

San Rafael Needs Assessment Survey Results

December 2023

Executive Summary

In December 2023, the City collaborated with service providers to conduct a needs assessment survey in San Rafael's largest encampments, to further understand the needs of individuals residing there, guide the City's camping ordinance implementation, and inform future grant applications. This memo describes the survey design, implementation, and results. The survey teams compiled 60 total responses, with a majority of those respondents residing in the Mahon Creek area encampment. 66% of respondents have lived in San Rafael for more than five years (35% more than 20 years, and 31% between 5-20 years). Only 12% (7 of 60) arrived in the City in the last year.

The results demonstrate widespread interest in additional case management and mental health services. While maintaining the anonymity of survey responses, City staff worked with Marin County Health and Human Services (Marin County HHS) staff to cross-check self-reported service enrollment with Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data.

- The majority of respondents (45 individuals) expressed interest in case management if it was available. Only 13 reported currently receiving case management. HMIS data indicates that 17 respondents are assigned case management.
- Only 9 respondents reported receiving County mental health services, while 27 respondents stated their interest in such services.
- The respondents indicated widespread uncertainty regarding their status on housing waitlists maintained by Marin Coordinated Entry and the Marin Housing Authority (67% and 64% did not know their status, respectively). Cross-checking this data, Marin County HHS showed that 55% of the respondents are included in Marin Coordinated Entry.
- Most participants would accept temporary placements such as interim housing while waiting for permanent placements, with 42% preferring a motel in the interim, 22% preferring non-congregate shelter, and 21% preferring to remain in place.

The results of this survey provide the City, County and system of care with guidance for policy priorities and funding. Staff have used these results to design the January 2024 County-City Encampment Resolution Funding Program Round 3 (ERF-3) joint grant application. The joint proposal requested funding for additional case management, interim housing, and basic health and safety measures in the Mahon Creek area. City and County staff would like to set a goal of 100% enrollment in Coordinated Entry, and deploy a full-time case manager to the site.

Background

The City partnered with four nonprofit service provider agencies to create a 35-question survey tool, in both English and Spanish, and conduct interviews with participants currently experiencing homelessness in the City's largest encampments. The agencies conducting the questionnaire were St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin, Downtown Streets Team, Community Action Marin, and the Ritter Center. Staff also met with the Marin County Lived Experience Advisory Board (MC-LEAB) to discuss the survey; four MC-LEAB members volunteered in outreach with the survey teams. The primary goals of the survey included:

- Identify common barriers experienced by the population in encampments to obtaining case management and housing assistance, to guide policy work and program development (e.g. applying for funding for more case management)

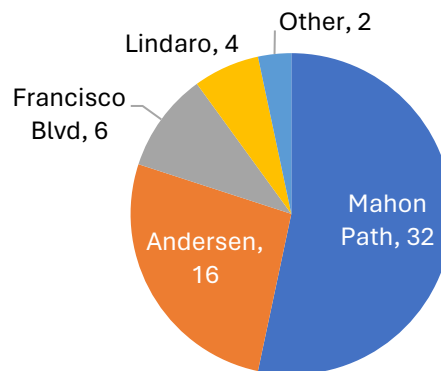
- Identify particular barriers identified by individuals within the encampments, in which individual interventions could remove those barriers (e.g. assistance with transportation for reuniting with family)
- Obtain information that could influence the City and County’s response strategy such as self-reported program enrollment, demographic data, document readiness, housing goals, suggestions for managing the encampments, etc.

The nonprofit service providers conducted the survey in English and Spanish on December 11, 12, and 13. Teams conducted outreach to encampments on Lindaro Street, Mahon Creek Path, Francisco Blvd West, and Andersen between Irwin and Rice, where staff counted 70 tents in total at the time of the survey. Respondents received a \$25 grocery gift card upon survey completion, a BBQ plate lunch provided on Tuesday, December 12th, and entry into a raffle for a 10.2” iPad Mini.

