

Homeless Outreach Program & Education HOPE Homeless/Transient Survey and Response 2015

Conducted by the Citrus Heights Police Department with the assistance of the Navigator program from the City of Citrus Heights

Created and Coordinated by the Citrus Heights Police Departments Problem Oriented Policing Unit with the Code Enforcement Officers working in conjunction with the Citrus Heights Police Department Patrol Division

Scanning:

In January 2015 the Problem Oriented Policing unit for the Citrus Heights Police Department began receiving numerous complaints in regards to people sleeping in public areas, urinating in public areas, loitering in public areas and this was a distraction to the businesses. In addition to that our local parks cleanup crews were finding used hypodermic needles, used condoms, other drug paraphernalia and homeless people passed out in common area. The overall nature of the problem was homeless people and people that appeared homeless.

In January 2015 a group conducted the "Homeless Count" in the City of Citrus Heights. As a result they notified us that we had 12 homeless people in our city. When the Citrus Heights Police department and members of the community questioned the count, we were told they conduct the count in the winter because most homeless people go into the local shelters. This makes the count quicker, easier, and safer for their employees. The Problem Oriented Policing unit felt that this number was not an accurate representation for our community. As a unit we created a the Homeless Outreach Program & Education (H.O.P.E.). We had a program, now we

needed data, more than just calls for service. We also discussed if this is a perception issue or is it reality. We conducted research and found that several cities in California were being watched for the “Criminalization of Homelessness”. So, the question was how do we contact, educate, and provide resources to our homeless population? Furthermore, who are they, where are they, and what more can we do to help. This led to the creation of the Homeless/Transient Survey Card.

In order to confirm the problem the Citrus Heights Police Department patrol units and the Problem Oriented Policing unit began making pedestrian contacts in the areas that we were receiving a majority of the calls for service. As a city we are comprised of 14.4 square miles which is made of a combination of residential, business, commercial and greenbelts.

We have a monthly meeting to discuss the Crimes And Traffic in Citrus Heights (CATCH). At this meeting crimes such as vehicle burglaries, petty theft, and vandalism are discussed. When the crimes were put on a map you could see how they overlapped in the areas that we were receiving calls for service regarding homeless/transient people.

We identified that we did have an increase in our homeless population that was going to the local businesses in order to:

- Commit the theft of water
- Commit the theft of electricity
- Vandalism of lights and security cameras (reported & unreported)
- Illegal camping (City Ordinance)
- Panhandling (City Ordinance)
- Illegal dumping
- Illegal narcotics usage with needles left behind

It should be noted that several years ago the Citrus Heights Police Department put into place a no camping ordinance that covered the entire city. This was put into place because our greenbelts were getting littered with junk and rubbish after a camp was built. Some of our Citrus Heights families were finding hypodermic needles and other drug paraphernalia as they walked along the creeks.

While working with the community and the patrol officers we came together and decided that we needed to determine the overall size of this potential problem. We selected it for special attention because we were getting numerous businesses and residents calling in when they would see somebody panhandling near an intersection. The Citrus Heights Police Department has a no panhandling ordinance near intersections because it is extremely unsafe and we did not want to interrupt the traffic flow. Other Homeless people were loitering in and around a business. When the business representative would ask them to leave, the homeless person would become confrontational or aggressive.

Analysis:

As a Problem Oriented Policing unit we needed to conduct a deeper analysis of the overall situation. We took our standard field interview card and changed it to be a survey card. We contacted local homeless advocacy groups, medical offices and other police agencies to find out what would be good information to ask a person who is homeless. (Attached within the appendices is a copy of the 2015 CHPD Homeless Transient Field Information card.)

Homelessness has been around within our city and within our state for quite some time. We explained to our patrol officers that **homelessness is not a crime**. For some people it is a

lifestyle. Some of them have chosen to live this way, some have not. There are numerous people out there who are at this point one paycheck away from being homeless. After the survey card was completed and finalized it was explained to the patrol officers that when they came across a contact whether it was a proactive pedestrian stop or a call for service on a loiterer, if they determined the person was homeless we requested that they fill out one of these cards.

