



Unable to afford housing, Santa Barbara resident Barbara and her dog, Phoebe, sleep in her car in a safe overnight parking lot.

HELP WHEN A CAR IS ALSO A HOME

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

New Beginnings Counseling Center
and the City of Santa Barbara

With Santa Barbara's mild temperatures, high real estate costs and a miniscule 1 percent vacancy rate for rentals, homelessness is a persistent fact of life in the city. Even people with jobs struggle to find housing they can afford.

Quite a few residents wind up living in their cars, sometimes sharing them with pets or children. No one knows how many people bed down behind the steering wheel, but at least 115 have a safe space to spend the night thanks to **Safe Parking**, a program funded in part by the city and managed by the New Beginnings Counseling Center.

Overnight space in nearly two dozen church, government, nonprofit agency and business parking lots is provided and includes access to bathrooms. The cars are expected to clear out by 7 a.m. New Beginnings distributes food, offers job tutoring and resume preparation, and connects people with shelters and other social services. Between July 2015 and June 2016, the organization found homes for 61 program participants.

"It's a hidden population and a growing population, and it is quite different from street homelessness," says Cassie Roach, Safe Parking's coordinator.

Monterey County, also in California, runs a similar program, and Los Angeles, where homelessness rose by 6 percent in 2016, has considered following suit. ■