

'Group homes' suggested for homeless

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A novel way to the house the homeless is being considered by homeless advocates in Santa Cruz.

Fred Gray, director of the River Street Shelter, and the Rev. Paul Pfotenhauer, of the Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, are trying to find rental housing in the Santa Cruz area for which several people per unit could pool their money to come up with the monthly rent.

The reasoning is many people who individually cannot afford rent could afford it as part of a small group of six or seven.

Many homeless people, Gray said, have Social Security payments or low-income employment which could pay for housing.

Homeless people in the county greatly outnumber available shelter spaces, Gray said.

The River Street Shelter currently only has 14 beds and will eventually be enlarged to 30 beds.

Also, homeless advocates run a church satellite program in which various churches rotate one day per week in serving as

a temporary shelter for those without a roof over their heads.

But shelters, homeless advocates say, are not really the best option for most of the homeless. Those who spend the night in emergency shelters must pack up their belongings during the day and head for the streets until evening falls again.

Some live in low-cost hotels at the beginning of the month and stay until their money runs out. Then they move back onto the street until their next check arrives at the beginning of the month.

"A lot of people can afford rent and food for two weeks out of the month, and then they run out of money," Gray said.

So far, Gray said, there hasn't been any luck in finding a large rental property for a group of the homeless.

"I think folks are a little spooked by the idea of it," he said. "But the first one will be the hardest. Once we get a landlord, he can be used as a reference to get other properties."

Gray said money would be managed by a group of local pastors involved in the church satellite program.