

# San Gabriel Valley Tribune

**Homeless head count under way in Valley**

**By Karen Rubin**

**Staff Writer**

**Wednesday, January 26, 2005** - A massive countywide effort to count people living in cars, under bridges and on the streets began Wednesday as trained volunteers fanned out to do head counts of the homeless living in the San Gabriel Valley.

This is the first comprehensive attempt to count the number of homeless living in Los Angeles County.

Before, only estimates were used.

The count covers 28 areas countywide and is coordinated by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, an agency addressing problems of homelessness. "It's been a broad estimate in the past," said Siri A. Khalsa, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. "We have never had an in-depth survey in this magnitude."

More than \$50 million in federal funds are at stake, Khalsa said. This year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development asked cities and counties nationwide to provide head counts in order to secure the funds, Khalsa said.

The money is used for homeless programs, shelters and outreach. In the past, gathering data on the homeless was considered costly and impractical. But now, more detailed information is needed to better understand and treat the problem.

On Tuesday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that California would receive \$228 million in HUD grants.

On Wednesday, 15 volunteers met at the Citrus Valley Medical Center - Intercommunity Campus in Covina, then fanned out on foot and in cars from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. They covered 315 miles of streets using census tract maps. They

counted anyone sleeping in a car, under a bridge and in a park or a darkened alleyway. They even opened Dumpster lids.

"We know where the homeless go," said Nicholas Hernandez, 52, who was among a number of homeless volunteers paid \$10 an hour to help in the count. Stephanie Ruth, 21, of Covina just wanted to help.

"It seemed like a constructive way to spend my time," she said. "I wanted to help the community because this is something that really needs to be addressed."

The countywide canvassing started Tuesday and ends today in areas that include Compton, Skid Row and San Pedro.

The count covers streets, shelters, jails, hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Face-to-face surveys collect data on age, gender and ethnicity, Khalsa said. Over the course of a year, an estimated 254,000 men, women and children experience homelessness in the county, according to a 2003 Institute For The Study of Homelessness and Poverty report.

About 2,700 people are homeless on any given day in the San Gabriel Valley, the study showed.

Volunteer William Guerrero said everyone should help.

"I look around and they are all decent people," he said. "We all have our scars to bear."

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