

TRANSGENDER HOUSING REPORT

HOUSING BARRIERS

FOR FRESNO'S TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

The city of Fresno has a high number of homeless and houseless people with over 1500 estimated living and surviving in the area (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). This issue is well known to Fresno citizens. Yet, minorities, especially transgender individuals get excluded from the conversation. The housing barriers and homelessness that transgender people in Fresno face are unknown and/or ignored. With little attention given to these issues, there are few resources and action taken to resolve them. The current efforts to help homeless/houseless people do not suffice to help transgender homeless/houseless people. Transgender homeless/houseless experiences are impacted by transphobia. This action report is created in response to the silence and failures of city and community services to accommodate and protect transgender homeless and houseless people.



This action report serves to build knowledge and raise awareness on housing barriers and homelessness that trans people face in Fresno.

Trans is an abbreviation for transgender. Transgender is an umbrella term to describe a wide range of individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned to at birth. In this report, the term **homeless** refers to those who do not have shelter or housing.

Houseless refers to those who do not have consistent and stable housing. The goal of this report is to end the silencing of trans homeless and houseless people and shed light on their experiences. We want service providers to be held accountable and work together to improve their services to accommodate trans people. It is also important that action is taken to modify policies that harm trans homeless and houseless people and to enforce the ones that protect them. Overall, we hope that the failures in current resources and policies get resolved to protect the wellbeing of trans people.

**This report was created by Fresno State's Women's Studies
Feminist Activism Undergraduate class in collaboration with Trans-E-Motion.**

As a semester-long undergraduate course, our research was limited in time and scope. This report is a small step to hopefully provide more comprehensive research on this marginalized community. This report centralizes trans voices on the issue of homelessness and houselessness. It was important that we captured various perspectives to understand people's stories, interview service providers, and research homeless policies and models.

Three groups of students were formed to document transgender experiences and research homelessness.

Group One reached out to trans people in Fresno who experienced houselessness/homelessness to record their stories. **Group Two** reached out to service providers for interviews as well to gain insight on the resources available for trans homeless/houseless people in Fresno.

Group Three researched California policies and what other major cities in California are doing to combat these issues to develop a plan for Fresno to implement. The groups attended Trans-E-Motion's hosted community discussions where they listened to members of the community and service providers discuss the issues that trans homeless and houseless people face. Participants' attending these community discussions gave their oral consent to have their voices recorded. For the trans participants, only first names and gender identities are included in this report. For the service providers and community organizations, we use first names and organization names.



As long as the invisibility around homelessness and the silencing of trans people continues, these issues will persist.

We hope that you, the readers, take this as an opportunity to not only learn about housing barriers and homelessness that trans people in Fresno face, but also how to be an ally to them. An ally to trans people must be understanding, supportive, and willing to defend them. By reading this report, you are helping trans people's voices to be heard. By learning from this and taking action, you are allowing their voices to make a difference. Use this knowledge to push trans homeless and houseless people's experiences to the forefront of the conversation around housing barriers and homelessness in Fresno. Carry this conversation on and educate others about what trans homeless and houseless people in Fresno are experiencing.

**THIS REPORT IS YOUR TOOL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND COMBAT THE
ISSUES THAT IMPACT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.**

TRANSGENDER REALITIES

SURVIVING THE STREETS

“People think when you're homeless, that you're just homeless, you don't have somewhere to stay and that's it.

But it's so much more than that, you don't have basic necessities. You can't shower, you don't have clean clothes, you don't have anywhere to eat, or a safe place to sleep, and that's so much stress on people.

[What] I want to debunk is that we are all not panhandling, we don't all steal, and we're not all on drugs, and we're not criminals, and we did not do this to ourselves to become homeless.

I have been homeless, documented since September 2017, to just the end of last month [February]

I have been pretty lucky because I've been living in my car while I was homeless . . .

I had to be careful about where I was. Most of the times I parked in front of a shelter if I could not stay there, or [I would leave] Fresno to the countryside to park there and sleep...-Alex

The above quotes come from Alex, a transgender man living in Fresno who experienced homelessness for over a year. Alex experienced discrimination when seeking services. He was repeatedly outed as a transgender person by staff at the shelter he was staying at. Alex recounts staff at the shelter purposely misnaming and misgendering him or telling other staff members that he was transgender. For example, the staff at one shelter asked him to show his driver license and to display it publicly behind the desk. The name on his driver license did not match the name he provided and his gender presentation.



