

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency

Breaking the Cycle

Re-integration Strategies for Homeless Families with
Children

June 2, 2025



Project Playground Family Housing Insecurity 2024

SUMMARY

Are we doing all we can to help the homeless population in Calaveras County get back on their feet and become successfully reintegrated into society? In 1994, the US House of Representatives published Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Public Health. In this document, Congress issued a directive on what is needed to combat homelessness. However, since then, the homeless situation has only gotten worse. Per the September 2023 edition of the *Calaveras Enterprise*, in an article entitled “San Andreas Residents Concerned about Homelessness,” a statement says “Point-in-time counts reflected an 81% increase in homeless individuals in the county from 2015 to 2018.” Reflecting that, as a county, we have been unable to find a solution that will help reduce that number.

California has passed laws over the last decade in an effort to address homelessness, but it remains a difficult challenge for the State. Calaveras County may not have the large homeless population that other counties have, but we also have fewer resources available to assist the homeless we do have. Everything from emergency shelter availability, permanent housing opportunities, and funding for supportive services becomes a challenge to provide. And while the Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency has remained dedicated to facing these challenges, there is no simple solution due to the wide array of causes that may contribute to an individual or family becoming homeless.

While the homeless situation can affect many different subsets of our population, the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury does not have the resources to investigate all of these. Therefore, CCCGJ chose to focus our time and efforts on one of the most vulnerable subsets: homeless families with children.

GLOSSARY

BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CoC	Continuum of Care
HHSA	Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency
HUD	Housing and Urban Development

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the current condition of homeless families with children within the county the CCCGJ gathered relevant information using the following methods:

- Interviews with personnel from various county agencies and non-profit organizations
- Review of documentation and reports released by HHSA
- Reports and publications available through the HUD website
- Reports and publications from various online sites

BACKGROUND

Calaveras County provides resources to the homeless members of our community with programs and services available through the Health and Human Services Agency. These services are

provided using a variety of funding sources including federal, state and local taxes, as well as various grants that may become available throughout the year. Calaveras County HHSA also works in cooperation with various local non-profit organizations and faith-based organizations in an effort to fill in gaps in service availability as well as improving the accessibility of information to those in need.

Federal funding through Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is based upon the annual count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless, utilizing a Point-in-Time survey, conducted across the country on a single night in January. Every year a team of government agencies, non-profits, and trained volunteers conduct a coordinated count of homeless individuals located in emergency shelters, transitional and temporary housing, and permanent supportive housing. Additionally, every other year (years ending on an odd number), this team of volunteers also counts the unsheltered homeless located under bridges, in tent cities, or any other location they can find them. This information is then sent to HUD who creates a report used by Congress to assess the efficacy of policy and distribute funding.

Since Calaveras County is a very rural community, it is often difficult to locate the temporary and improvised shelters used by the homeless population, especially in January. This leads to the counts being lower than reality. According to the Calaveras Planning Coalition, “the method and timing of the *Point In Time count*, along with the limited number of volunteers doing the work assures a significant under-count. In 2017, the count totaled 19 countywide! According to county Health and Human Services, data from 2017-18 applications for CalWORKs and MediCal revealed 819 Calaveras County residents who identified themselves as homeless. A number that has increased by 35% over the last five years” (emphasis original).

HUD has developed a model for categorizing the homeless population into 4 Categories. After the counts are completed, HUD then reviews and approves or denies grants, though HUD grants are only available to the homeless described in Category 1 as seen below.

CRITERIA FOR DEFINING HOMELESS	Category 1	Literally Homeless	(1) Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); <u>or</u> (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less <u>and</u> who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution
	Category 2	Imminent Risk of Homelessness	(2) Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: (i) Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; <u>and</u> (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing
	Category 3	Homeless under other Federal statutes	(3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who: (i) Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes; (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application; (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; <u>and</u> (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers
	Category 4	Fleeing/ Attempting to Flee DV	(4) Any individual or family who: (i) Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; (ii) Has no other residence; <u>and</u> (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing

HUD Homeless Definition,

https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf

Therefore, there are no grants available from HUD to people with an immediate risk of becoming homeless. Those people must seek out other avenues of assistance and that is where Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency comes in.

