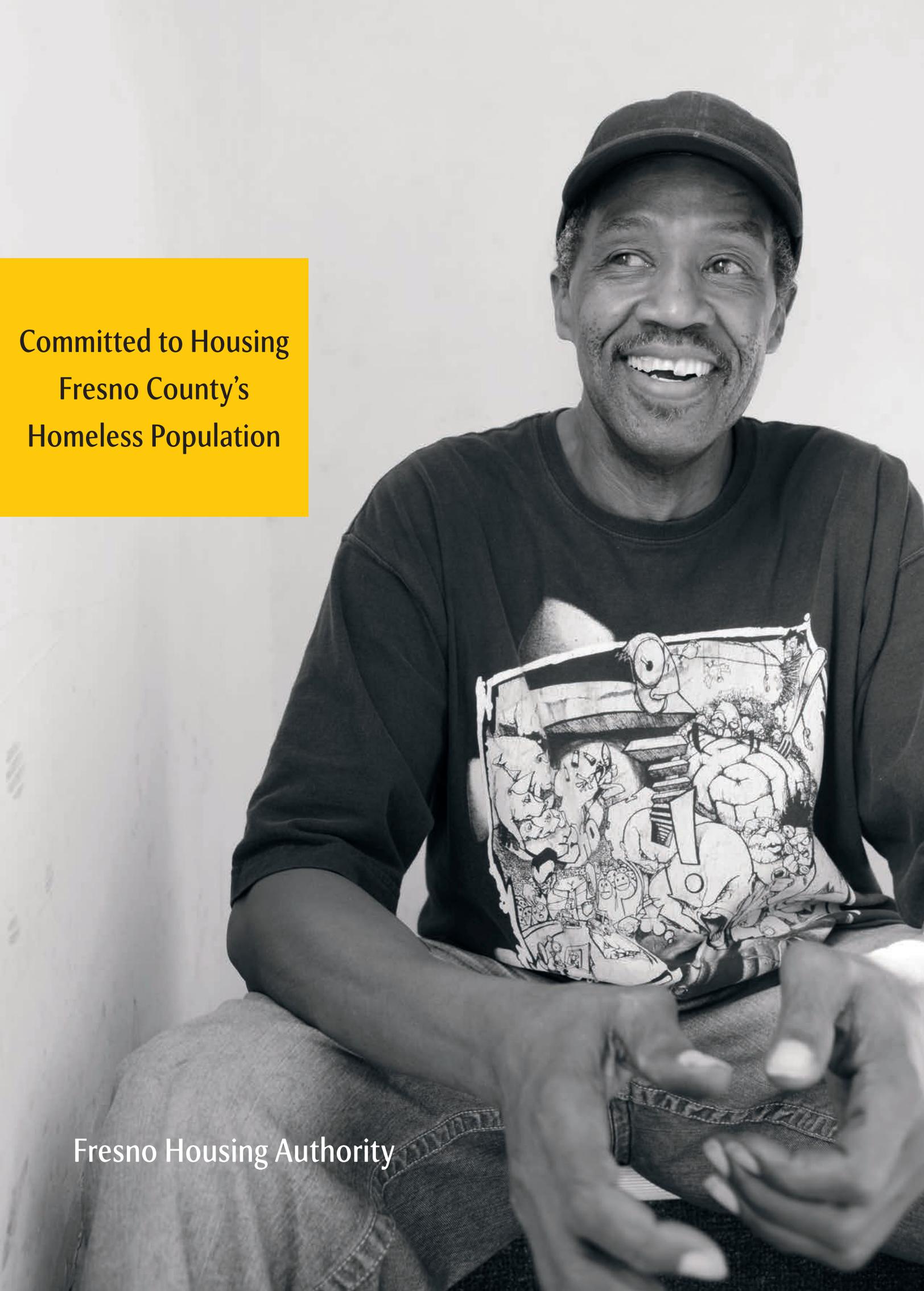


**Committed to Housing  
Fresno County's  
Homeless Population**

**Fresno Housing Authority**



# Making a Difference for Fresno

*Creating places, programs, and opportunities for the homeless is a critical piece of Fresno Housing's vision.*

**H**omelessness is a problem that spans urban, suburban, and rural communities — including cities and towns across Fresno County. It's a problem that affects the lives of thousands of families and individuals who find themselves without the most basic necessity: *a place to call home.*

With approximately 1,700 homeless individuals in Fresno County on any given night, the Fresno Housing Authority has worked collaboratively to develop and implement solutions that are appropriate for the population and the community.