Prior to doing these surveys, a person who was contacted and found to be homeless was just sent on their way with no help of resources or information given. As officers completed the survey card they would provide a booklet of services available throughout Sacramento County and our neighboring Placer County. In the course of asking a homeless the questions on the survey cards, we wanted to find out what was the combination of events that led them to be homeless. We also found out from one of the advocacy groups that they needed to know where the homeless people go for medical treatment.

We looked to talk to people that were veterans, people that suffer from drug and alcohol addiction, and people that were on probation or parole. We asked people if they suffer from any mental health illnesses (diagnosed or undiagnosed)

Another aspect that we wanted to analyze was the domestic violence history. There was a news article that showed the rising subjects in homelessness were single mothers with children as a result of a domestic violence history.

While contacting another police agency they stated they ask for next of kin information. Unfortunately, sometimes when people are living on the streets they get sick, cold and potentially die from their illnesses. If the police department is the main source of contact for that person, then we can hopefully contact a family member or give that information to the county coroner's office in order to be able to contact next of kin.

In order for the survey cards to be successful, we utilized our patrol teams who would be the messengers of the resource information for these different individuals. The specific goal was to remind people that although they are currently homeless, transient and living on the street that the Citrus Height's Police Department was there to help them. We are there to give them resources and guide them to a better living situation. The survey was conducted over a 60-day period and we were updating our analysis weekly in order to see the total extent of the problem. It was noted early on that a lot of the underlying causes that precipitated the problem was a combination of events.

Over the last several years, California has seen quite a few financial issues occur. In 2007-2008, there were issues with housing and the housing market. This was the start of putting people on the street. We know full well that people have been homeless since the beginning of time, but we wanted to look at the folks that don't choose this lifestyle that want to get into some kind of transitional home.

After the housing crash that occurred, cities and counties were losing money and having to adjust their budgets. One of the first things that got cut was money going towards mental health care. In Sacramento County, there was a facility that stopped taking new mental healthcare patients. Their answer to that was local law enforcement agencies that would put a person on a 5150 W&I, 72-hour hold for a mental health checkup with a psychiatrist were now being taken to local hospitals. These hospitals were still taking on their normal amount of injured patients and sick patients, but now we were adding on mental health, which was taking over a bed in the emergency room, specifically, in our area, was Mercy San Juan Hospital. It's located in Carmichael, which is in Sacramento County.

Now that somebody has lost their home and they do have a diagnosed or an undiagnosed mental health issue, they would have to figure out some way to self medicate. It's very difficult to maintain a job so you don't have health insurance and you don't have money to buy the medication that you need, so some people would start self-medicating with the use of illegal drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately by the time somebody would get to this point is when law enforcement would get involved. Now that law enforcement is involved, these people would be arrested, transported to the Sacramento County Jail and potentially be put on probation.

Now that this person is addicted to an illegal drug and on probation, it's that much more difficult to actually get a job.

We utilized a computer data system that allows us to break down times of day that we're seeing these issues the most and what locations. We were primarily seeing these homeless-related issues in our greenbelt areas and a little bit in our business areas. The business areas were getting calls for service between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and in the greenbelt areas, we were receiving phone calls from residents late into the evening. The overall environment of the greenbelt made it easier for somebody to hide and camp illegally in our city.

When going to the neighborhood meetings and discussing the issue with residents, they told us this is a "big problem" and they wanted to know what the police department is going to do about it. Based on that information we ran the survey to see if this was a perception issue or a reality issue.

Response:

The goals of the project were to specifically identify people that were homeless and what we could do to help them out. We knew that by doing this we would have to utilize several

different community resources. There are several homeless advocacy groups in and around the Sacramento region and we began to contact them to see how they would be able to help us. One agency, Homeless Assistance Resource Team (HART) requested to hire an individual that was referred to as the Navigator. The navigator program was set up through the City of Citrus Heights. The idea for the navigator is to have officers identify people that wanted resources and could be helped first, then forward the information to the Navigator.

With each answer that we found, we did find new problems that we were facing. The biggest problem that we found with some of our homeless was that they didn't want help at all.

We continued our approach as a three-prong approach, really, of education. We educated the businesses, we educated the residents and we educated our officers. We wanted people to have the full gravity and scope of the problem.

We rolled right into our engineering. This is where we became creative by working with the local parks district, Sunrise Parks and Recreation. We also offered and completed Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) for our local businesses. We went through our local parks and started with our biggest park and told them to cut the grass lower and cut the trees higher. This made it more difficult for people to hide out in wooded areas.

