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## Serving Youth in Santa Cruz County

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Serving Youth in Santa Cruz County

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## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### **Abstract**

The Community Action Board (CAB) of Santa Cruz County is an agency that serves low-income under-resourced community members in the county. Through their Youth Homeless Response Team (YHRT) Program, they serve youth ages 15-24 who are currently at-risk or facing homelessness. Too many unaccompanied youths in Santa Cruz County are suffering from homelessness and are in need to accessing services. The lack of motivational and support system, along with the unemployment increasing at alarming rates. Illustrating a dark and unsafe future. Some of the consequences include pushing youth to live on the street or inside cars and being in a hostile environment. To address this issue, mentors from YHRT create individualized plans for youth fit for their needs which include, housing opportunities, educational goals, and job readiness. This community-based project evaluated the effectiveness of the YHRT program. Asking individuals for their participation in ranking how being part of YHRT has benefited them. Feedback given back demonstrated that youth feel safe and supported by staff at YHRT. Participants stated that after being part of the YHRT team, they have increased their knowledge on the different programs and services out in the community.

Homelessness, Santa Cruz County, Youth, Motivational Support, Eviction

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## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### **Agency/Community Served**

The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County is a non-profit organization located in Watsonville California that serves under-resources individuals from Santa Cruz County. In Santa Cruz County, the population is of 275,897 and a total of 38.6k out of 275k people live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 13.4% (Datausa, 2015). The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County currently serves 8,599 of under-resourced community members and another 7,000 individuals with information and referrals. (CAB, n.d.)

Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County's mission statement states "To partner with the community to eliminate poverty and create social change through advocacy and essential services." (CAB, n.d.). The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County works to achieve their missions by offering programs such as The Rental Assistance Program, The Santa Cruz County Immigration Program, Alcance, and The Youth Homeless Response Team. In 2016, The Community Action Board gave over 450 participants job readiness support and helped them become successful in achieving employment. (Annual Report, 2016.)

One of the programs that Community Action Board offers, is the Youth Homeless Response Team. The Youth Homeless Response Team (YHRT) is an effort from the County Office of Education and the Community Action Board. Through the Housing Urban Development funded, Youth Homeless Demonstration Project in the Santa Cruz County. (HUD, 2019.) A program dedicated to serve individuals, 15-24 years-old individuals who are currently or at risk of being homeless, or are fleeing domestic violence. YHRT consist of trained mentors who asses' youth and help them create an individualized plan. Individualized plans consist of

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

setting up goals, identifying objectives, and making timelines. Each individualized plan tailored for the needs of the Youth.

### **Problem Definition**

To many unaccompanied Youth in Santa Cruz County are suffering from homelessness and are need of accessing services. The definition homelessness is people who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. (HUD, n.d.). Nationally, there are at least 40,799 unaccompanied children and transitional-age youth on the streets. (Report, 2019). The 2019 Point-in-Time Count identified 2,167 persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County. This represents a decrease of 4% from the count conducted in 2017. (Report, 2019). 588 out of 2,167 individuals are homeless unaccompanied minor children and young adults. (SCO, 2019.) Also, survey responders from the *Homeless Census and Survey of 2019*, 18% indicated experiencing being homeless for the first time at the ages between 0-17.

### **Contributing Factors**

One of the contributing factor is the lack of knowledge on how to access services. Young people experiencing homelessness have a harder time accessing services including shelter, medical, and employment. (Report, 2019) Youth reported not knowing where to obtain food services, shelter resources, and how to apply for county benefits. Youth often find themselves not accessing services due to the stigma that follows with it. For immigrant youth who are seeking residency or citizenship, fear being label or considered a “public charge.” A public charge is a “person who is likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsidence, as demonstrated by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance...” (USCIS, n.d.)

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Another Currently, the unemployment rates in Santa Cruz county are at 6.7% (Census, 2017.) Youth are most vulnerable to the unemployment rates affecting them because of the stigma attached to their age, lack of education, and lack of social skills. Higher perceived stigma was also related to low self-esteem, loneliness, feeling trapped, and suicidal ideation, with guilt/self-blame due to homeless status having the strongest impact on mental health variables. (Kidd, 2007.)

