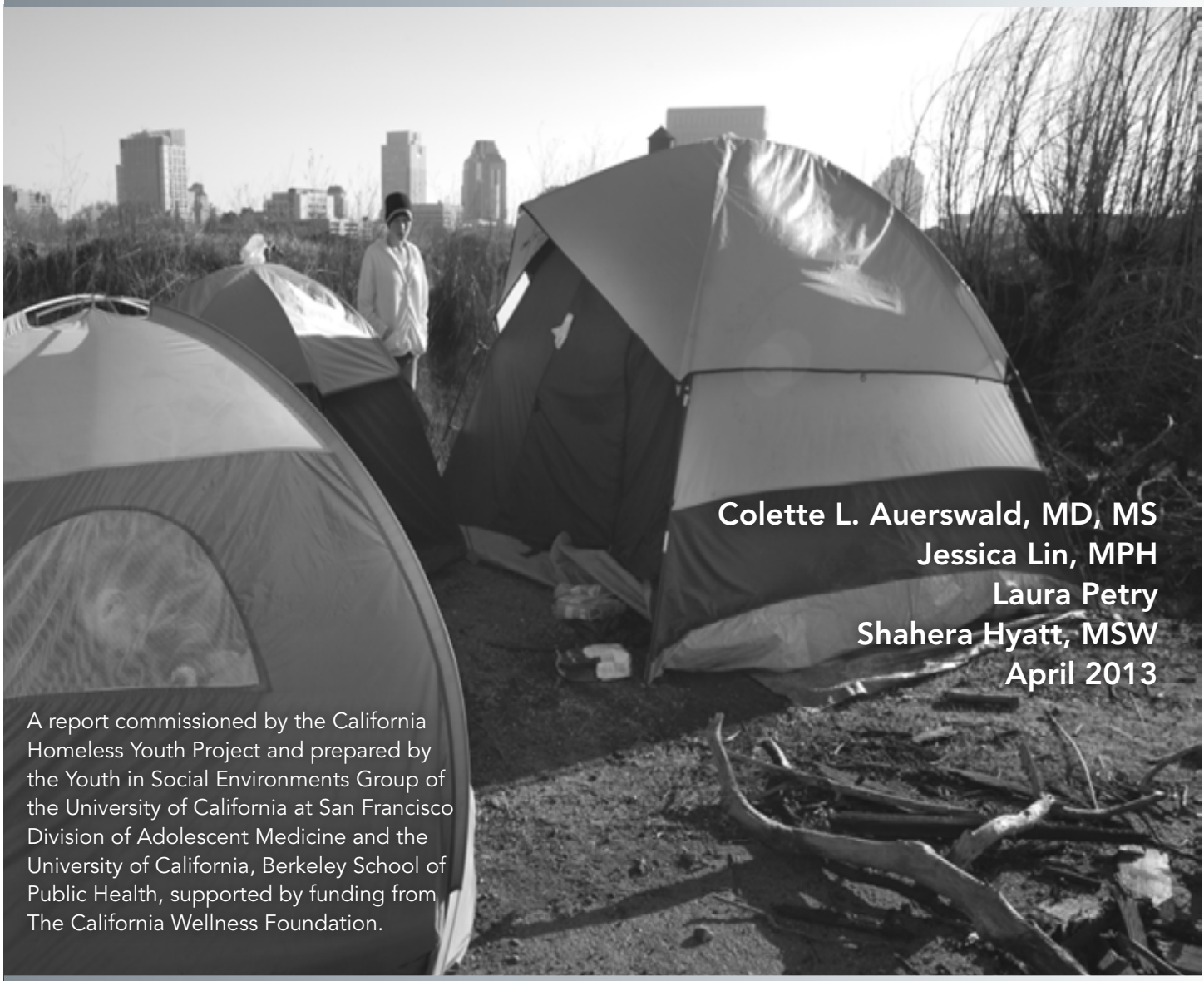
california homeless youthproject

*voices from the street*

SPECIAL TOPICS

# Hidden in Plain Sight: An Assessment of Youth Inclusion in Point-in-Time Counts of California's Unsheltered Homeless Population




Colette L. Auerswald, MD, MS
Jessica Lin, MPH
Laura Petry
Shahera Hyatt, MSW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CA Homeless Youth Project • CA Research Bureau • CA State Library
900 N Street, Suite 300 • Sacramento, CA 95814 • (916) 653-8722 • cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov

## About the Authors

**Colette Auerswald, MD, MS**, is an Associate Professor at the University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine and the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health. She is a pediatrician specialized in adolescent medicine and principal investigator of the Youth in Social Environments Group (Y-SE). She has been engaged in community-based research regarding the health of homeless youth in San Francisco for sixteen years. Her research interests include the study of the contribution of cultural and social factors to HIV and STD-related behaviors in marginalized youth populations (including homeless youth, low-income youth of color, and LGBTQ youth in San Francisco, and street children in East Africa); the sampling of hard-to-reach populations; the role of social networks in adolescent health; and the use of mixed qualitative and quantitative methods in adolescent health research.

**Jessica Lin, MPH**, is a research analyst at the University of California, San Francisco and project coordinator of the Youth in Social Environments Group. She has over a decade of experience working in public health services and research with vulnerable populations, including work as an investigator regarding the health of homeless youth, as an evaluator of sexuality education curricula for adolescents in California, and as an outreach worker with men who have sex with men, low-income adolescents, and injection drug users.

**Laura Petry** is a graduate student in Management and Planning at the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare and research intern at the Youth in Social Environments Group. With over 7 years of experience in social services, her work includes the design and implementation of programs for children and youth affected by chronic poverty, incarceration, and the child welfare system. She has served as a case manager for homeless youth in Hollywood, and supported the creation of a transitional housing program for foster youth in Alameda County.

**Shahera Hyatt, MSW**, is the Executive Director of the California Homeless Youth Project, a research and policy initiative of the California Research Bureau focusing on educating policymakers on the needs of homeless youth in California. Hyatt chairs the Sacramento Gay & Lesbian Center's Homeless Youth Initiative, and is a member of the National Alliance to End Homelessness' National Advisory Council on LGBT youth. Her publications include policy briefs on LGBT and sexually exploited homeless youth in California, as well as the nation's first state action plan on ending youth homelessness.

## About the Project

The California Homeless Youth Project (HYP) is a multi-year research and policy initiative of the California Research Bureau and the California State Library. The HYP highlights issues and solutions for youth ages twelve to twenty-four who are living "on the edge" of homelessness or are currently homeless in California. In particular, the HYP engages these youth directly in research and policy discussions, giving voice to their experiences and recommendations, as well as to those of researchers, practitioners and policy experts. The HYP is supported by funding from The California Wellness Foundation.

CRB reports can be found online at http://www.library.ca.gov/ under CA Research Bureau Reports; HYP reports are available at http://cahomelessyouth.ca.gov.

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## Executive Summary

Homeless youth are a hidden population that has historically been undercounted in local, state, and federal efforts to enumerate the homeless population. In recent years, researchers and advocates have emphasized the importance of considering the needs of homeless youth as a distinct sub-population of the homeless population overall. A clear recognition has emerged that improvements to the well-being of homeless youth in the US must be informed by accurate data regarding the prevalence and composition of the homeless youth population (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a).

> **"We can't afford to have youth missing from the only national homeless count we have."** Matthew Doherty, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, comments at the National Alliance to End Homelessness conference, February 21, 2013.

In 2013, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which mandates communities receiving federal funds for homelessness programming to conduct a biennial Point-in-Time (PIT) count of their unsheltered homeless populations, required for the first time that communities report the number of unsheltered, unaccompanied minors and 18 to 24-year-old youth (known as transition age youth, or TAY). Prior to this, CoCs had been required to report the numbers of unaccompanied minors but had not been required to record or report numbers of TAY separately from their adult homeless population. Communities have had a range of responses to this new directive, from changing little about their practices to establishing separate youth-specific count initiatives.

### Purpose and Scope of the Needs Assessment

This report provides a snapshot-in-time during a critical juncture in the evolution of youth Point-in-Time counts. In 2013, the California Homeless Youth Project and the Youth in Social Environments Group of the University of California at San Francisco Division of Adolescent Medicine and the UC, Berkeley School of Public Health conducted a statewide assessment of youth inclusion in the federally mandated PIT count of unsheltered homeless individuals in California. We spoke with Continuums of Care (CoCs) and other stakeholders immediately prior to and following the first PIT count in which youth inclusion has been a specific aim and a separate TAY count was required.

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders from 31 of California's 43 Continuums of Care charged with overseeing their community's PIT count, as well as individuals from five non-profit or university research groups involved as consultants on California counts. We reviewed all published 2011 and 2012 reports from CoCs, including 36 total reports. Seven of these reports included information from CoCs we were not able to interview directly, thus we report here on the experience of 38 of the 43 total CoCs. Supplementary data was garnered from online articles, reports and guidance on the PIT count, as well as the count numbers reported by each CoC to HUD from the years 2005 to 2012. A lexicon of commonly used terms is included as Appendix A.

## Strategies for including youth in PIT counts

Our findings reflect the barriers faced and best practices developed in prior counts, the innovations being made at present to meet HUD reporting requirements, and the needs of a group of CoCs who are largely eager but often struggling to accurately assess their youth homeless populations. CoCs reported a wide range of resources available and methods employed for including youth in their unsheltered PIT count. Methods fell along a continuum, from minimal changes made to separate youth-specific counts, including:

### Minimal changes

- Incorporating HUD's **new age and household type categories** into the PIT count.

### Changes to planning processes

- Including **youth service providers, other stakeholders working with youth, and/or currently or formerly homeless youth** in PIT count planning processes.
- Collaborating with **McKinney-Vento school homeless liaisons** to include data on homeless students as part of or a supplement to the PIT count.
- **Encouraging homeless youth to participate** in the PIT count through promotional materials and community outreach prior to the count.

### Changes to count methods

- Incorporating **youth-sensitive and/or youth-specific questions** into PIT count surveys.
- Including **youth-inclusive or youth-specific street enumeration routes, times, or survey sites.**
- Including **youth service providers and homeless youth** as PIT count enumerators/interviewers.
- Including **flexibility in the PIT count protocol** for enumerators to interact with youth during the count and to count in street locations identified by youth on the day of the PIT count.
- Providing **services, food, and incentives** to youth being counted.
- Providing a **stipend** to youth for their time staffing in the count.
- **Extrapolating from survey data** to determine the number of TAY and minors in the PIT count.

### Youth-specific counts

- Incorporating many or all of the above methods, and:
- Conducting a **dedicated count of youth** at specified locations and times of day during the PIT count

Communities also reported several tactics for making their PIT count overall and youth-specific counting less burdensome for the CoC. These included: engaging volunteers to help with enumeration and PIT count logistics; defraying costs through corporate or private sponsorship; leveraging funds and/or participation from partnering stakeholders, such as government agencies receiving HUD funding; working with university or consultant partners; and using new technologies, including Scantron surveys and GIS maps, to reduce the time required for PIT count planning or data entry and analysis.

## Barriers to youth inclusion in PIT counts

California CoCs and key informants identified barriers to counting homeless youth, at multiple levels including:

### Youth-specific barriers

- **Difficulty identifying homeless youth** because they are not accessing services or frequenting typical homeless "hot spots"; do not appear homeless to enumerators; are more mobile throughout the day; and are more intermittently homeless.
- **Missing sub-groups of youth**, including couch surfers; hotel- and motel-based homeless youth; campers; youth of color; youth who do not self-identify as homeless; homeless students; and juvenile justice- or child welfare service-involved youth.

### CoC and program-related barriers

- **Geographic factors** such as large rural or otherwise unreachable areas (such as mountainous areas, national park land, unincorporated areas, or places without ambient light), limiting enumerators' ability to canvass some communities.
- **Winter weather conditions** of snow and rain, leading to understaffing and undercounting.
- **Limited integration of youth service providers** in the PIT count planning process. Youth service agencies that are not members of their CoC may have limited input in and ownership over PIT count planning, making their experience and efforts with supporting a PIT count lackluster.

### PIT methodological barriers

- **Wariness of statistical methods** like de-duplication, extrapolation and calculated counts sometimes used with youth sub-counts.
- **Concerns about ability to compare results over time** if PIT count methods change to better include youth.
- **Inexperience with the new mandate to count transition age youth.** Some time may be needed for CoCs to learn how to implement such a count in their communities.

### Structural barriers

- **Lack of funding** for the PIT count overall and for counting youth in particular.
- **Limited capacity of youth service providers** to participate in the PIT count. Though HUD suggests CoCs work with their RHY programs to effectively count youth, 19 of the 43 California CoCs do not have a RHY grantee in their jurisdiction. In communities that do have youth service programming, providers are often operating with constrained resources and time.
- **Reluctance of some service providers to participate** in a count that they see as an undercount, as it does not include youth who are doubled-up, couch surfing, etc.
- **Concerns regarding the reporting obligations** of PIT count enumerators encountering unaccompanied minors.
- **Conflicting federal definitions of homelessness** and the resulting inability to integrate data or pool data collection resources amongst PIT counts, McKinney-Vento school homeless liaisons, and RHY-funded youth service providers.

## Ten take-home lessons for CoCs

1. The PIT count is an opportunity to gather locally relevant data that supports planning and funding needs.
2. The PIT count provides an opportunity to engage individuals in care.
3. Buy-in from the community, from service providers, and from youth is crucial to including youth in the PIT count.
4. There is a range of methods and levels of effort that communities invest in increasing youth inclusion in the PIT count.
5. Street count routes, locations, and times should be strategically planned to align with youths' routines.
6. PIT count surveys should include youth-focused survey items.
7. Technology may be a helpful tool that reduces the burden of data entry.
8. PIT counts can be innovatively funded (for example, through corporate or private sponsorships and other partnerships).
9. Rural communities may benefit from building on existing relationships between formal and informal service providers and homeless individuals for their counts.
10. Other CoCs are a valuable resource when determining what local practices may be most effective in one's community.

## Conclusions and recommendations for future inclusion of youth in PIT counts

CoCs reported receiving guidance related to including unaccompanied minors and transition age youth in their PIT counts from a number of resources, including webinars, publications, research consultants, youth service providers, listservs, and community members. However, most communities had requests for further support in conducting future counts. In addition, several areas of unmet need became evident during the assessment process. Areas for future technical assistance include:

- Guidance tailored to community type, particularly for rural communities unable to replicate the count methods utilized in urban areas.
- Guidance on engaging community members to collaborate in the PIT count, including youth, schools, police, and service providers.
- Materials and support for training staff, volunteers, and youth enumerators.
- Sample data collection sheets, surveys, and data entry and analysis tools for use in the PIT count.
- Promotional materials for communicating with homeless populations, volunteers, service providers, schools, and the media about the PIT count.
- Technical assistance on reporting changes to PIT count methods and any related increases in population size numbers to HUD.
- Clarification of legal guidelines regarding counting and surveying minors in the PIT count (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Counting and Surveying Unaccompanied Minors" for resources related to this issue).
- Guidance on potential funding sources and other resources for PIT counts.

In addition to providing communities with further guidance and materials, several policy changes would improve the count of unaccompanied minors and transition age youth. These include:

- **Funding** the PIT count overall and youth-specific count efforts in particular.
- **Coordination of definitions and data systems** for the homeless on the federal level.
- **Clarification from HUD** regarding the goals of the PIT count on a federal and local level.
- **Creation of a PIT count definition of youth homelessness** that is more workable on the ground.
- **Recognition from HUD** that the current standardized PIT count methods may lead to systematic undercounting in some areas more than others, and of youth more than adults.
- **Assurance from HUD** that any increases in PIT count numbers related to efforts to conduct more youth-inclusive counts will be praised rather than penalized.

## Introduction

This is an exciting time for advocates for homeless youth in California. Both in California and at the federal level, there has been increased attention paid to the needs of homeless youth (National Alliance to End Homelessness and The National Network for Youth, 2010; The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority and The California Homeless Youth Project, 2012; U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a; U.S. Department of Housing and Human Development, 2012b; Hyatt, 2013). A clear recognition has emerged that improvements to the well-being of homeless youth in the US must be informed by accurate data regarding the prevalence and composition of the homeless youth population (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a).

### Why Count Homeless Youth?

Accurate data regarding the size and composition of the homeless youth population are lacking nationally, statewide and locally. To our knowledge, no city in the US has an accurate count of its homeless youth population. Counts, when cited, often vary widely (Foster, 2010; National Alliance to End Homelessness and The National Network for Youth, 2010; U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a).

Accurate data are crucial for multiple reasons. First, data are critical to assess the scope of the problem nationally, statewide and locally to inform policy and spending. Second, understanding the composition of the homeless population is critical to informing both prevention and intervention efforts. For example, prevention of homelessness among foster youth requires different resources and approaches than prevention of homelessness among youth who have been incarcerated. Third, data are critical to measuring changes in the size and composition of the population over time. With accurate data, we can better answer questions such as: "How have the numbers of homeless youth changed in response to the economic downturn?" and, "How does the extension of foster care services influence the number and composition of the homeless youth population in California?" **"It's really hard to make a case of how to fill the gaps because we don't know what those gaps are,"** USICH Executive Director Barbara Poppe recently said (Ryan, 2013). Better data can help to clarify these gaps and to identify effective ways to fill them.

However, there are significant known barriers and challenges to counting youth. Homeless youth are a hidden population that is hard to locate and identify. They tend to be transient, moving between locations during the course of a day and also often traveling from one city to another. Youth are also known to avoid services, particularly services intended for homeless adults (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012c). Furthermore, stigma may affect the degree to which youth identify as homeless (Hickler and Auerswald, 2009). Finally, youth homelessness differs from adult homelessness in that the vast majority of youth are intermittently homeless, either returning home relatively quickly or cycling onto and off of the street (Morgan, 2013). Despite considerable advances in methods for counting homeless adults in the last 20 years, there has been less focus on how to improve the methods for counting youth. Development of methods that can accurately count youth and be feasibly replicated over time will allow local, state, and federal stakeholders to monitor trends in and inform social policy and funding streams for this extremely vulnerable population (Roman, 2012).

## Overview: What is the Point-in-Time Count?

### History of the Point-in-Time count

National and state data regarding the homeless population were sparse until 2005, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began requiring an annual sheltered Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and biennial unsheltered PIT count as a part of local service planning processes. In charge of the count are Continuums of Care (CoCs), groups of public agencies, service providers, and advocates working together to develop and implement plans to address homelessness within their city, county, or region. HUD requires that CoCs conduct a one-day PIT count of the unsheltered homeless population within the last ten days of January of every odd-numbered year, though many opt to conduct PIT counts annually (Sermons and Meghan, 2009). Data derived from the PIT count are then used to determine funding levels for HUD's McKinney-Vento federal assistance grant programs. For the 2013 PIT count, 41 of California's 43 CoCs conducted a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons.

### Point-in-Time count methods

For the unsheltered count, individuals are considered to be homeless if they reside in a place not meant for human habitation on the night of the count, including in a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or on the street (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Homeless Assistance Programs, 2008). CoCs are further required to collect sub-population data on the numbers of unsheltered individuals who are chronically homeless individuals and/or in chronically homeless families, veterans, female veterans, severely mentally ill, chronic substance abusers, and persons with HIV/AIDS.

Current methods suggested by HUD for the unsheltered count include the following:

- A **public place count**, also known as a "street count," identifies unsheltered homeless persons located in non-service locations, such as streets, parks, public buildings, parts of the transportation system, and vehicles. There are three primary approaches to such a count. The first is to canvass every block of the community; the second, to cover only locations where the homeless are known to congregate (also known as "hot spots"); and the third, to cover a sample of locations. "Sampling" entails first identifying areas (such as census tracts) where homeless individuals are the most likely to be found, as well as low-density areas (such as gated communities). Enumeration is then concentrated in a sample of, or in all, higher-density areas. Only a sample of the low-density areas is enumerated. Often statistical methods are used with sampling to extrapolate from the number of individuals counted in the sampled areas to the full community. Enumeration in hot spots and a sampling approach help to limit the resources required in a street count.
- A **service-based count** identifies unsheltered homeless persons utilizing non-shelter services such as soup kitchens, food pantries, drop-in centers, and mainstream social service agencies.
- Communities may also elect to plan their PIT count as a **combination** of street and service-based approaches.

Within these count parameters, communities may choose to identify who to count as unsheltered either by visual assessment, or through interviews. In a **visual count**, enumerators are trained to determine individuals' homeless status via visual cues and to count without interaction. In an interactive count, enumerators engage with individuals to assess their homeless status, often recruiting them to participate in a brief interview. **Interviews** supplement a basic count by collecting pertinent demographic and other information. These can be conducted either during the count, or subsequent to the count in order to supplement a visual count. Some communities create a unique identifier code for each participant interviewed that is used to help prevent including the same individual's information more than once (duplication). This identifier usually consists of the participant's first and last initials, birthdate, gender, and the state in which they were born.

### Summary of recent increased interest/changes in counting youth

In recent years, researchers and advocates have emphasized the importance of considering the needs of homeless youth as a distinct sub-population of the homeless population overall. At the June 2012 United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) meeting on youth homelessness, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness Nan Roman stated, **"For far too long, the plight of unaccompanied children and young adults has gone unaddressed."** Roman recommended requiring youth service providers and local Continuums of Care to include youth in the HUD-mandated PIT counts in 2013, stating that **"Any inclusion of youth will be an improvement"** (Roman, 2012). Federal interest in improving estimates of the size and composition of the nation's homeless youth population has also increased, with the USICH pointing to improved data quality and collection as one of their top priorities in the effort to end youth homelessness by 2020 (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a). Meanwhile, the recently enacted Housing Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition (HEARTH) act pushes HUD to improve data collection at the community level, including collecting data on the characteristics of newly and chronically homeless individuals (U.S. Department of Housing and Human Development, 2012c). In turn, in recent years HUD has strongly encouraged communities to use data to evaluate performance and make programmatic decisions tailored to local needs (U.S. Department of Housing and Human Development, 2012c). Improving the inclusion of youth in PIT counts is a key step in better collecting and applying data on homelessness in the United States.