Over the three days 60 surveys were completed, representing an estimated 85% participation rate among the surveyed encampments. Survey responses were digitized into an online form and shared anonymously with City staff using privacy identification numbers. Eighteen service provider staff members administered the survey, and on Tuesday December 12th, they were joined by the four members of MC-LEAB.

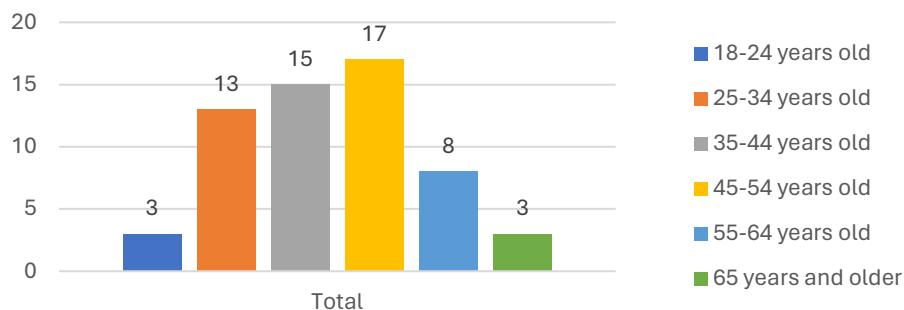
Survey Results

Locations of Respondents

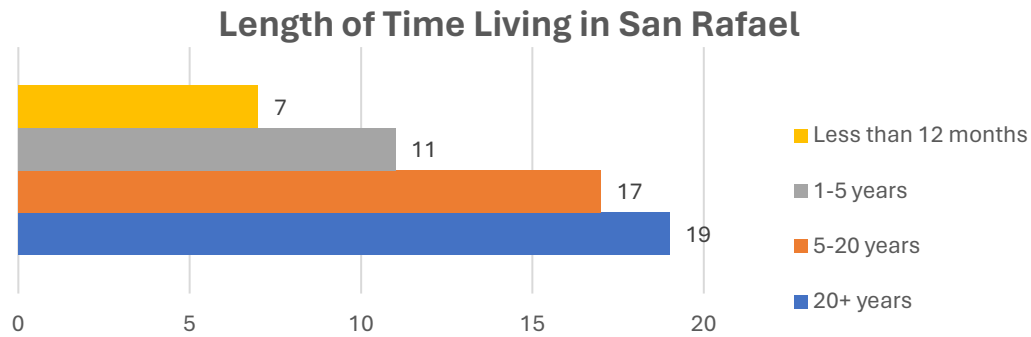


60 survey responses were collected on December 11 - 13, 2023. Respondents could decline specific questions, resulting in a varying number of responses to particular questions.

Age Ranges of Individuals Surveyed

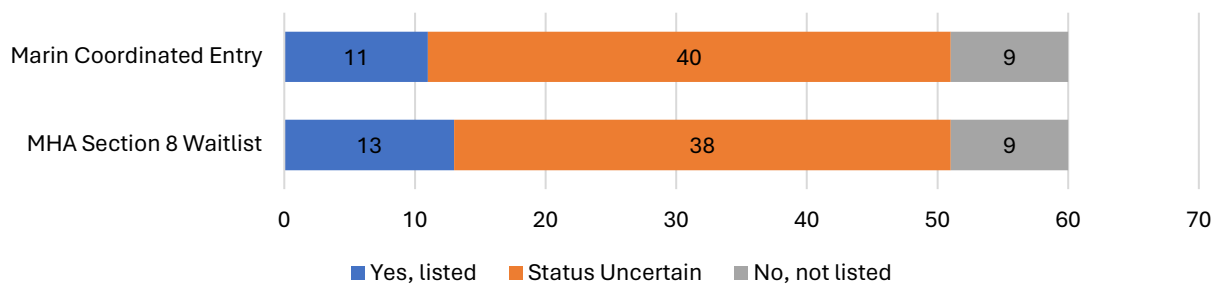


53% of respondents reported an age between 35-54 years old. The median age of individuals staying in the encampments is 46 years old.