To help alleviate homelessness, California passed the Housing First law back in 2016 with the goal of removing many of the barriers faced by individuals in HUD Category 1 trying to qualify for housing assistance. By expanding their focus to Calaveras residents in Category 2, HHS has been able to provide early intervention for many of these at-risk individuals and families and kept them from falling into Category 1. While anyone in Categories 1 or 2 can request housing assistance from HHS, applicants can also voluntarily enroll in a series of education and training

courses tailored to their specific needs with the goal of preventing future repeats of the conditions that caused the homelessness or near homelessness to begin with. This could be anything from classes on budgeting and basic house maintenance to how to read and understand a leasing agreement. Training can last anywhere from 6-18 months and families will stay at a place selected by HHSA until it is completed. The “graduation” from this program then makes the families eligible for permanent housing. HHSA will aid the families in finding the housing and will also provide up to a year of follow-up services.

DISCUSSION

While HHSA is the primary source of aid available, there are other options available through the Calaveras County Housing Resource Partnership which is comprised of various public and private entities, faith-based organizations, and nonprofit groups working together to care for those in need. Calaveras County is also implementing a “navigation” system that will better connect the government services an individual has been referred to as well as when they accessed those services. This added connectivity utilizes the “no wrong door” concept, meaning individuals seeking assistance from any one of the services provided by the County can also be connected to many of the other services that might be able to assist them as they move toward stabilization and self sufficiency. This will help Social Workers support their clients as they make progress on their reintegration journey.

It also networks with HHSA in surrounding counties that are part of the geographic region HUD identifies as our Continuum of Care (CoC). The CoC is a HUD program created for the purpose of providing a framework for coordination at a variety of levels from the federal government all the way down to the local level with county agencies, nonprofits, and other volunteer organizations. Our CoC supports the homeless populations of Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa Counties. Through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and the added connections created by the “navigation” system, the appropriate services can be located and offered. At any future time, if someone in need approaches a different government aid location within our CoC, their information will already be in the system.

The end result of this added networking ability is improved access to services for those in need while also helping HHSA better identify people who need more specialized attention. But it also helps prevent the misuse of services by giving HHSA a tool to identify individuals traveling from county-to-county attempting to take advantage of services. This is more difficult to do when counties are able to communicate with each other regarding who is accessing their various services.

In Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) – Public Health, Chapter 119, Homeless Assistance, Subchapter 1 General Provisions, Section 11301, Findings and Purpose, as referenced above, the US Congress found that:

(1) the Nation faces an immediate and unprecedented crisis due to the lack of shelter for a growing number of individuals and families, including elderly persons, handicapped persons, families with children, Native Americans, and veterans;

(2) the problem of homelessness has become more severe and, in the absence of more effective efforts, is expected to become dramatically worse, endangering the lives and safety of the homeless;

(3) the causes of homelessness are many and complex, and homeless individuals have diverse needs;

(4) there is no single, simple solution to the problem of homelessness because of the different subpopulations of the homeless, the different causes of and reasons for homelessness, and the different needs of homeless individuals;

(5) due to the record increase in homelessness, States, units of local government, and private voluntary organizations have been unable to meet the basic human needs of all the homeless and, in the absence of greater Federal assistance, will be unable to protect the lives and safety of all the homeless in need of assistance; and

(6) the Federal Government has a clear responsibility and an existing capacity to fulfill a more effective and responsible role to meet the basic human needs and to engender respect for the human dignity of the homeless.

By following the approach laid out by the U.S. Congress, Calaveras County has a responsibility to help the homeless, regardless of which HUD category they fall into. Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency's proactive approach of assisting Category 2 residents is not a method adopted by all counties in California. Many counties choose to focus their efforts on serving people in Category 1 through providing emergency sheltering options and getting the affected individuals a roof over their head as fast as possible. While there is no denying a person who is without shelter benefits from having a shelter provided quickly, it does little to prevent a relapse into the conditions that caused the initial situation, leading to a cycle of repeated homelessness. With Calaveras County HHSa assisting people in Category 2, and by offering participation in the personalized education program, upwards of 70% of the people who graduate to self-sufficiency remain that way and do not fall back into needing HHSa intervention for homelessness again.

Housing First

Calaveras County HHSa has implemented additional training for their Social Workers that provides an emphasis on a housing focused approach, maximizing the utility of all available programs that may benefit the families in need. These Social Workers are then able to help families succeed with their Housing First approach. They are also assigned smaller case loads to allow Social Workers to focus more time addressing the individual needs of their clients.