### 2013: Changes in HUD mandate to count minors and TAY

2013 marked the first year that HUD required CoCs to report the number of homeless 18-to-24 year-old youth (known as transition age youth, or TAY) encountered in the unsheltered PIT count. In previous years, communities were only required to report whether the homeless person was an unaccompanied minor (under the age of 18), an adult age 18 to 60, or an elderly individual over the age of 60. However, while transition age youth are technically adults, they are in a different developmental phase from older homeless adults, and are therefore best served by programs tailored to their specific needs. As explained by the USICH, **"Due to barriers that exist for young people in accessing adult-only shelters and their lack of connection to most social services, many if not most youth experiencing homelessness go uncounted**" (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a). As such, HUD recognized that communities would benefit from gathering data on TAY to aid in structuring programs and making local and federal funding decisions. HUD provided guidance on implementing these changes and supplemental guidance on counting homeless youth in 2012 (See Appendix F).

### Identified strategies for counting homeless youth

In conjunction with federal changes to the PIT count, in January 2013 the USICH launched Youth Count!, a pilot initiative to support efforts to count youth in urban, suburban, and rural areas and to learn more about best practices for counting homeless TAY and unaccompanied minors. Los Angeles was one of nine communities across the nation selected for the pilot. A report on their findings is expected in spring 2013. In the months leading up to the PIT count, the USICH provided guidance and recommendations on including youth in the PIT count via the Youth Count! webinar series. Resources on including youth in the PIT count were also developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the California Homeless Youth Project (see Appendix F). Recommendations from these agencies included:

- **Identifying a lead person or organization to develop and coordinate a youth-focused strategy**, and to act as a liaison to youth services providers not regularly attending PIT planning meetings.
- **Generating buy-in** by beginning the planning process early, involving key stakeholders, and leveraging existing homeless count efforts.
- **Partnering strategically** with stakeholders from outside of the homeless provider arena who

encounter or serve homeless youth in order to target youth subpopulations that might not be captured otherwise, e.g. unaccompanied minors enrolled in school, pregnant and parenting youth, and justice-involved youth. Potential partners include homeless education coordinators at schools, child welfare staff, law enforcement and probation officers, health practitioners, food banks, pregnant and parenting programs, recreation centers, and LGBTQ social service programs.

- **Coordinating with Local Education Agencies (LEAs)**, including informing students about events or participating organizations related to the PIT count, disclosing aggregate data on unaccompanied homeless youth enrolled in or served by LEAs, sharing databases, and obtaining parental consent at the time of enrollment to track information in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
- **Collaborating with federally-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs** to identify where unaccompanied youth might be located.
- **Engaging homeless and formerly homeless youth** to inform the survey instrument development, and in enumeration and survey administration activities.
- **Surveying locations during multiple times** throughout the day of the count.
- **Providing knowledgeable practitioners** available at PIT deployment sites for volunteers to consult should any issues arise during the count.
- **Practicing culturally sensitive data collection methods** that clearly inform youth about the goals of the count, give advance notice of sensitive survey questions, and stress voluntary participation. CoCs were also cautioned to be mindful of youth often not associating with the term "homeless," and of signaling support and acceptance for LGBTQ youth.
- **Utilizing incentives** to engage youth in the count, including stipends for youth assisting with planning and enumeration, as well as in-kind gifts for youth participating in the survey.
- **Employing sampling methods most likely to capture youth.** Geography-based sampling is noted for its efficiency, as youth tend to concentrate in relatively few areas of a CoC. Respondent-based or "snowball" sampling, wherein homeless youth encountered can then lead enumerators to others, may also be effective, though they require significant advance planning.

### Who is homeless?

From a practical and policy standpoint, a population must be defined to be counted. Because the population of homeless youth includes multiple subpopulations and because youth's degree of homelessness is often in flux, uniform definitions are difficult to establish. Thus, the definitions employed by different federal agencies vary, as do definitions employed by agencies, local governments, and researchers.

Below are the definitions that apply to this population as developed by various federal agencies:

> *The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)* defines a homeless individual as someone who "has a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public space not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, 2011)." Another term for this sub-group of the homeless, who are staying in a place not intended for human habitation, is *literally homeless*. This term is not one officially employed by HUD but it is employed in the academic literature and elsewhere to connote severity of homelessness.
>
> *The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act*, administered by the Department of *Health and Human Services (HHS)* defines a homeless youth as a youth "for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement" (Family and Youth Service Bureau, 2008).

*The Mc-Kinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (TITLE VII-B)* provides for assistance for homeless youth in school and is administered by the *Department of Education (DOE)*. The definition of homelessness under this act includes the following youth (U.S. Congress, 2002):

- Children and youth who are:
  - sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as *doubled-up*);
  - living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
  - living in emergency or transitional shelters;
  - abandoned in hospitals;
  - or awaiting foster care placement;
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

Finally, the *Food and Nutrition Act* of the *US Department of Agriculture (USDA)* includes "An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a temporary accommodation for not more than 90 days in the residence of another individual" in its definition of homeless (U.S. Congress, 2008). *The Child Nutrition Act*, also administered by the USDA, includes "An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a temporary accommodation for not more than 365 days in the residence of another individual" within its definition (U.S. Congress, 1966).

These overlapping yet distinct definitions provided by HHS, DOE, USDA, and RHY include minors and youth who are homeless as per HUD's definition, but also include, to different degrees, subgroups of youth who are precariously or temporarily housed. Service and government agencies funded through these programs in California's communities thus serve a population of youth including youth who are precariously housed and youth living in places not meant for human habitation, some of whom may qualify as homeless and eligible for services under one federal definition – but not under another.

Revisions to the definition of homelessness in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act in 2012 expanded HUD's definitions of homelessness to make an allowance for other federal definitions in the case of youth. However, this allowance was not extended to all precariously housed children and youth and is not applied to the definition for the PIT count. For purposes of inclusion in the PIT count, HUD's definition of homelessness explicitly *excludes*:

- Persons counted in any locations not listed on the Housing Inventory Count (thus excluding, for example, persons in hospitals and emergency rooms, detox facilities, jails, and acute crisis centers)
- Persons temporarily staying with family or friends
- Persons residing in their own unit with assistance from a provider program
- Persons residing in motel or hotel units not paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals

Although HUD notes that "youth who are homeless by another Federal definition, including youth who may be doubled-up, couch-surfing, etc., on the night designated for the count, may still be counted for CoC *planning purposes*" [emphasis added], they are not to be included in the PIT count data submitted to HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Homeless Assistance

Programs, 2008; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, 2011; U.S. Department of Housing and Human Development, 2012b). Consequently, CoCs are instructed to ensure that their PIT count methodology is able to distinguish the specific living situations of youth encountered during the count (U.S. Department of Housing and Human Development, 2012b).

## Methods: What did we do?

### Purpose of the assessment

This report was commissioned by the California Homeless Youth Project in collaboration with the Youth in Social Environements Group of the University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine and the UC, Berkeley School of Public Health to provide a snapshot during a critical juncture in the evolution of youth PIT counts. We spoke with CoCs and other stakeholders immediately following the 2013 PIT count. The 2013 PIT count was the first count for which youth inclusion has been a specific aim and for which CoCs were required to report their numbers by age category and household type and include both unsheltered unaccompanied minors and transition age youth 18-to-24 years of age (TAY).

The goals of our report are to:

1. Describe the current approaches being taken by CoC's to counting unaccompanied minors and TAY as part of the PIT count.
2. Describe the current best practices and the innovations in California regarding counting unaccompanied minors and TAY.
3. Describe the barriers faced by CoC's.
4. Describe the needs of CoCs.
5. Offer take-home lessons for CoCs for improving their count in the future.
6. Offer suggestions for state and federal level resources and policies that would support CoCs to improve future counts of homeless youth.

### Data collection

Data to inform this project were collected from three sources. The first was the Department of Housing and Urban Development's website. The second was from published Continuums of Care reports and other reports available online. The third was a series of individual and group interviews conducted with key CoC staff and stakeholders involved in California's PIT counts.

#### HUD Data

Data from communities' PIT counts are compiled and submitted to HUD via the Homelessness Data Exchange site and made publicly available at HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange website (http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHomelessRpts). Reports of each California community's unsheltered and sheltered homeless counts were created and compiled for each year from 2005-2012 for which data were available. Data were examined and are presented for California overall and by region. Regional breakdowns provided in Appendix B are examined over nine geographic areas: the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Coast, Far North, Inland Empire, San Joaquin Valley, Sacramento Valley, Sierras, and South Coast.

#### Published reports

We conducted a methodical search for published reports available on the web regarding PIT counts in California's 43 CoCs using combinations of each CoC name and the search terms "Point in Time," "homeless + census," "homeless + survey + report," and "homeless count." Additional web searches were conducted for CoCs for which no reports were found via these standardized search terms. Reports prepared by or on behalf of a CoC were found for 38 of the 43 CoCs. One of the 43 CoCs had not conducted a PIT count between the years of 2005-2012; another did not conduct a 2013 PIT count.

#### Interviews

A total of 36 structured interviews were conducted over a six-week period in early 2013. Individual and some group interviews were conducted with key informants involved with PIT count activities,

including local service providers, government officials, research consultants, and others. Although we attempted to include interviews with all 41 CoCs engaged in PIT count activities, not all CoCs were available within our limited data collection time period. This report includes interviews conducted with key informants from 31 CoCs, three consulting groups, and two university research groups. Interviews were specifically conducted within each of California's nine regions and covered experiences in a spread of rural, suburban, and urban CoCs.

| Region | CoCs | Interviews Conducted |
|---|---|---|
| **Bay Area** | Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma | 8 |
| **Central Coast** | Monterey/San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz | 4 |
| **Far North** | Butte, Del Norte, Dos Rios, Humboldt, Mendocino, Nevada*, Redding/Shasta, Sutter/Yuba | 4 |
| **Inland Empire** | Riverside, San Bernadino | 2 |
| **San Joaquin Valley** | Fresno/Madera, Kern, Kings/Tulare, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus | 4 |
| **Sacramento Metro** | El Dorado, Placer*, Sacramento, Yolo | 3 |
| **San Diego** | Imperial, San Diego | 1 |
| **Sierras** | Central Sierra | 1 |
| **South Coast** | Glendale, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Orange, Oxnard, Pasadena, Ventura | 5 |

**Placer-Nevada is one CoC in two regions*

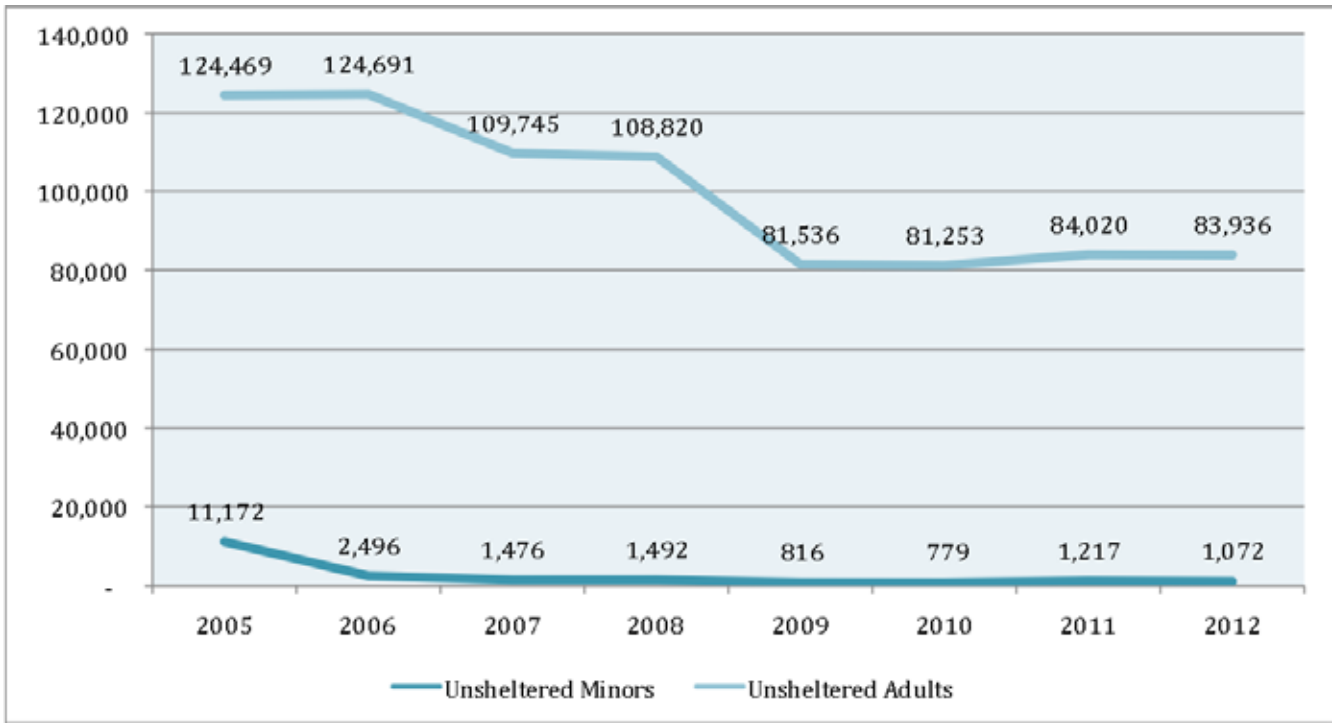
Data garnered from both interviews and published reports were collected and compiled using a web-based survey instrument (see Appendix C). We referenced the most recent data available for each CoC, which included interviews with 31 CoCs, six reports published in 2011, and one report published in 2012. No data were available from interviews or from any reports published between 2005-2012 for five communities, of which two did not conduct a PIT count in 2013. Where possible, we have characterized and classified CoCs' PIT count activities and systems into broad categories. We have not tried to quantify CoC practices for every issue addressed in this report. Instead, we more often describe "most," "many," "some," or "a few" CoCs as following certain practices. For the most part, CoC informant responses are included anonymously in this report, with the exception of best practice spotlight boxes. These examples are attributed directly to the CoC engaging in these best practices for individuals interested in learning more from their example.

There are several limitations to the data collection for our final report. First, as mentioned above, we were not able to interview representatives from all CoCs. Where possible, we supplemented interviews

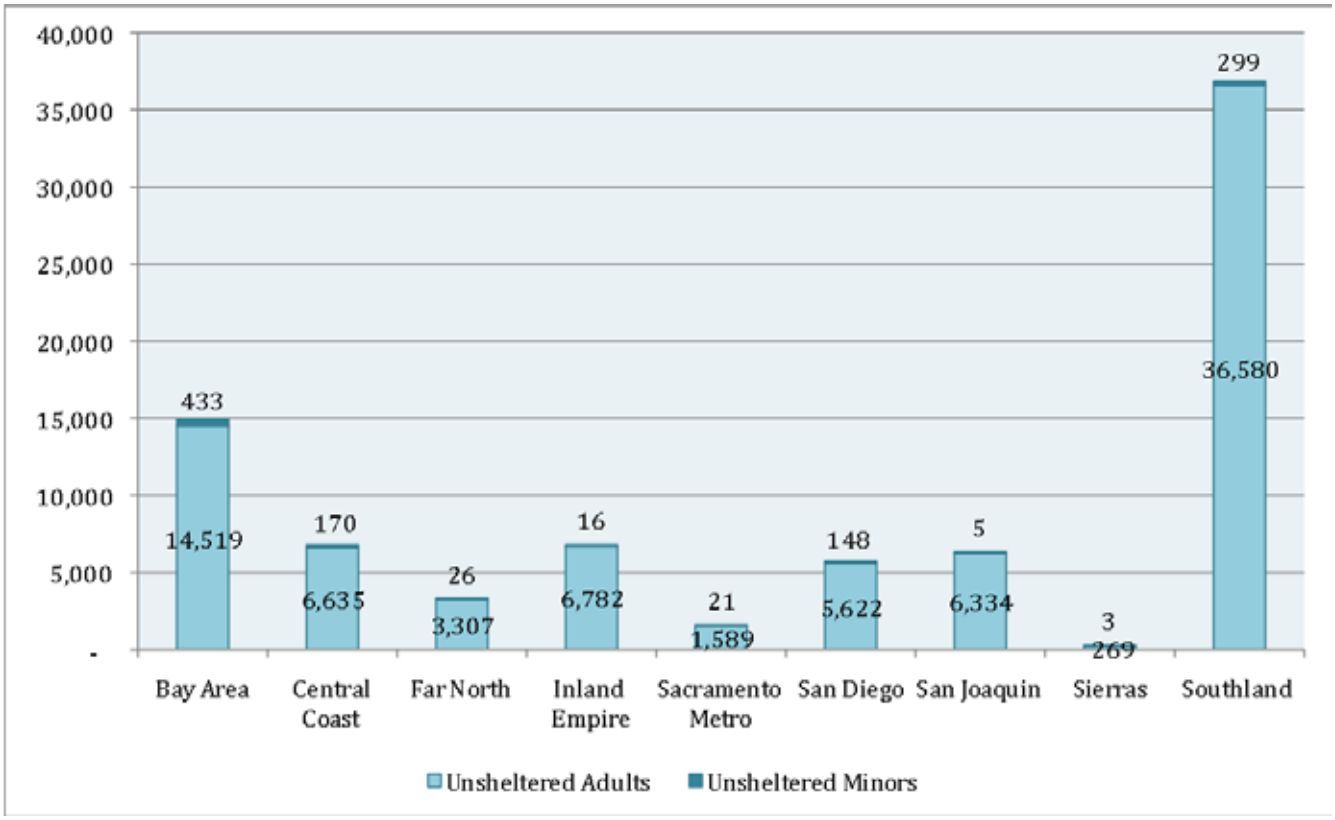
with information gathered from published reports. However, for five of California's CoCs neither an interviewee nor a recent published report was available for inclusion within this report. Second, where possible, we have referred within our report to the most recent count from which data for each CoC was available. For the seven CoCs for which this information came only from published reports, methods may have changed since their last report. However, all data collected from reports addressed counts conducted in 2011 or 2012 and so remain relatively current.

## The Numbers: PIT Count totals, 2005-2012

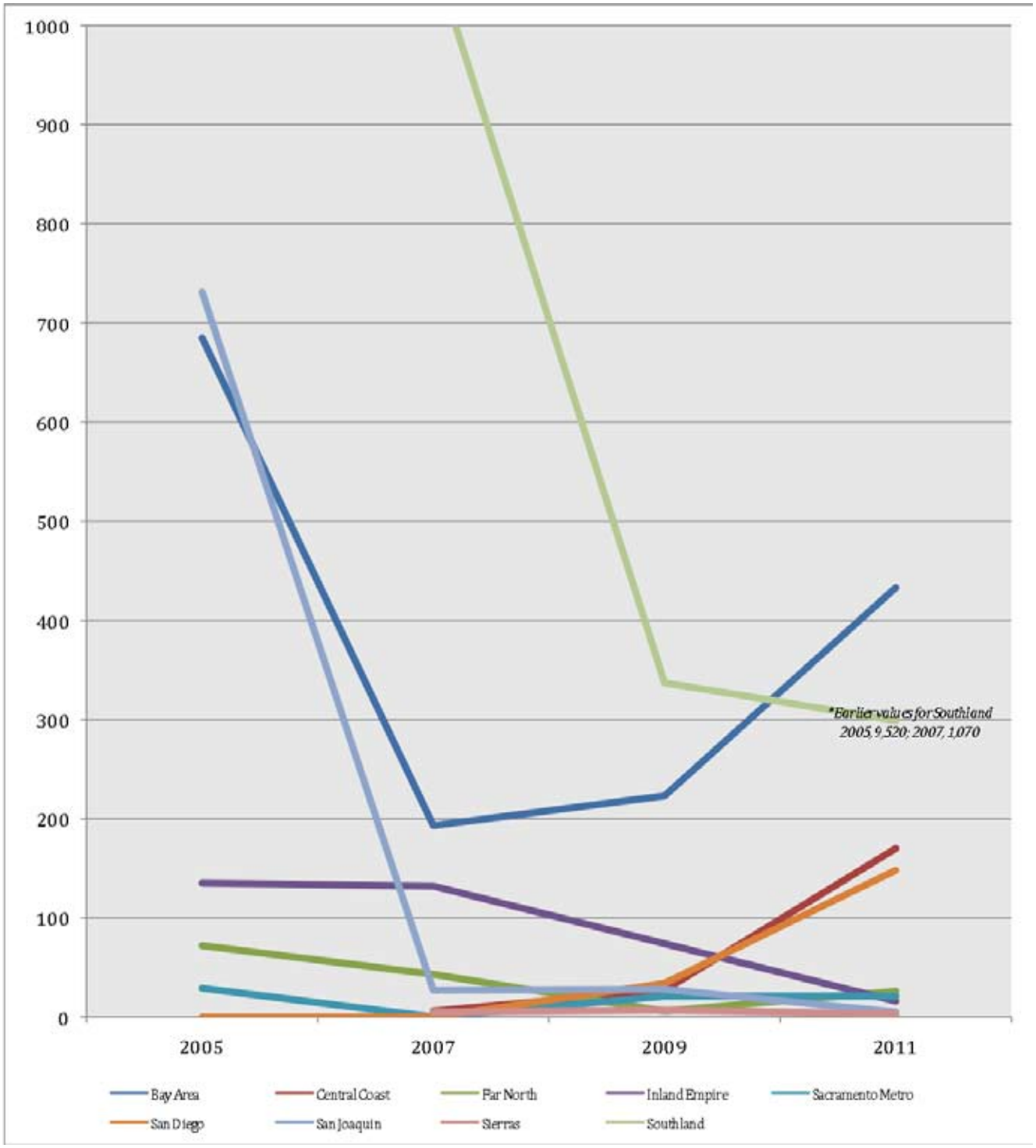
Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, State of California, 2005-2012




Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by Region, 2011



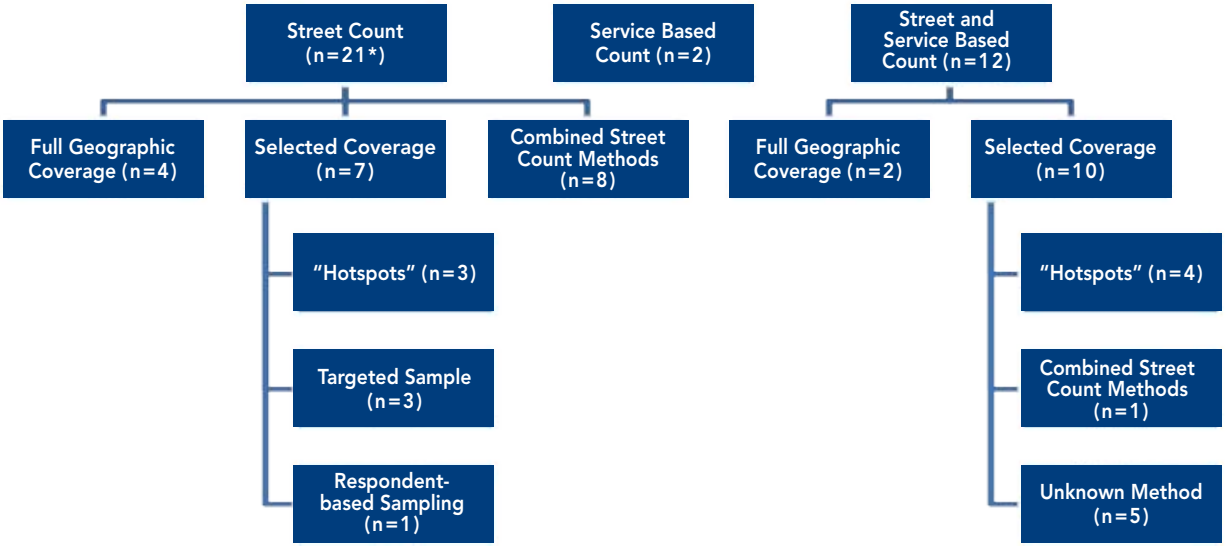
Unsheltered Minors by Region, 2005-2011



## Unsheltered PIT count methods: What do Continuums of Care do?

We first describe how CoCs planned their overall PIT count. Such a description offers an important backdrop to understanding how homeless youth were counted, especially since many CoCs simply incorporated unaccompanied minors and transition age youth into their overall count.