54 of 60 responded to a question about the duration of their residence in San Rafael. Among these, 66% have lived in San Rafael for more than five years (35% in the City more than 20 years, and 31% between 5-20 years). Only about 12% (7 of 60) arrived in San Rafael in the last year.

Reported Waitlist Status - Coordinated Entry, Section 8

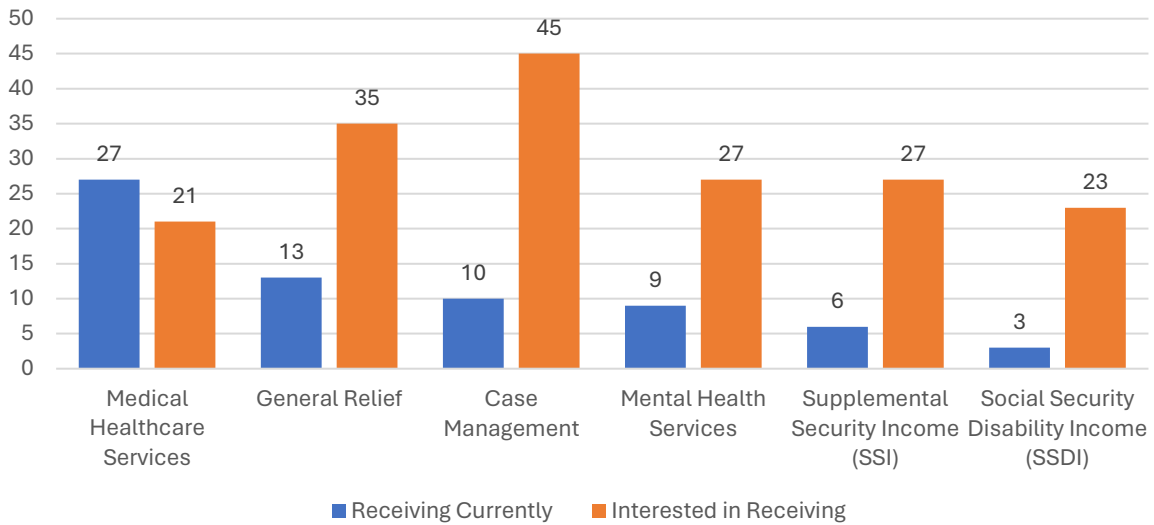


Respondents were asked whether they are listed in Marin County Coordinated Entry System (CE), a housing and service prioritization list, or on Marin Housing Authority’s (MHA) Section 8 waitlist.

A majority of 60 respondents (67% and 64%, respectively) did not know their status on these lists. 11 individuals indicated they are in CE, and 13 on MHA’s Section 8 waitlist. Additionally, 9 individuals indicated that they are not currently listed on either CE or MHA’s waitlist.

Staff worked with Marin HHS to cross-check the actual CE enrollment status with the survey’s self-reports. Marin HHS determined that as of February 7, 2024, 55% of survey participants are listed within CE, compared to the 18% responding “Yes, listed” in the survey. Most importantly, at least 45% of respondents are not in CE, a key initial step on the pathway to housing in our system of care.

