

Converting 99 Palms: Homelessness, Housing & History

Overview

In response to the COVID-19 epidemic, Tulare County galvanized a local effort to purchase and master lease a hotel for permanent homeless housing.

Challenge

Like all communities throughout the State, Tulare County has been faced with the urgent need to ensure the wellbeing of the community, especially the most vulnerable, like the homeless. While the County put to use State resources to provide temporary hotel space and services for the homeless community through Project Roomkey, Tulare County recognized the need to think long-term and come up with a permanent housing solution for this population as a smaller jurisdiction typically without many dedicated resources to utilize.

Solution

Given this challenge, Tulare County recognized it had to leverage all local resources and partnerships available. The County, led by its Homeless Initiatives Program Coordinator, formed an ad hoc coalition including the local housing authority, continuum of care, service providers, and local hotel owners. After identifying a local hotel with great significance to the history of the central valley – the Tagus Ranch site that served as the local agricultural hub during the early 20th century – the County worked out a solution wherein the Housing Authority would front its own capital for rehab and Mainstream Voucher Program vouchers, the Continuum of Care would allocate financing for rehabilitation, permanent vouchers, connection to a Coordinated Entry System for referrals, and operational expenses, and the County would assume a 10-year master lease and provide services on-site, from which the lease will be paid by rents collected from a wide mix of permanent housing homeless programs for the 50-units.

Innovation

This program is innovative because of the unique blend of partnership and resources required. The County has never entered into this agreement for this type of project. Working with the local Housing Authority to leverage their capital financing will allow the County to utilize upcoming Homekey funds for another hotel project, putting the County in position to permanently house more than 10% of the local homeless population, all in the midst of a global pandemic.

Results

Since the master lease was approved by the local board on August 15, the site is currently housing nearly thirty individuals, while the balance of empty units are being prepared for rehabilitation. The County operates on-site services, including Substance Abuse counselors, and is pending a MOU to provide a rotation of health care from a local hospital.

Replicability

This project shows that innovative projects can be implemented without dedicated financing. Even without Homekey funding, the County created a hotel permanent homeless housing project, which will allow the County to now utilize Homekey funding at a different site and replicate this initiative.

Project or Program Contact

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