Anyone coming into the shelter, as well as the entire staff, would see this and Alex's transgender identity would be publicly displayed. This small action left him feeling vulnerable and fearful of being attacked by others staying at the shelter. The fear and discrimination he experienced eventually made it so that sleeping in his car outside of the shelter was a safer option for him. Alex slept in his car for over a year, often times parked outside of the shelters that he did not feel safe to enter.

Alex's story is one of many within the community.

Housing remains one of the biggest struggles for the trans community in Fresno. An astounding number of transgender individuals are homeless or face housing insecurity caused by societal infrastructure. These individuals struggle daily to find secure housing and maintain a safe environment. In some cases, they face caseworkers who do not deem their marginalization significant and as such fail to assist them in any meaningful way, and sometimes even harm them.

Transgender individuals are a part of the social conversation now more than ever, but even as they enter the national viewpoint, too often they are still marginalized. Not only are trans individuals diminished in heterosexual and cisgender society, but within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer communities. As a board member of Trans-E-Motion, Marn commented:

Why is there a T in LGBT?...

It's like watching a Goldfish trying to infiltrate piranhas...

So the straights don't accept the lesbians and gays, and the lesbians and gays don't accept the Bi's and the trans, and the bisexuals don't accept the trans...

We become the minority of the minority.

What people don't realize is that a transgender person can fit into any of those groups. You can be a transgender person that is straight, lesbian, or gay.

Not one human being fits into a single category...-Marn

Similar to trans identities, homelessness is an issue often mentioned. But little is done to improve it, and so for those that inhabit both identities, their status within the two communities often pushes them to the margins of the national conversation. As they suffer on the edge, any money that goes to aid either group, passes over those that inhabit both as their unique needs are not met.

Of course one can get their ID changed to reflect their desired gendered expression... if they have the money. And inversely, one can go to a shelter (pending space availability)... as long as they conform to the principles of the shelter or as long as they are okay with the risk of being outed by the providers there to help them.

Through their experiences, the transgender community has few resources available, and even fewer that are considered safe for them if they face homelessness. Many trans individuals face stigma from being homeless. As Kevin, a transman who upon moving to Fresno was rendered homeless stated,

“as soon as you say homeless, people are like ‘oh that person’s going to steal from me or they’re going to attack me or they’re mentally ill or they are violent’”. - [Kevin](#)

But on the inverse because of their status as trans, they are often discriminated against housing service providers as they attempt to seek resources. Alex experienced that while staying at a local shelter:

"They [shelters] took advantage of me not knowing my rights..."

"I honestly know a little bit more you're not supposed to turn away LGBT individuals and I know this because of Trans-E-Motion..."

"I'm upset because places took advantage of that me not knowing my individual rights and they were literally harassing me." - [Alex](#)

When discrimination is perpetrated by those working in positions of power who are in control of needed resources, such as shelter, what options are left for trans individuals seeking housing and shelter assistance? For many, the only option is to live on the street. But, living on the street means being walking targets.

“AS SOON AS YOU SAY HOMELESS, PEOPLE ARE LIKE ‘OH THAT PERSON’S GOING TO STEAL FROM ME OR THEY’RE GOING TO ATTACK ME OR THEY’RE MENTALLY ILL OR THEY ARE VIOLENT...’”



TRANSPHOBIA & BEING A WALKING TARGET

On June 23, 2015, Casey Haggard was stabbed to death while walking along Blackstone Avenue in the early morning. Due to not being able to find secure housing and not being welcomed or feeling safe at the local shelters, Casey had to survive on the streets. Casey's vulnerability as a transwoman left her open to being murdered. As tragic as what happened to Casey was, her situation is not unique. When talking with trans individuals, many of them talked about having to live on the street because they were either turned away from shelters or felt that it was too dangerous for them to stay in them.

