

Juvenile Mentoring Program unveiled

By **RAMONA TURNER**
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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Santa Cruz County and the county Office of Education are joining forces to help troubled kids in alternative schools find the road to success.

APTOS Armed with a \$210,000 federal grant for the next three years, Big Brothers Big Sisters will match adult volunteers with 14- to 17-year-old students at seven of the county's 16 alternative-education campuses for some one-on-one mentoring.

With Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, and other elected dignitaries in attendance, the two agencies announced the new Juvenile Mentoring Program during a press conference on Tuesday at DeWitt-Anderson School for teen-age girls.

"Kids feel a lot of challenges," said Marie Cubillas, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters. "There's always the need for someone to be there for them."

The county's top educator agreed.

"This program will give (teens) an adult to talk through issues they can't talk with their

parents about, because their parents may be part of the problem," said Diane Siri, superintendent of county schools.

DeWitt-Anderson's students don't know where they would be without the school and positive adult mentors in their lives.

"Kim," who's full name can't be published because she's a minor, was 11 years old when she first teamed up with a volunteer from the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Santa Cruz County.

Now, the 17-year-old who once ran with the wrong crowd and got into trouble is on the road to graduating from high school and enrolling at Cabrillo College before heading to the University of Southern California to study criminal justice.

"My mentor helped me change my life around," Kim said. "She kept nagging. It irritated me at first. I didn't want to hear that, but it's worth it now."

Farr told the modest crowd of DeWitt-Anderson students and local elected officials that partnerships such as this are necessary to help young people have dreams and make them a

reality.

"This is really about building quality of life," he said. "You don't have a quality of life. As long as anybody is suffering, there's no

quality of life."

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Marie Cubillas, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Santa Cruz County, announces a \$210,000 federal grant to provide mentoring to students at alternative schools in the county. She spoke at DeWitt-Anderson School in Aptos on Tuesday.

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