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In Their Own Words: Californians' Journeys From Encampments to Housing



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Executive Summary

Unsheltered homelessness, including addressing the needs of people living in encampments, is one of the most visible and urgent challenges facing communities across the country.

In California, home to nearly one-third of the nation's homeless population, nearly two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered, living in places not meant for human habitation like the streets, cars, tents or abandoned buildings. In response, federal and state governments have made unprecedented investments through initiatives like the State of California's Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF) and HUD's Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity (SNOFO). These funding streams were designed to give communities targeted resources to respond to encampments in ways that are humane, effective, and lead to permanent housing outcomes.

This study examines how encampment resolution strategies are being implemented across four diverse California communities that received ERF and SNOFO funding, and, critically, how those strategies are experienced by the people most directly affected.



Through interviews with encampment residents and system leaders, document review, and analysis of local data, this research explores:

1. What strategies are communities using to address the permanent housing needs of people living in encampments?
2. What strategies are emerging as most impactful?
3. What are the perceived barriers to implementing these strategies?

Homebase partnered with four California Continuums of Care, who together represent more than half of the state's total unsheltered population: Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties. The study draws on 45 interviews with system leaders and service providers before and after encampment closures, 80 interviews on-site at nine different encampment, interim or permanent housing locations conducted before, during, and after encampment closures, review of local policies and funding applications, HMIS data analysis, and national best-practice frameworks.

Across communities, system leaders and service providers identified a set of promising strategies associated with improved outcomes and getting people on the path to permanent housing. These included coordinated cross-system partnerships, sustained and individualized outreach and engagement, strategic use of funding and flexibility, practical and transparent encampment protocols, and response structures that balance short- and long-term solutions. At the same time, providers reported shared barriers that constrained impact, including severe shortages in interim and permanent housing, a mismatch between the available housing type and the residents' needs, funding volatility and workforce instability, fragmented data and coordination, gaps in supportive services, and growing tensions between best practices and an increased pressure to enforce camping bans and criminalize unsheltered homelessness.

Across geographies and program models, resident experiences provided additional context and added critical depth to the system leader perspectives, ultimately converging around seven core themes that shape participation in encampment resolution and the likelihood of successful housing outcomes.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Residents emphasized that timely, accurate, and consistent information about closure timelines, housing options and expectations is fundamental to gaining trust.



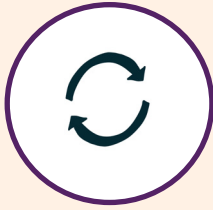
2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

Many residents come to the housing conversation with a history of broken promises, displacement and lost belongings. Outreach teams build engagement by showing this effort is different through consistent follow-through and tangible results.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Residents expressed a strong desire for transparent criteria to determine who was offered housing and a seat at the table to make program-wide decisions.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Residents often encountered fragmented services, unclear or inconsistent eligibility rules, and gaps in follow-up, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Access to documentation assistance, transportation, healthcare and employment support was particularly critical during transitions from encampment to housing.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

While residents consistently valued the safety and stability of being indoors, many described interim housing environments as overly restrictive, institutional or lacking basic amenities. Privacy, reasonable rules, and spaces that felt appropriate for an autonomous adult were central to resident's sense of success.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

The way in which closures were carried out affected resident perception and willingness to engage, sometimes as much as the housing offer itself.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Residents viewed interim housing as a foundation, not an endpoint. Moving inside from an encampment should be viewed as the first, foundational step on a supportive path to permanent housing, but continued case management, supportive services, and assistance are essential to long-term success.

Encampments are a visible manifestation of economic and system failures. However, as this report finds, they also offer a critical point of engagement for people who are often disconnected from services and provide an opportunity to make inroads and gain trust with an expansive community of people. This report offers a rare look at how communities are leveraging encampment resolution efforts to make connections, build trust, move people indoors, and advance pathways to permanent housing. It also suggests that that pathway to individual success is rarely linear, but instead is built through many small, incremental steps. This study identifies key takeaways from system leaders and encampment residents about the effective design and implementation of programs and funding structures to recognize, support and sustain this reality.



Introduction

This section includes an overview of unsheltered homelessness in California, background on encampments, existing frameworks and strategies for encampment resolution, and our study design and methods.

Overview

Unsheltered homelessness in California

Unsheltered homelessness remains one of the most visible and urgent dimensions of the homelessness crisis in California and across the United States. According to the 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, unsheltered homelessness increased by 17 percent between 2022 and 2024, while the total number of people experiencing homelessness rose by 18 percent overall. During the same period, the nation's inventory of year-round emergency shelter beds increased by about 8 percent, reflecting system expansion that has not kept pace with rising need.¹

In California—which accounted for nearly one-third of all people experiencing homelessness in the United States—approximately 66% of the unhoused population were unsheltered, the highest of any state.² California also has far fewer shelter beds relative to the number of people experiencing homelessness than many other large states; there are still roughly three homeless individuals for every available shelter bed.³

The high rates of unsheltered homelessness in California represent a humanitarian emergency and a growing challenge for state and local governments, service systems, and communities.

Impacts on individuals and communities

The human and social costs of unsheltered homelessness are significant. People living outdoors experience markedly higher rates of chronic disease, serious mental illness, and

substance use disorders than those who are sheltered.⁴ Moreover, unsheltered individuals often face limited access to basic hygiene facilities and healthcare services, greater exposure to violence, weather extremes and infectious disease, and substantially shorter life expectancy.⁵

From a community and system perspective, unsheltered homelessness is associated with significant social and economic costs. Public healthcare and emergency systems often bear the brunt of unmanaged health conditions among people living outdoors, with substantially higher rates of emergency-department use, hospital admissions, and other intensive services compared with housed populations.⁶ At the same time, community-level impacts include diminished walkability and public-space quality, increased demand on policing, sanitation and public works for managing encampments, and can include effects on neighborhood safety and property values.⁷ Taken together, the visible presence of unsheltered homelessness is not only an individual-level humanitarian concern—it is a systemic challenge requiring substantial cross-sector coordination and investment.


Policy and funding landscape

In recent years, both federal and state governments have directed unprecedented attention and resources toward addressing unsheltered homelessness and encampments. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity (SNOFO) to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness (2022) allocated \$415 million nationwide to support outreach, data integration, and housing-focused strategies for people living unsheltered.⁸

This initiative marked a significant policy shift toward coordinated, housing-first approaches for encampments.

In California, the Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) program—administered by the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH) and the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)—has provided nearly \$1 billion in grants since 2021 to help local jurisdictions implement housing-focused encampment resolution projects.² ERF funds support outreach, interim housing, and permanent housing connections for residents of specific encampments, emphasizing collaboration and person-centered planning. **Appendix A: Funding Streams** provides an overview of the various funding sources leveraged, including details on the administering agency, primary eligible uses, and relevance to encampment resolution.

These investments have spurred communities across California to pilot and expand locally tailored approaches—ranging from intensive outreach and targeted housing placements to enhanced interagency coordination and infrastructure improvements. At the same time, they underscore persistent challenges: the scale of unsheltered homelessness relative to available affordable housing, ensuring sustained funding, aligning systems and partners, and building an evidence base to understand which strategies are most effective in helping people move from encampments into stable housing. As a result, communities continue to face tradeoffs in how far current investments can move people from encampments into stable housing without broader structural and housing-market changes.



Purpose of this research

This period of rapid policy and practice evolution presents a rare opportunity to learn from communities in real time. This research examines how encampment resolution strategies are being implemented across diverse California communities, and what approaches, from the perspective of people with lived experience, are most effective in supporting transitions from unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by examining encampment resolution strategies across four California counties. Through interviews with homeless systems leadership, engagement with individuals actively experiencing unsheltered homelessness in encampments, and review of local administrative data, the research explores what approaches to encampment resolution are most effective from the perspective of those closest to the issue.

Background

Historical context

Homeless encampments are not a new phenomenon in the United States. “Hoovervilles” proliferated during the Great Depression as ad-hoc settlements amid widespread unemployment and housing scarcity, reflecting the intersection of economic hardship, limited affordable housing, and constrained public assistance.¹⁰ Their persistence over time suggests that encampments emerge from a combination of contributing factors—economic, social, and policy-related—that shape how communities experience and respond to homelessness in different eras.

In the modern context, the visibility of encampments has grown alongside rising rates of unsheltered homelessness, reflecting the interaction of housing scarcity, economic insecurity, and evolving public space governance.¹¹ Persistent shortages of affordable housing, wages that lag behind housing costs, and limited income supports for adults with dependent children constrain pathways out of homelessness, even amid expanded programmatic investment.^{12,13} Within this context, legal and policy frameworks—from early vagrancy laws to contemporary rulings such as *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* (2024)—continue to influence where and how encampments form, persist, or are resolved.

Drivers, dynamics, and community responses

Encampments often arise where people have no viable housing or safe shelter options and seek safety, autonomy, and community. They are visible expressions of the increasing rates of unsheltered homelessness across the United States.¹⁴ During COVID-19, federal public-health guidance advised against clearing encampments without alternative housing because dispersal can worsen disease spread—another factor that shaped local practices and encampment visibility in 2020–2021.¹⁵

Research and federal syntheses consistently identify severe shortages of affordable housing as the primary structural driver of unsheltered homelessness.¹⁶ Housing-market evidence shows that higher rents and low vacancy rates are strongly associated with higher homelessness, underscoring the structural nature of encampment growth in high-cost regions.¹⁷

While cost of housing is a key contributing factor, research and practice also point to a range of non-housing drivers that influence how and where encampments form. Encampment residents frequently cite barriers within shelter systems—such as curfews, restrictions on partners, pets, and belongings, or concerns about safety and privacy—as reasons for remaining outdoors rather than entering congregate shelters.¹⁸ Some residents experience barriers within institutional systems—including health care, behavioral health, and the criminal legal system—that limit their ability to access or sustain housing.¹⁹ Encampments can also serve as informal communities that offer stability, social connection, and mutual support for people who may feel disconnected from mainstream service systems.²⁰

Mental and behavioral health challenges also intersect with homelessness in complex ways. Untreated or undertreated mental illness, substance use disorders, and trauma can make it more difficult for individuals to maintain stable housing, navigate service systems, or comply with housing program requirements. For example, a recent meta-analysis found that approximately 67% of people experiencing homelessness had a current mental health disorder and 77% a lifetime prevalence of mental health disorders.²¹ These rates are substantially higher than those observed in the general population, where estimates in high-income countries suggest that approximately 17 to 25% of adults have a current mental disorder and 29 to 48% have a lifetime diagnosis.²² These differences reflect both higher underlying vulnerability among people experiencing homelessness and longstanding structural barriers, including limited access to consistent behavioral health care for people living in poverty. Additionally, individuals experiencing homelessness may develop or experience worsening mental health symptoms because of prolonged housing instability, exposure to violence, and the stress of living unsheltered.²³

Policy and enforcement dynamics also play an important role in the development, persistence, and visibility of encampments. Local governments vary widely in their approaches to managing public space, balancing health and safety concerns with civil rights and humanitarian considerations. The 2024 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* affirmed the authority of jurisdictions to enforce camping bans even when shelter is limited, a ruling that is reshaping how many communities respond to unsheltered homelessness. Some jurisdictions have increased enforcement or clearance activity, while others have maintained a focus on outreach and voluntary relocation efforts.²⁴

Taken together, these factors highlight that homelessness—and the emergence of encampments—results from many intersecting influences. Structural conditions such as housing affordability combine with individual circumstances, service system barriers, health challenges, and local policy approaches to shape where and how people experience homelessness. Recognizing this complexity provides important context for understanding encampments and informs efforts to develop coordinated and responsive strategies.

Frameworks for coordinated encampment resolution

Recent national frameworks and prior federal guidance encourage coordinated, housing-focused approaches to encampment resolution.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness's (USICH) *19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively* (2024) outlines key principles of equity, collaboration, data-use, crisis-response, housing and support, and prevention.²⁵

The UCSF Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative (BHHI) *Encampment Resolution Guide* (2024) builds on these priorities, providing a framework for local governments and service systems.²⁶ It describes a multi-system process that includes outreach and engagement, individualized housing planning, inter-agency coordination, and post-move stabilization supports designed to reduce risk of re-encampment.

Similarly, the National Alliance to End Homelessness's *Housing-Focused Street Outreach Framework* (2025) defines outreach as a housing-driven, system-integrated practice that emphasizes person-centered engagement, cross-system collaboration, data-informed action, and equitable, trauma-informed care to connect unsheltered people directly to permanent housing.²⁷

Together, these frameworks represent a growing consensus that durable solutions to unsheltered homelessness depend on both adequate housing resources and coordinated, person-centered implementation across systems of care. See **Appendix B: Strategies Crosswalk** for more details on the shared strategic elements across these three frameworks.

Evidence on encampment resolution strategies

Although these frameworks offer valuable guidance, empirical research on how encampment resolution strategies are implemented and what outcomes they produce remains limited. Few studies have evaluated how local efforts translate these principles into practice or measured their effectiveness in moving people from encampments into permanent housing. Research to date is often descriptive, single-site, or qualitative in nature.

For example, Abt Associates' Los Angeles studies document how local policies and operational practices for encampment resolutions unfolded in 2023-2024, including outreach intensity, site stabilization, and housing pathways, while noting implementation challenges and mixed progress.²⁸ RAND's work following unsheltered residents across three Los Angeles neighborhoods adds year-over-year insights into needs, service engagement, and system dynamics in encampment contexts.²⁹ Other studies highlight that involuntary displacement ("sweeps") of encampments may increase health harms, rather than improve outcomes; a model projecting outcomes found increased mortality and hospitalizations under continuous displacement scenarios.³⁰

The evidence base on which strategies work, for whom, under what conditions, and at what scale remains underdeveloped.

This study contributes to that evolving knowledge base with a descriptive examination of how encampment resolution strategies are experienced and implemented on the ground. Through the perspectives of people directly affected—both residents and practitioners—it aims to deepen understanding of how these efforts take shape in practice and what they reveal about system strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.



Study design and methods

Study goals and guiding questions

This study was designed to document and analyze strategies used by California communities to resolve encampments and connect unsheltered residents to permanent housing. The research aims to identify which approaches are most impactful, how they are implemented in practice, and what barriers communities face in deploying them effectively.

The study was guided by the following questions:

- 1 What strategies are communities using to address the permanent housing needs of people living in encampments?
- 2 What strategies are emerging as most impactful in addressing the permanent housing needs of people living in encampments?
- 3 What are the perceived barriers to implementing these strategies effectively?

To explore these questions, Homebase partnered with four California Continuums of Care (CoCs) that received Supplemental NOFO (SNOFO) funding—Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, and Santa Clara Counties. The study focused on capturing the perspectives of people with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with residents of encampments in each community.

To understand the broader policy and operational context, the research team also conducted interviews with system and service leaders—including outreach supervisors, program administrators, and local government staff—about the design and implementation of encampment resolution strategies. These qualitative data were complemented by a review of local policies, program documents, and implementation approaches to understand how strategies were developed and applied across different contexts.

In addition, Homebase analyzed Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data from the City of Berkeley to trace the paths of encampment residents over time, providing a quantitative perspective on system engagement and housing outcomes. By drawing on insights from both residents and system partners, the study aims to illuminate how encampment resolution strategies are taking shape on the ground and to identify lessons that can inform more equitable, effective pathways from encampments to permanent housing statewide.

Data collection methods

The study employed multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to capture both lived experience and system implementation perspectives.

- 1 Interviews with system and service providers.**

Local government staff, outreach teams, housing navigators, and nonprofit partners were interviewed to understand encampment resolution strategies, processes, coordination, partnerships, funding, and implementation. 45 interviews were conducted throughout the study period.
- 2 Fieldwork and interviews with unsheltered residents.**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on-site at encampments, interim housing programs, and permanent housing sites. In Oakland (Alameda County) and Los Angeles County, encampment residents were interviewed both at encampments and at the housing locations where they were placed after resolution. In Berkeley (Alameda County), Santa Clara, and Contra Costa Counties, former encampment residents were interviewed at bridge or interim housing sites only. Homebase also conducted fieldwork at an active encampment in Contra Costa County just prior to its resolution. In total, the team conducted 80 resident interviews across all sites (see **Table 1: Encampment Engagement Summary**).
- 3 Document review.**

Local reports, policy documents, and funding applications were reviewed to contextualize site activities and strategies.
- 4 Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data analysis (Berkeley).**

Administrative data from 2021 to 2025 were analyzed to trace encampment residents' system interactions and housing outcomes over time, providing a quantitative view of encampment inflows and outflows. In total, 201 encampment residents across 5 encampments were included in the HMIS analysis. Analysis of 2,774 service interactions and 3,290 program enrollments helped illuminate the connection between HMIS interaction and housing journey success. See Appendix C: Berkeley Quantitative Case Study.

Table 1. Encampment Engagement Summary

Encampment				Homebase engagement		
County	City	Site	Engagement location(s)	# visits completed	# residents engaged	# interviews conducted
Alameda	Oakland	Mosswood Park	Mosswood Park, Mandela House	4	11	23
		East 12th Median	East 12th Median, Mandela House	2	6	6
	Berkeley	2nd Street	Capri Hotel	1	10	10
		People's Park	University Homes	1	5	5
Los Angeles	West Rancho Dominguez	Redondo Blvd	Redondo Blvd, Parkside Inn	2	7	8
	El Monte	El Monte Waterways	El Monte Waterways, Heritage Hotel	2	5	7
Santa Clara	San Jose	Various	Via Del Oro	1	7	7
Contra Costa	Richmond	Various	Rodeway Inn	1	10	10
		29th and Hoffman	29th and Hoffman	1	4	4

Site selection and description of participating counties

Homebase partnered with four California Continuums of Care (CoCs) that received HUD's Supplemental NOFO (SNOFO) funding: Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, and Los Angeles Counties. The selected CoCs reflect the geographic and programmatic diversity of California, which is home to roughly half of all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the United States. Together, these communities represent 55% of California's total unsheltered population and 90% of the state's total Supplemental NOFO award, offering a representative view of strategies emerging from the national epicenter of unsheltered homelessness.³¹ Across these four CoCs, the research team conducted fieldwork at nine sites, including both encampments along with interim and permanent housing locations connected to encampment closures. Several sites were studied longitudinally, with visits conducted before and after closure to document implementation and resident outcomes over time.

Participant demographics and recruitment

Encampment residents were recruited using a non-probability sampling approach, combining purposive sampling through outreach worker and city staff referrals with convenience and self-selection through direct field engagement. In some cases, outreach workers facilitated introductions; in others, residents volunteered to participate when approached. Interviews were conducted in outdoor or interim or permanent housing settings, with participants' informed consent and assurance of confidentiality. Participants represented a range of ages, genders, racial and ethnic identities, and lengths of time experiencing homelessness.

Analytical approach

Qualitative data from interviews and field notes were coded thematically using an iterative process to identify key patterns across sites. Codes reflected both the study's research questions and emergent themes from the field, such as engagement practices, coordination challenges, and equity considerations. Interviews with system and service leadership were used not only to contextualize resident findings, but also to inform the development of interview protocols and lines of inquiry with encampment residents—helping ensure that questions reflected local priorities, operational realities, and system design considerations.

Findings were synthesized into case studies for each site, allowing for cross-county comparison and identification of promising practices. Throughout the qualitative analysis, the research team drew on existing frameworks—particularly the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness's *19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively* (2024), the UCSF Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative's *Encampment Resolution Guide* (2024), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness's *Housing-Focused Street Outreach Framework* (2025)—as analytic guideposts. These frameworks informed how outcomes were interpreted, with particular attention to the strategies identified as effective in promoting housing-focused, person-centered approaches. **Appendix B: Strategies Crosswalk** summarizes the shared strategic elements across the three frameworks, including a detailed crosswalk of their overlapping principles and application within this study.

Quantitative analysis of HMIS data from Berkeley focused on encampment residents' trajectories—tracking client inflows and outflows, service utilization, and housing outcomes (see **Appendix C: Berkeley Quantitative Case Study** for more details).

By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the study aimed to triangulate findings and develop a comprehensive understanding of encampment resolution implementation and effectiveness.

Study limitations

This study is primarily descriptive and exploratory in nature. Fieldwork provided snapshots of encampment resolution efforts rather than comprehensive or generalizable accounts. Across nine sites in four Continuums of Care, visits captured different points in time—some before closures, others after, and a few multiple times—yielding partial but illustrative perspectives on how strategies were implemented and experienced. Because participation was voluntary and sampling non-random, the views represented here reflect those who chose to engage and may not capture the full range of experiences among encampment residents or practitioners.

The HMIS analysis was limited to data from the City of Berkeley, constraining opportunities for cross-site quantitative comparison and analytic generalizability. Analyses were descriptive rather than causal, designed to identify broad patterns and contextual relationships rather than estimate effect sizes or causal mechanisms. Data completeness and consistency also presented challenges: variation in entry practices, missing or miscoded fields, and possible underreporting of unsheltered service contacts may introduce bias or measurement error.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a rare multi-county snapshot of encampment resolution in practice and offers actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve housing outcomes for unsheltered residents.



System leaders and practitioner perspectives

Homebase conducted 45 interviews with system and service provider leadership across the four counties to better understand how each community is approaching encampment resolution. This section covers key themes from these interviews.

Overview

Homebase conducted 45 interviews with system and service provider leadership across four counties—Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, and Santa Clara—to better understand how each community is approaching encampment resolution. These conversations explored how local systems are structured, what strategies communities believe will lead to success, and the challenges that continue to impede progress.

Alameda, Los Angeles, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara Counties have each engaged in encampment response for multiple years, with shared goals but distinct implementation models. While all emphasize coordinated outreach and housing-focused outcomes, the counties differ in scale, degree of centralization, the role of law enforcement and public works, the use of interim housing, and how encampment resolution fits within broader prevention and housing strategies. These differences shape how encampment resolution efforts operate in practice across contexts.

Insights from these interviews provided critical context for our subsequent fieldwork, allowing the research team to understand local decision-making environments, interagency coordination structures, and system-level dynamics before engaging directly with encampment sites and frontline staff.

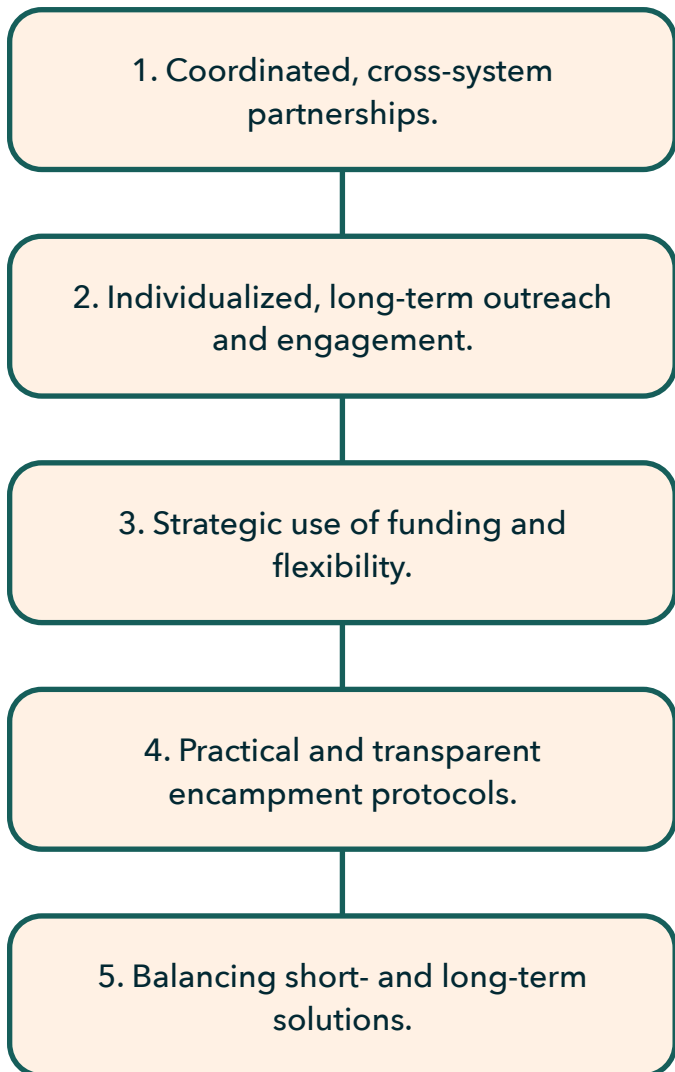
This section summarizes key themes that emerged—highlighting both the promising strategies communities are implementing and the persistent barriers that continue to shape their efforts to resolve encampments and sustain housing outcomes.

Interview participants

Interview participants represented a diverse cross-section of system leaders and practitioners engaged in encampment resolution efforts, including:

- 3 Coordinated Entry Leads
- 1 City Housing Manager
- 1 representative from a City Manager's Office
- 9 City staff supporting encampment resolution work
- 3 County staff supporting encampment resolution work
- 1 Encampment Data Lead
- 2 ERF subcontractors
- 4 Grantee Leads for ERF-funded projects
- 8 Grantee Leads for SNOFO-funded projects
- 3 HMIS Administrators or Data Leads

Promising strategies



1. Coordinated, cross-system partnerships.

Interview participants consistently highlighted collaboration and coordination as central to success. Effective encampment resolution requires communication across multiple systems—housing, health, behavioral health, law enforcement, public works, and parks—alongside community-based organizations and outreach providers.

Multi-departmental meetings, joint response teams, and clear division of roles were cited as best practices that prevent duplication and allow communities to mobilize quickly. City-County partnerships were described as “foundational,” with leaders noting that misalignment between jurisdictions often results in fragmented services and worse outcomes for residents.

2. Individualized, long-term outreach and engagement.

Across all regions, outreach workers emphasized the importance of sustained, relationship-based engagement—particularly with people who have been unsheltered long term or have high service needs. Successful efforts rely on highly trained teams using trauma-informed and population-specific approaches.

Consistent with the findings below, communities that invested in consistent, individualized engagement reported stronger housing outcomes and fewer re-encampments. Interview participants underscored that “going the extra mile in the short term reduces need in the long term,” especially when outreach staff are equipped to address the holistic needs of clients, including health, employment, and community connection.



3. Strategic use of funding and flexibility.

While all interviewees agreed that funding remains insufficient to meet need, they pointed to flexible local resources—such as general funds or local measure dollars—as critical tools for filling gaps left by more rigid state and federal streams. Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF) dollars were described as catalytic, helping communities pilot new, lower-barrier shelter models and build momentum for system change. Interview participants identified flexible funding as essential for creative, person-centered problem solving and for sustaining the workforce needed to carry out this work. HUD Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity (SNOFO) funding was highlighted as a unique opportunity to focus resources on encampment strategies such as increasing the capacity of client engagement teams, because other funding sources are highly competitive and prioritized for permanent housing.

4. Practical and transparent encampment protocols.

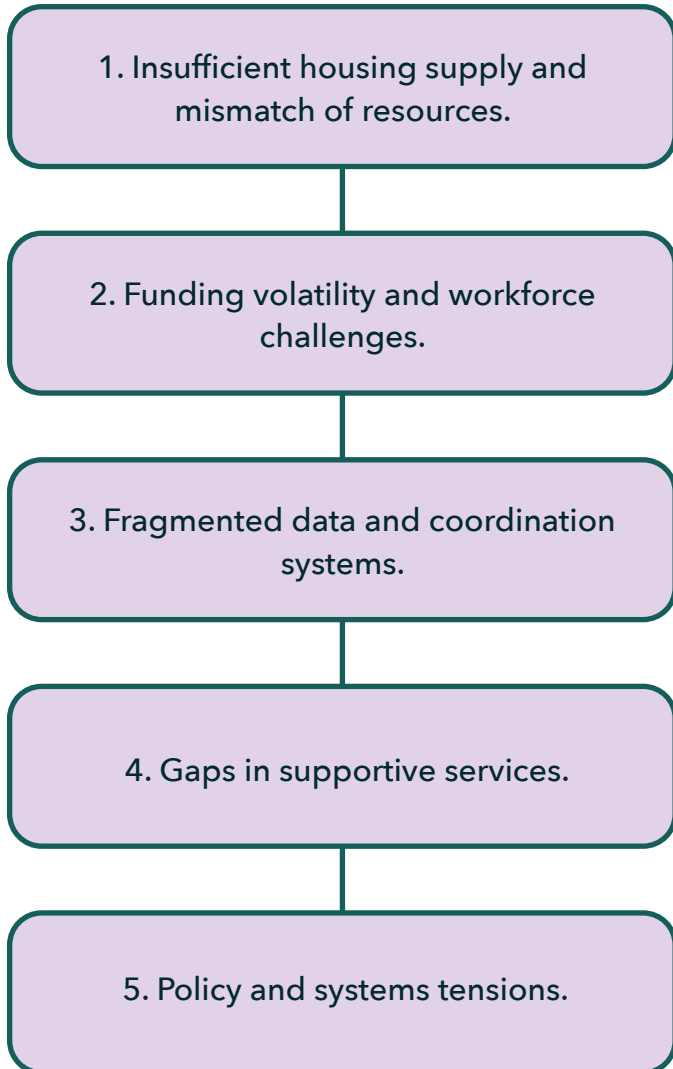
Several communities have developed structured, transparent approaches to encampment management—balancing compassion with public safety considerations related to the use of shared public spaces. Clear protocols outlining notice periods, outreach timelines, and relocation supports were viewed as essential to preserving dignity while maintaining accountability.