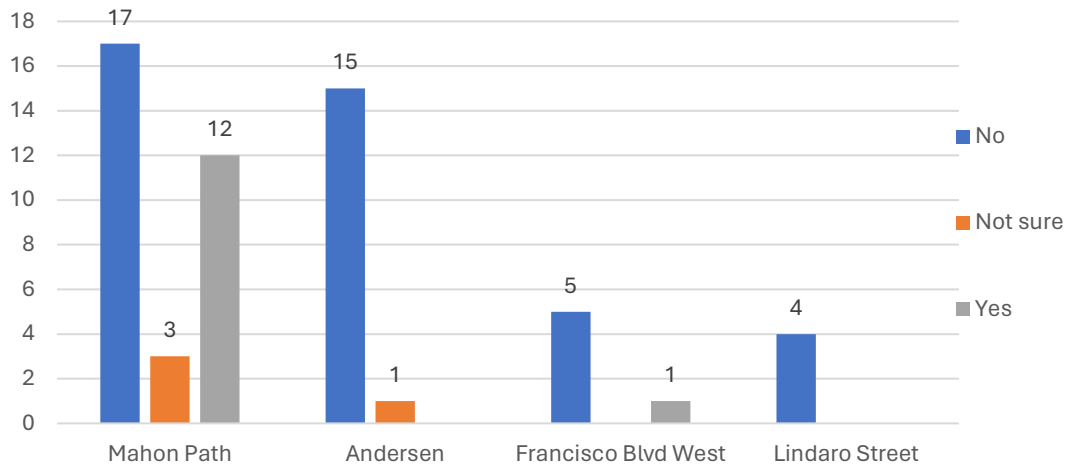
Services Received and Interest in Services



45 respondents expressed interest in case management if it was available; 3 additional full-time staff would be needed to serve this group. According to HMIS, 17 have a case manager assigned.

Respondents reported that mental health services are reaching only a limited number of those interested; 9 reported currently receiving mental health services, with 27 interested. Respondents also indicated receiving medical services and income benefits at rates far below their expected eligibility; they report interest in obtaining those services.

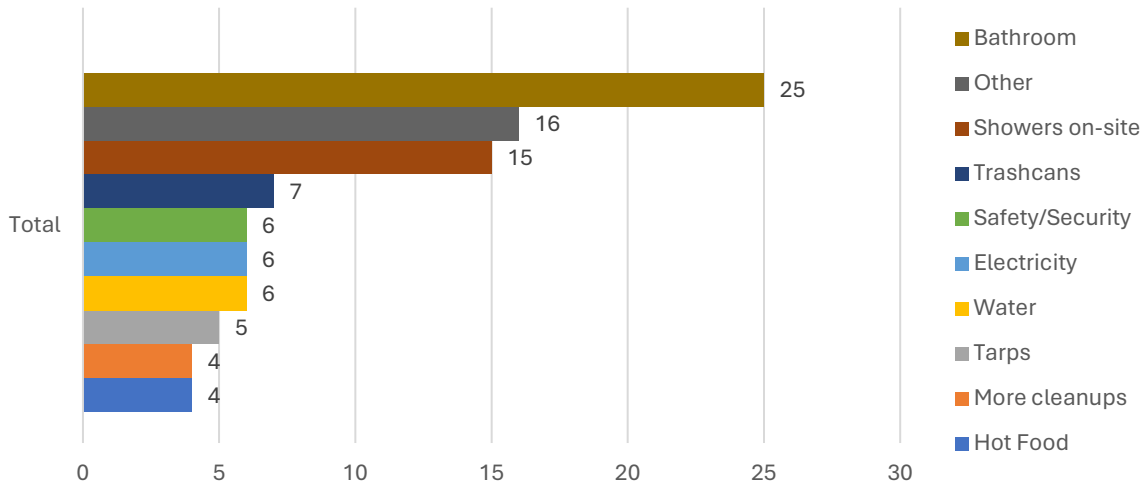
Individuals with Housing Case Manager by Location



Only 13 of 60 respondents (22%) indicated having a housing case manager; HMIS data indicates that 17 (28%) are assigned a case manager. The lowest case management rates were at Andersen, where monolingual Spanish speakers are most prevalent.

Individuals receiving housing case management services identified the following agencies as their provider: Downtown Streets Team (2), St. Vincent de Paul (4), Ritter Center (3), Catholic Charities (1), and Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (1), and not specified (2).

