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San Bernardino County cities see declines, increases in homelessness

Adelanto shows biggest increase, Yucca Valley biggest decrease according to latest count

By Joe Nelson, *The Sun*

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Out of San Bernardino County's 24 cities, Adelanto saw the biggest increase in its homeless population in 2015, rising a whopping 226 percent over the previous year, according to preliminary findings from the annual point-in-time [homeless count](#).

And while the High Desert city showed the highest year-to-year percentage increase in its homeless population, it did not make the list of cities with the highest numbers of homeless, which are: San Bernardino, Victorville, Upland, Redlands, Ontario, Fontana and Barstow.

The 71 homeless persons counted in Adelanto in January included 13 living in homeless shelters, 48 in transitional housing and 10 living on the streets, the data show. [Last year's point-in-time count](#) showed only three homeless persons living on the streets.

"One theory as to why there may be more homeless in Adelanto is that what was once a homeless encampment along the Mojave riverbed bordering Victorville and Apple Valley was closed by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department this past fall, driving many of the inhabitants to other areas," city spokesman Michael Stevens said.

He said the city has not implemented any new programs or services for the homeless in the past year, nor does the city have any existing programs that serve the homeless. But the city does refer anyone in need of social service assistance to local resources and/or the county's 211 program, a toll-free number people can call 24-7 for referrals to health and social service providers, Stevens said.

For the second-straight year, the cities of Ontario and Upland made the point-in-time count list of cities with the largest homeless populations, but the upside to that is the cities showed declines in their homeless populations by 8.9 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively, in the past year.

In 2015, 146 homeless people were counted in Ontario and 166 in Upland. This year, 133 homeless persons were counted in Ontario and 164 in Upland, the data show.

Upland Police Chief Brian Johnson, who [joined the department](#) last year after serving 26 years with the Los Angeles Police Department and worked on homeless issues in Venice Beach, said his department is working with community stakeholders on a five-year strategic plan on ending homelessness in the city by focusing first on getting the homeless into shelters, ensuring they get the services they need, then finding them permanent housing.

Last year, he formed a homeless outreach team composed of two full-time police officers and one sergeant, and he hopes to expand the team to four by July.

“The goal for us is to give a hand up, not a hand out,” Johnson said. “We’ll continue to do what we’re doing, and we’ll continue to evolve as we find better solutions.”

Two cities that saw drastic declines or increases in their homeless populations in 2015 were Yucca Valley and Redlands.

Yucca Valley, which last year made the list of cities with the highest number of homeless persons, dropped from 161 to 28 in the past year, a decline of 82 percent.

Redlands saw a 64.4 percent increase in the number of its homeless persons, jumping from 90 to 148 in the past year. It landed the city on the point-in-time homeless count’s list of cities with the highest concentrations of homeless people. Yucca Valley was removed from the list this year.

In Redlands, the homeless have become a regular presence at Sylvan Park and throughout the downtown area. Police are doing everything they can to address the issue, but the bottom line is that local governments, especially in cities as small as Redlands, do not have the resources to address homelessness, city spokesman Carl Baker said.

When asked what is attracting the homeless to the city, Baker said it is likely because the city has a reputation for being a generous community.

Last year, the city launched an anti-panhandling campaign, “Positive Change, Not Spare Change,” discouraging people from handing over their money to panhandlers and instead donating it to nonprofit organizations set up to assist the homeless, Baker said.

The city works with its local nonprofits that advocate for the poor and homeless, including the Redlands Charitable Resource Coalition and YouthHope, to strategize on better serving Redlands’ homeless population, Baker said, adding that the Police Department also has officers serving as liaisons to the homeless.

But there is only so much the police can do when it comes to homelessness, Baker said.

“It’s not a policing issue. We cannot arrest our way out of these problems,” said Baker. “A lot of the solutions are things that are either really expensive or are things that need to be done on a regional or even larger level than that. You can’t do it on a scale of a city as small as Redlands.”

Other cities showing the highest increases and decreases in homelessness in the past year include San Bernardino and Rialto.

Rialto showed a 189 percent increase in its homeless numbers in the past year, from 19 counted in 2015 to 55 counted in January. But the reason as to why the city’s homeless population more than doubled remains unclear. Mayor Deborah Robertson and Police Chief Randy De Anda did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

The city of San Bernardino, which continues to have the lion’s share of the county’s homeless population, saw a 26.4 percent decrease in its homeless population in the past year, dropping from 767 to 564 person counted.

San Bernardino Councilwoman Virginia Marquez attributes much of that decline to the San Bernardino

Homeless Access Center, which opened last year on the northeastern end of Seccombe Lake Park. It provides services to the homeless and helps those who qualify find permanent housing.

Kim Carter, who founded Time for Change Foundation in San Bernardino in 2002, a nonprofit assisting homeless women and children and parolees in finding permanent housing and achieving self sufficiency, said the focus on ending homelessness should be two-prong approach: creating more decent, low-income housing that is not slumlord-driven and developing effective case plans that help the homeless learn the necessary life skills so they can achieve independence and stay on their feet.

She stands by her organization's record. Last year, Time for Change Foundation housed 48 families, who still remain housed, she said.

"We have a model that has been exposed across the nation because it works," Carter said, adding that officials from the cities of Fresno and San Francisco have reached out to her expressing interest in her program and how it works. But for some reason, Carter said she has had little interest expressed from officials in San Bernardino on expanding or duplicating her program.

"They're always looking down the freeway for someone else to ride into town," she said.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20160402/san-bernardino-county-cities-see-declines-increases-in-homelessness>

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