Leaders emphasized the importance of dedicating housing and services to specific encampment populations to ensure meaningful follow-through. When paired with “care first” policies and clear communication, these protocols were seen as an effective way to reduce harm and promote stability.

5. Balancing short- and long-term solutions.

Respondents described the need for strategies that address immediate safety and engagement needs while also investing in long-term housing supply. Rapid exit (for example, housing problem solving) interventions were seen as effective short-term tools, but their success depends on availability of permanent housing and supportive services to prevent returns to homelessness.

Persistent barriers



1. Insufficient housing supply and mismatch of resources.

Interview participants overwhelmingly identified the lack of both interim and permanent housing as the greatest obstacle to progress. Many noted a mismatch between client needs and available housing types—such as rapid rehousing placements for people who require permanent supportive housing—and emphasized that without expanding the overall housing stock, encampment resolutions will remain temporary fixes.

2. Funding volatility and workforce challenges.

Communities described the funding landscape as unstable, fragmented, and administratively burdensome. Many are “patch-working” multiple grants to sustain programs year to year, leaving outreach, shelter, and housing teams vulnerable to turnover. Leaders stressed the need for sustained funding, competitive wages, and ongoing workforce development to maintain skilled staff and service continuity.

3. Fragmented data and coordination systems.

Data sharing across jurisdictions remains limited, hindering the ability to track outcomes, monitor returns to homelessness, or coordinate across county lines. Interviewees also noted that people often move between counties when seeking safety or opportunity, highlighting the need for regional collaboration and consistent data practices.

4. Gaps in supportive services.

While many communities have built strong outreach and housing pipelines, post-housing services—particularly for residents placed in rapid rehousing—often lag behind. Interview participants cited a need for individualized, ongoing support, particularly for residents with mental health, substance use, or chronic health conditions whose needs may exceed the time-limited supports.



5. Policy and systems tensions.

Interview participants described ongoing tension between the imperative to protect the rights and dignity of unsheltered residents and the pressures faced by cities to enforce public safety and health standards. Several stressed that closures should only occur alongside viable housing options and coordinated service plans, warning that enforcement-first approaches risk deepening mistrust and displacement.

Overall perspectives

System leaders and practitioners across all four counties expressed cautious optimism. They believe that current strategies—when coordinated, funded, and scaled appropriately—can effectively resolve encampments and sustain exits to permanent housing. Yet the path forward requires durable funding, expanded housing options, regional coordination, and a skilled, supported workforce.

“What we’re doing works to solve homelessness—it just isn’t scaled to the need.”

- Interview participant



Encampment resident findings

This section includes four in-depth case studies from across the four counties that Homebase conducted research in: Alameda, Los Angeles, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa.

Overview



Homebase conducted 80 interviews with 65 individuals who were either currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness, or who had recently moved indoors.

These semi-structured interviews explored residents' trust and engagement with outreach teams, the amount and transparency of notice and support they received before encampment closures, and their safety, comfort and satisfaction during and after relocation to shelter or housing.

Working with City and County partners across the four subject counties, Homebase identified encampments marked for closure where dedicated shelter or housing was available for residents.

Wherever possible, Homebase conducted repeat interviews with the same individuals—first at the encampment prior to and during closure, and again afterward at the interim housing site.

Findings from these interviews are organized by city, as encampment responses are primarily shaped by local policies and practices. Each city is grouped within its respective county, and each county section begins with an overview of the county's overall and homeless populations, along with a summary of its homelessness response system.

Within each county, cities are introduced individually. Each city section opens with background information on the city, details about its homelessness response system, an overview of encampment closure policies and strategies, and a summary of related funding and implementation efforts.

Following the city overview, individual encampments are described in detail. Each encampment profile begins with a description and history of the site, including—where available—demographic information about residents. The narrative then outlines the closure process, including the reasons for closure, the intended approach, and coordination efforts among relevant agencies and stakeholders.

The remainder of each encampment section presents resident feedback on the encampment resolution process. This feedback is organized consistently across all sites.



The **Outreach** section details the history and duration of outreach efforts at the site, the level of trust developed between residents and outreach workers, and, where available, the specific services provided. The **Engagement** section explores how effectively outreach workers met residents' needs and how residents perceived their interactions with both city staff and outreach teams. Particular attention is given to levels of trust and clarity of communication before, during, and after the closure process.

The **Concerns** section highlights key challenges identified by residents, including issues with closure procedures and barriers to connecting with interim or permanent housing. Finally, the **Housing connections** section describes residents' experiences transitioning to new interim housing sites.

Each city's section concludes with a **Summary of feedback**, which synthesizes the recurring themes and lessons described in the previous sections. These findings are consistently organized across seven key themes.

Key themes



Clear, consistent communication builds trust.



Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.



Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.



Reliable service access and coordination matter.



Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.



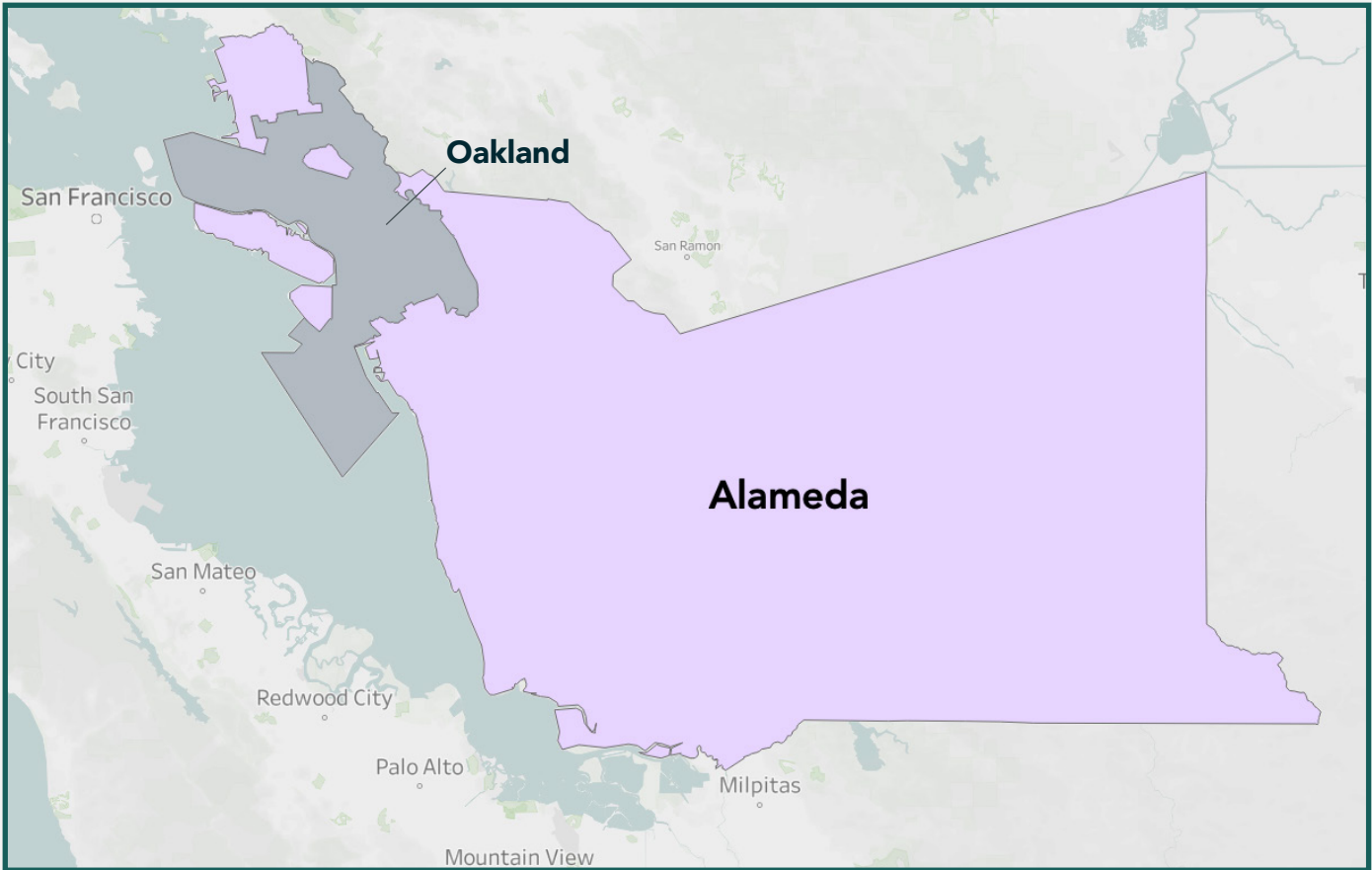
Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.



Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.



Oakland (Alameda County)



Alameda County

Alameda County, located in the eastern San Francisco Bay Area, is home to more than 1.6 million residents and a strong regional economy anchored in technology, education, and healthcare.³² Median household income exceeds the national average, but housing costs have risen far faster than wages, creating severe affordability challenges.³³ The average monthly rent exceeds \$2,600, and typical home payments exceed \$5,900, up more than 80 percent since 2020.³⁴

Over 61,000 low-income renter households lack access to affordable housing, and most extremely low-income households spend more than half their income on rent. These pressures have contributed to one of the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in California, particularly visible in Oakland and Berkeley, where encampments and displacement reflect deepening economic disparities.³⁵

On a single night in January 2024, about 9,450 people were experiencing homelessness in Alameda County, with more than two-thirds living unsheltered.³⁶ Although overall numbers declined slightly from prior years, chronic homelessness increased by 40 percent since 2022 and over 80% of those surveyed have been homeless for more than a year. Alarming, first-time homelessness is rising sharply—57% of people counted in 2024 were experiencing homelessness for the first time, up from 31% in 2019.³⁷ The County’s Home Together 2026 plan seeks to address these trends through coordinated strategies to expand affordable housing, strengthen prevention and re-housing programs, and align local and regional resources toward a shared goal of ending homelessness. For this study, Homebase focused on two cities within Alameda County—Berkeley and Oakland—where ongoing encampment resolution efforts illustrate the county’s broader challenges and emerging strategies.

City of Oakland

Oakland, the largest city in Alameda County, is home to more than 425,000 residents, over half of whom identify as people of color, including 29% Hispanic/Latinx and 21% Black/African American.³⁸ Despite its economic and cultural vitality, 14% of residents live below the poverty line,³⁹ and rising housing costs and displacement pressures have made Oakland the epicenter of the county’s homelessness crisis, accounting for 58% of Alameda County’s homeless population.⁴⁰ In 2024, the city recorded 3,659 unsheltered and 1,826 sheltered individuals, with Black residents representing more than half of those experiencing homelessness—a stark indicator of ongoing racial inequities.⁴¹

58%

of Alameda County’s homeless population lives in Oakland.

Homelessness response system

Oakland’s homelessness response is coordinated with the Alameda County Continuum of Care (CoC) and delivered by a network of city departments, county agencies, and nonprofit organizations, including Bay Area Community Services (BACS), Operation Dignity, East Oakland Community Project (EOCP), and Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS). Together, these partners operate across the full spectrum of response—from prevention and diversion to interim and permanent housing.

The City’s prevention work is anchored in Keep People Housed, a program providing short-term financial assistance, legal services, and case management to help residents avoid eviction. Oakland also maintains a variety of interim housing options, including Community Cabins, RV Safe Parking sites, congregate and non-congregate shelters, and transitional housing, all designed to reduce barriers by allowing pets, partners, and possessions. Long-term efforts center on permanent supportive housing, with more than \$98 million invested through the Homekey and Rapid Response Homeless Housing (R2H2) programs to create over 400 units through motel conversions and modular construction.

Policy evolution and encampment strategy

Oakland’s approach to encampments has shifted over the past five years—from management and harm reduction toward stricter enforcement and abatement.

The Encampment Management Policy (EMP), adopted in 2020, “seeks to address the adverse health and safety impacts of unsheltered homelessness, with compassion and care to not criminalize poverty” by categorizing “high sensitivity” areas (parks, schools, emergency routes) and establishing notice and shelter-offer requirements prior to closure. The EMP coordinated 13 city departments under an Encampment Management Team (EMT) to oversee hygiene, cleanups, and service connections.

In 2024, Executive Order 2024-1 accelerated implementation of the EMP, authorizing shorter notice periods—sometimes same-day for urgent safety threats—and allowing closures even when shelter capacity was limited. This move reflected the increased attention and scrutiny surrounding unsheltered homelessness following the *Grants Pass v. Johnson* ruling, and pressure on elected officials and system leaders to respond to encampments differently, while still prioritizing shelter offers when possible.⁴²

In 2025, a proposed Encampment Abatement Policy (EAP) sought to replace the EMP with a framework focused on complete site removal rather than management.⁴³ The proposal would expand enforcement zones, relax shelter requirements, and establish penalties for re-encampment—reflecting increasing political pressure to restore public spaces.

Advocates have expressed concern that this shift may reduce service engagement and conflict with state and federal housing-first guidance, but the policy remained under deliberation at the time of this study.

Funding and implementation

Oakland’s homelessness response is supported by multiple state and local funding streams. In 2024, the City and County jointly secured \$7.2 million from the Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3) to address large encampments at Mosswood Park, East 12th Street, and Martin Luther King Jr. Way. The project emphasized coordinated outreach, trauma-informed engagement, interim hotel placements, and permanent housing through Homekey projects—Imperial Inn, Quality Inn, and Dignity Village—totaling 190 deeply affordable units.

These efforts leveraged more than \$67 million in local, county, and state funds. The City of Oakland provided \$60,000 for street outreach, \$252,223 for analysts supporting program administration, and \$92,336 for staff in coordination with outreach teams to support connecting the identified population to permanent housing. Alameda County provided \$1,200,000 in direct staff costs for housing navigation support. The State of California contributed more than \$65 million in funding for 3 Homekey projects, which funded acquisition and rehab of two hotels and modular construction on a city-owned lot.

In addition, HHAP-5 allocations provided \$28 million in 2024 to expand interim sheltering, rapid rehousing, outreach, and prevention:

- Rapid Rehousing - \$3.75 million
- Prevention and Diversion - \$0.75 million
- Delivery of Permanent and Innovative Housing - \$1 million
- Interim Sheltering - \$16.97 million
- Street Outreach - \$3.7 million

Further support from HHAP-6 (2026-2029) added another \$2 million for regional coordination and system improvement. Together, these investments reflect Oakland's multi-tiered approach to reducing unsheltered homelessness through outreach, interim shelter, and long-term housing development.



Mosswood Park encampment



The Mosswood Park encampment was located in central Oakland, near Broadway and Webster Streets, at the southern edge of Mosswood Park—a historic 4-acre green space across from Kaiser Permanente Medical Center and surrounded by the Piedmont Avenue and Temescal neighborhoods. The park has long held cultural significance in Oakland, originally the estate of J. Mora Moss before its conversion to public use in 1907.

After a 2016 fire destroyed the park's recreation center, the rear section near the freeway was fenced off and left undeveloped for years, becoming the primary location for encampments. By 2018, Mosswood was one of only two parks in Oakland with more than 10 tents or shelters, according to the City's park census, and had since become a long-standing site for unsheltered residents.⁴⁴

The encampment ebbed and regrew over time despite multiple closure and cleanup attempts. Residents described cycles of displacement and return, noting that service interruptions—such as the suspension of trash collection—contributed to growing debris and sanitation challenges.

By early 2025, roughly 40 residents lived at the park, primarily along its southern perimeter, separated from playgrounds and main streets.

Two clusters had emerged: a smaller section of semi-permanent structures near Broadway, and a larger concentration of tents near Webster Street abutting the fenced construction zone. Despite hardship, residents had formed a close-knit community with informal leadership and periodic collaboration with housed neighbors.

Reason for closure

The City prioritized Mosswood Park for closure due to a combination of public safety concerns, the need to clear the site for recreation center reconstruction, and the availability of new Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3) resources to provide housing alternatives. Fires, accumulated debris, and frequent health complaints from nearby institutions accelerated the timeline. The City's Encampment Management Team (EMT) coordinated with Operation Dignity to identify long-term residents and prepare individualized housing plans prior to closure.

Closure process and coordination

The Mosswood closure was conducted concurrently with the East 12th Street operation as part of a citywide encampment resolution effort. Outreach teams from Operation Dignity and the Housing Consortium of the East Bay (HCEB) coordinated a "jigsaw approach," alternating site visits weekly between Mosswood and East 12th to maintain consistent engagement and prevent outreach fatigue.

In May 2025, the City of Oakland relocated 33 of Mosswood's 41 core residents to Mandela House in nearby Emeryville, a non-congregate interim housing site funded through the ERF program. Residents were matched with case managers and housing navigators to support stabilization and connection to permanent housing.

Some residents declined placements, and a few late arrivals were not included in the move-in cohort as the limited spaces available at Mandela House were prioritized for long-term encampment residents.

The City emphasized communication and gradual engagement throughout the process, though residents reported limited details on the exact closure date until shortly before the move. Following the transition, the site was cleared and landscaped, with security measures like fencing installed to deter repopulation.

Mosswood Park residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with 11 residents who had previously lived at the Mosswood Park encampment and were later relocated to Mandela House, Oakland's transitional housing site for former encampment residents. Interviews were conducted across four touchpoints—twice prior to closure, on the day of the operation, and again after residents had moved into Mandela House—to understand their experiences with outreach, the closure process, and their transition into interim housing.

Outreach

Residents described receiving limited and inconsistent communication about the upcoming closure. Seven residents said they were given two bags to downsize their belongings but were provided little other information—no exact dates, no transportation plans, and few details about what awaited them at the extended-stay hotel. This lack of clarity, combined with memories of prior broken promises, fueled skepticism.

As one resident put it, *"They are only taking folks on the Mosswood master list, but there have been six or seven housing lists and they didn't specify which one. We're supposed to be so excited, but we haven't received detailed information. They are spitting out a bunch of buzzwords and expecting us to go along with it. The last sweep, it was three days of getting chased around by a massive bulldozer. I lost all of my belongings the last time around."*

Others echoed confusion about logistics: *"They haven't even shared how we are going to get there. Will transportation be arranged? Do we need to take a bus?"* Another urged, *"Don't tell us we're being moved in two weeks—give us specific dates, even if it's just a range."*

Some residents recalled promised supports that never materialized. *"They said they didn't know when they're moving us so they were going to bring a shower truck and a laundry truck twice a week—that never happened. Someone was going to come take us to the DMV to help with IDs—that never happened."*

As timelines shifted repeatedly, anxiety mounted. *"A number of deals fell through,"* one resident explained. *"Every day we were told we were supposed to move; something has come up."* Another observed that *"it seems like they're trying to do a controlled media thing."* Word of mouth spread quickly, attracting new people to Mosswood and, according to some, making the area feel less safe.

"Don't tell us we're being moved in two weeks - give us specific dates, even if it's just a range."

-Mosswood Park resident

Services provided

Operation Dignity resumed frequent engagement about two to three months before the closure, visiting weekly to connect residents to shelter and services. TRUST Clinic, Lifelong Medical, and the Berkeley Free Clinic also provided rotating food, clothing, and limited medical care. While trash pickup occurred several times per week, coordination was poor. As one resident put it, *"When does the dumpster come to address our trash? They don't. It just sits there. Sometimes I've walked for blocks to find [a privately owned] dumpster, and sometimes those places tell me that it's their dumpster and I can't use it."* Furthermore, access to hygiene remained limited. *"There are bathrooms here,"* one resident noted, *"but they aren't opened for residents—they're locked."*

"When does the dumpster come to address our trash? They don't. It just sits there."

-Mosswood Park resident

Several participants said what they needed most was help obtaining identification or critical documents. One suggested having a designated "document day" with transportation support to government offices.

Engagement

Trust

Experiences with outreach and service providers were mixed. Four residents reported positive, respectful engagement, praising TRUST Clinic for being "very helpful. They provide me support with *mental health and don't judge me. I feel comfortable going there and talking to them.*" Another added, *"They're polite and understand what I'm going through. They ask me what kind of supports I need."*

However, seven residents expressed frustration over broken promises and unmet expectations. One summarized, *"I don't trust the outreach workers. Down to the simplest things, the smallest things—they don't keep their word. There's a history of people offering and saying things are going to happen and then nothing happens."* Another said, *"I understand that staff have limited capacity, but I wish promises weren't broken time over time. Sometimes residents stay at the site all day and lose out on wages waiting for staff who never show up."* Others described engagement as *"more like a check-the-box thing than actually getting things done."*

Even those who distrusted outreach staff felt dependent on them for access to services. One resident described the dynamic bluntly: *"It's been a bunch of empty promises to shut the residents up. I also realize I'm talking to the people lowest on the totem pole. I'm taking what [a senior staff member] shared more seriously because they're higher up in leadership. The only reason why I feel like I'm going to be housed this time is because they came."*

"I understand that staff have limited capacity, but I wish promises weren't broken time over time. Sometimes residents stay at the site all day and lose out on wages waiting for staff who never show up."

-Mosswood Park resident

Transparency

Residents consistently voiced a desire for clear, written information about move-out logistics, contacts, rules, and timelines.

"It would help to know what is going on," one resident said. "I'd rather have all of the information in front of me instead of getting partial information every once in a while." Another explained, "We were given no contact information—how are we getting a hold of these people? A lot of information isn't being fully shared."

"I'd rather have all the information in front of me instead of getting partial information every once in a while."

-Mosswood Park resident

Conflicting or incomplete details about program rules added to stress. *"Extended stays have rooms with kitchenettes, but the rooms we'll be staying in don't allow any cookware," one resident said. "They don't want anyone cooking in the rooms. Staff only shared that an outside provider will supply food after we repeatedly asked."*

Some information reached residents informally. *"The City didn't share this with us," one resident said, "but a resident from another encampment came over to hear what was going on at Mosswood and told us we'd be housed with East 12th folks. It would have been nice to know ahead of time."*

As one resident summarized, *"It's very fly-by-night. They expect residents to be okay with it because we get to go inside. They think we have nothing but time to sit outside waiting for handouts."*

Concerns

Residents' concerns centered on autonomy, dignity, and maintaining connection to pets and partners.

"We want dignity, agency, and clear and respectful communication," one resident said. "We don't want to be displaced and policed under the guise of housing support."

Pets were non-negotiable for many. *"I'm not letting go of my dogs," one resident stated. "At first they were trying to get me to put some up for adoption. I've lost everything—I lost my husband. I refuse to give them up. I'm not moving without all my dogs with me."*

Others feared that restrictive rules would make the extended-stay program feel punitive. *"I'm not in jail or on probation," one said. "I don't want to be treated like a patient or be policed."* Some worried short rapid-rehousing timelines would leave them homeless again, while others feared curfews, security practices, and evictions for minor infractions.

"We want dignity, agency, and clear and respectful communication. We don't want to be displaced and policed under the guise of housing support."

-Mosswood Park resident

Housing connections

Outlooks on housing

One resident expressed concern about the time-limited nature of the housing intervention and the risk of returning to homelessness once assistance ends. *"We were told they were going to get us section 8 vouchers, but this isn't true. We are being placed in RRH. I'm concerned that after a year, we'll be back in homelessness... The goal is to stay in the extended stay for a year, and next year it'll be a step down of residents paying 50% of the rent. Two years sounds like a lot, but it goes by so fast. I shared earlier I didn't want rapid rehousing, I wanted permanent supportive housing."*

Despite frustration and anxiety about the process, many residents viewed the extended-stay placement as a chance to rebuild stability, pursue education, and reconnect with family. *"I'm going to use this as a stepping stone for longer-term stability,"* one said. *"Getting a job will be so much easier when I have a roof over my head and a place to shower regularly."* Another added, *"I would like to work with music and make beats. I'm trying to start a clothing line and pursue my creative interests."*

Residents emphasized a desire for privacy, autonomy, and reasonable rules. *"I want to cook, have my own bathroom, and have enough space where it doesn't feel like a jail cell,"* one explained. *"We're adults—if you give us the place, we can figure it out and we don't need too much enforcement."* Others expressed that shared or highly programmed housing would not work for them given past trauma or incarceration histories.

Choice and location were also important. *"I would hope that there is client choice regarding where we get placed, but I don't know. It's slim pickings out there,"* one resident said. Another added, *"I want a yard to maintain and keep, I want to cut the grass. I want to barbecue and have my friends come and kick it."*

Community ties were mixed. Some residents wanted to preserve the sense of camaraderie from Mosswood—*"I would like to have a similar sense of community and camaraderie as Mosswood"*—while others were anxious about being rehoused with other encampment residents they didn't trust: *"I'm nervous living with the other encampment residents. They're very mean to me and I'm scared being around all of these people."*

Several residents emphasized wanting to stay in a central location. One resident wanted assurances that they would be able to continue running their bike-repair business from wherever they moved. Others prepared backup plans in case the extended-stay environment did not work out.

"I'm going to use this as a stepping stone for longer-term stability. Getting a job will be so much easier when I have a roof over my head and a place to shower regularly."

-Mosswood Park resident

Relocation to Mandela House

The move to Mandela House unfolded unevenly. Some residents described quick, well-supported transitions: *"I wasn't ready the first day they came—they caught me off guard with the move. They weren't mean about it—just came back when I was ready the next day."* Another said, *"They came and picked up clothes and things. I had to bring my own bikes over, but they brought everything else here and even found and returned what was missing."*

Others, however, found the process abrupt and distressing. *"It sucked,"* one resident said. *"They came the day of and told me I have to move now and leave everything behind. I went off on them—these are people's lives."* Another recalled, *"Staff were picking apart their suitcase, berating them—'We're giving you a second chance and this is the shit you bring us.' They threw away sentimental things and made fun of people's belongings. It was brutal."*

Some described intake procedures as demeaning: *"You have to take a shower before you're allowed upstairs. It's kind of demeaning that you demand that we shower—how do you know I didn't shower every day out there?"*

"I feel a lot better. I'm eating better. It feels like a weight has been lifted off my chest."

-Mosswood Park resident

Living experience

Residents expressed gratitude for safety and basic stability. *"I feel a lot better. I'm eating better. It feels like a weight has been lifted off my chest,"* one said.

Yet many criticized Mandela House's institutional feel and lack of furnishings: *"We don't have anything because they don't want us going into each other's rooms, so they don't have anything in there that other people can sit on besides the bed."* Another resident, shared, *"[They] went out of their way to remove the things that make a place a home and habitable... They took out all the kitchenettes. There are no sinks—they paid people to take sinks out. No chairs, no desks, no tables, no TV."*

"There are no tables, nowhere to sit and eat—you have to eat in bed and drink from the bathroom sink."

-Mosswood Park resident

The absence of cooking facilities was a recurring frustration. *"They serve food twice a day supposedly, but they don't tell you when,"* one explained. *"Now that all the residents from East 12th are also here, there's not even enough for everybody. I'm trying to be a vegetarian and there's just no options for that."*

Several residents described negative staff interactions and intrusive security practices. *"They cuss you out, talk bad to you, and scold people like they're their children,"* one said. Another added, *"Security digs through my bag every time I come home. I know where they're going to look. It doesn't make it any less invasive."*



Case-management expectations also caused confusion. *"Each household needs to complete two goals a month, but they don't tell you how or when to make appointments,"* one resident said.

A few residents felt their quality of life worsened since moving indoors. *"Honestly, I was doing better before,"* one reflected. *"My dog could run around and play. There are no tables, nowhere to sit and eat—you have to eat in bed and drink from the bathroom sink."*

Still, some sought constructive improvements: *"Or just have a way that's easy for them to communicate with us where they don't feel like they need to be in a position of power. We're all equal. We're all adults."*

Others balanced gratitude with calls for respect. *"I understand that they're giving us an opportunity,"* one said, *"but they don't need to rub it in our face that it's them saving us from the streets. I've survived on my own for three years. Just a little kindness goes a long way."*

"I understand that they're giving us an opportunity, but they don't need to rub it in our face that it's them saving us from the streets."

