

SUCCESS STORY

Bill Wilson Center

Bill Wilson Center's program fills a housing void in Santa Cruz County by providing a Hosted Homes Program specifically focused on helping a segment of the 569 homeless youth population, age 18-24.

Bill Wilson Center was founded in 1973 to help end youth and family homelessness. Through programs and services such as a residential center, crisis hotline, rapid rehousing, education, counseling, advocacy and more, Bill Wilson Center has connected with over 30,000 people in Santa Clara County. The success of its program in Santa Clara County is why, in 2018, Bill Wilson Center was asked to try a new and innovative approach in Santa Cruz County.

At the heart of Bill Wilson Center's program in Santa Cruz County is something that hasn't been done here before: matching local host families with homeless youth. With the Santa Cruz County Hosted Homes Program, local families generously open their homes to provide homeless youth with much needed transitional housing, in a supportive environment.

When a referral comes to Bill Wilson Center through Smart Path (Santa Cruz County's coordinated entry system that streamlines access to housing assistance and services), the referral is matched with a host family where the youth can live for up to six months. While they have stable housing and access to the host family's network, they may also receive mental health, outpatient health, transportation, legal and other support services.

A case manager assists the young person with specific needs such as finding a job, finishing school or getting a bank account, as well as ensuring they have food and personal care items. The case manager maintains regular contact with the youth and host family to be sure that needs are met, all barriers and challenges are addressed, and the youth is acclimating to their new environment.

While living with the host family and working with the case manager, the youth will begin to develop skills needed to become self-sufficient with the goal for the youth to stabilize and integrate back into society.

The program is jointly funded by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Youth Homeless Demonstration Project and the State of California's Homeless Emergency Aid Program.

“Bill Wilson Center has a no fail policy. Everyone can be successful. Sometimes it can just take a little longer for some.”

Santa Cruz Program Manager Desiree Herrera

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