

# Life in Santa Cruz County

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Comprehensive Report  
Community Assessment Project  
1999



### *About the Researcher*

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a nonprofit, social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded on the principle that community sustainability and program success are closely tied to assessment of needs, evaluation of community goals and development of appropriate responses. The Community Assessment Project is a prime example of a comprehensive evaluation of the needs of the community. Its goal is to stimulate dialogue about growing trends and to devise informed strategies for shaping future policies and effective actions.

Community Assessment Project Products: The Community Assessment Project's Year 5/1999 Comprehensive Report – hundreds of pages of data and survey results is available for \$25.00 at the United Way Office, 1220 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Capitola, CA 95010. Tel: 831-479-5466 ■ Fax: 831-479-5477

Customized reports, tailored to geographic and demographic specifications, are available by contacting:  
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Also available at no charge are the Community Report Card and a sixteen-page color magazine (Summary Report) of the Year Five, Community Assessment Project findings.

The report is also available on the World Wide Web at: **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and **Error! Bookmark not defined.** For statewide comparisons, see The Healthy California Progress Report on the World Wide Web at: **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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# The Community Assessment Process

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In 1994, the United Way, in partnership with the City and County of Santa Cruz, City of Watsonville, Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, Watsonville Community Hospital, the County Office of Education, and a host of community-based organizations, came together to think creatively about where Santa Cruz County had been and where it wanted to go.

The group also began a systematic review of community assessment projects throughout the nation, the best practices of which could be adopted and replicated in Santa Cruz County. Three of these best practices included: the use of technical advisory committees for research areas,

as was done in Albuquerque, New Mexico; the use of quality of life indicators, as was done in Jacksonville, Florida; and the inclusion of community opinion data as was done in Snohomish County, Washington.

Applied Survey Research (ASR), a nonprofit, social research firm was contracted by the United Way of Santa Cruz County to incorporate these best practices into a community assessment model that would provide public and private interests with clear information about past trends and current realities and could assist in steering policy and services on the right course toward meeting community goals.

## Project Overview

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What is the quality of life like in Santa Cruz County? Do residents feel safe? Are there enough employment opportunities? Do people feel they have access to good schools and services? Is our community healthy?

These are just a few of the questions that a consortium of public and private health, education, human service and civic organizations set out to answer when they began the Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project. As defined, the CAP project goals are:

- Raise public awareness of human needs, changing trends, emerging issues and community problems;
- Provide accurate, credible and valid information on an ongoing basis to human services planners and those providing funds;
- Provide information for individual institutions to guide decision-making about creation, management, and redesign of programs;
- Establish community goals using measurable quality of life indicators that will lead to positive, healthy development for individuals, families and communities;

- Develop and support collaborative action plans to achieve the community goals.

With these goals in mind, CAP organizers intend to provide the most relevant information about the needs of residents to point our community toward specific initiatives or changes that will have a real effect on the quality of life for all.

This community assessment model, now implemented for its fifth year, provides a comprehensive view of the quality of life in Santa Cruz County. It is based on credible primary (public opinion) data and secondary (empirical trend) data that are gathered for a series of indicators in six areas—the economy, education, health, public safety, natural environment and social environment. These components are described below.

### *Quality of Life Indicators*

Indicators are a mechanism for getting feedback about a system that might otherwise be too large and complex to understand. As an example, we might ask ourselves, “Do people have adequate access to health care? Increasing use of the emergency room for non-emergency purposes, could be an indicator that they do not.

For the purposes of this project, special groups known as Technical Advisory Committees (TAC's) developed over one hundred quality of life indicators. These committees were represented by a rich mixture of professionals, advocates, and community volunteers, all of whom were experts in the respective areas under study.

The TAC's used special criteria to develop the quality of life indicators (QLI's) used for this project. This criteria stipulated that indicators need to be understandable to the general user and the public; to be responsive quickly and noticeable to real changes; to have relevance for policy decisions and be available yearly.

### *Benchmark Quality of Life Indicators*

In addition to quality of life indicators, the community assessment model also uses benchmark indicators to present a snapshot of the changing conditions in each area. This snapshot is meant to be readily understood by the general public. The Benchmarks are not necessarily the most important quality of life indicators but the most indicative of the overall condition of that particular subject area. If Benchmarks Indicators are improving or worsening, it is likely that trends in the whole area are moving in the same direction.

