



Enterprise®

Harmony Village

Yuba City, Sutter County



Introduction

Harmony Village is a 62-unit hotel located in Sutter County, northern California. Divided by the Yuba River, Sutter and Yuba Counties border each other and have historically served a population experiencing homelessness who took residence in informal campsites along the river and moved between locations on each side. Homekey funding provided an opportunity for Sutter County to build on its experience with the Project Roomkey program and provide permanent, supportive housing that has blossomed into a successful and thriving community. Overcoming challenges, including unexpected rehabilitations and some community resistance, county officials and local partners believe that Harmony Village is one of the county's most successful affordable housing projects in recent memory and could serve as inspiration for providers around the country.

For more information,
please visit: homekey.hcd.ca.gov

SNAPSHOT

Project:	Harmony Village
Project Team:	Sutter County, Habitat for Humanity Yuba-Sutter
Location:	Yuba City, Sutter County
Number of Doors Acquired:	62
Number of Units:	62
Number of People Housed*:	56
Target Population Served:	Homeless and those at risk of homelessness – priority to elderly, disabled and veterans.
Building Type:	Motel Acquisition
Occupancy Type:	Permanent
Total Homekey Award:	\$6,714,550
Philanthropic Award:	\$403,978
Total Cost Per Unit:	\$116,565

*As of September 2021



Context

In 2019, a consortium of cities, counties, service providers, and other public and nonprofit stakeholders released a [5-year Regional Strategic Plan to Respond to Homelessness in Sutter and Yuba Counties](#). Though the counties had made significant progress on creating a comprehensive network of emergency shelters and services, it identified a growing need for permanent, supportive housing. With a transient population experiencing homelessness in increasing numbers, the county aimed to establish permanent, supportive housing for residents in need and to offer services on both sides of the river. While scrambling to address the crisis through a variety of strategies, the county jumped at the opportunity to participate in Homekey, developing affordable housing that would provide both space for social distancing and much-needed services over the longer term. The result was the area's first permanent, supportive housing development at Harmony Village.





Successes

- **Safe housing with private bathrooms and kitchenettes kept an at-risk population safe from major COVID-19 outbreaks, and on-site vaccinations built on that success.** When COVID-19 arrived, many of the people experiencing homelessness in the area were at high risk due to their proximity in campsites and shelters that shared bathrooms, showers and other spaces. The opportunity to move to safe, private rooms with their own bathrooms and kitchenettes helped limit COVID-19 infections, even during the peak of the crisis. When vaccines became available, the county worked with Adventist Health and Sutter County Health and Human Services to provide vaccinations to residents on-site.
- **With high-quality housing and a full suite of supportive services, Harmony Village quickly became a thriving community.** County officials and service providers are effusive about the high standard of living and visible sense of community that Harmony Village has created. Before the project started, many of its residents were living on the Feather and Yuba River banks and levy systems with no shelter or safety. Today, with permanent, safe shelter and supportive services, officials say they have watched “the genesis of community.” People in the residences take care of each other, cook together, participate in classes and workshops together, tend to community gardens and more. “It’s magical,” officials say.
- **Crime and public disturbances have declined, and neighbors have taken notice.** Prior to its use for affordable housing, local officials say, Harmony Village was often used as a site for illicit activity. Since its conversion to permanent, supportive housing through Homekey, that activity has all but disappeared. To address this, the county converted the property into a gated community with required check-in upon entry. According to local law enforcement, the site used to have eight calls to the facility per month, frequent enough that sheriff’s deputy knew the features of each room. Since its conversion to permanent, supportive housing, the number of calls to law enforcement declined to one over the course of five months.

