

## **Project objectives**

We began with the goal of increasing fire safety in the unhoused community. Unsure of how to reach this goal, we began to brainstorm what does this action meaningfully look like? We decided to address the goal in two ways, thinking of short term and long term impacts. In the short term we gave a fire safety talk to people who are unhoused, and in the long term we are laying the groundwork to develop a plan to reduce the risk of unhoused community members starting a wildfire.

## **Methodology and Current Conditions**

When we began this project our goal was to identify what the needs and risks of the unhoused community are as they pertain to fire safety. To achieve this goal we decided to survey the houseless community as well as speak to them about cooking and camping safely outdoors. Through these methods and research, we hoped to be able to create a plan for the town of Burney to increase fire safety.

To administer this survey we partnered with Circle of Friends, a local agency which offers services to people in need. We decided to administer this survey during the last week of the month in September, October, and January (2021-2022). The survey was conducted in a conversational style which often yielded much more information than we were asking with survey questions alone. At the end of the survey we gave folks a talk on fire safety and a gift bag of healthy snacks, socks, and a hairbrush to thank them for their participation. We were able to survey 11 individuals, which we considered a success as this number will represent a meaningful percentage of the community.

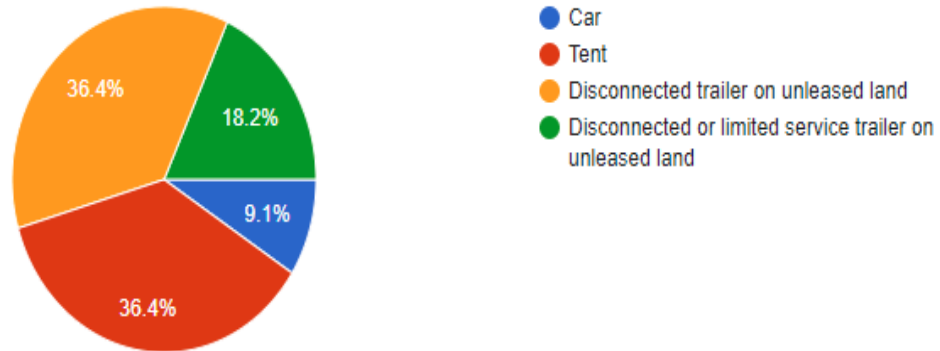
Currently local fire dept. and CAL FIRE do not keep records of when fires are started by the unhoused community. According to recent point-in-time counts, a population of 20-30 people live without homes full-time in the Intermountain area. Typically folks camp in heavily wooded areas out of a desire for privacy and shelter. Burney is a high risk area due to its climate, natural fire regime, and poorly managed public and private forest lands. Wildfires that begin in town are typically human caused with common sources of ignition being vehicles, cigarettes, cooking outdoors, and escaped fires. Current camps in Burney exist mostly on private land that is poorly managed. Many issues with these camps put the town at risk for wildfire, illegal dumping, and contamination of waterways due to human waste.

## **Survey Questions**

Our first survey question was gained out of conversing with folks and was not an actual question, but we thought it relevant to include the information. Most folks are living in a disconnected or limited service trailer on unleashed land. Some are living in tents or cars.

What kind of shelter do you live in?

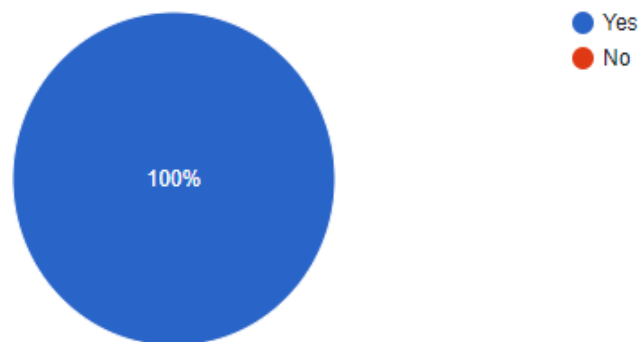
11 responses



To better understand this population and their relationship to the community we also asked if participants lived here year round. In conversation we also learned that at least half of the survey participants have lived here their entire lives. We also wanted to get a sense of how long these folks had been without a home.

