

# Community Assets in San Luis Obispo County

ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES  
UNVEILS A NEW QUALITY OF LIFE STUDY

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ASSETS IN OUR COUNTY

*San Luis Obispo County residents are fortunate to live in a community that is rich in natural, cultural, social, health/environmental resources.*

Survey results revealed San Luis Obispo residents are engaged not only in utilizing the rich resources, but also in actively supporting the entire community through volunteerism, collaboration and charitable giving.

This news should come as no surprise!

- The median family income is relatively high, with most residents meeting their basic needs, enjoying a short commute to work, and contributing generously with their charitable resources.
- San Luis Obispo County residents have reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of public services and local government, feel safe in their community, and vote in public elections.
- In 1990, San Luis Obispo became the first city to ban smoking in all public buildings, bars and restaurants. The collaborative efforts of the community were instrumental in supporting this health ordinance. However, recent statistics reveal smoking rates have increased slightly, a reminder that continued vigilance is needed to maintain our heroic efforts in reducing exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Access to dental care has improved for low-income preschool children due to an increase in number of Medi-Cal dental providers, more dental chair appointments and a reduction in wait time for emergency dental work. Once again, SLO County must continue to focus on primary prevention in order to provide optimum opportunities for the overall health of our children as their bodies continue to develop.
- Generous volunteer efforts and charitable donations have been and will continue to be critically important to maintain this positive momentum. The anticipated transfer of wealth in the coming decade presents residents with a unique opportunity to designate funds for charitable investments that would continue to support the quality of life for future generations in our county.

So, you might ask yourself, “Will the residents of San Luis Obispo County continue to enjoy this quality of life?” For a closer look at the Community Assets of San Luis Obispo residents, please read on.



*ACTION for Healthy Communities is a consortium of public and private organizations that collaborate to assess the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County. The goals of the project are to raise public awareness, provide accurate and reliable data, improve decision-making, establish community goals, and develop collaborative action plans to achieve those community goals.*

ACTION started collecting data about the county in 1999 and has updated the data in 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2010. This 2010 project includes a telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,101 San Luis Obispo County residents. The term “residents” is used to identify the telephone survey respondents. The overall study also includes a face-to-face survey with homeless individuals, dependent adults, and Spanish-speaking parents. The data pieces have been combined with data from a wide range of federal, state and local sources to bring you a picture of life in San Luis Obispo County. The full report may be found at <http://ActionSLO.org>

The majority of county residents experience a better than average quality of life.

- 88% of residents surveyed said they never went without basic needs; but 12% said they did go without some basic needs, mostly health care and food.<sup>1</sup>
- Most residents have short commutes to work; over 77% said it took them 25 minutes or less.<sup>1</sup>

The median family income in the county is slightly higher than the state and national incomes.

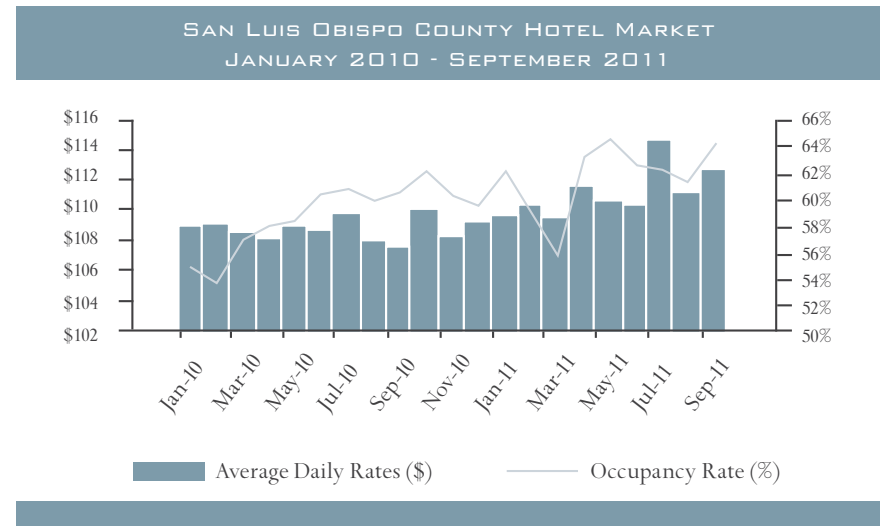
- Family income in San Luis Obispo County (\$72,500) compared to California (\$71,100) in 2010; and much higher than the national average of \$64,400.<sup>2</sup>

However, the median household income in the county is lower than the state median household income, though higher than the national median household income.

