

Homeless 1990-1999

UP FRONT

Good Times 6/26/97

PAMPHLET BRANCIORTE BR. LIBRARY
230 GAULT ST.
SANTA CRUZ, CA 95062

Homeless Center Wins Approval

Above the Line expected to open by end of year

by Helen Meservey

AMONG THE MANY THINGS A homeless teenager might need, a home is typically on the top of the list. Soon, some of the estimated 200 homeless teens in Santa Cruz County will get the chance to cross that one off.

After months of meetings and hearings, organizers for Above the Line allowed themselves a brief celebration after the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 June 17 to approve the location of the innovative shelter and resource center being planned for Corralitos.

The Bottom Line

"We are determined to have this program for kids in this county," says organizer Kimberly Carter. "No matter what delays we get, the fact remains that there is not a single, legal place for homeless minors to sleep in this county. And that's the bottom line. We're not stopping until that is no longer true."

Conceptualized more than two years ago, the proposed resource center was met this year with bitter opposition as it jockeyed for final county approval. Part of the resistance came from neighbors of the 2716 Freedom Blvd. site, who have objected to having homeless kids living in the area.

Other opposition has come from the agricultural community, which has objected to the zoning variance allowed by the Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission. The variance grants Above the Line permission to operate a



Opposition to the Above the Line center has come from neighbors, who have objected to locating the facility inside an agricultural buffer zone.

transitional residence and educational service center, even though the property is located halfway inside a 200-foot agricultural buffer zone.

Conditions Pending

Supervisors were expected to meet again June 24 to approve the list of conditions by which Above the Line must abide, including the formation of a neighborhood partnership advisory council.

Also among conditions is a clause that prohibits employees and clients from suing grow-

ers for problems arising from legal, normal farming practices. Lawyers for the state and local farm bureaus as well as the county have agreed that the group's conditions "protected farmers adequately," Carter says. "We have done a huge amount of research. If we didn't feel this was a safe thing, we absolutely would not do it."

Carter and other organizers for Above the Line have been toiling for more than two years to raise funds, coordinate resources and earn the necessary approvals from county planners and social service agencies. Carter had hoped the

center would be operational by this month, but unforeseen opposition required additional hearings and meetings and added a new political element to the process, she says.

Multifaceted Program

As designed, the program would operate as a multifaceted residential program for qualifying county residents aged 11 to 18 years. In addition to an emergency shelter resource, the center would also provide kids with an 18-month transitional housing option, education services, counseling, medical and dental care, case management and skills training. Plans call for an annual operating budget of \$800,000 on top of an initial cost of \$1.2 million to buy the actual property and an additional \$300,000 to remodel it.

The 1.4-acre site accommodates a 6500-square-foot, 10-bedroom home, a strip of six 2000-square-foot residential cottages and a two-story, 2000-square-foot multiuse facility to house the various educational, counseling and training services.

Originally, the center was to have opened this month. But appeals waylaid the plans — as well as some grant requests that now must be resubmitted. But organizers are intent on launching the program by the end of the year.

"The delays were due to a lot of things, not the least of which was my naiveté," says Carter. "But these issues around homeless are controversial things, and people are really afraid. But you know, if we're running into this as adult, professional people, think of what these kids would come up against if they were advocating on their own behalf. This really has strengthened my conviction."