

Volunteers scour San Bernardino, county streets during annual homeless count

By [Doug Saunders](#), The Sun
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San Bernardino County Sheriff's deputy Mike Jones looks for homeless individuals under a makeshift tent in front of a business Thursday in San Bernardino. The Sheriff's HOPE team and San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership spent the morning talking to and counting homeless individuals throughout the city, and San Bernardino County, in order to develop current and future services that serve the homeless population. RACHEL LUNA — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SAN BERNARDINO >> Nearly 100 volunteers, city and county officials along with law enforcement gathered early Thursday morning in the parking lot at San Manuel Stadium. They came prepared to hit the streets for a single purpose: To find and count as many of San Bernardino County's homeless population as they could and provide them with available services and assistance.

Two San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies, Sgt. Matt Yost and Deputy Mike Jones, assigned to the sheriff's Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement team, made their way through parks and fields, contacting numerous homeless individuals to offer them help through county programs. "We make on an average of 20 to 30 contacts daily," Jones said. "Some of their stories are heartbreaking, but many of them have mental issues or drug and/or alcohol problems or both."

One group of the city's homeless population was living in a tent city in a field behind Pioneer Cemetery, near Sierra Way and Seventh Street. "I've been homeless for a while," 40-year-old Wesley Burroughs said. "But Step Up found me a home, and I should be moving in soon." Step Up on Second is a program that finds and places chronic homeless individuals in housing, giving them the second chance they need. Burroughs, who is HIV positive, has been homeless for a few years after he was laid off from his job at a car wash. "I lived paycheck to paycheck, and once I got laid off I couldn't find another job," he said. "I lost everything and have been in a tent for quite some time."

The Office of Homeless Services, a branch of San Bernardino County's Department of Behavioral Health, organized Thursday's annual Point-In-Time Count, or PITC. "The PITC not only provides a measurement of the rate of homelessness in San Bernardino County, it offers insight into the characteristics of people and families sleeping on the street or in places not meant for human habitation," said Tom Hernandez, Office of Homeless Services. "The information gathered by community volunteers is used as a road map or blueprint to design current and future services that best serve our local homeless population."

On the west end of the county in Upland, county CEO Greg Devereaux, Supervisor Josie Gonzales and Philip Mangano, former homeless czar under President George W. Bush and former director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, joined several dozens of volunteers counting and finding resources for Upland's homeless population. "There is nothing more important than having elected and appointed officials taking part in the count, interacting with the homeless community and making an effort in finding resources to help them," Mangano said. "They realize that this is something that needs resolution, and it comes from the highest level of government."

Devereaux, who participated in his first county Point-In-Time Homeless Count, arrived to Magnolia Center in the predawn hours where he was greeted by Mangano and Upland council members. Along with Mangano and San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzales, Devereaux spent three hours crisscrossing streets near San Antonio Community Hospital looking for homeless. "I went to Upland to help spotlight there are problems everywhere. Just because you have higher income and education levels doesn't mean you don't or won't have a homeless problem," Devereaux said by phone later Thursday afternoon. It highlights the misconception that homelessness is only an issue in lower economic cities, such as San Bernardino, he said. The Upland point-in-time count was one of only three cities in the county that had a strike team there to provide immediate housing assistance and any other social services available. The team consisted of members of the sheriff's HOPE team and county's HOST team.

The PITC isn't just a San Bernardino County effort to end homelessness. "Every community in the country is required to do a PITC and the idea is to get as close to science as possible," said Mangano, who is sometimes referred to the nation's czar on homelessness. "We recognize not everyone is found, but if we do this every year we get a sense if the homeless numbers are going up or down."

One homeless woman, a Texas native, told her story to the HOPE team deputies. "I've been living on the streets for almost a year," 55-year-old Maria Perez said. "I went to college and was a drug counselor. Now I have nothing." Yost and Jones took Perez's information and told her that a representative from [Step Up](#) was expected to be in the area to talk to her about housing. "So many of the homeless population deal with a variety of issues," Jones said. "We're out there trying to help them get away from their current situation and move beyond homelessness."