-Mosswood Park resident

East 12th Median encampment



The East 12th Median encampment, located along the I-880 corridor from 14th to 19th Avenue, was one of Oakland's largest and most visible encampments, home to more than 80 long-term residents living in tents, vehicles, and makeshift structures. The site's presence dates back several years, expanding around 2018–2019. In 2020, it became the focus of a grassroots housing effort, when advocates and volunteers constructed 11 small wooden shelters during the "MLK Emergency Housing Build."⁴⁵

The City of Oakland made multiple unsuccessful efforts to close the encampment, with residents returning shortly after each operation. As one resident recalled, *"They tried to get us to move out without offering alternative placement. We came back less than 30 minutes later and rebuilt."* Between 2022 and 2024, the Encampment Management Team (EMT) and Operation Dignity conducted repeated cleanups and outreach, connecting a small number of residents to temporary or permanent housing, while most remained unsheltered due to limited units. LAO Family provided on-site resources such as food, hygiene kits, and employment assistance.

Reason for closure

The final closure was driven by public health and safety concerns and new housing resources made available through the Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF). East 12th had become a focal point for fires, sanitation issues, and violent incidents, including a 2023 homicide that heightened community pressure for action. Following the *Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision, the City intensified encampment abatement, prioritizing high-visibility freeway corridors such as East 12th Street.

Closure process and coordination

The East 12th operation was conducted in tandem with Oakland's Mosswood Park encampment closure. Outreach teams from Operation Dignity and the Housing Consortium of the East Bay (HCEB) coordinated a "jigsaw" approach, alternating weekly site visits between the two locations. In practice this meant that Operation Dignity visited Mosswood one week and East 12th the next, while HCEB followed the opposite schedule to ensure consistent engagement at both sites. This collaboration helped residents distinguish between outreach and enforcement and eased distrust built over prior closure attempts.

City staff used aerial mapping to define encampment zones and sequence move-out logistics. Two weeks after Mosswood residents were notified, East 12th residents confirmed for housing received final closure notices. Operation Dignity and HCEB provided assessments, HMIS enrollment, and warm handoffs to shelter and housing placements. Over several months, the City worked with Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless to coordinate medical care, while outreach teams focused on connecting residents to the Coordinated Entry System (CES).

The site's final closure in Spring 2025 transitioned most residents to extended stay placements, supported by landscaping and security measures designed to prevent repopulation.⁴⁶

East 12th Median residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with six residents who lived at the East 12th Median encampment and were later relocated to Mandela House, Oakland's transitional housing site for former encampment residents. Interviews were conducted across two visits—first at the encampment prior to closure, and later at Mandela House—to understand residents' experiences with outreach, the closure process.

Outreach

Five of the six residents learned about the encampment closure directly from staff, who told them they were on the housing list and would be moving to an extended-stay hotel within two weeks. Residents recalled being shown photos of the motel. One participant, however, only found out through local news: *"I didn't hear nobody say anything. I actually, I be on the news on my phone a lot and saw that they were supposed to shut this place down."*

While many residents were added to a by-name list maintained by Operation Dignity, several described confusion about how selection decisions were made and who qualified. Some believed that long-term residents—especially those who worked during the day—were left out of the process.

As one participant reflected, *"Core residents who'd been here longer got left off. They could've asked us to help check the list."*

"[Service providers] all come here, but it's like only certain ones will help certain people."

-East 12th Median resident

Services provided

Residents described frequent visits from organizations such as Operation Dignity, Roots, BACS, and HCV, who distributed food, hygiene supplies, and provided case management and health services. One resident said, *"Some people come by once a day and give out burritos... Roots comes by for health services—if I have a doctor's appointment or something, they'll provide transportation. Yeah, they'll Uber us there."*

However, others noted that certain needs—like hygiene access and site cleanup—were inconsistently met. *"Yeah, that's when they started coming out here cleaning up and it's not even the city coming to clean up though. It's like an organization,"* one resident said.

Despite the visible presence of service providers, residents were often unclear on eligibility or how to access particular supports. *"They all come here, but it's like only certain ones will help certain people,"* one resident explained. *"It seems like to me, Roots and Bay Area Community Services only help certain people sometimes or it's only if you qualify, but I don't really know what those qualifications are."*

Several residents emphasized that assistance with documentation and employment would have been most helpful. *"Having transportation to the offices to get my birth certification and social security card would be helpful, I'm burned out,"* one said. Another added, *"The most helpful support would be connections to work. Some of us are capable and want to work—we've been hustling, recycling, etc."*

Engagement

Trust

While residents expressed appreciation for being offered housing opportunities, many were skeptical about whether this effort would actually materialize.

Several cited past experiences where promised housing never came through. *"I've signed up three times before. This is the fourth time I'm on a housing list. I'll believe it when I see it,"* one resident said. Another echoed, *"I'm just not that optimistic because I don't know if it's a gimmick or not."*

Two residents recounted losing their possessions in previous closure attempts and having to start over repeatedly—experiences that eroded trust and made them wary of new promises.

Transparency

Across interviews, residents described limited communication about the closure process, housing program rules, and next steps. *"We were expected to mindlessly sign our rights away,"* one said. Another shared, *"I have no clue what the rules and regulations are for the extended stay... They said they will come back in 30 days and share more information."*

"We were expected to mindlessly sign our rights away."

-East 12th Median resident

Others only knew fragments of information, like move logistics or what they were allowed to bring. *"They gave us bags to move with. I've been prepared, I'm just ready to go. When is this going to happen? They had us sign something like a rental agreement, but they didn't put the date in for anybody,"* one resident explained. Another added, *"How are we going to get to the extended stay in Emeryville? We don't have an exact move-out date."*

Residents generally knew that they could bring two bags and two dogs, but many wanted clearer details about timing, transportation, and what to expect once housed.

"I have three dogs, I'm not sure if all three will be allowed [...] They're like my babies."

-East 12th Median resident

Concerns

Residents voiced anxiety over the two-bag limit and lack of storage options. *"They basically had us give up our rights and now I'm going to have to leave most of my stuff here,"* one said. *"I can't really afford to pay for additional storage; my only income is general assistance."*

Pets were another major concern. *"I have three dogs, I'm not sure if all three will be allowed at the Extended Stay. They're like my babies. I've raised them since they were pups,"* one participant shared.

These practical and emotional challenges reinforced residents' sense of loss and disempowerment during the transition process.

Housing connections

Despite confusion and mistrust, all six residents expressed some optimism about moving indoors and leaving the unsafe conditions of the encampment. One described the opportunity as a step toward rebuilding family connections: *"I have a child... I'm trying to better myself for her so she can be able to come home... I appreciate the offered room at the Extended Stay."*

Others highlighted the dangers they faced at East 12th and their relief at the prospect of safety: *"We sit around here and see outsiders trash our stuff, but we can't really fight because they could drop by and shoot us... It's really unsafe."*

Many residents said they were eager for stability and normalcy. *"They're helping us get our foot in the door and housed and giving us two meals a day, I appreciate that part,"* one said. *"The rules aren't too bad to me, but at the same time we're adults and we can do the rest; we just need a bit of support."* Others described what stability meant to them: *"I want stability to deal with my mental health. There's a lot of stress out here."*

"They're helping us get our foot in the door and housed and giving us two meals a day, I appreciate that part."

-East 12th Median resident

Another resident shared more specific goals: *"A place where I can take a shower every day and get ready for work... I have my 11-year-old granddaughter... I know she'll be better once we get out of here."* A final participant summed up the broader hope for long-term recovery and independence: *"I'd like employment training and help getting IDs so I can get back to normal."*

Summary of feedback: City of Oakland

Homebase engaged with 17 residents while they were living at Mosswood Park or East 12th Median. Several of those interviewed at Mosswood Park were interviewed a second time at Mosswood after the closure was announced. Five individuals who were previously interviewed at Mosswood or East 12th Median were also interviewed at Mandela House after closure and relocation. These interviews provide unique insight into the experiences of individuals living outside before and during closure proceedings, and their adjustment to housing afterward.



2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

Many residents expressed skepticism due to past experiences with broken promises, repeated displacement, or lost belongings. Several noted being added to housing lists multiple times without results. They recommended stronger follow-through, regular updates, and clear distinctions between outreach and enforcement roles. The presence of trusted leadership during outreach (e.g., supervisors or known staff) helped improve confidence.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Residents across both sites described inconsistent or incomplete information about closure dates, eligibility for housing, program restrictions, and move logistics. Some heard directly from outreach staff, while others learned through news or word of mouth. Conflicting messages and last-minute notifications created stress and confusion. Residents emphasized the need for clear, written timelines, consistent updates, and designated contacts to build trust.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Both encampments raised concerns about how housing lists were created and who qualified. Some long-term residents and those who worked during the day felt excluded. Residents suggested involving encampment leaders or peer representatives in verifying by-name lists to ensure fairness and transparency in housing selection.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Residents at both sites reported regular visits from service providers—Operation Dignity, Roots, BACS, TRUST Clinic, Lifelong Medical—but said eligibility rules and follow-up were unclear. Many needed help obtaining IDs, transportation, employment connections, and consistent hygiene access. Improved coordination and communication among service partners could make support more reliable and easier to navigate.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Strict two-bag limits and lack of storage caused distress, especially for residents with sentimental items or larger possessions. Pets were frequently described as family members, and uncertainty around pet policies caused anxiety. Residents urged more compassionate handling of belongings, flexible pet policies, and access to short-term storage options during moves.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Residents appreciated the safety and stability of Mandela House but described challenges with livability—limited furnishings, lack of cooking facilities, restrictive food options, and invasive security practices. Some viewed the environment as institutional or carceral. They requested private, furnished spaces with reasonable rules, food choice, and more respectful staff interactions.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Many residents saw the housing placements as a foundation for rebuilding stability, employment, and family connections. They emphasized the importance of continued assistance with job placement, documentation, and mental health support to maintain housing and independence. A couple of residents did express concerns about the short-term nature of the housing support being provided and the fear that it may not provide lasting stability.

Longer-term, flexible case management and goal setting were identified as essential.

Comic: Linda's journey

Introduction

The following comic is a story of a fictional encampment resident named Linda. The story of the comic was developed by the artist and the research team to illustrate key themes from across interviews with encampment residents. Linda is not a literal representation of any of the individuals we interviewed in this study. For the purposes of the comic, Linda's story is a simplified summary of experiences and does not reflect the full complexity of any of the human stories shared with us.

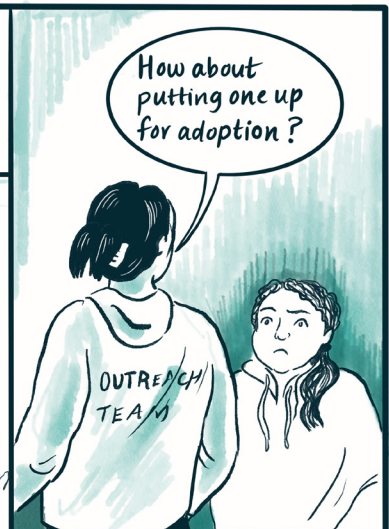


Linda's Journey from an Encampment to a Motel



Meet Linda. She lives in an encampment with her dogs.

Linda had met many outreach workers who seemed judgmental, didn't follow up, or didn't have space for her dogs.



How about putting one up for adoption?

They asked her to do the unthinkable.



Linda's dogs were her family!



Hi Linda! Could I ask you some questions to get to know you better?

But one day, outreach took a different approach.



I need a stable place.

My dogs are very important to me.

They listened to Linda's needs.

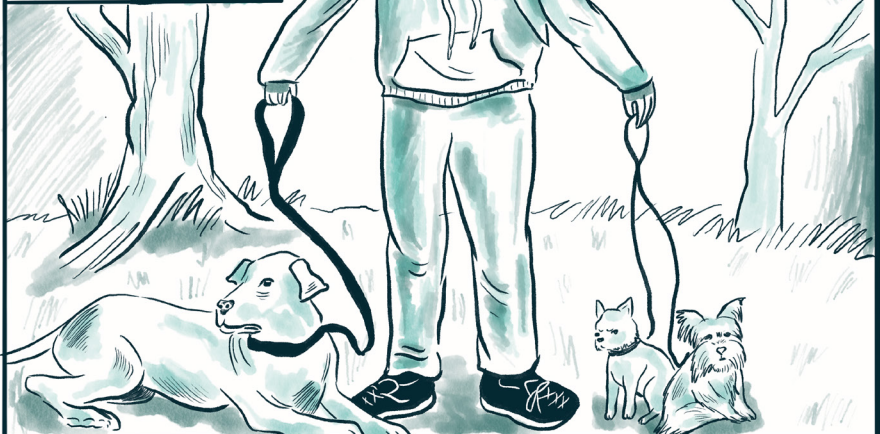
Linda wished they had brought blankets and food.



But soon...



The outreach team offered Linda a waiver for her dogs so they could all stay in a motel together!



Outreach workers helped Linda pack up her stuff.

The process was pretty smooth, but Linda wasn't sure where they were taking her.

SOME HOURS LATER...

Your keys, ma'am.

Linda arrived at a motel.

Checking in was easy!

More communication would have helped build trust with Linda.

Having a space to shower, rest, and be with her dogs felt amazing.

No visitors!

No getting your own mail!

No outside food!

I don't have much freedom here...

But Linda soon found that the new space came with a lot of rules.

TODAY...

Linda hasn't heard from her care coordinator and isn't sure what's happening next. She wants to make sure she gets permanent housing at the end of this.

The "no outside food" rule was especially hard. Breakfast was very heavy - and there was no fruit!

She doesn't want to be misled like she has been in the past.

Berkeley (Alameda County)



City of Berkeley

Berkeley, located in northern Alameda County and home to the University of California’s flagship campus, is a compact, highly educated city of about 120,000 residents. The population is racially and ethnically diverse, with 52% White, 21% Asian, 7% Black/African American, and 12% Hispanic/Latinx residents.⁴⁷ Despite its academic and economic strengths, 17% of residents live below the poverty line, and housing costs remain among the highest in the Bay Area.⁴⁸ The median home value exceeds \$1.34 million, and fewer than 35% of households own their homes.⁴⁹

High housing costs and limited availability have made Berkeley one of the region’s most

challenging housing markets and a focal point of Alameda County’s homelessness response. On a single night in 2024, an estimated 1,000 residents were experiencing homelessness, most living unsheltered in tents, vehicles, or outdoors.⁵⁰ While the city achieved a 45% reduction in unsheltered homelessness since 2022—the largest decrease among major cities in the county—racial inequities persist: Black residents represent nearly 60% of people experiencing homelessness but only 8% of the city’s total population. Many unhoused residents also report disabilities, chronic health conditions, or behavioral health challenges, reflecting the complex intersection of housing, health, and systemic inequity in Berkeley’s homelessness landscape.

Despite a 45% decrease in homelessness, racial disparities persist in Berkeley. Black residents represent nearly 60% of people experiencing homelessness but only 8% of the city's total population.

Homelessness response system

Berkeley's homelessness response is guided by a "coordination and compassion" framework grounded in Housing First principles and aligned with the All Home Regional Action Plan. The plan sets a goal of reducing unsheltered homelessness by 75% through a balanced system of prevention, interim housing, and permanent solutions. The City's progress—particularly its 45% decline in unsheltered homelessness—reflects sustained investment and cross-sector collaboration.

The system is managed by the Health, Housing & Community Services Department in partnership with Dorothy Day House, Lifelong Medical Care, the Berkeley Food & Housing Project, and other nonprofit providers. Core strategies include:

- **Prevention:** Eviction defense, rental assistance, and shallow subsidies, reaching more than 900 households since 2020
- **Interim Housing:** Tripling of non-congregate beds since 2021 through motel conversions and other private-unit models with higher occupancy and housing exit rates.
- **Permanent Housing:** Expansion of permanent supportive housing (PSH) by nearly 130 beds since 2022 and a pipeline of 1,200 affordable units, including 220 PSH.

- **Behavioral Health Integration:** Coordination with CalAIM and the Behavioral Health Services Act to align multidisciplinary teams serving residents with complex behavioral health and medical needs.

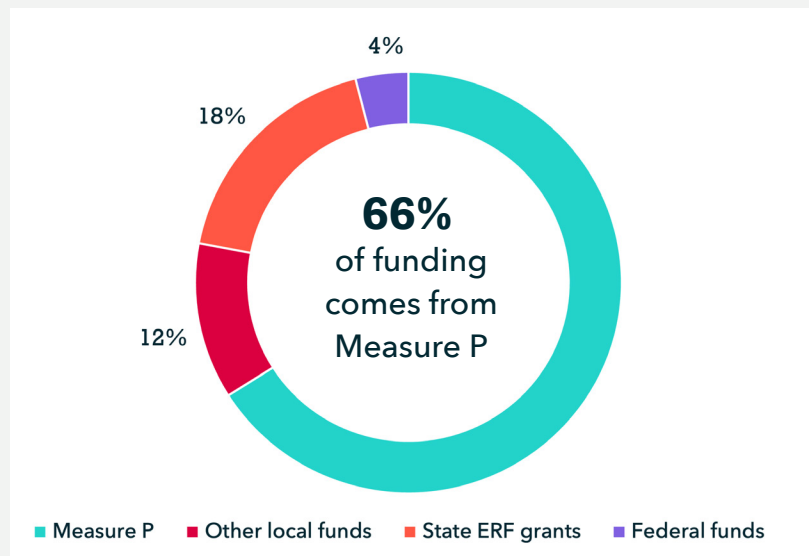
Policy evolution and encampment strategy

Berkeley's Encampment Policy Resolution (September 2024) reaffirmed the City's Housing First approach, requiring that interim or non-congregate shelter be offered before any encampment closure whenever practicable. While the *Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision removed the federal requirement to provide shelter prior to enforcement, Berkeley chose to maintain this best practice to balance compassion with public health and safety.

Encampment management is led by the Homeless Response Team (HRT)—a multidisciplinary unit coordinating outreach, sanitation, and enforcement under a "care first, jails last" framework. When encampments are identified, the HRT evaluates fire hazards, environmental risks, and infrastructure impacts, convening case conferences with service providers to develop individualized housing plans. Outreach teams engage residents for weeks or months before closure, prioritizing voluntary relocation and non-congregate options. The City provides written notice—typically at least 72 hours in advance—and ensures property storage and retrieval consistent with due process protections. Enforcement occurs only after extensive engagement and is used sparingly.⁵¹

Following closures, outreach continues to support displaced residents and prevent re-encampment. This approach—grounded in harm reduction and dignity—positions Berkeley as maintaining a housing-led, non-punitive encampment resolution strategy after the *Grants Pass* ruling.⁵²

Figure 1. Sources of funding for Berkeley's homelessness initiatives



Homelessness services fund sources (FY24) courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

Berkeley's homelessness initiatives are supported by a mix of local and state funds, including HHAP, Homekey, and the voter-approved Measure P and Measure U1. In HHAP-5 (2024-2026), the City received roughly \$4 million for outreach, prevention, and interim housing. Under Encampment Resolution Fund Round 3 (ERF-3), Berkeley secured \$5.4 million to address the 2nd Street encampment, a high-priority site with severe health and safety risks.

The ERF-funded plan included master leasing a 27-room motel for low-barrier, non-congregate shelter paired with intensive case management, housing navigation, and supportive services. An additional \$5.2 million in local matching funds from Measure U1 was dedicated to sustaining operations beyond the grant term. The City also introduced an innovative RV buy-back program to help residents transition indoors and partnered with the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHII) for a formal evaluation of outcomes.

Implementation involved the Homeless Response Team, Lifelong Medical, Dorothy Day House, and legal advocates, with weekly case conferences to track individualized progress. The program aimed to enroll 80% of residents into interim housing within six months and move one-third into permanent housing within the first year.

Through this coordinated, evidence-driven approach, Berkeley is linking immediate health and safety interventions with long-term housing solutions—using compassion, research, and innovation to model humane encampment resolution practices for the state.

2nd Street encampment



The 2nd Street encampment, located in West Berkeley, spanned approximately three blocks—from 2nd Street and Page Street south to 2nd and Cedar Street—and covered roughly 550,000 square feet. The area contained a mix of RVs, vehicles, and tents, with around 10 structures and 15 RVs used for shelter. Conditions at the site included a significant accumulation of trash, bulky debris (such as furniture and pallets), hazardous waste (including loose syringes), and rodent harborage due to rotting food and refuse. These conditions created obstructions in traffic lanes and sidewalks and posed acute fire and life safety risks due to unsafe structures and open flames.

The encampment had undergone multiple partial closures and cleanups in previous years, with repeated outreach efforts providing shelter offers, housing navigation, and case management. At the time of the Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3) grant proposal, 31 people were residing at the site, with an expected inflow of up to 56 individuals during the project term.

Demographic and health data from outreach and assessment indicated that the population was primarily male (61%) and composed of single adults (100%).

A large majority reported significant health vulnerabilities: 65% with mental health conditions, 55% with chronic health conditions, and 65% with drug or alcohol use disorders. Additionally, 48% reported a physical disability, 23% a developmental condition, and 7% HIV/AIDS. Over 60% were assessed as eligible for Permanent Supportive Housing, while 32% had not yet been assessed.

Reason for closure

The City of Berkeley's Homeless Response Team (HRT) prioritized the 2nd Street encampment as the highest-priority site for resolution due to escalating public health and safety risks. The site had been formally declared imminently hazardous by the City's Health, Police, and Fire Departments, citing intravenous drug use, fire hazards, rodent infestation, and unsafe living conditions. The combination of environmental danger and high resident vulnerability led the City to focus ERF resources on resolving this location as a top-tier intervention.

Closure process and coordination

The City established three primary goals under the ERF-3 initiative for the 2nd Street Encampment:

1. Establish low-barrier, non-congregate shelter and enroll 80% of residents within the first six months.
2. Resolve Berkeley's largest remaining encampment, reducing unsheltered homelessness and transitioning at least one-third of residents into permanent housing within the first year.
3. Pilot an RV buy-back program to test its acceptance and impact on transitions to housing.

To achieve these objectives, the City master leased the 27-room Capri Motel for the exclusive use of encampment residents, offering private rooms, onsite services, and housing navigation support. Once enrolled in shelter, participants worked with housing navigators to develop individualized housing plans and connect to permanent housing resources.

In parallel, the City launched its innovative RV buy-back program targeting the approximately 15 RVs located at the site. Participants received \$175 per linear foot of their vehicle—roughly \$6,000 for a 35-foot RV—in exchange for relinquishing the RV and moving into shelter. Residents received 15% of the payment upfront, with the balance provided once they remained in shelter and the RV was removed. Participants who opted out later retained their initial payment and vehicle.

Following the closure, the City emphasized non-punitive approaches, focusing on preventing re-encampment through continued outreach and case management rather than citation or arrest.

Planning leading up to closure

City staff and nonprofit partners conducted several months of pre-closure engagement with encampment residents, combining outreach, education, and logistical planning. Notices were posted on vehicles, and outreach teams met regularly with residents to explain the RV buy-back offer and available shelter options. The City held community meetings with residents, advocates, and service providers to discuss the closure plan, address questions, and incorporate resident feedback into implementation.

This advance engagement helped establish trust and ensured that residents were informed of their options, resulting in smoother coordination between outreach, operations, and service delivery when the closure occurred.

2nd Street encampment residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase interviewed 10 residents who had previously lived at the Second Street encampment and were later relocated to the Capri Hotel. All interviews occurred after residents had transitioned into Capri, reflecting on both their experiences prior to closure and their adjustment to interim housing. The closure of the Second Street encampment was an ongoing process from January to February of 2025; the residents we spoke with had moved directly from Second Street to Capri during that time.

Outreach

Residents described learning about the encampment closure through a mix of formal and informal channels. At least six residents said City staff provided both verbal notifications and posted written notices directly on vehicles and throughout the site. One resident shared, *"The City approached me, gave me the lowdown on the new law coming into effect—they were closing the encampment because of a City ordinance. They gave me about three months advance notice."*



The City and advocacy groups held community meetings to explain the closure process, outline housing options, and encourage participation in the upcoming programs. However, not all residents could attend due to work schedules. One resident recalled, *"The City came down and had a meeting with the encampment area and said that if we didn't take advantage of this opportunity, we would be subject to getting arrested and go to jail."* Another added, *"The City said they were closing the encampment because of the surrounding businesses not wanting us to be there. They gave us a month to move out."*

Flyers were distributed to notify residents of meetings, and word of mouth spread quickly among neighbors. Residents estimated it took between a month and a month and a half from initial notice to the actual move. During this time, Dorothy Day House and City staff conducted counts, assigned residents to specific lots, and instructed them to separate items they wanted to keep from those that would be discarded.

"The City [...] said that if we didn't take advantage of this opportunity, we would be subject to getting arrested and go to jail."

-2nd Street resident

Services provided

Residents reported receiving regular visits and support from multiple organizations. Lifelong Medical provided weekly care, including health check-ins, disability verification, and hospital follow-up. Dorothy Day House was also praised for its active role in coordination and communication.

As one resident said, *"My [name of case manager] is very on top of her game!"* Another noted, *"My wife had a stroke when we were outside. During the stroke and immediate treatment Lifelong wasn't very [involved] but Lifelong was involved in post-recovery. Lifelong and Dorothy Day House communicated really well—got her transportation, helped follow up on what she needed to do, and sent reminders about appointments."*

Faith-based groups and volunteers also played a visible role, providing meals, coffee, and clothing. *"The nuns would make homecooked meals—chicken and mashed potatoes. You could never go hungry out there. I miss the nuns, I liked the company and the community. It would be nice to still have coffee and donuts with them here at Capri Hotel."*

However, mobile hygiene services were inconsistent, and residents also had mixed experiences around support managing their belongings—one resident said staff helped them organize their area, while another described support being limited to *"two orange trash bags"* to haul personal items: *"I had to leave most stuff behind which got either stolen or burnt down that very night. I lost a couple thousand dollars' worth of magic cards, etc. I lost a lot of stuff."* Some residents also wanted more help gathering documentation or understanding how to complete forms online.

RV buy-back program

Two residents described the RV Buy-back program process (see **Closure process and coordination** above) as smooth and appreciated the outreach support, with one noting, *"I didn't know what to expect and the City was pretty generous on the quotes and their plan sounded good. Some of the vehicles weren't even registered."*

However, payments expected within days often took weeks or months, leaving some residents in financial hardship or unable to pay registration fees, resulting in fines or vehicle loss.

At least five residents reported confusion and stress from the delays. One said, *"weeks and months go by and the RVs are still there and haven't been towed... The City tells us not to worry, but the DMV keeps sending letters and now the fines have increased."* Another shared that *"the City ran out of room to take everything at once to scrap, so they couldn't pay everyone in a timely fashion, but that shouldn't be on us."* One resident noted that an outreach worker had to intervene to help them finally receive their check.

" I didn't know what to expect [...] the City was pretty generous on the quotes and their plan sounded good."

-2nd Street resident

Several residents also expressed frustration over shifting communication about the order of vehicle removals. As one explained, *"there was a lot of speculation and anxiety. The City could have just come down and spent five minutes with us to clarify what was going on."* With belongings and RVs left for extended periods before scrapping, residents reported theft, vandalism, and even fires—leaving them anxious about whether they would still be paid. Some felt compelled to return to guard their property until removal was complete.

Overall, while the buyback program offered meaningful financial support and a pathway to housing, implementation challenges and unclear communication caused significant emotional and logistical strain.

Engagement

Trust

Initially, several residents felt uneasy due to past experiences with enforcement and uncertainty about whether outreach staff were affiliated with law enforcement. Over time, consistent presence and follow-through built trust. One resident shared, *"One of the guys was similar to me—he'd been to prison before, he'd been through it. I felt more comfortable knowing that someone could really understand what I had been through."*

Many appreciated staff reliability and responsiveness: *"They always got back to me about questions I had, maybe not that day but they'd always follow up."* Although skepticism persisted, most described feeling heard, respected, and supported as relationships deepened.

Transparency

Residents generally valued the advance notice they received but noted that program rules—particularly around towing, visitation, and next steps—were not clearly explained. Shifts in communication created uncertainty and tension. *"They never explained anything about the rules,"* one resident said. *"Had I known, I would have turned this offer down."* Others said they wished for written details about program expectations and the towing process to avoid misinformation.

Concerns

Residents identified several recurring concerns about living conditions and program design at the Capri Hotel, underscoring the tension between safety requirements and residents' need for autonomy and stability.

Many participants described parking and accessibility challenges, noting that the site lacked adequate parking and accommodations for mobility needs. Residents with disabilities shared that navigating the property was difficult and often unsafe. *"We should be able to park where we live. It's hard to navigate with a walker,"* one resident said. Others reported being ticketed or forced to move their cars every two hours—an added burden that disrupted routines and limited independence.