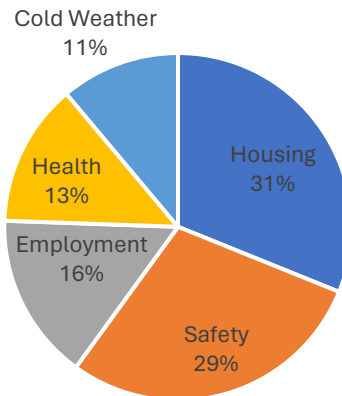
Top Responses for Encampment Improvement



Survey participants were prompted to share one to two ideas for improving conditions in the encampment areas. The top ideas included additional public bathrooms, trash cans, increased safety and security measures, and access to water and electricity.

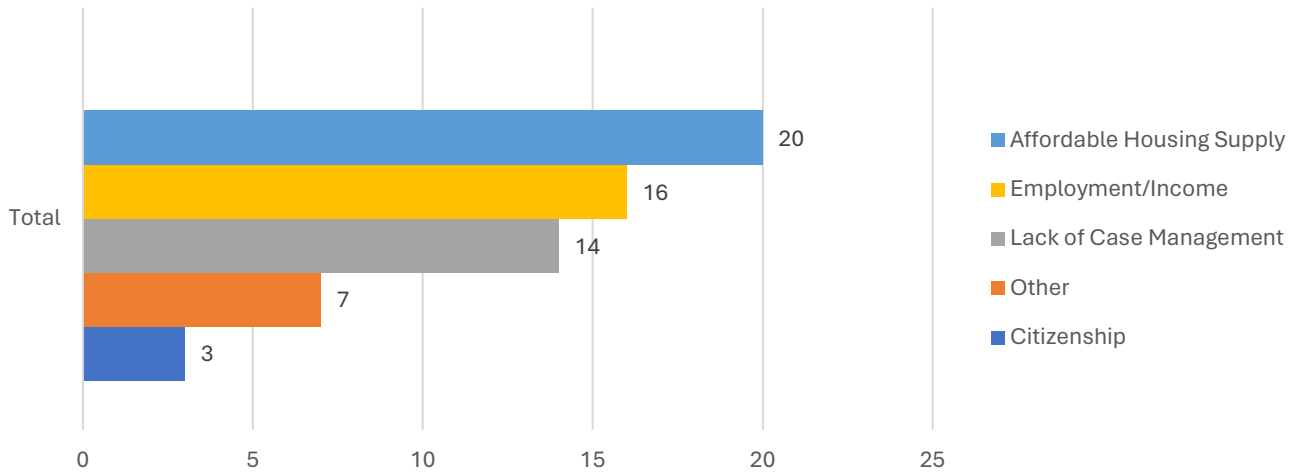
The City began providing six portable bathrooms (2 of which are ADA portables) and handwashing stations in December 2023. The City provides twice-weekly trash service through a contractor, and Downtown Streets Team volunteers collect trash once weekly.

Top General Concern of Encampment Residents



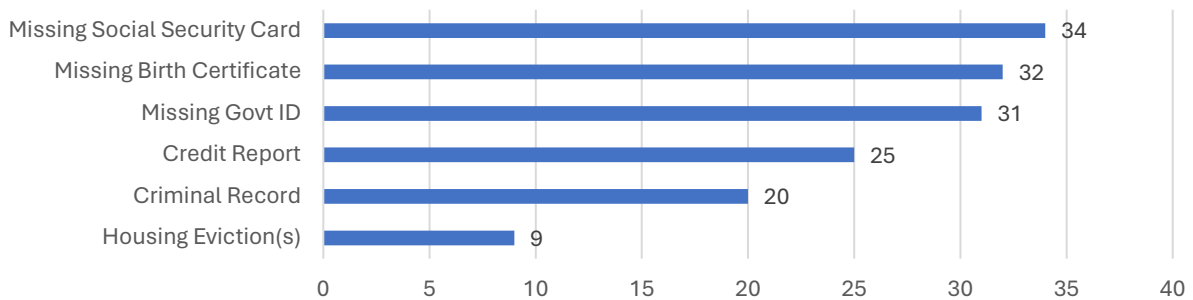
Housing and safety were the top identified general concerns (60% of responses). Survey participants saw the lack of affordable housing as their greatest barrier.