- Median household income in San Luis Obispo County (\$55,555) is lower compared to California (\$60,392) in 2010; but higher than the national average of \$51,425.<sup>17</sup>

Trend data for San Luis Obispo County's hospitality industry shows

that hotels in the region are beginning to rebound. Tourism is a revenue source that contributes to a healthy economy for our county. Visitors to the area enjoy the plentiful resources found within our county boundaries.



- Following a low point of 53.7% (February 2010), hotel occupancy has increased more than 10 percentage points, to 64% for September 2011.<sup>3</sup>
- The daily average room rates are up more than 5% since September 2010, as the result of increased room demand.<sup>3</sup>

In 2010, the cumulative net worth of SLO households was estimated to be \$35

billion dollars. Over the next ten years, an estimated \$7 billion will transfer between generations in SLO County households.<sup>4</sup>

This is a unique opportunity for families to partner with local organizations who are making the difference in the quality of life in our community by making bequests/provision for them in their estate planning.

- Over 82% of residents made charitable contributions in 2009 with the top four local recipients: schools (55%), religion (50%), human services (42%), and animal welfare (38%).<sup>1</sup>

## HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

The majority of residents in SLO County have a regular source of health care and health insurance, and low-income residents are taking advantage of the health collaborative(s) in our county.

- Data gathered during the telephone survey revealed 84% of residents said they had health insurance; while 85% said they had a regular source of health care.<sup>1</sup>

Most residents rate their own mental health and physical health as good to excellent.

- 35% of residents said their mental health was excellent, 32% said it was very good, and 22% said good, while 12% reported it was fair or poor.<sup>1</sup>

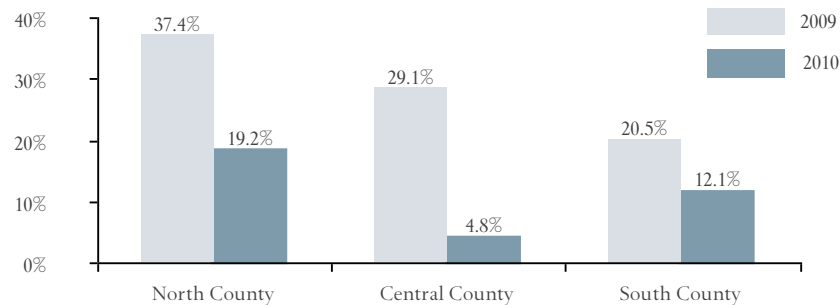
- In 2009, 80% of California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) respondents stated their health was “excellent-very good-good” compared to 92% in 2007 CHIS.<sup>5</sup>
- In face-to-face surveys, 49% of homeless residents stated their physical health was “fair” or “poor” compared to 23% of Spanish speaking parents in our county.<sup>6</sup>

Access to dental care has improved for low-income preschool children due to an increase in number of Medi-Cal dental providers, more dental chair appointments and a reduction in wait time for emergency dental work.<sup>7</sup>

A continued collaboration with dental providers and case management will provide optimum opportunities for the overall health of children as their bodies continue to develop.

- The percentage of low-income preschoolers needing dental care decreased throughout the county. The most significant decrease was found in the Central County (Cambria, Morro Bay, Cayucos, San Luis Obispo), where the percentage decreased from 29.1% in 2009 to 4.8% for 2010.<sup>7</sup>

PERCENT OF LOW-INCOME PRESCHOOL CHILDREN  
NEEDING DENTAL CARE 2009 VS. 2010



Source: SLO County Oral Health Coalition Smile Survey Data, 2010

## Beginnings, a local collaborative, has increased awareness about pre-natal exposure to alcohol, tobacco and other substances.