### *Community Goals and Heroes*

The Benchmark Indicators ultimately chart progress towards the project's Year 2004 community goals. These range from more residents obtaining access to primary health care - to greater volunteerism and voter participation - to more students graduating from high school prepared for a job and/or for higher education.

Each year the project honors a handful of special individuals, community heroes, whose efforts help move Santa Cruz County toward achieving these community goals.

### *Primary Data*

Measures of community progress depend upon consistent, reliable, and scientifically accurate sources of data. As noted previously, one of the types of data gathered for this project is primary (public opinion) data. There is much to be learned from people's perception of their community, especially when those perceptions contradict the empirical evidence about its conditions. For instance, in the area of public safety, crime rates may be going down while perceptions of danger are going up.

For this reason, each March, Applied Survey Research conducts a random telephone survey of over 500 county residents in both English and Spanish. The intent of the survey is to be fairly representative of the overall demographics of the county while ensuring representation of special population groups. Respondents are asked open-ended questions that elicit opinion, as well as questions, which present options to choose.

There is a 95% confidence that the opinions of survey respondents reflect those of the general population within approximately +/- 4.3%. It is important to note that all surveys have some inherent biases. This study's bias probably appears in the area of respondent self-selection and the capturing of opinion of those willing to contribute 30 minutes of their time to the community.

### *Secondary Data*

Another type of data used for this project is secondary or empirical data. Secondary data is collected from a variety of sources including but not limited to: the U.S. Census, federal, state, and local government agencies, academic institutions, economic development groups, health care institutions, libraries, schools, local police, sheriff and fire departments and computerized sources through on-line databases and the internet.

## What's New in 1999

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This is the mid-point of the ten-year Community Assessment Project (CAP) for Santa Cruz County. This year the Steering Committee made a concerted effort to examine and reevaluate the community goals that were originally set in the beginning of the Community Assessment Project (1994). Eight Technical Advisory Committees (TAC's) reconvened to revisit the indicators and community goals which had been previously set. One of the significant changes was the addition of a new area, the Natural Environment, and the development of indicators, community goals and benchmarks therein. Now there are six areas that are considered important to the quality of life in Santa Cruz County.

Another important effort was to steer community action and social change to achieve community goals. The data was thus aligned around those benchmarks and goals. Future discussions will include how to make progress on more community goals.

Specific populations were carefully included when the community goals were addressed. Senior, youth and Latino populations were included in the discussions throughout the project this year. The display of survey data reflects ethnicity, geographic, gender, income and age breakdowns as well.

Another new item is Geographical System Information (GIS) mapping of selected data.

GIS is a type of computer software that links geographic information with descriptive information. These maps can be found in the appendix.





There is a new community goal added as a result of merging the Community Assessment Project with another project, "Investing in Children and Families: What Works!" What Works! is a countywide public/private partnership to improve outcomes for children and families by identifying and supporting effective strategies to meet the new CAP community goal, "Children will be safe in their families and communities." It is hoped that this methodology can be applied to the other CAP community goals in the future.

For the future, CAP is very interested in addressing new research questions such as:

- What are ways to better understand homelessness?
- How is quality of life impacted in the face of affordable housing challenges; for instance, when one third or more of resident's income is going to housing costs?
- How can questions about the quality and affordability of childcare issues be best answered?
- How can questions about basic needs be best addressed?

## Key

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<p><b>No. County</b> North County – includes Bonny Doon, Capitola, Davenport, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Soquel</p> <p><b>So. County</b> South County – includes Aptos, Corralitos, Freedom, La Selva Beach, Pajaro and Watsonville</p> <p><b>SLV</b> San Lorenzo Valley – includes Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, Brookdale, Felton, Lompico, Mount Hermon and Zayante</p> <p> Provides a description of what the indicator means or measures.</p>	<p> Note: not every indicator has a description</p> <p> Indicates no new data for a particular indicator is available</p> <p><b>% Change</b> Describes change in value between the current and previous year data</p> <p> Denotes a telephone survey question</p>
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Please see the appendices for demographic cross-tabulations, question by question.

## Suggested Uses of this Report

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Because the scope of the CAP is so broad it may take a while to become familiar with the data and format of the report. The tips shown below on using the information are offered to make the report more useful.

### *For a Broad Overview of Quality of Life Issues in Santa Cruz County*

It is best to review the first few pages of each of the six sections of the report—Economy, Education, Health, Public Safety, Natural Environment and Social Environment. Each of these sections begins with a listing of the Community Goals and Benchmark Data established for the research area. A brief narrative is also provided that details significant trends, which pertain to each section. For a graphical display of this information, please refer to the Benchmark pages in the report and the Community Assessment Report Card at the end of this report.