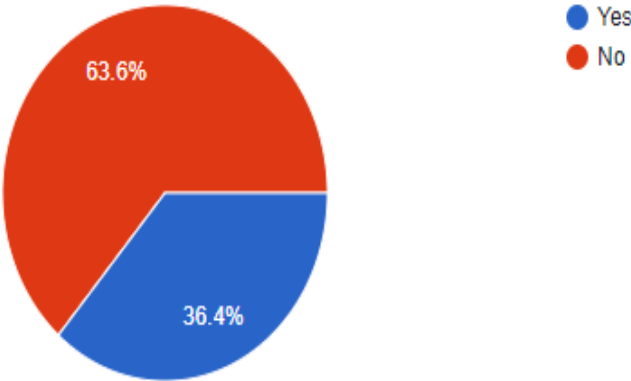
Do you stay in the area year round?

11 responses



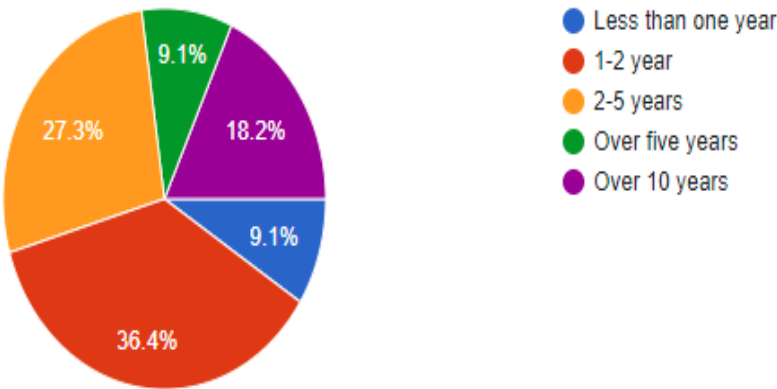
Is this your first time being without housing?

11 responses



How long have you been without a home?

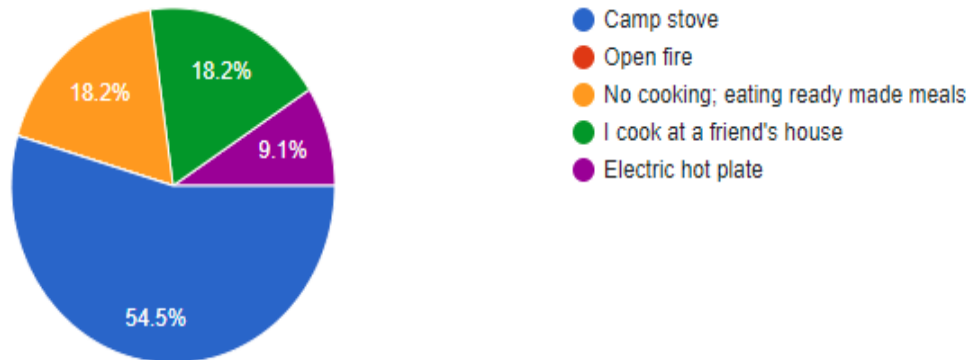
11 responses



Our survey indicated how fire is being used by folks, mostly to keep warm, cook and burn trash. Most folks surveyed are using propane heaters and camp stoves to meet these needs.

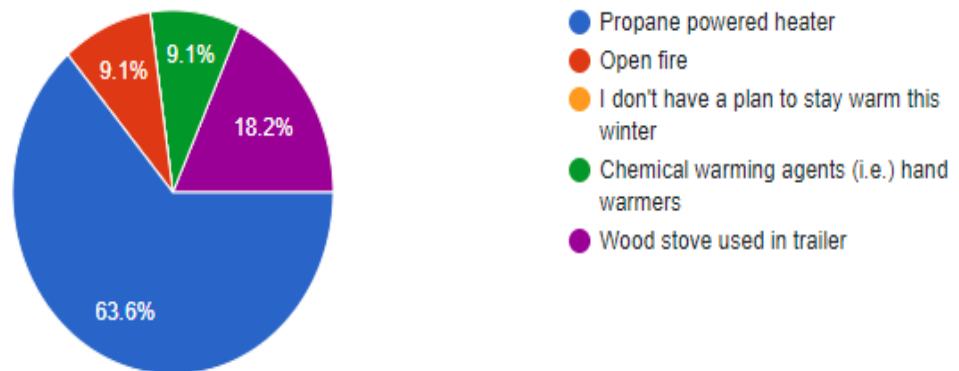
### How do you prepare your meals?