Concerns about ADA compliance were also common, with several residents said requests for accessibility accommodations were delayed or ignored, leaving them uncertain about whether their needs would be met. As one person explained, *"I had a question about ADA compliance which was never followed through on. It's an ordeal just to take a shower."*

Finally, residents described how restrictions on autonomy and visitors—including limits on cooking and prohibitions on guests—undermined their sense of home and connection. *"My grandkids and kids can't come visit me. It's really stressing me out,"* one resident shared.

" I had a question about ADA compliance which was never followed through on. It's an ordeal just to take a shower."

-2nd Street resident

Another added, *"We can't even go into each other's rooms. We all moved here together and feel like family."* Another resident shared, *"It would be nice to be allowed visitors so our families could see we're doing alright and doing well."*

Together, these themes illustrate how logistical barriers and restrictive policies can affect residents' dignity, independence, and ability to maintain community ties—key elements of long-term housing stability.

Housing connections

Some described the move as life-changing: *"When you become homeless you think you can do it on your own, but I can say this program actually saved my life."* Another resident shared in this optimism, *"Being able to shower, lay in a bed, get three meals a day is huge, I'm not going to turn that down."* Another said, *"I love it here, it's cool, it's safe, the staff are great, the food is good. I get to keep my dog with me. I wouldn't change a thing. All I'm waiting for is permanent housing."*

"[...] I can say this program actually saved my life."

-2nd Street resident

Some residents reported mixed experiences with the housing services offered at Capri. A couple of residents shared that staff had supported them with getting their documentation in order and were actively looking at potential permanent housing options while others felt the program lacked structure and follow-through.

As one resident noted, *"There's no structure—there are folks who really want to learn new things but there's nothing to do here...it's a shame there are no outlets to maximize residents' talents. We want to be doing things."* one resident said.

"More resources like support with resumes, more drug treatment stuff to help people who are actively using, exercise programs to support folks with their wellness could have been provided. Sitting around here doing nothing isn't easy or helpful."

-2nd Street resident

Another resident shared, *"The people here are great but the transition from being in the streets to the motel isn't quick, more supports could have been provided to support our transition indoors. We're used to freely doing things in bigger areas. More resources like support with resumes, more drug treatment stuff to help people who are actively using, exercise programs to support folks with their wellness could have been provided. Sitting around here doing nothing isn't easy or helpful."*

One resident shared their experience with the program so far, noting that while they were informed they were eligible for housing, they would appreciate additional support to pursue education and employment opportunities first, which would help them feel more confident about maintaining housing over the long term. *"They said it's a 6-18 -month program and we've been here for 4 months and there's been no support. They told me I was eligible for housing, but I don't have a job."*

They said they'd file for Social Security, but that isn't what I want. I want to get some education resources and get back to work so that I can then maintain housing when this program ends."

Still, six residents shared a renewed sense of hope, describing the program as a turning point that helped them move from survival mode toward long-term goals like sobriety, employment, and self-sufficiency. As one resident expressed after moving into Capri Hotel, *"I've cleaned myself up a little bit, it's made it easier to take care of necessary business so that I can excel. It's not as rough of a life as living in a mobile home."*

Another resident shared that they were *"now able to see the forest for the trees. My outlook on the future has changed, it feels like I'm taking a step in the right direction. It felt like we were crawling before, now we're actually walking. I see people moving into housing. It's just a matter of time until I get housed."* One resident expanded on their goals beyond housing, sharing that their *"other goal is to have fun, to go to a movie. I'm looking forward to doing that. I've been stuck in survival mode for so long."*

When talking about the rules at Capri Hotel, one resident noted that *"there's always going to be rules for everything so I have no problem with that. There's always structure everywhere you go."* Another resident shared that all the program *"asks for here is that you participate and apply yourself—baby steps and it happens. Before there were no steps, just getting by day by day."*

"I see people moving into housing. It's just a matter of time until I get housed."

-2nd Street resident

People's Park



People's Park, located in the heart of UC Berkeley's campus, has been a landmark of social activism since the 1960s and a long-standing refuge for unhoused residents. The site has symbolized decades of debate over public space, housing rights, and community self-determination.

In 2018, UC Berkeley announced plans to redevelop the park into student housing with 42 units of supportive housing for unhoused and veteran residents, acknowledging its historic role in advocacy. After years of legal disputes and community protests, the California Supreme Court cleared the project in 2024. By midyear, the University fenced off the site with shipping containers and began demolition, marking the end of its use as an encampment.

Since 2017, UC Berkeley has employed a full-time social worker dedicated to People's Park, building trust with residents and connecting them to housing.

Through this sustained outreach, more than 200 households secured permanent housing and 50 were added to the housing queue. In partnership with BACS, LifeLong Medical, and faith-based groups, the University worked to ensure that each remaining resident had a housing plan before closure.

Reason for closure

The 2024 closure was driven by safety concerns, long-term redevelopment plans, and legal authorization to begin construction. The University committed to minimizing displacement by prioritizing People's Park residents for housing at University Homes, a former hotel converted through the state's Homekey program into 42 units of permanent supportive housing.

People's Park residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase interviewed five residents who had previously lived at the People's Park encampment and were later relocated to University Homes. All conversations occurred after residents had moved indoors, reflecting on their experiences with the closure process, outreach, and transition into interim housing. Most residents we spoke to had been at Capril Hotel since the closure of People's Park, in early January 2024.

“We had it all at People’s Park—a whole community. It was very well resourced, very organized and supportive. I’m talking about internal support, not external supports.”

-People’s Park resident

Outreach

Residents described People’s Park as a self-sufficient, tight-knit community before its closure. As one resident explained, *“We had it all at People’s Park—a whole community. It was very well resourced, very organized and supportive. I’m talking about internal support, not external supports.”* Residents looked after each other, mediating conflicts and responding to crises such as overdoses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Berkeley allowed residents to shelter in place at the park, but shortly thereafter, police activity reportedly increased. One resident shared that law enforcement *“would come at night, anywhere between 11 p.m. to 3 a.m., and tear down people’s tents. During the day they would do tent searches.”* Another added that *“the City started pushing people out without offering any connections to services.”*

A UC Berkeley social worker began working full-time with People’s Park residents in 2017 to build trust, provide consistent outreach, and connect residents to housing. Through his efforts, along with the City’s partnerships with BACS, LifeLong Medical, and local churches, over 200 households secured housing and another 50 were placed on the permanent housing queue before closure.

Closure notice

Four residents recalled that before the final closure, *“the City came and told residents that everyone had to leave.”* According to one participant, *“A private contractor came with bulldozers, barricaded the whole thing and put up shipping containers to prevent repopulation.”* Others described heavy police presence: *“Police came a couple times with riot gear and stormed the park. It felt like a warzone.”*

Two residents said the closure was widely covered by news outlets and spread by word of mouth. A couple of residents shared that they kept thinking it wouldn’t happen because there had been previous threats to close it down but none of those ever materialized, with one resident admitting, *“I wasn’t taking it seriously. When they closed down People’s Park, they did it at 4 a.m. I lost a lot of stuff.”*

“Police came a couple times with riot gear and stormed the park. It felt like a warzone.”

-People’s Park resident

Services provided

Residents credited outreach partners with ensuring a smooth transition to housing. Movers were hired to help with belongings, and residents could take essential items with them or store them securely. BACS and UC Berkeley staff helped residents navigate the housing process, while LifeLong and church groups provided food, mobile hygiene, and healthcare.

All residents highlighted the daily presence of UC Berkeley's social worker, and his interns. As one said, "[Name of social worker] is the People's Park hero. He wasn't just there to fill out paperwork and check boxes—he was there for the people, and he proved it through his actions." Another added, "He would rather walk than drive a car so he didn't miss anyone during his outreach. He was an actual blessing."

Engagement

Trust

Trust in outreach staff—particularly the UC Berkeley social worker—was central to residents' willingness to move indoors.

One resident explained, "It's hard for us to trust; we need to smell you and really know who you are. He did his homework. He was showing up and followed through."

The UC Berkeley social worker's understanding of residents' needs helped overcome skepticism. As one participant shared, "He told me that things were going to be challenging if I continued to stay outside with my disability and my dog. He told me that if I moved, other people would move too because I'm a trusted member in the community."

Several residents expressed comfort with LifeLong and church-based service providers for their respectful, nonjudgmental approach. However, one resident described feeling disheartened by "broken promises and lack of follow-up from some providers."

"It's hard for us to trust; we need to smell you and really know who you are. [The UC Berkeley's social worker] did his homework. He was showing up and followed through."

-People's Park resident

Housing connections

Alignment with needs and preferences

Most residents reported a positive transition to University Homes, describing staff and security as caring and responsive. One noted, "They are implementing weekly community meetings. We now have an extra case worker so it feels like things are moving forward."

At move-in, residents received a \$2,000 setup allowance to furnish rooms and buy essentials. The program later began installing kitchenettes in units. Two residents said their "quality of life improved dramatically" and praised their new healthcare access: "My LifeLong coverage now is incredible—better than Kaiser. It's shocking how good it is."

Residents appreciated being housed near longtime friends: "We've been friends with people in the Park for 20-30 years." However, one reported ongoing violence on-site and feeling "dismissed and stigmatized" after seeking help. Another mourned the loss of the park's communal space: "It's hard knowing I can't have my ashes laid to rest in the one place that truly felt like home."

"It's hard knowing I can't have my ashes laid to rest in the one place that truly felt like home."

-People's Park resident



Transition experience

Initially, University Homes operated under bridge housing rules—no visitors, security-controlled entry—but these were relaxed as the site converted to permanent supportive housing. *“Now this place has been converted to permanent housing, and those rules are relaxed because we pay rent,”* one resident explained. *“I didn’t mind the restrictions early on; in fact, I felt safer because of them.”*

Two residents raised that moving directly from encampments to permanent housing without a transitional phase can be destabilizing and emphasized a need for a phased approach. As one resident described, *“when people transition out of the encampments, they should be moved into emergency temporary housing but instead they are being integrated into this permanent housing site. It’s hard to move directly from encampment sites to permanent housing. Transitional housing can provide more targeted supports, and the rules can provide more structure.”* Another resident noted, *“you’re placed here but you’re then expected to pay for your food, laundry, and services. This is stressful. We need to bring people in, but it needs to be phased. We have traumas in shelters, we don’t trust the systems. We eat better outside on the streets than inside. When people experience abuse in establishments, they prefer to live outside.”*

**“We have trauma in shelters,
we don’t trust the systems [...] when people experience abuse
in establishments, they prefer
to live outside.”**

-People’s Park resident

Summary of feedback: City of Berkeley

Homebase engaged with 15 residents who had previously lived at the 2nd Street and People's Park encampments and were later relocated to the Capri Hotel and University Homes. All interviews took place after residents had already moved indoors, reflecting on both their experiences during closure and their adjustment to housing.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Residents across both sites described inconsistent or incomplete information about closure timelines, eligibility for housing, and program expectations. Some heard directly from outreach staff or City representatives, while others learned of closures through word of mouth or media coverage. At both sites, shifting timelines and unclear details about move logistics created confusion and anxiety. Residents emphasized the importance of clear, written communication—especially around dates, rules, and duration of stay—to reduce stress and build trust.



2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

Many residents expressed skepticism based on prior experiences with broken promises, displacement, and loss of belongings. Trust grew where staff maintained a consistent presence and delivered on commitments. At People's Park, long-term, relationship-based outreach from UC Berkeley's social worker built credibility and motivated participation. At 2nd Street, residents responded positively to outreach workers with lived experience and trauma-informed approaches. Residents across both sites stressed the need for follow-through, honesty, and distinction between service and enforcement roles.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Residents highlighted leveraging peer champions to garner the support among other encampment residents to transition indoors.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Residents reported regular visits from outreach and service providers—including Dorothy Day House, BACS, LifeLong Medical, and faith-based partners—but noted unclear eligibility rules, inconsistent follow-up, and limited coordination among agencies. Assistance with documentation, employment, transportation, and healthcare were identified as the most pressing needs. Participants said service continuity often depended on individual staff rather than established systems of coordination.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Strict limits on possessions and rushed move-outs caused distress, particularly for residents with sentimental or essential items. Some described losing valuable or irreplaceable belongings during the transition. Pets were universally described as family members and vital to emotional stability. Residents called for storage options, flexible pet policies, and more compassionate handling of belongings to preserve dignity during relocation.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Residents appreciated the safety and stability of housing at Capri Hotel and University Homes but described challenges that made programs feel restrictive or institutional. At Capri, residents cited accessibility barriers, limited visitor access, and lack of parking. At University Homes, participants praised private rooms, furnishings, and healthcare integration but said adjusting to rules and routines was difficult after years outside. Residents across both sites wanted clean, furnished, and home-like environments with reasonable rules, privacy, and respectful staff interactions.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Residents viewed housing as a crucial first step toward stability but emphasized the need for sustained support to prevent returns to homelessness. Many requested continued help with employment, documentation, mental health, and family reconnection. Several from People's Park said that moving directly into permanent housing would be difficult without an interim phase to adjust. Across both sites, residents identified flexible case management, meaningful daily structure, and gradual transition planning as key to long-term success.

Quantitative insights from Berkeley

Overview

To supplement the qualitative case study, Homebase leveraged Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data to examine Berkeley's approach to resolving homeless encampments through their Homeless Response Team (HRT), analyzing five major encampments between 2021-2025. Please see **Appendix C: Berkeley Quantitative Case Study** for full analysis with breakdowns by encampment.

The study encompasses 201 unique residents across Harrison Street (75 people), 2nd Street (57 people), Civic Center Park (39 people), People's Park (37 people), and Old City Hall (8 people).



Figure 2: Flow from encampment to last exit destination

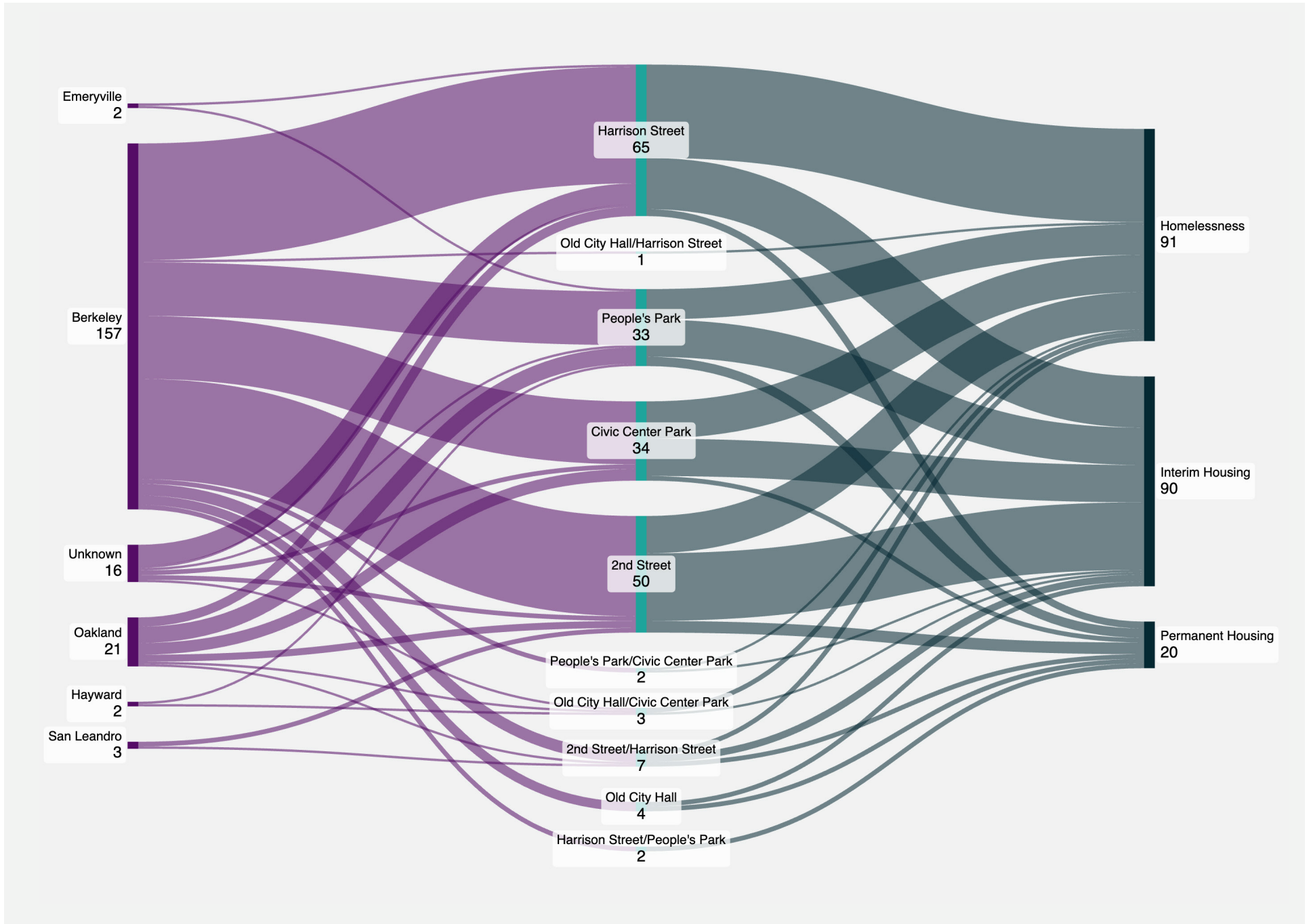


Figure 2 shows the city in the Bay Area each resident calls home on the left, the encampment(s) they were a part of in the middle, and their last exit destination category on the right.

Notably, every known city that residents identify as home is within Alameda County, which is also where all of the encampments are located. Many of the encampment residents had been experiencing long term homelessness, some living unsheltered for as many as 15-20 years.

Key findings

Table 2: Overview of encampments studied and last exit destination

Encampment name	Total # of residents	% to Interim Housing/ Emergency Shelter	% to Permanent Supportive Housing	% to homelessness
2nd Street	57	56%	12%	32%
Harrison Street	75	33%	9%	57%
Civic Center Park	39	49%	5%	46%
People’s Park	37	46%	16%	39%
Old City Hall	8	37.5%	25%	37.5%

Housing outcomes varied significantly by encampment size

The study reveals a strong inverse correlation between encampment size and housing success rates. Old City Hall, the smallest encampment with only 8 residents, achieved the best outcomes with 62.5% of residents securing emergency shelter or permanent housing. In contrast, Harrison Street, the largest encampment with 75 residents, had the poorest outcomes with only 42% achieving housing placement and 57% returning to homelessness. This pattern could indicate that early intervention before encampments grow large is critical for successful resolution.

Service provision strongly predicts housing success

Residents who transitioned to permanent housing received an average of 8.5 services within 180 days before encampment exit, compared to only 2.2 services for those returning to homelessness. Services included case management, hygiene kits, food, medical care, pet support, and legal aid. The timing of service delivery proved crucial - intensive service provision within 30 days of closure showed the strongest correlation with positive housing outcomes. This finding could emphasize the importance of consistent, early engagement to build trust with encampment residents.

Program enrollment correlates with better outcomes

The homeless response system in Berkeley offers a wide range of programs to participants including Street Outreach, Service Only, Housing Navigation, Emergency Shelter, Permanent Housing and more. The data shows that increased engagement with the homelessness response system, even when not immediately resulting in housing, improves long-term outcomes. Residents who eventually secured housing had enrolled in an average of 21.3 programs throughout their time experiencing homelessness, compared to 9.5 programs for those who remained unsheltered. This may suggest that repeated system contact, despite apparent “failures,” builds familiarity and trust that facilitates eventual housing access.

Challenges and complexities

Harrison Street: A case study in obstacles

The Harrison Street encampment presented many unique challenges that impacted how the data is interpreted.

Despite extensive interventions including weekly trash removal, portable toilets, mobile showers, and master leasing a Super 8 Motel with a non-congregate shelter bed available for every resident, Harrison Street remained Berkeley’s most challenging encampment. The city removed over 124 tons of debris through nine deep cleanings and faced continuous legal challenges, including multiple restraining orders that prevented closure attempts. This encampment illustrates how factors beyond service provision—including legal constraints, community opposition, and infrastructure damage—can impede resolution efforts even with substantial resource investment.

The role of external partnerships

People’s Park demonstrated the importance of institutional partnerships, as UC Berkeley’s ownership enabled coordinated closure with dedicated resources. The university partnership facilitated transitional housing at a Quality Inn and plans for both student housing and 125 units of permanent supportive housing. This collaboration model achieved favorable outcomes, with 62% of residents pursuing housing options.

Areas for further research

Whether temporary/interim housing is a helpful intermediate step is an area for further investigation. Moving residents from encampment to interim housing was the only option in The City of Berkeley as the county owns the Coordinated Entry System (CES) and connections to permanent housing. Having permanent housing options set aside for encampment residents or incorporating encampment status into CES prioritization could help in resolving encampments more quickly.

Strategic recommendations

The quantitative analysis in Berkeley identifies three critical strategies for effective encampment resolution:

- 1 Early intervention.**
Utilize available resources to address encampments immediately as they form, before they become entrenched and grow to unmanageable sizes. The HRT's three-person team struggled with larger encampments, suggesting need for scalable rapid response capacity.
- 2 Intensive service engagement.**
Provide frequent, diverse services beginning well before planned closures. The data strongly supports investing in skilled outreach workers who can build rapport and relationships with encampment residents over time.
- 3 Systems integration.**
Connect residents to multiple programs and services, recognizing that each contact builds toward eventual housing acceptance. The average resident who achieved housing had over twice the program enrollments of those who didn't, indicating that persistence in engagement pays dividends.

Conclusion

Berkeley's experience demonstrates that successful encampment resolution requires more than simply offering shelter - it demands sustained investment in relationship-building, comprehensive service provision, and strategic timing. While smaller encampments showed better outcomes, even large, entrenched sites like Harrison Street saw some success when provided dedicated shelter resources like the motel rooms funded through state Encampment Resolution Fund grants.

The city has an 81% shelter acceptance rate during encampment closures, though the persistence of street homelessness (32-57% across sites) indicates need for expanded permanent housing solutions.⁵³ As Berkeley continues this work with Measure W extending funding through 2027, these findings suggest prioritizing early intervention, intensive pre-closure services, and dedicated housing pathways for each encampment will maximize successful transitions from encampments to stable housing.

Los Angeles County



Los Angeles County

Home to nearly 10 million residents across 88 cities, Los Angeles County represents one in four Californians and includes the Los Angeles, Pasadena, Glendale, and Long Beach CoCs, coordinated by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)⁵⁴. The CoC—one of the nation’s largest—recorded 71,201 people experiencing homelessness in 2024, including 49,509 unsheltered individuals, the highest number nationwide.⁵⁵ To coordinate services across its vast geography, LAHSA organizes efforts through eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs) spanning Antelope Valley to South Bay.

Los Angeles is racially and economically diverse: 48% Hispanic/Latinx, 33% White, 15% Asian, 8% Black/African American, and smaller groups identifying as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, or multiracial.⁵⁶ Median household income is \$86,587, about \$10,000 below the state median, with 13.7% of residents in poverty and 44% of households cost-burdened.⁵⁷ These structural pressures—combined with severe housing shortages—drive the region’s homelessness crisis.

Homelessness response system

The City and County of Los Angeles, in partnership with LAHSA, lead one of the nation's most complex homelessness response systems. Despite scale and complexity, recent trends show progress: from 2024 to 2025, homelessness decreased 4% countywide and unsheltered homelessness dropped 9.5%, a 14% reduction over two years.⁵⁸

Two major initiatives anchor encampment resolution efforts:

- **Inside Safe (City of Los Angeles):** Led by the Mayor's Office, Inside Safe relocates residents from encampments to private interim housing, primarily motel rooms, and coordinates wraparound services through field teams and providers such as USC Street Medicine and LAHSA. On closure days, city and county teams jointly transport residents, provide debris cleanup, and connect participants with case management, meals, and housing navigation.⁵⁹
- **Pathway Home (County of Los Angeles):** Operated by the County with partners including LAHSA, Housing for Health, and the Department of Mental Health, Pathway Home offers residents private interim housing with comprehensive on-site supports—case management, life skills, benefits enrollment, and mental health care. The average stay before permanent placement is about 250 days.⁶⁰

Both programs prioritize harm reduction, individualized services, and non-congregate placements as a bridge to stability.

Policy evolution and encampment strategy

Homelessness remains a defining political issue in Los Angeles, with 70% of residents calling it a "big problem."⁶¹ Following the *Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision and Governor Newsom's directive to accelerate encampment clearances, local leaders have faced pressure to increase visible enforcement.⁶²

In response, the City of Los Angeles replaced Municipal Code 41.18, prohibiting obstruction of streets and sidewalks—effectively expanding local authority to clear public spaces.⁶³ Yet, both City and County continue to emphasize "care first" approaches, pairing outreach and housing offers with selective enforcement.

Balancing compassion and accountability remains a central challenge for Los Angeles in the region's evolving encampment strategy.

Funding and implementation

Los Angeles receives some of the largest homelessness allocations in California.

Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP):

- Round 5: \$97.4 million (90% to permanent and innovative housing, 10% to interim).
- Round 6: \$85.1 million (2025–2029).⁶⁴

Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3):

- \$51.55 million awarded,⁶⁵ with 23% expended to date—funding Inside Safe and Pathway Home.

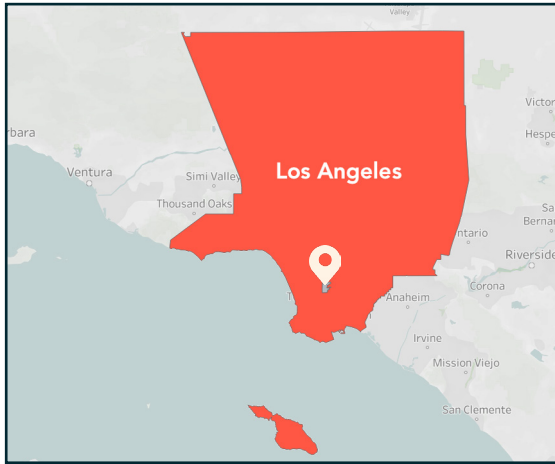
Local ballot measures:

- Measure ULA (2022): A real estate transfer tax on property sales over \$5 million, generating hundreds of millions annually for affordable housing, rental assistance, and homelessness prevention.⁶⁶
- Measure A (2024): A 0.5% countywide sales tax expected to raise \$1.07 billion per year for housing, rental aid, mental health treatment, and supportive services.⁶⁷

Together, these initiatives represent a multi-billion-dollar investment in housing creation, encampment resolution, and prevention—illustrating both the scale of Los Angeles’ crisis and the breadth of resources mobilized to address it. In 2024, 70% of 71,201 people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles City and County were unsheltered, nearly double the national unsheltered rate of 36%.⁶⁸



Redondo Boulevard encampment



The Redondo Beach Boulevard encampment in West Rancho Dominguez was a longstanding, primarily RV-based community that had existed in roughly the same location for many years, earning the designation of a “legacy encampment.” At its peak, the site hosted approximately 80 residents living in 60 RVs, forming a tight but transient community along a largely industrial stretch of road.

Some residents had lived in the encampment for up to nine years, with their RVs serving as both shelter and personal property—valued for their practicality and sentimental importance.

Reason for closure

County officials identified the Redondo Boulevard site as a priority for resolution due to health and safety concerns and the need to restore the roadway and sidewalks to public use. Accumulated debris, long-term vehicle habitation, and fire hazards had created unsafe conditions for both residents and surrounding businesses.

The closure was led by the Los Angeles County Pathway Home initiative, in partnership with LAHSA, aligning with the County’s broader strategy to replace large-scale encampments with structured interim housing options that provide pathways to permanent housing.

Closure process and coordination

Due to the longstanding nature of the encampment, Pathway Home began outreach nearly a year before the closure, offering residents motel rooms and support toward permanent housing in exchange for surrendering their RVs. Over two days, the County coordinated the removal of 44 RVs, four additional vehicles, and roughly 840 cubic yards (the equivalent of about 7 RVs in volume) of debris from the site.

In total, 57 residents accepted interim placements through Pathway Home. Those who participated were relocated to several motel-based interim housing sites operated under the County’s program. Residents described mixed emotions about giving up their RVs—acknowledging the opportunity for stability but expressing anxiety over losing autonomy and the tangible security their vehicles provided.

Rules at the motels limited visitation and inter-room contact, and each unit allowed a maximum of two pets (though some waivers were granted, including one resident with five animals). Residents were also informed of a step-down rent model in which they would gradually assume a greater share of rent costs after transitioning into permanent housing, contributing to ongoing uncertainty about long-term affordability.

Redondo Boulevard residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with five residents who had previously lived at the Redondo Boulevard encampment and were later relocated to the Parkside Inn, one of Los Angeles's interim housing sites for former encampment residents. A total of seven interviews were conducted across two visits—first prior to the encampment closure and again after residents had transitioned into the Parkside Inn—to understand their experiences with outreach, the closure process, and their adjustment to interim housing.