### **Consequences**

Inevitably, there are consequences that are presented with those kinds of contributing factors. Unaffordable housing, is presented though these individuals due to the fact living median in Santa Cruz County is \$75,000. (Census, 2017) Which is causing youth to live with inside cars, in shelters, or in the streets. The Homeless Census and Survey of Santa Cruz reported that 6% reported staying in a structure or indoor area not intended for human habitation, 9% were staying in a motel or hotel, and 15% were in a vehicle. (Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey, 2019)

With those presented living situation, unaffordable housing, unemployment rates it is also setting up youth for failure. In 2017, 9.0% of Santa Cruz County residents ages 18-24 had an education less than high school. 23.3% possessed of a high school diploma or GED equivalency. (Fact Finder, 2017) This demonstrates how there is still more than 5% of youth who did not complete high school. The percentage of those who do possess a high school diploma or GED is extremely low.

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### Problem Model

Contributing factors	Problem	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of knowledge of available resources</li><li>• Unemployment</li></ul>	To many unaccompanied Youth in Santa Cruz County are suffering from homelessness and are need of accessing services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Living in shelters, with a friend, or in the streets</li><li>• Set for Failure</li></ul>

### Capstone Project/ Implementation

The capstone project proposed to the agency is a research/evaluation project. An assessment report will be created to address how The Youth Homelessness Response Team has succeeded in serving their participants. In addition, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of The Youth Homelessness Response Team will be done.

The project will be implemented by completing the following steps. First, data must be collected. This will be completed by creating a survey that will ask a series of multiple choice questions. In order for a more accurate evaluation to be formulated, it is very important that all Youth Homelessness Response Team participants complete the surveys. There will be five sections in the evaluation. Each sections will ask participants to rank how well the services being offered address their needs on a scale from 1-5. A one means their needs are not being addressed at all, a 5 means all their needs are being addressed. The last two questions will be in short answer format, where the youth can write in the answers. The survey will be completed at the

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

weekly meetings that participants are required to attend as part of their requirement to be part of The Youth Homelessness Response team. Surveys will also be filled out on days that participants attend monthly group meetings.

Once data is collected, it will be illustrated on a pie chart. The pie chart will be used in the assessment of the program's mission and how the agency has fulfilled the youth's needs. After thorough analysis is completed, an internal pamphlet will be created and will be in color to differentiate the outcomes. The pamphlet will then be distributed to the executive board, grant committee, and the peer navigators.

Once the pamphlet is complete, participating in multiple community tabling events must be done. During the tabling events, the program must be exhibited with information on the type of services they provide and the population served. Will be part of Project Homeless Connect of Santa Cruz County happening in June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This is an important step that must be completed in order for the public to gain knowledge of what the services the Youth Homeless Response Team offers.

In order for this project to be completed efficiently, the following steps will need to be completed. First, project leaders will need to survey the participants to ensure the needs and wants of participants are being met. Program Coordinator, Erika Cortes, will supervise the participants to ensure that surveys are being fully completed. Ms. Cortes will also ensure that surveys are being completed at every weekly meeting. Another key role of this ongoing process is for peer navigators to read the survey responses and if any improvements needs to be done towards the agency, create a plan that will improve the serving of the youth homeless participants. (See Appendix A)



## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### **Project Purpose**

The Capstone Project will focus on how well the homeless youth have been served and how well their needs have been addressed after being a part of the Youth Homeless Response team. The capstone project will provide the agency with insight on what to continue doing as they serve their participants. It will also inform the agency what needs to be improved in order to effectively keep the YRHT running.

The agency's goal is to best serve their participants and this project will show the agency how well they are achieving their mission. It will also serve as a guidance for the agency, as it will assess their performance.

### **Project justification**

The evaluation of the program should be implemented for the benefit of participants and the agency. By completing this project, the agency will receive feedback on the type of work that is being delivered. The agency will be able to learn what can be improved in order to best serve their participants. The participants will benefit from this project because leaders will eventually be able to find better/proper tools to help them become self-sufficient. This project will also benefit the executive board as they will be granted a tool to demonstrate how the program is changing, improving and growing as time progresses.

