

SANTA CRUZ YOUTH WORKER WINS INS WORK PERMIT

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Body

Marciano **Cruz**, who helped coordinate city anti-gang and anti-drug programs **in Santa Cruz's** Beach Flats neighborhood until he was forced to resign over immigration problems last year, may be returning to **work** soon.

Cruz, 30, was granted a temporary **work permit** Thursday by officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service **in** San Francisco.

"It's a relief," said **Cruz**. "At least I'll be able to **work** and support my kids now. We **won't** have to worry about missing the rent."

The **permit** came after several prominent political leaders wrote letters to the **INS in** support of **Cruz**, including U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel and **Santa Cruz** Mayor Scott Kennedy.

A former gang member who served time **in** prison for a 1986 burglary conviction, **Cruz** gained the respect of the largely Hispanic Beach Flats community -- and many city leaders -- by teaching children how to avoid drugs and violence by recounting his own experiences.

"With his background and the changes he's gone through, he is irreplaceable," said Kennedy.

Since June 1990, **Cruz** had **worked** part time as a senior playground leader with the **Santa Cruz** Parks and Recreation Department, overseeing the after-school Kids Klub program **in** Beach Flats for children 6 to 12.

He resigned last March after officials at the state Employment Development Department notified **Santa Cruz** City Hall that **Cruz's** temporary visa had expired.

Since then, **Cruz** has battled to stay **in** the United States.

He is scheduled to appear at a deportation hearing May 25 **in** San Francisco Immigration Court, where a judge will decide whether he may remain **in** the United States while his application for residency is pending.

City parks officials said Thursday they would like to hire **Cruz** back.

"We want to talk to him about a variety of opportunities," said Dannettee Shoemaker, recreation superintendent of the city parks department.

Cruz was born **in** Mexico and first came to the United States **in** 1980. His wife, April, a security guard, and two children are U.S. citizens. Her wages have supported the family during the past year.

Because he could not legally **work**, **Cruz** has lectured students **in** schools across **Santa Cruz** County as a volunteer. He also has helped run the **Santa Cruz** Soccer league, a collection of 16 teams of adults.

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Although still worried about the deportation hearing, **Cruz** said he is thankful for the letters and phone calls to the **INS** from dozens of supportive community members.

"They had faith **in** me," he said. "I have faith **in** God now that something good will happen."

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