The biggest complaint that our parks were having is that every morning their clean-up crew would find used condoms, used needles and people passed out that appeared to be dead because they had been using heroin all night. We discovered that the subjects that were homeless and using illegal drugs in the park actually knew when the sprinkler system was going to be on and most of the sprinkler systems would operate at nighttime, so they could move throughout the park at nighttime and avoid the sprinklers. We asked Sunrise Parks to re-engineer the sprinkler system to run at random times. Within about a week, there was no more people

using drugs or having sex inside the park on the grass areas. The kids that were arriving at the park in the morning were not finding needles and used condoms.

Our goal is not to just displace this homeless issue into another jurisdiction, our goal is to find homeless people that want the help and are willing to work a little bit for it.

We had found, through the Francis House Center located in Sacramento, that there was a street sheet to help us with homeless people.

We printed out almost 1,000 copies of the street sheet to give to our patrol officers to hand out to, not just homeless individuals, but also folks who are suffering from other mental health-related issues or looking for domestic violence help, other counseling, and hot meals. The resource booklet is 10 pages of information all throughout Sacramento County that is available to them.

Now, we are aware of our community and the values that they possess and we were able to find several local churches that wanted to help the people in need. We see it most often in the wintertime, when they help out with winter shelters and other church groups that donate clothing and sleeping bags. The cost associated with this is zero because it's all through donations. It just takes the time for the officers to go out and make the contact and provide these resources to our homeless population.

Assessment:

As a result of our survey, we were able to establish that we had 56 homeless people residing in Citrus Heights, which was a lot higher than the state count that said we had 12. The state count is done during January, because most of the homeless are in shelters and it makes it

easier for them to count; however, a lot of homeless people in January are also couch surfing with friends or family. By doing this survey during March and April 2015, we were able to find more out in the streets and in the greenbelts. As a result of the program, we actually had more homeless people from surrounding areas coming into our city to get resources. In order to measure the results of this, we actually went through our RIMS database and began changing the address for anybody that was homeless or transient in Citrus Heights to general delivery. We began explaining to somebody that's homeless, that if they have a general delivery address, that their mail will go to the local post office. We, as a police agency, gathered all of our data and compiled it in order to complete a report and a presentation to members of the city and other members of the police department. By identifying people who wanted help and wanted services, the navigator was able to find transitional housing for 17 of those individuals.

This is a huge step in getting subjects off of our streets and out of the greenbelts and into a home.

There were some setbacks. One particular subject was contacted several times by several different Officers. He had been issued citations and he had been given rides to surrounding areas to get help. The navigator had attempted to locate him on a couple of occasions. Part of the setback is that the Navigator was only funded for 6 hours per week. The subject finally accepted an appointment with the navigator.

The navigator took him to an office in order to start his general assistance, which is start for him with an income source, which would enable him to be able to get an apartment. They were very close to having his number called, when he told the navigator that he needed to take his dog for a walk. Six hours later he returned. He had missed his window of opportunity and had no reason or explanation to give the navigator. While the navigator was driving him back to

Citrus Heights, he became angry and violent towards her, claiming that she had failed him because she didn't get his general assistance. She explained to him that he needed to be there in order to take care of the paperwork. He demanded to get out of the car on a busy freeway. She pulled off and let him leave the vehicle.

This was an isolated incident. Some of the other set backs were people that did not want the help. One person has been homeless for almost 30 years. He scoffed when I tried to give him the resource information. He made it very clear that he enjoys his life style. This was hard for our HART team to understand.

We did have the set back of getting “buy-in” from the patrol officers. As police officers we are expected to enforce the laws. There were several homeless people that were contacted as a result of a call for service in regards to a law violation. Violators were cited or taken to county jail, but they were still given the resource information and a survey card was completed. Again, it is not a crime to be homeless. The top three officers were highlighted for their efforts during the survey timeframe.

Based on the response that we received from community members, we decided that we will continue monitoring the homeless and transient population in Citrus Heights, and we already began making plans in order to run the survey again in 2016. It was determined that this will become an annual event in order for us to contact the homeless residents in Citrus Heights. We know that homelessness cannot be cured in a day and our officers are very well aware that homelessness is not a crime.

