

County secures \$496,000 for homeless families

The Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) has been awarded almost half a million dollars to open doors to housing for local homeless families.

The grant, provided by the California Department of Social Services, will fund a range of services and supports for qualified families, from housing search and application assistance to short-term cash aid for rent and utilities.

Eligible families must be enrolled in or qualified for CalWORKs—the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Act—which provides needy families with time-limited cash assistance and welfare-to-work services.

“We can’t expect parents to hold down jobs or children to do well in school when they don’t have a place to live,” said DHHS Social Services Director Stephanie Weldon. “These funds will help families move toward self-sufficiency by removing barriers to housing.”

According to the terms of the grant application, families whose housing situation is most dire will be given first consideration.

“I know a lot of us wish there was more affordable housing in Humboldt County, but grants like this one help us take fuller advantage of the housing we have,” said Fourth District Supervisor Virginia Bass. “They help remove barriers such as poor credit, poor rental history, deposits, back rent, etc., and also help staff cultivate relationships with property owners, which will serve us well across a number of programs. I’m grateful to staff for identifying the funding opportunity and bringing these state dollars to Humboldt County.”

Funding comes from 2014’s Senate Bill 855, which appropriated \$20 million for the CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP) allocated specifically to address homelessness and housing instability among CalWORKs families. All county social services agencies were eligible to apply. Forty-two applied; 20 were awarded. No matching funds are required.

Humboldt County’s successful proposal requested funding for:

- Housing search activities
- Rent assistance
- Rent arrears
- Deposits
- Transportation
- Renters’ education classes
- Application or credit check fees
- Landlord recruitment and liaison
- Assistance with rental applications

- Identification of tenant screening barriers
- Moving expenses
- Assistance with Section 8 applications.

The CalWORKs HSP uses the rapid-rehousing model, an evidence-based practice that reduces the amount of time families spend on the street or in transitional programs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness have both identified rapid re-housing as more cost-effective than traditional homeless shelter models. The Multiple Assistance Center in Eureka uses the rapid-rehousing model.

According to the California Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), homelessness is an often insurmountable barrier to employment, which undermines the CalWORKs goal of self-sufficiency. CWDA notes that for homeless parents, 84 percent of whom are single mothers, lack of secure housing is both cause and effect of job loss and physical and behavioral health problems. For children, homelessness contributes to impairments in cognitive development and interferes with learning and socialization.

Weldon said case management services will continue after housing is obtained to help stabilize families in their new residences. “This grant is so important,” she added. “It will give so many families something they didn’t have before—hope.”