



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

PRESS RELEASE

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WINTER SHELTER SERVES MORE THAN 500

The Salvation Army and Association of Faith Communities have successfully completed operation of the 2017-18 Winter Shelter program.

During a five-month operational period that saw unseasonably warm weather followed by a late surge of intense rainfall, the Winter Shelter program sheltered approximately 550 homeless individuals at sites in Santa Cruz and Live Oak. Of those, 382 were men, 141 were women, and seven were families, including 14 children. Through the support of the County of Santa Cruz and partner cities, the Winter Shelter program provided warmth, dinner and breakfast, community, and a safe place to sleep for a total of 151 nights, with an 87 percent occupancy rate.

The Winter Shelter program closed April 15 as planned. In all, more than 10,000 bed nights were provided, an increase of 2,100 over last year and the equivalent of adding a 100-room hotel for winter season.

"Despite increasing our capacity by 30 percent from the prior year and unseasonably warm temperatures throughout much of the winter, demand for the Winter Shelter program was still extraordinarily high," Santa Cruz County Homeless Services Coordinator Rayne Marr said. "We'd like to thank the Salvation Army and the Association of Faith Communities for their excellent leadership on this issue and for continuing to demonstrate the spirit of caring that defines the Santa Cruz community."

Forty faith-based and secular community organizations came together to provide meals for Winter Shelter clients at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7263 and the Loudon Nelson Center. Volunteers greeted and engaged with the shelter guests, exchanging stories and created a sense of community. Shelter staff also monitored and served the guests each night with compassion and professionalism while maintaining a safe environment. Staff also worked to establish and enforce guidelines that respected surrounding neighborhoods.



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"I am humbled by the efforts of so many volunteers and staff who worked to provide for our guests," Winter Shelter Program Director Debbie Bates said.

The County's Homeless Person's Health Project provided weekly health services at shelter sites, which were key in providing an opportunity for HPHP staff to offer vaccinations to protect the homeless population and broader community against flu and hepatitis A outbreaks. On a weekly basis, Santa Cruz County benefits representatives helped enroll clients in various benefits programs, and County Mental Health workers helped individuals with mental health issues and with referrals. The Santa Cruz Aids Projects also offered HIV testing.

Additionally, volunteers offered a variety of services including yoga classes, and community organizations donated clothes and bedding. Local high school students even visited to volunteer and learn what it means to be homeless and unsheltered.

The Winter Shelter program also served as a point of entry for a variety of existing shelter services, including those offered by the Homeless Services Center, Faith Community Shelter, Pajaro Valley Shelter Services, Domestic Violence Services, Pajaro Rescue Mission and the River Street Campground. Work program referrals were made to the Downtown Streets Team, Homeless Garden Project, the CalFresh Employment Training Program, Day Workers' Center and more.

Significantly, some individuals and families were able to locate housing and obtain employment through services offered at the shelter. Others were helped to maintain employment because they had the shelter to rest at before returning to work.

The County and its partners understand the need for year-round shelter services, and hopes to transition soon to a year-round shelter in order to eliminate the need for seasonal shelter sites. It is also exploring a safe parking program for County residents who sleep in their vehicles, and is engaged in broader conversations about the root causes of homelessness, including housing, substance use disorder, mental health services and more.

The County, Salvation Army and Association of Faith Communities feel tremendous gratitude to all who have contributed to the successful provision and completion of the 2017/18 Winter Shelter program. We thank our funders, partners, volunteers and neighbors for their support and community commitment on behalf of some of our most vulnerable residents.