### *For Information about Trends that may Impact your Business or Organization*

Within each of the six research areas there is a wealth of information on a wide range of issues. One of the most useful features of this report is the display of trend data, where it is available. A tremendous amount of detailed information can be found that may help identify new customers or emerging needs, or explain changes in the local environment that will have future impacts. Whenever possible, demographic breakdowns of data, most commonly by ethnicity or geographic groups have been included.

### *For Data to Support or Refine your Services and Products*

This information is intended to be used in your own reports and proposals, and as a baseline for performance systems. Display graphics are available for much of the data, and there are trained presenters who can come and speak with groups about the information in this report.

# Acknowledgments

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Cabrillo College	Dominican Hospital
California State University Monterey Bay	Food and Nutrition Services
City of Capitola	Pacific Bell
City of Santa Cruz	PG&E
City of Scotts Valley	Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center
City of Watsonville	Seniors Council
Coast Commercial Bank	Sutter Maternity & Surgery Center
Community Action Board	United Way of Santa Cruz County
The Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County	Volunteer Center
County of Santa Cruz	Waste Management of Santa Cruz County
County Office of Education	Watsonville Community Hospital

# 1999 Community Heroes

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Each year the Santa Cruz County Sentinel in association with the United Way seeks nominations from the public of people who have worked in the past year toward meeting the CAP community goals.

Steve Belcher,  
Santa Cruz Chief of Police

Pat Clark,  
NAACP

Karen Delaney,  
Volunteer Center

Pam Falke,  
San Lorenzo Valley Teen Center

Lisa Fraser,  
Aptos Junior High School

John Janzen,  
Texas Instruments

Majel Jordan,  
Elderday

Mary Jo May,  
Korner Pre-School, City of Santa Cruz

Irvin Lindsey,  
Outdoor Science Exploration

Jack O'Neill,  
O'Neill Sea Odyssey

Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce  
(contact: Michael Schmidt)

Jane Scherich,  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District  
(retiring this year)

Tim Siemsen,  
Community Volunteer

Erica Terence,  
High School Student,  
Youth Coalition Santa Cruz

Arcadio Viveros,  
Salud Para La Gente, Inc.

Elisabeth Vogel,  
Mercy Charities Housing California

Volunteer Center and  
Volunteers of Monterey Bay Girl Scout Council  
(contact: Brenda Whitsett)

# Community Goals

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The following community goals were selected by a broad cross-section of Santa Cruz County residents to guide decision-making, planning, and social action in the years to come. The purpose of these community goals is to focus attention and energy to improve the quality of life for the people of the county. These community goals are necessarily broad in nature. Detailed action plans involving people from all sectors of the community must be developed to realize the

community goals. In many ways, the community goals are interrelated. In some ways, they may even be in conflict or compete with each other for resources, energy, and attention. These community goals are not intended to endorse or oppose any particular project or initiative. They do chart the course for collective action for a better future for the people of Santa Cruz County.

### *Economy*

- Goal 1** By the year 2004, the number of jobs in Santa Cruz County will increase in proportion to the workforce.  
—SANTA CRUZ AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (CONTACT: MICHAEL SCHMIDT)
- Goal 2** By the year 2004, the County's unemployment rate will be at or below the State rate.  
—JOHN JANZEN, TEXAS INSTRUMENTS
- Goal 3** By the year 2004, more residents will have access to housing they can afford.  
—ELISABETH VOGEL, MERCY CHARITIES HOUSING CALIFORNIA

### *Education*

- Goal 1** By the year 2004, more Santa Cruz County students will graduate from high school job-ready or prepared for higher education.  
—JANE SCHERICH, PAJARO VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (RETIRING THIS YEAR)
- Goal 2** By the year 2004, elementary and middle school students will meet or exceed the average statewide test scores for academic success.  
—LISA FRASER, APTOS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
- Goal 3** By the year 2004, Santa Cruz County children will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.  
—MARY JO MAY, KORNER PRE-SCHOOL, CITY OF SANTA CRUZ

### *Health*

- Goal 1** By the year 2004, Santa Cruz County residents will have access to primary medical and dental care.  
—ARCADIO VIVEROS, SALUD PARA LA GENTE, INC.
- Goal 2** By the year 2004, Santa Cruz County youth alcohol and other drug use will be at or below statewide average.  
—ERICA TERENCE, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, YOUTH COALITION SANTA CRUZ
- Goal 3** By the year 2004, Santa Cruz County residents over age 60 will live healthy and independent lives.  
—MAJEL JORDAN, ELDERDAY

