

New Santa Cruz Dining Room Gives Warm Refuge to the Poor

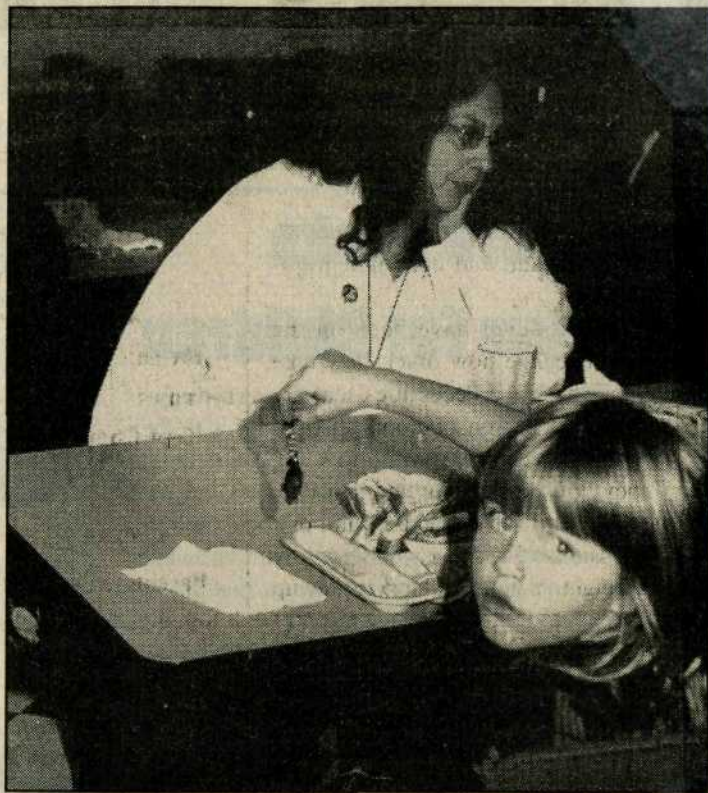
by Alene Smith

Two hundred free meals are served daily at the Homeless Services Center on River Street in downtown Santa Cruz. In October, the Center opened up a newly constructed, handsome, 2,000-square-foot kitchen and dining room seating 85 people. It's a major improvement over the old sandwich truck previously used to cook and hand out hot meals.

The new kitchen includes a walk-in freezer and refrigerator and a large restaurant-style oven. Construction costs of around \$425,000 were funded by a federal grant. The food served is donated; however, the cooks and workers buy food items and materials to supplement as needed.

The compassionate kitchen staff, along with the super-neat, pleasant, warm environment of this dining room has greatly helped people's attitude and self-esteem.

The community room, with a television and lockers, remains a cozy, central place for homeless folk to gather for warmth in friendship, camaraderie, and safety from the cold and rain of winter. It remains next door to the new dining room which had been a funky, old garage and store-room space, before being converted to this spacious refuge for homeless people.



A mother and her daughter enjoy the new dining room at the Homeless Services Center in Santa Cruz.

Alene Smith photo