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## **New PSU study examines effectiveness of tiny pod villages as alternative shelter for people experiencing homelessness**

The two-year study included interviews with village residents, staff, neighbors, designers and creators to understand and share best practices in a how-to guide

**PORTLAND, Ore.** — Researchers at Portland State University will release one of the nation’s first comprehensive studies on tiny pod villages as alternative shelter for people experiencing homelessness April 5.

Villages, or communities of individual dwellings, are emerging around the country as a form of alternative shelter. This report includes a how-to guide with best practices based on the study’s research findings to help inform cities around the country considering this model. Researchers in psychology, architecture, and urban planning at PSU’s [Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative](#) (HRAC) spent two years interviewing villagers, site managers, neighbors and builders.

One of the key findings was the connection between a sense of agency and villager satisfaction, said lead researcher and HRAC Co-Founder Todd Ferry, who has been working on villages since 2016 as an associate director at the PSU Center for Public Interest Design.

“Giving villagers a voice and sense of agency over how villages operate had a huge impact on villager satisfaction,” he said. “It didn’t have to be a full self-governance model, but just a clear way that they were involved in decisions.”

The study yielded a range of practical recommendations from designing village elements for mobility to the ideal number of villagers, which many placed at no more than 30 residents per site.

### **Key Findings:**

- 86% of villagers were largely or very satisfied with their pod, 69% were satisfied or very satisfied with their village, 79% were satisfied or very satisfied with their neighborhood.
- Food insecurity remains a major problem: 45% of villagers report food insecurity.
- Villages have disproportionately served white men: 17% of villagers in this study identify as BIPOC despite BIPOC residents representing 40% of the unsheltered population in Portland.
- Most neighbors who reported concerns at first did not have concerns after living near a village.
- 69% of villagers said that they should share in decision making at the village. Overall, the feeling of having a voice in the village had major impacts on villager satisfaction.

The study included 80 in-depth interviews from six villages and more than 2,000 community surveys in the Portland area. Portland is home to one of the first and longest running villages, Dignity Village, built 22 years ago by people experiencing homelessness. With the city's long history of villages and multiple examples, Portland is an ideal place to study this type of alternative shelter.

Overall, villagers in the study reported high rates of satisfaction with the pod, village and neighborhood. But the model has not been as effective in serving BIPOC residents. BIPOC villagers reported lower levels of belonging and acceptance in their villages.

“The village model, when implemented thoughtfully, serves an important response to alternative shelter, but questions still remain about the model’s racial equity. Projects such as the AfroVillage in Portland, designed by and for BIPOC residents, offer future versions of the village model that could better serve people of color,” said Center Director Marisa Zapata.

Researchers hope that these findings will help communities better understand villages, help improve existing ones and establish best practices for designing villages of the future. The research and design team created the village how-to guide to be as user-friendly as possible so anyone from a potential villager to community organizers could use it.

“This research gives cities a full picture of what a village is and best practices informed by people with experience living in villages, working in villages, designing villages and organizing villages. I hope it will be a resource that leads to better outcomes for those living in villages,” Ferry said.

The report acknowledges that the only solution to homelessness is permanent housing and supportive services. Villages offer possible alternative shelter while communities work to provide permanent housing for all.

A few unexplored opportunities identified in this report include: integrating villages into emergency preparedness plans; designing villages to better support parents; creating a city-level village liaison position; designing villages around activities and interests and leveraging village investment toward the creation of affordable housing.

This work was made possible through a grant from Meyer Memorial Trust.

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### **PSU’s Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC)**

[HRAC](#) is one of only a few research institutions in the country dedicated to homelessness research. It includes faculty researchers from multiple disciplines ranging from psychology and architecture to medicine and linguistics to address the issues that lead to and perpetuate homelessness. We work alongside community partners, elected leaders, and those experiencing homelessness on solutions with an emphasis on communities of color.