

# Van shuttles those needing rest for night

4-20-87  
By MARIA GAURA

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Every night at sunset, a crowd gathers in front of the abandoned Loudon Nelson Center on Chestnut Street. People pile their backpacks and bedrolls on the lawn and wait for the van to arrive.

The van shows up at 7:30 p.m., and begins ferrying the waiting homeless to shelter for the night.

Organized as a stopgap measure by local activists after plans to build a new shelter on River Street fell through, the van service coordinates homeless people looking for shelter with places to sleep, and then takes them to their destinations. Sleeping space, donated by 10 participating churches, usually consists of unused basements and social halls.

"It's not much," said organizer Fred Gray. "Just a place to sleep and a blanket, if there are enough to go

Please see back of section



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Homeless queue up for shelter at van outside Loudon Nelson Center.

## Bus for homeless

Continued from Page A1

around. Most of the churches offer a meal, too."

Since it began operating in mid-January, the van service has provided more than 3,209 nights of sleep for the city's homeless at an estimated cost of \$3.17 per night per person. As many as 65 people at a time have shown up in front of Loudon Nelson Center, but with the warmer weather the crowds now number about 30 to 40 people per night.

According to Gray, the van serves mostly single men. "When there's a child or a baby involved it's usually easier to find them a place to stay," he said. "But there are lots of single men and there's almost nowhere for them to go."

Organized by the Citizens Committee for the Home-

less and Democratic Management Systems' Shelter Project, the van service was financed originally by a one-time \$4,000 grant from the county and the money left over from the operating funds of the now defunct Cedar Street Shelter.

Costs are kept to a minimum because the sleeping space and foods are donated by the churches, and monitors are hired from among the homeless to keep order at the shelters.

According to Gray, the program has enough money to keep the van running until the end of April, but is seeking additional funding to keep it going through May as well.

"We were expecting the numbers to taper off with the better weather," Gray said, "But a lot of people are still showing up."