

Collaboration in Yuba County to Help Homeless Take Step Forward

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That noise you may have heard? That was Yuba County blowing up the belief that the wheels of government turn slowly. In a mere two-months' time, the County – in collaboration with various local partners – developed, built and opened a new temporary housing program for the homeless.

Adjacent to Twin Cities Rescue Mission and the Feather River levee, a small parcel of county land that was vacant just a few weeks ago now contains 20 “tiny homes” for the local homeless. The project is called “14Forward,” named after the nearby street and the hope that it will represent a significant step forward for an often forgotten population.

The individual shelters – modified Tuff Sheds — are for temporary stays while county staff works with the residents to find more permanent housing. “Residents” of the complex can also access a variety of county services, including behavioral health and substance abuse, on site from case managers.

The project is the result of an amazing collaborative effort within the community, which views the homeless living along the banks of the Feather River as local residents instead of just faceless transients.

Supervisor John Nicoletti said that in working with the homeless, county officials discovered that many were longtime Yuba County residents. They are people “we have gone to school with, people our children have played with ... It really opened our eyes.”

And while the county was already investing a lot of time and resources into assisting the homeless, most of those efforts were “siloed.” It was time to bring them together and combine the county work with that being done by local non-profits and faith-based organizations. Add in the private sector and the phrase, “It takes a village...” was coming alive in Yuba County.

“Once we all started flowing in a coordinated path, literally in two months' time we picked a location, designed a project, built up our partnerships, got delivery of services... ,” explained an exuberant Supervisor Nicoletti.

Yuba County Administrator Robert Bendorf said he has never seen anything like it in his 30 years of public service.

Working side by side in the collaborative efforts is everyone from county supervisors to homeless residents. For example, Raeylnn Butcher, affectionately known as the Mayor of the Homeless, has played an integral role in working with her neighbors to understand the benefits of the new shelter. Her passion over its ribbon cutting last week was obvious, as she closely clutched the large red ribbon after the ceremony.

All parties are realistic to know that there will be some bumps along the road. But everyone is committed to making a difference in reducing the estimated 300 homeless who have called the dusty “River Bottom” area home.

“We are going to learn along the way; this is not going to be perfect,” Bendorf acknowledged. “But I can tell you that we’re headed in the right direction.”

That you are, Yuba County.

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