



## **REQUEST TO SPEND ADDITIONAL INN FUNDS**

### **Santa Cruz County**

**Name of Current Innovative Project: Avenues: Work First for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders**

**Total Additional Requested for Current Innovative Project: \$1,111,054**

**Staff Recommends: APPROVAL**

#### **History**

In 2010, the Commission authorized a single year expenditure for Santa Cruz County to initiate a program called Work First for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders. Following the Commission's approval, the Legislature amended the statute to no longer require Commission approval for INN projects, requiring them only to be approved by the County Board of Supervisors. Santa Cruz County's INN program received subsequent approval by the County Board of Supervisors as required by law at that time. Subsequent to that law change, the Legislature has again required all INN plans to be approved by the Commission.

This project is entering its fifth year and the County is seeking approval from the Commission for the required operational funding, plus funding to complete an evaluation.

#### **Avenues: Work First for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders Summary**

Avenues: Work First for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders is a "work-first" approach to improving outcomes for people with co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorders, modeled after "Housing First," which provides homeless people with housing as quickly as possible and then offers other treatment, services, and supports. Work First begins by engaging people in work opportunities rather than focusing initially and primarily on the individuals' symptoms, thereby emphasizing work as a motivating and protective factor. The County expects to have more positive client outcomes by featuring "natural" work or career paths that provide incentives for success based on each participant's goals.

Referrals for Work First come from Santa Cruz County Mental Health Full Service Partnership (FSP) teams, the jail, court, probation, Proposition 36, hospitals, sub-acute settings, supported mental health housing, and shelters. Staff include a certified alcohol and drug counselor, licensed therapist, peer community navigators, employment specialists, and a psychiatrist. Treatment includes both traditional and alternative holistic approaches focusing on both mental illness and substance abuse, including coordination

with FSPs. Individuals are able to continue with “Work First” activities even after they are referred elsewhere.

Interim evaluation results indicate a significant drop in Behavioral Health Unit visits and in jail incidences for Work First participants.