



Help prevent homelessness

By Karl Keller
Sunday, October 14, 2007

Re: your Oct. 3 article, "Safety nets help those in county who face eviction":

The article by Star reporter Kathleen Wilson touched on some of the issues facing the estimated 80,000 to 100,000 residents at risk for homelessness in Ventura County. It's hard to include everything in any one article. As a follow-up, I'd like to share with our community how they might be part of the solution in preventing homelessness in Ventura.

Although the face of the homeless is often the chronic homeless person living on the streets, that is only 15 percent of the homeless population in our community. Most of the homeless are working individuals and families who cycle in and out of homelessness because of poverty. We often don't see them living in their cars or temporarily housed in a shelter or taken in for a few nights by a friend here or there. But they're out there. In the city of Ventura, 15,000 people earn less than \$25,000 per year, placing them at risk of homelessness.

Each time one of these families becomes homeless, there are many resources that must be found to get them back into a home. It costs thousands and takes many more resources to get people housed again than it does to keep them in their housing. They have to come up with another security deposit, first and last months' rent — not to mention trying to find a place that's affordable. Research clearly indicates that it is much less costly and much better for the families if we can keep them in housing. This can often be accomplished with minimal financial and social support — sometimes as modest as one month's rent or paying for a car repair — proving, without a doubt, that preventing homelessness is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

That's why the Ventura Social Services Task Force has begun a homeless-prevention effort aimed at keeping people in their homes. In collaboration with Catholic Charities, Project Understanding, Salvation Army and United Way Ventura County, the task force has developed the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund.

The Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund allows qualifying residents of Ventura to receive one-time financial assistance for up to \$1,000 or so to address special circumstances that put them at risk for homelessness. These funds are aimed at assisting individuals and families who have housing, but are at severe risk of becoming homeless due to an extraordinary setback.

Imagine a disabling injury that prevents a tradesman from working for a couple of weeks or a needed car repair that prevents the family breadwinner from getting to his night job. Oftentimes, these are the types of setbacks that leave people unable to pay the rent or mortgage, potentially forcing them to live in a car or on the streets.

This fund is used exclusively to assist people maintain their housing. Our goal this year is to raise \$60,000 to prevent more than 50 families in Ventura from becoming homeless. We need your help to reach our goal. The Rotary, United Way and a number of individuals have donated to the fund so far.

Recently, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura raised nearly \$2,900 through two special offerings designated for the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund. The Unitarian Universalists extend a friendly challenge to other congregations in Ventura to do the same.

In addition to the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund, the task force has subcommittees working on tactics within Ventura to implement the 10-year Strategy to End Homelessness in Ventura County. We invite those interested to participate on the housing, education or prevention subcommittees, which meet next as follows:

- Prevention: Oct. 24, 4:30-5:30 p.m. at Supervisor Bennett's office, County Government Center, 800 S. Victoria Ave., Ventura.
- Housing Options: Nov. 14, 6:30 p.m., at the Salvation Army on Oak Street in Ventura.
- Education: Nov. 14, 3-5 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 5654 Ralston St., Ventura.
- Karl Keller, of Ventura, is chairman of the Ventura Social Services Task Force.



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