

Ticket to ride — out of town

S.C. center starts
busing homeless
to different cities

By MATT KING

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Homeless-2000 1-7-07
SANTA CRUZ — A new program is helping dozens of homeless people get off the street — and out of town.

Officials at the Homeless Services Center are buying one-way bus tickets for homeless people looking to get a fresh start in another town. In the past six months, 24 tickets have been bought for destinations ranging from Oakland and Redding to Boston and Kalamazoo, Mich.

The program, funded entirely with private donations, is not open to all comers, executive director Ken Cole said. Nor is it a practice of dumping homeless people into other jurisdictions, as in 2004, when officials in San Benito County gave their homeless one-way bus tickets to Santa Cruz.

Cole said the practice has been used successfully in other cities.

"We're not using these dollars for people who just whimsically want to go somewhere else," he said. "This is for people who have a plan, who have a family or job offer, or see an opportunity somewhere else."

To be eligible for a ticket, a homeless person must already be receiving services from the center or have a relationship with a case manager at another local organization, such as the county Home-

Homeless

Continued from Page A1

less Persons Health Project, which has referred about 10 people to the program.

"They have to have something on the other end of the bus ride," said Paul Gendreau, a public health nurse. "The understanding is that this is not going someplace and then coming back. These are people who don't want to be homeless in Santa Cruz anymore."

The program has not been publicized because homeless advocates do not want to be inundated with requests for tickets. According to the last street count, there about 3,300 homeless people in Santa Cruz County. About 1,800 people

were aided by the Homeless Services Center last year.

So far, the tickets, worth about \$2,300, have been purchased by one anonymous donor, but the idea of helping homeless people move is gaining traction among people who think it makes little sense to provide meals and temporary shelter in a city where even the working poor have a hard time finding housing.

Soquel resident Michael Viall, who last week became the bus program's second donor, said he would rather help a homeless person get settled in a cheaper community than fund what he considers an unsustainable lifestyle.

"It seems to me that Santa Cruz County is one of the worst possible places you can try to make it with little or no money," Viall said. "I can't

help but think that my check would go a lot farther in the Midwest, or even the Central Valley. Sometimes I think we do a disservice by giving people food for the day rather than a plan for the future."

But where homeless people choose to settle is usually more an emotional decision than one based in logic, Cole said, and it is complicated by the addictions and mental illness that plague many in the homeless community.

"Some people make an academic argument, but people don't operate that way," he said. "The most successful relocations we do is when they're rebuilding a relationship, or returning to family and friends."

Contact Matt King at
mking@santacruzsentinel.com.

**'This is
for
people
who have
a plan,
who have
a family
or job
offer, or
see an
opportunity
somewhere
else.'**

KEN
COLES,
HOMELESS
SERVICES
CENTER