



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE MOTHER LODGE
2021-2023 STUDY OF RURAL HOMELESSNESS IN
TUOLUMNE AND CALAVERAS COUNTIES**

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INTRODUCTION

Undertaking a study for the League has been a three-year process. In February 2021, we polled our LWVML membership about issues that should be considered a priority for research and advocacy for our rural counties. Housing and homelessness were chosen as a top “critical priority” and fire and forest management were a close second. The survey results were publicized on our website and in “The Voter.” All members were encouraged to participate in a study committee and be a part of this important work for the League.

The study of housing and homelessness was adopted! Our journey began when nine interested members met at Woods Creek Rotary Park in June 2021. Two co-chairs were selected for our study committee as part of the League study process. Interestingly, it was not lost on us that we were among the very people we were about to study. We brainstormed many ideas and questions and discussed what areas to consider for studying homelessness.

How many people in each county are homeless?

What age groups are homeless?

What are concerns about youth and senior homeless?

Why do people become homeless?

What are county governments, local agencies, and service providers doing?

Why is homelessness a significant county, state & national problem?

What are the League positions on this issue?

Following the League of Women Voter guides on how to conduct a League study, we started our research. We reviewed the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) Homelessness Action Policy and Local League Toolkit, LWVC Program Planning kit, legislative updates, and state and national League positions on homelessness and related issues. We investigated if other Leagues in California studied rural homelessness.

The study committee quickly learned that both Tuolumne and Calaveras counties had five-year action plans (a state requirement, for reducing homeless numbers). Two funding homelessness services and affordable housing projects were contingent upon local counties showing efforts on reducing homelessness and reporting numbers of sheltered and unsheltered homeless. Both plans contained valuable information regarding county resources and data. These plans included service and outreach challenges,

partnerships, providers, services, shelters, affordable housing, funding, solutions, resources, and plans to reduce homelessness.

Study members attended Tuolumne County Commission on Homeless, Calaveras Housing Partnership, Area 12 Agency on Aging, and other service agencies to collect information and interview key players. We collected local news articles, searched online research papers, tracked legislation, and attended many county or local meetings as well as webinars. While we chose to emphasize this new research project, Observer Corps helped us stay up to date on other issues as well as housing and homelessness that came up at the Board of Supervisors or Sonora City Council meetings. As the study committee gained more information, we reported at general membership meetings, submitted monthly updates to “The Voter,” and reported to our League Board.

In 2022, one study member participated in the Point-In-Time (P.I.T) Count for unsheltered homeless. This is required by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to fund homeless projects and services which are managed by regional consortiums. Tuolumne County is part of Central Sierra Consortium of Care, a consortium that also includes Amador, Calaveras, and Mariposa counties. While the P.I.T data has been used nationally since January 2005, our study team quickly learned that rural homelessness was at a great disadvantage in receiving funds. The homeless counts are much lower in rural areas. HUD schedules the P.I.T. counts in January, when winter weather can be inclement, this is a challenging time to undertake unsheltered counts. It is also challenging to count unsheltered in widespread, mountainous terrain. Lack of centralized services, shelters, and transportation is a reality in rural areas. With lower numbers counted, the result is less funding for rural projects. We also learned that many homeless youths are not counted because of “couch surfing” and are not included in P.I.T. counting rules.

Developing consensus statements is an important part of the League study and involves the entire membership. At two consensus meetings in May 2022, the study team presented our research and P.I.T. findings. With our membership we developed five broad consensus statements regarding what needs to be done in our counties about housing unsheltered citizens. After the consensus meetings, our Board approved the five consensus statements.

In 2023, our study committee observed numerous changes and a lot of progress with how Calaveras and Tuolumne counties are working to reduce homeless numbers. While both counties and community organizations are doing a lot to support and help our unsheltered citizens, there is much more that needs to be done. Based on our research, we learned that there are myths about the face of the homeless. The data in both counties show a severe lack of affordable housing and emergency shelters. While citizens want to help the homeless, our communities do not want unsheltered programs in their neighborhoods. Our findings lead to a LWVML Position Statement which was approved by our Board and published in “The Voter” in May 2023.

