CAB Community Action Plan
An Equity-Based Approach to Addressing Poverty
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.

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.

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

**Needs**

- Access to Jobs, Higher Wages & Consistent Employment
- Barriers to Accessing Resources
- Housing Insecurity & High Rent Burden
- Discrimination, Prejudice & Stereotypes
- Health* (Including physical health, mental health, and substance abuse)

**Assets**

- Community & Family Support & Pride
- Access to Legal Rights Assistance
- Availability of Social Services
- Internal, Spiritual, & Relational Wealth

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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. 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.

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

- 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 rates and in employment growth rates.

- 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 - $17,500 annually, compared to the county average of $32,397. Workers in farming, fishing, and forestry were paid an average hourly wage of $14.82, versus the county-wide average wage of $25.24.

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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.

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