One indicator of perinatal alcohol, tobacco and drug use in our county is the “4P+” (Parents-Partner-Past-Pregnancy) screening for pregnant women.

- There’s a downward trend in positive (not using) screenings from a high of 51% (2004) to 37% in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

## Slightly more residents are smoking but fewer are smoking in the presence of non-smokers.

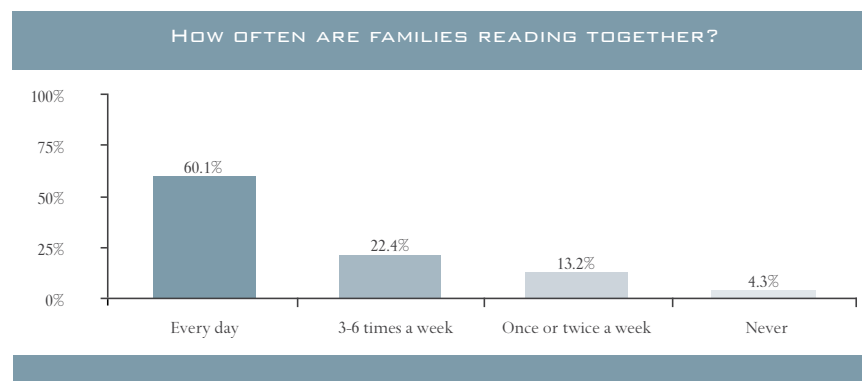
- Smoking is up slightly from 11.7% of residents saying they smoked in 2006 to 13.1% in 2010.<sup>2</sup> However, 95% of residents said that no one smoked in their house in the last 30 days, up from 87% in 2001.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2006, 67% of residents said there were non-smokers present in a house when people were smoking, which declined to 31% in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

### LOCAL SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Data shows reading to children is becoming a regular occurrence. This could be due to a county-wide focus on increasing parent literacy skills, through continued efforts from the schools, and school readiness programs.

With an aim to increase reading frequency in low income families, local funders have invested approximately \$160,000 over an eight year period to support the Raising a Reader Program.<sup>9</sup> When children are read to, they learn critical skills, like how to recognize letters, words and sounds, which increase their capacity for critical thinking and imagination. Children, who have these early learning skills, are more successful both in English and Math in elementary school and are more likely to attend four-year colleges.<sup>10</sup>

- Most (60.1%) families with younger children are reading together every day of the week.<sup>1</sup>
- Only 4% said they never read together.<sup>1</sup>



Source: ACTION for Health Communities, Telephone Survey, 2010. Total responses = 233.

## Almost all parents attended special events, and over 63% volunteered in their children’s classroom.

- Data from a phone survey revealed: Over 96% of parents attended special events, assemblies, open houses and parent conferences for their child in school; 86% attended parent education events; 76% helped with fundraising and booster clubs; and 63% volunteered in the classroom.<sup>1</sup>

## Schools in San Luis Obispo County continue to improve their test scores.

- Test scores, known as the Academic Performance Index (API), improved from 2005 to 2011. 73% of the county schools have improved from their base score in 2005 to 2011.<sup>11</sup>
- Of the 68 schools in San Luis Obispo County, 66% have reached the API Goal of 800.<sup>11</sup>
- Of the 45 schools above 800, six have passed the 900 mark.<sup>11</sup>

## Most residents have some college education; with only 4% having less than a high school diploma.

- 44% of county residents have graduate, professional or bachelor's degrees; 35% had some college or an associate's degree, 17% had a high school diploma or GED, and 4% had less than a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>

## ACTIVITIES

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San Luis Obispo County residents are fortunate to live in a community that is rich in natural, cultural, social and health/environmental resources.