Key Project Team Members

Officer James Garing
Officer Felicia Taylor
Code Enforcement Officer Debra Nathan
Program Assistant Dianna Wood
Sgt. Michael Wells
Lt. Ryan Kinnan
Navigator Fatemah Bradley-Martinez

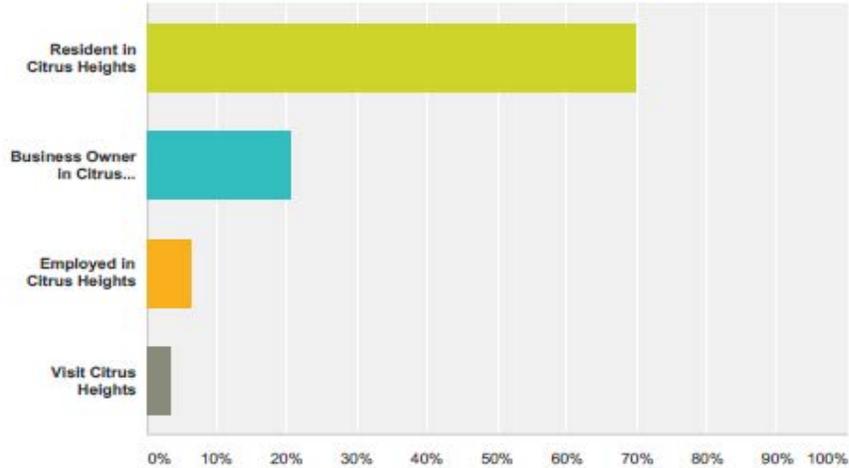
Patrol Assistance:

Officer Brian Barron
Officer Elena Calderon
Sgt. Jason Baldwin

Project Contact Person
James Garing
POP Officer
6315 Fountain Square Dr
Citrus Heights CA 95621
916-727-5819
jgaring@citrusheights.net

Q1 Which of the following are you?

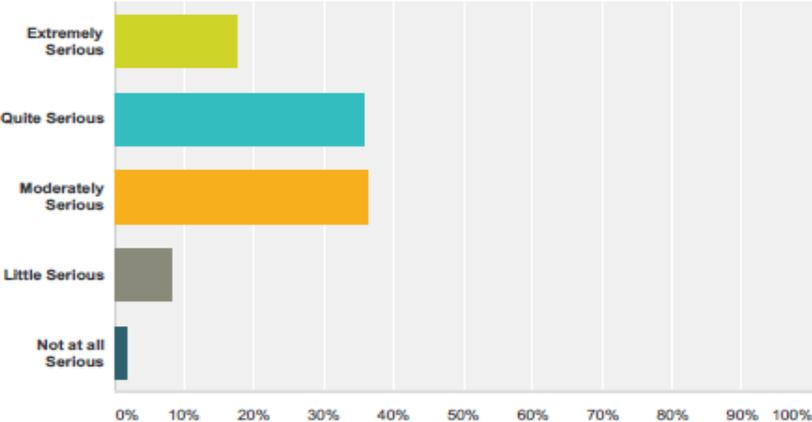
Answered: 215 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Resident in Citrus Heights	69.77% 150
Business Owner in Citrus Heights	20.47% 44
Employed in Citrus Heights	6.51% 14
Visit Citrus Heights	3.26% 7
Total	215

Q2 How serious is homelessness is in Citrus Heights?

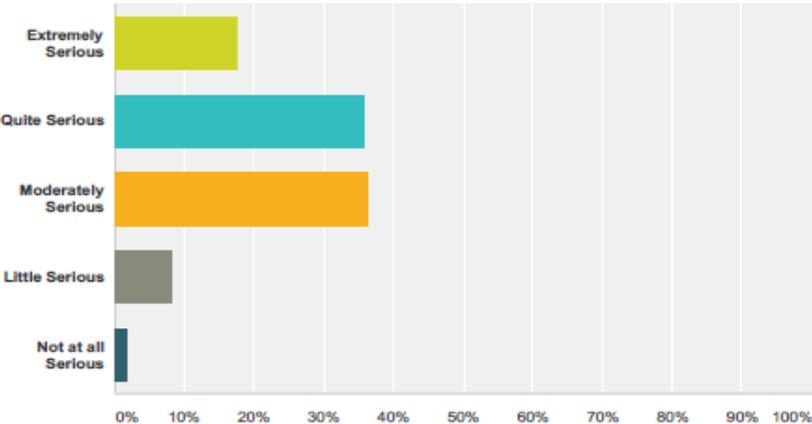
Answered: 215 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Extremely Serious	17.67% 38
Quite Serious	35.81% 77
Moderately Serious	36.28% 78
Little Serious	8.37% 18
Not at all Serious	1.86% 4
Total	215

