

Yuba County homeless become ‘tiny home’ residents

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- Each Tuff Shed ‘tiny home’ is 12 feet by 8 feet
- Village meant as temporary housing
- Sacramento, other cities nationally considering similar option



Yuba County created "tiny homes" for some of its homeless population. The county opened the doors on Friday, July 15. The houses are a collaboration with the city and Habitat for Humanity. About 40 homeless people are expected to move in. Erasmo Martinez The Sacramento Bee

Friday was moving day for as many as two dozen people who had been living along rivers surrounding Marysville and Yuba City.

Nearly half of the former river encampment inhabitants opted for a newly constructed community of “tiny homes” dubbed 14 Forward. Yuba County officials are hopeful the remainder will follow suit.

County officials say they have been preparing for the move since February, first by getting to know the community’s homeless population – estimated to be between 240 and 300 people – then preparing them for a gradual clearing of the three longtime encampments. Officials Friday approved 11 volunteers to move into the county’s tiny home experiment.

“It’s a scary thing for them,” said Chaya Galicia, Yuba County’s homeless coordinator. “A lot of them have been down there for years.”

The 20-unit village of small sleeping quarters hardly qualifies as “tiny houses” by modern hipster definition. The residences are spruced up Tuff Sheds – windows, insulation and two single beds have been added.

They have no plumbing or electricity but there are portable lavatories on-site. The nearby Twin Cities Rescue Center will offer meals and showers. Residents will be allowed to keep one dog with them. While shade and seating are in short supply within the fenced-in complex, each unit has a plot of 32 square feet of artificial grass.

Officials say the units are appropriately sparse since the goal is to quickly get people out of 14 Forward by connecting them with jobs, health care, the services they need to move on.

“It’s a place to sleep,” Galicia said. “We want to help them get permanently housed.”

She said the county, which paid \$100,000 for the Tuff Sheds, decided the tiny home route was classier than allowing residents to sleep in tents.

“We were pretty certain that our community would not be open to a tent city,” Galicia said. “We wanted to do it first class.”

A number of communities nationwide have turned to tiny home villages of various configurations to combat homelessness. They offer a significant savings over other housing options, case studies suggest.

Some Sacramento City Council members have voiced support for a homeless advocates’ proposal to build a village of tiny cabins in the city, as opposed to the tent city suggested by some.

Yuba County’s 14 Forward has a full-time host charged with keeping order, or at least with calling 911 if trouble arises. Drugs and alcohol are not allowed on site.

“We want it to be a positive environment. If your behavior is too disruptive, you will be asked to leave,” she said. “If their behavior is bad enough, we’ll call the cops. It’s not whether they are drunk or high, it’s their behavior.”

Johnny Woods, the house manager of the rescue center, said he at first he had some concerns about placing 14 Forward right next door, since he said keeping the peace and sobriety at the center is already a challenge. His center houses 46 people and offers drop-in services.

“It’s something we have to adapt to,” said Woods, who lives on-site. “It’s going to be rough for a little while.”

He said his skepticism was overcome by reading a passage of the Bible and seeing the services 14 Forward was bringing to the table. He said he will support services offered to help the residents.

Yuba County officials had initially agreed to allow media outlets to interview incoming residents, but later decided it might be too disruptive to the process.

Galicia said coaxing long-time (homeless) encampment residents out of the woods and into the village has been a challenge.

“They are nervous. They are afraid of us wanting to control their lives,” she said. “There is one guy who has been down there for 12 years. He’s buried his animals there.”

Moving the population from the river and into permanent housing will be a gradual process. A good percent of those moved from their encampment can be expected to find a new hidden place to camp.

“We’re not forcing anyone to come,” Galicia said. “They are more than welcome to find someplace else to stay.”

She added she hoped the new place will be a legal one.