Approaches to conducting the overall PIT count varied among CoCs. Recommended methods were often combined in an attempt to complete a more accurate snapshot of homelessness, as well as to account for geographic diversity within a given community. Of the 38 CoCs for which recent data on methodology are available, 20 combined methods to count unsheltered persons. The most common combination entailed conducting a street count together with a service-based count, with variation in how the street count was completed. Less frequently, CoCs conducted a combination of street count methods, for example choosing to canvass the full geographic area in some parts of their community and hot spots in others. The majority of these CoCs covered the full geographic area in more densely populated areas, and worked with stakeholders to identify "hot spots" in rural areas where homeless individuals were known to be located. However, one CoC divided its rural areas into low, medium, and high-density communities, conducted the count in one of each type, and then extrapolated count data to the other rural communities identified. The mixed street count methods approach was most common in CoCs with both rural and urban areas, and in CoCs for which responsibility for planning and conducting the count was divided among several designated communities.




**Street count methods for two CoCs were not specified in the available data.*

Eleven CoCs relied on a visual count of homeless individuals, meaning that enumerators were trained to make visual assessments of an individual's homeless status, age, and gender. Other CoCs either verbally communicated with persons to confirm their housing status (one CoC), or combined their count with a survey designed to collect more detailed information about participants' demographics and other locally relevant items (22 CoCs). Nine CoCs reported conducting a survey after their PIT count to supplement count information. **Of 31 CoCs interviewed, seven reported conducting a youth-specific sub-count as part of their 2013 PIT count.**

## Youth inclusion in current PIT counts

All participating CoC staff were aware of HUD's new guidance regarding counting minors and transition age youth and of the federal interest in better including these groups in the PIT count. Their responses regarding practices used to include youth in the 2013 count and plans for youth inclusion in future counts varied widely. The range of these approaches is described below.

***Minimal or no changes to incorporate youth.***
Many continuums reported that they had not sought specifically to include youth in their 2013 PIT activities beyond their usual strategies to engage the homeless overall. At a minimum, communities incorporated HUD's new age and household type categories into their 2013 counts. All continuums interviewed reported that they had received HUD's guidance around revised PIT count reporting of age and household type and had tallied the number of minors and transition age youth 18-24 years of age to meet these requirements.

***Integration of youth or youth service providers' input into the count planning processes.***
Many CoCs reported that they had included youth homeless providers, other stakeholders working with youth, and/or currently or formerly homeless youth in their count planning processes.

Communities sought input through a number of methods, such as:

- Ensuring that youth service providers were invited to participate as active members of their CoC and had an opportunity to give input during the PIT count planning process.
- Engaging with currently and formerly homeless youth and youth service providers to identify street locations and times of day where youth were known to congregate and to advise on count planning activities. Several communities conducted focus group discussions or interviews with local youth to identify the best locations and times for finding youth. One CoC described plans to develop a youth advisory group to advise the planning of future PIT counts (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Peer Advisory Groups and the Orange County PIT Crew" for an example of homeless advisory groups for the general count).
- Engaging youth service providers to dispatch outreach teams prior to the count to confirm that youth were residing in identified locations and/or to inform youth about the upcoming PIT count and encourage their participation.
- Collaborating with stakeholders from non-homeless systems, including Independent Living Program/foster care systems, justice system transition programs working on AB109 prison realignment, job skills training, sheriff's departments, health clinics, faith-based organizations, and food banks, to identify locations where eligible youth could be found during the PIT count. As one provider stated, **"Depending on the diversity of your county, it's important to have as many providers as possible [provide input], because they each provide a different perspective. Collaboration is really important."**

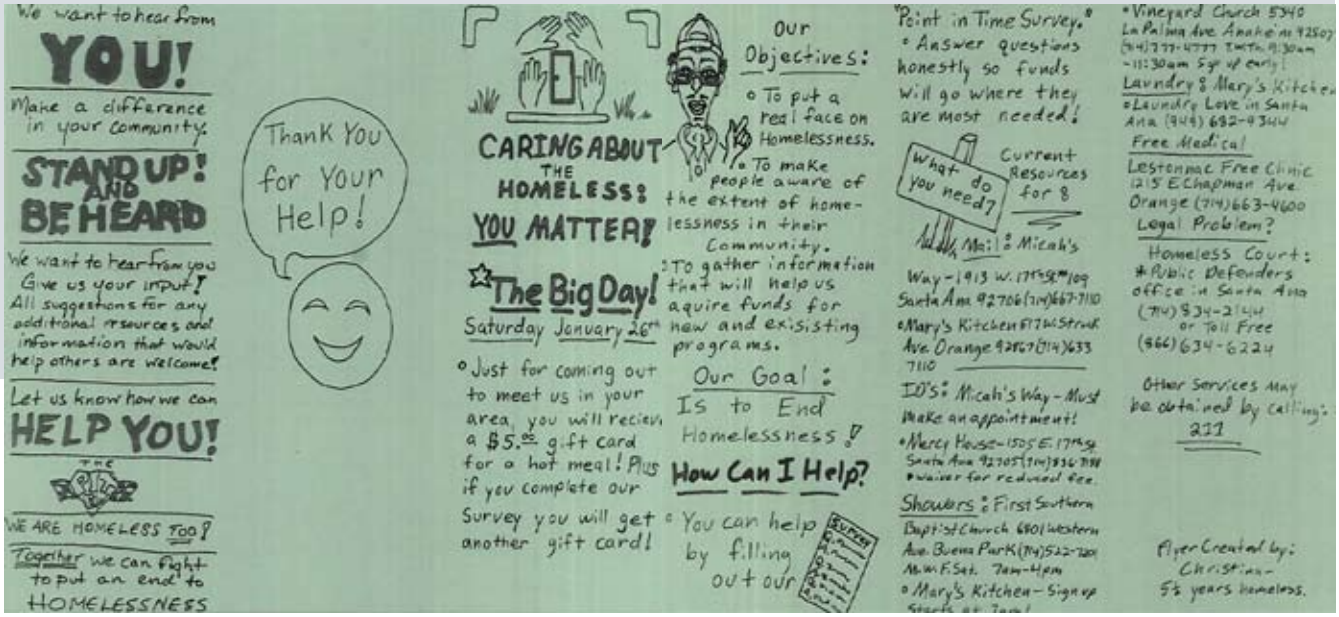
Though it was often difficult to determine in published reports the extent to which youth and youth service providers were engaged in a CoC's planning and enumeration efforts, most reports included the names of youth-serving organizations or governmental departments in their acknowledgements sections, indicating that there was at least some effort to include these organizations in the PIT count processes. Many of those interviewed also described such collaborations.

### Best Practice Spotlight: Peer Advisory Groups and the Orange County PIT Crew

For their 2013 count, **Orange County** formed a homeless advisory group called the PIT Crew to inform the count planning process. Comprised of formerly and currently homeless individuals nominated by local service providers and health care outreach workers familiar with the CoC's homeless population, the PIT Crew met weekly for several months prior to the PIT count.

Group members advised the CoC count planning process, helped to identify hot spots and plan routes for the count, determined appropriate incentives for participation in the count survey, and developed a handwritten brochure that they distributed to the community explaining the purpose of the PIT count. **"We were more than ever wanting to make sure the community understood what the PIT was and was not,"** organizers explained. On the day of the count, PIT Crew members joined enumeration teams to serve as local guides and advisors during enumeration. **"It's a win-win – a win for us because we're engaging with the community, and a win for them because they're engaging back with us. They served as bridges back to their own communities... and a reality check for us"** about the feasibility of methods being considered for the count, said count organizers.

The PIT Crew was considered so instrumental in the PIT count planning process that the OC Partnership is currently seeking private funding to continue convening the group to act as an advisory group informing future counts, as well as other programs for the homeless in their CoC. Future counts may include youth PIT Crew members or a youth-specific advisory group.



***Collaboration with school district McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons.***
Some CoCs worked with their county school districts' McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons to include school-based data on homeless students as either part of or a supplement to youth PIT data. The majority of CoCs working with their homeless liaisons viewed McKinney-Vento data as supplementary because of the different definitions of homelessness, the different timing of data collection employed by the two data systems, and concerns about duplicating youth who may already be counted as part of the PIT count. Some communities collected data from their public school districts that were specific to HUD's time frame and definition of homelessness, and so included these counts in their PIT count reporting. CoCs viewed collaboration with school districts as a way of gaining access to homeless youth who may be distrustful of adult enumerators. **"It's hard to count all the homeless youth through the street count, because especially minors, they're skeptical about talking to you on the street. That's why we used the Office of Education,"** explained one youth provider. (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Incorporating McKinney-Vento Data into the PIT Count" for an example of collaboration with McKinney-Vento liaisons to collect data on homeless students within the public school system.)

### Best Practice Spotlight: Incorporating McKinney-Vento data into the PIT count

Public school districts receiving McKinney-Vento funding are mandated to collect their own data on enrolled homeless students. While the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness includes those who are "doubled up" and "couch surfing," these data can still supplement CoCs' own data locally or be analyzed to include the appropriate sub-groups of eligible youth in the PIT count. CoCs can work with their local McKinney-Vento Liaison to coordinate data sharing and encourage school participation in the count.

Identifying homeless youth not only benefits CoCs, but also benefits schools. Identifying homeless students means identifying students eligible for Title I funds and the National School Lunch Program. It also creates an opportunity to provide additional support to homeless students experiencing attendance issues, which in turn improves schools' Average Daily Attendance and funding.

In 2013, **Humboldt County**'s PIT planning committee worked with their County Office of Education to develop a one-page electronic spreadsheet for collecting data from each school liaison in their community. The spreadsheet included questions about the total number of students considered homeless on the night of January 28, 2013, their age group, housing status, and location within the county. Humboldt reached out to its school districts to introduce the count by email and followed up with additional emails and phone calls before and after the date of the count. They found this method to be more efficient and effective at assessing their number of homeless students than previous efforts to conduct individual surveys with students in each school. A short electronic data collection file made it easy for school liaisons to participate, eliminated the need for data entry by the PIT coordinators, and circumvented conducting surveys with students who are often hiding their homeless status from peers and would not want to be interviewed by enumerators. Over two-thirds of the county's 32 school districts participated. For each child identified, school districts were given a pair of socks for their clothing closets. Although data garnered from the school liaisons was not combined with Humboldt's PIT count numbers reported to HUD, community members felt that it was valuable supplementary data. **"We decided that having the school data separate was better than not having it at all,"** coordinators reported. Humboldt's recommendations for future counts include providing a training meeting with liaisons prior to the count, and providing ongoing trainings to front-line staff in schools during which clarification of homelessness definitions is discussed.

In consultation with non-profit consultant **Applied Survey Research**, the communities of **San Luis Obispo**, **Santa Clara**, and **Santa Cruz** collaborated with their local school districts to identify those students on each district's list of unsheltered and motel/hotel housed students. Students from these lists were called to determine what their housing status was on the night of the PIT count in each community. In San Luis Obispo, students listed on the school registry as homeless were given index cards to bring home asking families to provide an update of their housing status on the night of the PIT count.

*Continued on next page*

**Ventura County** has worked with their school district liaisons to collect supplementary McKinney-Vento data on their homeless students. See Appendix E for a sample data collection form from their community.

**Additional Ideas for Coordinating with Schools:**

- *Provide ongoing trainings for front-line school staff* on the approach to recognizing unaccompanied minors.
- *Offer school districts incentives to participate*, for example clothing or food for their resource pantries.
- *Partner with schools to inform students of the count*, especially of youth count events hosted at nearby sites.
- *Work with schools to participate in direct HMIS entry*, with parental consent obtained during school enrollment. **West Contra Costa Unified School District** participates directly in HMIS entry. CoCs can work with school districts to train McKinney-Vento liaisons and other school staff to utilize HMIS and on obtaining parental consent for logging information into the HMIS database at the time of their child's enrollment in school.
- If unable to include McKinney-Vento data in the PIT count numbers, document these numbers in the Notice of Funding Availability application and local reports as a supplementary data point. **Orange County** reported using McKinney-Vento data in their presentations to local faith-based communities to provide a compelling face of homelessness and garner local support for the PIT count.

***Extrapolation from survey data to determine the number of TAY in the unsheltered count.***

Several CoCs conducting both visual unsheltered counts and a separate supplementary survey reported applying the percentage of transition-aged youth reached in their survey to the age breakdowns of their general count. For example, if a CoC recorded 200 adults in the street count and surveyed 80 individuals, of whom 20 (25%) were ages 18-24, they would calculate the street count as comprised of 50 transition age youth.

Other CoCs with a visual unsheltered count reported including categories for Unknown Age and Unknown Gender in their tally sheets. They strongly encouraged enumerators to use this box whenever age or gender was uncertain, and at the time of interview were awaiting HUD reporting guidelines to determine if and how age groups should be extrapolated from these Unknown categories.

*Photo credit: Dave Kempa*

### Best Practice Spotlight: Technology and the PIT Count

Technology can be a useful tool for decreasing the burden of data collection and entry. Some currently used and potential applications of technology for the PIT include the following:

HMIS

- **Urban Initiatives**, a non-profit agency consulting on PIT counts with several communities in Southern California, recommends that one way to decrease the burden of street counts is to increase the youth-serving agencies participating in the Homeless Management Information Systems database. **"If a youth is going to services and the agency providing services is not in HMIS, what can we do to get that agency in HMIS?"** they suggested. One of their main areas of focus has been on helping communities to conduct as much of their data collection and analysis in-house as possible, thus decreasing the specific resources required within their street counts.

Computerized surveys

- **Napa** converted their 2013 PIT survey to a Scantron format to reduce the time required for data entry.
- **Humboldt** created a one-page electronic spreadsheet for collection of supplementary McKinney-Vento data.

Mobile phone-based surveys

- Many survey applications are now accessible via mobile phones with internet capability. Communities may be interested in creating web-based instruments that allow enumerators with mobile internet access to enter information from their counts or surveys directly into a database, eliminating the time required for data entry.
- Recent expansion of the Federal Communication Commission's Lifeline program means that homeless individuals will be eligible to receive free cell phones with text messaging capability (Federal Communications Commission: Office of Consumer and Governmental Affairs; Associated Press, 2013). Communities interested in having homeless individuals enter their own information into a system may now be able to create mobile phone-based surveys that homeless individuals can answer by voice or text message.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping

- Several CoCs reported that their city planning departments used GIS to create high-resolution deployment route maps for their street counts.
- Many mobile phones now have GIS mapping capabilities. Communities looking to computerize their data collection process may want to explore ways of tapping into mapping technology to precisely mark locations where enumerators encountered homeless individuals.

***Development of youth-sensitive and youth-specific data collection items.***
Several CoCs that employed a survey as part of their count activities included youth-sensitive and youth-specific survey items. Such items included questions regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, human trafficking or child abuse involvement, foster care history, educational history and aspirations, service utilization, perceived causes of homelessness, social supports and networks, and unmet needs. One CoC included an item asking participants who reported having been released from a correctional institution in the prior 12 months whether or not they had been provided referrals to service providers upon release. This question was designed to help the CoC identify gaps in services and referrals for transition age youth within their Realignment processes under AB109. (For an example of a youth survey instrument, see Appendix C.)

***Inclusion of youth service providers and homeless youth as PIT count enumerators.***
Many communities noted the importance of engaging youth and/or trusted youth service providers to serve as the face of the count. They recognized that as an especially vulnerable population, youth tend to be particularly hidden and reluctant to be counted unless seen or approached by someone with whom they have an established relationship. Communities recruited volunteer enumerators from a wide variety of organizations that work with youth, including nutrition programs, youth drop-ins, faith-based organizations, community colleges, and workforce training programs. Agencies providing food were highlighted as places where youth might be most willing to seek services and be identified in a count.
Communities also agreed unanimously that youth themselves were best positioned to be able to recognize, enumerate, and interact with other youth. As one provider stated, **"This thing kind of stands or falls based on the youth you can recruit, because they are the experts. And if you don't have those kinds of connections, you're not going to get a good count."**

- For CoCs conducting street counts, enumeration teams were recruited from among local youth outreach workers or from youth programs. For example, one CoC recruited fifty youth from a local jobs training initiative to be enumerators on the day of the count. Several CoCs reported recruiting youth clients of transitional living or drop-in programs, as well as youth outreach workers (often formerly homeless themselves), to be enumerators.
- For CoCs conducting service-based counts, youth-serving organizations frequently participated as survey sites during the PIT count. In some CoCs, youth service providers conducted interviews themselves with youth coming in for services. In other CoCs, volunteer interviewers were stationed at youth service locations with service providers referring their willing participants to the interviewer to be surveyed. One CoC reported that their TAY service providers hosted a free breakfast event on the day of the PIT count, providing food and a $5 gift card incentive to youth completing their survey.

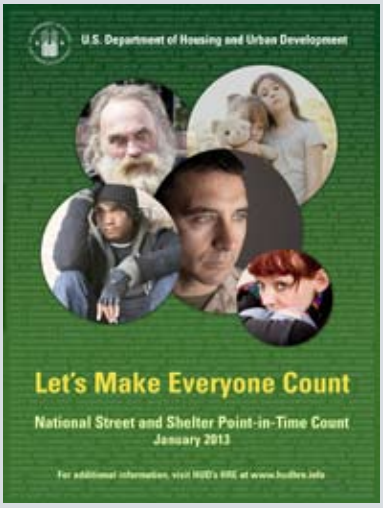
### Best Practice Spotlight: Promoting the PIT

Promotional materials may be an effective tool to engage community-based organizations, volunteers, and youth themselves in PIT activities. Examples of such promotional materials include:

Local newspaper, radio, and television articles promoting the PIT count in the general community can help to boost volunteer recruitment as well as increase community awareness of homelessness.

A public service announcement by pop icon Cyndi Lauper released by HUD and the True Colors Fund helped to spread awareness of the PIT count (US Department of Housing and Urban Development and The True Colors Fund's Forty to None Project, 2013).

Posters released by **HUD**, the **Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority**, and **King County of Washington State** were designed to increase public awareness of the count, recruit volunteers, and encourage homeless and unstably housed youth to participate in count efforts (Gibbard, 2013; Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013).



***Development of youth-inclusive or youth-specific street enumeration routes and survey sites.*** Some CoCs described devising youth enumeration routes staffed by teams comprised of youth and/or youth service providers. This was done either as part of the general count or as a part of a youth-specific count. One CoC conducting a survey-based count described having their local youth service providers come to the table to split the CoC's geography amongst themselves, separately from the general PIT count survey process. Areas were assigned according to providers' expertise and existing local relationships with youth. Each organization took responsibility for having their outreach team incorporate the survey into outreach activities across that assigned area on the day of the PIT count.

### Best Practice Spotlight: Youth Outreach Teams

In **Humboldt**, homeless youth already working as outreach workers were hired to engage in efforts to identify homeless youth, as well as to complete surveys with homeless youth.

**Applied Survey Research** encourages communities to hire homeless youth to participate as count enumerators and interviewers, based on the belief that youth themselves possess unique knowledge of and access to areas where their peers congregate. In 2013, ASR worked with the communities of **Sonoma**, **San Francisco**, **Monterey**, and **Santa Clara** to conduct dedicated youth counts conducted by groups of youth enumerators. Youth enumerators and interviewers were most frequently recruited by local service providers who chose a diverse group of youth whom they knew had existing knowledge of the geographic areas and communities to be covered in the count. Recommendations from these communities' experiences in developing youth outreach teams included providing youth with a monetary *stipend* for their time and expertise, making sure that youth are assigned to enumerate in locations and with groups of youth that are *safe and comfortable* for them (for example, ensuring that gang-involved youth are not asked to cross territory lines), and recruiting a *diverse* group of youth enumerators familiar with the different sub-populations and locations with a community.

In **Los Angeles**, youth-serving organizations in each of the county's eight regions were contracted to conduct youth-specific counts. Youth were recruited from transitional living programs and other service programs to work in enumerator teams of two to five youth. Transportation for each team was provided by either service providers or the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Youth participating in the enumerator teams were given a gift card stipend and two food gift cards for their work on the count, an incentive determined through the count planning process. Los Angeles served as a Youth Count! pilot site in 2013. Further lessons learned from their count will be shared in the coming months. **"Were we not to have [used youth enumerators] we would've missed 50 percent of our 18-24 homeless youths,"** reported a Los Angeles count coordinator (Duran, 2013). For more on Los Angeles' work to count youth, please visit http://www.theycountwillyou.org/ and the California Homeless Youth Project and Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's Tool Kit for Counting Homeless Youth (The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority and The California Homeless Youth Project, 2012).

