

Homeless-teen shelter has neighbors upset

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CORRALITOS — Tonight, they'll be sleeping in parks, in cars, on rooftops and in garages around the county. By the end of the summer, some of the homeless teens in Santa Cruz County may have a new place to call home.

But a group of neighbors concerned about a proposed shelter on Freedom Boulevard is saying, "Anywhere but here."

After a two-year fund-raising drive, Above the Line, the brainchild of former production consultant Kimberly Carter, is preparing to buy a sparkling new seven-building complex on Freedom Boulevard near Corralitos. Nestled in among the apple orchards and sin-

gle-family homes in the area, the acre-and-a-half complex is an oasis of calm — just the isolated environment that was needed to get kids away from the influence of the street.

There are an estimated 250 homeless youths in the county who have no parent or guardian to turn to. The county has no shelter for teens, and local shelters for adults do not allow unaccompanied minors.

The local non-profit has teamed up with Mercy Charities Housing to buy the complex and is halfway to its fund-raising goal of \$3 million.

"We thought that if people knew there were homeless minors with

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Peggy Flynn and Kimberly Carter hope to welcome teens to this home.

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Homeless teens

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no place to sleep in this county, they would want to do something to help," Carter said. So far, that's proven to be true; hundreds of local residents, including health care providers, counselors, teachers and other professionals — and even formerly homeless teens themselves — have contacted the agency to offer help.

Not everyone is thrilled at the prospect of having troubled teens housed in the area, however. A group of 11 residents met with Carter Tuesday morning to voice concerns.

"We live out here in the country and it's quiet; that's why we live here," said Virginia Deanda, who lives down the street from the proposed facility. "They're bringing the city out here. I have two kids, and I have no worries with them. I don't want to see trouble start, things stolen, graffiti. ... It's a great thing for those kids if they're really wanting to get help; that's great — but someplace else."

County Zoning Administrator Don Bussey will hear from Deanda and other residents as well as Above the Line supporters Friday, and is authorized to make a decision on the issue. That decision can be appealed to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Alan Sherer, executive director of Triad Community Services, said the opposition was not unexpected. Triad, a drug and alcohol treatment program, is one of about 20 local agencies that will provide services to the teens at the Above the Line facility. His agency has encountered similar concerns with local residents opposed to Triad's methadone and drug and alcohol programs. The concerns turned out to be unfounded, he said.

"If they're at the shelter, the commitment is to be drug- and alcohol-free while they're in the program," said Sherer. "These kids are going to be more committed to sobriety than many of the kids living in the neighborhood now who have homes and parents they're living with."

The program calls for round-the-clock supervision and a wide-ranging daytime program run by licensed professionals. It will house up to 43 youths for up to 18 months.

"It's a very carefully monitored program, not just a flophouse," he said.

Law enforcement agencies around the county are throwing their support behind the group. "We've worked with Above the Line for over a year, and their track record is to work closely with people who have a concern

around this issue to come up with solutions," said Santa Cruz County Sheriff Mark Tracy. "My hope would be that could happen around this too; certainly there is a need for this facility in the community."

Above the Line has been working with about two dozen local groups and agencies to provide counseling, education, job training and substance abuse counseling services to teens who would be housed at the seven-building facility. Besides providing shelter to the youngsters who would live there, the group plans to provide a variety of services to "day students" who would come to the facility to receive the same services.

"All of these services already exist in the county; we're just filling in the missing piece — the shelter — and pulling it all together," Carter said.

The group has raised funds from local residents at cash registers and banks around the county with a coupon-based campaign, and has garnered grants from the Packard Foundation, the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, local governments and other private groups.

To contribute time, money or support to Above the Line, call 457-9754, ext. 123.