

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Homeless project houses

200

New goal of 1,200
by 2020 set

By Jessica A. York

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LIVE OAK » Flush with excitement and momentum for housing more than 200 Santa Cruz County homeless people in a little more than a year, the 180/180 campaign has upped the stakes.

The group now says it wants to house an additional 1,000 of the county's chronically homeless by December 2020, effectively ending homelessness locally. During a celebration Thursday, the initiative announced its new name, 180/2020, and goal, to end the area's chronic homelessness within six years.

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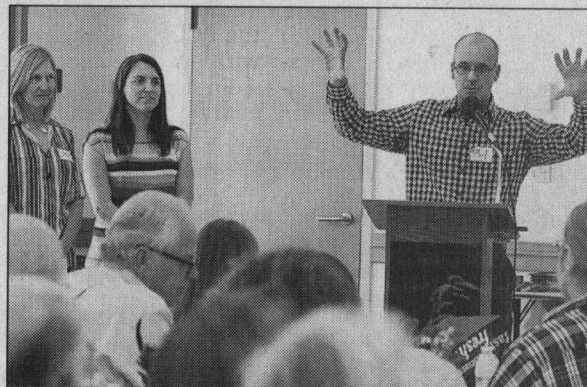
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"Now, we've been talking about this for years, what do we mean by end," said Encompass Community Services Executive Director Monica Martinez, formerly the Homeless Services Center executive director. "It's not going around and saying, I found one (homeless person), you're wrong ... The solution is not we're finished when we house someone for the night. We've finished when everyone is housed."

Martinez qualified "ending homelessness" to mean that involved agencies will commit to the goal.

In the midst of a national search to replace Martinez, the Homeless Services Center is being led on an interim basis by Shelley McKittrick, the center's programs director and Alyssa Willett, the operations director. Two executive director finalist candidates are scheduled to be interviewed early next week.

More than 70 people involved with the former 180/180, a collaborative interagency project, gathered at the Simpkins Family Swim Center on Tues-



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Phil Kramer, Monica Martinez and Christine Sippl, from right, announce that the 180/180 initiative has surpassed its goal of housing 180 chronically homeless people in Santa Cruz County by July, and will aim to end homelessness here by 2020.

day to celebrate the project. Not only did 180/180 meet its goal, it surpassed it. The former 180/180 aimed to turn around the lives of at least 180 homeless persons to change the way homeless housing issues are approached for all partner agencies. It is modeled on the national 100,000 Homes Campaign.

Project Director Phil Kramer said that since the effort's mid-2012 launch, 201 people have been housed; 96 percent have stayed that way.

"We forever have changed the way we have addressed homelessness in

our county," Kramer said.

Kramer cited 120 housing vouchers dedicated to homeless individuals, the hiring of two homeless housing case workers, hundreds of volunteer hours devoted to the effort, weekly collaborative meetings between agencies involved with the homeless and the \$900,000 now set aside for homeless housing.

Besides providing humane treatment from the county's most vulnerable population, housing the homeless also pays off in cash dividends, reducing the annual burden on public agencies by about

\$13,000 per person, Kramer said. That translates into a \$2.6 million annual savings to Santa Cruz County taxpayers for the 200 people already housed, he said.

While the national 100,000 Homes Project aims to eliminate homelessness in its partner agencies by 2016, Kramer said the local effort may aim for a more modest goal to house all the county's homeless veterans by 2016.

"To be honest, we're not quite ready for that," Kramer said of the earlier national deadline. "We have about 1,000 people experiencing homelessness in our community."

Christine Sippl, director for Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency's Homeless Persons Health Project, said in future homeless housing steps, "we're going to build the ship while we're sailing," but that some future efforts are likely to include providing assistance to keep borderline homeless persons from losing their homes and potentially building more affordable housing.

For more information, visit 180santacruz.org or contact Kramer directly at Philip Kramer 831-334-4976 or phil@180santacruz.org.