***Integration of a youth-specific sub-count into PIT activities.***
Several continuums of care conducted youth-specific homeless sub-counts within their unsheltered PIT count. Rather than employing complete geographic coverage, these youth counts involved selective coverage of the areas known to have a higher density of youth. Continuums conducting youth-specific counts generally employed the following approaches to improve the quality of their data:

- *Stipends for youth's work as enumerators/interviewers.* Appropriate stipends for youth were often determined based on input from youth service providers or youth themselves. Providers also stressed the importance of providing food to youth enumerators on the day of the count.
- *Counts in locations and during times of day that work for youth.* A majority of youth counts were conducted during afternoon and evening hours, as it was agreed that youth tended to be less visible on the street during the late night and early morning hours when PIT counts are generally conducted. One CoC added that count routes were assessed prior to the count to ensure that

teams would be in the right places at the right times, as youth tend to migrate throughout the day. Thus, a location that is crowded in the morning may be empty by only a few hours later. Another CoC noted that they planned to extend the hours of their future counts into the evening hours, to reach youth during the time between when drop-in programs close for the day and when they retire for the night.

- *Empowerment of youth enumerators to interact with their peers during the count.* One CoC noted that although volunteers for their PIT count performed only a visual identification of homeless individuals, enumerators for the youth-specific count were encouraged to ask questions of other youth. This CoC argued that allowing for interaction between youth helped enumerators to better assess their housing status to appropriately include or exclude them in the count.
- *Flexibility in the youth enumeration routes.* Several communities noted that their enumerators were sometimes informed by youth of unmapped locations where youth were congregating on the day of the count. These communities gave count teams the flexibility to deviate from their planned routes to include these new areas or enabled them to call into a centralized deployment station, which could assign locations to the appropriate count team.
- *Use of unique identifiers to reduce the risk of duplication*. Youth counts often employed a unique identifier in the survey portion of their count, whether it was integrated into the count or separate. By devising a unique ID (UID), often employing a youth's initials, birthdate or age, communities were able to reduce the risk of duplicate data entry.

Trainings and resources on additional elements of a successful youth count have been documented and are shared in the resources section (see Appendix F).

### Best Practice Spotlight: Community Counts and the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership/University of Southern California Count

In October of 2012, the **Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership (HHYP)**, a partnership of seven youth-serving agencies working to prevent and reduce homelessness among young adults, collaborated with the **University of Southern California (USC) School of Social Work**, to conduct their own PIT census of homeless youth in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles. The HHYP was interested in counting the number of homeless youth specifically in Hollywood, a question often asked of them when seeking programmatic funding. In addition, given the transience of their youth population, they hoped to develop a count methodology that extended past the traditional one-day PIT approach.

HHYP and USC developed a weeklong "agency-based" approach to counting. USC interviewers were co-located with the HHYP's seven agencies and three outreach teams during all service hours from October 19-25, 2012. Interviewers attempted to interview every youth who came into contact with the services during this week. The survey instrument contained 21 questions, including items used to create an anonymous unique identifying code and a question about where youth had slept on the index night of October 18. Youth were given two bus tokens for participation in the survey or one token if they reported that they had previously participated that week and provided their unique identifying code to the surveyor.

441 unique youth were interviewed at agencies and street locations. Of these, 228 reported sleeping in a place that would be included in the HUD PIT count (i.e., on the street, outdoors, or in an emergency shelter). 380 youth reported having slept on the street, outdoors, or in an emergency shelter within the past year, and 315 had done so in the past 30 days.

The resources expended for developing and conducting the count included: several planning meetings between the HHYP leadership and the USC study staff to develop and refine the survey instrument; one week of the USC staff's time during the count; 20 volunteer social work graduate students to conduct interviews with youth; HHYP agencies' staff time and space during planning activities and the week of the count; assorted costs for photocopying and other paper materials; and $1,300 in bus tokens given as an incentive to participating youth. In addition, The USC principal investigator developed an Access database (available to communities interested in conducting a similar count) designed to de-duplicate the count data. The USC study staff contributed several days' worth of time following the count to enter and analyze the count data.

*Continued on next page*

Tips from the HHYP/USC team:

- Conduct census counts in the *later part of the month*, as youth getting assistance checks at the beginning will not be on the street until later in the month.
- *Count over a period of several days.* Youth are transient, often moving from one part of town to another within a week. For groups interested in conducting neighborhood-level counts, counting over a longer period of time makes it more likely that study staff will encounter eligible youth.
- *Engage youth to survey other youth.* Youth are best positioned to both locate current hot spots where other youth are likely to be found and appropriately identify eligible youth. In addition, their existing relationships within or visibility as part of a peer youth network equip them to interact with youth who may be distrustful of adult figures. As the USC researchers noted, **"Youth can tell you where the hot spots are that you shouldn't miss and help broker, tell people, 'These people are ok.' And they can identify youth – it could be someone who I would walk right by, because there's no clear marker that would make me think, 'Hey, this youth is homeless."**
- *Conduct a survey-based count* rather than visual identification. **"How invisible youth are is sort of a universal,"** said an HHYP provider. Youth are especially difficult to identify visually, making a survey approach more accurate. In addition, a survey provides the opportunity to garner more information from youth about their housing history and other locally relevant questions.

## Feasibility and cost

Across CoCs, one of the most pressing concerns reported was the feasibility and additional cost of supplementing general PIT count methods to better include youth in the unsheltered count. Overall count costs varied widely by community, with budgets ranging from zero to several hundred thousand dollars. Though cost data were not uniformly available, budgets for communities conducting youth-specific sub-counts also ranged widely. Communities generally sought to stretch their count dollars and capacity by making significant use of volunteers, recruiting from dozens to nearly 5,000 volunteers to enumerate and support the PIT count, depending on the CoC's size, needs, and capacity. In addition, they relied heavily on the staff and resources of local government and community-based organizations within their CoC. Some CoCs, generally the larger and more urban CoCs, engaged outside consultants to assist with the count planning and implementation process. Often these consultants were simultaneously hired to draft 10-year plans to end homelessness or write the CoC's Notice of Funding Ability (NOFA) application.

CoCs described a number of innovative ways to defray the costs and resources involved in conducting the PIT count. These included:

- *Corporate sponsorship*: One CoC described working with local businesses to secure corporate donations of food and other supplies for their PIT count. Local restaurants and grocery stores provided food for volunteers on the day of the count, and meal coupons that enumerators were able to offer each homeless individual as a token of appreciation for their participation.
- *Volunteer donations*: Several CoCs reported setting up drop boxes for donations from the general public for toiletries, warm clothing, and other supplies that were given to homeless individuals encountered on the day of the count. Faith-based organizations in particular were described as major supporters of the PIT count efforts in a number of communities.
- *University partnerships*: Though not an official PIT count, the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership's youth count pilot was implemented in collaboration with a research team from the University of Southern California (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Community Counts and the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership/University of Southern California Count"). USC-based study staff and the principal investigator's time were donated to supporting the count design, implementation, and analysis. Furthermore, volunteer social work graduate students were recruited to survey youth.
- *Leveraging CoC membership*: One CoC reported that the final reports developed from their PIT and other community planning processes are made available only to organizations that have paid membership dues to the CoC. CoC members are free to access these data and use them for their own planning and grant-seeking purposes. By encouraging membership, the CoC is able to leverage the funds raised to support their PIT and other activities.
- *Private sponsorship*: Several CoCs mentioned that future plans include seeking private funding to support their PIT count activities. One example of a successful public-private collaboration for youth counts can be found in this year's Count Us In youth count initiative in King County, Washington, where the United Way of King County, the Raikes Foundation, the Medina Foundation, King County, and the City of Seattle partnered to fund and implement a youth-specific PIT count (Curtin, Gibbard et al., 2013).

## Barriers and limitations

California CoCs and key informants identified numerous barriers to counting homeless youth in California. While some of these barriers would apply to any CoC, others apply more specifically to rural or urban CoCs, and others still to jurisdictions with fewer resources. Many of these barriers are interrelated.

**Youth-specific factors** are the most consistently cited barriers to counting youth. Of youth-related factors, the statement that youth are "hidden" is the most common. One provider summarized this challenge as: **"I don't know how we go about capturing a particular population that doesn't want to be identified."**

- Youth may be *intentionally hidden* for a number of reasons, including lack of trust of providers and adults due to a history of past abuse or neglect, fear that enumerators will detain or report them to Child Protective Services (for minors), runaway status and fear of being returned home, or outstanding warrants.
- Youth may be *effectively hidden* because they do not appear homeless so cannot be visually enumerated. As described by one provider, **"The TAY are couch-surfing and less apparent to the average eye, whereas if you see an older woman with a shopping cart, you look at her and think she's homeless. But if you see a TAY, you can't tell if she's homeless or not."** They may be also be effectively hidden because they spend time in different locations than do homeless adults, for example avoiding large encampments of homeless adults because of safety concerns or stigma. Youth may not be visible because of the time at which a count is taking place, which for most CoCs is late at night or very early morning – times during which youth are far less likely to be present in street sites.
- Youth who *do not access adult homeless* services are also hidden, particularly in counties where parallel youth services may not be available. This may be particularly true of shelters. **"In our emergency shelter, I do not see anybody under age 35,"** stated one provider. In addition, *newly homeless* youth may not know about the services that are available to them.

Related to being hidden, youth are seen as more intermittently homeless and more transient once on the street. Specifically, youth were cited as *more likely to be in and out of housing*, so not counted on the night of the count though they may have been eligible earlier or later in the week. Youth are also more transient once on the street. Therefore, it is more difficult for enumerators to pinpoint "hot spots" where youth may be found in a street count, since these may change or may not be known to those working with adults in large, fixed adult homeless encampments. Furthermore, the fact that youth move around more in the day ("moving targets") and may stay in smaller groups than adults also makes it more challenging to include them in a systematic enumeration.

Multiple specific sub-populations of youth were cited as being most likely to be missed by CoCs' counts of youth because of their hidden nature. Some of these youth may fit the definition of homeless that HUD intends. Others are precariously housed, so may not fit strict definitions on the day of the count, but may fit the definition of homelessness on a different day.

- *Couch surfers* are the most cited sub-group of youth likely to be missed in the PIT count. Though they do not fit the definition of homelessness as per the HUD guidelines, their situation may change. As stated by one provider: **"[Couch-surfers] never come in for services, so you just don't know until they reach that last couch."**
- Youth *may not identify themselves as homeless* and therefore may neither target nor be targeted by providers. Many youth are reluctant to identify themselves as homeless due to the stigma of homelessness. Unaccompanied minors may be especially reluctant to identify as homeless for fear of involvement in child welfare services. This may be particularly true

of certain social groups of youth, such as migrant farm workers and day laborers (for whom immigration status and language may also present challenges to being counted), gang-involved youth, and juvenile justice-involved and paroled youth (who may have outstanding warrants). These subgroups of youth are often disproportionately youth of color living in neighborhoods that have been historically under-resourced. One youth service provider noted the disconnect between how youth self-identify and their actual housing status when discussing the PIT count with a team of youth enumerators in their community's PIT count: **"They were like, 'There are homeless youth [here]?' I'm like, '*You're* homeless.'"**

- Youth in *particular living situations* may be hard to identify, for example, youth living in cars who may not be visible to enumerators, youth in motels or RVs, or youth who are camping in hidden rural areas.
- Other subgroups of youth are hidden because of their *social status*, such as trafficked youth, LGBTQ youth, foster youth, and runaway youth. Minors attending school may also be hard to identify, as unaccompanied minors are not specifically listed under McKinney-Vento criteria.

**Geographical factors** were also cited in interviews. These were especially cited by rural CoCs, who faced numerous barriers due to a combination of limited resources and various geographic factors. Rural CoCs were faced with counting youth in jurisdictions that were often very large, sparsely populated, and might present harsh conditions for enumerators (for example, snow, mountainous terrain, or desert). A representative from a rural CoC stated, **"One of the hardships that we talk about a lot here is the PIT because the homeless population in rural communities is hidden. A lot of them don't want to be found, and they're spread all over. The time, trying to get a count in a 24-hour time frame is very difficult for the people trying to conduct the count to come up with anything realistic... I'm sure that we're getting a very small percentage that way."** One provider from a mountainous region stated, **"Right now, it's so cold that people are not living outside. They're couch-surfing."** Many California counties have faced rain on the days of the count, and suffered from understaffing (because volunteers are less likely to show up) and undercounting (because the homeless are more likely to have sought shelter in more hidden, dispersed locations) as a result.

**Youth program-related factors** are both CoC-specific and structural in nature. Although youth service providers are almost uniformly described as having bought in to the importance of the count and wanting to be involved, a number of communities nevertheless faced challenges to getting providers involved in the count. Though HUD directed CoCs to Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) grantees to support their counting activities, **19 of the 43 California CoCs do not have an RHY Grantee program in their jurisdiction** (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2012). Even in CoCs with RHY services available, providers may not have the capacity to adequately support a full youth count for a number of reasons. Many youth service providers are not members of their local Continuums of Care and do not participate in HMIS data entry, and communities reported difficulty integrating them into the count. Youth service providers' ability to support the count may be limited by staff resources. In particular, the planning for the mandated January count takes place after the holidays, a particularly intense period for youth service providers who are then constrained in their ability to participate in planning activities. Providers' limited capacity is compounded by a lack of PIT-specific funding to support their participation, including the staff time and program resources necessary for participation in a count. Finally, providers may be best able to support counts when the expectations regarding their participation are clear and tailored to the level of effort they are able to share with the PIT count. One youth service provider assisting with the youth count in his community this year reported that while his organization was invested in supporting a successful count, and he would in fact have been willing to help more with the count planning processes, it seemed that their support was only requested after plans had been finalized for the count. Without having some sense of ownership over the planning process or being given clear responsibilities, their efforts felt lackluster.

**Structural factors** that were outside of the CoC's or youth's control were prominent.

The most frequently cited structural barrier and one underlying many other barriers to an effective youth count is *the lack of funding for the PIT count overall and for the youth PIT in particular*. This lack of funding and resources may preclude the ability of a CoC to conduct an adequate youth count, despite the best intentions. The PIT count was frequently described as an "unfunded mandate," though resources may be requested and granted as part of the budget for CoC planning activities in a CoC's NOFA application to HUD. CoCs often expressed frustration over the perceived incongruity of being mandated to conduct a rigorous count with limited resources. As one coordinator stated, **"If HUD would pay for the expense of the PIT… otherwise it's groups of volunteers, loosely organized, throwing darts and seeing what they get."** A minority of CoCs do not perceive that they have a sufficient number of homeless youth to justify developing youth-specific count methods and that they must prioritize the chronically homeless instead.

There was also concern that conducting *a more complete youth count may lead to negative consequences* for a CoC's funding, should the numbers be seen as an increase in the homeless population, as opposed to a more accurate count.

Concern regarding the *reporting obligations of PIT staff regarding unaccompanied minors* was frequently cited as an obstacle to including this population in the count and/or the survey portion of the PIT count. CoCs held widely differing policies regarding how to approach this obstacle, with some treating youth as effectively emancipated while others treated them as potential wards of the state who had to be detained and reported to CPS or the police. Some jurisdictions considered enumerators to be mandated reporters, others not.

The lack of formal relationship between *McKinney-Vento* staff, data and definitions, and HUD staff, data and definitions was also cited as an obstacle to counting youth – particularly minors, but also youth 18 years of age or older who are still in school. As stated in the Overview, the McKinney-Vento definition includes youth who are defined by HUD as precariously housed but not as homeless (such as those living in doubled-up circumstances), leading CoC staff to see those data as inflated for their purposes. In addition, the McKinney-Vento data do not systematically count unaccompanied minors, a subcategory of particular interest to CoCs. Data are generally collected in the fall or over the course of the year, rather than during the same period of time as the January PIT count. As stated by one provider, **"It's a lot of apples and oranges when you try to compare the data."** Finally, CoC staff may or may not have relationships with McKinney-Vento staff. Some CoCs include dozens to hundreds of school districts, some of which may not have a designated McKinney-Vento liaison. As stated by one provider, **"One of our challenges would be the bazillion school districts that we have... not every liaison is interested or participating in the homeless count. Some of them do, and we're able to capture information... in many areas, the homeless liaison is the school superintendent [and it doesn't get done]."** Finally, given the different methods and timing for the collection of McKinney-Vento data, CoCs had concerns about the risk of duplication of data, for example of youth who report being in shelters, who may already have been counted in the sheltered youth count as well.

Concerns about *duplication* were omnipresent in the interviews as an obstacle to counting youth. It was one of the reasons most frequently cited by CoCs not to conduct a separate youth count in their jurisdiction.

*Wariness of extrapolated or calculated counts* was also cited as an obstacle to counting youth, since a number of methods to count this population or even the homeless overall have included such methods. Providers cited their own distrust of such numbers, the distrust of local officials of such

numbers, the lack of the necessary technical support to carry out such methods properly, and the extra time required for the analyses to yield the final data.

Finally, the fact that the inclusion of transition age youth is a *relatively new* part of the overall PIT was cited as an obstacle. Simply put, CoCs felt they needed time to learn how they could conduct such a count in their jurisdiction, and were doing their best in the meantime. As stated by one provider, **"This is a new conversation. The dialogue around counting this population is new to us. I don't know what the other CoCs are doing to count this population. Now that we're being forced to focus on this specific age group, I think it's going to take us a year or two to figure out what the struggles are."**

## Recommendations: Ten take-home lessons for CoCs

1. **The PIT count is an opportunity to gather locally relevant data that supports planning and funding needs.** Many communities viewed the PIT count as a useful exercise for gaining helpful baseline data not only on the HUD-mandated points of information, but also on other information about their homeless population that was locally relevant to their community's planning process. Though these data points may not fit within HUD's reporting requirements, they can be included as an addendum in reports to HUD.
    - Several CoCs reported that they chose to include sub-populations deemed ineligible by HUD, such as couch-surfers and homeless individuals living in jails, in motels without a voucher, or in doubled-up circumstances. Though this meant conducting some data analysis to avoid reporting these larger numbers to HUD, these communities felt that it was important for their planning processes to have a broader snapshot of homelessness.
    - Several CoCs reported working with their McKinney-Vento school liaisons to get a snapshot of the number of homeless students in their school districts. Due to differences in definition and dates of data collection, most of these CoCs were unable to apply their McKinney-Vento numbers directly to their PIT count, but felt the information provided a valuable backdrop to the bigger picture of housing instability and homelessness in their community.
    - Some CoCs conducted semiannual counts in order to better understand seasonal variations in their homeless populations. One community in a mountainous region stated that in January, snow made it impossible for enumerators to reach a number of areas; in response, they conducted a summer count as well in order to better know and plan for their community's needs.
    - One CoC publicized their count as a "Housing Survey" rather than homeless count in order to engage with and better understand the precariously housed and at-risk of homeless populations in their community as well as those homeless per HUD's definition.
    - One CoC reported that although their survey was designed primarily to determine if an individual fit within any of the HMIS sub-population categories (as chronically homeless, disabled, a veteran, etc.), they framed each question intentionally to be as de-stigmatizing and nuanced as possible. Thus, for example, "Do you have a drug or alcohol problem?" was reframed as "Have you ever been convicted for a DUI or a drug-related offence?" "Have you ever participated in AA, NA, [etc.]?" and, if so, "What is your drug of choice?" **"Now with the data that have come in, we can see that we have a little more than one in five homeless are using meth,"** they said, data that helps their county to appropriately target meth reduction programming as well as to determine how many of those in their community's homeless population should be categorized within HMIS as substance-abusing.
    - Another CoC reported that data garnered from a needs assessment included in their survey led to an understanding that hunger was the biggest issue affecting youth in their community. Based on these data, the county created a very successful food stamp outreach program to address hunger issues amongst their homeless populations.

    The collection of locally relevant data may encourage providers to participate in the PIT count. As one consultant noted, **"A lot of the outreach groups have a hard time with the definition [used for the PIT] and feel their participation with the census effort would lead to an undercount of the population they feel is homeless. For a lot of communities, it's been difficult to get community buy-in when they're recognizing that [the PIT] is getting a smaller population estimate than they think should be counted."** Collecting information about precariously housed and at-risk of homeless populations could address these concerns and incentivize providers to support local count efforts.

Locally relevant data collected during the PIT count can also help to draw down funding dollars. One CoC used PIT data documenting a homeless TAY population in their community to garner funding for a TAY-specific housing program. **"I believe that [our PIT] had a lot to do with it," they explained, "because in our application we were able to present the numbers for this age group, and the most compelling point was that there's no other transitional housing program in the county that exists for this age group."**

2. **The PIT count provides an opportunity to engage individuals in care.** A successful PIT count provides an opportunity to interact with individuals who are not accessing services and engage them in care. Several CoCs reported that their counts are integrated with the 100,000 Homes Campaign's Registry Week initiative, in which CoCs create a customized database for each homeless individual in their community (100,000 Homes Campaign Powered by Community Solutions). The Registry Week methodology includes a Vulnerability Index survey, which can be combined with the PIT count and used to prioritize housing placements for the community's most vulnerable and chronically homeless individuals and families. CoCs can also link individuals to services on the day of the count. One CoC described plans to combine their next count with a Project Homeless Connect event, where participants could immediately be linked to needed services. Others provide their enumeration teams with relevant referral numbers, including shelter numbers they could call that night to check on bed availability for anyone interested in finding an indoor placement.