Some transgender people not only lack the support from shelters but from their own law enforcement as well. When we spoke with members of the trans community about their experiences with the Fresno Police Department (FPD), some reported first or second hand accounts of abuse and harassment.



escalate because the gender and name on his ID did not match his gender presentation and his name provided. Alex would then be accused of identity theft and would have to wait at least thirty minutes for the officer to run all of his information through the system. Meanwhile, the officer would question Alex about his gender. Alex also recalled a time when he was so desperate for sleep but could not park anywhere in Fresno because the FPD would follow him so he had to drive out to the countryside where he knew he would be safe from the police.

relationships between the trans community and the FPD. He also discussed the fact that members of the community have had run-ins with the police and have had poor outcomes.

"That mutual respect for the cops and us is definitely needed, and we pretty much told the police 'you need to have respectful relationships with our community, because of the fact that we may need you and we should not be afraid to call on that service'"-Marn

"I DON'T THINK THE POLICE ARE RESPECTING LAWS TO PROTECT US..."

"I don't think the police are respecting laws to protect us. You get harassed for all those reasons being race, gender identity or sexual orientation. In my case I get racially profiled which is why I stay out of Clovis because I'm always followed or stopped."

Alex

These examples of the injustices of the FPD are provided to show that transgender discrimination by the police does exist and there has to be an effective change. Living on the streets means walking around with a target on your back. This is doubly so for homeless or houseless trans individuals, who experience violence from multiple angles. Not only are trans people vulnerable to violence by others, but by those sworn to protect and serve Fresno citizens.

For example, when Alex was living in his car, he would be stopped by the police simply because he was sleeping in his car and appeared to be homeless. When officers asked for his ID, the situation would

Not all FPD are harassing the trans community. Marn stated that there are police officers who are supportive and offer help. Trans-E-Motion hosted a training for the FPD to help improve

LACK OF ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Being homeless not only makes a person vulnerable to verbal harassment and physical insecurity. For trans individuals, it also creates a barrier to their transitioning and building their life. Homelessness or houselessness makes it difficult to access trans-specific health care, such as hormones or gender-affirming surgery. Kevin recounts not being able to afford a house or pay for his transitioning:

“I felt like it was a struggle.

I was off of testosterone for a while because I couldn’t afford both.

I couldn’t get it and I wanted to have a hysterectomy but that was impossible and top surgery wasn’t even in my thoughts.

You know it was like, ‘okay it’s either take care of my psychiatric needs or take care of my physical transition’ and the psychiatric was more important because I was not well at all.”--Kevin

There should not be a need to choose between living authentically as you are and having necessary shelter. But as the system stands now that is a choice many have to make. Marn stated:

“I know that if you're homeless it's even harder to get into these programs because you have to have a permanent address for the insurance cards to come to you or the paperwork to be mailed to you.

And if you don't have an address for them to send stuff to you, you're out of luck, and they won't send it to a P.O Box...

It's really hard for the homeless to get into County Health programs because of these restrictions”--Marn



1 IN 5 TRANSGENDER

PEOPLE ARE DENIED HEALTH CARE BY A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL

NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE



“THERE SHOULD NOT BE A NEED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN LIVING AUTHENTICALLY AS YOU ARE AND HAVING NECESSARY SHELTER.”



Mental health was a recurring theme during our interviews with the trans community, specifically the lack of resources dedicated to it. Many survive off the goodwill of others, as Kevin had to:

**“I was able to see my psychiatrist and she was like ‘okay I’m just going to charge you \$40 but you don’t have to pay it now you can pay it whenever you start to get money’
I honestly haven’t had any money so I haven’t paid her and it’s been you know eight years but she saw me, she would give me samples for my meds”--Kevin**

But for those not so fortunate, the lack of mental health services can cause those who do get placed in housing programs to not benefit as much as they could. Jordan, a trans man who was placed in a housing program, shared:

**“To be honest, in this program I was using alcohol pretty heavily and some other drugs and I don't really remember a lot of it.
I was in a blackout constantly, which was how I survived; basically [I] was keeping myself numb”--Jordan**

Some are not as lucky. Marn shared his experience with having to drive several hours to receive adequate health care:

