

Child-welfare reform sought

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Professionals involved in child-abuse cases say the county's child welfare system needs fixing so that abused kids don't slip by unaided.

At a minimum, Santa Cruz County should have a volunteer child advocacy program, according to Dan Reid, a founder of the Santa Cruz Coalition for the Protection of Children, a fledgling group of professionals involved in child-abuse cases.

Spurred into action by the Ruby Pointer child-neglect case, the group has joined the Board of Supervisors in seeking reforms of the county's Child Protective Services and a implementation of a child advocacy program.

"The Pointer case needs to be viewed as a catalyst for change through shared commitment rather than a source of shame," said Reid, a Soquel clinical social worker who works with abused children and coordinates a child-abuse studies program for UC Santa Cruz.

Reid said a task force including social workers, counselors, psychologists, agency representatives and physicians should be established to suggest changes.

"We are the ones who deal with CPS and the courts and the other agencies who work with these kids. And yet, we're not being asked to be a part of the solution," Reid said. "We feel we ought to contribute by telling about what our experiences have been and what our concerns are."

"We ought to be looking at the model in Santa Clara County. But

'The Pointer case needs to be viewed as a catalyst for change through shared commitment rather than a source of shame.'

— *Dan Reid, social worker*

we also ought to look at models in other counties that more closely approximate Santa Cruz County," said Reid.

In the Santa Clara program, trained volunteers stick with one child throughout the system, following them through foster home to foster home and through court appearances. The child advocates are able to represent the interests of the children in court.

In addition to a child advocacy program, Reid said members of the group are interested in assessing how CPS sets priority of cases and screens calls regarding suspected abuse.

How the cases fare in the court system is another area of concern. Reid said reform of the child welfare system should include educational requirements for attorneys who represent children and others who investigate and evaluate child abuse.

Please see REFORM — A16

Reform

Continued from Page A1

"That is something that absolutely needs to be changed," he said.

Supervisors on Tuesday approved a proposal made by Chairman Fred Keeley directing county officials to meet with representatives of the Court Appointed Special Advocates program in Santa Clara County.

Keeley's proposal also directed that the results of several investigations of CPS currently under

way be given to the supervisors. A third element of the supervisors' plan authorizes Keeley to meet with Loren Suter, director of the State Department of Social Services, regarding the scope of a state review of CPS.

All the information is to be given to the supervisors by Oct. 8, when they are scheduled to consider improvements in the CPS operations.

Members of the professional coalition will meet Thursday at the Aptos Library from noon to 2. Keeley will attend, said Reid.