

Stairways Programming says community is safer through partnership with Target Team



Chico Police officers work with Stairways Programming specialists when speaking to homeless people living under the bridge on Ivy Street that crosses Little Chico Creek. Photo contributed by Michael Madieros

By [Ashiah Scharaga](#), *Enterprise-Record*

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Chico >> Twenty homeless people have been housed and more than 125 have received supportive services since Stairways Programming and the Chico Police Department entered a collaborative relationship geared toward getting people off the streets and into care.

Stairways Programming released statistics about the success of the partnership, which started last August, on Thursday.

“When officers are free to do some prevention and other things, that helps us as a community,” Stairways Executive Director Michael Madieros said.

The most significant finding, Madieros said, is the time savings programming has provided for the Police Department, improving community safety. This allows them to direct resources toward preventing other crimes, he said.

In the five months prior to being housed, the 20 residents accounted for 213 contacts with police and 64 arrests, representing roughly 554 police hours. At a minimum rate of \$25 per hour, that represents savings of \$13,850 in pay for one officer alone, the report said.

Participants spent about 660 nights in jail in the five months before housing, with the Butte County Sheriff’s office estimating an average cost of \$92 per night. That represents \$60,720 in savings.

“It’s just amazing what’s happening,” Madieros said. “We’re seeing a dynamic where police aren’t having to invest a lot of time in little things.”

For example, people who would normally cuss out or run from officers are greeting them when they approach, Madieros said, listening to the officers when they ask them to stop smoking marijuana in the City Plaza or make sure their dogs are on leashes.

Sgt. Scott Zuschin, who oversees the Target Team, said the department’s community policing model and the Offenses Against Public Property Ordinance has allowed police officers to establish trust

with those in the homeless community. Officers have approached the policy as an opportunity to educate and help people get the support they need, with citations issued as a last resort.

“It just gives us the opportunity to engage in conversation with people that we maybe normally would not have the opportunity to speak with,” he said. “We’re really trying to build that trust within the homeless population.”

None of the 20 people who have been housed at Stairways have active warrants, every participant has made their court dates and there was only one probation violation, according to the report.

“With Chico PD’s help, it truly is a fresh start,” Madieros said. “When they get through this process, there’s not a whole bunch of court stuff waiting on the other side.”

He said the immediate legal, mental health and other services assistance has not only resulted in cost savings to the community but positively impacted the lives of the people in the program. Police involvement has sent a message that officers are there to help, not harm.

Hardly any of the 20 residents were receiving professional treatment for mental illness when they entered the program, and now 90 percent are, the report said. There has been an 80 percent success rate of keeping people housed and participating in the program, and 35 percent have become employed, enrolled in school or started GED programs.

The report also mentions a decrease in substance use, with only one participant testing positive for a substance other than marijuana since enrolling in the program, though 90 percent admitted daily drug use upon entry.

The organization has found the top barriers to housing include:

- Substance use disorders.
- Mental illness.
- Legal issues, including parole, probations, warrants or registration statuses.
- Pets.
- Housing and program history.
- Family structure or relationship breakdowns.
- Identification or documentation.

Madieros said every person rapidly housed experienced at least two of the barriers, with most experiencing all of them.

A lack of funding has been the only hindrance for the partnership, Madieros said. Stairways currently has 37-person waiting list.

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