**“If you’re homeless and you have no transportation, you have no money, and then you have to try to go out of town to try to get your hormones...
It's not going to happen. There's no way they can get to transportation, there's no way to get the funding for the transportation.
I mean a trip to San Francisco for me cost \$100 in gas. And at least 50 bucks in food, and that's for two people going to San Francisco for a day trip just to go to the doctor's appointment then back.”--Marn**

Currently, there is one doctor in Fresno County that provides trans-specific health care. Marn paints a picture of the reality of booking health care professionals, such as endocrinologist and doctors specialized in transgender health care. He explained that, unless one is able to see the one doctor in the county that provides hormone therapy, the only way to obtain hormone therapy is to get on the Planned Parenthood three-month waiting list. Yet, this all depends on having the stability of housing as well as other resources to make this happen. Having a doctor and making doctors appointments are challenging without some sort of fixed address. The stress of living day to day as a homeless person makes it hard for anyone to get the necessary documents and keep the schedules required to obtain adequate treatment. Accessing trans-specific health care, such as hormones or gender affirming surgery, is life or death for many in the trans community, not only for their mental health and sense of being but also their ability to safely live in a world that deeply discriminates and violently targets trans persons. Trans people who experience homelessness want to build their futures the same as anyone else. But, without the stability of housing and affordable access to health care, this future is much harder to reach.

“ACCESSING TRANS-SPECIFIC HEALTH CARE...IS LIFE OR DEATH FOR MANY IN THE TRANS COMMUNITY”



SCARCITY ENVIRONMENT

AMONG HOUSING SERVICE PROVIDERS

Scarcity environment is when you are working with extremely limited or scarce resources. Scarcity mindset is when you see only the boundaries of those limitations and operate as though nothing can change. The scarcity of resources has led to the exhaustion of social workers and other service providers. This reflects through the high volume of clientele taken on by a single service provider, ultimately leading to a large workload and a limited amount of time. This issue coupled with the larger issue of limited funding and lack of supportive staff, often halts the system, impacting the transgender community's quality of care.

The community discussions that were held with local community members and service providers highlighted the barriers transgender individuals have experienced when trying to receive housing. However, in order to understand how transgender people fall into the margins of homelessness in Fresno, it is also important to understand the context of homelessness in this city. Since homelessness is such a large issue, impacting at least 1,834 people, Fresno has created an

SCARCITY ENVIRONMENT

IS WHEN YOU ARE WORKING WITH EXTREMELY LIMITED OR SCARCE RESOURCES.

SCARCITY MINDSET

IS WHEN YOU SEE ONLY THE BOUNDARIES OF THOSE LIMITATIONS AND OPERATE AS THOUGH NOTHING CAN CHANGE.



action plan to help those facing homelessness. The city's 2018-2019 Action Plan for housing does not allocate any funding specific to this highly vulnerable population. Furthermore, this action plan does not highlight the insufficient amount of employees for the number of clients or their exhaustion from being overworked.

SCARCE AND UNSPECIFIC FUNDING IN FRESNO

Fresno's 2018-2019 Action Plan for housing claims the city has allocated \$14,228,588 through grants from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (1). These grants include Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), and the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS/HIV Grant (HOPWA) (1). This funding does not adequately address the population growth and diversity in Fresno. According to Fresno's Action plan,

“Fresno has determined the following sub-populations are a high priority for ESG services:

- Unsheltered homeless persons who are living outdoors or in other places not intended for human habitation;

- Chronically homeless persons;
- Homeless veterans; and
- Other homeless persons who have been identified as highly vulnerable” (65)

This definition is oddly specific, yet vague. Who are the other vulnerable homeless persons? What makes them vulnerable? The lack of specificity when naming communities within the homeless population is a form of erasure. Omission is a form of lying. If we do not name the marginalized people who are prey to the dangers of homelessness then we are not being honest about homelessness as an issue. We need terms, we need names, we need the language that will help the marginalized and appropriately allocate the monies needed. Fresno is excluding trans individuals by not considering them in this definition. They are vulnerable because they face transphobic discrimination and harassment from the public and service providers. There is not enough funding focused on the homeless population and no funding specifically for the the homeless transgender community.