Outreach

Residents emphasized how essential the outreach workers from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and the Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS) were in helping them transition indoors. Every participant described the consistency and reliability of these teams, often noting their schedules—*“they come twice a week”* or *“every Monday and Wednesday”*—and saying that when it came down to what really helped them decide to make the move, *“HOPICS, LAHSA, even the sheriffs, they came through.”*

At the Redondo site, outreach began nearly a year before the closure. Workers began building rapport with residents through consistent visits and providing services. This level of steady engagement stood in contrast to past experiences residents described as *“one-sided ultimatums”* or *“people making promises without helping.”*

Initially, several residents admitted they didn't trust the outreach teams because they'd *“been misled or even lied to before.”* Over time, though, that changed.

Reliable follow-up, transparent communication, and clear timelines built a sense of trust that many had not experienced before.

Services provided

Residents described receiving a wide range of services before and after the closures, including food, hygiene supplies, and assistance with identification and medical needs. Outreach workers arranged for septic tanks to be drained weekly, which residents said was an invaluable support—something that *“meant a lot”* and made daily life safer and cleaner.

These consistent services helped residents begin to see the transition as credible and supported, even if they had reservations about giving up their RVs or outdoor structures.

Engagement

Residents described the engagement process as unusually consistent and respectful compared to prior closure efforts. Outreach teams communicated months in advance, returned repeatedly to answer questions, and made sure residents understood what would happen on the day of closure. One resident explained that *“we've been working together as a family—we're all in the same predicament—and these people keep coming back to make sure everyone knows what's going on.”*

Trust

Although many residents initially distrusted outreach workers due to past experiences, they said their perceptions changed as staff kept showing up, kept promises, and followed through on small commitments. *"They always got back to me about questions I had—maybe not that day but they'd always follow up,"* one person said. Over time, that reliability fostered genuine trust. Several residents said they were especially moved by outreach staff who had shared life experiences, including formerly incarcerated workers who *"had been through it too"* and could relate without judgment.

Transparency

At Redondo, residents appreciated the clear advance messaging but described the final move-out as *"chaotic"* after years of accumulated belongings. They were limited to two bags each, and one woman said she accidentally left behind her and her son's birth certificates in their RV, which was demolished soon after. Others described the day as emotional but organized: *"It was smooth, everything was nice."*

Concerns

Residents expressed complicated feelings about the trade-offs involved in accepting housing. Many described having little real choice: *"We were presented with two options—give up our RV and move into interim shelter, or move away from Redondo."* Other residents expressed anxiety about leaving behind property or community members. One woman described seeing a friend who had refused the housing pathway, now living by the freeway: *"I feel really bad. I tell him, 'Come try and get the room,' but it's discouraging. I know how it feels when it doesn't work out—it's hard."*

Some also worried about the terms of their future permanent housing path, including pet limits and the *"step-down"* rent model that would gradually increase costs over time. For many, however, safety and stability outweighed those concerns.

"We were presented with two options - give up our RV and move into interim shelter, or move away from Redondo."

-Redondo Boulevard resident

Housing connections

For most residents, the transition to interim housing was swift and structured. Those who accepted the Pathway Home offer were moved into motels within hours of the encampment closure and met with case managers the same day to begin developing permanent housing plans. Residents described the process as smooth and decisive, saying, *"They said it would happen, and it happened on time."*

However, several participants were disappointed that those who initially declined interim housing could not later rejoin the program. One woman explained that her RV roommate *"chose not to take the housing initially but now wants to connect to the resource and can't."* She added that if there had been even a short grace period, *"more people would have come inside once they saw it was working out."*

Relocation to Interim Housing

Residents were relocated to motel-based interim housing that offered private rooms and access to meals, medical services, and case management.



Most expressed relief and gratitude at having a secure, clean space, though some described difficulty adjusting to strict rules. Pet restrictions were a particular issue, with one woman granted a rare waiver to keep her five animals.

Others said they missed the freedom of their RVs but recognized that this was *"the first step toward something better."* A few noted that the transitions happened quickly and efficiently—*"we were in our motel rooms in a matter of hours"*—which made it easier to adjust to the change.

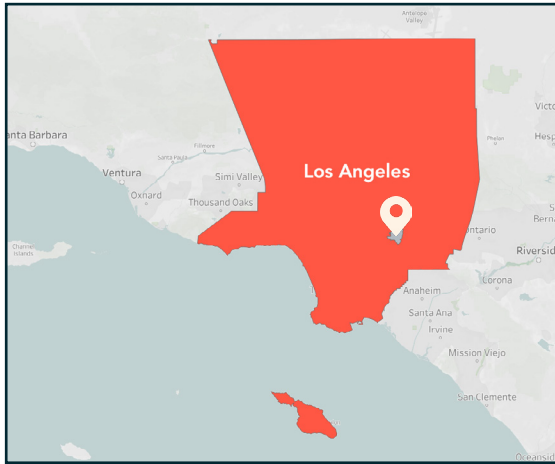
Living experience

Once indoors, residents' experiences varied. Many expressed gratitude for safety and privacy after years outdoors. One man said, *"It's not as rough of a life as living in a mobile home,"* while another shared that *"it felt coordinated and consistent... but it's still hard to lose everything and start over."* Residents were grateful for offers of housing pathways that were reliable, from people they could trust.

"It felt coordinated and consistent...but it's still hard to lose everything and start over."

-Redondo Boulevard resident

El Monte Waterways encampment



The El Monte Waterways encampment was located within a series of flood-control channels in Los Angeles County. At least two dozen people were living in these concrete-lined tunnels, which serve as drainage conduits for stormwater. The site posed severe health and safety risks—residents described frequent flooding during heavy rains, with one noting, *“The weather, especially the rain, is very dangerous in the tunnels—people have died there. Getting into the motel meant safety from the elements.”*

Caltrans initiated coordination with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and the County’s Pathway Home program after repeated flooding and hazards made the site unsafe for continued habitation. The area also contained roughly ten smaller encampments within a short radius, many of which had shifted locations multiple times due to ongoing Caltrans sweeps. This movement made it difficult for outreach teams to provide continuous services or maintain accurate by-name lists. At the time of closure, the County identified 14 core residents associated with the Waterways site.

Encampments in and around El Monte Waterways had been partially cleared and re-occupied several times over the years.

Past cleanups displaced residents to nearby freeway underpasses or storm channels, only for the sites to repopulate within weeks. Recognizing this pattern, Pathway Home coordinated with Caltrans, LAHSA, and County agencies to take a comprehensive approach—offering services and interim housing to all encampment residents in the immediate area and closing all associated sites at once rather than one or two at a time.

Reason for closure

The closure was driven primarily by life-safety concerns. The tunnels routinely flooded during rainstorms, putting lives at risk, and debris accumulation created additional hazards. The County cited public health risks, stormwater obstruction, and the ongoing danger of serious injury or death as reasons for prioritizing the site for resolution.

Closure process and coordination

Residents were notified of the impending closure roughly two weeks in advance through posted signs and verbal outreach. Word spread quickly among those in the tunnels. Unlike other Pathway Home operations that included several months of preparatory engagement, this closure moved on a shorter timeline due to the severity of conditions. During the two weeks leading up to the closure, outreach teams visited regularly—mainly distributing water and providing basic supplies.

On closure day, County staff, LAHSA, and Union Station Homeless Services coordinated the transition from the encampment to interim housing. Each resident who accepted services was transported to a nearby motel, where they were assigned a Care Coordinator through Union Station, the Coordinated Entry System (CES) lead agency for the San Gabriel Valley.

El Monte Waterways residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with five residents who had previously lived at the El Monte encampment and were later relocated to the Heritage Hotel, one of Los Angeles's interim housing sites for former encampment residents. A total of seven interviews were conducted across two visits—first prior to the encampment closure and again after residents had transitioned into the Heritage Hotel—to understand their experiences with outreach, the closure process, and their adjustment to interim housing.

Outreach

Outreach for the El Monte Waterways encampment began only one to two weeks before closure, a much shorter timeline than at Redondo. Word spread quickly through posted signs and verbal communication. Outreach workers continued to show up regularly, providing water and basic supplies and explaining what would happen next. Residents reported between one and three direct interactions with outreach staff but described those encounters as respectful and helpful. One participant shared, *"They were very, very nice, very polite and asking questions—what do I need?"* Another said, *"They always run me through everything, how the process works and make sure I was aware of what I was getting into."*

Residents appreciated the comprehensive nature of the encampment closure.

One resident reflected that after years of being shuffled from one freeway underpass to another, this was the first time the County *"offered everyone services at once instead of moving us around."* Even with limited engagement time, residents felt comfortable pursuing the housing resource. One noted, *"They listen to my needs. I have two adult kids and two dogs and we need a place for all of us—not just me or not just them. They said they could offer that."*

Even though notice was shorter at El Monte, outreach teams still provided clear, repeated messaging about available interim housing and transportation, ensuring that even those living deep within the flood channels had the chance to connect to services. Several residents said that unlike previous CalTrans sweeps, *"this time it felt coordinated and consistent."* Residents appreciated that *"when they said it was going to happen, it really did,"* contrasting that with earlier closures that dragged on for months or fizzled without resolution.

"I have two adult kids and two dogs and we need a place for all of us - not just me or not just them. [Outreach] said they could offer that."

-El Monte Waterways resident

Engagement

The closure was coordinated, clearly communicated, and executed quickly. Residents had been told for two weeks that Wednesday would be the day; the day before, outreach workers reminded everyone to have their two yellow bags packed.

One resident described, *"They said they were going to be there and they were there."*

When the morning came, the County and service providers arrived promptly at 9 a.m. and began helping residents move. *"Half hour maybe. It was quick,"* one participant said. *"They showed up, said, 'Hey, we're here to get you. Where's your bags?' Took them up to the truck for me. We left."*

"It's amazing. I'm so happy that it worked out."

-El Monte Waterways resident

Residents transitioned into motel-based interim housing managed by Union Station Homeless Services, where they were connected to healthcare, case management, and meals. Arriving at the motel within hours, they described a smooth check-in process: *"There was food, healthcare on-site, and we were in the rooms within 15 minutes."* The clarity and punctuality of the process built confidence among participants that their needs would continue to be met. One resident summed up the experience: *"It's amazing. I'm so happy that it worked out. I can say I'm not homeless anymore."*

Housing connections

While all interviewees ultimately accepted interim housing, many of their former neighbors declined the offer. Several residents noted that a number of those who stayed behind were undocumented and fearful about sharing information. As one participant explained, *"A lot of people are scared—worried about immigration—but they said I didn't have to worry about that."*

Pathway Home staff were trained on supporting undocumented residents, often partnering with the County's Office of Immigrant Affairs to provide legal guidance. Still, about 36 percent of residents did not move into interim housing when the site closed.

Many participants felt that more time for relationship-building could have increased uptake among those hesitant to trust.

Rolling basis acceptance

Unlike other encampment closures, El Monte residents could still access interim housing after the closure date. Word spread quickly within the unhoused community, leading some who had initially declined to reconnect. One motel resident described, *"They asked me if I wanted to come to the motel. At first I said no, but after about two weeks I thought I would try it."*

Others spoke about maintaining ties with people still in the tunnels. *"Oh yeah, that's where I go back sometimes,"* one woman said. *"I see people and tell them to try and get the room."* Another resident described the ripple effect: *"Just a lot of people have been asking me how do they get here. I got a brother out there that could use some help, and a lot of friends that really need help."*

Residents emphasized that keeping housing access open helped build confidence and trust: *"They regret saying no that day—they were scared. Now they see it's real."*



Outlooks on housing

At El Monte, residents appreciated the healthcare, food, and mental health support provided by Union Station Homeless Services, describing the move into the motel as a welcome step toward safety and stability after years of instability. While some found the environment restrictive and the short notice of the closure anxiety-inducing, most felt the transition process itself was clear and ultimately represented meaningful progress.

Those who accepted interim housing are currently working with their case managers to develop permanent housing plans. One resident described feeling hopeful for the first time in years, while another emphasized the difference between this operation and past sweeps: *"This time, they actually helped us move somewhere safe instead of just pushing us out."*

As of this writing, the El Monte Waterways encampment has not repopulated.

***"This time, they actually helped
us move somewhere safe
instead of just pushing us out."***

-El Monte Waterways resident

Summary of feedback: Lose Angeles County

Homebase engaged with 12 residents at the Redondo Boulevard and El Monte Waterways encampments. Several residents also gave second interviews at Parkside Inn and Heritage Hotel, following their move from the closed encampment. Because the interviews occurred during and after closure, they reveal how residents experienced life outdoors, the closure process and their transition into housing.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

When messaging was consistent, timelines were firm, and actions occurred as promised—as in both of these encampment closures—residents reported feeling more confident and supported. Sudden or unclear processes, by contrast, contributed to anxiety and mistrust.



2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

At both sites, residents described outreach teams—especially LAHSA, HOPICS, and Union Station staff—as respectful, present, and clear. Consistency and familiarity over time helped overcome initial skepticism rooted in prior negative experiences with government-led closures.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Allowing residents who initially declined interim housing to connect later proved highly effective. Word-of-mouth between former encampment residents encouraged others to pursue shelter once they saw successful outcomes.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Residents valued being treated with respect and transparency. Practices that felt procedural or demeaning (such as rushed moves or rigid bag limits) undermined trust, while simple, clear explanations and follow-through strengthened it.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Residents from both encampments described harsh living conditions—exposure to weather, violence, and environmental hazards—as key factors driving their willingness to move indoors. Safety and reliable shelter outweighed fears of restrictive rules or loss of autonomy.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Encampments functioned as mutual support networks. Coordinated closures that acknowledged these social ties—and allowed residents to maintain community connections in housing—helped ease transitions and sustain participation in services.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Residents described interim housing as crucial step toward safety and stability after living outside, one which provided them meals, healthcare and support while they planned for permanent housing. While many appreciated the privacy, structure and relief housing offered, some noted the challenges of adjusting to rules, routines, and starting over.

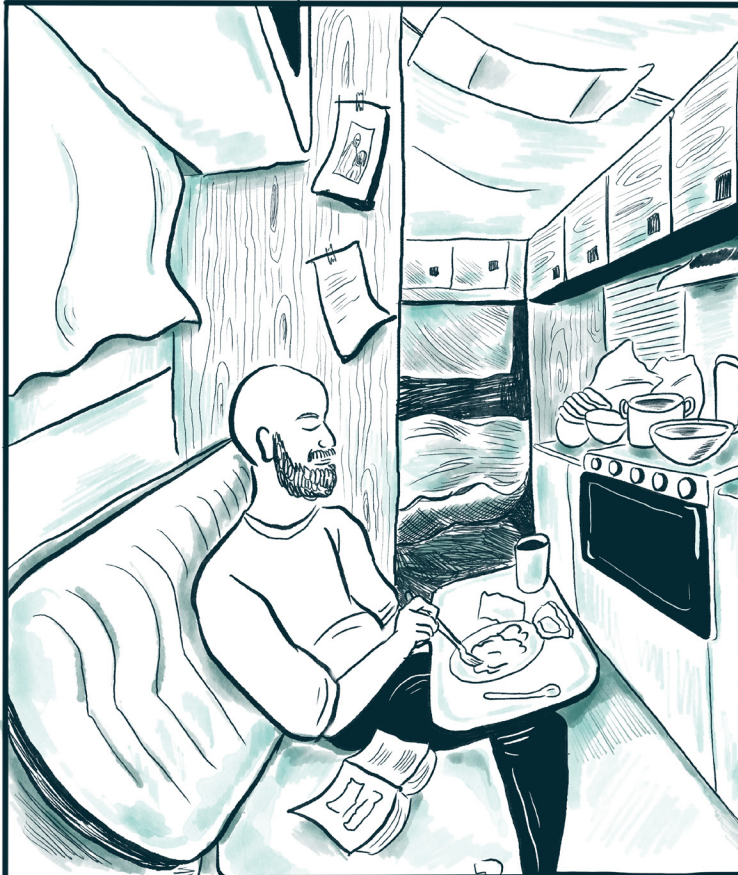
Comic: Rob's journey

Introduction

The following comic is a story of a fictional encampment resident named Rob. The story of the comic was developed by the artist and the research team to illustrate key themes from across interviews with encampment residents. Rob is not a literal representation of any of the individuals we interviewed in this study. For the purposes of the comic, Rob's story is a simplified summary of experiences and does not reflect the full complexity of any of the human stories shared with us.



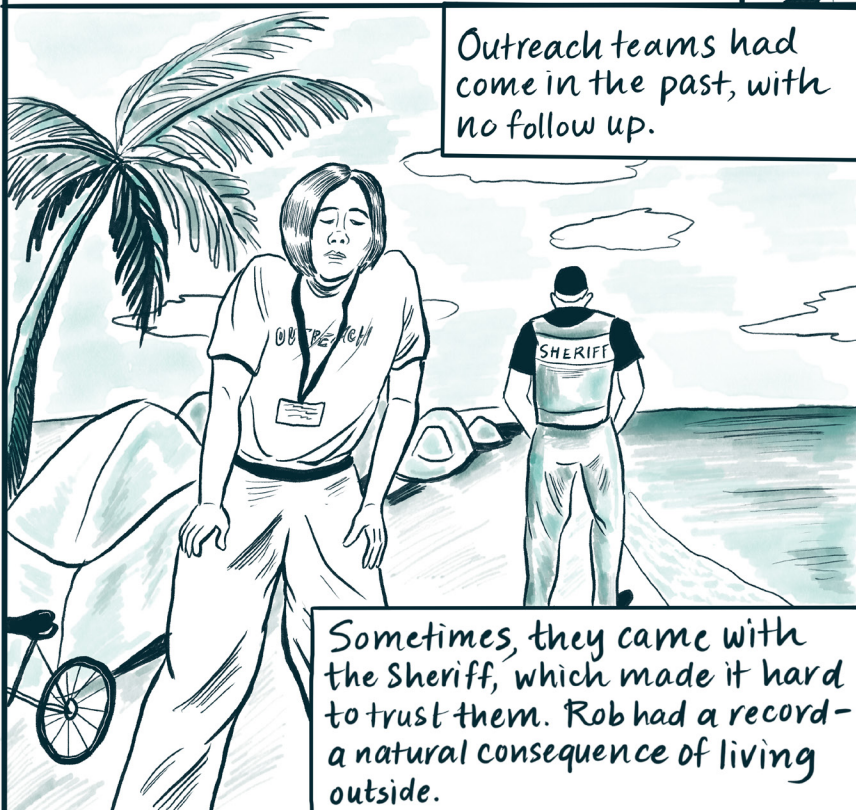
Rob's Journey From Living in an RV to Permanent Housing



Rob's RV was part of a much larger encampment. He had heard that the City was going to close it and was anxious about where he'd move next.

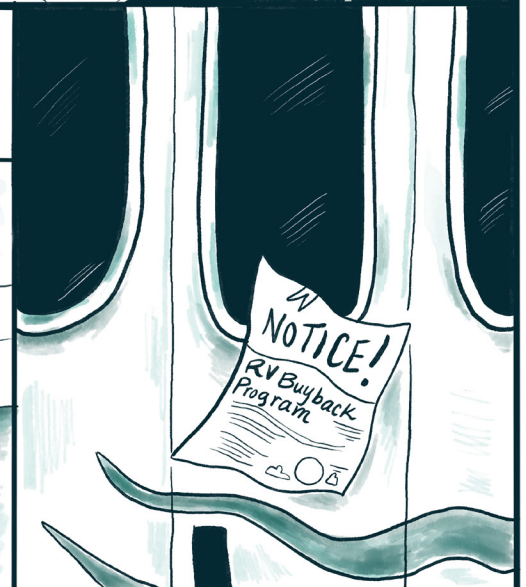


Meet Rob. For several years, his RV was his home.



Outreach teams had come in the past, with no follow up.

Sometimes, they came with the Sheriff, which made it hard to trust them. Rob had a record—a natural consequence of living outside.



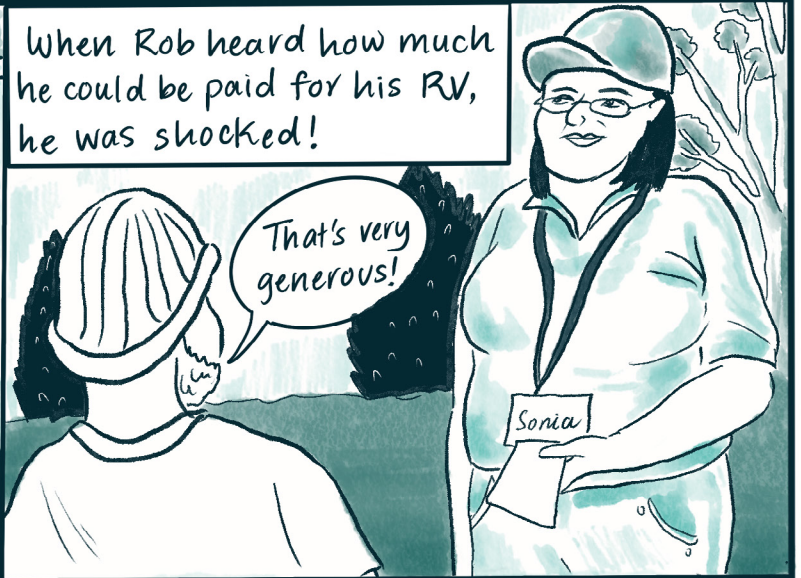
One day, Rob found a flyer for a new RV buyback program, run by the city. There was going to be a meeting to learn more.



Feeling skeptical, Rob decided to check out the meeting.



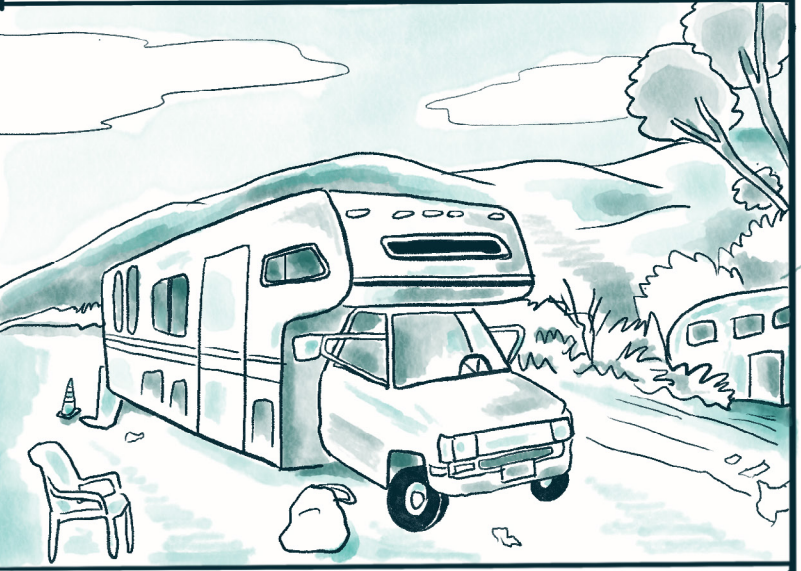
He liked that the program staff seemed to value people's feedback.



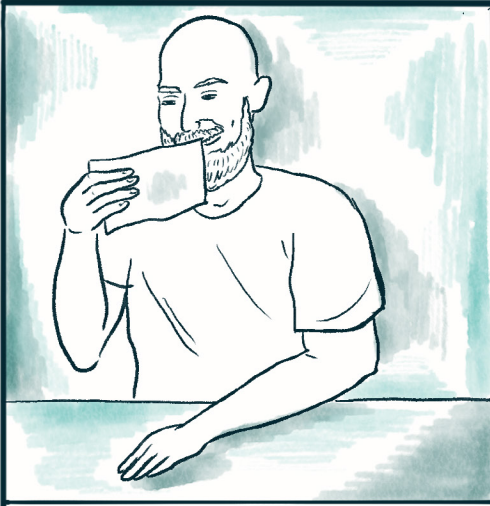
When Rob heard how much he could be paid for his RV, he was shocked!



Rob started imagining what he could do with the extra money.

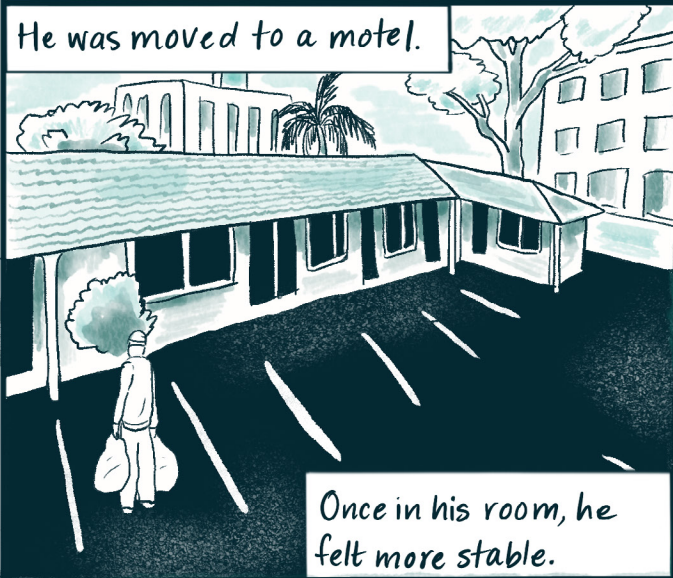


After weighing his options, he made the hard decision to sell his home.



But moving was stressful. Rob had to pack up his whole life in two bags and say bye to his home.

Rob got a third of the payment right away, which put him at ease.



He was moved to a motel.

Once in his room, he felt more stable.



Rob waited for the other payments, but they didn't come for weeks.



The program was so successful that there was a delay in getting RVs towed and people paid on time.

But no one had told Rob that.

Instead, he heard from his friends that his RV was still there—and getting vandalized.

After some very stressful weeks, Rob got the rest of his payments.

Eventually, his case manager helped him apply for a job and find an apartment of his own.

Today, Rob is feeling more hopeful about the future.



San José (Santa Clara County)



Santa Clara County

Home to 1.93 million residents, Santa Clara County anchors the heart of Silicon Valley's global innovation economy. The county's prosperity—reflected in a median household income of \$159,674 and a highly educated workforce (over 55% hold a bachelor's degree or higher)—stands in sharp contrast to its deepening housing and homelessness crisis.

Despite some of the nation's highest wages, housing costs have outpaced income growth for decades: average rent now exceeds \$3,200 per month, and the median home price surpasses \$1.3 million.

Nearly three-quarters of extremely low-income households spend more than half their income on rent.

The 2025 Point-in-Time count identified 10,711 people experiencing homelessness, an 8% increase since 2023. Roughly 70% were unsheltered, and over 4,000 households sought homelessness assistance for the first time last year, signaling a growing inflow of newly unhoused families and workers. Chronic homelessness remains a persistent challenge, driven by housing scarcity, rising costs, and health or economic shocks.⁶²

City of San José

With nearly 1 million residents,⁷⁰ San José is California's third-largest city and the economic and civic hub of Santa Clara County.⁷¹ Its population reflects Silicon Valley's diversity and dynamism: 32% Hispanic/Latinx, 40% Asian/Asian American, 28% White, 3% Black/African American, and 12% multiracial.⁷² Nearly 60% of households speak a language other than English at home.⁷³ Despite its tech-driven economy, 9% of residents live below the federal poverty line,⁷⁴ underscoring sharp income inequality amid regional prosperity.

San José faces some of the nation's highest housing costs. Average rent is \$2,890 per month⁷⁵—69% above the national median—and the median home price tops \$1.8 million, or \$810,000 for condos and townhomes.⁷⁶ These pressures have made housing unattainable for many working families and directly fuel homelessness. The 2025 PIT Count identified 6,503 people experiencing homelessness, a 3.8% increase since 2023.⁷⁷ While unsheltered homelessness has declined 23% since 2019, the city still accounts for 61% of the county's unhoused population.⁷⁸

Homelessness response system

San José's homelessness response system operates through the Santa Clara County Continuum of Care, linking city departments, county agencies, and nonprofit partners such as Destination: Home, HomeFirst, and Sacred Heart Community Service.

Core components include:

- **Homelessness Prevention System:**⁷⁹ Countywide collaboration combining short-term financial assistance and supportive services; prevented 1,700 San José households from becoming homeless in FY 2024-25.⁸⁰
- **Interim Housing Expansion:** The sheltered population rose 160% from 2019 to 2025, reaching 2,544 people—nearly 40% of the city's unhoused population, well above county and state averages. The Mayor's Office plans 1,000 new interim units under a citywide initiative.⁸¹
- **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH):** The county currently serves ≈1,600 individuals, funded primarily through HUD CoC grants and the Measure A Affordable Housing Bond.⁸²
- **Data Infrastructure:** A centralized Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Coordinated Entry System support real-time coordination and public transparency via online dashboards.