Greatest Barrier to Permanent Housing



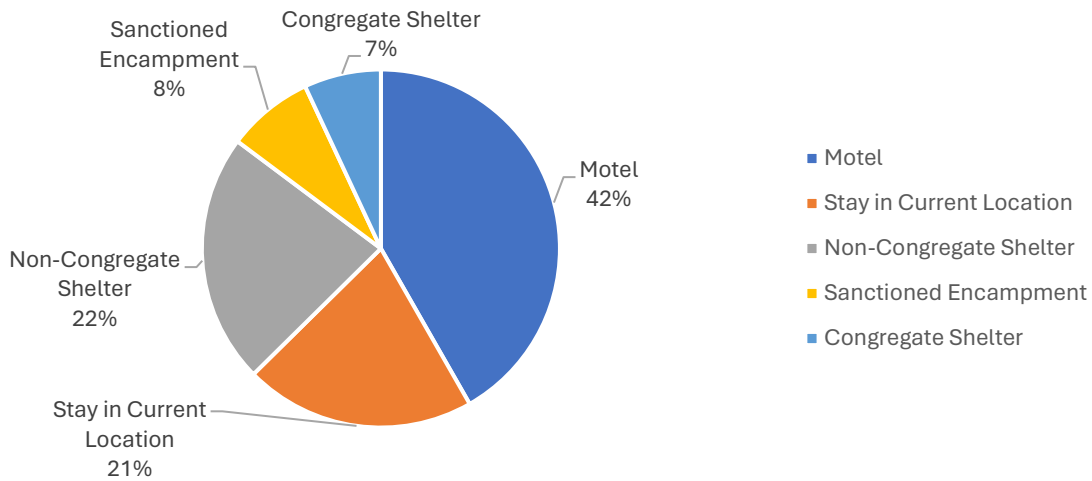
The most cited barrier to applying for housing was the lack of identification documents. Other identified barriers included poor credit, criminal records, and previous housing evictions. Housing case managers possess training and experience to advocate with housing providers and to assist individuals to overcome these barriers.

Application Readiness - multiple responses possible



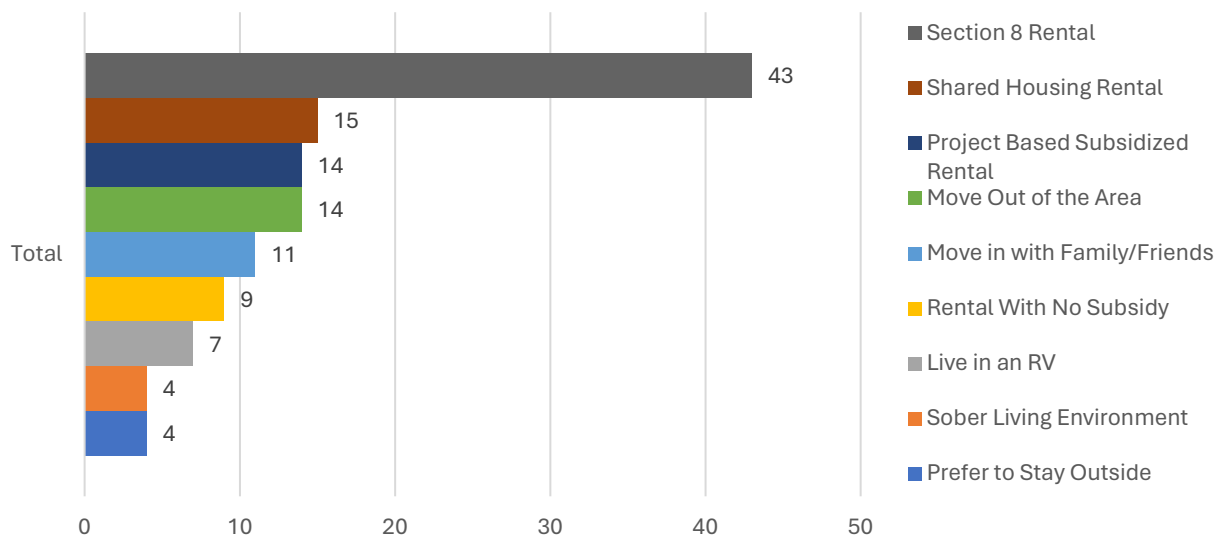
Participants were asked about their preferences for temporary placements (including interim housing, motels, sanctioned camping and shelter programs) while they wait for permanent housing placement. 42% indicated a preference for and a willingness to accept motel accommodations. A combined 29% would accept managed temporary shelter programs (congregate shelters 7%; non-congregate shelters 22%).

