 28, 2021, the Commission will engage homeless youth to develop strategies on where additional shelter beds might be prioritized in other areas of the County. Further analysis will be required to secure, fund or develop sheltering, whether temporary or permanent supportive housing.

Between now and February 28, 2021, an interim approach the CDC can take will be to request existing providers to set aside beds for youth in areas such as South County (Petaluma), and youth beds in our winter shelters in Guerneville and Santa Rosa.

However, there are no year-round adult shelters in West County (Guerneville) or North County (Healdsburg/Cloverdale), which means that other interventions such as shared housing and Mainstream Vouchers might be utilized in areas without shelter facilities.

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- R9. Sonoma County Community Development Commission allocate funds to homeless youth programs and services proportionate to the size of the subpopulation in the most recent census data, when not otherwise constrained by restrictions on state and federal funds, for the FY 2021-22 budget cycle. (F8)**

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

It is currently the policy of the Commission to allocate State and Federal homeless dollars to programs and services proportionate to the percentage of subpopulations that compose the homeless count. Commission staff will allocate available State and Federal funds in the FY 2021-22 budget to the most recent census data. In order to expeditiously prepare an estimate of funds, Commission staff will utilize 2020 Homeless Count data. It should be noted that the 2020 Count reflects a decrease of 45% in the youth count due to efforts already in place to reduce homelessness.

- R12. Sonoma County Community Development Commission establish and budget for a Youth Action Board to improve the chances of federal funding through HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, by February 28, 2021. (F10)**

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The establishment of a Youth Action Board (YAB) as part of the Home Sonoma County Leadership Model has been proposed. Commission staff will partner with youth providers (Social Advocates for Youth, TLC Child and Family Services, Community Support Network, and VOICES, as well as Child Welfare and the AB12 Cohort) to develop a YAB by June 30, 2021.

The YAB will receive staffing support as well as funding for food/stipends for monthly meetings and will report to the Home Sonoma Leadership Council.