Policy evolution and encampment strategy

San José employs a structured, outreach-first encampment resolution model balancing public safety with compassion. When a site is reported through BeautifySJ or the Homeless Concerns Hotline, city staff assess jurisdiction, health risks, and environmental hazards. If appropriate, outreach teams engage residents weeks in advance, offering housing pathways such as emergency interim housing, supportive sleeping sites, and shelter placements.

Residents receive posted notices (typically 72 hours ahead) and support to store personal belongings. Previously, Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services conducted blight clean-up activities concurrently with encampment abatement. However, after discussions with the Housing Department, the teams agreed to shift these clean-up efforts to occur after an encampment has been resolved, recognizing that performing demolition or debris removal while residents are still transitioning out could be distressing and potentially traumatizing.

Sites in No Encampment Zones—such as waterways, school areas, or emergency housing perimeters—can be cleared immediately for safety reasons. In both standard and restricted zones, the City emphasizes connecting people to housing and reducing future encampments through prevention and services.

Funding and implementation

Between rounds 1 and 3 of Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF), the City of San José gained several key insights:

The City learned the importance of maintaining consistent engagement with partners throughout the gap between submitting an application and actively resolving an encampment. During Round 1, they found that relationships can weaken over time, and when it's time to implement solutions, it often feels like starting from scratch because partners may have shifted to other priorities or plans if not actively engaged.

In their Round 1 application, the City felt stretched thin trying to place individuals directly into rapid rehousing from encampments.

Outreach teams found it particularly challenging to work with encampment residents to secure documentation and the like while residents were actively navigating the stress of living outdoors without their basic needs being met.

The City of San José found more success in permanent housing placements by first addressing residents' immediate needs in interim housing and then slowly and steadily working with residents on their longer term housing goals. This approach is reflected in their Round 3 application, where residents were first moved from Cherry Avenue to Via Del Oro emergency interim housing before working with residents to gradually transition them into permanent housing by 2027.

San José received \$4.82 million in state Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3-R) resources for the Cherry Avenue Encampment Resolution Program (CAERP) (2024–2027).

- **Rationale:** Cherry Avenue was prioritized due to its location in a Water Resource Protection Zone and associated flood and fire risks.
- **Structure:** Three phases—(1) Targeted Outreach (HomeFirst), (2) Emergency Interim Housing at Via del Oro (75 units), and (3) Permanent Housing placements through PSH, RRH, and Housing Problem Solving.
- **Outcomes by 2027:** Serve 150 individuals (including inflow), transition 130 into interim housing, and permanently house ≈105 people.

- Budget Allocation: \$3.4 M for EIH operations; \$1.19 M for outreach; \$0.23 M for program management; plus \$2.8 M in leveraged resources through the County and Valley Water.
-



Via del Oro



Homebase conducted interviews with residents living at Via del Oro, San José's Emergency Interim Housing (EIH) site. These residents had previously lived in multiple encampments across the city, including Cherry Avenue and others cleared through San José's Encampment Resolution initiatives. The goal was to understand residents' experiences with outreach, closure processes, and their transitions into the Via del Oro program.

Via del Oro residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with seven residents who had previously lived in multiple encampments across San José and were later relocated to Via del Oro. At the time of Homebase's interviews, residents had been at Via del Oro for 2-3 months.

Outreach

Residents reported that encampment closures were communicated in advance—typically with warnings from both City staff and law enforcement. As one resident described, *"Cops would let us know that if we stayed past a certain date, we would be considered trespassing,"* while another recalled being told that *"if we didn't move our stuff, they'd throw it all away and we'd be arrested."*

Two residents from Cherry Avenue said the City monitored the cleanup closely, *"coming to ensure the space was left clean"* and *"numbering each tent."* However, the process was stressful. One person explained, *"Teams were coming down weekly with a big trash can demolisher—they were indiscriminate in what they deemed trash. Everyone would be outside trying to advocate that their belongings weren't trash. I lost a lot of stuff during that period."*

Despite this, residents praised HomeFirst's rapid engagement and support, noting that the organization *"was out there daily prepping folks for the move"* and able to transition many into housing *"within one to three weeks of the first closure notice."*

"Teams were coming down weekly with a big trash can demolisher - they were indiscriminate in what they deemed trash."

-Via del Oro resident

Services provided

Residents identified HomeFirst as the most consistent and reliable presence. Outreach workers conducted VI-SPDAT assessments, distributed hygiene kits and care packages, and facilitated mobile health and hygiene clinics. *"Anything I asked for help with, they connected me to,"* one resident said.

Cherry Avenue is located on property owned by Caltrans and Valley Water, both of which fenced off the area after the official abatement took place. While both agencies were collaborative with the City of San José and allowed residents time to relocate, delays related to the construction of Via Del Oro caused disruptions in services before all residents had fully transitioned out. One resident noted, *"They locked the gates with chains, and only they had the keys."* Caltrans and Valley Water eventually restored access to the site, but the City had to work closely with both agencies to support the remaining individuals post-abatement. After HomeFirst gained access, service resumed smoothly.

Residents especially valued HomeFirst's ability to handle documentation and logistics. *"They did all the paperwork right there. As long as we had our Social Security numbers, that was it,"* one resident explained. Another appreciated help with ID replacement and pet documentation.

"Anything I asked for help with, [HomeFirst] connected me to."

-Via del Oro resident

Engagement

Across interviews, trust in HomeFirst was high. Residents described outreach staff as *"sincerely trying to help us and not just get a paycheck."* The team's reliability, transparency, and follow-through helped counteract skepticism from previous negative experiences with outreach efforts.

Transportation support was repeatedly cited as transformative. One resident said, *"The transportation to the site really helped. If I had to do it all on my own, it would have been really difficult. HomeFirst helped motivate me."* Others appreciated that HomeFirst *"was true to their word"* in allowing multiple trips to retrieve belongings.

A resident who initially declined housing said staff *"encouraged me to come see the site first. When I saw it, I agreed—it felt like a good option."*

Housing connections

"We all live together, so telling us after 10 pm we can't talk or visit each other doesn't make sense."

-Via del Oro resident

Upon arriving at Via del Oro, residents received warm handoffs to new caseworkers and began individualized housing plans. Orientation sessions outlined program rules, which most residents found reasonable. However, some felt that certain restrictions—quiet time after 10pm and no outside visitors policy—were infantilizing. *"We're grown adults—it makes me feel like a baby,"* one resident said.

Another added, *"We all live together, so telling us after 10 PM we can't talk or visit each other doesn't make sense."*

Despite these frustrations, both residents said they were *"really happy overall"* and appreciated feeling safe, supported, and stable.

Outlooks on housing

All seven residents at Via del Oro described the move as life-changing. One said, *"From having nothing to having a bed to sleep in—it's absolutely amazing. I'll be on the Light Rail coming home and it'll hit me that I have a home to come back to."* Another shared, *"People here show that they care. A lot of us don't have emotional support, but I receive that here. I feel heard and supported."*

Residents also expressed optimism about their futures. *"My case manager is helping me find jobs that match my skills. I don't see myself being here long—I want to be self-sufficient,"* said one resident. Another echoed, *"Being given timely information and HomeFirst following through on their word made all the difference."*

"A lot of us don't have emotional support, but I receive that here. I feel heard and supported."

-Via del Oro resident

Summary of feedback: City of San José

Homebase engaged with 7 residents at Via Del Oro, representing individuals who had lived at encampments throughout the city. As all interviews took place after residents had already moved indoors, they reflect both their experiences during closures as well as their adjustment to housing.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Early and transparent communication reduced anxiety, while mixed signals—like belongings discarded before move-out—undermined confidence.



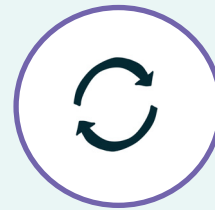
2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

Residents emphasized that consistent, reliable outreach and follow-through motivated participation during encampment closures. Outreach's daily presence, clear communication, and assistance with logistics, documentation, and transportation helped residents navigate the stressful process and encouraged even those who were initially hesitant to participate.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Allowing residents to visit the site and decide on their own terms promoted autonomy and higher housing uptake.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

HomeFirst's steady presence, follow-through, and practical help (e.g., IDs, pet documentation, transport) built lasting trust and encouraged participation.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Quiet hours and visitor restrictions, though well-intended, felt confining. Incorporating resident input can balance safety with dignity and independence.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Providing rides to the emergency interim housing and back for belongings supported residents' move indoors and eased stress during relocation.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Residents described their move to Via del Oro as life-changing, providing safety, support and stability after extended periods of homelessness. The experience of getting housed fostered optimism and confidence in further pursuing plans for increased stability.

Richmond (Contra Costa County)



Contra Costa County

Home to 1.16 million residents, Contra Costa County bridges suburban, rural, and industrial areas across the East Bay. While its median household income (\$122,000) is among the state's highest,⁸³ rising rents and limited housing supply continue to strain low- and moderate-income households.⁸⁴

The 2025 Point-in-Time count found 2,118 people experiencing homelessness, down 26% from the prior year but still with 60% unsheltered. Chronic homelessness remains high (62%), and stark racial disparities persist—Black residents comprise 34% of the homeless population but only 9% of the total population.

Despite adding 34% more shelter and housing beds since 2023,⁸⁵ system capacity remains limited. The county's 2025–2030 Consolidated Plan⁸⁶ emphasizes affordable housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing, supported by \$28.9 million in HHAP⁸⁷ and \$22 million in federal CoC funds.⁸⁸

The Contra Costa Continuum of Care and Council on Homelessness have prioritized racial equity, embedding anti-bias training and equity audits into local policy.

City of Richmond

Located on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay, Richmond is a diverse city of 115,000 residents,⁸² 46% Hispanic/Latinx, 21% White, 20% Black/African American, and 15% Asian.⁹⁰ With 11% of residents living below the poverty line, Richmond faces acute affordability challenges:⁹¹ over half of all households spend more than 30% of income on housing, and more than 80% of renters earning \$20,000–\$50,000 are rent-burdened.⁹²

Homelessness response system

The City's Homelessness Strategic Plan (2023)⁹³ established a coordinated framework built on assessment, community engagement, and inclusion of people with lived experience. The plan expands shelter capacity, launches Safe Parking programs, converts motels to transitional housing, and funds mobile outreach teams such as CORE and SOS for navigation and case management. It emphasizes racial equity and re-entry housing and integrates coordination with the Contra Costa County Continuum of Care.

Despite local leadership, implementation has been uneven. The City Council has faced pushback on proposed emergency shelters and safe parking sites, with multiple projects denied or canceled following community opposition. Still, Richmond has achieved notable long-term investments, including over \$14 million in Homekey funds (2024) to convert a motel into permanent supportive housing and \$1.5 million (2025) for a "State of Black Richmond" report to address racial disparities. In Richmond, Black residents make up 18% of the population but 57% of people experiencing homelessness.

Policy evolution and encampment strategy

Richmond's encampment policy aligns with the Contra Costa County Homeless Encampment Action Protocol (2024), which standardizes how local agencies identify and resolve encampments. The protocol prioritizes outreach-led responses through County CORE Teams and the Coordinated Entry System, emphasizing voluntary relocation where possible.

When health or safety hazards—such as fires or blocked rights-of-way—pose imminent risks, sites may be cleared without the standard 72-hour notice. Otherwise, notices must be multilingual, posted for at least 72 hours, and followed by continued outreach. Personal property that is not hazardous must be stored for 30 days, though the protocol does not require notice about available shelter or recovery procedures for belongings, leaving significant gaps in transparency.

While intended to balance safety and dignity, implementation varies across sites, and advocates note inconsistent adherence to outreach-first principles.

Funding and implementation

Richmond has pursued significant state and local investment to support encampment resolution and housing:

- Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-3-R): \$9.3 million awarded in 2024 to serve 165 individuals across eight high-priority encampments, supported by \$70+ million in leveraged resources.⁹⁴

- Project Homekey: \$14 million for permanent supportive housing conversion.
- Local Developer Fees and HEAP funds: Supporting Safe Parking, navigation, and outreach programs.

The ERF initiative targets 64 encampments across a 10-square-mile Homeless Encampment Corridor, pairing case management, job training, and housing navigation with the development of a pet-friendly navigation center. The City of Richmond introduced an enhanced focus on workforce development and life-skills training in their latest ERF Round 3 application, underscoring the importance of employment training in promoting housing stability and long-term permanence for individuals. Their approach now includes a three-tier employment model—from stabilization jobs with SOS Richmond to transitional and permanent placements through RichmondWORKS—aimed at increasing income and reducing returns to homelessness.

By June 2027, Richmond aims to:

- Transition 90 residents into permanent housing and 105 into interim housing
- Support 120 residents in sustaining housing
- Provide job training to 75 residents and employment placements for 60

Through these coordinated efforts, Richmond is working to move beyond reactive encampment management toward sustained, employment-linked housing stability—though continued community resistance and limited affordable housing supply remain major obstacles.

Rodeway Inn



Homebase met with residents currently living at Rodeway Inn, a non-congregate interim housing site in Richmond that now serves individuals relocated from multiple former encampments, including Bayview, Costco, Castro, Blackside, and the Soup Kitchen area. These sites were resolved through earlier rounds of ERF—rounds 1 and 2. Residents' experiences reflect varied outreach, closure, and relocation processes across the city but share a common theme of transition—from unstable outdoor living situations to temporary shelter with uncertain next steps.

"We were allowed to take two containers of belongings, anything that didn't fit had to be thrown away. That pissed me off—why couldn't we get storage for additional belongings?"

-Rodeway Inn resident

Rodeway Inn residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase engaged with 10 residents living at the Rodeway Inn, an interim housing site in the City of Richmond. All participants had previously lived in nearby encampments resolved through the County's Encampment Resolution efforts. Interviews were conducted during a single site visit, focusing on residents' experiences with outreach and communication during closure, their transitions into the Rodeway Inn program, and their perspectives on housing, services, and ongoing stability.

Outreach

Residents described a patchwork of outreach efforts leading up to the closure of their encampments. Those from Bayview said that the Richmond Police Department, CORE, and SOS teams visited for several weeks before the closure, warning that camping would soon be prohibited. As one resident recalled, *"SOS and CORE would come and warn us about the closing for about 2-3 weeks. The closure date kept getting pushed though."*

Others, like those near the Soup Kitchen, reported shorter notice periods—sometimes just a week—when police and City staff arrived to announce both cleanup operations and new housing opportunities. At the Castro encampment, the timeline was more extended and structured. Residents remembered being told nearly a year in advance that the City intended to restore the site to its original use: *"The City came down—J—and told us this site was being closed. They wanted to reinstate the site to its original intent and purpose. They gave us a little under a year to move."*

“They said they’d give me \$1,700 for my RV which was nice, I wasn’t expecting anything. The check came the next day.”

-Rodeway Inn resident

The Blackside encampment had weekly meetings led by City staff to keep residents informed of closure plans, while those at Costco described personal visits to each RV and firm follow-through: *“They actually came the day that they said they would, and they brought bulldozers.”* For others, the process was more chaotic—one resident missed the relocation bus entirely, saying, *“Somebody called me and informed me, but by the time I got there I missed the bus to the extended stay. I kept calling [the City] and asking [them] to put me in the extended stay.”*

Services provided

Residents said multiple organizations provided ongoing assistance before and during the closures. CORE offered weekly outreach with snacks, hygiene supplies, and sign-ups for housing lists. SOS visited with mobile showers, while medical and benefits assistance came sporadically from partner groups. City staff were credited with coordinating services and ensuring multiple agencies worked together.

Several residents participated in the RV buyback program, describing it as unexpectedly fair and well-administered. *“They said they’d give me \$1,700 for my RV which was nice, I wasn’t expecting anything. The check came the next day,”* one resident explained. Others, however, felt the process moved too quickly, forcing difficult decisions. *“We were allowed to take two containers of belongings, anything that didn’t fit had to be thrown away,”* one said. *“That pissed me off—why couldn’t we get storage for additional belongings? The whole process felt very rushed.”*

Engagement

Most residents described positive interactions with City outreach workers and nonprofit partners. *“[Name of outreach worker] really cares and listens,”* one resident said, *“but not everyone does.”* Several residents appreciated the opportunity to work consistently with familiar staff, which helped build comfort and trust: *“I push a lot to work with the same people. Staff have grown to be understanding about my preference... I can advocate for myself when they’re recommending something that I’ve already tried or know won’t work for me.”*

Still, not all experiences with staff were equitable. *“They had their attitudes and favoritism—they pick and choose who they helped,”* one resident shared. Overall, though, residents agreed that respectful engagement made a major difference in how the closures and transitions felt.

Housing connections

Many residents now at Rodeway Inn had been relocated multiple times. Some came from earlier housing placements that fell through due to property disputes or code issues. One person explained, *“The City ended up having an issue with the property owner, so they stopped paying all the clients’ rents and everyone got a 30-day eviction notice and was moved into Rodeway Inn.”*

Another had been placed in a unit later deemed unsafe: *"They inspected the housing and deemed it not up to code. I was then moved into Rodeway Inn."*

For some, safety remained a concern. A survivor of domestic violence shared, *"Rodeway wasn't responsive to my safety concerns and wouldn't move my unit. The owner doesn't want to fix my door until they can ensure that my perpetrator won't repeat his actions."*

Others contrasted Rodeway with previous placements. *"At the extended stay, we got more than adequate freshly cooked hot meals. Now everything is packaged and needs to be microwaved,"* one resident said. Still, many found relief in stability: *"I feel safer. I don't have to worry about anyone running up on me and stealing my room."*

"I've been able to get my medical needs taken care of - I just got an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon to get my hip fixed."

-Rodeway Inn resident

Living experience

For most, Rodeway Inn provided a noticeable improvement in safety and access to care. *"I've been able to get my medical needs taken care of—I just got an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon to get my hip fixed,"* one resident shared. Another said, *"I like having my own space and bathroom. I have a microwave, TV, and little fridge here."*

"I don't feel comfortable here - it doesn't feel like home, and it isn't relaxing. It feels like this could go away at any time."

-Rodeway Inn resident

However, residents also described stress about uncertain timelines and inconsistent communication. *"It could end at any time—I'm only guaranteed two weeks here,"* one resident said. Another added, *"One morning the manager came and knocked on my door and told me I needed to be out at 11. I contacted SOS and thankfully was able to get an extension."*

Several cited pest infestations and lack of autonomy as challenges, but still emphasized that conditions were preferable to encampment life. Some residents received more intensive case management, including help securing vital documents, court petitions, or new pets. Others wished that workforce and job-readiness supports were more personal: *"It would be helpful to have a human element to job placement. Right now, it's just internet searches and job fairs."*

Housing outlook and preferences

Across interviews, residents expressed a shared desire for stability, affordability, and community connection.

"Rent is high and we're on fixed incomes. How are we expected to move anywhere?"

-Rodeway Inn resident

Many worried about where they would go next and how long they could remain at Rodeway Inn. *"I don't feel comfortable here—it doesn't feel like home, and it isn't relaxing. It feels like this could go away at any time,"* one resident said.

For many, maintaining relationships and a sense of belonging was imperative for their next move. *"I want to be moved with people I know. I don't want to move to a different city."* Another resident declined room-and-board options that felt isolating or culturally incompatible, noting that *"the living environment wasn't conducive to one's mental health if you're not a hoarder."*

Some expressed skepticism about being able to afford future rent: *"Rent is high and we're on fixed incomes. How are we expected to move anywhere?"* Others balanced gratitude with uncertainty: *"It's a small price to pay for a roof... I can stand on my two feet once they help me get up."*



29th and Hoffman encampment



The encampment at 29th and Hoffman in Richmond sits on private property bordered by residential homes and the I-580 freeway. For nearly a year, the site has hosted around 30 individuals, including more than 10 RVs—many inoperable. The encampment has been the focus of multiple prior closure attempts, during which residents received notices or warnings that were never followed by full abatement. These repeated notices, often without clear follow-through, created uncertainty among residents and frustration among nearby neighbors and community organizations.

Faith in Action East Bay, one of the organizations providing outreach at the site, noted that the encampment's makeup had shifted over time: newer residents moved in, disrupting what had previously been a cooperative community culture. *"Many of the older residents had a community-minded outlook,"* one outreach partner explained, *"but the newer additions made it hard for others with few options to maintain the property and relationships."*

Reason for closure

Community concern about health and safety conditions was the primary driver of the closure effort. The encampment's proximity to Ephesians Church—a space frequented by families and children—amplified calls for action. Reports of drug activity, increased debris, and deteriorating conditions led to involvement from the City of Richmond, which cited public safety and neighborhood well-being as motivating factors.

Closure process and coordination

Because the site is privately owned, the City's ability to intervene was limited and depended on cooperation from the property owner. In response, the City coordinated with Contra Costa County, the CORE team, and Safe Organized Spaces (SOS) to provide weekly outreach, documentation support, and service connections while planning a longer-term solution.

The City worked across multiple departments—Code Enforcement, Community Development, and Public Works—and with external partners like Oliver's Tow Company to design an RV buyback program for residents with inoperable vehicles. Plans also included relocation support, cleanup, and towing operations once property access was secured.

29th and Hoffman residents' feedback on encampment resolution

Homebase conducted interviews with four residents at the 29th and Hoffman encampment to understand their experiences with outreach, closure notices, and service access. Their perspectives, detailed in the following sections, provide insight into the lived realities of ongoing closure efforts, barriers to engagement, and opportunities for improving future encampment resolution strategies.

Outreach

Residents described a long pattern of partial or postponed closure attempts. One explained, *"They've notified me about this encampment closing about four different times, but they haven't done anything. They just hang a notification on the vehicle."* Another recalled a particularly difficult episode during heavy rain: *"We had three days to clean up as it was pouring down rain and mud. After all of that, they didn't even come and fulfill the tagging."*

A resident shared that they had previously entered the Way 2 Love program but were told they had to abandon their van immediately to check into a hotel. *"I said, if I leave right now, it's not going to take even half an hour for people to come steal my stuff—and that's exactly what happened. I lost everything. All I needed was a little bit of time to secure my vehicle."*

Despite repeated closure attempts, the encampment persisted and developed a degree of structure.

One resident described *"a strong sense of community, with roles and responsibilities assigned to maintain order and cleanliness."* Most recently, residents were informed that the site would close because it sits on private property, but they were not given specifics about timelines or next steps.

Services provided

Residents reported that SOS regularly visited three times a week, offering rides to a warehouse for hygiene services, haircuts, and meals. Other support was less consistent. *"They say they're busy, of course,"* one resident remarked, describing brief visits where staff handed out snack bags but rarely stayed to talk. Another resident noted that they were trying to renew their work permit and Social Security card but found the process difficult.

Health-related barriers were common. One resident who required refrigerated medication said they lacked access to a refrigerator. Others appreciated the help they did receive—such as assistance from SOS and CORE in gathering documentation—but felt services overall were stretched thin.

"They come in here and treat us just like we're dirt. It's not okay. It's severely not okay."

-29th and Hoffman resident

Engagement

Residents described mixed experiences with outreach and City engagement. While some appreciated the consistent visits from SOS, others felt forgotten or dismissed.

"The local authorities have used the same tactics as in overseas military operations to remove the encampment, with little regard for the rights and dignity of the individuals living there," one resident said. "They come in here and treat us just like we're dirt. It's not okay. It's severely not okay."

The lack of sustained engagement and repeated unfulfilled closure attempts left residents skeptical about the City's follow-through. As one explained, *"They keep coming, saying they'll close it, but nothing really changes."*

Housing connections

All four residents expressed frustration with the uncertainty surrounding the closure and their limited housing options. One questioned the broader strategy: *"Why don't we invest in this property and get it copacetic to the neighborhood instead of uprooting us into another place that's going to leave us with very little economic agency and very little ability to carry on our life?"*

Another said that previous short-term housing offers felt more disruptive than helpful: *"It's just going to be a year, and that's going to be a setback of a year."* Negative past experiences have also made some residents wary of new programs: *"It's going to be difficult to get me to smile and wave as I walk into a housing program."*

Several residents rejected the idea of moving into Brookside Shelter, citing restrictive rules, safety concerns, and an inability to stay with pets. *"A lot of shelters won't let us stay with our dogs,"* one said. Still, all four expressed interest in an RV buyback program, viewing it as a more dignified and practical bridge toward permanent housing.

"I'd be interested," one resident said, *"but it needs to offer fair compensation and a humane approach."* Another added that they had heard positive things about Berkeley's RV buyback program and hoped Richmond would model its approach similarly.

"Why don't we invest in this property and get it copacetic to the neighborhood instead of uprooting us into another place that's going to leave us with very little economic agency and very little ability to carry on our life?"

-29th and Hoffman resident

Service provider update on encampment resolution

Following Homebase's interviews with residents, the City of Richmond resolved the encampment at 29th and Hoffman. The City implemented an RV buyback program, with 7 of 13 residents choosing to participate and turn in their vehicles. Residents initially declined to participate, viewing the \$500 buyback offer as inadequate compensation for giving up their only current housing option. City staff successfully advocated to increase the amount to \$1,000, which residents found agreeable.

Residents also received support from CORE and SOS, including assistance with family reunification efforts. Some residents were connected to shelters, while others are still in the process of securing housing assistance. The City of Richmond hopes to utilize a portion of ERF 3 funds to help the remaining individuals transition into stable housing.

Summary of feedback: City of Richmond



Homebase engaged with 14 individuals in the City of Richmond at two different sites. At the encampment at 29th and Hoffman 4 individuals were interviewed who were experiencing active unsheltered homelessness. At the Rodeway Inn, 10 individuals who were previously unsheltered from throughout Richmond and West Contra Costa County were interviewed.

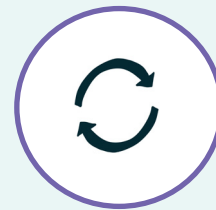
3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Experiences with enforcement and staff interactions strongly influenced residents' willingness to engage. Some at 29th & Hoffman described enforcement as abrupt and demeaning, while others at Rodeway Inn appreciated being treated "like adults."



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Across sites, residents said shifting timelines and mixed messages created confusion and anxiety. Repeated closure notices at 29th & Hoffman without follow-through, and last-minute move-outs at Rodeway Inn, left many skeptical about what to expect.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Access to transportation, storage, and help with belongings greatly affected the smoothness of transitions. Where supports like CORE and SOS coordination existed, residents reported fewer disruptions and less trauma. At both 29th & Hoffman and Rodeway Inn, the level of collaboration among property owners, city staff, outreach teams, and service providers determined how coherent and supportive the process felt to residents.



2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

Residents valued outreach workers who were dependable, respectful, and familiar. Frequent staff turnover or impersonal engagement eroded trust and made it harder to stay connected to services.



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Traditional shelters were often seen as unsafe or too restrictive—especially for people with pets or partners. Non-congregate options, safe parking, and RV buyback programs were viewed as more realistic and dignified pathways.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Residents appreciated safety and privacy at sites like Rodeway Inn but cited issues such as pests, limited food options, and isolation. These conditions influenced morale and perceptions of progress.



7. Interim Housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

Fixed incomes, scarce affordable units, and short-term rental assistance left residents uncertain about long-term stability. Many called for clearer housing plans and support with job placement and landlord engagement.





Synthesis of key themes

In conversations with system leaders and individuals with lived expertise of unsheltered homelessness from across California, certain key themes and stories continued to emerge as especially important, or detrimental to, successfully resolving unsheltered homelessness. In this section, we unpack these themes to guide communities to consider and adopt practices and policies that are effective in supporting the transition from unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing.



1. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Consistency in messaging, timelines and expectations across outreach teams and city departments is critical, both to ensure effective service delivery, and to maintain and build trust with residents and the public.

System Leaders: System leaders highlighted the importance of multi-departmental efforts and coordination to effectively address unsheltered homelessness. Clear, transparent protocols across departments establish consistent practices which balance public safety and the dignity of encampment residence.

Residents: Inconsistent or incomplete information about closures, eligibility, move-out logistics, and program expectations create confusion and stress among people living in encampments and can quickly lead to a deterioration in trust about the entire closure process. Mixed messages from outreach staff, city and county employees, other residents, and even the media and public can erode confidence. Residents emphasized the need for written timelines, designated contacts and regular, consistent updates to reduce anxiety and foster trust.

Open Questions: Future research could explore how jurisdictions written plans for encampment closures match their on-the-ground efforts and timelines, how and why this changes over time, and how best to communicate changes to residents.



2. Reliability and follow-through motivate participation.

In addition to the need for consistent and clear communication about the timeline and expectations for the encampment closure itself, it is also important that providers begin any closure process from a place of trust and respect with encampment residents.