Creating places, programs, and opportunities for homeless people is a critical part of the agency's vision. For those who have been helped, the rewards are simple but priceless, and well-stated by a formerly homeless Veteran: *"I sleep a lot better now."* In partnership with diverse local and regional organizations addressing homelessness, Fresno Housing has:

- participated in the *Fresno/Madera Continuum of Care Collaborative*, securing funds for supportive housing
- leveraged federal funds to provide move-in costs and rental assistance to homeless individuals and families with special needs
- supported homeless Vets with *Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)* vouchers
- led data collection and analysis using the *Homeless Management Information System*
- created a multi-agency access point to deliver coordinated services
- provided local leadership on national initiatives to end chronic homelessness
- developed 121 permanent supportive housing units at *Renaissance Communities* — a long-term approach to meet the needs of chronically-homeless individuals

Through these and other strategic ventures, Fresno Housing is playing a crucial role in transforming the lives of homeless people in the county — reducing homelessness by 34% over the past five years and striving for more successes in the coming years.



# Fresno Housing Authority

*Striving to eliminate homelessness across the county; changing life stories one by one.*

## A Key in the Door

**Ed Hudson** arrived in Fresno expecting a job to be waiting for him. He had worked on and off with a traveling fair, setting up carnival rides. But wires got crossed, and when he arrived in Fresno, the fair was nowhere to be found.

He located a shelter where he got meals and a place to sleep. "It was more like a shed," he says. "No heat. No electricity. But it was a roof over my head, so I was quite grateful." Soon, Ed got a job at Foster Farms, biking 40 minutes to get to work. Then, the shelter changed some policies and Ed decided to start sleeping in a local park. Eventually, his bike was stolen, and his commute became a 90-minute walk.

One day, Ed saw some homeless friends packing their bags. When he asked where they were moving, they said "talk to her," pointing to an employee of Fresno Housing. "I told the young woman my story and she said she might have a way to help me... And here it is," Ed said, surveying his very own apartment.

Ed has taken advantage of numerous Fresno Housing programs and has been both surprised and pleased by the support. "They helped me get a bus card, food, and a bed."

"It feels good to put a key in the door. I don't look for a place to lay my head any more. I don't worry about food, clean clothes, or weather. Now, it's about responsibilities. They helped me, like a friend. That's what they really were, let me put it that way. They're my friends."



## All They Need

**Anyssa and Jason Burge** are more than excited about their apartment. "It's amazing. We love it," says Anyssa with a big smile and obvious relief. It's clean, new, and has a playground for their young children. But mostly, it's safe.

Anyssa and Jason were high school sweethearts in Reedley. Despite their best intentions of getting jobs after

graduation, their plans changed when they got pregnant. With help from family and a program for teen parents, they both earned high school diplomas.

Jason secured a job at a meat packing plant, allowing the young couple to rent an apartment and focus on raising their son. But when Jason suffered an injury, everything quickly fell apart. Without a steady paycheck, Jason and Anyssa lost their apartment and moved in with family.

They slept on couches. Space was tight, resources were slim, and tensions grew. After a year, they found themselves sleeping in their car with their young son.

Eventually, they connected with Fresno Housing and after obtaining a rent voucher, quickly found an apartment in Parlier, near Anyssa's mother — in a place they are proud to call 'home.' Jason's injury healed and after making what he thinks were about 100 calls, he found a job working in a chicken processing plant. Eventually he'd like to either drive a truck or become a barber. Anyssa plans to study medical billing. Now, they dream of owning their own house.



## Making the Journey

**John Estrada** spent years in survival mode — focused on where to sleep, how to get food, and how to get the alcohol that kept his fears at bay.

John enlisted in the Navy after high school, as the Vietnam War was ending. He traveled the world as a yeoman. Toward the end of his three-year tour, he was struck by a motorcycle and suffered multiple injuries. In constant pain, he started drinking heavily as he waited for treatment. "The drinking caused me to make bad choices," John says, pushing him toward homelessness.



*"I told the young woman my story and she said 'I think I might have a way to help you.'"*



# Creating Places, Programs, and Opportunities that Make a Difference

On any given night, more than 600,000 people in the U.S. are homeless; California's homeless population represents 20% of that total; Fresno/Madera counties have more than 1,700 homeless people, 70% of whom are 'unsheltered.'

## Making the Journey

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home. Soon Christina was pregnant again. The stress of raising two children on minimum wage was hard on her relationship, and she found herself alone with two children.

Following another relationship, and a third son, Christina lost custody of her boys. She went to counseling and took parenting classes. "I fought hard so we could be together," she says. After regaining custody, she found Fresno Housing's program for homeless families, and secured an apartment and child care so she could get back on her feet. "We moved to our apartment in December. My caseworker told me to spend the money I had saved to buy presents for the boys," says Christina. "We had a good Christmas and it was a blessing for all of us." But Christina has higher goals: a better job, a bigger house — "near a playground," she says with a glowing smile.