SCARCITY MINDSET AND THE NEED FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The \$14,228,588 in funding appropriated for programs providing resources and support for the homeless community pays for the labor service providers put in to meet these demands (Fresno's 2018-2019 Action Plan). However, it's not enough. One service provider stated she has to write her own case notes in addition to her caseload of more than 18 clients. This is also the same for the other case managers at this agency. The large caseload of each employee increases the amount of case notes each employee is responsible for. These case managers are overworked, underpaid, and understaffed due to the amount of funding allocated for housing in the Central Valley. The environment they must work in indirectly affects the way they treat their clients and the amount of time they can direct towards cultural competency training. As a result, this negatively impacts the trans community who have faced harassment and have been discouraged during their encounters with service providers.

“...WE NEED A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM... HOUSING FOR TRANS PEOPLE AND ALSO THOSE THAT WORK IN THE HOUSING FACILITY TO BE TRANS...”



BARRIERS WITHIN THE SCARCITY ENVIRONMENT

While a significant number of shelters are not accepting and/or are not safe places for transgender persons, there are organizations that do provide assistance and shelters. These notable organizations are the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission, The Living Room and Westcare, and the Marjaree Mason Center. Yet, the resources available are limited and often are contingent on specific granting programs, such as those for individuals under a certain age (24 years), with mental health needs, with HIV/AIDS, or fleeing from domestic violence. This means that if one does not fit within these specific guidelines, these services are not available. The transgender community experiences multiple oppressions based on gender, race, sexuality, and class. Due to this intersecting oppression, it is very difficult for trans people to qualify for these programs. They either age out of the LGBT youth services, have not received a mental health diagnosis (this requires several visits with a doctor), or are fleeing from violence that does not fit within the parameters of domestic violence as defined by these programs.



Trans people who are faced with housing insecurity want safe camp zones, but they are also calling out a need for trans specific housing. The “T” in LGBT is often left out of the conversation. Activists within the trans community are now calling for action for sustainable housing for the trans community, run by trans individuals for trans individuals. In an interview, Dre stated, “...we need a sustainable system... Housing for trans people and also those that work in the housing facility to be trans...” Limited funding is available but many do not qualify. A self-sustaining system that houses individuals in need will also provide a platform for achieving financial stability for trans individuals who find it difficult to secure a stable source of income.

One example of how homeless trans individuals are confronted with a scarcity of resources within Fresno can be seen in the limited supply of section 8 vouchers and landlords who will accept them. The caseworkers at the EOC are charged with placing individuals in housing using this method. This can be difficult for the EOC caseworkers because a person's homelessness is not caused by a single issue. The caseworkers we spoke with at the community discussion, Jen and Latasha, both stated that there needs to be a wraparound program that addresses issues that directly affect an individual's housing insecurity including mental health, substance abuse, and

employment. It's important to get a homeless person housed, but that's only half the battle. It's about keeping them housed. To do that, these other contributing factors need to be addressed for the long term. Funding specific to transgender homelessness is needed in order to accomplish these objectives.

Another issue is that the homeless population generally does not have cell phones at their disposal. This makes it difficult for them to effectively contact their case managers. In situations where clients don't have a cell phone, the case workers have to make appointments in locations accessible to the clients. The inability to get a hold of clients and this unstable form of meeting means that the case workers are spending more time on each case. This has been attempted to be resolved by issuing government cell phones to the homeless transgender population. However, it has been reported these phones do not work, causing communication problems to arise between the client and case managers.

FURTHER DISCRIMINATION

Even with the limited amount of resources, trans people do not have access to all of it. This occurrence is due to the ever-present discrimination and violence experienced by this community. Many of the concerns voiced by community members were focused around the ignorance from non-profit organizations, specifically religious organizations. This ignorance regarding transgender identity is present in Fresno homeless shelters, due to many of them being religion-based. These places do provide support for underserved homeless populations with many of them having resources specifically focused to marginalized groups, such as abused women or substance abuse. Even though many trans individuals would fit under these categories, they are denied services or made to feel unwelcome at these shelters because of anti-LGBT beliefs. Therefore, the transgender community is forced into making impossible choices in which they must either choose to hide their true self out of fear of discrimination or threat of violence. This consequently leads to living on the streets because there is no safe housing or shelter available.



