

CAB Community Action Plan

An Equity-Based Approach to Addressing Poverty



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

— Nelson Mandela

Community Voices

"Many are one paycheck away from poverty."

- LGBTQ+ Listening Circle

PURPOSE In 2017-18, the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. (CAB) conducted an assessment of poverty-related needs in Santa Cruz County to guide our multi-year Community Action Plan (CAP). In an effort to capture an accurate and deep understanding of poverty in our community, our staff and Board of Directors intentionally designed a new approach to gather, assess, and analyze information.

Our CAP process was guided by two core commitments:

- An inclusive and robust model of community engagement, one that moves beyond traditional means of data collection and needs assessment and that involves those most affected by poverty; many of whom lack access to traditional forms of involvement.
- An equity-based approach to assessing and addressing poverty, one that strives to expand conventional views of poverty, advance equity and promote social justice.

The intent in sharing our findings is to inspire a county-wide conversation around developing equity-based standards to guide planning processes, leadership, policy, resource development, resource allocation, program design, and service delivery.

"Poverty exists sometimes because of low wages, and rent and food are extremely high. Fieldworkers are paid very little in comparison to the cost of living."

- Center for Farmworker Families Listening Circle

PROCESS Our findings were drawn from a series of poverty conversations, client and service partner surveys, a public hearing, and local data assessments. The poverty conversations included eleven facilitated small-group "listening circles" and nine "pop-up conversations," which involved brief interviews with individuals. Participants included day workers, farmworkers, homeless individuals, immigrants, incarcerated individuals, LGBTQ+ individuals, parents, seniors, youth, and women.

FINDINGS Participants in CAB's 2017-18 needs assessment identified five poverty-related needs and four assets in the community:



"Being wealthy, being rich, comes from within. That's a huge eye opener for society. It's not about how much money you have or your possessions, but what you're doing for your community and the relationships you're making. Who is there supporting you and who have you supported? And how do you feel about yourself? "

- CAB Day Worker Center Listening Circle

* Including physical health, mental health, and substance abuse.

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DATA HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to gathering input from community members, CAB examined poverty indicators for the county. We focused on data that clarified or contextualized the insights offered by participants in each of the five identified need areas. Highlights include:

The official poverty rate 2017 in Santa Cruz County was 12.7%, which was close to the statewide and national averages.¹ However, when regional differences in the cost of living and other adjustments are incorporated, as in the California Poverty Measure, the poverty rate in our county is 23.8%, the second highest rate among the 58 California counties.²

Poverty Rate
23.8%
 2nd Highest Poverty Rate
 in California

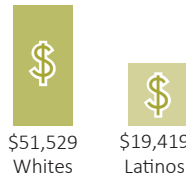
The populations with disproportionately high poverty rates in Santa Cruz County include:

Disproportionately High Poverty Rates

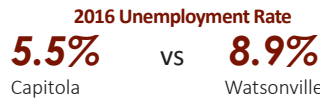
Children and infants ages 0-5
Farmworkers
Female-headed households
Latinos
South County residents
Those with less than a high school diploma

Latinos earned significantly less than Whites in Santa Cruz County. The average per capita income in 2017 was \$19,419 for Latinos versus \$51,529 for Whites.³

2017 Per Capita Income



The 2016 Santa Cruz County unemployment rate was 6.9%; higher than the state (4.5%) and national (4.9%) averages. Major disparities between employment prospects in North and South County are reflected both in unemployment rates⁴ and in employment growth rates.⁵



Farmworkers face extreme poverty due to low wages, seasonal employment, and little recourse to enforce legal protections for wages and working conditions. According to the Center for Farmworker Families, farmworkers earn \$13,000 - \$17,500⁶ annually, compared to the county average of \$32,397.⁷ Workers in farming, fishing, and forestry were paid an average hourly wage of \$14.82, versus the county-wide average wage of \$25.24.⁸

2017 Annual Salary



\$14.82/hr.
 Farming, Fishing & Forestry

\$25.24/hr.
 County Average

"Watsonville is a good community. Family is the driving force."

- Pajaro Valley Unified School District Immigration Forum Pop-Up Conversation

"Poverty means being hungry and not having food."

- LGBTQ+ Listening Circle

"I think often the topic of poverty is ignored or put to the side. People think it's work harder and you're going to get out of this, get what you want, but it's not like that."

- CAB DACA Listening Circle
 (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)

"We don't take advantage of the programs that help us for the lack of knowing the language."