11 responses



### How do you plan to stay warm this winter?

11 responses



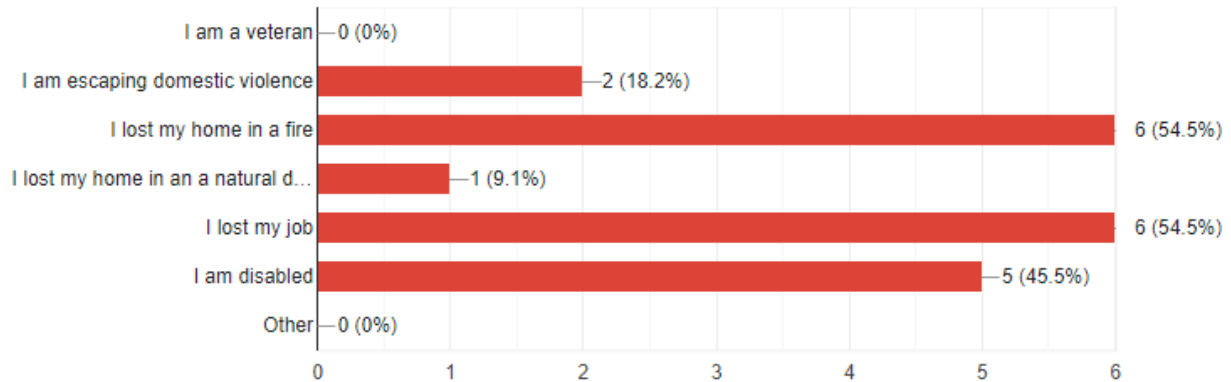
In addition to this survey we also did some general research on homelessness as a whole and were able to identify several factors that put someone at a higher risk of being without a home. Nationally, folks most likely to be homeless are the most vulnerable in our communities- veterans, people struggling with mental illness, people with physical and mental disabilities, victims of domestic violence, people who have experienced significant trauma, and people who struggle with substance abuse and addiction.

Locally, we have several community members who fall into these categories. 2 survey participants are victims of domestic violence. 6 participants lost their home in a fire, 1 lost their home in a flood. 6 reported losing their jobs and five have a mental or physical disability that prevents them from working.

Do any of these apply to you?



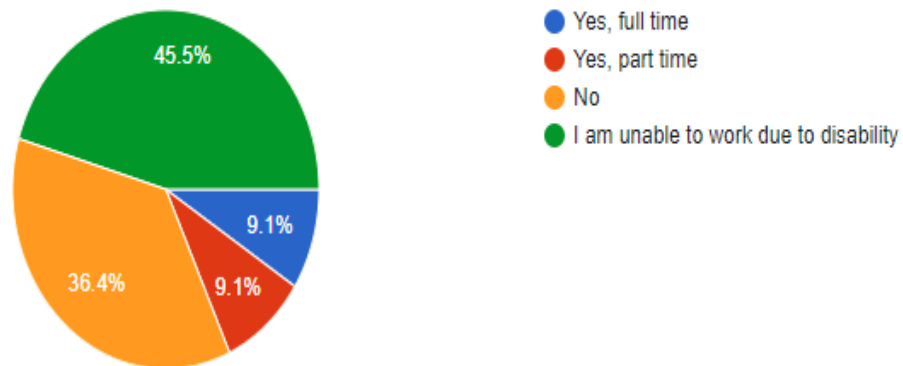
11 responses



Looking at employment we also found that nearly half of survey participants were unable to work. A quarter are employed and a quarter are unemployed.

