



Bust those affordable-housing stereotypes

Taking the first step onto a Mutual Housing community in California immediately challenges long held stereotypes of affordable housing. You are first struck by the meticulously maintained native landscapes, clean and well-designed buildings, whimsical public art and children playing on safe and friendly tot lots. Your eyes are drawn upward to the roof-mounted solar panels and cool roofs. This is not the affordable housing your brain had been wired to expect.



New Harmony Mutual Housing Community

Mutual Housing provides monthly public tours of its rental housing communities in Sacramento and Yolo Counties for this very reason—to break stereotypes. The tours also give visitors the opportunity to meet residents whose lives have been transformed by living in mutual housing. Visitors see firsthand how Mutual Housing is bridging divides—the green divide through solar and energy efficiency features, the digital divide through free community-wide internet, and by charging low rents, they are helping to close the divide between those who can afford market rate housing and those who would otherwise be relegated to unsafe housing based on their low household incomes.

The tour of Mutual Housing at Spring Lake highlights the organization's commitment to sustainable building. At many of its communities, Mutual Housing is bridging the green divide for families who would not be able to afford solar panels and the energy-efficient designs needed to produce as much energy as a family uses.

Like most people with low incomes, the agricultural workers who live in the Woodland community had complained that utility costs were the second, after rent, most difficult housing-related bill the resident families worried about paying each month. To meet these concerns, Mutual Housing built its most energy efficient community yet. Mutual Housing at Spring Lake became the first rental community in the nation to be certified zero-net energy by the U.S. Dept. of Energy. Guests who tour the property see rooftops and carports with large solar panels. They also visit resident homes where each is equipped with an easy to read color-coded electricity consumption monitor to help families regulate their energy use.

On all tours of Mutual Housing, guests visit the computer labs where computer literacy is taught. Mutual Housing is intent on closing the digital divide. Many children in low income families fall behind because they lack computers for school work. In Mutual Housing, youth can use the computer labs for homework or research. Some of the labs allow residents to borrow

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops sustainable housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

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Chromebooks for home use. Like all of our communities, Victory Townhomes Mutual Housing Community, the location of our July tour, also has a community room where workshops, and seminars, meetings and community celebrations are held.

New Harmony Mutual Housing Community is one of our greenest communities and is located in the ecologically conscious college town of Davis. This property includes permanent art installations that tour participants enjoy—all made out of repurposed, cast-off metal objects. There is a family of brown metal elephants greeting visitors in the courtyard, a large turtle hanging on display in the community room, a colorful mural on the community garden shed and life-size “people” made from old garden tools and equipment. The art adds whimsy to the hour long tours. Guides also point out that these creations make art accessible to both youth and adult residents who might not regularly visit art galleries and inspire budding artists.

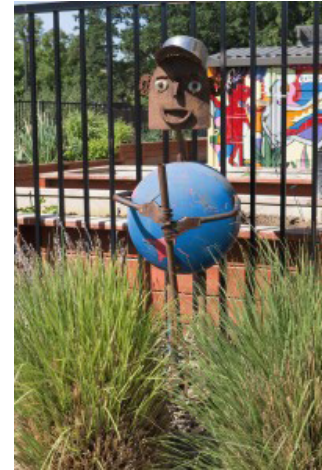
Tours are open to wheelchair-bound guests. While all mutual housing community amenities and some apartments are wheelchair accessible, at New Harmony, all apartments

are either fully accessible or can be easily made so if a wheelchair-bound resident moves in.

The tour of Mutual Housing at River Garden in Sacramento includes a walk around the large urban community farm with individual plots where residents grow fruit, vegetables and flowers. Started by the residents on multi-acre utility easement adjacent to the property, the farm has since been expanded by the City of Sacramento to include plots for neighbors of the property. The tour includes visiting the urban farm and hearing the story of fighting for the right to use vacant underused land—and winning.

Some of the tours, such as the trio of communities in South Sacramento, even show off recent renovations and green upgrades as Mutual Housing continues to make sure their residents live in homes that are healthy, energy efficient, and well-maintained.

Since tours also include resident stories of their lives being transformed since moving into and becoming part of a Mutual Housing community, tours also illustrate how stable, affordable housing can change people’s lives on a daily basis and ultimately, stabilize families.



Repurposed Garden Art