Homeless group reaches milestone

180/180 program meets goal ahead of schedule

Homeless - 2000

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SANTA CRUZ » A program that began in 2012 to house 180 of the most medically vulnerable, chronically homeless people in Santa Cruz County was completed Thursday, ahead of its July deadline.

By using existing funding and programs from city, county and nonprofit agencies, the program has aimed to turn around the lives of the homeless 180 degrees. Like some other successful programs in the state, the 180/180 program has tried to provide housing first and then work on problems such as job placement, mental health and drug and alcohol abuse.

Phil Kramer, director of the

Group

180/180 program, said he was enthused with the results — but he said more work must be done. There are about 990 chronically homeless people in Santa Cruz County, according to a 2013 homeless census.

"The need is greater than the 180 we've helped so far," said Kramer.

"So we're scaling up our efforts to connect more people who are homeless with housing and support."

Leaders said case managers and "housing navigators" move 180 participants into housing, which includes one-bedroom apartments, studio apartments and residential hotels across Santa Cruz County.

They then coordinate with service providers and volunteers to make sure residents receive the services they need to retain their housing.

Leaders of the 180/180 program will celebrate reaching their goal at an event at noon July 17 at Simpkins Family Swim Center, 979 17th Ave., Live Oak.

"I'm thrilled that 180/180 has reached their goal and is committed to continue this great work," said Mary Lou Goeke, executive director of United Way of Santa Cruz County.

"Our community is healthier and more vital when our most vulnerable, homeless neighbors are housed."