Are you currently employed?

11 responses

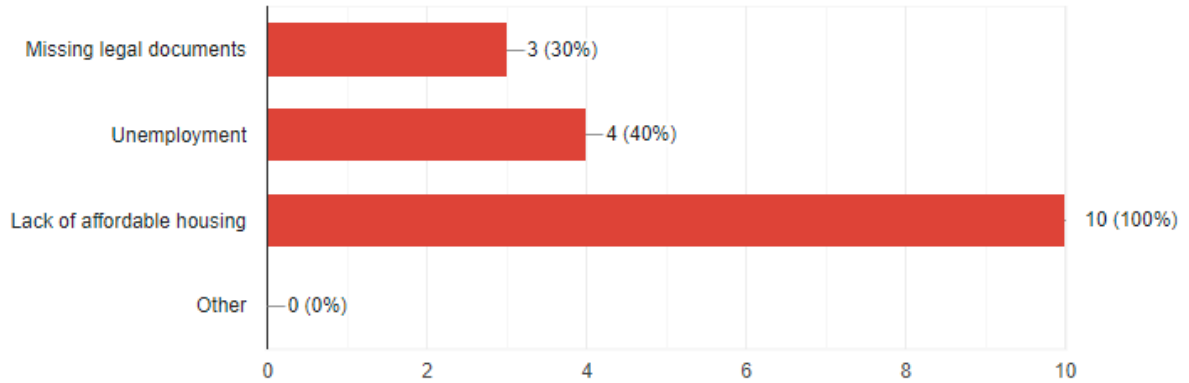


To better understand why these folks are having difficulty getting and maintaining housing, we identified potential barriers in our conversations with them. Overwhelmingly the lack of affordable housing in our area was a main issue. Burney has no transitional or section 8

housing. Low-income housing is severely limited with a competitive market and long waiting list. Rental houses are few and far between and home ownership is simply too expensive.

Is there something preventing you from getting housing?

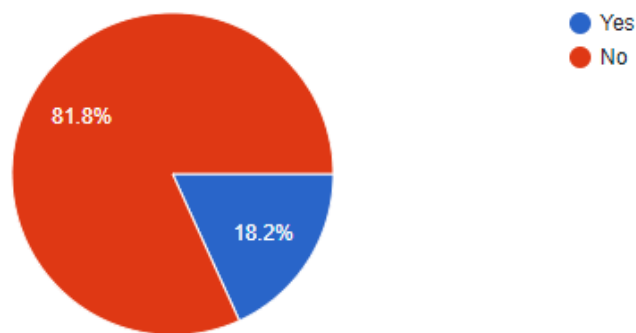
10 responses



We also wanted to identify if COVID has been a limiting factor in these folks' lives and found that 2 survey participants did lose their job due to COVID.

Has COVID-19 been a reason that caused you to become homeless or remain without a home?

11 responses

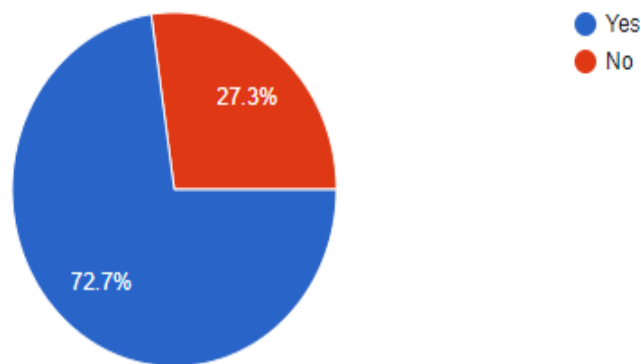


Through our survey we were able to identify what the main needs are of the unhoused community in our area. Shelter, water, and food are of course life-sustaining major concerns. Hygiene is also a major issue. Burney does not have any shelters so individuals are currently only able to shower twice a week at Circle of Friends. We also identified that this community is in need of a way to legally dispose of trash. Without any public dumpsters and very few public garbage cans, trash is often illegally dumped, buried, or burned. A huge need of this community is stability and security. Not having a place to securely store valuables creates anxiety and

distrust. Being constantly pushed off of campsites and told to go elsewhere has also resulted in the same. Additionally, we also saw a need for an outreach worker who could direct individuals to services that they may not know they are eligible for. Finally, we also identified a need for affordable transport to the DMV. Currently it costs \$40 by local taxi to go from Burney to the Fall River Mills DMV and there is no public transport. 3 survey respondents were in need of getting a new ID from the DMV, but simply could not afford to get there.