We also learned how rural homelessness is unique with solutions, resources, and funding. There are many similarities to what Tuolumne and Calaveras counties are experiencing in trying to reduce the numbers of unsheltered citizens. There are also many differences, unique to each county, as to how each is working to provide emergency shelters, more affordable housing, and wrap-around services especially for those with mental illness and addiction problems.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

1. Reasons for homelessness and the “face” of homeless
2. Homeless Youth and Seniors in Both Counties
3. Obstacles of rural homelessness
4. Affordable housing, and shelter data in both counties
5. Tuolumne county current projects and successes
6. Calaveras county current projects and successes
7. LWVML Position Statement and its development
8. Local League Actions and Advocacy for Consideration

LEAGUE CONSENSUS STATEMENTS

1. We support education in the community about homelessness and its causes and consequences in our counties.
2. We support emergency shelters and services for the unsheltered.
3. We contend that government has a responsibility, in partnership with local organizations, to secure housing and provide services for those unsheltered or inadequately sheltered, to promote public safety and address basic human needs for its citizens. These are citizens and residents deserving of attention.) (Homeless does not mean “transient”.)
4. We recognize that rural communities have unique needs and challenges not found in urban settings. Actions to correct inequalities must take place locally and statewide. (Rural homeless are vastly under counted in the Point in Time count, which affects funding and local awareness. Transportation issues for centralized services is significant. In rural areas, the homeless are sometimes hidden in remote areas, which masks the full extent of their number and needs.)
5. We assert that there needs to be provision for affordable housing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and low-income housing for those experiencing homelessness.

COUNTY REPORTS

Homelessness Study Summary for Tuolumne County

WHY DID THE LWVML CHOOSE TO STUDY HOMELESSNESS?

- Based on membership survey in 2021, most members stated that Housing and Homelessness should be a “critical priority.”
- The goal of the study is to increase understanding of issues of homelessness and create opportunities to meet specific identified needs of the homeless.
- The League of Women Voters encourages active participation in government through education and advocacy to influence public policy.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT HOMELESS CITIZENS IN TUOLUMNE COUNTY:

- Government definition of homeless:
Any person, youth or older, lacking a primary or permanent night-time residence or shelter. This includes run-away youth, children aging out of the foster care system, veterans and seniors, women escaping domestic violence, and families with children. 42U.S.C. Section 11302 103(a) and (b).
- Causes of homelessness:
Lack of affordable housing
Lack of employment opportunities and low wage jobs
Medical debt
Substance or alcohol abuse, mental illness, or disability.
Circumstantial factors – fleeing domestic violence, run-away youth, aging out of foster care, parolees from prison, veterans, and senior’s encampment removals with no alternatives, homeless by choice.
- “Faces” of homeless – unique stories:
Loss of spouse through death or divorce, high cost of medical care, high costs of rent with minimal rental assistance - some landlords do not accept section 8, etc. Individual stories of attempts to put their lives together.

- Barriers due to homelessness:
A permanent address is needed for some government agencies (Department of Motor Vehicles, seeking employment, official documents, hospitalization, right to vote.)
- Challenges of being homeless in Tuolumne County
 - Limited transportation options and resources (6 fixed routes, Monday through Friday, not on weekends)
 - Dial-a-ride (subject to availability and requires advanced reservations)
 - Only one county-wide taxi service
 - Lack of centralized location or a hub for services, information, and housing
 - Limited case management resources critical for guiding people through “the system.” Referral process is challenging, ever-changing and relationship based. Lacks continuity.
- Homeless youth in Tuolumne County
 - Low P.I.T. Counts i.e. 177 count out of 711 Summer of 2017 by ATCAA, 288 total. 2017-2018 by Tuolumne County schools. 189 students signed up for ATCAA food bank deliveries to homeless camps (2018)
 - 5% of public-school children are homeless (2019, CDE)
 - About 15% children live below federal poverty level (Children’s data, 2014-18, U.S. Census)
 - About 17% children live in low-income working households (American Community survey, 2020)
 - Youth homeless resources at Cassina High (created safety net) Accurate homeless counts kept by county schools, Cal fresh, Medi-Cal, and Dept. of Social Services.
- Lack of funding plus funding restrictions in rural counties. - Some funding is one-time only or limited term. Inaccurate, low point-in-time counts. Lack of centralized services and transportation issues.

- Many non-profit and faith-based organizations are helping the homeless. For example, Nancy’s hope, Give Someone a Chance, Interfaith Community of Social Services, ATCAA, David Lambert Community Center, Resiliency Village, Lighthouse Ministries, and Center for Non-violent Community.
- County government created two plans to help fund permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, emergency and transition shelters, outdoor managed shelters, case management, development of a navigation center, and workforce housing projects.
- Using Housing First model. Five-year plans:
 1. TC plan to combat homelessness, 7/16/19.
 2. Permanent local housing allocation (PLHA), July 2022. Based on S.B. 2, known as building homes and jobs act approved by Calif. Legislation in 2017.
- The creation of Tuolumne County commission on homelessness in 2021 has resulted in coordinated, county-wide efforts to decrease homelessness.
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- Shortage of emergency and transition shelters and emergency shelters available in Tuolumne County:

