

SOCIAL SERVICES

ALL ENCOMPASSING

Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center celebrates 40 years, changes name to Encompass



Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center Executive Director Carolyn Coleman speaks during a celebration of the organization's 40th anniversary last week. The nonprofit has changed its name to Encompass Community Services.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Clubs + Associations - 2004

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — Jason Davis was emerging from the depths of a mental health crisis and needed a quiet place to recover.

Sleep-deprived after detoxing from substance abuse, he was admitted to Dominican Hospital's mental health treatment facility and later a brief diversion program. Not ready to go home, he moved in February to Second Story, a two-week residential recovery program operated by Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center.

"It felt like it was someplace where I could really relax and return to the living," said the 38-year-old Davis, who has since come back to serve as a counselor in the peer-led Santa Cruz program.

It's common for former clients of the center's 40 social service programs, hosted at 50 locations around Santa Cruz County, to remain involved or contribute to the community in other ways.

"For some who feel stigmatized, on the outside or engaging in behaviors that weren't part of the



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Hilda Valencia, holding her son Isaah, is a client of the Primeros Pasos program of Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center, which celebrated 40 years of service last week. The agency has changed its name to Encompass Community Services.

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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Hilda Valencia, carrying her son Isaah, is a client of Primeros Pasos program of Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last week. The agency has changed its name to Encompass Community Services.

SERVICES

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community in a positive way, that turning around is really part of the journey and the healing and reconnecting," said Carolyn Coleman, executive director.

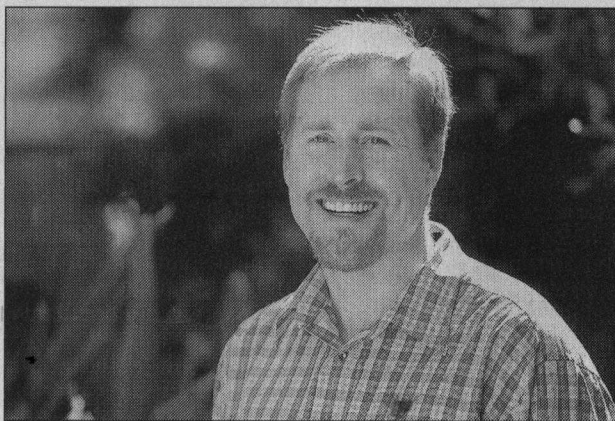
The center, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last week during an event at the Paradox Hotel, announced a name change that night to one that better describes the array of services and their full-circle effect: Encompass Community Services.

With about 400 employees, the center that began in 1973 with a \$100,000 grant is now a \$23 million operation that represents the county's largest human services non-profit organization. It draws funding from federal, state and county governments, as well as private foundations and client fees.

ARRAY OF SERVICES

Neal Coonerty, chair of the county's Board of Supervisors, heralded the organization's reach, saying one in four families in the county are touched by its work on behalf of children, teenagers and adults. The center is focused on reducing homelessness, hospitalizations, criminal recidivism and substance abuse while reunifying families and supporting at-risk youth.

"They have worked tirelessly to promote hope and healing," Coonerty said during the Thursday celebration. "This community is



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Jason Davis is a counselor and former client at the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center's Second Story program. The center celebrated its 40th anniversary last week and changed its name to Encompass Community Services.

better for Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center."

Programs run the gamut of early-childhood education for low-income families to foster youth initiatives and a school for teenagers recovering from drug and alcohol use. There are several parenting programs for people who have lost custody of their children because of substance abuse, incarceration or child abuse and neglect.

The center also runs several residential treatment facilities and the River Street Shelter, an emergency 60-day shelter where 60 percent of 32 beds are typically set aside for people coming out of mental health crisis.

Last year, the center also took the Santa Cruz AIDS Project, whose annual Surf City AIDS Ride is Sunday, under its umbrella. Facing budget constraints, the project that offers free testing,

housing services and advice on medical benefits had been on the brink of closure.

TURNING LIVES AROUND

Watsonville resident Hilda Valencia, who has fought a methamphetamine addiction and went to jail briefly for dealing drugs, has been attending the Primeros Pasos parenting program for a year. While caring for her 10-month-old son, she said she is working to regain custody of her 2-year-old son from one of his relatives.

"They were there for me," the 22-year-old Valencia said of the program's leaders and other parents. Classes taught her "to put my kids first before anything," she said.

Encompass reports that 85 percent of mothers who participated in Primeros Pasos in 2011-2012 finished the program and achieved sobriety. Another program,

Families Together, which is designed to reduce re-referrals for child abuse to county authorities, saw 92 percent of clients experience no further abuse allegations in the six months after their cases were closed.

Louis Riddick, a graduate of the Yes School, said he was using drugs, stealing and generally didn't care about his life before joining the program for high-schoolers seeking recovery.

In two months, he said he will have been clean and sober for two years, and he now attends Cabrillo College. Encompass reports that students at the school in 2011-2012 improved their grades, earned more academic credit and saw a substantial drop in significant substance abuse.

"I didn't know how to be my genuine self," Riddick said. But through the Yes School, he said he gained "real friendships" and "learned how to work through my problems without drugs."

Alfonso Maldonado came to Si Se Puede, a substance abuse recovery house, to get a handle on his life. Several years later, he is a full-time counselor for the Watsonville program.

"It wasn't until Si Se Puede that I saw myself," he said, adding that he hoped for a life that was "not only clean and sober but not hurting people in my community or my family also."

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