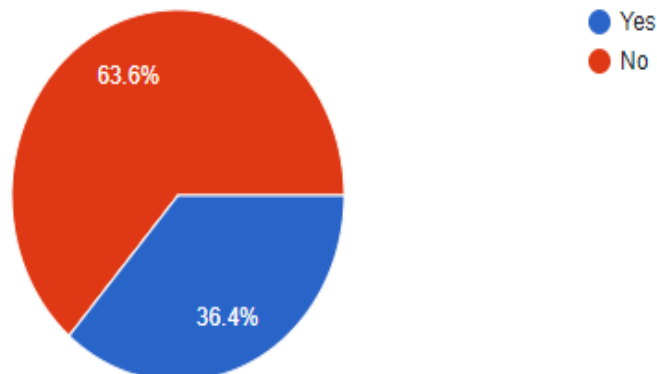
Do you struggle to find fresh water?

11 responses



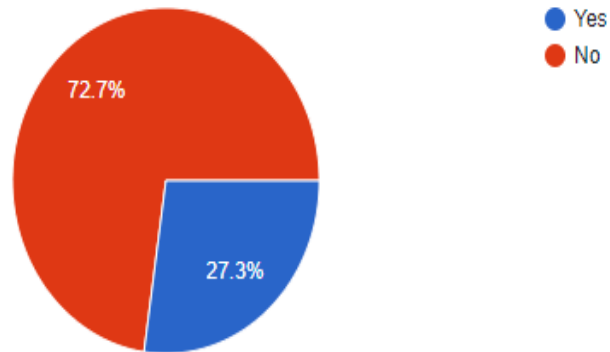
Are you in need of being connected with a social worker?

11 responses



Are you in need of medical care?

11 responses



### **Long term Risk Reduction Plan**

After identifying the needs of the community we began to formulate a plan based on the survey results, modeled after an idea that other communities have used- creating a managed designated fire safe campsite for this community to specifically use. This location should be near town so that it can be carefully managed and monitored and folks can easily get to town. This campsite would be landscaped and planned for maximum fire safety and reduced fire spread. The campsite would feature a designated paved area for cooking and a dumpster for trash needs. It would also have a tank of freshwater that could be used for drinking, cooking, and hygienic needs. This campsite should also have a pit toilet so that folks can use the bathroom and reduce biohazards and water contamination. Ideally this site would also have secure lockers so that people can have a sense of security. In addition, an outreach worker should visit this site weekly to direct folks to any services they may be in need of. Furthermore, the town is encouraged to establish a monthly free shuttle to the DMV that anyone in the community could take advantage of.

With this plan in mind we posed the next two questions to get an understanding of the willingness to use a designated camp cook area. We chose to include the wording of working with CAL FIRE to gauge whether or not the community would be willing to work with a government agency. We were pleased to find that every survey participant would be thrilled to have this designated area.



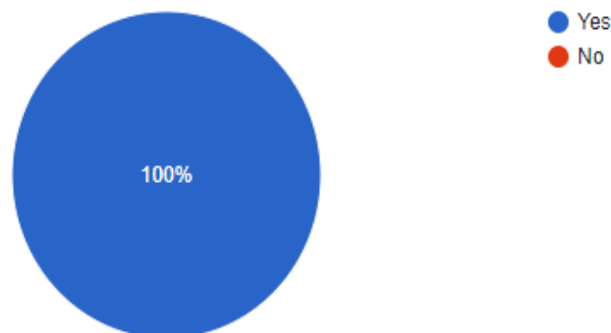
Would you use a designated fire safe area to cook determined by CAL FIRE?

