



COUNTY OF YOLO
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Yolo County Neighborhood Court Program
Expands to Address Homeless Offenders**

(Woodland, CA) – September 24, 2015 - District Attorney Jeff Reisig announced that the Yolo County Neighborhood Court program has expanded to create the Homeless Restorative Justice Program. The new homeless program is a collaboration between the District Attorney's office, the Health and Human Services Agency, local law enforcement agencies and community members.

Neighborhood Court is an adult criminal diversion program based on restorative justice that addresses criminal violations which impact the quality of life in the community. It offers an alternative to criminal court. Rather than charging a case for prosecution, the District Attorney's Office will refer certain misdemeanors and infractions to Neighborhood Court. In Neighborhood Court, a panel of trained volunteers from the community participates in a facilitated conference with the offender. All conferences are confidential and participation by the offender is completely voluntary. In addition, any victim must also consent to the program for a case to be diverted into Neighborhood Court. If either the victim or the offender does not agree, the matter will be handled in the traditional criminal justice system.

The new Homeless Restorative Justice Program expands the existing Neighborhood Court program by focusing on the homeless populations in Davis, Woodland and West Sacramento. Emphasis will be placed on health, behavioral health, housing and self-sufficiency of the homeless or situational homeless offender. This expansion will not be limited to first time offenders but will address homeless individuals with varied criminal histories. The program will use the conferences to come to agreements with these offenders that include access to state, county and non-profit resources that can assist these individuals to change their current living situation. A Social Worker Practitioner will provide short term case management services, including

information and assistance, goal oriented counseling, and linkages to employment, mental health and substance abuse services if needed.

One major addition to the existing conference process is that the social worker will also hold a pre-conference meeting with the homeless offender to assess the offender's needs. This assessment will lead to the creation of a six month case plan that addresses health, behavioral health, housing and self-sufficiency which will assist the conference participants with information for the agreement and also assist the offender in determining how they will avoid the criminal conduct in the future. The social worker will be able to assist the homeless offender in following through on the case plan and the agreement by obtaining access to resources and then following up with the offender to help them succeed in using these resources to complete their agreement.

Homeless people tend to be fearful of attending court, yet their outstanding warrants limit their reintegration into society, deterring them from using social services and impeding their access to employment. Much like the homeless courts in San Diego and Los Angeles the conferences will be held in community facilities to allow homeless individuals to feel more comfortable.

For Neighborhood Court to be successful, the District Attorney relies on the dedicated volunteers who are given the opportunity to help improve the quality of life in their city by working with fellow citizens to address harms to their community caused by the effects of crime, and they work together to identify solutions to help offenders avoid repeating the same mistakes that led to their original offense. This program creates an atmosphere of inclusion and responsibility by providing a direct role for residents to oversee the resolution of offenses in their city. To date over 150 community volunteers have supported this innovative program and more are needed. The conferences with the offenders are held on weekday evenings and the volunteer commitment is very flexible. Volunteers must complete the appropriate training and must complete a Live-Scan background check.

The next training session for volunteers will be held at the Davis Police Department on Saturday, October 10th, 2015. Volunteer applications are available online. The application deadline is October 8th, for this training. Recruiting is ongoing, and future training dates will be available. For more information on the Neighborhood Court program go to www.yoloda.org/nc. We will hold an informational meeting on Wednesday, September 30th, from 6:30-7:30pm at the Davis Police Department. You may also contact the program directly by email at neighborhoodcourt@yolocounty.org or by phone at (530) 666-8378.

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