In recent studies, a survey conducted in Canada asked participants ages 16-24, who had spent a day at least in the homeless shelter, to rank their satisfaction of the service. "Four questions were developed for this study to explore youth perspectives about hope, the future, and service satisfaction" (Hughes & Clark, 2010.) In addition, they were also asked about their history of learning problems, general health and reasons for leaving home. Researchers were able to conclude that the levels of participant's social needs being addressed were very low. This

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

research demonstrates the importance of evaluating of the Youth Homeless Response team and how well they are also addressing service needs. Similar questions as the ones mentioned above will be asked in this project due to their effectiveness in addressing needs and wants.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The outcomes that are expected once the evaluation is complete, is for YHRT improve on the services they offer. Finding more resources that their participants can benefit from. As well as improving the type of referrals they are giving out. Such as finding a counselling site for the individuals who are suffering from depression. A safe place where participants can be referred and can benefit from attending. The data analysis will enable the agency to find ways to better serve the populations they are serving. If data analysis demonstrates that the agency is already addressing their participants needs, the agency will know to continue doing what they are doing.

It is expected that the agency will receive feedback to help them increase the completion of their mission. This will also demonstrate the community that the organization is truly there to help individuals become self-sufficient

### **Assessment plan**

In order to evaluation participants becoming self-sufficient, biweekly meetings will be held. Participants will be asked through a survey if they found housing, enrolled in school and if they had a job interview. Becoming updated on the participants status is a requirement that needs to be done while they are part of the Youth Homeless Response Team. As well, asking for participants to show proof that they have attended counseling or attended some of the mental illness services that the agency has referred them to. All these steps will guide the program in the correct path and prevent downfall from occurring.

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### **Project Activities**

For the capstone project, an evaluation was created. The evaluation was made to assess the effectiveness of The Youth Homeless Response Team. The preparation of the evaluation took three months from June of 2019 to September of 2019. The process started by figuring out what type of evaluation was going to be created. Such as, what kind of evaluation this was going to be. Whether it would be online or hard copy. Performance of researching ideas on the type of questions to ask was completed. The evaluation was going to be based on asking questions how well participants of the Youth Homeless Response Team had been served.

The evaluation was broken down into different categories of questions. The categories were housing, food resources, safe space, education, and employment services. Question varied upon the different sections. The style of the questions were “on a scale from one being bad and five being the best... how well did the staff inform you of places where you can access food?” The evaluation was in English on one-sided 15 rank able questions and three short responses.

Once the evaluation was created, feedback from professional survey analyst was asked for. Analyst gave minimal feedback on improvement, though he believed the evaluation was nicely worded and organized.

A fundraiser was created to allocate funds for a stipend. The funds allocated from the fundraiser, were used to buy Gift Cards for Target Supermarkets. Stipend was created to give back and thank those who participated in successfully completing the evaluation. The individual's participation was an expected outcome needed to make this project successful. Without them answering the composed survey, critical feedback would have not been collected. That is why the incentive was a critical component in having a successful project. Not only did it

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

gave back to the individuals but it also was a way to outreach for more advocacy on the agency, homelessness and networking.

### **Project outcomes**

The expected outcomes by doing this survey was for feedback to be given back to The Youth Homeless Response Team. Since the program recently opened up in February 2019, survey gave feedback on the effectiveness of having this program in place. Showed answers on what was working great, to continue doing. Also, the feedback provided what participants wanted to see out of being part of the Youth Homeless Response Team.

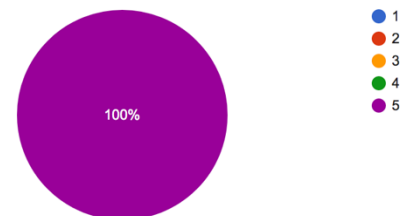
### **Findings/Results**

As a result of creating this project, the engagement of participants was highly notable. Ten participants were given the evaluation and seven were able to complete it. Having the stipend really helped get completed evaluations backs. This project was successful was because it was monitored. All completed surveys where turned into a box, and participants would turn them into the box then write their names on a clipboard. On the clipboard, participants were only allowed to write their name down once they had completed and turned in the evaluation. Having their names on the clipboard, guaranteed them receiving their incentive.