Q2 How serious is homelessness is in Citrus Heights?

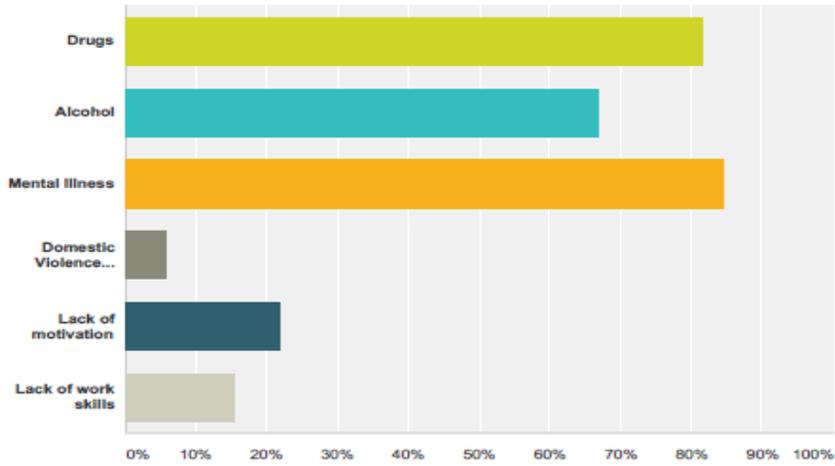
Answered: 215 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Extremely Serious	17.67% 38
Quite Serious	35.81% 77
Moderately Serious	36.28% 78
Little Serious	8.37% 18
Not at all Serious	1.86% 4
Total	215

Q3 What do you think are the main reasons people become homeless? (Select up to 3)

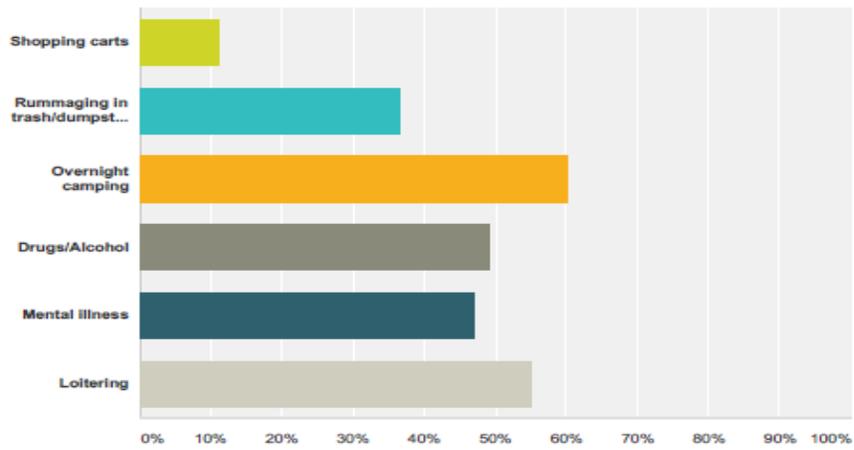
Answered: 206 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses
Drugs	81.55% 168
Alcohol	66.99% 138
Mental illness	84.47% 174
Domestic Violence Problems	5.83% 12
Lack of motivation	21.84% 45
Lack of work skills	15.53% 32
Total Respondents: 206	

Q4 What are your main concerns related to homelessness? (select up to 3)

Answered: 209 Skipped: 6



Answer Choices	Responses
Shopping carts	11.00% 23
Rummaging in trash/dumpsters (scavenging)	36.84% 77
Overnight camping	60.29% 126
Drugs/Alcohol	49.28% 103
Mental illness	46.89% 98
Loitering	55.02% 115
Total Respondents: 209	

