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HUD sweep operation cracks down on fraud

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ADELANTO * Several people were arrested Thursday — including a man suspected of having sex with a minor — during a HUD sweep operation led by law enforcement and the Housing Authority of San Bernardino County, officials said.

As of 2 p.m., four people had been arrested, Staci Johnson, spokeswoman for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Adelanto station, said. The sweep continued until the late afternoon.

"We conduct these type of operations about four to five times a year throughout the county," Susan Benner, executive director of the Housing Authority of San Bernardino County, said. "Our goal is to get those people who are committing fraud off the program and service those who need it."

Starting early Thursday, two teams of officials including Sheriff's deputies, State Parole officer and a District Attorney's official headed out to hit six targets authorities had designated as people who were potentially defrauding the housing authority voucher program.

"We cross-referenced a list of parolees and probationers against HUD's list of people on assistance and came up with the targets," Deputy Greg Jones said. When they checked the list of 333 households receiving assistance, they learned in six instances a parolee or probationer was living in the home and the recipient failed to report it to the housing authority.

According to authorities, participants have 10 days to report if anyone new moves into the dwelling. That person must then be screened and approved to reside in the home.

While investigating one home, officials learned the 20-year-old son of the woman receiving aid had been living at the home with his 16-year-old girlfriend.

Andrew Cordova was arrested for suspicion of having sex with a minor. The distraught teen told investigators that her grandmother gave her permission to live with Cordova and his mother, Linda Sanford. Sanford was arrested for fraud and perjury for failing to report her boyfriend, who was recently released from prison, was living in the home.

As part of the arrests made Thursday, officials will be seeking restitution for the money spent on the program. Sanford received assistance for four years and could be asked to pay back approximately \$37,500, authorities stated.

"We are trying to recover the taxpayers' money," said Ana Gamis, spokeswoman for the housing authority.

Officials noted that many times, the aid recipients will not report new people living in the home for fear they will not be approved.

"They do a pretty extensive background check" said Ron Hall, spokesman for the Sheriff's Department, "and they also have a list of crimes that would disqualify them from the program." Some of those crimes include various violent crimes such as rape, murder and assault, but also include drug offenses, child neglect, vandalism, disorderly conduct or prostitution.

According to both housing authority and sheriff's officials, the majority of the people who are on the voucher program use it legitimately.

"Seven percent of the 30,000 people we service countywide through the voucher program are seniors, disabled or a families with young children," Benner said. "Most of the people on the program are good people."

Hall echoed her sentiment and pointed out that when the department collaborates with the organization, they usually have less than 20 targets where a parolee or probationer is found to be living at a subsidized home.

Anyone who suspects program abuse can mail a report to the Program Integrity Unit at 672 S. Waterman Avenue, San Bernardino, CA 92408 or visit www.HACSB.com and file a report online. Concerned citizens can also contact their local housing authority office or call WeTip at (800) 78-CRIME.



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TAKEN INTO CUSTODY: Linda Sanford, foreground, is taken into custody Thursday morning in Adelanto. Sanford was taken into custody for fraud and perjury under housing assistance rules. The Housing Authority of the county of San Bernardino and the Victor Valley Sheriff's station conducted the joint operation aimed at fraud in the housing program.



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UNDER SUSPICION: Victor Valley Sheriff's station Deputy Greg Jones interviews Samoeur Nhek about people living in her home Thursday morning as the department operated a housing sweep. Nhek receives housing subsidies and was taken into custody on suspicion of fraud and perjury.