3. **Buy-in from the community, from service providers, and from youth is crucial.** Communities who invest in making sure that the big picture impact of their PIT count is understood by community members, service providers, and youth, and that the asks they make of youth and youth service providers are clear and attainable, will achieve more meaningful input and participation from youth and youth-serving agencies. CoCs made several recommendations regarding ways to improve community buy-in:
    - *Include youth service organizations as members of Continuums of Care.* **"I've been surprised by how many youth-serving organizations aren't part of their CoC and aren't feeling welcome at the table. Being part of their collaborative is the first step,"** noted one youth service provider who has been involved in their community's youth count.
    - *Develop promotional materials regarding the PIT count* to be shared with providers and youth. This includes:
        - *Explaining the methods and long-term impact of the PIT count to providers.* Without education about the PIT count, count processes and their importance can be opaque to key stakeholders who might otherwise be willing to invest staff time or other agency resources into enumeration. One provider commented, **"I figure that they take the numbers and do something magical with them to get the real number [of homeless youth]."**
        - *Explaining the use of the data locally and statewide to providers to justify their investment of resources.*
        - *Outreach to youth prior to the count* to inform them of the reasons for the count and encourage youth participation. Promotional materials that could be shared with youth-serving agencies to both educate providers and be distributed to youth participants might be of particular help.
    - *Facilitate youth participation as enumerators* and ensure that youth understand and have buy-in into the big picture implications of a more inclusive youth PIT count. This might mean offering several tiers of youth participation, ranging from a few hours of participation on the day of the count to an extensive planning role over several months before the PIT count. As an example, several CoCs described future plans to create youth advisory

boards, in which a few well-connected and qualified youth could help to provide input on the overall count planning process. For an example of such an advisory group at the general adult population level and could be easily translated to a youth-specific context, see "Best Practice Spotlight: Peer Advisory Groups and the Orange County PIT Crew."

- *Facilitate provider participation with clear and feasible tasks.* Although providers are often resource-limited, they are overwhelmingly invested in a successful count and are often willing to invest substantive time and resources if they have a sense of ownership over the issue and a clear set of expectations. CoCs can facilitate provider participation by designating a clear point person to coordinate efforts. This youth count point person can develop relationships with youth service providers, establish what their individual capacities and areas of expertise are in relation to the count, and work to capitalize on their resources and strengths in the count strategy. As with youth, offering several levels of involvement in the PIT count could help to engage providers to the degree to which they are comfortable participating. For example, providers could choose to participate by recruiting youth and staff members to enumerate on the day of the count; to take on additional responsibilities by helping to review count locations; or to take on advisory roles and offer input on the count planning process overall.

4. **There is a spectrum of methods that CoCs can implement in striving to improve their youth PIT counts.** As seen in the Methods section, from engaging with youth service providers to conducting youth-specific sub-counts, there are many ways that communities can work to increase youth inclusion in their unsheltered PIT count. Among the methods described by CoCs and in other excellent resources (See Appendix F), communities pointed in particular to the following tactics as best practices:
    - *Engaging with youth service providers from a variety of sectors* who have already built trusting relationships with youth to support the planning and actual count process. Examples provided by CoCs included working with food pantries, with community colleges, and with informal service networks, such as a local drum circle leader in one community who was known as the hub of a social network of homeless and unstably housed youth.
    - *Engaging homeless youth to count each other*. Many communities felt a peer-based model was the best way to appropriately identify and interact with youth. CoCs recommended that youth participating in planning and/or enumeration processes receive compensation for their time and expertise. One service provider described positing the count as an opportunity for youth participants of their drop-in program to demonstrate work readiness and potentially move to a position as a peer outreach worker for the program. CoCs recommended that trainings for youth participating as enumerators be both low-threshold (easy to participate) and thorough (providing some big-picture information about the count to increase youth buy-in).
    - *Conducting a youth-specific sub-count*, if at all possible. A number of communities identified youth as very different from their general homeless adult population for whom a separate count using different tactics might be more effective. One CoC mentioned that their community conducts a separate sub-count of adults living in encampments, as it was felt that specific expertise, planning, and relationship-building was required to adequately reach this population; though they had not been able to dedicate resources to a similar youth count, they were interested in doing so in future counts. **"If we're going to keep using the methodology we have for the street count, I don't know how far we're going to get in counting youth," they noted. "What I see as maybe more effective to counting youth would be a count within the count, so deploying a team of young folks to areas where we know youth are."**

5. **Street count routes, locations, and times should be strategically planned.** To the best of their ability, communities should plan their street count routes and times around enumerators' expertise. This can be done during several stages of the PIT count planning and implementation process:
    - While planning the PIT count, *engage with youth service providers* from both within and outside of the homeless services network to identify locations where youth are known to congregate and the times of day when they are most likely to be found in each identified location.
    - Seek to include count locations where *historically marginalized subgroups of youth* tend to congregate. As discussed in the Barriers section, communities often acknowledged that sub-groups of youth such as migrant workers, gang-involved youth and youth of color in under-resourced neighborhoods, tend to be undercounted in their PIT counts. To the best of their ability, communities should seek buy-in and participation from local experts in these areas and map specific locations and times to maximize inclusion of historically underrepresented youth.
    - One to two weeks prior to the PIT count, *revisit the list of identified locations and times* to verify that they have not shifted. Engaging service providers and youth through brief interviews or conducting a walk-through of the mapped areas can help to confirm the list of locations and identify any new locations that should be added if possible.
    - During the PIT count:
        - *Assign enumerators to the areas with which they are most familiar* and where they already have already relationships with youth.
        - For CoCs with teams of youth enumerators, *ensure that youth are assigned to routes that are safe for them to travel*. Youth may be gang-involved or be subject to other risks related to territory issues; it is paramount that their safety be considered in assigning routes to young people.
        - *Allow for flexibility in updating enumeration locations during the count*. Several CoC's reported that their best informants were homeless individuals encountered during the count who told enumerators where other individuals could be found that day. If the new locations were within a team's assigned area, they could then be sure to focus on the newly identified locations; if outside of their area, they called a count coordinator who could relay information about the new location to the appropriate team. This kind of real-time responsiveness to new data points allows teams to better include people on the day of the count.
        - Communities not wishing to develop separate routes specific to youth may choose to simply *assign those geographic areas known to have a high density of youth to teams comprised of or including youth and/or youth service providers*.

6. **Surveys should be as youth-inclusive as possible.** CoCs conducting surveys as part of their count have an opportunity to include survey questions that are especially pertinent to youth's circumstances, such as youth-specific items regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, foster care history, educational history and aspirations, service utilization, perceived causes of homelessness, social supports and networks, and unmet needs. While all communities should seek to be youth-inclusive, CoCs extrapolating demographic data from surveys should be especially mindful that their survey data collection be as inclusive of youth populations as possible, as results will influence their final youth count number. Incentives are a useful tool to increase youth response rates in a survey and to show appreciation for their participation. Communities providing incentives should consult with youth service providers and youth to determine what incentive would be locally relevant, desirable but non-coercive. Experience from CoCs conducting youth counts suggests that cash or gift card stipends may be especially appropriate. Incentives may be innovative: one CoC conducting surveys at a breakfast event raffled a donated bicycle and other prizes for individuals who had participated in the survey.

7. **Technology is a valuable resource.** CoCs may want to consider using electronic data collection methods to reduce the burden of data entry. Several CoCs have already digitized aspects of their data collection process. For example, one CoC worked with its school district to create a digital spreadsheet that was emailed to all district homeless liaisons and returned via email. They felt that converting the data process to an email format was less burdensome to liaisons and led to improved participation. Another CoC converted their survey to a Scantron format this year in order to decrease the resources required for data entry. In addition to reducing data entry time, movement to a digital system of data collection may reduce youth's distrust of enumerators or surveys associated with the count. One CoC reported that youth in their local schools were more comfortable with digital data collection, which felt more official and, in this digital age, less obtrusive, than pen and paper surveys.

8. **Counts can be innovatively funded.** Across the board, communities reported that the PIT count is difficult for communities to fund. However, from budgets of zero to several hundred thousand dollars, each of the California collaboratives we spoke with viewed the PIT count as investment not only in continued HUD funding but also as an important data element in their own local planning processes. *CoCs described several innovative approaches to funding their counts, from seeking corporate sponsorship to seeking private foundation grants. Given recent federal interest in an improved youth count, it is possible that foundations and other private funding streams may take note of this issue and be increasingly receptive to funding efforts to improve youth counts within a community's PIT count.* Examples of funding approaches are listed in section the Feasibility and Cost section. In addition, communities described relying heavily on volunteered time and resources, including one count outside of the PIT count which was spearheaded by community-based organizations and conducted in partnership with a university research team (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Community Counts and the Hollywood Homeless Youth Project/University of Southern California count"). Communities may be able to engage with student volunteers and research staff from their local community colleges and universities to help with count design, enumeration and interviewing, and data analysis at minimal or no cost.

9. **Rural communities may benefit from building on service-based and informal relationships with homeless individuals for their count.** Rural CoCs face a challenge of having to reach individuals in hard-to-reach geographic locations. Several tactics may work especially well in a rural context:
   - Rather than canvassing their community at large, these communities may be well-served by building on existing relationships to draw homeless individuals to participate at dedicated locations during the count. For example, one CoC plans to hold a Project Homeless Connect event concurrent with their PIT count so that there is a draw for homeless individuals and immediate linkage to resources when participants are surveyed. One CoC requested an extension of their count so that it would coincide with the day a popular food program distributed food, as they knew many individuals attending this program were not otherwise connected to care and would not otherwise be counted.
   - Other CoCs have their service providers call participants and ask them to come to the agency or to other count locations on the day of the PIT count.
   - One CoC conducting a survey-based count created a dedicated phone line to which individuals could call and complete an interview by phone on the day of the count rather than being surveyed in person.
   - Rural communities may also be better positioned to work effectively with their school liaisons to appropriately integrate McKinney-Vento data into their counts – as one provider said, **"In small school districts, they already know who's in those kinds of homeless situations"** and have developed trusting relationships with youth.
   - CoCs should capitalize on informal service and social networks, which may be especially strong

in rural areas. CoCs should seek out individuals with social or informal service connections to youth (for example, local community members who operate informal youth drop-in spaces, serve as the hub for getting mail or sending out messages, or distribute food to youth) in the count planning and implementation process. These informal providers may be linked to youth's social networks and able to outreach effectively to youth about the importance of participation in the count.

Other suggestions specific to conducting counts in rural communities may be found in HUD's 2009 guidebook for Rural Continuums of Care (US Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development, 2009).

10. **Other CoCs are a valuable resource.** CoCs may be each other's best resource in determining what local practices will be most effective in their community. CoCs would be well served to learn from each other. For example, one CoC described contacting a neighboring community to learn about their count methods. For this year's count, they integrated many of these methods in their planning process and contracted their neighboring CoC to provide safety and protocol trainings to their volunteers prior to the PIT count.

## Recommendations: Technical assistance for Continuums of Care

In this section we briefly describe the types of assistance and guidance that CoCs employed, the types of assistance that CoCs requested and the types of technical assistance which were not specifically requested by CoCs but which we propose may be necessary for a successful PIT count on the basis of our assessment process. The vast majority of CoCs reported consulting with either webinars or publications related to including unaccompanied minors and transition age youth in the PIT count, chiefly from either the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, or the United States Interagency Council to End Homelessness. Other sources named included research consultants, youth service providers, listservs, and community members. Very few CoCs reported not consulting with any form of guidance on counting youth.

However, even with the available information, not all CoCs found the guidance useful or even pertinent, citing difficulties in implementing HUD recommendations due to time constraints; inability to apply the information to rural communities; and/or finding the guidance too general rather than providing specific instructions. One CoC stated, **"[We need] guidance tailored to our specific community so rural communities don't have to wade through urban materials."** Most CoCs had requests regarding further support they could use to conduct a more effective count, including requests for resources and guidance and requests for media and advocacy training and materials.

CoC's requested resources and guidance for use in training and for the count, including:

- Specific guidelines regarding the count and/or guidelines that were applicable to their region. The latter was a particular request of the non-urban CoCs, who felt that the available guidance did not apply to them. This included a request for a toolkit for counting youth in rural areas.
- Case studies and best practices regarding the count as conducted in other CoCs.
- Guidance regarding the engagement of community members to collaborate in the count, including youth, schools (particularly McKinney-Vento liaisons), police, and service providers.
- Specific guidelines, materials and support for training of staff, volunteers and youth participating in the PIT count, including standardized training methods regarding enumeration methods for volunteers and/or for youth participating in the count.
- Sample data collection sheets and surveys for use in the PIT count.
- Relevant online calculators, "apps", or sample Excel sheets to assist in data entry or analysis.
- In-person technical training, possibly as a follow-up to webinar training.

CoCs requested communication, media and advocacy training and materials to be used for communication about the PIT count, including:

- Materials for communication with schools about the PIT count.
- Materials for communication with the homeless regarding the purpose of the PIT count.
- Media advocacy training, including approaches to talking to the media to minimize damage and misuse of the data and to increase community buy-in and support for services for the homeless. One interviewee stated, **"Fairly high numbers [of homeless youth] reported as a result of good efforts puts a lot of pressure on the jurisdiction, because a lot of cities look at homelessness as a performance measure for their term in office. They go into denial, which is why we see a lot of homeless sweeps before the counts, and there's census denial afterward… There's definitely a lot of pressure in the overall numbers in the PIT on a macro level."**
- Materials to increase awareness of youth homelessness.

We noted additional areas of unmet need that were not specifically requested by CoCs but which became evident during the evaluation process. These include the following:

- Legal guidelines regarding counting and surveying minors. Concerns about the ability of youth to consent for themselves were frequently cited as an obstacle to surveying minors as part of the PIT count. However, this was not the case for all CoCs. Guidance is needed regarding how to approach this issue. (See "Best Practice Spotlight: Counting and Surveying Unaccompanied Minors")
- Guidance regarding how to raise resources or take advantage of funding opportunities for the PIT count.
- TA regarding how to report about improved (often increased) numbers to HUD due to changing methodology in the PIT count.

### Best Practice Spotlight: Counting and Surveying Unaccompanied Minors

*Can CoC's or their representatives (i.e., volunteers and staff for the Point-in-Time Count) legally survey minors?*

Many CoCs survey minors as part of their PIT count. A number of other California CoCs do not include minors living on the street in their PIT count survey, though they do interview adults. Based on our expertise as providers for youth in California and on the advice of attorneys familiar with youth law in California, we offer the following guidance. We acknowledge that we cannot provide a legal opinion for CoCs and that CoCs must operate under the guidance of their own legal counsel. Nevertheless, we propose that California law suggests an intent that may be applicable and that this intent would support CoC's ability to reach out to minors.

- We have identified no federal or state law that requires parental or guardian permission to interview minors living on the street.
- We have not identified any legal cases where parents brought a case against government representatives for administration of such surveys.
- There is clear guidance in California law (specifically the California Family Code and the California Health and Safety Code) regarding youth's right to provide their own consent for reproductive care and to medical care as follows:
  - California law allows youth 15 years old and older who are living apart from their parents and meeting their own needs, to consent for their own medical care.[1]
  - Minors can consent for reproductive care without their parents' consent, and minors 12 years of age and older can consent to STI and HIV prevention, diagnosis and treatment.[2,3,4,5]

This may suggest that, given that our state allows youth to consent for medical care which entails far greater risk to youth than an anonymous survey, youth may similarly be able to consent for far lower-risk activities, such as a PIT count survey.

- The exclusion of minors from the survey excludes the population of homeless minors from the benefits that could result from such inclusion. Accurate and

*Continued on next page*

inclusive data can and has resulted in increased provision of services for the homeless that could shorten their time on the street and improve their health status, including those less than 18 years of age. Thus, one might argue that the exclusion of youth from the PIT count is in fact harmful to youth.

- Youth on the street often come from families with a history of abuse or neglect. Attempting to contact their families could represent a risk to youth.
- Finally, a recently proposed Assembly bill (AB 652: Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act: Homeless children) would clarify that a minor's homelessness is not, in and of itself, a sufficient basis for reporting child abuse or neglect.[6] The bill's authors note that this clarification would be consistent with federal law regarding homeless youth.

"A minor may consent to the minor's medical care or dental care if all of the following conditions are satisfied: (1) The minor is 15 years of age or older. (2) The minor is living separate and apart from the minor's parents or guardian, whether with or without the consent of a parent or guardian and regardless of the duration of the separate residence. (3) The minor is managing the minor's own financial affairs, regardless of the source of the minor's income." (Cal. Family Code § 6922(a)).

[2] A minor 12 years of age or older who may have come into contact with a sexually transmitted disease may consent to medical care related to the diagnosis or treatment of the disease. (Cal. Family Code § 6926).

[3] A minor 12 and older is competent to give written consent for an HIV test. (Cal. Health and Safety Code § 121020).

[4] A minor 12 and older may consent to the diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. (Cal. Family Code § 6926).

[5] Duplessis V, Goldstein S and Newlan S, (2010) *Understanding Confidentiality and Minor Consent in California: A Module of Adolescent Provider Toolkit. Adolescent Health Working Group, California Adolescent Health Collaborative.*

[6] AB 652: An act to add Section 11165.15 to the Penal Code, relating to child abuse. (2013).

## Recommendations: Policy

### What can be done on a state or federal level to improve the youth PIT count?

Several policy agenda items that would improve the count of unaccompanied minors and TAY were raised by CoCs or became apparent during the course of the assessment.

### Funding

The most pressing need to improve the youth PIT count (and the PIT count overall) is the need to provide specific, additional and adequate funding for a count. A number of CoCs stated that employing CoC funds to conduct a count takes funds away from already limited services. Although for this year's NOFA application communities were allowed for the first time to apply for funding for CoC planning activities, including their PIT count, the funds in most cases fall far short of the amount needed to fully fund planning activities and the count. Adequate funding of the CoCs that does not detract from service or continuum dollars would enable CoCs to allocate the resources to properly count all the unsheltered, including youth. Furthermore, the engagement of youth providers, universally recognized as critical to the success of a count, often requires these providers to donate their personnel and resources to the effort. Funding the collaborative activities of these often strapped, and sometimes threatened, agencies would enable them to contribute the necessary effort and expertise for CoCs to be successful. As stated by one CoC interviewee: **"Instead of relying on the kindness of strangers, if we could actually pay for the survey I bet the information pool would get a lot better. Everybody who's doing this is giving up their own time."**

### Coordination of definitions and data systems on the Federal level

Aligning the structure of currently disparate data systems (HMIS, RHYMIS, PIT) would help CoCs to be able to assess numbers of youth, minimize duplication, and collect data based on comparable definitions. At the local level, supporting and incentivizing agencies to coordinate their data collection and maintenance efforts would help to systematize these collaborations so they would not be jurisdiction specific. Effective data alignment would not only require sharing or standardizing definitions, but also updating of data so that they may be useful to jurisdictions at the time they are needed. For example, at the present time, McKinney-Vento data are often not current when the PIT count data are needed. One CoC suggested that if schools receive McKinney-Vento funds, they should be required to participate in the count and attend CoC meetings. However, this depends on adequate funding and staffing for McKinney Vento Liaisons to be put in place and to be able to participate.

Another data source that needs to be coordinated for the PIT count is the HMIS system. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of including all youth-serving agencies in HMIS.

### Clarification and messaging from HUD regarding the following points would be beneficial:

- Agencies asked for clearer definitions of who is homeless for the PIT count and/or definitions that were more workable or that fit what they see on the ground. As stated by one stakeholder, **"[We need] more details about what's considered homeless and how for youth, and making sure that those definitions make sense... HUD doesn't consider a family living in a trailer to be homeless unless they're squatting... [but] the situation is so unstable that for the sake of the PIT they might be counted anyway."**
- *Federal recognition that better data may mean increased numbers.* It may be important to be clear on a federal level that CoCs are to be commended for improving their data and that this likely means a "rise" in the numbers of homeless in a jurisdiction. CoCs need to be assured that if they document these good faith efforts to include youth and the resulting counts, these more inclusive numbers will be praised rather than penalized.
- *Recognition that standardization of counts may work for one CoC but not for another.* The

guidelines as they stand may lead to systematic undercounting in some areas more than in others. For example, rural areas may be systematically undercounted by a system that is perceived as based on counting urban homelessness, as are areas that are frequently affected by rain at the time of the count. Several CoCs mentioned that their communities do not have funding for emergency weather shelters, meaning that on a rainy PIT count day, the unsheltered homeless disperse to find hidden shelter areas and are therefore disproportionately undercounted.

- *Clarification of the goals of the PIT count at the Federal level*. Is it intended to be a snapshot, intended to be compared across regions or time? Clarifying the role of the PIT count in CoC funding would make it relevant to CoCs. Similarly, encouraging and rewarding CoCs for developing jurisdiction-specific metrics for data collection would help inform CoCs' internal planning processes and assist CoCs in evaluating interventions or monitoring the composition of their population.

## Conclusion

Homeless youth are hidden in plain sight. They cross our paths not only on the street, but in our communities, in schools, in clinics, in programs focused on homeless youth and not, and, too often, in our emergency rooms and jails—yet we still face significant barriers to including them in counts.

We have an ethical and fiduciary responsibility to the minors and youth who are living on our streets to help them exit street life and enjoy the same opportunity to reach their full potential as other children and youth in our society. The first step to this, as stated by the USICH, is **"an intentional and coordinated strategy for getting to better data…in order to advance our understanding of youth homelessness and refine our plan to end youth homelessness"** (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012a).

While requiring the inclusion of both TAY and unaccompanied minors in the PIT count represents an important first step in better understanding and addressing the needs of this unique population, the accuracy of current youth count practices continues to be contested. Despite the innovations taking place in California to include homeless youth in the PIT count, the majority of CoCs find their youth counts to be underestimations.

> **"[The count is] unscientific—based on the weather and the volunteers you have."**
>
> **"This report recognizes that there was an undercount of homeless persons."**
>
> **"We always report a very small number of homeless youth, especially unaccompanied. I don't know if that's because we're vastly undercounting them or because they are couch surfing."**
>
> **"If we're going to keep using the methodology we have for the street count, I don't know how far we're going to get in counting youth."**

Although we await the results of the 2013 PIT count and the Youth Count! pilot community sites in particular, we already possess the knowledge and resources to conduct better youth counts in the future.

Our findings in California suggest a number of clear next steps. As described in the report, these steps will require coordination and input at the local, state and national level, and from both the public and private sectors. The bottom line is: **CoCs need adequate funding, guidance and support** in order to feasibly move forward in the continuum of youth-inclusive and youth-specific counting approaches. In the short term, the majority of CoCs can make their count more inclusive of youth, regardless of whether they have the capacity to conduct a separate youth count, by structuring their counts to address barriers identified during the assessment process. In the long term, with adequate support, communities may work toward a complete and inclusive count of homeless youth, with youth-specific counts in all CoCs tailored to the specific composition of their youth population.

Clearly these steps need to take place not only in California, but nationwide. A number of steps in particular will require Federal leadership in order to be implemented, including **calculating annualized estimates of the population size of homeless youth** to aid in program planning**.** Such estimates are particularly important for homeless youth, given that they are more likely to be intermittently homeless.