## Residents frequently use outdoor recreation sites.

- In a phone survey, 90.6% of San Luis Obispo residents stated they had visited an outdoor recreational site at least once. Only 9.4% had never visited a site in the three months prior to the survey.<sup>1</sup>
- From the same phone survey, bike paths (57%) and hiking trails (54%) were the top two recreational interests residents reported as areas for future development.<sup>1</sup>

## Most popular cultural activities reported were reading or writing for pleasure.

- 83% of residents said they read books, wrote for pleasure, or attended a book or writing club.<sup>1</sup>
- 45% attended a music, dance or theater performance.<sup>1</sup>
- 42% created arts and crafts such as painting, sewing and pottery.<sup>1</sup>
- 42% attended gallery shows and visual arts exhibits.<sup>1</sup>
- 29% went to a museum.<sup>1</sup>

## Volunteerism supports our community, as a place to live and visit.

- 45% of residents volunteered compared to 26% volunteering nation-wide.<sup>12</sup>
- As an example, over 700 people participated in Creek Clean-up at nine sites throughout the county.<sup>13</sup>

SLO county residents report high levels of satisfaction with the quality of public services and local government.

Voter turnout is increasing.

- 83% of registered voters turned out to vote in the November 2008 General Election, an increase from 43% in the 2006 General Election.<sup>14</sup>

Most residents are satisfied with local government and public services.

- Most residents (72%) rated San Luis Obispo County government as excellent, very good or good; while 28% said fair or poor.<sup>1</sup>
- The majority of the residents rated local public services as excellent, very good, or good, but the greatest concerns were for: roads (48%), land use and zoning (42%), public transportation (37%), and welfare and social services (35%).<sup>1</sup>
- SLO County Library circulation percentages rose 7.1% (2,432,510 - total items circulated) in 2010-11 from 2009-10 (2,271,335 – total circulated).<sup>15</sup>

Some discrimination remains, most commonly based on race/ethnicity.

- Approximately 90% of residents said they had not felt discriminated against or treated unfairly in the county in the last year, while almost 10% felt some discrimination.<sup>1</sup>
- The most common forms of discrimination were in the area of ethnicity/race (28%), followed by disability (12%), income (9%), and gender (8%).<sup>1</sup>

Ninth grade males (20%) report being harassed or bullied due to their ethnicity/race; by comparison, females are harassed or bullied for their gender (13% of 7th grade, 11% of 9th grade and 12% of 11th grade girls).<sup>16</sup>

The majority of residents feel “very safe” in their community.

- Most residents report feeling “very safe” in their neighborhoods and 19% reported feeling “somewhat safe.”<sup>1</sup>
- Middle and high school students (70% of 7th grade; 67% of 9th grade; and 72% of 11th grade) revealed that their school was a “very safe” or “safe” environment.<sup>16</sup>

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Endnotes:

1. ACTION for Healthy Communities, Telephone Survey, 2010.
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Program Income Limits, 2010. (based on U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-year estimates). The figures for median family household income represent income levels for family households, which account for about 62 percent of the 102,663 households in San Luis Obispo County; the other 38 percent of households are nonfamily households.
3. Dean Runyan Associates, California Impacts by County 1992-2009, 2011. retrieved: [http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/media/uploads/files/editor/Research/2010\\_California\\_Tourism\\_Impact.pdf](http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/media/uploads/files/editor/Research/2010_California_Tourism_Impact.pdf)
4. San Luis Obispo Community Foundation, Investing in the Quality of Life of our County: The Transfer of Wealth in SLO County Over the Next 50 Years, 2011.
5. California Department of Health Services, California Health Interview Study (CHIS), 2007.
6. ACTION for Healthy Communities, face-to-face survey, 2010.
7. SLO County Oral Health Coalition, SMILE SURVEY DATA, 2010.
8. Beginnings, SLO County Public Health Department, Family Health Services Division, SLO, 2010.
9. San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation, Raising a Reader Fund, 2010.
10. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Early Learning, Later Success: The Abecedarian Study, 1999.
11. California Department of Education, Assessment, Accountability and Awards Division, 2010.
12. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 2010.
13. The Land Conservancy of SLO County, phone conversation, October 2011.
14. San Luis Obispo County Elections Department, Elections Division, California Secretary of State, 2009.
15. San Luis Obispo County Library, phone conversation, 2011.
16. California Healthy Kids Survey, California Department of Education (Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office) and WestEd (Health and Human Development Department), 2009-10.
17. U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. The figures for median household income represent median income levels for all households in San Luis Obispo County.

*Action*

FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES