

Homeless to
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NEWS

Church Shelter Project Meets the Need

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When the planned city/county River St. shelter project stalled last winter it looked like the area's homeless would be out on the street. Instead, local churches jumped in to fill the need and are now providing shelter, food and other services to as many as 50 homeless people each night. The fate of the River St. shelter is still up in the air (city officials say they are still negotiating with the University of California for purchase of the property), but the so-called "satellite church shelter program" is going strong and plans to continue through the spring and summer.

According to organizer Paul Lee, the program is now entering a new phase, as church members begin to "sponsor" homeless individuals, offering them help with specific needs on a one-to-one basis. Lee says the satellite program, in which each church serves as a shelter one night a week, has been working very well, and participating churches are very enthusiastic about actually being able to make a difference in the community. This week, he adds, 10

members of the homeless community met with 14 people from the Calvary Lutheran Church in Aptos. They had dinner together, and in the course of the meal the homeless laid out their immediate needs: things like laundry facilities, money management assistance, showers and storage for their belongings. And, says Lee, "All the needs expressed were immediately met. One guy said, 'I desperately need a car to look for work.' Someone from the church said, 'Hey, I've got an extra car, go ahead and use it.' Another man said he needed eyeglasses, which would cost around \$100; and suddenly there was \$100 on the table." Lee says other churches are planning similar sponsorship activities, and he would eventually like to see everyone who is homeless in Santa Cruz have a sponsor. He adds that the next big step is setting up more permanent housing situations for people. He hopes the Citizen's Committee for the Homeless will be able to help people who can't afford housing pool their resources and live cooperatively.

Meanwhile, Lee says, the satellite program is a cost-effective way to provide temporary shelter. While he would like to see the city's shelter deal work out, he admits that he hasn't much hope that it will, and points out that the church-based program is housing between 30 and 50 people each night for just \$1,000 a month. In addition to shelter and food, the program offers a weekly clinic for participants and job placement services. The Work Company (an outgrowth of the former William James Work Company) is, says Lee, "... up and running. We've got a group of guys with marvelous skills and jobs are beginning to come in." They can be reached at 423-7923.

Lee calls this growing operation a sort of "alternative welfare system," adding, "It's really beginning to click." He has less than kind words for the county's welfare system, which, he says, by a rough estimate spends "75 percent of the welfare dollar making sure people who need welfare don't get it." ●