The previously mentioned Housing First law passed in 2016 identifies the immediate need of a family with children to have a roof over their heads. This usually is accomplished by placing the family in a motel. The family is allowed to stay there until they graduate from the housing training program. This gives the family a sense of stability that will help them reach their goals. If the family chooses to not participate in the voluntary training program offered, they will still receive the required housing assistance but will miss out on the opportunity to receive all of the personalized educational services available.

The former California housing readiness program required individuals to address their various medical, mental, and behavioral health concerns prior to receiving long-term housing placement. The new Housing First law removes those prerequisites and focuses on getting people into long-term housing first so they have more stability when attempting to address those concerns later.



January 26, 2018 | Jon Anderson

Stable Housing is The Single Best Way to Combat Poverty And Save Money

Taking this proactive approach and providing this highly beneficial customized training does not come without additional cost. As previously mentioned, HHSA funds these programs through various grants. Currently HHSA is able to apply for grants up to \$50,000. When applying for grants exceeding \$50,000, HHSA must first obtain approval from either our County Board of Supervisors or a State agency. As with all processes, particularly government processes, additional steps mean additional time. This added time negatively impacts the ability of HHSA to apply for this funding, meaning they might miss out on grants they would otherwise have qualified for. It also creates a delay in how fast that money is received, which negatively impacts their ability to respond to the needs of our vulnerable populations in a timely manner.

Finding housing for the homeless is not an easy task. There is a need for both temporary emergency shelters as well as permanent housing. There is an active landlord engagement program where landlords may contact HHSA when they have available properties. These may come with a reduced rent or financial assistance from HHSA. However, this is not enough.

Studies show that homeless shelters often provide access to healthcare services, helping residents address physical and mental health issues. This helps reduce the strain on emergency medical services in the community which improves stability of service availability as well as the individual lives of the homeless. In essence, by providing shelter and support services for people who are homeless, shelters contribute to community stability by helping individuals transition out of homelessness.

Within the HHSA is the county Public Health department, and one of their primary duties is the prevention of communicable diseases. The Public Health website lists this as the first goal of the Infectious Disease Control and Prevention Unit. And according to an article published online in 2020 by the Cambridge University Press titled “Communicable disease among people experiencing homelessness in California,” the homeless population is disproportionately affected by numerous injuries and communicable illnesses as a direct result of the conditions associated with homelessness. Conditions such as poor hygiene and sanitation, poor nutrition, overcrowding due to limited shelter availability, and the exacerbation of preexisting conditions caused by environmental exposure are all drastically improved by the ability to get these at-risk individuals off the street and into emergency shelters, temporary transitional housing, or long-term housing.

However, due to the impact public opinion has had on the County’s lack of emergency shelters, Calaveras falls short on the ability to meet that commitment to these residents who have paid taxes to ensure these services would be available if they ever needed them.

The following timeline shows Calaveras County’s most recent attempt to address the need for an emergency homeless shelter.

- In June of 2016, the BOS directed staff to determine what type of emergency shelter the County needed.
- By May of 2018, a new taskforce had been formed to look into the homeless situation.
- In December 2018, the taskforce gave its first update to the BOS.
- In May 2019, the taskforce gave its second update to the BOS and the BOS declared a shelter crisis.
- In June of 2019, the BOS, in a unanimous vote, paid \$5,529 to have a plot of land in West Point rezoned to allow the placement of tiny houses for the homeless.
- In July of 2019, the BOS approved the use of property on Government Center Drive for the second location of tiny houses.

Following the July 2019 BOS meeting, the plans had been drawn up, with the funding available through grant money totaling \$1,000,000. These new shelter plans were presented to the public via a Town Hall meeting, which according to an article in the *Ledger Dispatch*, became “heated” as the project was discussed. One Supervisor stated they experienced a level of embarrassment when Calaveras County had to seek help for the homeless from other counties that do have emergency shelters. Representatives from Health and Human Services Agency were available and pointed out the many benefits of an emergency shelter, however, some Supervisors and residents of the affected districts made their disapproval known.

Following the Town Hall, residents from these districts attended the next two BOS meetings and made their sentiment clear – Not In My Backyard. The plan was subsequently cancelled and the grant money had to be returned.

The establishing of an emergency shelter is a subject the local communities have a variety of opinions about. And while the county as a whole has a duty to take those opinions into consideration, it must also weigh those opinions against the expectation of service availability made to the members of our community when they pay their taxes, as well as the legal obligations placed upon our state and local government to promote and protect the public health.