Another innovation that would better inform program planning for CoCs would be to support CoCs in **counting couch surfing and other unstably housed and intermittently homeless youth.** These youth represent a substantial proportion of youth served by many federal programs, including RHY and McKinney-Vento programs, yet are noticeably absent from the PIT count. Regardless of HUD's definition of homelessness for the PIT count, CoCs need tools and support for counting these youth for their own planning purposes. **Development of a clear and consistent federal definition of youth homelessness** utilized across all federal programs would be an even further improvement.

Finally, we must **engage in an ongoing dialogue about how to obtain better data on homeless youth.** Should they be included in the PIT count, a process well suited to and developed for chronically homeless adults, but a fundamentally poor process for counting homeless youth? Or are there better ways of meeting our fiduciary responsibilities to counting and accounting for the needs of these youth? We must assess whether standardization of counts is more important than inclusion. As stated by one CoC, **"There needs to be a separate national homeless youth count to allow for flexibility in definitions and collecting better, more comprehensive information. [It is] particularly difficult to lump youth in with the other subpopulations mandated by HUD."** However, to do so, methods need to be developed that can be feasibly implemented in low- and high-resource communities, and rural, urban and suburban settings.

Recent initiatives in California, including the first statewide plan to end youth homelessness, and the Federal goal to eliminate youth homelessness by 2020, have signaled a sea change in political will. We hope our report may contribute to this momentum to bring us one day closer to proclaiming youth homelessness in California—and across the nation—a thing of the past.

*Photo credit: Dave Kempa*

## Appendix A: Lexicon of terms

**AB 109 (2011):** This bill enacted criminal justice alignment, allowing non-violent, non-serious, and non sex offenders to serve their sentence in county jails instead of state prisons.

**Census:** Point-in-time count of a population

**CoC:** Continuum of Care, a regional or planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals in a specific region.

**Couch-surfing:** The act of moving place to place, residing as a short-term, temporary guest with friends or family members.

**CRB:** California Research Bureau

**DOE:** Department of Education

**Doubled-up:** The act of sharing a residence with other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or other circumstances.

**GIS:** Geographical Information Systems

**HDX:** Homelessness Data Exchange, an online tool enabling Continuums of Care to submit data to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

**HHS:** Department of Health and Human Services

**HUD:** Housing and Urban Development

**HMIS:** Homeless Management Information Systems, an electronic database used to collect information on homeless individuals and families accessing residential or other homeless assistance services.

**HEARTH Act:** Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act.

**HIC:** Housing Inventory Count, conducted annually, collects information on the total number of beds and units in each Continuum of Care.

**CHYP:** California Homeless Youth Project

**LGBTQ:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, & Questioning/Queer

**LEA:** Local Education Agency, also commonly referred to as a school district.

**Literally homeless:** Residing in a place not intended for human habitation (e.g. sleeping in a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or on the street).

**McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act:** This federal legislation aims to provide children and youth experiencing homelessness a full and fair opportunity to succeed in their education by requiring the public school system to provide a range of services.

**McKinney-Vento homeless liaison:** This role complies with the McKinney-Vento Act by identifying the children and youth experiencing homelessness and ensures they receive educational services. Such services include: providing referrals to health care, dental, mental health and other appropriate services; informing parents/guardians of the educational opportunities available to their children; providing parents/guardians with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education; disseminating public notice of educational rights; ensuring an expedited enrollment when applicable; assisting families and youth in accessing transportation services.

**Minor:** A youth under the age of 18.

**NAEH:** The National Alliance to End Homelessness

**NOFA:** Notice of Funding Ability

**Precariously or unstably housed:** Lacking a fixed residence, and therefore couch surfing or residing in places such as: hotels, shelters, recovery/transition houses, and jails.

**PIT:** Point-in-Time count

**RHY:** Runaway and Homeless Youth

**RHYA:** Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

**TA:** Technical Assistance

**TAY:** Transition Age Youth, age 18 through 24

**UID:** Unique Identifier, often consisting of a homeless individual's first and last initial, gender, date of birth, and/or state of birth, used in ensuring an individual is not counted more than once.

**USDA:** United States Department of Agriculture

**USICH:** United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, an independent agency within the federal executive branch consisting of 19 federal Cabinet secretaries and agency heads, coordinates the federal response to homelessness.

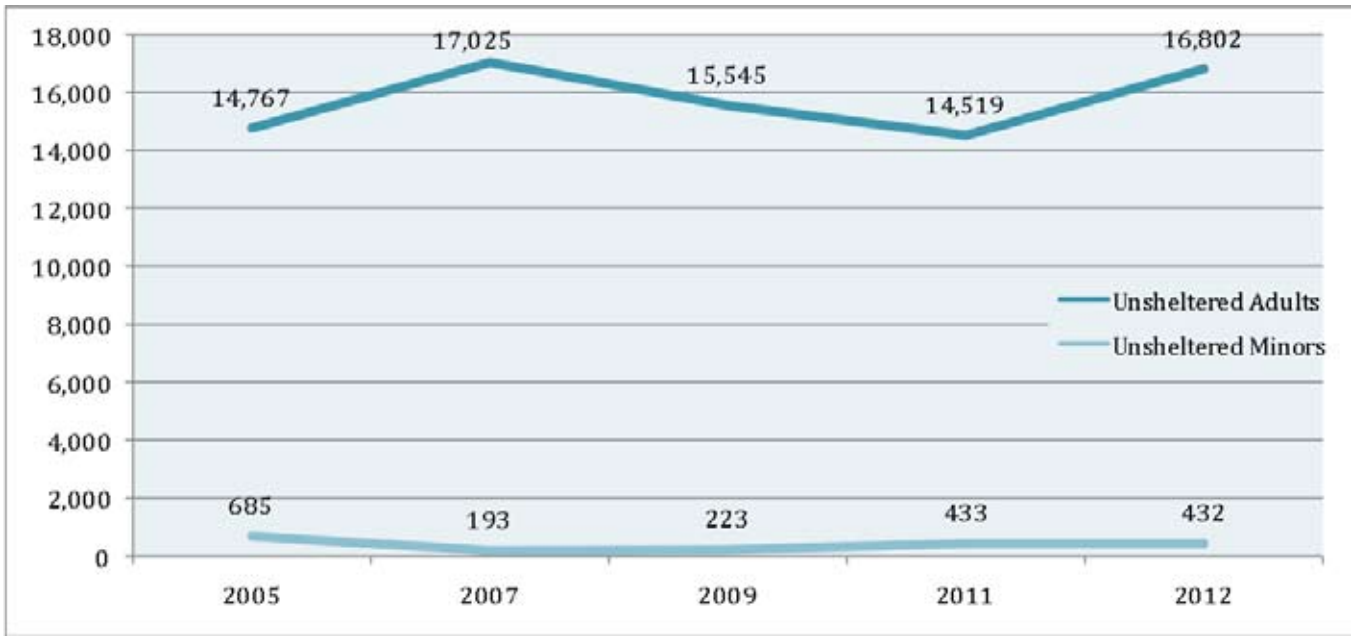
**Unaccompanied Minor:** Youth, age 12 through 17, who are living apart from their parents or legal guardians.

**Youth:** Refers to both unaccompanied minors (age 12 through 17), and transition age youth (age 18 through 24).

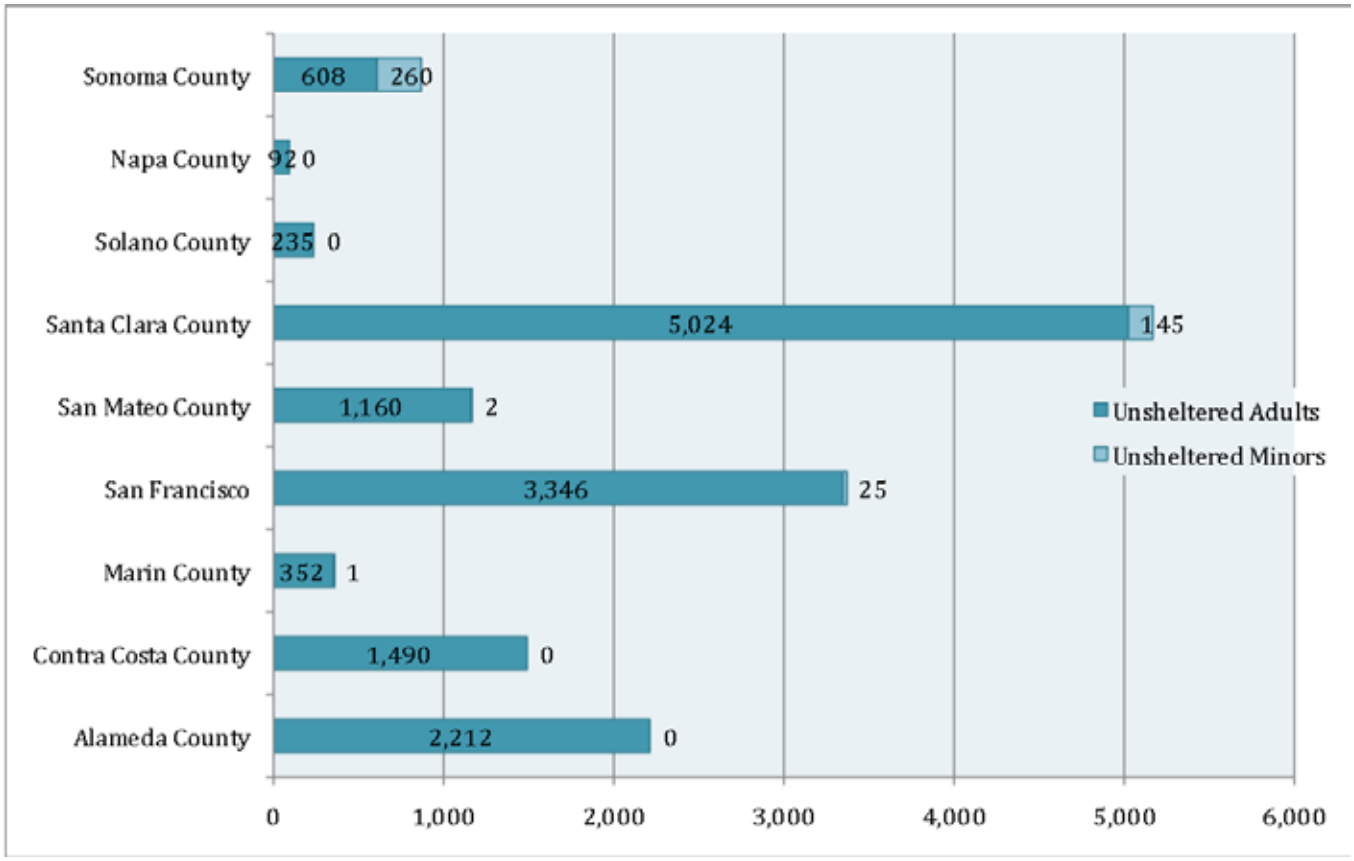
## Appendix B: Regional PIT count totals, 2005-2012