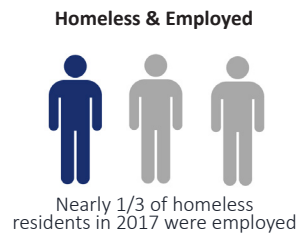
- CAB Day Worker's Center Listening Circle

1. United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2017), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_af=ACS_17_1YR_S1701&prodType=table
 2. Public Policy Institute of California, "Just the Facts: Poverty in California" (July 2018), <http://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california>
 3. United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2017), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_af=ACS_16_1YR_S1902&prodType=table
 4. Applied Survey Research, "Year 23 Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project" (2017), <https://online.flowpaper.com/73630724/CAP23ReportFINAL/#page=32>
 5. Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board, "Industry, Economic and Workforce Research of Santa Cruz County" (2018), <http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/portals/0/SCWDB%202018%20Report.pdf>, page 7.
 6. Santa Cruz Sentinel, "'Legalized slavery': Democratic Women's Club of Santa Cruz County holds meeting on farm labor" (Oct. 2017), <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2017/10/21/legalized-slavery-democratic-womens-club-of-santa-cruz-county-holds-meeting-on-farm-labor>
 7. United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2017), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_af=ACS_16_1YR_S1902&prodType=table
 8. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages in Santa Cruz-Watsonville" (May 2017), https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages_santacruz.htm

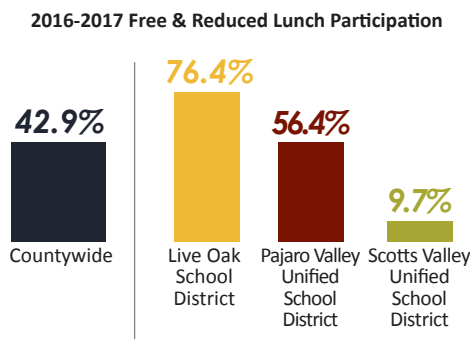
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Santa Cruz County is the least affordable county in the state for renters. The high cost of rent results in overcrowding, forced moves due to rent increases or eviction, and in some cases, homelessness. These problems are more severe for Latino residents.⁹

Work is no guarantee of financial security. Nearly one in three (31%) of those experiencing homelessness in the county were employed in 2017.¹⁰



More than forty-two percent (42.9%) of the children in the county's schools received free or reduced-cost meals and the numbers vary widely by school district.¹¹



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

We conclude this report with a series of recommendations and opportunities for action. Given the various community and county-based initiatives underway, these initial recommendations are intended to offer possibilities for any organization choosing to advance equity, no matter where they may be in their process. The hope is that this project can serve as a catalyst for collaboration around natural points of alignment. Our ultimate goal is to inspire an explicit focus on advancing equity as a collective strategy for eliminating poverty in Santa Cruz County.

Examples include:

- In the area of building equity: Invest in potential internally and externally. Examine your operating and leadership structures and identify where diverse voices are missing, e.g. boards of directors, elected bodies, commissions, and executive and middle management leadership staff, in addition to direct staff and volunteers. Provide training, mentoring, support, and capacity building for community members of underrepresented groups to enable them to participate in formal leadership positions. Ensure that your operations and structures are welcoming and culturally appropriate.
- In the area of alignment: Assess existing and new strategic plans, planning initiatives, and related frameworks for gaps, points of intersection, and natural alignment as they relate to the five need areas identified by the community through this Community Action Plan process.
- In the area of community connection: Establish, cultivate and/or strengthen relationships with culturally, economically, and socially diverse communities as an ongoing practice to build trust and facilitate effective community engagement.

To download a copy of the full report, please visit www.cabinc.org.

"Privilege gives people a big blind spot. A lot of people don't understand. [It's] harder when you don't have a car. There are a lot of things that people who have more are unconscious of for other people. Silverware, things that we just don't have access to. Not getting waited on when you walk into a store because hygiene options are limited, don't have the fashion to be waited on. Seeing poverty is not convenient for many people."

- LGBTQ+ Listening Circle

"I feel like there's a stigma behind poverty and because of the stigma people are scared of reaching out and asking [for help]. A lot of people need more dialogue of what poverty is."

- CAB DACA Listening Circle

"We are only focusing on the surface of these problems and not working on the roots of the problem."

- CAB Day Worker Center Listening Circle

9. University of California Santa Cruz Center for Labor Studies, "No Place Like Home" (2017), <http://noplacelikehome.ucsc.edu/en/the-issues>

10. Applied Survey Research (2017), "Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey", <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3894455-SantaCruzCounty-HomelessReport-2017-FINAL.html?sidebar=false>, page 11.

11. Applied Survey Research, "Year 23 Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project" (2017), <https://online.flowpaper.com/73630724/CAP23ReportFINAL/#page=40>