



February 19, 2019

An open letter to our community -

The issue of homelessness in our community has reached a critical point. More people are experiencing homelessness and more are dying on the street in Santa Cruz County than ever before. Winter rains and freezing temperatures are adding greater misery to an already difficult situation. Community frustration has reached new heights over a perceived lack of progress toward housing people who are homeless and addressing related issues. And all of this is happening at the exact moment when desperately needed funding is finally becoming available from state and local sources.

Elected leaders, policymakers, advocates and concerned community members are working hard to develop and implement solutions as quickly as possible, including on an emergency basis. As the largest local nonprofit provider of services and housing navigation to help those experiencing homelessness, we want to shed light on what the Homeless Services Center (HSC) is doing now and is prepared to do moving forward.

While actions taken by HSC will only be a portion of an overall solution, we recognize that lives are on the line and our community is looking for progress. It is essential that organizations working on the issue of homelessness, including HSC, support each other to the greatest extent possible as ideas and programs are put into action in the coming weeks and months.

To help increase understanding and transparency surrounding community-wide efforts that are gaining momentum, what follows are HSC's plans now in place, for which we are applying for funding:

- Keep the 40-bed Paul Lee Loft emergency shelter open at HSC, an important action given that the federal government no longer provides support for emergency shelters. In 2018, this facility served 108 people.
- Expand the Paul Lee Loft with 50 new emergency shelter beds, a cost-effective move that expands this existing program to add a portion of the new shelter beds that are critically needed.
- Add professional case management staff so that people in the expanded emergency shelter find housing more often and more quickly. Doing so will free up beds for more people who are currently on the street, a proven strategy at HSC that has produced measurable results over time.

www.santacruzshsc.org



PO Box 1319
Santa Cruz, CA 95061



115B Coral Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060



ph: (831) 458-6020
fax: (831) 316-5010

- Repair and expand the shower and hygiene facility so this critical service remains open to anyone who arrives from the street. HSC currently provides approximately 100 showers per day.
- Purchase property for the construction of a Navigation Center that will provide temporary housing, while at the same time providing professional supportive services to help people “navigate” to permanent housing.

HSC helped 296 people (in 150 families) navigate out of homelessness in 2018, more than in any year in the organizations history. We believe the actions listed above will significantly increase that number. This will be one component of reducing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

In addition, HSC is prepared to play a key role in addressing the need for permanent supportive housing to assist people coming from long-term homelessness who need the most help to be successfully housed. Though this is a very cost-effective strategy, it has not yet been significantly implemented in our community. Yet it is the only solution for some chronically homeless individuals. HSC is currently pursuing building such housing as soon as possible. We expect to start building six units in 2019 and are seeking permission from the City of Santa Cruz to build about 100 units more.

HSC has decades of experience with providing both emergency services and helping individuals and families permanently end their homelessness. We are fully committed to coordinating with other local efforts on the strategies listed above. We are eager to join others to develop and implement near-term steps to effectively address the complex issues around reducing homelessness in our community.

For HSC, our local government partners and the rest of the nonprofit community dedicated to ending homelessness, we know the community is watching and waiting for tangible progress. We're eager to continue building momentum and working as partners to bring change – *now*.

If you have questions on any of these topics, please reach out anytime.



Phil Kramer
Executive Director
pkramer@santacruzhs.org



Claudia Brown
Board President
claudiarbrown@gmail.com