

Overview:

In this era of digital over-indulgence and constant ‘connectivity,’ Santa Cruz seeks to address a growing hunger for companionship (authentic interpersonal connection) via revitalizing the County’s *In Home Supportive Service Model* as a means of cultivating a more cohesive, collaborative, and sustainable community. To do this the County has contracted the local grassroots organization, “Sweaty Sheep,” whose mission of ‘utilizing recreation and deliberative shared experience to break down down faith, social, economic and situational barriers’ compliments the Purposeful, inter-Personal, and Playful spirit of this initiative.

Your Minister of Loneliness:

Rev. Ryan Althaus has been making and riding waves of inclusivity in Santa Cruz over the past several years via engaging diverse community members in deliberative ‘play.’ Althaus’ tattoos and dreadlocked hair disguises his role as an ordained Presbyterian Minister in charge of the regional hunger/homelessness/inclusivity work for the National denomination. Currently nine month’s into an experiential year of ‘living houseless’ in his van, Ryan regularly hosts local recovery, special needs, and other ‘mis-labled’ community groups for free weekly sailing trips. Over the past two years he has taken the Homeless Garden Project’s participants deep sea fishing alongside county legislators, lead multiple retreats for Downtown Streets Team Homeless cleanup crew to Lake Tahoe alongside of special needs and youth community representatives, and overtaken the Valley Christian School system for a homeless awareness training. Most recently he has taken a dive into Children’s Literature by releasing a picture book themed on Social Inclusivity which he co-illustrated alongside Noah Habib... a 22 year old whose work in overcoming the restrictions of advanced Cerebral Palsy is demonstrative of this project’s hope to reveal the special gifts of our special needs neighbors. Noah and Ryan are working hard to partner in growing (literally) a special needs inclusive farm and intentional community, Costanoa Commons (www.costanoacommons.org) at the foot of the Poginip Forest which seeks to provide purpose and community for adult special needs individuals via farming, friendships, and food!

The Plan:

Over the next year the County hopes to engage diverse populations to give new life to the *In Home Supportive Service program* by focusing on deliberately matching groups and individual’s whose natural (special) gifts and resources address one another’s unique (special) needs. The program seeks provide meaningful work opportunities that promote purposeful social engagement socio-economic divisions in the community by:

- ◆ Create longterm partnerships with local agencies that provide ongoing opportunities for diverse neighbors to utilize IHSS as a transitional, supplemental, and/or sustaining employment opportunity.
 - ◆ Enhance the work of a diverse community organizations via existing County resources while conversely reinvigorating the caretaker support network of the County via existing community resources.
- ◆ Engaging existing naturally supportive groups (local faith groups, student organizations, etc) as paid companionship communities for relevant neighbors within their network/community.
- ◆ Pilot a series of one-day training/registration/enrollment IHSS mobile events to replace the month-long process of the past... these will also include matchmaking times of which to more deliberately pair complimentary individuals utilizing a county-wide registry network and in person meet and greets.
- ◆ Pair advancing/screened houseless or recovery program participants with special needs neighbors whose needs for companionship naturally compliment the journey of recovery and can also open doors for live-in support as an alternative housing model... an example of utilizing existing resources in an innovative way to address housing and homelessness issues in the community.
- ◆ Emphasis the **Healing** and **FUN** side of IHSS Caregiving!
 - ◆ Althaus’ passion is for ‘**compassion**’ is achieved by revealing unifying ‘**common-passions!**’ He seeks to provide regular community intentional ‘play’ opportunities as ways to introduce diverse populations and provide community, reprieve and support to existing caregivers. Things such as ‘its just lunch’ style IHSS matchmaking, Community art projects and games at local senior and special needs agencies, etc...
 - ◆ Launch Adopt a grandparent programs for students and community members
 - ◆ Enroll new individuals/families as providers: Coming together around a neighbor is a great lesson for children and unites a family unit in a shared mission that simultaneously provides a family to another.

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