By placing those families who have graduated from the training program directly into appropriate housing located throughout the community, the residents being assisted would be able to reintegrate into our community without being burdened by the stigma associated with homelessness or receiving housing support services. This helps to reduce the negative public perception of “government housing” and allows people getting back on their feet to maintain their dignity and be judged on their abilities and contributions going forward instead of on labels assigned by situations from their past. Children who live in housing subsidized by HHSA programs no longer live on the other side of the tracks; they live on the other side of the street. And when the kids on the block meet up to play ball or a game of tag, they never know that their housing situation is only slightly different than their neighbors’.

This is an invaluable benefit for helping create the sense of community belonging that so many who have experienced homelessness struggle to find. Media often portray the homeless as dirty, lazy, crazy, addicted, and delinquent. And while addiction, disabilities, and mental health are frequent contributors to a person becoming homeless, these media representations tend to ignore the many other causes. Economic instability, catastrophic illness, or unexpected changes in employment are also common situations that lead to homelessness. The hard truth is any one of us could find ourselves in a situation where we needed to rely on the support provided by our community while we stabilize our foundation and begin to rebuild our lives.

Not every person seeking assistance qualifies for the HHSA skills program and Transitional Housing. Or if they do, they may need some time gathering necessary documentation to apply. For these people, having emergency housing is crucial because the options available to them are even more limited. Currently HHSA, various nonprofits, and faith-based organizations rely on donations to purchase motel vouchers to assist with the immediate need while more stable arrangements are made. However, because these are donations, fund availability can’t be guaranteed and may be insufficient to meet all the needs that come up during the year. Additionally, for the nonprofits fortunate enough to have a home donated or purchased to be used as emergency housing, other challenges are presented. It’s not uncommon for multiple individuals or families to need shelter at the same time. When this happens, due to space constraints, personal safety, and legal responsibilities, it’s a common practice to house women and children together while leaving the single and married males to find other accommodations, which don’t always exist. Some counties address this by having separate emergency shelters for men and women with or without children, some repurpose vacant commercial spaces by working with local leadership to update zoning codes, or some even provide individual tiny house units that can be assigned based on family size or need.

As evidenced by the 2019 Town Hall meeting, many people agree that there is a role for local government to play in addressing homelessness, even if they don’t all agree what that role is or the extent to which the services should be provided. And while the apprehension of taxpayers to

have emergency shelters located in or near their communities is understandable, to simply not provide the service due to disagreements about the location does nothing to resolve the lack of emergency shelters. It is far more productive to work together as a community to remedy the concerns causing the objections. Not providing a home for these families based solely on not wanting it in our backyard not only reflects poorly on us as a community, but also does nothing to address the situation of the homeless family in need who will still be homeless and still be in our community.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, RESPONDENTS

Penal Code §933 and §933.05 require responses to the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury Reports within 60 days from applicable elected county official(s) and department heads, and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next CCCGJ report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews and reviewing documents, CCCGJ's findings and recommendations are as follows:

F1: Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency's ability to respond quickly to community needs by applying for grants or securing contracts is negatively impacted by the current \$50,000 limit before requiring Board of Supervisors or State approval.

R1: The Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors and Health and Human Services Agency develop methods of improving accessibility for funding above \$50,000 by October 1, 2025.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency

F2: Calaveras County does not have a dedicated emergency shelter which greatly limits the County's ability to provide emergency housing for residents in crisis.

R2a: The Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency coordinate with local non-profits and other members of the Housing Resource Partnership to reevaluate the County's need for an emergency homeless shelter by October 1, 2025.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency

R2b: The Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency coordinate with local non-profits and other members of the Housing Resource Partnership for the purpose of developing plans to mitigate

the resident concerns that resulted in the cancelation of the 2019 emergency shelter plan by October 1, 2025.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency

F3: With annual budgetary and resource allocations being based on Point-In-Time data collected on a single day of the year, County agencies are not able to accurately plan to accommodate the changes in the homeless population and their needs throughout the year.

R3: The Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, with the assistance of Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency, develop supplemental data collection methods to compile a more accurate real-time count of the homeless population throughout the year by January 1, 2026.

Required Response

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency

COMMENDATIONS

C1: The Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury would like to commend the Calaveras County Health and Human Service Agency for their continued efforts in assisting the homeless families with children within our county. Based on the 2024 data released by the Central Sierra Continuum of Care, the number of homeless families with children has decreased since the last Calaveras County 5-year plan to end homelessness released in 2019.

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Civil Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

REFERENCE SOURCES

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