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Challenges

- **Working with aging buildings required unexpected rehabilitations.** Some major repairs were required that were not clear at the outset of the project. For example, the developer, Habitat for Humanity, had to replace all the electrical systems because much of it appeared to be previously installed by unlicensed contractors and was not code compliant. Additionally, the facility used a septic system that needed maintenance and the water system was not suitable for long-term use.
- **Neighbors initially expressed resistance to the project, which the county overcame with proactive communication and strategic messaging.** At the outset of the project, some neighbors expressed concern about effects on their property values and a feeling that they did not get sufficient notice. Making matters worse, a local elected official referred to the project as a “homeless hotel,” which some county officials felt fueled negative perceptions of the project. The county quickly went into “rapid recovery mode” and scheduled community meetings so that residents could ask questions, and the county could make their case. The county pointed to their success with shelters and emphasized that they would prioritize elders and the disabled. Today, county officials say, they were able to “turn ‘not in my backyard’ folks into ‘let’s go to church together’ folks,” and neighbors have written two letters of support for the project.
- **Some residents have chafed with the facility’s rules and security procedures, feeling they are overly restrictive.** In interviews, more than one resident compared the site’s rules to those of an institutional setting. Some resented the prohibition of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis on site. Moreover, some feel more isolated than they did prior to moving in, as friends are less likely to visit because of the rules, and it can be difficult to align work schedules with the site’s entry and exit hours.



Keys to Success

- **Partnerships across silos led to the robust and growing set of services available on-site.** In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the county communicated and collaborated frequently with local providers and stakeholders and leveraged these partnerships to serve Harmony Village. The site now has on-site nursing, bible study, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, Yuba College classes and others. All of this was made possible through the weekly meetings with the sheriff's deputy, County Administrator's office, Habitat for Humanity, security services, and other groups of interest, which began in the lead-up to Homekey and has continued throughout the project.
- **Though challenging, securing funds for support services is essential.** Because the state sometimes releases funding for infrastructure but not staff, the county sought funding from a variety of sources including the federal government (CARES Act), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), the state's Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP), and local general funds. Fortunately, the site has a 302-unit storage facility, which has helped generate meaningful revenue. Resources for housing development are important, county officials say, but are not sufficient without services.
- **The county and housing developer were prepared to implement their plans well in advance of the opportunity for funding.** Habitat for Humanity, the housing developer of Harmony Village, stressed that the success of Homekey was not a matter of luck via the opportunity for funding alone. Rather, they had been planning and seeking resources for this kind of work for years. That preparation is what made the success of Harmony Village possible.



What's Next

At the time of these interviews, county officials were continuing to place residents at Harmony Village to reach full occupancy. In addition to finding residents, the county was continuously setting up new services and opportunities for on-site enrichment for residents such as life skills classes and substance abuse counseling. They were also seeking funding to build an elevator on-site, as currently residents with limited mobility are restricted to the first floor.



THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS:



About Homekey

Homekey is California's innovative program to purchase and rehabilitate hotels, motels, vacant apartment buildings, manufactured homes and other properties to convert into permanent homes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Partnering with Gov. Gavin Newsom's office and the California Department of Housing and Community Development, Enterprise Community Partners helped deploy \$46 million in philanthropic funds in the first round of Homekey.

These funds, \$25 million from Kaiser Permanente, \$20 million from Blue Shield of California and \$1 million from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, provided additional operational and supportive services, and reinforced the pathway to safe, affordable and sustainable homes for California's most vulnerable. The grants leveraged Enterprise's expertise in providing technical assistance to help build the capacity of trusted housing and service providers.

About Enterprise

Enterprise Community Partners is a national nonprofit that exists to make a good home possible for the millions of families without one. We support community development organizations on the ground, aggregate and invest capital for impact, advance housing policy at every level of government, and build and manage communities ourselves. Since 1982, we have invested \$44 billion and created 781,000 homes across all 50 states all to make home and community places of pride, power and belonging. Join us at enterprisecommunity.org.

About HCD

The California Department of Housing and Community Development is dedicated to the preservation and expansion of safe and affordable housing, so more Californians have a place to call home. Our team works to ensure an adequate supply of housing for Californians and promotes the growth of strong communities through its leadership, policy and program development. For more information, please visit www.hcd.ca.gov.