Amador—Tuolumne Community Action Agency (TCAA)		
Family Shelter		25
290 S. Stewart Street, Sonora		15
Center for Non-Violent Community		
Emergency Shelter		12-15
Resiliency Village (includes octopods)		16
Navigation Center, Soulsbyville		50
Estimated total shelters		121

- Lack of affordable housing in Tuolumne County:
 1. Building codes and restrictions and CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) requirements.
 2. Limited residential development and greater than average vacancy rates as noted in TC plan to combat homelessness & U.S. News and World Report 369 units built (2010-2019) while 17+ units built (2020+) vacancy rates = 27.4% county median, 7.8% CA, and 16.3% U.S.
 3. Homeowners and developers are opting to increase Airbnb's.
 4. Affordable housing wait time is at least 1-to-5-years!
 5. Rental assistance is limited. Some landlords do not accept section 8.
 7. Estimate of shortfall 69.8% county median, 73.5% California, 61.4% U.S. (U.S. News and world report housing report for Tuolumne County)
 6. Weekly hours needed to pay for affordable rent. Cases in 53 county median, 40.61 U. S median.

- **CONCLUSIONS**

1. Rural homelessness presents many challenges and barriers. Inaccurate and low counts result in less funding, limited transportation, lack of centralized hub for services, and lack of staff, local agencies, and services dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. Grant requirements are often limited to urban areas.

2. Limited employment opportunities and low paying jobs do not adequately cover monthly rent.

3. Little coordination of services and no centralized Hub.

4. 13.2% of Tuolumne County residents live below the federal poverty line. In 2022, county population was 54,431, making the poverty population 7,198 who cannot afford housing.

5. Tuolumne County citizens support homeless services and programs; however, they do not support housing initiatives where they reside.

Homelessness Study Summary for Calaveras County

There are similarities and differences between the approaches taken to address homelessness in Tuolumne County and Calaveras County. Both counties are dealing with rural homelessness, with most of the unhoused staying hidden in remote areas. This creates unique problems in counting the individuals who are unhoused, which affects funding, and in getting services to these people. The two counties, while neighbors, have different situations. One obvious one is that the unsheltered in Tuolumne County are more visible around Sonora than they are in San Andreas. Visibility and awareness seem to drive the public demand for something to be done.

The numbers reported to HUD by both counties in their 2019 documents are admittedly low. The Point-in-Time Count administered every two years is the number used to calculate funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The count is done in January because in the cold weather the homeless will be more likely to be in a shelter, at least in cities. It is very difficult to find the homeless in rural areas because many wish to be hidden and do not trust strangers asking questions. The count was held in January 2024. Volunteers were trained and sent to locations with Incentive Bags from the Calaveras Mariposa Community Action Agency filled with practical items and a list of services. It should provide more accurate numbers of the unsheltered residents than previous counts.

The Calaveras 2019 Five Year Plan to End Homelessness states, "Our geography creates barriers to service. The population of 45,602 is spread out over 1,000 plus square miles with 80% of our residents living in unincorporated communities along the main travel corridors."

Calaveras had a Homelessness Committee that was disbanded. Instead, the Housing Resource Partnership was formed to address all levels of housing needs, including the unsheltered. The partnership consists of two committees: Housing Services and Housing Development.

Housing Services includes Community Organizations including faith-based organizations, community organizations, those groups dealing with housing services and those affected by those needs.

The other committee is working on the development of additional housing units. It consists of private and public industries including developers, realtors, contractors, and government agencies that touch housing such as Economic Development.

The two groups meet on a regular basis, separately, to address housing needs at all levels, including workforce housing, low-income housing, and the unsheltered.

This approach is innovative and has undergone some changes as necessary. One advantage of a small county is the ability to experiment and discard what isn't working and move on to something else. The goal is to eventually come up with agreement on what works for all housing needs.

In Calaveras County, the programs focus on long-term housing solutions, not emergency sheltering. There is a strong emphasis on case management which is housing- focused with strong partnerships that support non-housing needs.

Tenant education and Housing Stability Plans concentrate on Four Pillars of Housing Stability:

1. Finances: budgeting, credit management
2. Home Care: maintenance and upkeep
3. Relationships: self, roommates, family, neighbors, landlords, community
4. Housing Competitiveness: search, lease savvy, portfolios

Housing needs to be addressed as a whole community need.

Homelessness can be seen as two types:

- There are the chronically homeless that need permanent supportive housing. These are often people with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse issues. This group will need long-term rent subsidies and support services. Recent studies suggest that 90% of those in supportive housing remain housed after 2 years.
- The second kind of homelessness is the recently unhoused or those on the verge of being homeless. Rapid rehousing resources can provide emergency cash, and even rent money for up to two years for those meeting eligibility requirements.

