

## Fullerton kicks off task force to help homeless, mentally ill

The group is formed after the death of Kelly Thomas, a case in which two police officers face charges.

By LOU PONSI

FULLERTON – In an effort to improve treatment of the mentally ill who are homeless in town, a task force held its first meeting Thursday afternoon at the Fullerton Public Library to begin forming solutions.

About 15 attended the meeting, listening as the 16-member panel laid out the framework for future meetings.



*Kelly Thomas, a local transient. Thomas, 37, was taken off of life support and died five days after a July 5 struggle with Fullerton Police officers.*

"There are many issues that are important in this area (mental illness and homelessness)," said facilitator Rusty Kennedy, executive director of O.C. Human Relations, a county agency that aims to eliminate intolerance and foster diversity.

"The goal is to not necessarily agree but to hear what others have to say and explore divergent perspectives," said Kennedy, a longtime Fullerton resident.

The task force's formation was approved by the City Council in September, in the wake of the death of Kelly Thomas, a mentally ill homeless man who died five days after a confrontation with police at the Fullerton Transportation Center in July. Two police officers now face charges in the case, heavily covered by the media.

"Are there things we can do to make sure that this doesn't happen again," said Kennedy, referring to the Kelly Thomas case. "What we are going to do is look at what we can do as a caring community."

The task force made up of county mental-health experts, religious leaders, service providers and family members of the homeless and mentally ill will broach a variety of topics and meet at 4 p.m. on the first and third Thursdays of each month for six months.

Then the task force will provide recommendations to the City Council on instituting permanent programs.

For more information, call 714-738-6760