System Leaders: Staff consistency, relationship-based outreach, and dependable service delivery were all identified as essential elements to building resident trust long before encampment closure even begins. Leaders observed that sustained presence and follow-up are ideal, and that recognizing residents' past negative experiences while clearly communicating how current efforts differ can help encourage participation in new initiatives.

Residents: Past experiences with broken promises, displacement, lost belongings, and disrespect caused skepticism among many encampment residents. Consistent outreach, visible leadership, and dependable follow-through increased engagement, even among residents who were initially hesitant. Distinctions between service and enforcement roles were crucial to maintain this trust.

Open Questions: Many residents interviewed perceived that city and county officials failed to provide health and public safety services to the sites of encampments ahead of closures, such as stopping trash services, making restrooms unavailable, etc. Future research might track the actual incidence of these events, how lack of services contributes to perceived health and public safety concerns for housed and unhoused residents near the encampment, and whether a lack of follow-through in this area had an effect on participation of encampment residents.



3. Residents value fairness and inclusion in housing selection.

Allowing residents to participate directly in decisions about the availability of housing helps to ensure equity and increases program success.

System Leaders: Allowing residents to participate in decisions and observe outcomes strengthened engagement throughout encampments. Word-of-mouth endorsements from previously housed residents can be key in encouraging others to accept housing opportunities.

Residents: Concerns often arose about how housing lists were created and who was eligible for housing, with some long-term residents feeling excluded. This was especially true for residents who work during the day, when outreach and staff typically visit encampments. Including peer representatives and encampment leaders in list verification, clearly communicating and sticking to objective selection criteria, and offering opportunities for residents to visit sites promotes fairness and transparency.

Open Questions: Communities tended to prioritize shelter and supportive services for “core residents” of encampments and spent time and effort determining who made this list. Future research could focus on how these lists were drawn up, who was prioritized and deprioritized and why, and the reasons communities created these lists and dispersed services in this way.



4. Reliable service access and coordination matter.

Consistency in service delivery is key to effectively transition people into living inside.

System Leaders: Sustained and relationship-based engagement was key to success across all sites for successfully housing people, especially those who had been unsheltered for a very long time or had high service needs. Service continuity often depends upon individual staff rather than systemic processes, which highlights the need for more formalized collaboration between city staff, outreach teams and providers.

Residents: Service access was often inconsistent, with unclear eligibility rules and fragmented follow-up. Coordination among providers and agencies improved reliability and ease of navigation, creating trust with residents and laying the groundwork for successful transitions to housing. Support with IDs, transportation, employment, healthcare, and hygiene are especially critical to residents.

Open Questions: What types of programs and services are most aligned with positive housing outcomes and long-term housing success?



5. Dignity, autonomy, and respect shape participation.

Encampment closures threaten to upend resident's lives, by separating them from their community, destroying their homes and belongings, and denying them the dignity to act as autonomous adults. A recognition of the gravity of these events, trauma-informed engagement, and individualized housing plans are key to ensure buy-in and participation.

System Leaders: Successful efforts relied on highly trained teams providing individualized engagement with trauma informed and population-specific approaches.

Residents: Strict rules which limit possessions, rush move-outs and put all individuals into the same box cause distress among residents and decrease a willingness to engage. Pets are central to emotion well-being and efforts should be made to provide flexible pet policies.

Open Questions: Some residents from encampments in this study declined placements into temporary housing. Future work could seek to understand the reasons for these denials and what people who choose to stay outside did after the encampments were closed. Additional research could also explore how the Grants Pass decision and criminalization of homelessness affect denials and otherwise impact people living outside who declined temporary housing or left it.



6. Housing and programs should be designed for safety and comfort.

Interim Housing sites should strive to provide supportive and comfortable environments for residents to live and community to gather.

System Leaders: Interim Housing allows jurisdictions to make rapid exits from encampment settings, which is often a necessary short-term tool to provide some stability to residents whose encampments are being closed, but long-term success depends on the availability of permanent housing and supportive services.

Residents: While the safety that interim housing provides is recognized and appreciated, residents complained that livability challenges such as greatly limited furnishings, cooking facilities, restrictive food options, and institutional rules undermine comforts. Residents valued sites with community gathering places and events.

Open Questions: Additional research following people on their path to permanent housing would be useful to understand what specific elements and factors make a program more livable and how those contribute to better outcomes for the program and individuals in it.



7. Interim housing is an important step, but stability requires longer-term support.

While interim housing provides an important step for people to adjust to permanent housing from unsheltered homelessness, long-term support and permanent housing placements are necessary to prevent returns to homelessness.

System Leaders: Encampment closures should be tied to dedicated housing whenever possible. Additional funding and support are needed to ensure that the availability of housing matches the number and needs of residents.

Residents: Residents emphasized that interim housing provided them with critical safety, stability and structure and could serve as a foundation for employment, family reconnection, and independent living. However continued support to find permanent housing, obtain economic benefits and stability, reunify with family, obtain mental health and medical treatments, etc., was essential to achieve long-term success.

Open Questions: Many of the sites in this study connected people to transitional or interim housing without a clear path to permanent housing. Future work could explore the long-term impacts of this model, who moved into permanent housing, who reentered homelessness, and why.

Conclusion

This study comes at a pivotal moment, one in which California and the nation face a humanitarian crisis unlike any in recent memory, with hundreds of thousands of people living without shelter. As local, state and the federal partners work to find lasting solutions, the report offers a rare, real-time snapshot at how multiple communities are approaching encampment resolution on the ground.

What emerges is a portrait of innovation and persistence. Cities are testing a range of strategies to meet the permanent housing needs of people living in encampments. They are coordinating across agencies, strengthening outreach, and creating housing and shelter options that work for the people they house. Across interviews and sites, the most effective efforts shared common themes of transparency, autonomy, and trust. They also recognized that moving from an encampment inside is not a single step but is part of a broader continuum of care that begins long before closure and continues well after. Of course, challenges remain. The housing market is tight, resources are stretched, and systems are strained. Still, the findings of this study are encouraging.

Progress does not hinge on one perfect formula. Rather, successfully transitioning people inside requires many smaller, intentional actions, each one making the path to stable, permanent housing clearer and more certain.





Appendix A: Funding Streams

Appendix A summarizes the major federal, state, and local funding sources that supported the encampment resolution efforts examined in this study. Table 3 provides an overview of each funding stream's administering agency, primary eligible uses, and relevance to encampment work, highlighting how communities braided flexible and targeted resources to support outreach, interim housing, and pathways to permanent housing. Together, these funding sources illustrate the financial infrastructure underpinning person-centered encampment resolution across the study sites.

Table 3. Overview of funding streams

Funding Source	Administering agency/ level	Primary eligible uses	Relevance to encampment work
Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF)	California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD) / California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH)	Outreach, interim housing, rapid rehousing (including case management, rental subsidies, security deposits and first month’s rent, landlord incentives and unit holding fees), coordination, and stabilization supports for specific encampments	Nearly \$1 billion in grants in multiple rounds since 2021; catalytic funding for pilot projects and person-centered encampment resolution. Every community in our study received ERF funds.
Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP)	California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD) / California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH)	Flexible block grant for homelessness systems: interim housing, rapid rehousing, prevention/diversion, street outreach, regional coordination, and system improvement. HHAP dollars may be awarded to CoCs, counties, and large cities in California	HHAP has awarded a total of approximately \$4.4 billion through six rounds of funding since 2019. Oakland, San Jose and Los Angeles were direct recipients of HHAP funds. Berkeley and Richmond were not direct recipients, but benefitted from regional allocations to the CoCs that serve their communities. The encampment resolution efforts in our study were often supported by HHAP-funded services, such as housing navigation and wrap-around care.





Funding Source	Administering agency/ level	Primary eligible uses	Relevance to encampment work
HUD Supplemental NOFO (SNOFO) to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	Outreach, data integration, permanent housing solutions (including rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing), and supportive services.	\$322 million nationwide; used by partner CoCs (Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Los Angeles) to support outreach, housing pathways and health partnerships.
Homekey Program	State of California / HCD	Acquisition and conversion of hotels, motels, and other properties into permanent or interim housing	Used to create over 15,000 units statewide. In the communities in our study, the properties acquired through Homekey were typically used to provide interim housing for people directly from encampments.
Rapid Response Homeless Housing (R2H2) Acquisition Fund	City of Oakland	The R2H2 program is used to facilitate the quick acquisition of buildings for homeless housing. R2H2 helps Oakland respond more swiftly to housing opportunities and improves competitiveness for state funding like Homekey grants.	The Mandela House, which housed many of the Oakland residents in our study, was purchased in 2025 using a combination of state and local funds, including over \$4.5 million from the R2H2 program.



Funding Source	Administering agency/ level	Primary eligible uses	Relevance to encampment work
General Funds / Local Measure Dollars	Local jurisdictions (cities, counties)	Fill gaps in rigid federal/ state funds; support flexible, person- centered problem solving and workforce sustainability.	Several communities in our study, including Berkeley, Oakland, Alameda County and Los Angeles, passed local measures to fund homeless services or housing. These measures typically increased sales taxes or property transfer fees to generate revenue.



Appendix B: Strategies Crosswalk

Appendix B explores three leading national frameworks on addressing unsheltered homelessness and encampment resolution from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

To ground our fieldwork and analysis in evidence-based practice, Homebase reviewed three leading national frameworks on addressing unsheltered homelessness and encampment resolution: the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness’s *19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively* (2024), the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative’s *Encampment Resolution Guide* (2024), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness’s *Housing-Focused Street Outreach Framework* (2025).⁹⁵ Together, these frameworks establish a clear national consensus that effective responses to encampments must be coordinated, person-centered, housing-driven, data-informed, equitable, and sustainably staffed.

Table 4 presents a crosswalk summarizing the shared strategic elements across the three frameworks—emphasizing coordinated systems, person-centered engagement, housing-focused approaches, data-driven planning, equity, and workforce capacity. These principles provided both a conceptual and practical foundation for our research, shaping how we approached fieldwork and analysis.

In particular, our qualitative data collection examined how outreach teams engage encampment residents, how coordination occurs across agencies and systems, and how the role of housing in encampment response efforts. Collectively, these frameworks anchored our interview design, field observations, and analytic interpretation, ensuring alignment with nationally recognized best practices.

Table 4. Cross-framework synthesis of encampment and outreach strategies

Strategy category	Description	Commonalities across frameworks	Distinguishing features
1. Cross-System Coordination & Governance	Aligns planning, funding, and implementation across agencies to ensure a unified, accountable response.	All frameworks stress collaboration among local governments, CoCs, outreach teams, and housing providers to prevent duplication and improve referral pathways.	BHHI specifies a Core Strategy Team with clear roles and timelines. USICH elevates shared accountability across government levels. NAEH integrates outreach within the larger homelessness response system.
2. Person-Centered & Trauma-Informed Engagement	Builds trust and reduces harm through individualized, respectful, and culturally responsive outreach.	Each framework prioritizes relationship-based engagement that honors autonomy, incorporates lived experience, and minimizes re-traumatization.	NAEH emphasizes small caseloads and consistent navigators. BHHI details transparent closure communication and site-based trust-building. USICH explicitly centers humane, equitable treatment.
3. Housing-Focused Approach	Positions permanent housing as the organizing goal for all outreach and encampment resolution efforts.	All frameworks make housing—not relocation or clearance—the endpoint of engagement, supported by Housing First principles and flexible funding.	NAEH codifies housing-focused outreach integrated into CES. BHHI provides individualized housing plans and post-move stabilization. USICH includes housing and support among its six strategy domains.

Strategy category	Description	Commonalities across frameworks	Distinguishing features
4. Data-Driven Planning & Accountability	Uses real-time data and evaluation to guide resource allocation, track outcomes, and ensure transparency.	All emphasize coordinated data systems, disaggregated analysis, and iterative performance improvement.	BHHI operationalizes data through prioritization and by-name lists. NAEH defines “data and impact analysis” as a core element. USICH links data to system-level decision-making and equity monitoring.
5. Equity & Community Health	Embeds racial equity, health, and safety into all aspects of outreach and resolution.	Each framework underscores that humane responses must promote community well-being, address disparities, and involve those most affected.	USICH lists equity first among its strategy domains. BHHI focuses on mitigating health risks and ensuring inclusive engagement. NAEH integrates trauma-informed, culturally competent practices.
6. Workforce & Implementation Infrastructure	Ensures outreach and encampment strategies are sustainable through staffing, training, and operational structure.	All highlight the need for well-resourced, professionalized outreach teams with clear guidance, supervision, and safety supports.	BHHI provides stepwise operational protocols and staffing guidance. NAEH includes workforce training and safety. USICH connects implementation to funding coordination.





Appendix C: Berkeley Quantitative Case Study

Appendix C presents a quantitative case study of five encampments in the City of Berkeley, using complete HMIS data from 2021-2025 to examine residents' housing pathways and outcomes. Drawing on data for 201 unique individuals, the analysis tracks transitions from encampment residence to interim shelter, permanent housing, or continued homelessness, and compares outcomes across sites. The appendix situates these findings within encampment-specific contexts—including size, longevity, service intensity, and legal and political constraints—to explore how conditions and interventions may shape housing success. The analysis complements the main report's qualitative findings by highlighting patterns and variation across encampments.

Background and methodology

Background

This case study shares the same overarching goals as the qualitative research described in the main text: to understand which strategies and conditions support successful exits from encampments and placements into permanent housing. Unlike the qualitative case studies, which provide rich, in-depth snapshots of resident experiences at a particular moment in time, this analysis offers a more comprehensive, system-wide view of encampment residents' housing trajectories. Using complete Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data for all residents associated with City of Berkeley encampments between 2021 and 2025, we trace each person's path - from encampment to housing or non-housing outcomes - and use these patterns to ground a discussion of policy and practice. While this approach enables a full view of outcomes across the encampment population, it offers limited insight into implementation, decision-making, and resident experience.

Methodology

Our quantitative study of encampment resolution in Alameda County is focused on 5 encampments that the City of Berkeley has been working to resolve: Harrison Street, 2nd Street, Civic Center Park, People's Park, and Old City Hall. With complete HMIS data for Berkeley, we are able to examine the full range of housing pathways and outcomes for every resident associated with these sites.

The dataset, drawn from the City of Berkeley's Homeless Management Information System for the years 2021-2025, includes 201 unique individuals—some connected to more than one encampment (see Table 5 below). All data were current as of August 2025.

In order to gather qualitative context surrounding the closure of the encampments, we conducted five interviews over the course of 15 months with system leaders at the City of Berkeley. Topics of discussion included the process and rationale for the closure of our focus encampments, as well as the policies that were implemented. The City of Berkeley also provided documentation outlining additional context about the encampments and their closure.



Table 5. City of Berkeley encampments, 2021-2025

Encampment(s)	Number of residents
Harrison Street	65
2nd Street	50
Civic Center Park	34
People’s Park	33
2nd Street & Harrison Street	7
Old City Hall	4
Old City Hall & Civic Center Park	3
Harrison Street & People’s Park	2
People’s Park & Civic Center Park	2
Old City Hall & Harrison Street	1

Encampment context

Across the five Berkeley encampments included in this study, the City navigated a complex mix of safety concerns, political pressures, legal constraints, and limited housing resources.

The encampments varied substantially in size, location, and risk profile, and together illustrate the challenges facing communities attempting to resolve longstanding unsheltered sites.

Table 6. Encampment characteristics

Encampment name	Size (residents)*	Longevity	Closure date	Outreach/service provided	Connected shelter	Political context
2nd Street	57	10-15 years	July 2025	Voluntary compliance approach, deep clean-ups, trash removal, intensive outreach by HRT. Weekly engagement and case management. Focused on minimizing re-encampment.	Dedicated 27-room motel (Howard Johnson) for residents; ~120 non-congregate shelter units made available as well	Prioritized by City Council Resolution 71,513-N.S (Sept 2024) due to health, safety, and traffic concerns.
Harrison Street	75	6 years	Active	Multiple deep cleanings (124.9 tons of debris removed), weekly trash and illegal dumping removal, mobile showers and laundry, bathrooms, rodent mitigation, RV relocation, weekly by-name case conferences, intensive HRT and County Street Medicine Team presence.	Super 8 motel master lease for non-congregate shelter	Ongoing litigation (<i>Prado v. City of Berkeley</i> , <i>Parnell v. City of Berkeley</i>), community opposition, legal constraints, COVID guidance restrictions, Ninth Circuit <i>Martin v. City of Boise</i> implications; repeated attempts to close encampment met with TROs and resistance.

Encampment name	Size (residents)*	Longevity	Closure date	Outreach/service provided	Connected shelter	Political context
Civic Center Park	39	3 years	April 2025	Coordination with majority of residents for voluntary clearing; fencing off the park for construction; engagement during closure.	Scattered site interim housing provided.	Closure associated with construction; anticipates reopening and potential return of residents; municipal redevelopment priorities guided closure.
People's Park	37	40+ years	January 2024	Collaboration with UC Berkeley, transitional support services during closure, voluntary relocation support.	Quality Inn designated as interim shelter in partnership with UC Berkeley.	UC Berkeley jurisdiction; closure planned in coordination with university; park space preserved and mixed-use redevelopment planned (student housing + supportive housing).
Old City Hall	8	3 months	December 2024	Notification of impending closure, coordination with winter shelter facilities; outreach to residents for transitions.	Scattered site interim housing provided.	Closure driven by construction and seasonal winter shelter needs; small encampment, limited political opposition.

*Encampment size is as of August 2025.

Context and physical conditions

Encampment locations varied in their surrounding environments and the types of external pressures they generated. Each encampment presented a distinct mix of public health, safety, and operational considerations. According to a City of Berkeley memo, Harrison Street was deemed to be the most unsafe encampment due to significant fire incidents, large volumes of hazardous debris, exposed needles on the ground, rodent harborage, presence of raw sewage and other chronic public health concerns.⁹⁶ 2nd Street had fewer documented incidents but longstanding deep entrenchment, with some residents present for over a decade. Civic Center Park and People's Park were less physically hazardous but presented potential public safety concerns, including crimes such as robberies and aggravated assaults, often committed against encampment residents.⁹⁷ Old City Hall posed minimal direct danger but required clearance due to operational needs such as facilities and grounds maintenance.⁹⁸

Political dynamics

Prioritization was further shaped by policy actions, political context, and legal constraints. At multiple points, City Council actions and legal dynamics shaped encampment prioritization. The 2024 Encampment Policy Resolution directed accelerated attention to 2nd Street and Harrison Street due to the safety risks listed above. People's Park carried profound political and historical weight after decades as a site of protest, drawing national attention and necessitating close coordination between UC Berkeley and the City. Harrison Street, meanwhile, became a flashpoint for litigation and advocacy, with injunctions repeatedly halting city operations.

Service and housing supports

Across sites, service delivery and housing outcomes were shaped by a combination of limited system capacity, legal constraints, and site-specific conditions. A persistent challenge was the scarcity of permanent housing and the limited capacity of the City's Homeless Response Team (a 3-person unit) to manage multiple high-needs sites simultaneously. Legal barriers—including *Martin v. Boise*, pandemic-era enforcement restrictions, and repeated temporary restraining orders—significantly constrained resolution operations such as placement in shelter – particularly at Harrison Street. Re-encampment occurred rapidly at nearly every site unless fencing or redevelopment plans created firm physical barriers.

Within these constraints, the City paired enforcement or closure actions with a broad suite of supports: motel leasing (ERF-funded), expansion of non-congregate shelter beds, sanitation infrastructure, weekly case conferencing, mobile hygiene services, and targeted outreach. The scale and intensity of services varied by site. Harrison Street received a wide range of services that many other encampments did not, such as abating rodent harborage conditions and nine deep cleanings, which removed a total of 124.9 tons of debris. However, those services were provided inconsistently due to ongoing legal challenges. The 2nd Street encampment benefited from a dedicated interim housing site; the City of Berkeley prioritized ERF funds toward the master leasing of a 27 room Howard Johnson motel in Berkeley, as well as increasing the availability of 120 new, private non-congregate shelter units, which helped to facilitate voluntary resolution.

People’s Park featured university-city coordination and a long-term redevelopment plan that incorporates both student housing and PSH. Old City Hall and Civic Center Park required smaller but coordinated closure efforts tied to construction timelines.

Taken together, these variations in site conditions, constraints, and service approaches suggest that encampments function as distinct environments, raising questions about how differences in context and intervention may be associated with different resident outcomes.

Linking context to outcomes

Encampments differ in important ways that may be related to differences in resident outcomes. To examine these patterns, we analyzed each site along five dimensions: size, longevity, vulnerability, service intensity, and resident program enrollment. These characteristics varied substantially across encampments and shaped the contexts in which services were delivered and residents navigated housing pathways. We use these dimensions to explore how differences in encampment conditions may be associated with variation in engagement, service delivery, and housing outcomes across sites.

Cross encampment findings

Housing outcomes

Figure 3 below traces residents’ pathways from their home location prior to encampment, through encampment residence, to their most recent housing exit. Housing outcomes varied across encampments.

Most residents identified the City of Berkeley as their home prior to entering an encampment, and while many residents’ most recent exits were to homelessness, more than half were actively engaged in a housing pathway at the time of analysis. The City’s strategy of moving residents from encampments into interim placements—primarily emergency shelter—meant that many individuals were temporarily housed while awaiting permanent housing availability.

Housing connection rates were highest at Old City Hall, People’s Park, and 2nd Street, where 60 percent or more of residents were in emergency shelter or permanent housing. Civic Center Park showed moderately lower housing engagement, with 54 percent of residents connected to shelter or permanent housing, while Harrison Street had the lowest rate, with 41 percent of residents connected to emergency shelter or permanent housing. Overall, these patterns indicate meaningful variation in housing outcomes across encampments, with stronger housing connections observed at Old City Hall, People’s Park, and 2nd Street compared to Civic Center Park and Harrison Street.

Figure 3. Housing pathways by encampment

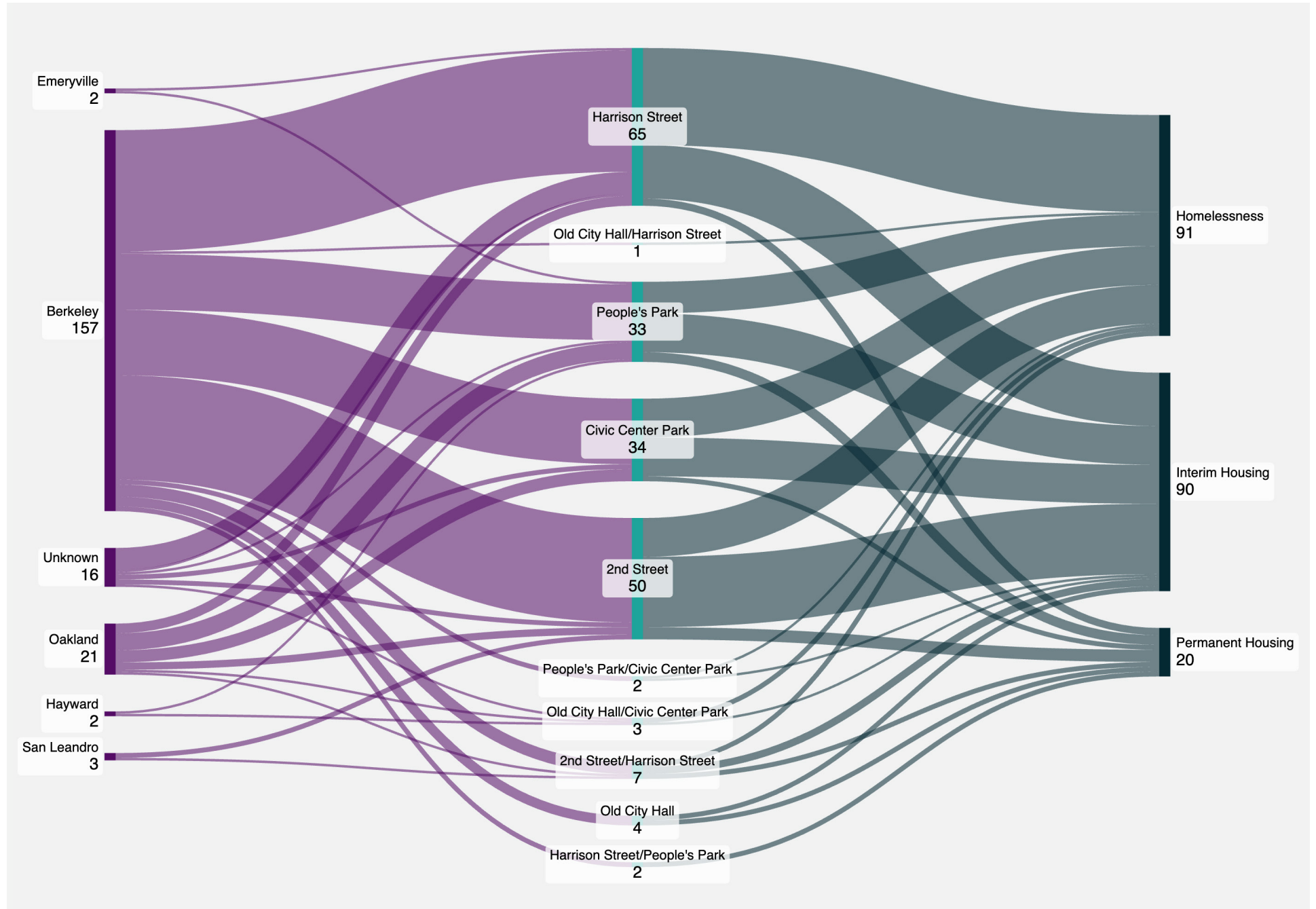


Table 7. Housing outcomes by encampment

Encampment name	Total residents	% to Interim Housing	% to Permanent Housing	% to homelessness
2nd Street	57	56%	12%	32%
Harrison Street	75	33%	9%	57%
Civic Center Park	39	49%	5%	46%
People's Park	37	46%	16%	39%
Old City Hall	8	37.5%	25%	37.5%

Factors associated with housing outcomes

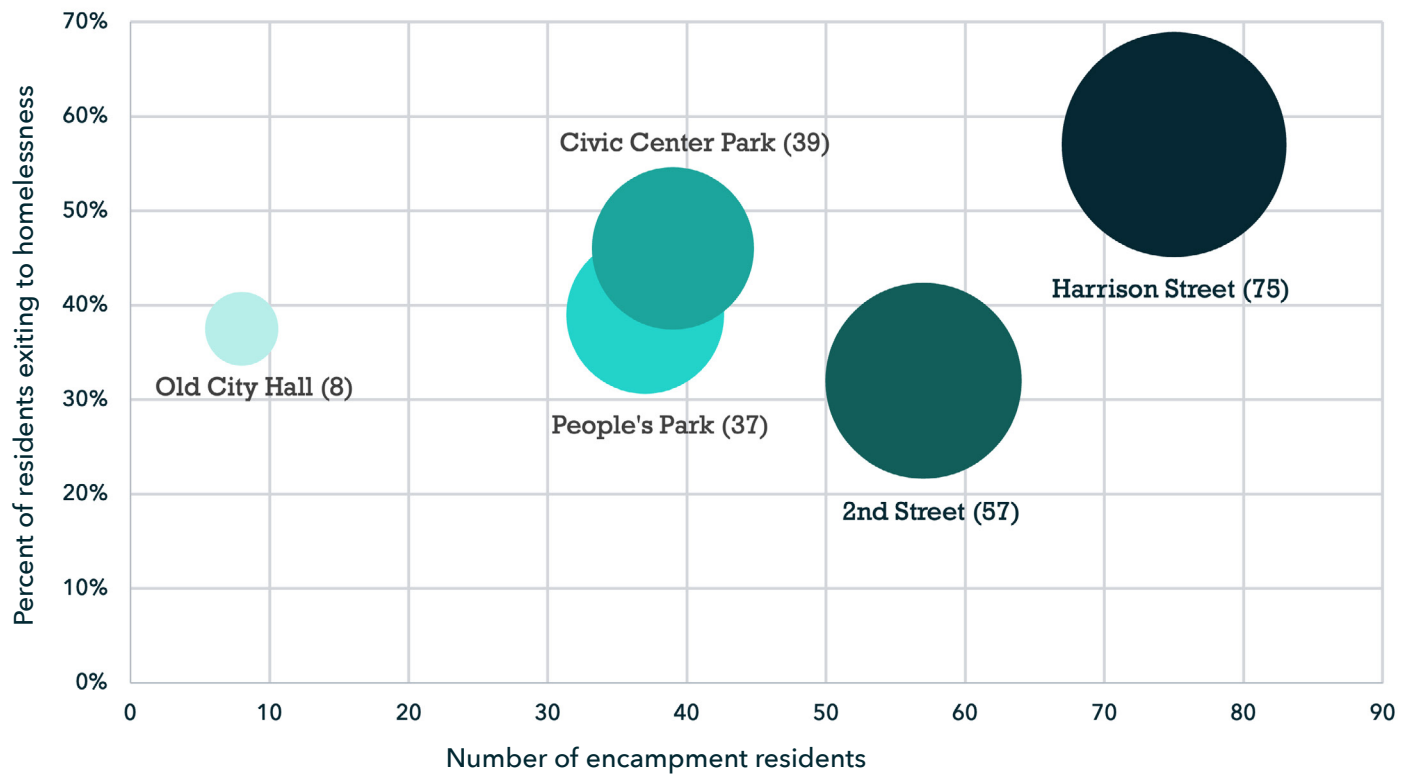
As a note, this section of the report will be discussing “programs” as well as “services.” Programs include all different types of program enrollments including Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Permanent Housing, Services Only, etc. Services focus on non-housing services provided to residents including Case Management, Food, Safety Net Services, Household Items, Life Skills, Transportation, etc.