### Bay Area

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2012

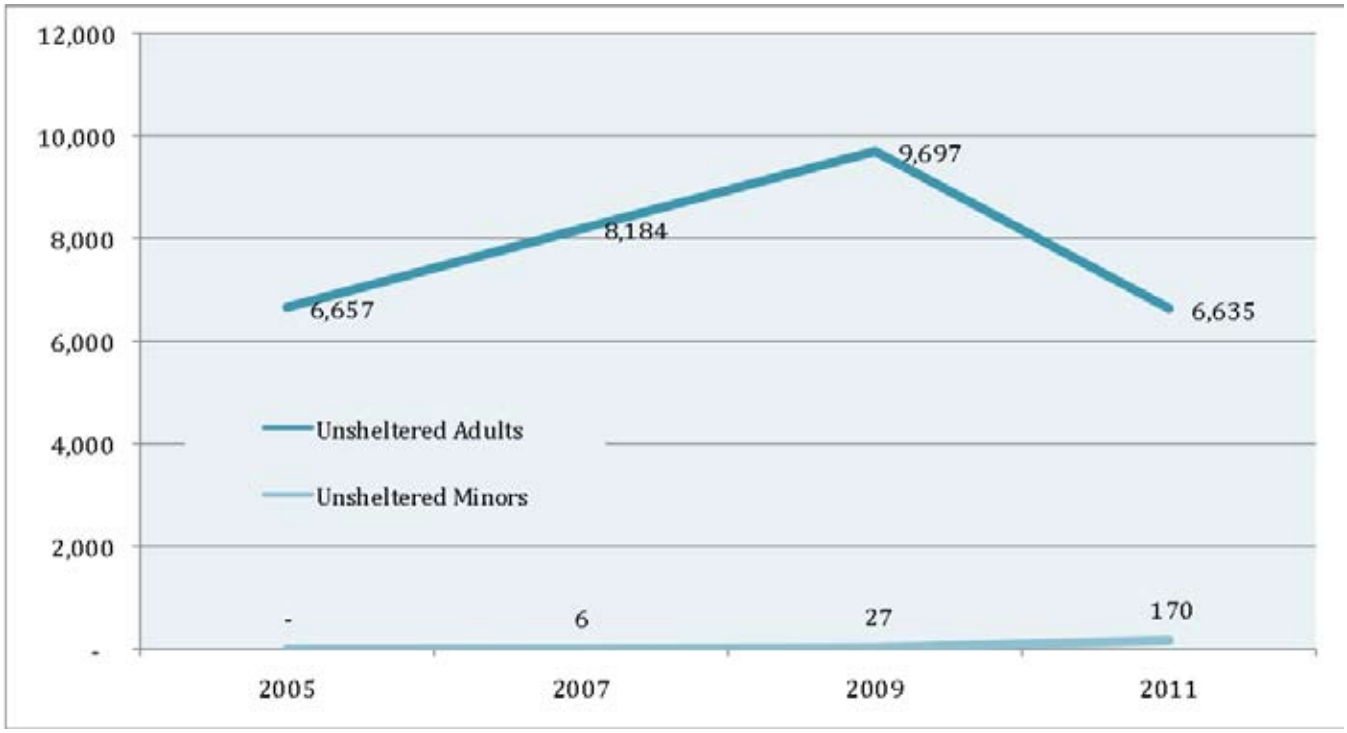



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

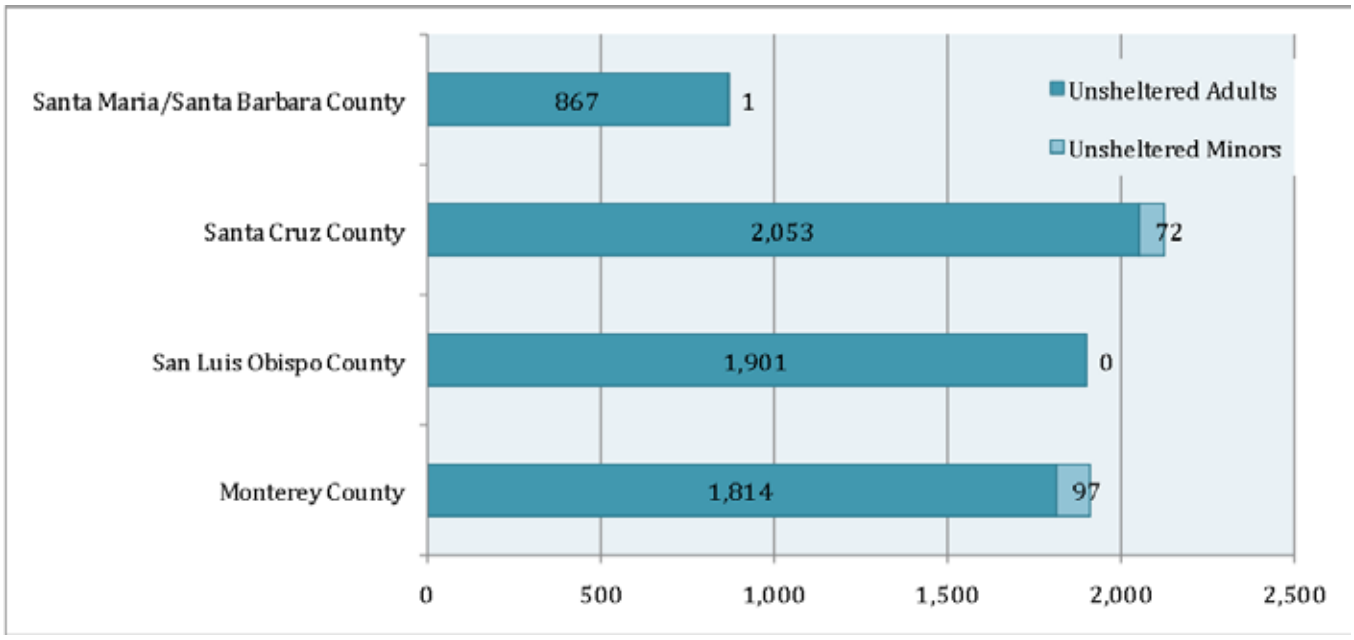


## Central Coast

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011

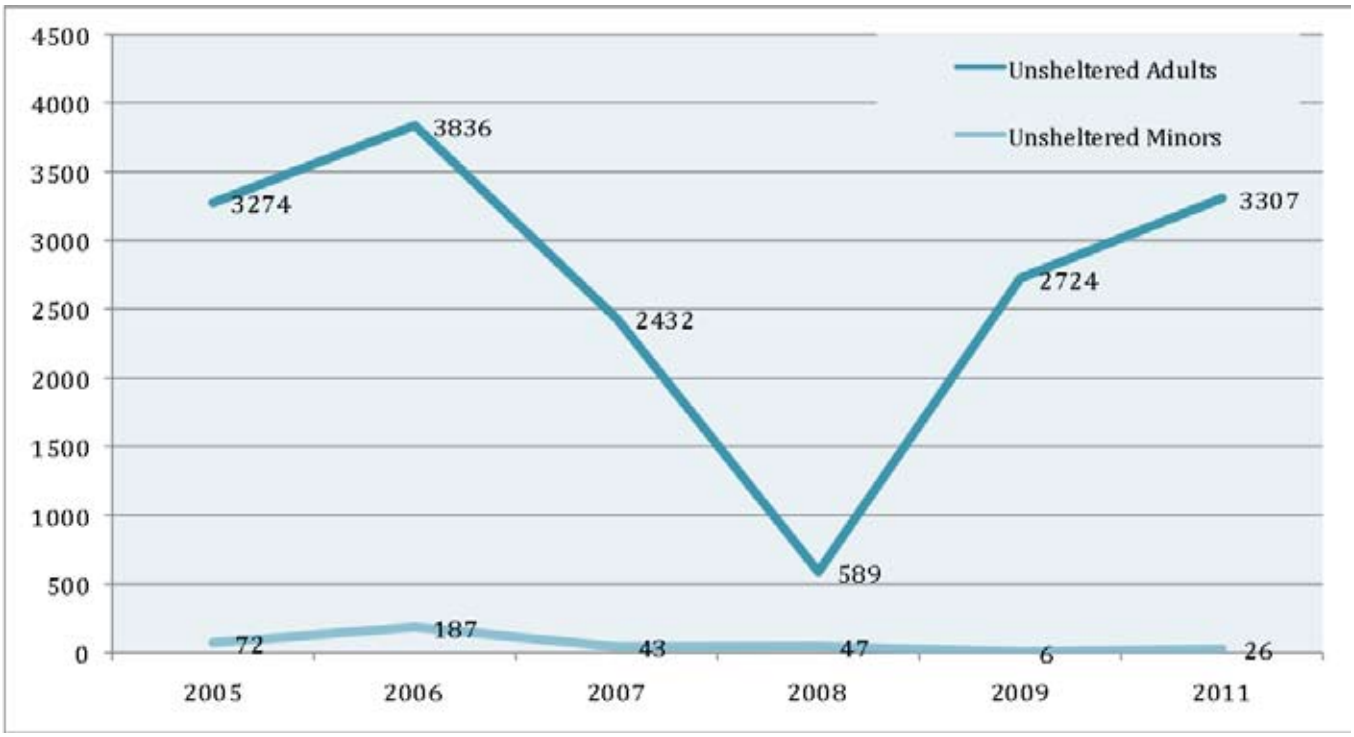



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by Region, 2011

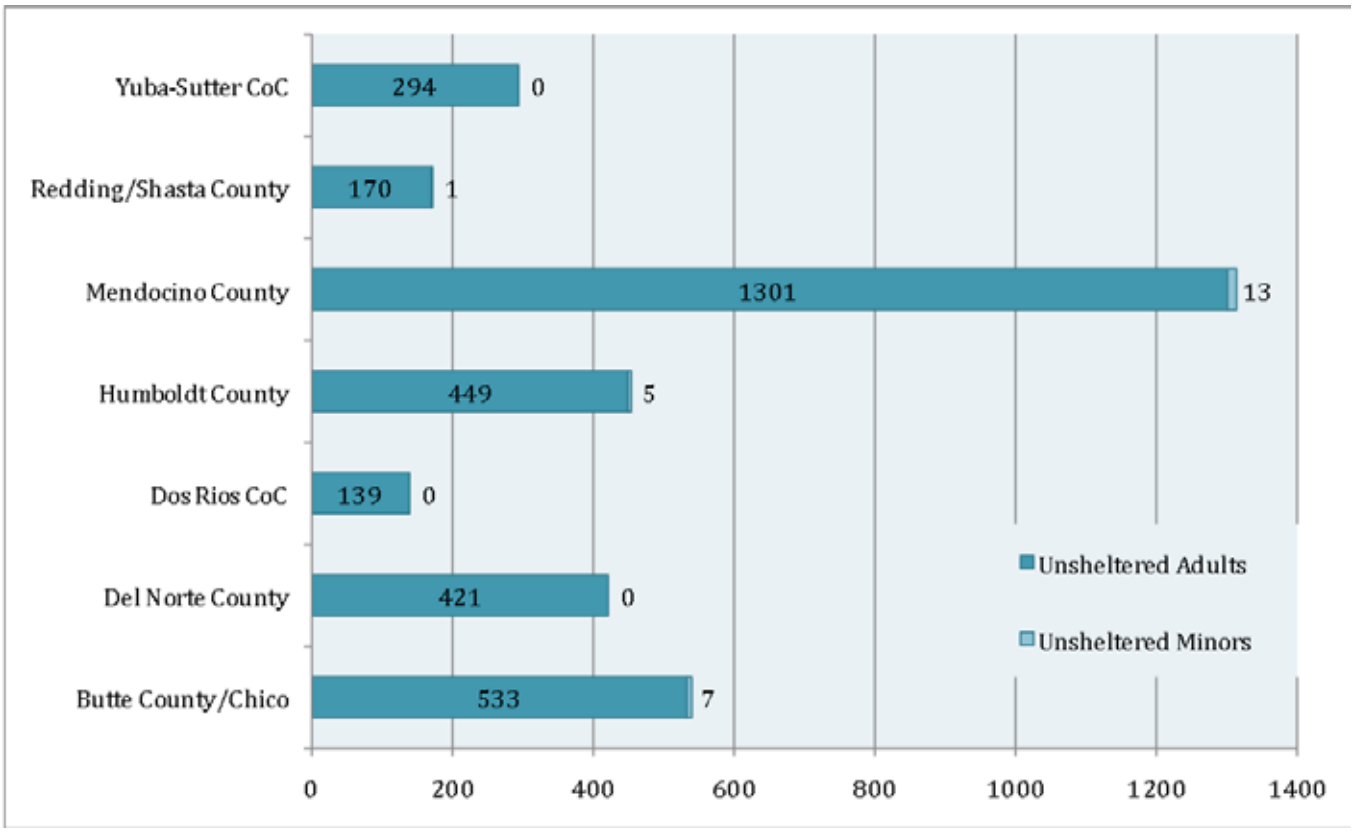


## Far North

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011

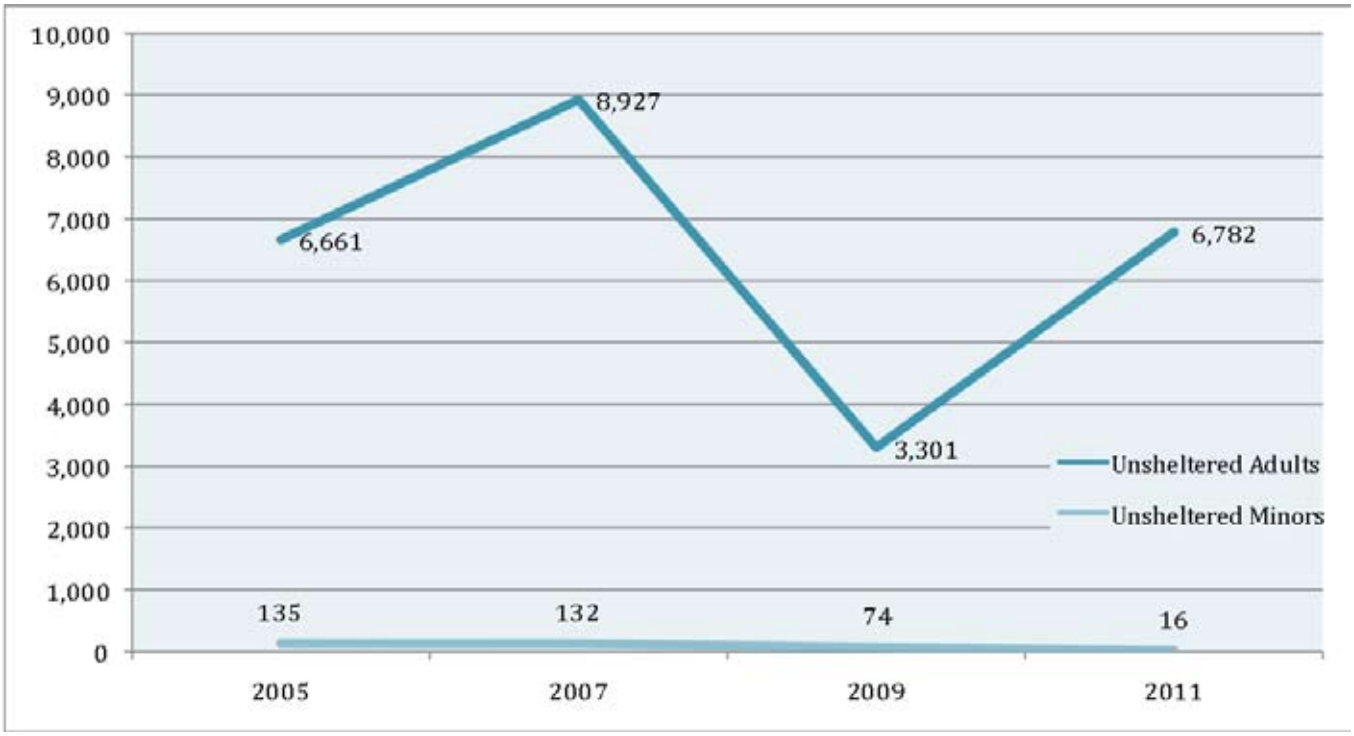



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

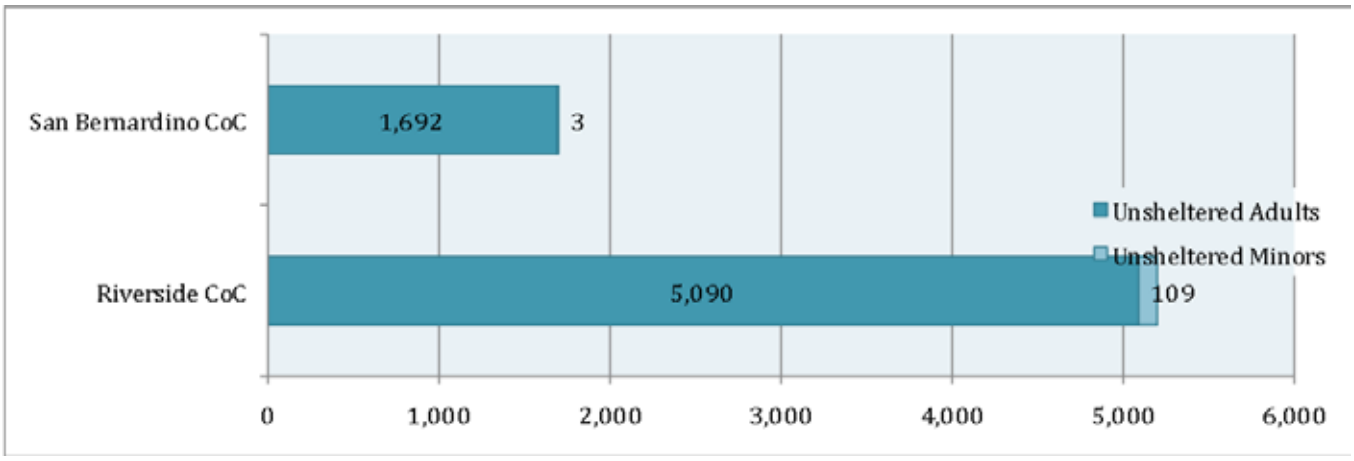


## Inland Empire

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011

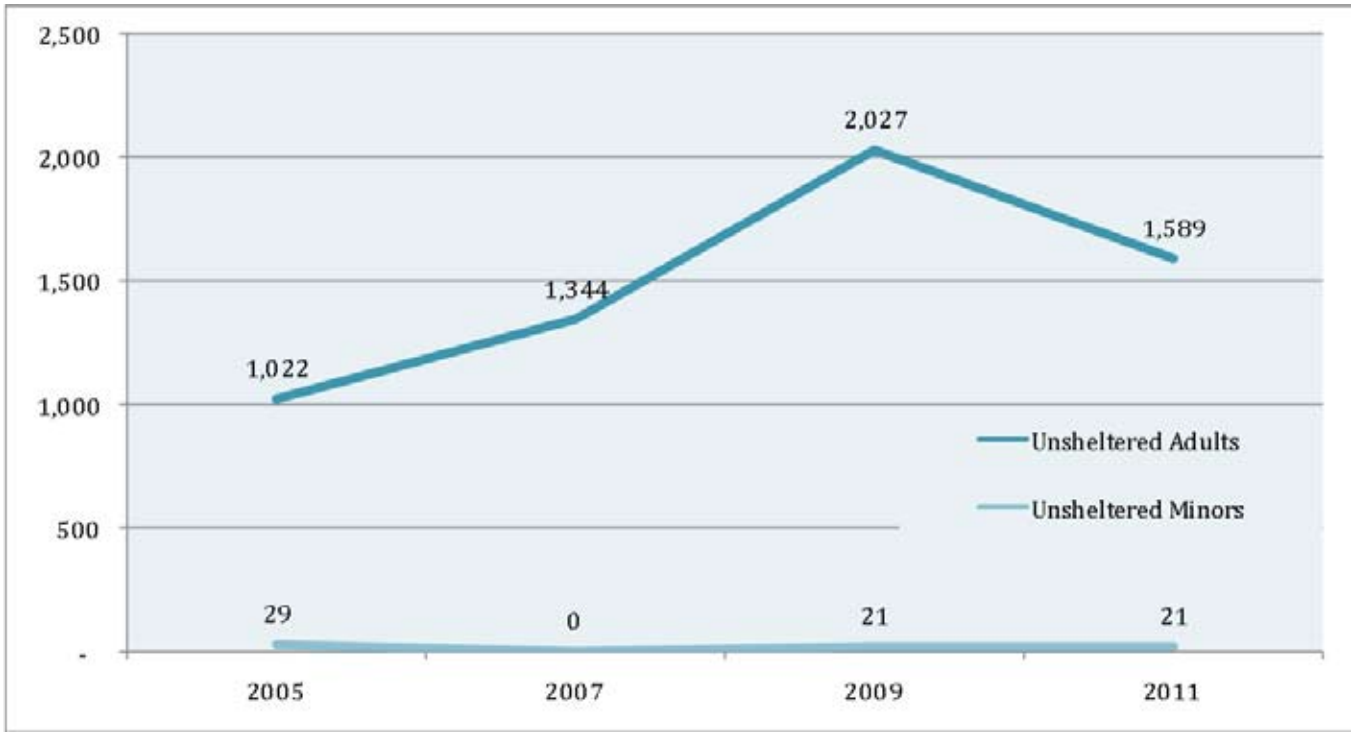



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

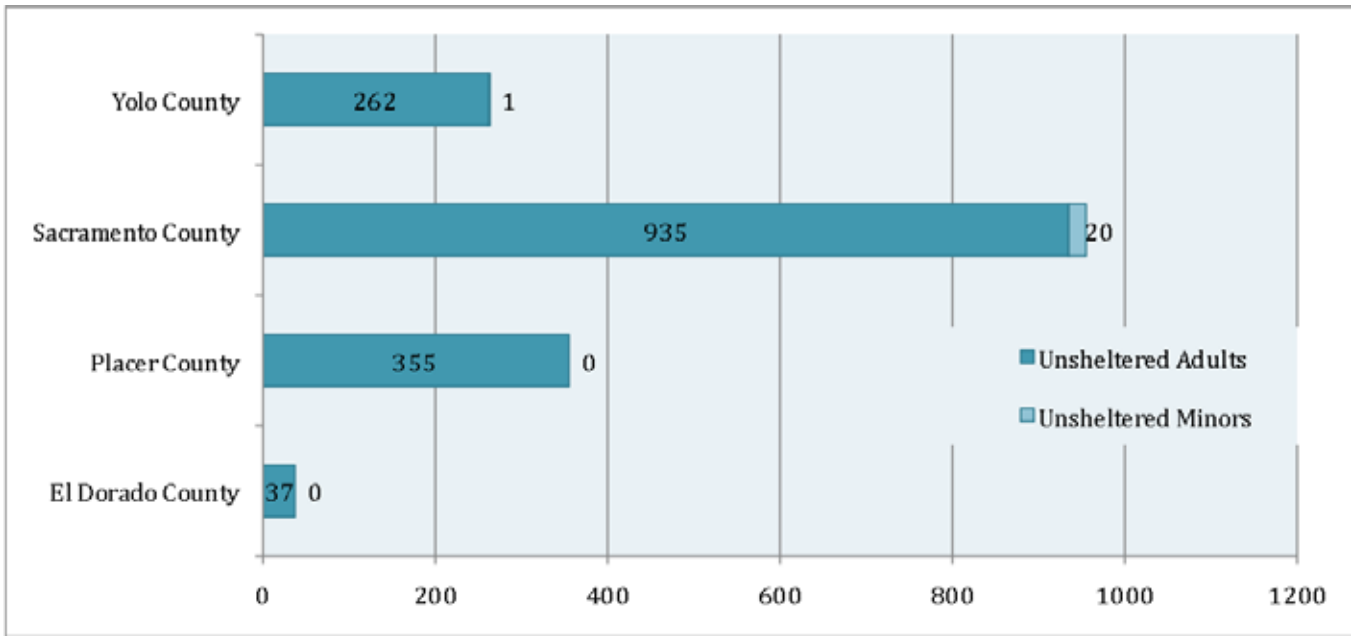


## Sacramento Metro

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011

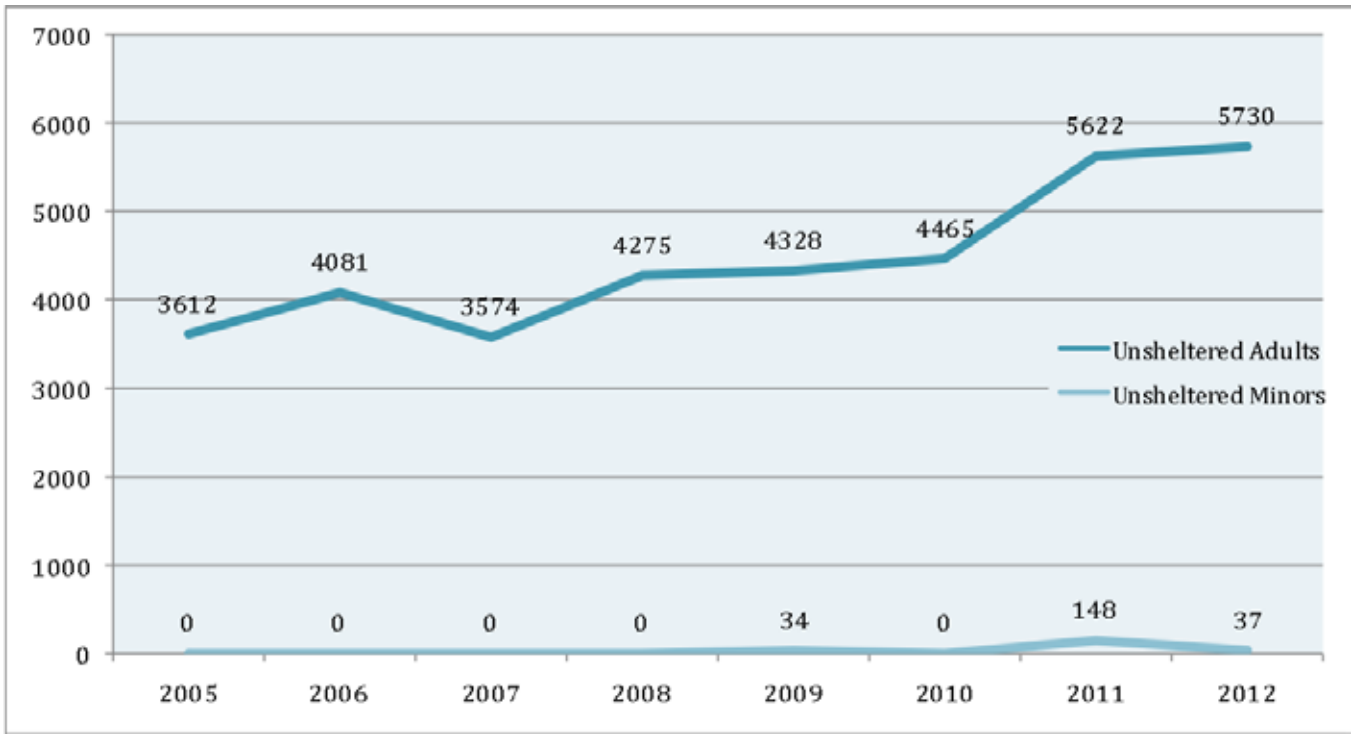



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

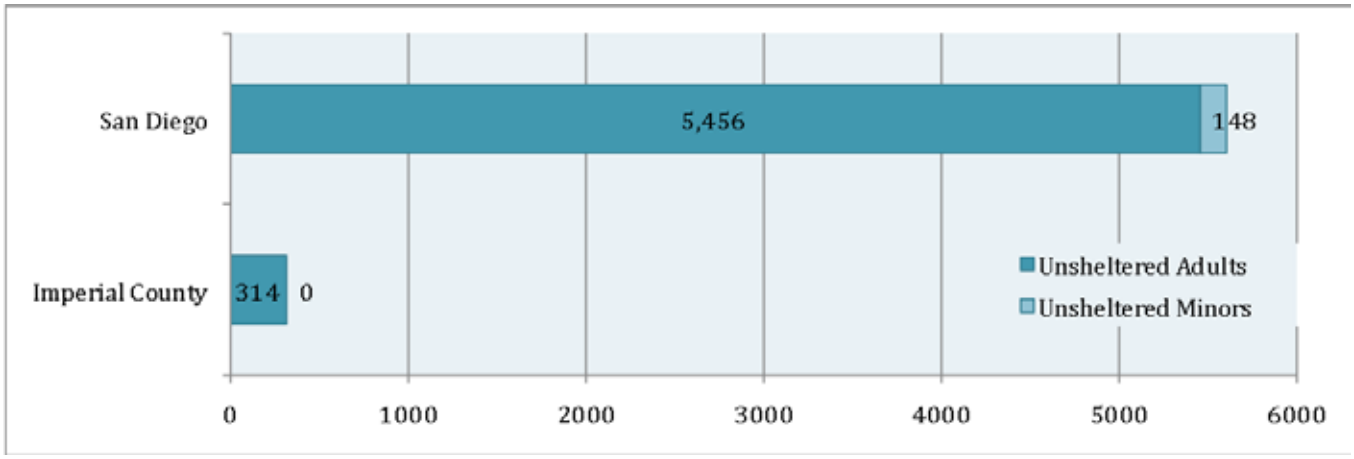


## San Diego

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011

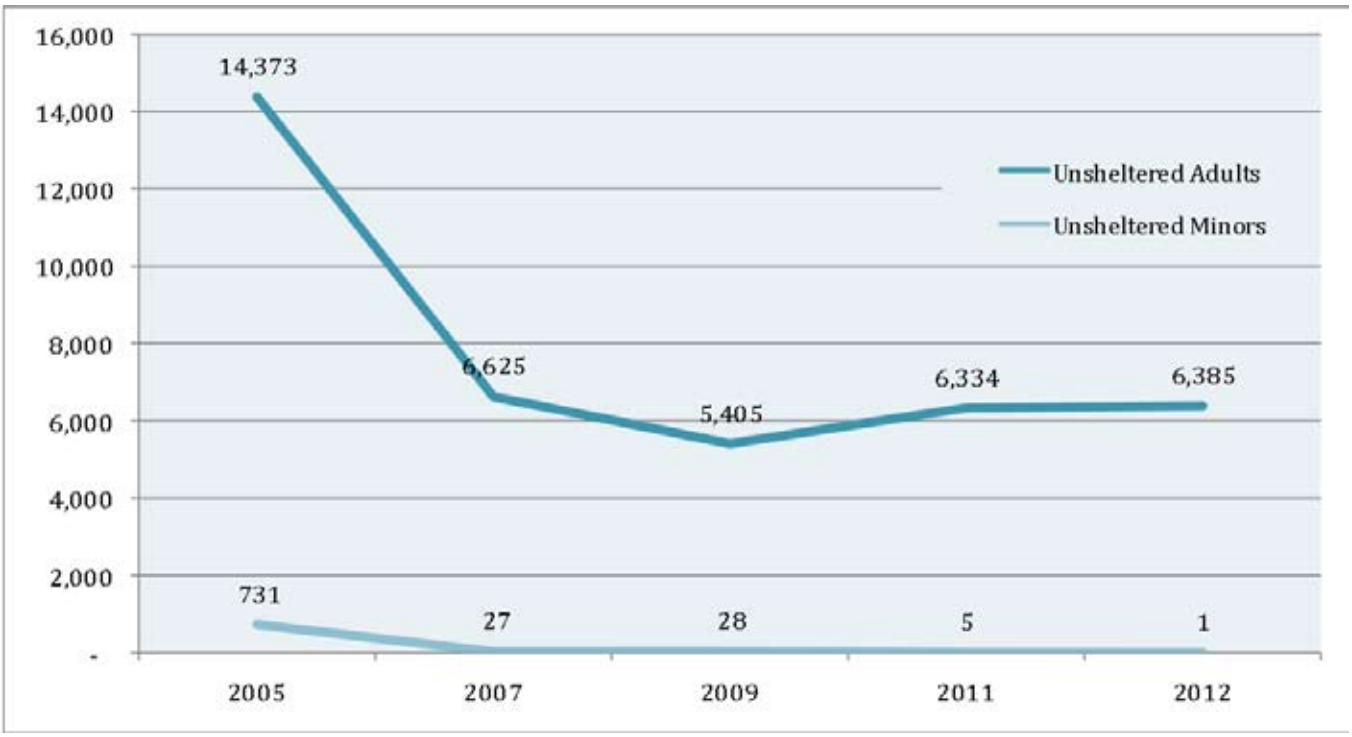



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

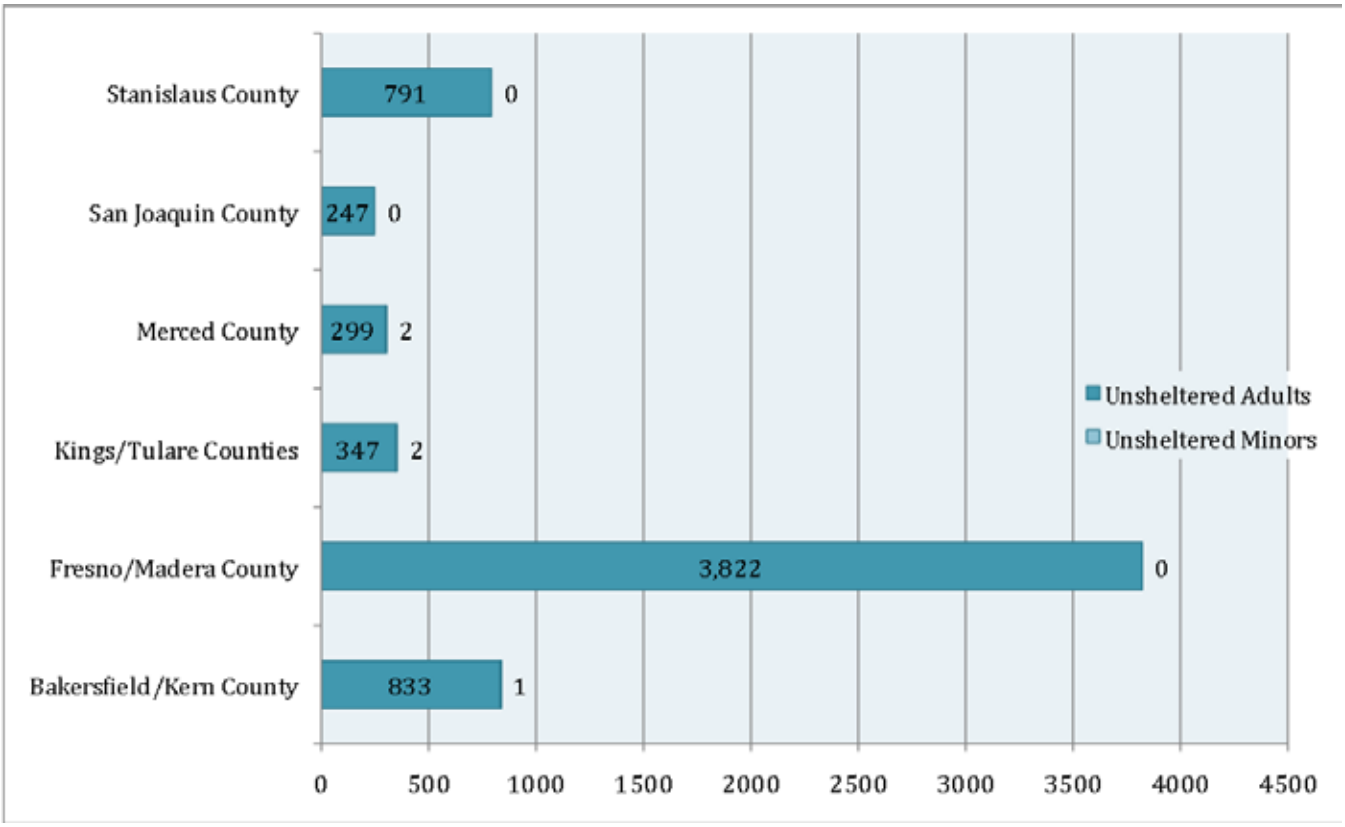


## San Joaquin

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2012

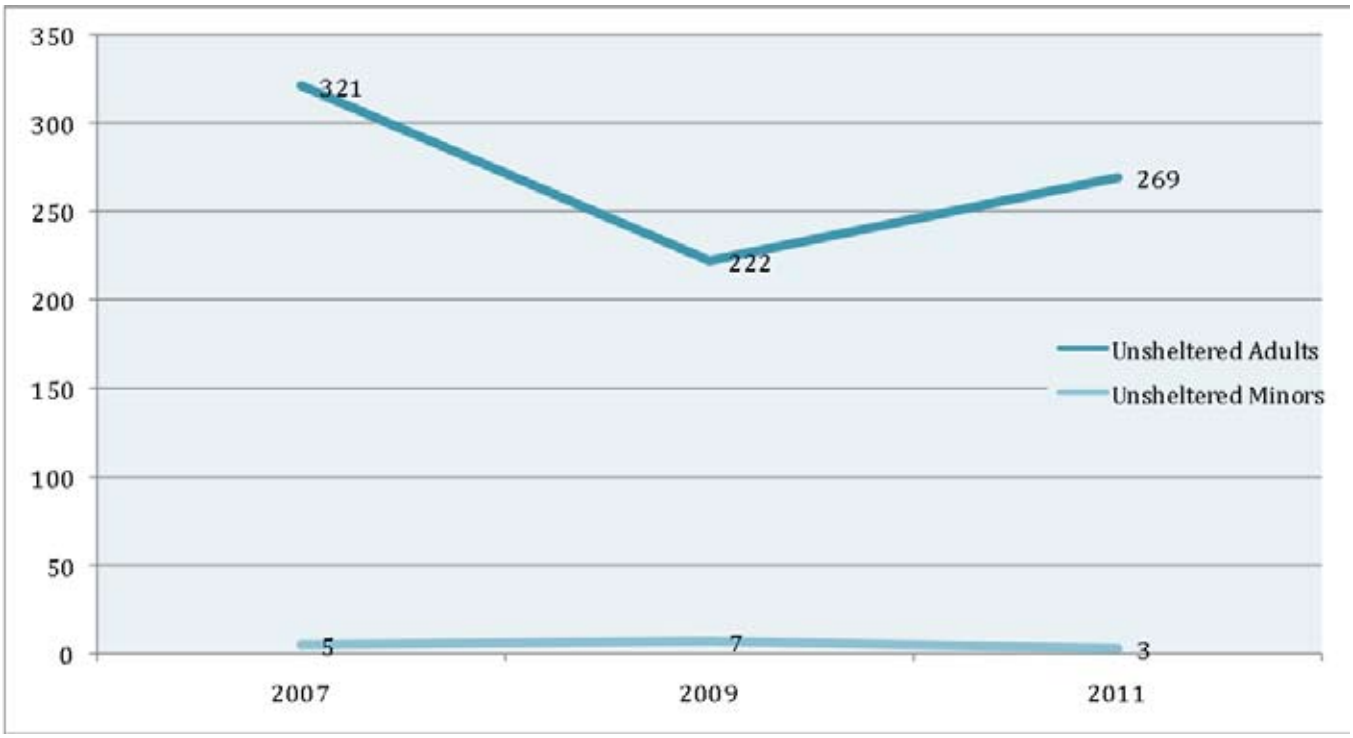



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

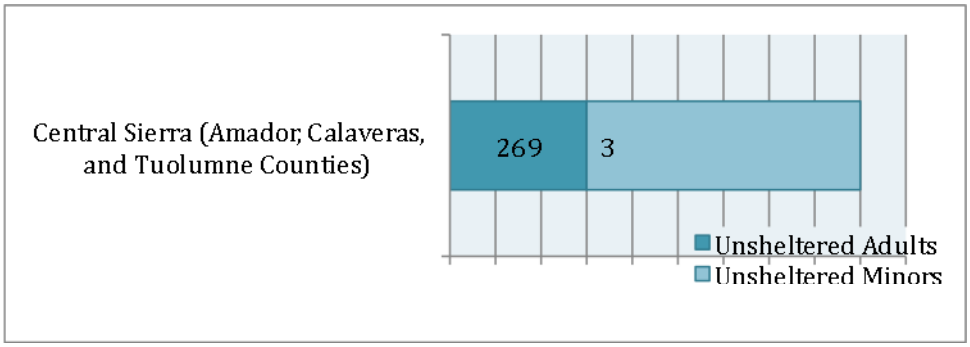


## Sierras

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2007-2011

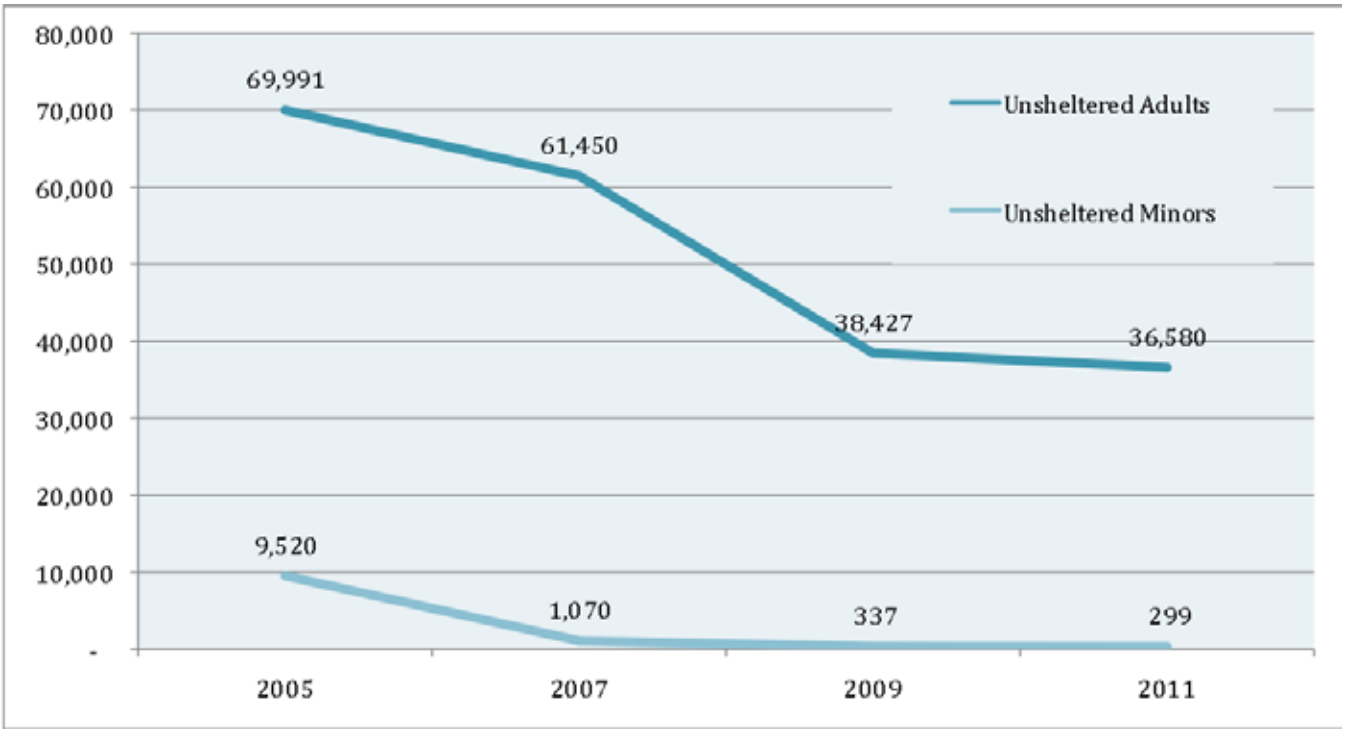



Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011

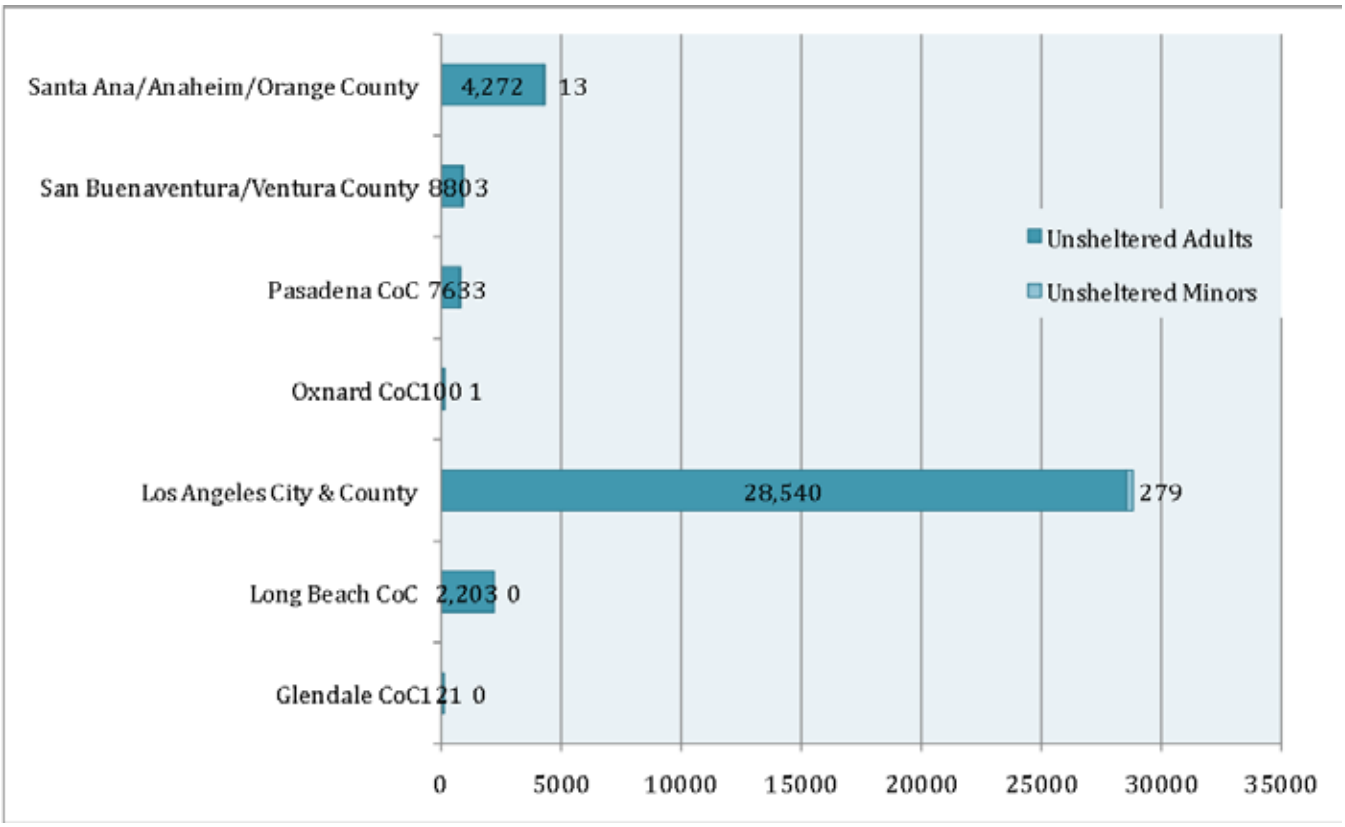


## South Coast

Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors, 2005-2011




Unsheltered Adults vs. Unsheltered Minors by CoC, 2011



## Appendix C: Assessment survey instrument

*Confidential*

*Page 1 of 4*

# Youth Pit

Study ID _____
(For Interviews: [CoC name]_[MM_DD of survey]; For Reports: [CoC name]_[Year of PIT count])

Date _____
(date)

Interviewer _____

### CoC Information

CoC Name _____

Data Source
- ☐ HUD website
- ☐ Other website
- ☐ CoC Report
- ☐ Phone Interview
- ☐ In-Person Interview
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Other

If other, specify: _____

Web link _____

Organization _____

PIT Count Date(s) _____

PIT Time(s) of Day _____

Total # of unsheltered individuals _____

Total # of unsheltered, unaccompanied minors _____

Total # of unsheltered TAY (TAY are defined as ages 18-24) _____
((18-24 years old))

### PIT Logistics

Please describe how your CoC conducted the PIT count (including preparation activities, methodology of count) _____

Geographic coverage of the count
- ☐ All blocks
- ☐ Select blocks
- ☐ Other

If other, specify: _____

Visual count only?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Who planned the PIT count? Was there a subcontractor? _____

Who staffed the PIT count? (including volunteers, partnering agencies, outreach workers, government agencies) _____

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Were homeless or formerly homeless individuals engaged as outreach workers?
☐ Yes
☐ No

How were they stipended for their work? _____

How were unaccompanied minors and/or TAY identified? (visually as well as definitions of minors/TAY) _____

Were TAY counted?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Was there a separate youth count?
☐ Yes
☐ No

**Youth Count Logistics**

Please describe how your CoC conducted the youth PIT count (including preparation activities, methodology of count) _____

Geographic coverage of the count
☐ All blocks
☐ Select blocks
☐ Other

If other, specify: _____

Visual count only?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Who planned the PIT count? Was there a subcontractor? _____

Who staffed the PIT count? (including volunteers, partnering agencies, outreach workers, government agencies) _____

Were TAY counted?
☐ Yes
☐ No

How were minors and/or TAY identified? _____

What resources does your PIT currently require for the youth-specific count? _____
☐(Staff (numbers/time))

☐(Volunteers (numbers/time))

☐(Service providers (numbers/time))

What is the budget for your youth-specific count? _____

**For CoCs without a separate youth count:**

Are there youth service agencies with whom you have partnered to include youth in your PIT count?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Are there youth service agencies with whom you could partner to include youth in your PIT count?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Interviewer: Please record any additional notes relating to this issue here. _____

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**Survey**

Did your count include a survey component?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Total # of individuals surveyed _____

Total # of unaccompanied minors surveyed _____

Total # of TAY surveyed _____

When was the survey conducted? _____

What time(s) of day was the survey conducted? _____

Were there any TAY or minor-specific elements to the survey? _____ (Either recruitment methods or survey items)

What, if any, compensation did participants receive for participating in the survey? _____

**Count Assessment**

How accurate do you think the PIT was in its count of unsheltered adults in your CoC?
☐ Extremely accurate
☐ Very accurate
☐ Somewhat accurate
☐ Slightly accurate
☐ Not at all accurate

How accurate do you think the PIT was in its count of unaccompanied minors in your CoC?
☐ Extremely accurate
☐ Very accurate
☐ Somewhat accurate
☐ Slightly accurate
☐ Not at all accurate

How accurate do you think the PIT was in its count of TAY in your CoC?
☐ Extremely accurate
☐ Very accurate
☐ Somewhat accurate
☐ Slightly accurate
☐ Not at all accurate

What (if any) changes have you made to include unaccompanied youth in your 2013 count? _____

What counting methods (if any) does your CoC use that are not HUD-mandated? (e.g., two counts for seasonality) _____

What data (if any) does your CoC collect in the PIT/youth count that are not required by HUD? (e.g., if TAY have been counted historically, if couchsurfers are counted) _____

