



HEATHER MURTAGH/DAILY JOURNAL

Three-year-olds Andy, left to right, Jeremy and Jose play with cars and trains at the Haven Child Development Center for homeless children in Menlo Park Thursday. The center, funded through a combination of state and federal funds, is one of many in San Mateo County which could be drastically affected by proposed budget cuts.

Child care programs at risk

By Heather Murtagh
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When Karen Van Pelt found herself homeless last year, she found comfort in a number of programs that helped her get back on her feet.

A single mom, Van Pelt was placed at the Haven Family House, a transitional housing complex in Menlo Park run by Shelter Network. While the nonprofit offered housing and other services to Van Pelt, an onsite partnership with Peninsula Family Service gave her daughter, Aaliyah, a safe place to stay, learn and grow.

At the time, Van Pelt didn't have a

car. An onsite facility that offers a learning environment for her daughter as well as therapeutic support was ideal. The services helped Van Pelt get on her feet and support her family.

No longer living on site, Van Pelt takes advantage of the subsidized child care for 2-year-old Aaliyah as part of an alumni program, which allows her to continue to make ends meet.

Van Pelt is a parent of just one of the about 300 young children in low-income families served in numerous child care centers in San Mateo County through Peninsula Family Service. The number of chil-

dren served could take a drastic hit if proposed budget cuts by the state are adopted. Gov. Jerry Brown proposed a 35 percent statewide reduction in the funding of child development and care programs. For these subsidized programs, the loss of about \$770,000 annually would be devastating.

Parents, who are struggling to get by anyway, are expected to make up the difference — a daunting thought for these individuals.

"This is bigger than us," said Peninsula Family Service President Laurie Wishard.

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Wishard noted countywide programs have come together with the goal of preparing children from lower economic areas for school to create greater

academic success later in life. All these programs face cuts, creating larger issues throughout the county, she said.

At the Haven Child Development Center, for example, 18 children ages 18 months to 5 years old are served at one time, said Site Director Rose Juarez.

Due to the facility's nature of

families coming and going, the child care center sees about 50 to 55 children throughout any given year. With these children also dealing with the trauma of being homeless, therapists are on hand to offer preventative services for the children.

Without this help, many of the families served will struggle to not only cover the cost of child care services, but also attend work, said Juarez.

"Without these services, parents cannot achieve self sufficiency," she said.

Van Pelt, for example, estimates the new fee would mean an additional \$200 for her a month. She admitted that may seem like a minimal amount to many. But for her, it creates a struggle.

"I'm torn right now. It's really hard. I don't know what I'm going to do. That's \$200 more out of my pocket," she said.

Changing facilities could mean a drop in services to her daughter, a lack of trust with new people and could affect her job. These consequences worry Van Pelt.

Families eligible for these subsidized programs are barely making it, said Juarez.

"With any increase, they're not going to be able to do that," she said.

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