



PHOTO BY JIM KNOWLES

Building Futures Director Liz Varela accepts a check from the county presented by Supervisor Wilma Chan as City Councilman Jim Prola, City Manager Chris Zapata and shelter residents look on.

By Jim Knowles

San Leandro Times

County Supervisor Wilma Chan delivered a check for \$50,000 to a shelter in San Leandro this week to help keep the doors open.

The shelter for women and children has been running at 100 percent occupancy and was in danger of cutting back its services as it faced a budget shortfall this year, but money from the county and city means it will keep operating.

Building Futures for Women and Children has beds for 30 people at its facility near downtown San Leandro, helping women who are victims of domestic violence or homelessness.

The need for the shelter is as great as ever, Chan said. At a press conference on Tuesday, the supervisor said that domestic violence is insidious in our society. Alameda County issues 2,500 protective orders and 3,300 restraining orders annually, she said.

But at the same time, Building Futures is having a budget shortfall. A decrease in funding and a drop in charitable contributions since the recession began has put the shelter in a bind with a \$100,000 shortfall, said Building Futures Executive Director Liz Varela.

Building Futures' program includes two emergency homeless shelters (one in San Leandro and one in Alameda), a domestic violence safe house and temporary housing, a 24-hour crisis line, a children's program, and a domestic violence outreach program. Each year, Building Futures helps 700 women and children go from homelessness to housing.

"We faced a \$100,000 shortfall this year and that's when I called Supervisor Chan," Varela said.

In addition to the check from the county, the City of San Leandro donated \$20,000 from the city manager's discretionary fund and other contributions arrived to help Building Futures meet its goal.

Clients of the shelter spoke at the check ceremony about how Building Futures has helped them.

Cassandra York said she was laid off her job when the recession began and thanked the shelter for helping her.

“They gave me a lot of tools and resources, and the staff is great,” York said. “I’m working now. I have an apartment and I’m a grandmother. Building Futures got me on track.”