Who conducts your data analysis for the PIT? _____

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## Appendix C: Assessment survey instrument

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**Structural Issues**

What barriers do you face to including youth in the PIT count? Are there particular groups or types of youth who are more/less likely to be included in the count? _____

What kind of guidance have you received around counting unaccompanied minors? From whom? _____

What kind of guidance have you received around counting unaccompanied TAY? From whom? _____

What types of assistance would help you to include youth in the PIT count? (e.g., webinars, one-on-one TA, written materials) _____

How are your data on youth used locally? On a state level? _____

What data would you like to have about your CoC's unaccompanied minors and TAY? _____

Is there anyone else we should talk with about youth homeless counts in your CoC? _____

Any other thoughts/feedback/ideas concerning youth inclusion in the PIT that you would like to share before we conclude? _____

Interviewer: Ask the interviewee if they would be willing to share: - Any documents relevant to the youth PIT count, including survey tools and reports - Any photos from their PIT count that could be included in our report - Any press coverage from their PIT count _____

**Interviewer Notes**

Interviewer: Include any additional notes here _____

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## Appendix E: Sample McKinney-Vento school data collection form

**2013 Ventura County**
**McKinney Vento Youth Point in Time Count**

**"Youth Count Survey Sheet"**

School Name:_____ School Site Coordinator Name & Phone #:_____ District Liaison Name:_____

| Student initial | Age | Grade level | Gender | Language | Sped? Migrant? EI? | Current living location:<br>Motel/hotel<br>Street<br>Shelter/transitional center<br>Unsheltered/street<br>Doubled up due to economic hardship | Have you lived in any previous locations in the last 3 years? -or- foster care? | Have you stayed in any of the previous locations for 12 months in a row? | Unaccompanied? |
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## Appendix F: Guidance on counting youth


### Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development, HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs: A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People, Second Revision, January 2008.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013 Housing Inventory Count and Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons: Data Collection Guidance, September 2012.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2013 Housing Inventory Count and Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons: Supplemental Guidance on Counting Homeless Youth, December 2012.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rural Continuums of Care, June 2009, retrieved from https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/RuralCoCGuidebook.pdf

### California Homeless Youth Project

Foster, Lisa K., Estimating California's Homeless Youth Population, October 2010, retrieved from http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/HomelessYouthPopEstimateReport.pdf

Hyatt, Shahera & Silverbush, Mark, A Toolkit for Counting Homeless Youth, June 2012, retrieved from http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/Toolkit_for_Counting_Homeless_Youth.pdf

### YouthCount! Webinar Series

Strategies for Coordinating Data for Youth Counts: Street Counts, HMIS and Schools Data, retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/coordinating-data-0

Outreach & Sampling Methods for Youth Count! Data Collection, retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/sampling-methods-youth-count

Culturally Appropriate & Sensitive Data Collection, retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/culturally-appropriate-data-collection

Training & Preparation for Youth Count!: Involving Youth, Universities, & Volunteers, retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/training-for-youth-count

Culturally Appropriate & Sensitive Data Collection, retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/culturally-appropriate-data-collection

### National Alliance to End Homelessness

2013 Homeless Counts Map, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/2013-homeless-counts-map1

Webinar, Youth Targeted Point-in-Time Counts: What You Need to Know!, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/webinar-youth-targeted-point-in-time-counts-what-you-need-to-know

Webinar, It's a Data-Driven World: Making the Most of the 2013 Youth-Inclusive PIT Count, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/its-a-data-driven-world-making-the-most-of-the-2013-youth-inclusive-pit-cou

Webinar, Including Youth in Your Community's Point-in-Time Count Part I, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/including-youth-in-your-communitys-point-in-time-count-part-i

Webinar, Including Youth in Your Community's Point-in-Time Count Part II, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/including-youth-in-your-communitys-point-in-time-count-part-ii

Counting Homeless Youth: Developing Key Partnerships, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/counting-homeless-youth-developing-key-partnerships

Counting and Surveying Homeless Youth, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/counting-and-surveying-homeless-youth

Counting Homeless Youth: City of San Jose Homeless Youth Census Survey, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/counting-homeless-youth-city-of-san-jose-homeless-youth-census-survey

Toolkit: Counting Homeless Youth, retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/counting-homeless-youth

**100,000 Homes Campaign – Making PIT Counts Work for Your Community**
Making PIT Counts Work for Your Community: Integrating the Registry Week Methodology into Your Point-in-Time Count. Retrieved from http://100khomes.org/sites/default/files/images/Registry%20Week%20PIT%20Integration%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf

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