Interim/Shelter Placement Type Preference



Individuals were asked about their next immediate housing goals, with the option to provide multiple responses. The most prevalent goal was securing housing through Section 8 rental assistance. 14 respondents expressed their intent to relocate out of the county or state. 11 individuals intend to move in with a partner, family, or friends.

Next Housing Goal by Surveyed Respondents



Next Steps and Recommendations

Survey results have been shared with the four participating service agencies and Marin County HHS, and are currently being published. Survey results will be published on the City's website and emailed to its homelessness newsletter list. The survey will become part of public education events that City staff conduct with community groups on the issue of homelessness. We invite the public to comment on the results and follow up with ideas.

Some next steps already underway since the survey include:

1. After conducting this survey, the City installed six portable restrooms and hand-washing stations in the vicinity of the encampment, including two wheelchair-accessible toilets, and expanded its trash-hauling services.
2. The County and the City jointly applied for approximately \$6M in ERF3 funding for programs to support people living in the surveyed encampments in January 2024. The application includes funding for case managers, interim housing projects/programs, and ongoing encampment support (i.e. waste management, public restrooms, etc.).
3. Staff recommend conducting this survey tool with additional individuals experiencing homelessness, and have already conducted surveys with those camped in the vicinity of San Rafael's City Hall.
4. Staff have already engaged Ritter Center to dispatch Ritter's Street Medicine Van to provide focused services in the encampments around identified mental and medical health care gaps. Street Medicine will look for opportunities to match individuals in need to Ritter's psychiatry services, and to connect with underserved Spanish-speaking residents.

Proposed follow-up steps for the near future include:

1. Staff will present these findings to the principal collaborative of Marin County's system of care, the Marin Alliance to Solve Homelessness (MASH) in March, and engage the service provider community in addressing gaps and providing solutions.
2. City and County staff would like to set a goal of 100% enrollment in Coordinated Entry among the population staying in the encampments. Having an assessment for Coordinated Entry is the fundamental first step toward permanent supportive housing in our system of care. While staff typically find that a small group prefers to decline these services, our system offers enrollment for 'decliners,' utilized after multiple engagement attempts while long-term engagement continues. City and County staff will work with outreach teams to identify and prioritize CE assessment completions for unassessed individuals.
3. Some individuals expressed interest in shared housing or moving in with family or friends—interventions that may require less subsidy than scarce rental vouchers. Shallow subsidy programs and shorter-term case management could benefit this group more quickly than Section 8 and similar programs. Others were interested in leaving the area; if these individuals have a verified support system and better housing possibilities outside the area, agencies may explore assisting them with transportation and moving costs.
4. The data shows a need for focused outreach and service delivery to vulnerable populations, such as monolingual Spanish speakers (18 respondents, 30%), and transition-age youth (TAY) and seniors (combined 6 survey respondents).
5. Staff plans to explore a partnership with agencies that issue identification documents, such as the Social Security Administration and Department of Motor Vehicles.

Links to the Survey Tool below:

[San Rafael Encampment Needs Assessment Survey](#)

[Encuesta sobre Campamentos en San Rafael](#)