

Affordable Housing for the Homeless Supports the Arts

Sacramento, Calif.—Affordable housing provides stability for the homeless. “You first have to get homeless people into housing,” Rachel Iskow, Sacramento | Yolo Mutual Housing Association’s executive director, tells MHN. “Then, with that stability, they can work on the other challenges they have, whether it is a disability or difficulty in finding and maintaining employment.”

The Sacramento-based nonprofit organization followed this model, called “Housing First,” at Mutual Housing at the Highlands, their new completed affordable housing community. According to Iskow, this model has been “enthusiastically embraced” and has “led to more focus on developing permanent housing for the homeless, rather than temporary shelters.”



Made of recycled metal by artist Steve Cook, "Gertie" stands in one of the six courtyards at Mutual Housing at the Highlands, Sacramento, Calif. Courtyards have deciduous shade trees, tables, benches, bike racks and large planters for flowers or vegetables.



Sacramento | Yolo Mutual Housing Association

Transforming Lives...Building Community

Sacramento Mutual Housing Association develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development.

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The Highlands has 90 units, 66 of which are for the homeless. Iskow says these units have rental subsidies, and the other units are fixed rents based on income for people of very modest means.

The community includes studio apartments and three-bedroom apartments. All units have tankless water heaters with ductless heating in the smaller apartments and evaporative coolers in the larger ones, as well as energy-efficient appliances and solar panels. The Highlands is expected to be certified green by Building It Green later in the year.

Community amenities include a kitchen, computer lab and conference room. Additionally, there is a community room that will be used for educational workshops in energy conservation, leadership training, financial management and youth programs.

“Homeless residents also are given help with immediate needs such as getting food, clothing and household goods and medical attention,” Iskow says. “Long-term treatment for mental illness and substance abuse, as well as help getting benefits and job training also is part of the services.”

Mutual Housing is working with other nonprofits to provide services, including Lutheran Social Services of Northern California, The Effort and Turning Point.

“Working with these other nonprofits gave us the confidence to move forward,” Iskow says. “Although this is a new frontier for us, we thought it would be a low-risk venture.”

The Highlands offers many social services, but that doesn’t mean it disregarded aesthetics. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act partially funded the development. And currently, “Gertie,” a giraffe

designed by Sacramento artist Steve Cook and made of recycled metal, stands in one of the Highlands’ courtyards.

“We currently are planning a program for residents that will allow them to work with artists, such as Steve Cook, to create art that speaks to them and their community,” Iskow says. “With their involvement, we hope to bring an innovative spirit of art to the Highlands and other communities.”

For more information on housing, programs and services at Mutual Housing, go to <http://www.mutualhousing.com>.