What seems to be working well is a strategy of quickly finding housing for the newly or about-to-be homeless. After placement in suitable housing, often little or no further help is needed. More intensive case work is needed for those who have been unhoused for a long time. It can take up to 6 weeks of work with a case manager for a client to be able to plan beyond one day. Living day-to-day in survival mode takes time to undo.

One of the successes is the announcement from Habitat for Humanity that they will build 107 units in the Angels Camp area.

Statistics for 2020-2023 show an overall success rate of 59% for Calaveras County Housing Program Clients to find housing. In the first six months of 2023 alone, 80 households with 153 individuals were served. 41 of them were successfully housed, 1 was transferred to another program, 33 households continued in Calaveras County Housing Programs and 5 Households unsuccessfully exited.

Recent successes include:

A former foster youth was providing temporary housing while she was helped in finding a job, learning to budget and increase her credit score, continue her education, focus on her relationship with herself and to end self-sabotaging behaviors and to locate permanent housing. She can manage her housing expenses without government help now.

A family whose children were removed received temporary housing assistance while they found employment, sobriety and attended parenting and anger management classes. Eventually permanent, affordable housing without government subsidy was found for this family that they can afford without government subsidy.

Several Adult Protective Services clients unable to care for themselves received support for assisted living care while they were going through an assessment process necessary to being conserved.

Calaveras County is in the process of creating a Housing Strategic Plan. The county is also working on improved navigation for clients provided through a phone app. Both are expected in the coming year.

The Calaveras County website has housing resources listed for those eligible. There is a card available in various locations that lists resources for housing, food assistance, clothing, crisis support and veterans' support. The Angels Camp Police Department is also giving out this card.

Calaveras County has a reliable transportation system along the main corridors of Highway 4 and Highway 49, allowing its citizens access to services such as food banks and those offered at Health and Human Services and Behavioral Health in San Andreas.

There are many faith organizations also providing help to the unhoused.

Rural homelessness is unique with its resources, solutions, and funding. It requires creative problem solving and the flexibility to change direction if something isn't working.

We encourage opportunities to raise public awareness of what life is like for those experiencing homelessness; their needs and the services and support that are effective in getting and keeping them housed.

We advocate for more affordable rentals to house our citizens at all income levels. We also support plans to quickly rehouse newly homeless people, or to prevent those on the edge of losing their home from becoming homeless.

We encourage all concerned citizens to be informed and to communicate with your representatives regarding homelessness, and to acknowledge those in our communities who successfully help our unsheltered residents.

LWVML 2023 POSITION STATEMENT

The League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode supports actions to recognize the unique challenges to reduce and eliminate homelessness in rural counties. We support addressing policies that include accurate identification and demographic information of the unhoused. We have found there are transportation challenges and physical and mental health needs of the rural unsheltered population that must be addressed in Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties.

WE SUPPORT:

A local count that would reflect a more accurate enumeration of the unsheltered. (The HUD Point- In-Time count is generally regarded as inadequate to provide a realistic count of homeless persons.)

Education for the community and law enforcement about the unsheltered to allay fears and create better understanding of the causes and the people who need housing assistance.

Providing easy access to information for those in need of shelter about services.

Adequate transportation which is a big issue in a low population and large geographic area. Access to transportation services that will allow clients to get to locations for help, employment, education, etc.

Providing mobile van services to the homeless community.

Exploring use of existing buildings as transitional housing, temporary or emergency shelters. Programs that transition to permanent, supportive, and independent housing.

RESOURCES

Population	2022	Calaveras 46,234	Tuolumne 54,751
	2010	45,263	55,365
FED, POVERTY LINE	2022	12.8% (5,286)	14.75% (6,739)
\$1,132.50/individual \$2,312.50/family of four		\$1,038 Median Rent	\$917 Median Rent
COST BURDEN -30%+ HOUSING AFFORDABLE HOUSING – FED. PROGRAMS (sections 515,531, 538 . . .		34% of renters	71.7% of renters
apartments, townhouses		644 units (215 low-income apts.)	1728 units (920 low-income apts.)
AVERAGE FAMILY HOUSEHOLD SIZE		2.45 RENTERS = 2.56	2.28 RENTERS = 2.22
POPULATION IN LOW INCOME HOUSING		1,649	3,836
POVERTY WITHOUT HOUSING?			
		HIGHEST P.I.T. COUNT = 186	HIGHEST P.I.T. COUNT = 712
REFERENCES:			
U.S. Census, HUD P.I.T data Affordable Housing Online Tuolumne County Plan to Combat Homelessness Calaveras County, 5-Yr. Plan			

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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