Once the surveys were completed, the results were conducted through Excel. Graphs where composed of gathered feedback. Figure one demonstrates how well the staff from YHRT have been connecting youth to educational services.

Educational services include GED completion and college enrollment information.

**Figure 1**  
How well has the staff connected you with educational services  
7 responses



## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Figure 2 demonstrates that 100% of YHRT participants are knowledgeable of where to access free food. It is notable that staff from YHRT are connecting participants to food local pantries. Some of the responses from participants say the satisfaction with accessing food pantries after being part of YHRT. Also, participants mention their knowledge of different food banks close to their hometown has increased.

Figure 3 demonstrates how effective the staff at YHRT are with connecting participants to hiring agencies. Participants also stated that YHRT staff is helping with resume and cover letter. As well as doing mock interviews, to help prepare for future interviews.

The project was successful because feedback was produced back to the agency to reflect on. This project was a collaboration of peers, coming together to advocate for the social support of Santa Cruz's County Youth suffering from homelessness.

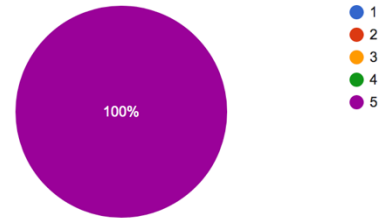
### Conclusion

Based on the results, it is notable that YHRT is serving the individuals needs of their participants. Some ways to better improve the services they offer include finding more transportation services for their participants. Individuals stated that they would like to see more

**Figure 2**

How effective has the staff been at finding you a place to eat for free?

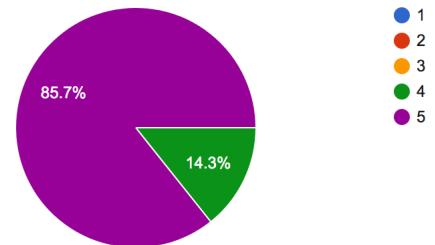
7 responses



**Figure 3**

How effective has the staff been at connecting you with different hiring agencies?

7 responses



## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

self-defense classed offered through the YHRT. Some recommendations to improve are connecting,

To make sure this program is doing what they need to do to serve the people, CAB can continue to do surveys on the yearly basis. When creating an evaluation is it important to be open to new ideas and suggestions. An evaluation is created to learn what needs to be continued to be doing and what needs to improve. It is important to keep in mind that although surveys will critic, it is important to receive feedback to continue thriving. This project should be adapted as a yearly requirement. Not only for the Youth Homeless Response Team but also the rest of the programs the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County offers. To always striving for improvement, helping individuals become self-sufficient and find ways to best serve the Santa Cruz County communities.

### **Personal Reflection**

This project was definitely a learning experience. Learning how to manage many tasks, meet deadlines and handle stress were the most memorable learning experiences. This project really demonstrated that collaboration is key to make anything possible. Without the help and knowledge of others, creating and implementing a project would have not happened. Although take part of new things can be overwhelming, taking risks is very important to do. Taking risks allows exposure to new ideas and different perspectives.

I like to compare this evaluation as a reflection of someone who is an intern. Interns must be open to new ideas, suggestions and be able to receive feedback without taking it personal. When interning for a new place, keep in mind that you will receive feedback and criticism that will only be beneficial. It is best to be corrected and learn from previous experiences.

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Another crucial skills to develop in order to conduct a survey is communication. Not only is communication the key to developing an evaluation but it is a good skill to carry for a lifetime. Having good communication skills will be beneficial at interning sites, at home, with personal relations, and in work.

## SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**Appendix A**

**Scope of Work**

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Create evaluation	Survey	July 2019- September 2019	Erika Cortes, Helen Ewan-Storey and Anissa Banuelos
Organization of fundraiser	Network with Cassidy’s Pizza owner to finalize fundraiser date. Come up with fundraiser goal, attendee list, outreach plan, and assign tasks/duties of actual fundraiser date.	August 2019- September 2019	Helen Ewan-Storey, Erika Cortes
Pizza Fundraiser	Conduct a fundraiser to allocate funds for Youth Homeless Response Team. (as an extra/incentive/thank you)	October 2019	Erika Cortes, Helen Ewan-Storey and Anissa Banuelos
Collection of Data	Give participants the survey to take, addressing how to access the survey online (if they feel more comfortable)	September 2019- November 2019	Erika Cortes
Present findings	Research paper/ Evaluation of program. Create graphs from the data collected, to show findings. Talk about fundraiser event, demonstrate how the money was ultimate.	December 2019	Erika Cortes, Anissa Banuelos, Helen Ewan-Storey

# SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

## Appendix B

<b>Contributing factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="280 506 594 604">• Lack of knowledge of available resources</li><li data-bbox="280 615 548 646">• Unemployment</li></ul>	<p data-bbox="678 506 1024 684">To many unaccompanied Youth in Santa Cruz County are suffering from homelessness and are need of accessing services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1109 506 1446 604">• Living on the street, car, in shelters, or with family members</li><li data-bbox="1109 615 1393 684">• Not enough Self-Sufficient youth</li><li data-bbox="1109 695 1263 726">• Failure</li></ul>

Appendix C



**Youth Homeless Response Team  
Program Evaluation Survey**

**Housing**

*Rate the following statements along this scale (1 being the worst, 3 is ok, 5 being the best)*

- |    |  |     |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Were you in need of emergency shelter? If yes, how satisfied were you with the support of getting emergency shelter? | N.A | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | How satisfied were you with the assistance you received for housing services ?                                       |     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | If we have helped you find housing, how safe do you feel in the housing? N.A   |     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Food Resources**

*Rate the following statements (1 being the worst, 5 being the best)*

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How well did the staff explain where you could receive food?                           |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | How satisfied are you with the staff efforts to call different food resources for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |
| 3. | How effective has the staff been at finding you a place to eat for free?               |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Employment Services**

*Rate the following statements (1 being the worst, 5 being the best)*

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How well did the staff do in helping you find a job?                               |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | How effective has the staff been at connecting you with different hiring agencies? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |
| 3. | How well did the staff prepare you for your interview process?                     |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Education**

*Rate the following statements (1 being the worst, 5 being the best)*

- |    |  |     |   |   |   |    |   |
|----|--|-----|---|---|---|----|---|
| 1. | Have you completed your high school diploma/ GED               | Yes |   |   |   | No |   |
| 2. | How well has the staff connected you with educational services |     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4  | 5 |
| 3. | How well has the staff helped you with your educational goals? |     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4  | 5 |

**Safe Space**

*Rate the following statements (1 being the worst, 5 being the best)*

- |    |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How comfortable does the staff make you feel?               |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | How safe do you feel going to the main YHRT office?         |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | How well has the staff understand your personal background? |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**In this section, write two to three sentences per each answer:**

1. **What is something that you liked about your experience with the Youth Homeless Response Team?**
  
2. **What is something you disliked about your experience with YHRT?**
  
3. **What other services would you like to see as part of the Youth Homeless Response Team? (For example; transportation services, hot food services, counselling services?)**



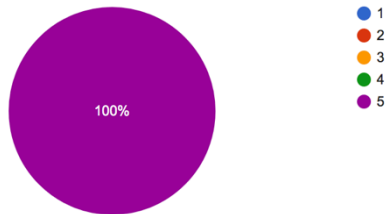
# SERVING YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

## Appendix D

### Figure 1

How well has the staff connected you with educational services

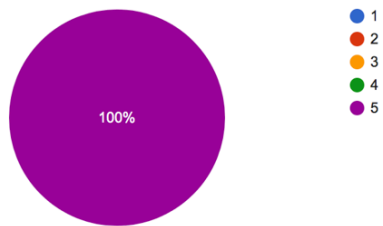
7 responses



### Figure 2

How effective has the staff been at finding you a place to eat for free?

7 responses



### Figure 3

How effective has the staff been at connecting you with different hiring agencies?

7 responses

