

Employment is just as critical as housing

Carrie McKellogg

California has begun to incorporate planning for livelihood-sustaining jobs into discussions of homelessness, but it is still an afterthought in a “housing first” model.

A more explicit set of initiatives are needed to combine jobs (in social enterprise), economic mobility (via education/training (in the workplace or in other settings), and affordable/subsidized housing in a context where subsidize rent is gradually withdrawn rather than a cliff which disincentivizes work.

Working people are able to contribute to their housing expense in an increasing share over time (and with flexibility as income fluctuates) if housing subsidy models can be more dynamic rather than fixed subsidies.

Much like the model of employing affordable housing residents in the upkeep of their properties, a similar social enterprise model could be expanded to involve homeless individuals in the construction of new housing (modular housing, ADUs, new residential development, etc.).

The construction trade represents a career pathway that is adaptable and open to people with barriers (like criminal justice system involvement) that could be scaled up using the apprenticeship model to create a pipeline of individuals with lived experience providing the labor pool for housing construction.

Wages paid represent individuals’ ability to pay for an increasing share of their housing costs, as well as avoided costs of incarceration, public assistance, etc.

Carrie McKellogg is Chief Program Officer for the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF).