

Employment *8/21/92*

County job-training program wins high praise

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SANTA CRUZ — The numbers are low but the percentages are great for a county-run pilot program aimed at getting able-bodied people off general assistance by helping them get jobs.

Three of the four people enrolled in the program got permanent, unsubsidized jobs before they finished their training, and the program wound up saving the county money.

"I think it was a big success," said Judy Schwartz, an analyst with the county's Human Resources Agency who helped develop and administers the program. "... What this program does is it allows people to develop some local work experience, some local work references. That really helps in finding them a permanent job."

County supervisors were happy with the program, too, and asked that it be continued despite uncertainties of both the state and county budgets.

It comes at a time when the state Legislature is looking at toughening regulations to keep employable, able-bodied people from getting the assistance, which last year averaged about \$310 a person monthly.

General assistance is required by the state but paid for by the counties.

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The county has budgeted \$630,000 for its entire General Assistance program for fiscal year 1992-93, Schwartz said. The money is officially a loan and people are supposed to pay it back once they begin receiving disability payments from Social Security, or get a job. Since not all the money is repaid, she said, next year's program is estimated to cost the county about \$460,000.

The pilot program involved placing people in jobs at community-based organizations, Schwartz said, much like on-the-job training. The county paid the workers \$5 an hour for a 24-hour work week, and also provided support and counseling from program staff.

The money came from county funds normally budgeted for general assistance.

In the last fiscal year, some 2,300 people received

general assistance in Santa Cruz County.

The pilot program probably will be able to help only about 5 percent of them, according to Schwartz's figures.

Some 85 percent of those receiving general assistance last year were disabled and waiting to be approved for Social Security disability benefits. The money tided them over until they qualified.

Another 350 were considered employable, and were required to do an active job search while receiving general assistance. About two-thirds of the employable people found jobs on their own, Schwartz said.

The rest — about 120 — are the ones the program is aimed at.

Most are motivated, she said, but for a variety of reasons have trouble getting a job. They may be

homeless or marginally housed ("crashing on somebody's couch"). They may have a history of drug or alcohol problems, and they may have a poor work history or none at all. They may need help with getting to work on time, or attendance, or getting along with other people.

Of the 10 people referred to the program, four were accepted into the program. At an average cost of \$522 each, two now have jobs and a third has an offer of a permanent job as soon as she completes computer training. A fourth refused a job offer and was barred from getting further general assistance.

"Given their poor work histories, lack of skills, and other problems, we estimate that each of these clients would have remained on GA for at least three months and received a minimum of \$930 ...," said a report to the board from agency head Will Lightbourne.

Schwartz credited a lot of the success to "carefully targeting who we selected."

The six people turned down by the program were not considered good candidates for a variety of reasons, including lack of motivation and ongoing alcohol abuse.

The program was a joint project of the county's General Assistance program and the Homeless Employment Project.