

## Housing authority to help homeless find homes

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With a goal of reducing homelessness, a new program through the Crescent City Housing Authority and NorCal Continuum of Care will hand out 15 emergency housing vouchers to at-risk individuals in the county.

Megan Miller, housing director, outlined the program in a presentation to city council Monday. Miller said individuals who are experiencing homelessness, at-risk of homelessness, fleeing domestic violence or experiencing housing instability can qualify for the vouchers, which are being funded through COVID-19 relief money as a part of the American Rescue Plan.

Qualifying individuals will be identified by Del Norte Mission Possible or Department of Health and Human Services using the Homeless Management Information System, which is used to track at-risk individuals and connect them to services. Once they are identified, those individuals will be ranked on a scale of vulnerability, with the most vulnerable being awarded the vouchers.

Miller said one of the greatest challenges of using housing vouchers is convincing landlords to accept them.

However, in an effort to incentivize landlords to accept voucher participants, each voucher will come with an additional \$3,500, which participants can use toward security deposits, landlord incentive payments or to furnish household goods.

Miller said the extra money could dramatically increase a participant's chances of finding housing.

"Security deposits have always been a hurdle for our participants. It's a lot of money to come up with, and we have never had the ability previously to assist with that," said Miller.

According to a 2019 point-in-time count, there are roughly 190 homeless individuals in Del Norte County. Point-in-time counts are completed once per year, usually in January.

As this is a new program, Miller said they are expecting to run into other hurdles along the way.

"We are all going into this with our eyes wide open, we know it's not going to be easy," Miller said.

Nevertheless, all members of the city council were in favor of the program and approved it to begin.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake Inscore said he was especially excited because six women currently living at the Harrington House — interim housing for victims of domestic violence — could qualify for permanent housing through this program, which would in turn free up space for more women to occupy the shelter.

"We have some graduates who are ready to rebuild their life on their own, so this is amazing," said Inscore.

Mayor Jason Greenough echoed Inscore's excitement.

"It would be nice if we did not need these, but we do have needs in our community, and what an exciting opportunity this is," said Greenough.