

14Forward: a temporary Homeless shelter program that provides opportunities for people to gain resources for self-sufficiency and permanent housing. Program provides case management and Services

Yuba and Sutter Counties in CA have a large homeless population and they have made some great strides in Marysville through a consortium of government, non-profits and civic organizations in dealing with the issues in the past few years. Chaya Galicia is The Coordinator and works for Yuba County as the Homeless project manager, and her email is cgalicia@co.yuba.ca.us

This Yuba County program is a recipient of a 2018 CSAC Challenge Award, which spotlights the most innovative programs in county government. The program was only one of two to receive the California Counties Innovation Award. The information below is from David Liebler is the Director of Public Affairs & Member Services for the California State Association of Counties.

<https://www.counties.org/county-voice/yuba-countys-14forward-what-has-made-it-so-successful>

Yuba County's 14Forward program for the homeless is a success story. It's taken a lot of collaboration, creativity, patience, learning, and trust-building since it opened its doors in July 2016 – but the results are evident. The program is taking people off the streets and helping them turn their lives around.

14Forward's tiny homes made out of modified Tuff Sheds get a lot of the publicity, but the program is much more than that. It provides wrap-around services for homeless individuals who are ready to start a new chapter.

"It's really not about the sheltering," explains Yuba County Supervisor Gary Bradford. "It's about the services that are provided." His comments are echoed by 14Forward Project Manager Chaya Galicia who says, "Shelter is good, but coupled with case management is 100 times better."

Mary Ontiveros is just one of more than 100 Forward14 success stories. She refers to herself as "one of the guinea pigs that first started 14Forward." It's turned her life around and her initial skepticism for the program has turned into optimism. Without 14Forward, "my life would still be going downhill. I would still be homeless and I would have lost my custody battles."

County Administrator Robert Bendorf describes the program as "an opportunity for the homeless who want to move forward."

As soon as 14Forward opened its doors, it caught the attention of local government officials throughout California and beyond. Bendorf estimates there have been nearly 40 visits to the site, and other communities are beginning to emulate the program.

Project Manager Galicia has led a number of those site visits. "People are very interested," she says. "It's really becoming a movement."

Bendorf adds that "it's not only a great model but it's a constant learning process. We're learning something different every day, and that learning promotes improvements we can make to our model."

It took homeless individuals some time to see the value of 14Forward. Perception initially was negative among the homeless community.

“I would walk the levee and say, ‘You will never catch me there’, “ says Rosa Muniz, who was homeless before agreeing to come to 14Forward. Now she lives in a three-bedroom, two-bath mobile home with her husband, son and mother.

“One of the things I have learned over the past few years is patience – especially patience in letting the homeless community slowly understand the value of 14Forward, Bendorf says. “That is key to our success here. And over time that patience has paid off.”

14Forward Program Aide Kercell Stowes adds that “now (homeless residents) see that people are getting housed, getting employed, getting the documents they need. People are realizing that we are a service.”

The building of strong relationships between 14Forward staff and residents is proven to be paramount. And that, too, takes patience.

“It’s all about relationships,” Galicia says. “People don’t change because of a program, they change because of relationships. And we are building those relationships. We are investing in people and helping them move forward in their lives.”

Stowes agrees. “Everyone has a story. We found out a lot of these people had jobs, careers, houses and ... situations happened to get them to where they are now,” he explains. “We are listening, we are caring.”

14Forward’s success has become a rallying point in the community to help the homeless. The message that “if we all work together we will achieve better outcomes” has resonated with all sectors of the community, Bendorf adds.

Muniz is a strong advocate of the program that has turned around the lives for her and her husband. “If anybody doesn’t want to be homeless anymore, this is the best place to go to. They are on it. You don’t have to sit around for a year or two to get housing,” she says. “We’re a family again because of 14Forward.”

Those stories bring a smile to Galicia’s face. “I’m so proud of the people who have come through this program. It warms my heart that we have made such a difference in so many people’s lives.”

Stowes sums up the program in three simple words: “14Forward is hope.”

Conversation with Chaya Galicia regarding 14Forward 13 June 2019

Tell me about the collaboration/consortia that was pulled together to make 14Forward happen.

14Forward was a county driven initiative as a result of an increasing homeless population that had become very visible along the river. The county administrator decided that action needed to be taken and called all of the county agencies and non-profits working with the homeless together in December 2015 to address the gaps in how services were being provided for this population. The two largest gaps were no to low barrier shelters (shelters willing to accept folks with addiction and mental illness issues) and shelters that would accept pets which are the primary source of solace for this population. Tent cities were considered but the county administrator vetoed that concept and looked toward tiny houses.

The county already owned land near the river in Marysville that could be developed rapidly and the county had a funding source as a result of a reserve fund that was built from fines for housing code violations and some other sources of ~\$150K. A decision was made to improve the available land to support "Tuff-shed" houses with electricity and a central water source. The land was graded, aggregate brought in to support the structures and the counties Economic Development Corporation turned loose to publicize the project and solicit funds from various civic organizations to purchase the sheds themselves.

14Forward opened for homeless folks late April into early May 2016. All of the foregoing was accomplished in less than 5 months as a result of being driven by the County Administrator who made sure that every agency in the county was aware of what was expected and the effort was fully committed to by all involved. See lessons learned below for more detail.

During the development phase the county provided the direction, initial funding and governance for the effort. Once the village was established the government is transitioning the project and its management to a non-profit that is part of their Continuum of Care (CoC). Efforts continue through the Economic Development Corp to find funding for additional units.

How does Yuba County intend to use it moving forward in the effort to end homelessness?

Presently they are looking at all available options. They intend to add 5 additional units of supportive housing to 14Forward and are now focusing on building permanent supportive affordable housing. They are exploring other opportunities also such as Accessory Dwelling Units and mobile homes.

Are there any lessons learned/best practices regarding 14Forward

A key lesson learned was to engage the homeless in the process. The county director of human services, the local police chief and Chaya went into the encampments and asked the people to identify who the leaders were in the homeless community and then they had those leaders engage with the county's team to provide guidance as to what would work with those living on the river and provide a trusted means of communicating with that community. (A lesson of "not for me without me")

They also learned that you need to get a "good grip" on what is happening regarding the homeless and all of the stakeholders need to be fully informed of what is transpiring. This includes all of the government agencies involved with homelessness, all the civic groups (i.e. Rotary, Lions, etc.), all of the non-profits serving the homeless and the community in general through Town Hall Meetings and listening sessions. The message they sent to the community at large is "we are going to do this and we want you to help us put it together"

Having all of the county agencies engaged meant that red tape was cut or eliminated. Developing the site and installing the Tuff-shed tiny homes was done quickly as those responsible for zoning and building codes were on board and not creating road blocks.