Old City Hall—the smallest encampment—had the strongest outcomes, with 63 percent of residents connecting to a housing option. In contrast, Harrison Street, the largest encampment, had weaker outcomes, with 43 of 75 residents returning to homelessness. In interviews, city officials noted that larger sites experience frequent turnover and pose challenges for maintaining an accurate census, complicating service coordination and housing placement.

Encampment Size and Longevity

Encampment size and duration appear to be related to housing outcomes. With one exception, residents in smaller encampments were more likely to connect to housing than those in larger sites (Figure 4).

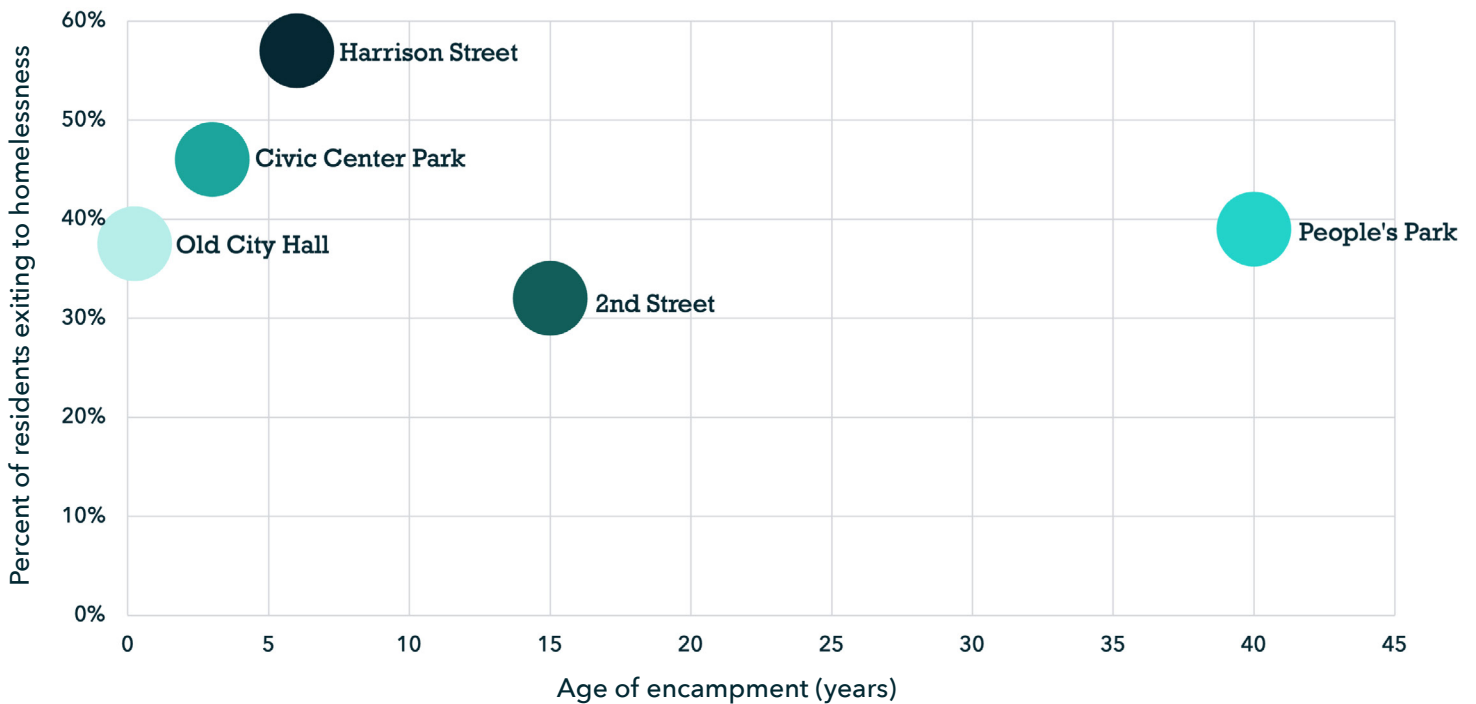
Figure 4. Number of encampment residents vs. percent of residents exiting to homelessness



Encampment longevity showed a similar pattern (Figure 5). Longstanding sites such as Harrison Street (approximately six years) and People’s Park (over 40 years) generally saw lower housing success than more recently formed encampments like Civic Center Park (three years) and Old City Hall (three months). The primary exception was 2nd Street, which achieved relatively strong housing outcomes despite its six-year duration, likely reflecting sustained prioritization by the City and the absence of significant litigation or community opposition.

Taken together, the data and stakeholder input suggest that earlier intervention, before sites become large or deeply entrenched, may improve housing outcomes by limiting growth and enabling more responsive service delivery.

Figure 5. Age of encampment vs. percent of residents exiting to homelessness



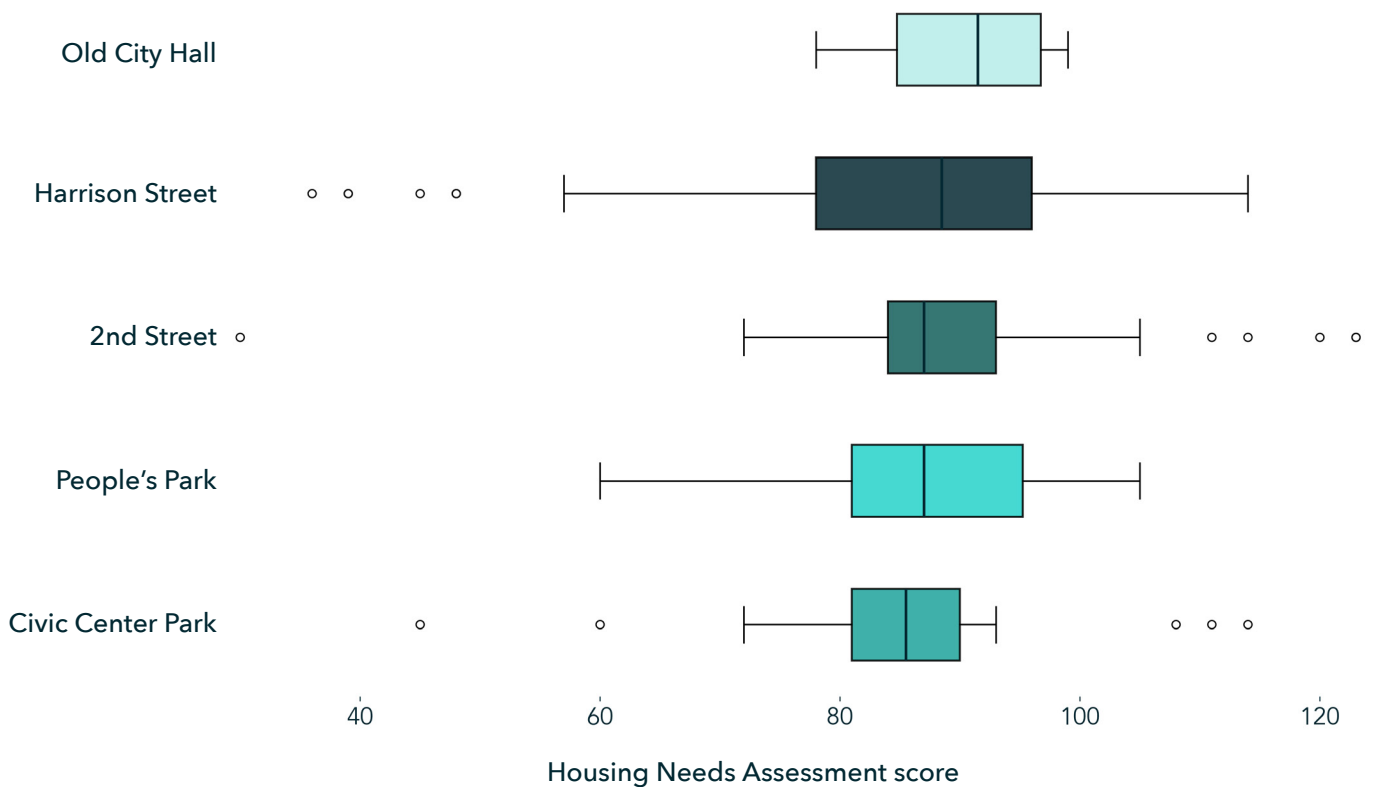
Vulnerability levels

The level of vulnerability across the encampments provide important context for interpreting housing outcomes. In Alameda County, a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) is used to determine eligibility for housing resources, with a score of 80 set as the threshold for permanent supportive housing. Understanding the distribution of HNA scores within each encampment may help explain differences in housing outcomes, as encampments with higher or more complex needs often face greater barriers to housing.

HNA scores varied across encampments. As shown in the box plots, 2nd Street seems to have the overall highest needs, with the largest median and upper quartile scores. Harrison Street exhibited a very spread of needs, indicating a large diversity of experiences for the residents of this encampment. Old City Hall has the narrowest spread, consistent with its small size and more uniform population; this concentration of high and similar needs may have supported clearer housing matches and stronger outcomes.

Figure 6 depicts Housing Needs Assessment scores for people living just in one of our focus encampments (186 total), 28 of whom did not complete the HNA.

Figure 6. Distribution of most recent Housing Needs Assessment scores by encampment



Vulnerability of an encampment's population is one tool that can be used to determine housing success, but it not fully predictive. Larger encampments, with wide variation in resident needs can be more difficult to serve, while broader system conditions (like housing availability and service capacity) can also mediate outcomes for residents.

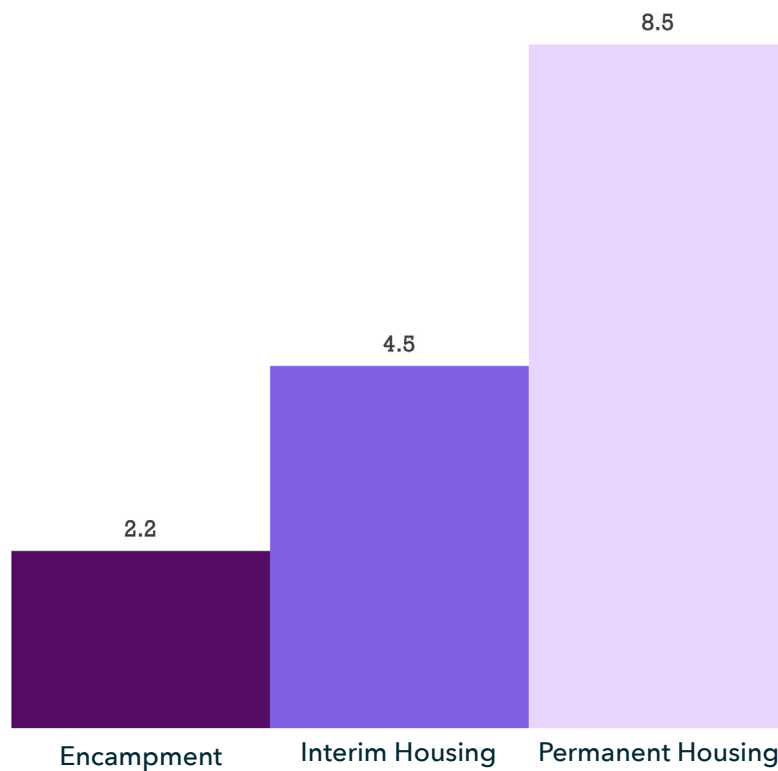
Service intensity

Service intensity also appears to be associated with housing outcomes. Across encampments, residents who exited to permanent housing received substantially more services in the months leading up to closure than those who did not (Figure 7).

On average, residents exiting to permanent housing received 8.5 documented services within 180 days of encampment exit, compared to 4.5 for those exiting to emergency shelter and 2.2 for those who did not connect to housing.

Similar patterns were observed when examining services delivered within 30, 60, and 90 days prior to encampment exit. While this relationship may not be causal (residents preparing for housing may have more frequent contact with outreach staff), the pattern suggests that sustained service engagement supports housing pathways.

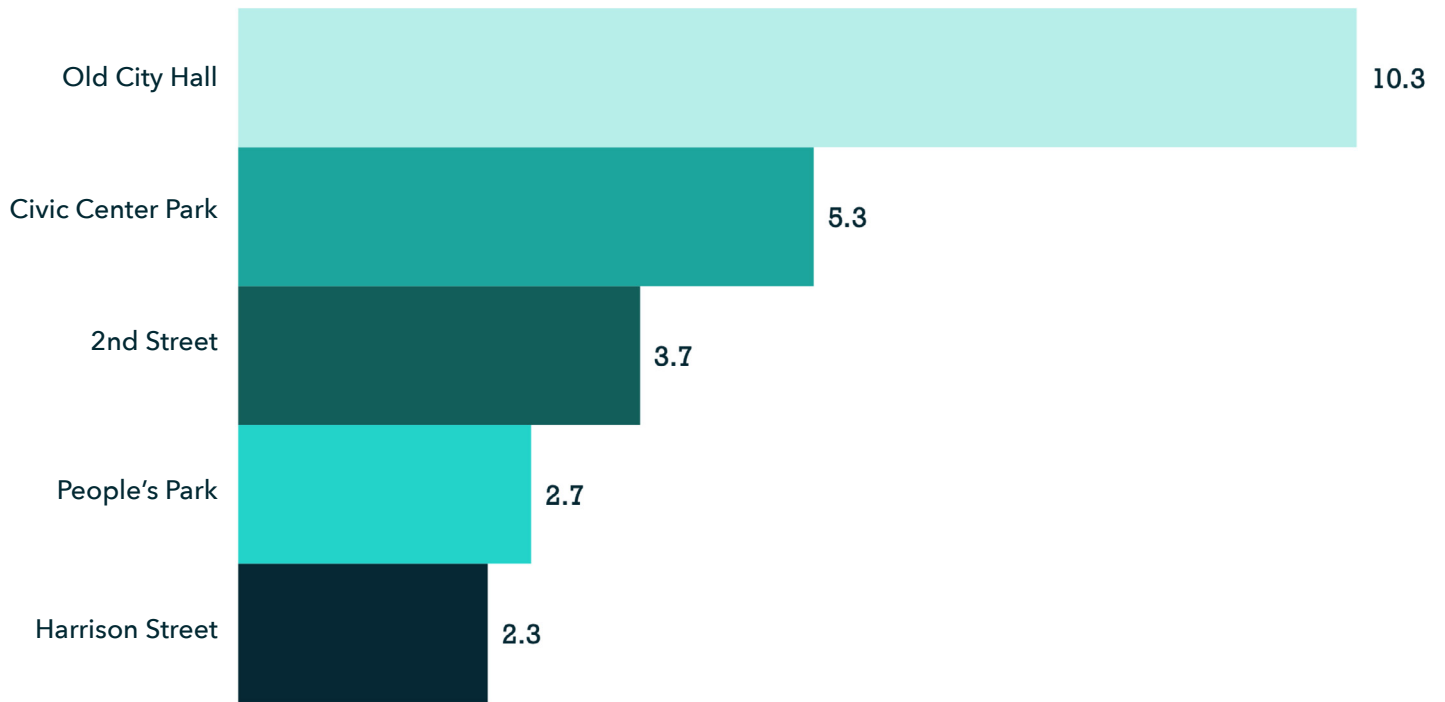
Figure 7. Number of services by housing outcome, 180 days before exit



Differences in service intensity were also evident across encampments (Figure 8). Among residents associated with a single encampment (n=186), encampments with higher average service levels generally showed stronger housing outcomes. Harrison Street had both the lowest service intensity and the lowest housing connection rates.

Old City Hall showed high service levels, though conclusions are limited by its small sample size. Civic Center Park received relatively high levels of service but did not achieve housing outcomes commensurate with that investment, suggesting that service intensity alone does not fully explain outcomes.

Figure 8. Average number of services by encampment, 180 days before exit

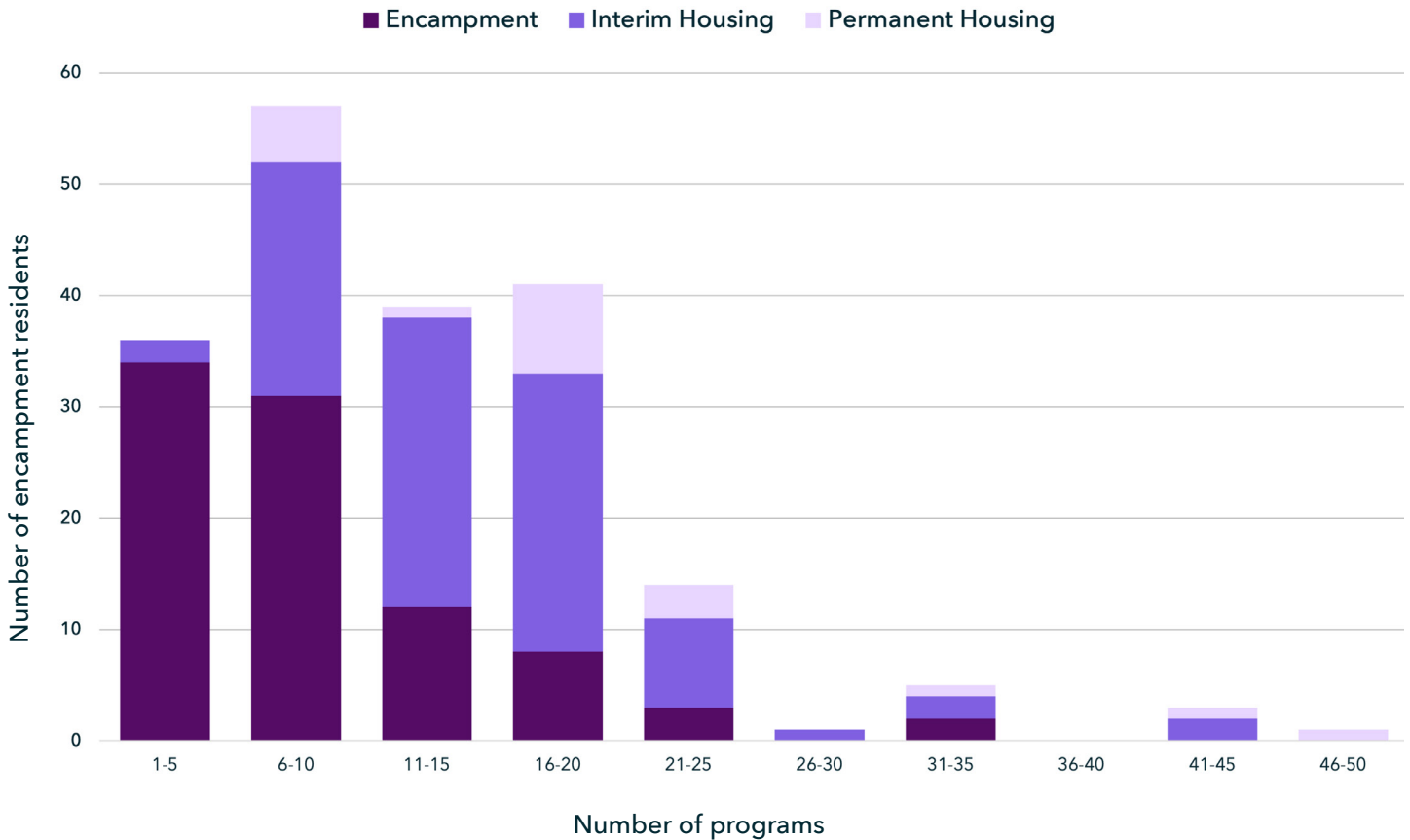


Program enrollments

Many residents cycled through multiple programs while unsheltered, including outreach efforts, emergency shelters, and transitional housing, often experiencing numerous enrollments before connecting to permanent housing. This raises an important question: whether repeated program engagement increases the likelihood of achieving housing, or whether extended system involvement without permanent exits may reflect barriers that limit housing success.

Figure 9 plots the number of program enrollments against exit outcomes. Figure 10 depicts the average number of program enrollments for residents exiting to Emergency Shelter or Permanent Housing and those exiting back to unsheltered homelessness.

Figure 9. Total number of programs received, by exit type



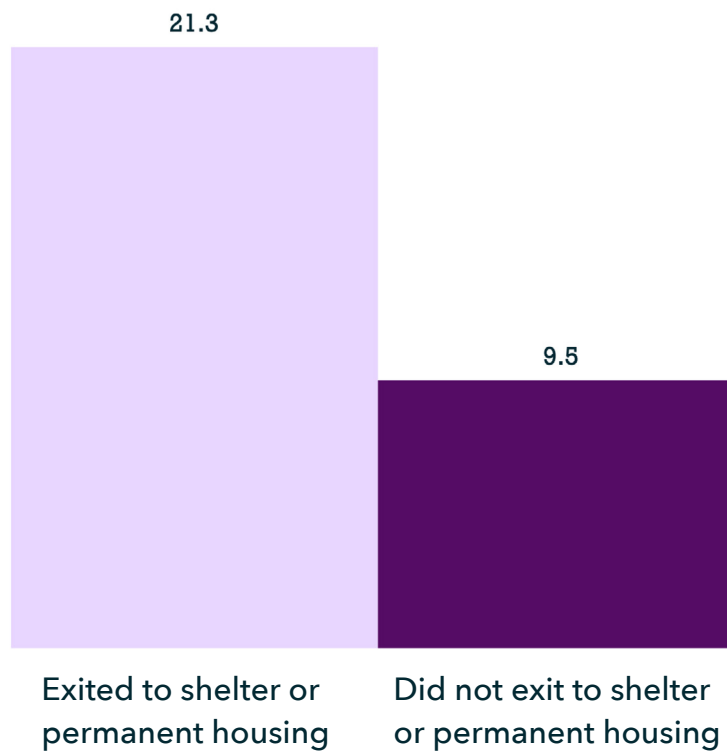
Note: Four individuals participated in more than 50 programs. Three exited to Interim Housing and one to an Encampment. These were considered outliers and were omitted from Figure 9.

Higher levels of program enrollment were generally associated with housing outcomes; residents with more program enrollments were more likely to have their most recent exit be to housing. On average, individuals who exited to emergency shelter or permanent housing had more than twice as many program enrollments as those whose most recent exit was not to housing.

While housing was often not achieved immediately following enrollment, sustained engagement with programs appears to support housing connections over time.



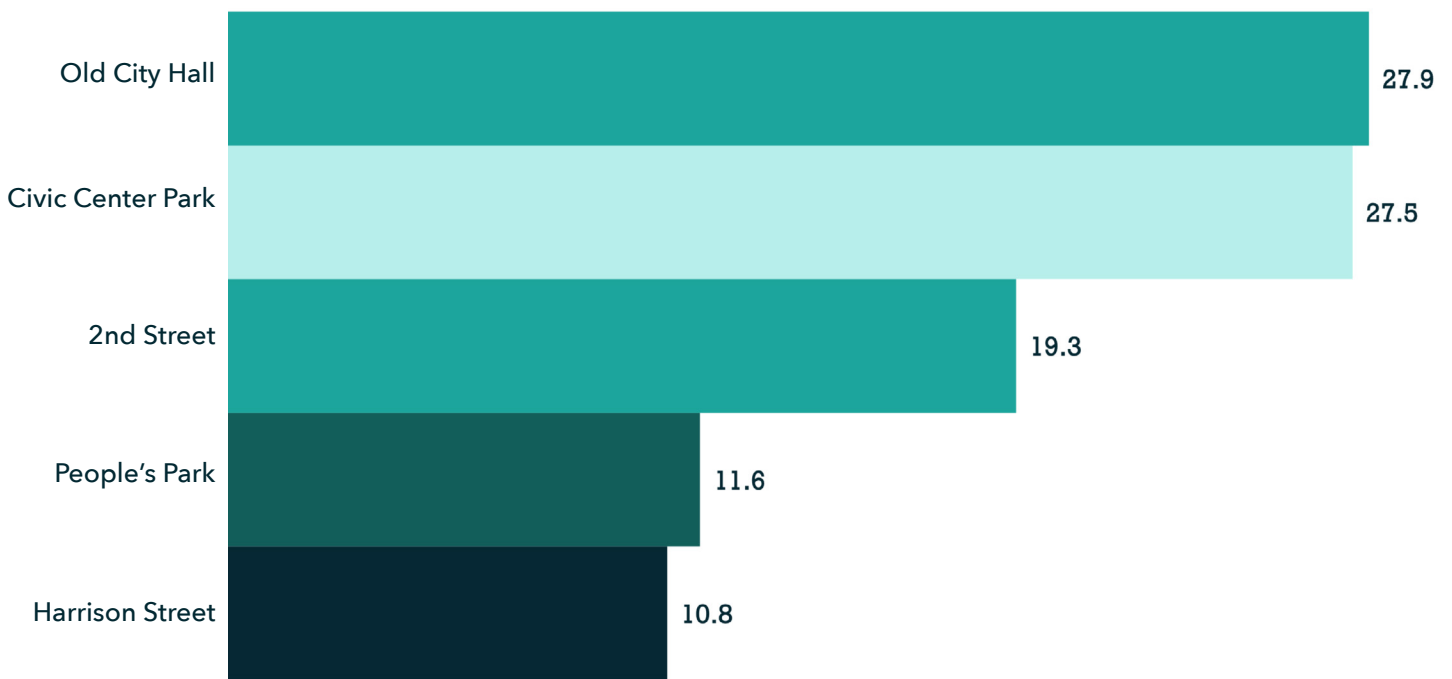
Figure 10. Average number of program enrollments prior to exit, by exit type



However, this relationship was less consistent at the encampment level (Figure 11). Although Harrison Street had the lowest average number of program enrollments and weaker housing outcomes, encampments with stronger outcomes (such as Old City Hall and 2nd Street) did not consistently have the highest enrollment counts.

This suggests that while repeated program engagement may support housing at the individual level, program volume alone does not fully explain differences in outcomes across encampments, pointing to the influence of site conditions, service coordination, and housing availability.

Figure 11. Average number of program enrollments by encampment





Areas for further investigation

Whether temporary or interim housing is a necessary intermediate step in encampment resolution warrants further investigation. In Berkeley, transitions from encampments to interim placements—primarily emergency shelter—were often the only available pathway, as Alameda County administers the Coordinated Entry System and controls access to permanent housing resources. As a result, many residents remained in interim settings while awaiting permanent housing opportunities.

Strategies such as setting aside permanent housing units for encampment residents or explicitly incorporating encampment status into Coordinated Entry prioritization may help shorten resolution timelines and reduce the risk of re-encampment, though further analysis is needed to assess the feasibility and equity implications of these approaches.

Conclusion

Findings from this analysis suggest that encampment characteristics, service strategies, and system constraints meaningfully shape housing outcomes. Smaller and less entrenched encampments showed greater resident mobility into housing, while long-standing sites marked by safety risks, legal challenges, and sustained conflict—such as Harrison Street—faced persistent barriers to resolution. Across encampments, both the intensity and timing of outreach and services mattered: sustained engagement, particularly in the period leading up to closure, was associated with stronger housing connections.

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of relationship-based service delivery. Connecting residents to services that address immediate, practical needs helped build trust and familiarity with the system, increasing residents' willingness to engage with interim housing when permanent options were not immediately available. These small, consistent interactions appeared to lay the groundwork for longer-term housing pathways.

Taken together, the analysis points to several implications for policy and practice. Communities may benefit from encampment response teams that can act early, providing proactive outreach as sites begin to form in order to prevent large, deeply entrenched encampments. Robust and sustained outreach—supported by well-trained staff skilled in rapport-building—appears critical to successful resolution. Finally, the experience of Berkeley underscores how legal and jurisdictional constraints can limit progress at long-standing sites, suggesting that efforts to align policy, legal frameworks, and housing prioritization with encampment resolution goals are essential for achieving durable outcomes.



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