



Officials laud Marin City youth program, allocate \$50,000

Nels Johnson

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A Marin City program that mentors troubled youth, providing a clubhouse, counseling and jobs, has been so successful that crime rates are falling in the community, jubilant officials said.

The Phoenix Project won high praise as housing commissioners accepted \$50,000 from the Board of Supervisors Tuesday to help keep the program going through the year.

The county money augment funds from the Milagro and Marin Community foundations to provide a budget of \$162,000.

Housing Authority chief Dan Nackerman said a public housing unit in the 200 block of Drake Avenue at "ground zero" of Marin's City's crime area was cleared out to become an office and clubhouse for the program.

About 40 youths are regularly enrolled and about that many more drop by on occasion. Fifteen participants have been placed in a variety of jobs with employment partners including the Conservation Corps North Bay. The endeavors include jobs that help maintain public housing.

The program was spearheaded last summer by Performing Stars of Marin executive Felecia Gaston with help from several nonprofits and supervisors Steve Kinsey and Charles McGlashan. It has survived "on very much of a shoestring budget" while "really changing the trajectory of some of these kids' lives,"

Nackerman said.

He said incidents of crime including assault, theft, shoplifting and vandalism have dropped in the community since the program started. Juvenile arrests plummeted 40 percent in 2009, he added.

The Phoenix Project "helps between 40 and 80 young men ... who may be involved in crime or are headed toward being involved in crime," Nackerman said. Eighty percent of participants were raised in single-adult homes, 25 percent have children and 25 percent are homeless, he added.

The program drew praise from criminal justice officials, including District Attorney Edward Berberian and Deputy Probation Officer Darnell C. Roary, a Marin City native, as well as community activists like Gaston.

"I am very pleased to see the results that have happened," Gaston said. "Some of them are now feeling so much better about themselves."

Berberian noted the program "builds bridges" between Marin City youths and law enforcement, and said a retired district attorney staffer is getting involved as an educational aide.

"They are looking at their future now," said Roary, a key mentor for youths in the program.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" said Virginia Edwards of San Rafael, an educational consultant. Edwards is launching a drive to stock a "clothing closet" at the clubhouse so that participants can dress for success in the job market.

Gaston, fed up with crime in the community, developed the program after someone took a shot at

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a sheriff's deputy a year ago.

"You guys are hitting an absolute home run,"
McGlashan said.

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