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Santa Cruz County receives \$2.2 million homeless youth grant

County Homeless Action Partnership, with Encompass Community Services as lead, to participate in highly competitive multi-year grant from HUD focused on preventing and ending youth homelessness

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded \$2.2 million toward preventing and ending youth homelessness in Santa Cruz County, one of 10 communities chosen nationwide from among 130 applicants to participate in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), a multiyear effort to help communities end youth homelessness.

Led by Encompass Community Services and the County of Santa Cruz, a team of local community organizations will implement the demonstration grant, which is aimed at developing and testing new ways to address teen and young adult homelessness throughout Santa Cruz County. The goal is to positively shift services, individuals and the community from a system that is culturally disconnected, fragmented and incomplete to one that is culturally fitting and compassionate, unified and comprehensive.

“The awards are part of national change in thinking about homelessness – a shift from managing homelessness to preventing and ending it,” said Christine Sippl, Encompass Senior Director for Impact and Partnerships. “This grant provides a unique opportunity for us to look at our local systems for youth at risk of homelessness and to go upstream to address the very factors that contribute to homelessness among local youth and young adults.”

Nationwide, there are approximately 1.3 million homeless youth on a given night, according to the National Runaway Switchboard. Homeless youth are at a higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, substance abuse and death. Additionally, 75 percent of underage runaways are female and between 20 and 40 percent identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (GLBTQ).

Santa Cruz County experiences a high per capita incidence of homelessness across all age groups, and youth homelessness is one of eight priority areas identified in the County’s *All-In* Strategic Plan to End

Homelessness. According to a 2015 point-in-time homeless count for Santa Cruz County, there were 270 persons under the age of 25 identified as currently homeless with the vast majority of them unsheltered.

“The services we have at this time for this highly vulnerable population are limited,” Santa Cruz County Homeless Services Coordinator Rayne Marr said. “The initial stakeholder group convened to address implementation of the youth strategies identified in the *All-In* plan prioritized this grant, because we knew the need was great and the funding would facilitate the strategies.”

Funds are received through the County’s Homeless Action Partnership (HAP), a coalition of community organizations and partners that oversees HUD homelessness funding received by County agencies. During 2017, Encompass, the County and partners will begin the process of designing and testing new service models. They will be assisted by a Youth Advisory Board, made up of youth and young adults who have experienced homelessness. The effort will focus on a number specific, measurable areas, including prevention, outreach, safety and health, housing, independence and healing.

“Our community’s ability to prevent the repeat trauma experienced by young people while they are homeless is critical,” Sippl said. “HUD is providing an important opportunity to work with communities across the nation to design, test and evaluate new systems and models that can support all of our youth to make the transition to healthy, thriving adult members of our community.”

Partners in the new Youth Homeless Demonstration Project Team include:

- Encompass Community Services
- County of Santa Cruz
- County Health Services Agency Homeless Persons’ Health Project
- County Human Services Department (Child Welfare Agency partner)
- Homeless Action Partnership
- Families in Transition
- Youth Advisory Board
- Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County
- County Office of Education
- Homeless Services Center, Rebele Family Shelter and Page Smith Transitional Housing
- Smart Path Coordinated Entry System

Community members interested in learning more can visit www.encompasscs.org.

About Encompass Community Services. *At Encompass Community Services we provide our community with a wide range of services related to family & social well-being, early childhood education, behavioral health, housing and more. Every day through these services we work to make health, education and housing more equitable for all people in Santa Cruz County. For more than 40 years our work has touched generations by helping people have access to education, rebuild relationships, restore their health and regain dignity.*