



**Publication:** Cape Argus Early - Main  
**Title:** Mixed emotions for city's homeless seeking shelter  
**Publish date:** 08 Aug 2024  
**Page:** 3

**Reach:** 10459  
**AVE:** R 63649.74  
**Author:** Byron Lukas

RELOCATIONS

# Mixed emotions for city's homeless seeking shelter

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THERE were mixed emotions among the homeless people living along Heerengracht Street, who quietly packed up their belongings and relocated to City Safe Space shelters yesterday.

This follows more than 150 homeless people accepting the City's offer for transitional shelter, following an eviction order granted by the Western Cape High Court against those illegally occupying various sites in the CBD.

Yesterday, about 20 people living near Customs House on Heerengracht Street gathered their belongings as City employees moved in to clear the area.

The officials, including the law enforcement's Displaced Persons Unit and Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers, cleared the area as those who once lived there could only watch as a new chapter awaited them.

The City previously said individuals would voluntarily be moved to Safe Spaces from August 5-9.

Those who still unlawfully occupy a City-owned location by August 12 would be removed.

Themba Bangani, 54, was optimistic about his new home, saying he doesn't want to live on the streets any more.

Bangani, who is relocating to Ebenezer Safe Space in Green Point, has spent the past 10 years living on the streets of the CBD.

"All my stuff is packed up, I'm ready to go. I know that it will be better than living on the streets. I just



EXPANDED Public Works Programme staffers clear the area along Heerengracht Street where 20 homeless people were relocated to Safe Space shelters. | ARMAND HOUGH Independent Newspapers

hope they will help me with my ID, I desperately need it," he said.

As the makeshift structures were knocked down one by one, those who called it home gathered together as they waited to be transported.

They were also given black plastic

bags for the items they were taking with them, while the other things were loaded onto a truck.

An anxious and nervous 49-year-old Bridget Kelly said she hoped the Safe Spaces would help those who suffer from addiction.

Kelly, like many who live around her, is on methadone, which is taken to treat heroin addiction.

"I'm just worried about a few as it won't be easy to leave heroin just like that. They do need some professional help.

"Otherwise, I'm okay with the move as it will be my first time," Kelly said.

A couple were crying as they packed up, saying they would find it difficult to handle the withdrawal symptoms of quitting heroin.

Safe Spaces are expected to give people access to social workers, doctors, drug rehab facilities and EPWP work.

Nkosinathi Sithole, a lawyer representing the homeless from the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, was present for the move.

Three other couples, including 35-year-old Wisdom Nzvimbo, who claimed to find his own home, were left behind, according to Sithole.

"It was important for us to be here. If we were not here to point out what needs to be done, a lot of people would find themselves with no homes and not being relocated.

"We made sure everything was carried out peacefully and with dignity," said Sithole.

Homeless people living at Helen Suzman Boulevard were also relocated to a Safe Space yesterday.

All those at City-owned sites such as Buitengracht Street, FW de Klerk Boulevard, the Foreshore, Strand Street, Foreshore/N1, Virginia Avenue, and Mill Street Bridge are expected to be relocated or evicted soon.