11 responses



Would you camp in a fire safe area determined by CAL FIRE?

11 responses



Ideally, offering these services to this community would also be a benefit to the Burney community as a whole. We would hope to see a reduction in trash and encampments, a reduction of water contamination and biohazards, and a reduction in wildfire risk. Furthermore, this campsite could also function as a platform of stability and dignity to give these vulnerable folks a platform to get out of homelessness.

A possible issue we identified was whether or not creating a managed campsite could draw populations of unhoused individuals from other areas such as Redding. Conversely, Redding is better suited for the needs of unhoused individuals as it has more amenities, public transport, actual shelters to receive services, a warmer climate for sleeping outdoors, and a larger population to “beg” from. Furthermore, Redding needs to identify a plan for their unhoused population, as multiple fires are started in the city by this community every year.

Lastly, we also want to address that we can't guarantee that this will help the community, but we do know that doing nothing only creates more issues. Pushing these folks from one illegal camp to the next only furthers environmental degradation, fire risk, and illegal dumping. We do know that without a dumpster to use, people will continue to dump or burn their trash. We do know that cooking and camping outdoors will inevitably lead to an escaped fire. We encourage the community to be proactive vs. reactive.

### **Presentation of Survey and Plan to Fire Safe Council**

On 02/03/22 the Burney Basin Fire Safe Council met and this survey information and plan was presented. Also at the meeting was a guest speaker from the Santa Cruz Fire Department, Fire Prevention Captain, Rob Oatey. Rob has been instrumental in the creation of a managed campsite in Santa Cruz. Rob provided insights and challenges to the project. Notably Rob mentioned that the managed campsite had led to a measurable decrease in fires started by the unhoused community. After this there was a question and answer period. Overall the fire safe council was interested in the project and will continue to pursue planning efforts for the project. Currently there is a meeting planned for April of 2022.

## **Exhibit A**

### **Survey for unhoused individuals**

How long have you been houseless?

Do you stay in this area year round?

Would you use a designated area to cook determined by CAL FIRE?

How do you prepare your meals?

Would you listen to a talk on fire safety?

How do you plan to stay warm this winter?

Do you struggle to find fresh water?

Would you camp in a designated area determined by CAL FIRE?

Do you want to be connected to a social worker?

Are you in need of medical care?

Is this your first time being without housing?

Is Covid 19 the reason you are without housing?

Is there something preventing you from getting housing i.e. birth certificate, social security card?

#### **Which of these apply:**

Veteran

Escaping Domestic Violence

Lost your home in a fire

Lost your job

Disabled

Other

## Exhibit B

### Fire Safety Talk

- Check for any rust damage in metal grills, which make it possible for charcoal to fall through onto surfaces below and cause a fire.
- Never use gasoline, fuel oil or kerosene to light your grill. Not only is it dangerous, but it leaves an oily residue on your food.
- Keep a spray bottle or a water hose nearby to control flames.
- Keep a fire extinguisher within close reach to prevent small fires from spreading quickly.
- Make sure the fire is completely out before you leave.
- Never grill in tents. Make sure it is at least ten feet away from any buildings and dry vegetation and check for any overhead tree branches that could catch fire in the event of a flare-up.
- Because of the fire potential, do not grill on a wooden deck.
- Stabilize your grill on a flat surface to prevent it from moving, sliding or toppling over.
- Keep clothes close to your body; roll up shirtsleeves, tuck in shirts, avoid wearing flowing skirts or scarves and make sure apron strings are securely tied. It's also a good idea to keep long hair tied back.
- Cook your food in small batches to avoid overloading the grill, particularly with fatty meats. If too much fat drips on the grill flames, it can cause a flare-up.
- Don't leave a lit grill unattended. Prep everything you need in advance.
- Avoid grilling while intoxicated.
- Keep children and pets away from the area by declaring a three-foot "kid-free zone" around the grill, even after you're finished cooking since grills can keep their heat for some time.
- Make sure children understand the tools used to ignite the grill fire (matches, lighters, lighter fluid, etc.) are for adults only. Teach them to report loose matches or misplaced tools to adults immediately.