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## A Safe Place

"I was always scared," recalls **Albert Jones** when thinking back to his days living on the street. He tried to keep to himself, but he still got "jumped" frequently, even in his sleep, so he could never let his guard down or relax. "If you fall asleep, you're vulnerable," he explains. "Even if I was asleep, I wasn't really knocked out, so I could hear them coming. I don't like getting beat up and robbed."



A naturally gentle man, Albert grew up in Fresno. He says he spent lots of time at home, helping his mother clean the house. This is evident as his new apartment is spotless. After high school, he worked as a janitor for the Fresno Unified School District. But after 12 years, Albert began to use drugs, lost his job, and spent most of the next 15 years on and off the streets. He got sober with help from Poverello House (a local agency that provides food and services to the homeless) and was referred to the Fresno Housing Authority. He was able to move into

a studio apartment at *Renaissance at Santa Clara*, a Fresno Housing complex that offers supportive services designed to combat homelessness.

Since moving, Albert has been building a new life — attending classes that provide strategies to deal with depression, addiction, and anger — as well as searching for steady work.

Albert's experience with the School District comes in handy in his role as chair of the Renaissance Safety Committee and his effort to see that the facility is well-maintained. When asked to share the best thing about living at *Renaissance*, he doesn't hesitate: "I'm safe now and I don't have to worry all the time."

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## A Long Path Home

When **Jacqueline Storm's** chronic health issues and drug addiction caused her to lose her job, her apartment, and her 3-year-old daughter, she moved into a shelter for single women. She feels fortunate that she never had to sleep on the streets. "It's scary out there," she says, knowing firsthand that homeless women are frequently victims of violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation.

One of Jacqueline's many recovery challenges is her constant pain. She requires medication to treat four ruptured discs in her back, arthritis, and severe tissue damage in her knees and elbows — making recovery all the more difficult. It was clear that Jacqueline needed permanent housing so she could focus on her health and addiction recovery. She was introduced to the Fresno Housing Authority, which located an apartment at a *Renaissance* complex. There, Jacqueline found a trusted friend and ally in her case manager. "I love the staff here," she says. "I've gotten a lot of respect from these people and I really appreciate it." Support classes are helping Jacqueline with her recovery, and she's been directed to healthcare providers who are helping with her injuries and

chronic pain. Jacqueline has found peace working in the garden at *Renaissance*. "This is my safety place," she says. The path to recovery is long, but Jacqueline is thankful for the opportunity to take the first step.

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## Beyond Shelter

Before he got his apartment at *Renaissance at Trinity*, **Larry Reyes** spent five years living on the streets of Fresno — the city where he was born and raised. "When you live out in the streets under those bridges with about 50 other people — you just can't trust nobody," he says. "I got jumped twice. Someone pulled

a gun on me, took my wallet." Even when he could secure a room at missions or shelters, he worried about safety. "I got a lot of things stolen, even my hearing aids," he explained. "You can't keep nothing out there."

At some shelters, residents have to leave very early in the morning — rain or shine. And on the streets, life is difficult and sleep is rare. So when some of Larry's friends found apartments through the Fresno Housing Authority, they encouraged him to apply. When other people on the waiting list repeatedly failed to show up for appointments, he rose to the top of the list and was contacted about an available apartment. "I got there an hour before my appointment!" he exclaims.

Larry has friends who ask why he wants to pay rent when he can live on the streets for free. "I say, 'I got my own shower, TV, my own bed. I don't have to take all my things with me everywhere I go. I have a place where I can just leave them.'" But most important, says Larry, is the community at *Trinity*. "I got good friends here now. If I need something, they'll help me out. Same thing with the front office and the manager. She always tries to help me as much as she can and tells me what I need to know... I thank the Lord that I got a good place... It feels like a big family."

## A Time for Help

**Christina Harley** is mom to three rambunctious boys under the age of 8. Her tired smile reflects how hard she's working to make a better life for her family. She works part-time, goes to school full-time, and tries to keep her boys happy, safe, and on-track for school.

Christina never looked to anyone for help. But when she found herself homeless with three small children, she knew she needed support. After high school, she worked two jobs, fell in love, and got pregnant. Following a premature delivery, her son spent a year in the hospital fighting for his life. Happily, he got stronger and came



*"I've gotten a lot of respect from these people, and I really appreciate it."*

Fresno Housing has invested more than

**\$4.5 million**

in projects and services that have  
impacted the lives of about

**1,200**

homeless people and created housing  
for close to

**1,000**

homeless people.



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