

NEWS

Homeward Bound

The county makes progress on transitioning people from three encampments to housing.

By Pam Marino

The tiny homes, looking like slatted cubes, started arriving behind a church in Watsonville on Aug. 5, the fruition of over two years of work to give people living in tents along the Pajaro River a warm, dry place to sleep and a stepping stone to future permanent housing. It's just one of three success stories for the County of Monterey in transitioning unhoused people living along the Pajaro and Salinas rivers into homes, using over \$19 million in state encampment resolution funding awarded since 2023.

The Watsonville tiny home village—a partnership between the counties of Monterey and Santa Cruz, the City of Watsonville and the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency—was already in the planning stages in 2023 when the state awarded the project nearly \$8 million, three months after the river's levee was breached, flooding the community of Pajaro and displacing the encampment's residents.

"We housed 11 people effective Aug. 1. That's permanent housing."

The units can temporarily house up to 34 people. Residents will receive supportive services as well as help finding permanent housing. It's scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

"We still have a lot of work to do," said Roxanne Wilson, Monterey County's homeless services director, during a county press briefing on Aug. 6. There are utility line connections to be made, and each unit must be lifted 3 feet off the ground in case of flooding.

Meanwhile in King City, a celebratory groundbreaking took place on July 30 for Casa de Esperanza, the former Days Inn hotel originally slated to

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The Watsonville tiny home village is now under construction behind Westview Presbyterian Church, located near the Pajaro River. The 32 modular units can temporarily house up to 34 people.

become a Homekey project, the state's program to repurpose hotels into permanent supportive housing. When that fell through after developer Shangri-La defaulted on its loans, King City officials stepped up to finish it.

The city purchased the hotel on April 22 for \$4.4 million, immediately signing it over to the Housing Authority of the County of Monterey. A coalition of the city, HACM, county, state and Central California Alliance for Health were able to raise the \$16.7 million needed for the project, including \$6.4 million in encampment resolution funding awarded last year.

When finished, Casa de Esperanza will include 46 studio apartments, supportive services and health care. Meanwhile, the city has been paying for the project's future residents—many of them displaced after a fire along the river in 2022—to live in a nearby hotel.

Soledad received \$4.7 million in encampment funds in 2024. Officials moved 40 people onto an alternative site on city-owned property, where they are camping until a second tiny home village can be built. Wilson said they removed 380 tons of trash and debris from the Soledad encampment in the process. Officials hope to break ground by mid- to late-August on the village.

"Even though people are still experiencing a technically unsheltered provisional site, 25 percent of those individuals have been permanently housed," Wilson said. "We housed 11 people effective Aug. 1. That's permanent housing; we don't expect them to return to homelessness." ★

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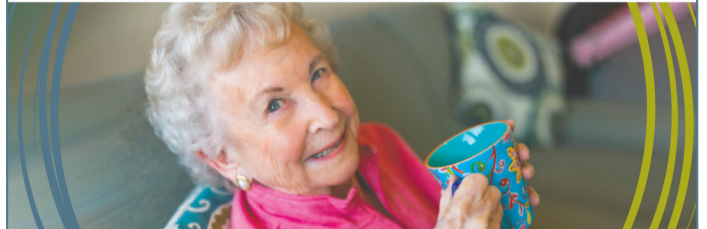


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