### *Public Safety*

- Goal 1** By the year 2004, crime within Santa Cruz County will continue to decrease, and residents will have increased confidence in their personal safety at home and in the community.  
—STEVE BELCHER, SANTA CRUZ CHIEF OF POLICE
- Goal 2** By the year 2004, children in Santa Cruz County will live in safe families and communities.  
—TIM SIEMSEN, COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

### *Social Environment*

**Goal 1** By the year 2004, more residents will be engaged in community involvement to make Santa Cruz County a better place to live.

—KAREN DELANEY, VOLUNTEER CENTER AND VOLUNTEERS OF MONTEREY BAY GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL (CONTACT: BRENDA WHITSETT)

**Goal 2** By the year 2004, racism and discrimination in Santa Cruz County will be reduced.

—PAT CLARK, NAACP

**Goal 3** By the year 2004, children in Santa Cruz County will have access to affordable, high quality child care and after school/summer enrichment and recreation opportunities.

—PAM FALKE, SAN LORENZO VALLEY TEEN CENTER

### *Natural Environment*

**Goal 1** By the year 2004, water demand and supply will be in balance (sustainable yield).

—NO HERO SELECTED

**Goal 2** By the year 2004, environmental stewardship will increase within Santa Cruz County.

—IRVIN LINDSEY, OUTDOOR SCIENCE EXPLORATION

**Goal 3** By the year 2004, open space, wetlands and protected habitats will be increased and improved.

—JACK O'NEILL, O'NEILL SEA ODYSSEY

## 1995 – 1999 Midpoint Review

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Five years into the Santa Cruz Community Assessment Project (CAP) and there is good news to tell.

At this mid-point in the 10-year project, actions initiated by the CAP are already making headway towards improving the quality of life for all Santa Cruz County residents.

The "Together for Youth/Unidos Para Nuestros Jovenes" program is a case in point. In 1997 a coalition of 110 community organizations came together with the ambitious goal of reducing teenage drug and alcohol use, after CAP-based research found a disturbingly high level of usage among junior and high school students. In just two years after implementing a seven part comprehensive plan, teenagers report a reduction in alcohol and drug use.

Another effort born out of the CAP is the Latino Strategic Planning Collaboration. When CAP reports revealed that Latinos' typically fared worse than the rest of the community in almost every quality of life indicator, a group of concerned parties decided to act. The collaboration developed their own strategic plan, based on the CAP, and set community goals to improve the quality of life for local Latinos'.

Both of these initiatives were made possible because of the information that the CAP generates: data from multiple sources that provide a comprehensive overview of the community. After five years the report is able to show valuable trend data which indicates how the community is faring.

"We have a higher level of information and facts about what's going on in our county," says Mary Lou Goeke, executive director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County, the lead group for the CAP. "That's what we wanted to accomplish, to make it easy to access information [so that organizations] don't have to spend a lot of money gathering that information. For \$25 each year

they have a wealth of information at their fingertips."

Not only are community-based organizations saving time and money because of the CAP, they are also more competitive when it comes to competing for funding in California and nationally. Several hundred thousands of dollars has already flowed to local efforts because organizations are able to provide reliable information about community needs to grantors.

"We can say to grantors that we are tracking these quality of life indicators and that we can tell if we are making a difference in teen pregnancy, for example. The fact that we can do this gives us a competitive edge," says Goeke.

This year the CAP steering committee saw an opportunity to address two areas of concern: children's safety and homelessness.

The CAP adopted the "Investing in Families and Children: What Works!" program in order to boost the effort to keep children safe in their families and communities. It also committed to conducting a homeless census and needs assessment, to take place in February 2000, to measure the quality of life for this typically under-represented population. "We are trying to take our health and human service work to a whole new level of community planning and investment in strategies that work, and that work together in a comprehensive system of care," says Goeke.

The Santa Cruz County CAP has thus far fulfilled its mission. The community goals envisioned in 1994, refined at this midpoint, have been adopted through 2004. And the Santa Cruz CAP was recognized by the University of California, Los Angeles; School of Public Health in its national survey of community report cards, "They felt ours was one of the best. It shows us that it's not just our opinion that community report cards can be powerful tools for social change," says Goeke.

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