"I HAVE HAD MY CLOTHING STOLEN, AND OTHER PERSONAL PROPERTY.

I'VE HAD A NURSE SAVE ME FROM BEING ATTACKED AND THEN TURNED AROUND AND SAID I STARTED IT.

SOME OF THE STAFF CONSTANTLY MISGENDERED ME

AND DIDNT APOLOGIZE OR ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY DID THAT" --ALEX

It is important to address the multiple oppressions transgender individuals face on the basis of race, language, and citizenship. Fear is a prevailing sentiment among the transgender community because of homophobia and transphobia. This fear does not stop there. One form of fear took shape among the undocumented homeless transgender population. The fear of being deported poses a significant barrier from seeking housing services. Additionally, the language barrier has been found to prevent many transgender individuals to seek housing services.

Many of the organizations we researched out to do not have established procedures for clients to file a complaint against a service provider and/or staff member. This makes it difficult for clients and service providers to address what may be systemic issues in the organization. Issues that have arisen once a transgender individual is housed or sheltered come from untrained staff members of organizations. As noted previously at the beginning

"ONCE THESE [TRANSGENDER] INDIVIDUALS ARE OUTED, THEIR SAFETY BECOMES AN ISSUE..."

of this report, staff members of various homeless and housing organizations were reported by the trans community to be discriminatory towards the transgender population. Service providers outed trans individuals by misgendering them during intake and trans individuals were housed in rooms with the gender



that they do not identify as. Furthermore, staff members have been found to be using the wrong pronouns and refusing to call transgender individuals by the name given to them. Once these individuals are outed, their safety becomes an issue. The fear of harassment and/or assault escalates when being housed with cisgender, transphobic clients and service providers. This issue will expand if service providers do not become adequately trained to work with transgender individuals.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPER TRAININGS

The need for cultural sensitivity training on transgender issues for volunteers and staff was identified at our community discussions as one of the most relevant issue affecting transgender individuals seeking housing services. In order to resolve this issue, we suggested that employees receive cultural competency training that specifically focuses on gender and trans related issues. When speaking to service providers, the topic of employee and volunteer training was brought up. We were

informed that harassment training is mostly for Human Resources and follows California state requirements.

Despite this, not all volunteers or staff members receive this training or if so it is infrequently. Most of the trainings that do occur happens online, therefore, making it ineffective to those taking it. These online trainings are not engaging to the individual and most of all, they are not frequent enough. From evaluating the information received, it is clear that training is needed in regards to harassment, cultural sensitivity, and competency. In order to solve this issue, we suggested that employees receive cultural competency training that specifically focuses on gender and trans-related issues. This proposal was not well received by some service providers since they believed the workshops they had were ineffective because of time constraints. This greatly reflected the ways service providers already have so much to do with such little time and a large amount of clientele. Thus posing a larger issue of limited funding and staff that impacts the trans community the most.

FAILING TO RECOGNIZE THE ISSUES

Transgender homelessness is not unique to Fresno. It is now estimated that one in five transgender individuals have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives according to the National Center for Transgender Equality. The statistics are high when looking at the rates of violence and discrimination that are faced by trans people in conjunction with homelessness. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 70% of transgender people faced discrimination in shelters across the U.S. due to their gender identity. Of these, 52% faced verbal harassment, physical assault and/or sexual assault.

**70% OF TRANSGENDER
PEOPLE WHO STAYED IN
A SHELTER FACED
DISCRIMINATION AND
MISTREATMENT**

**2015 U.S. TRANSGENDER
SURVEY**



One in ten are thrown out of shelters once the staff learns of their identity. It comes as no surprise then that more than one in four transgender people avoid staying at homeless shelters for fear of discrimination and violence. Transgender homelessness is clearly not prioritized as it is still a prevalent problem.

The transgender homeless population faces unprecedented challenges in accessing much-needed resources due to discrimination. To create a safe environment for trans people, providing services and implementing programs that are specifically created to serve the transgender homeless community is crucial. Policies regarding the homeless in Fresno have proven to be inefficient such as the No Camping Ordinance which uses funds, law enforcement, and legal services ineffectively. Policies such as these continue to perpetuate homelessness and create

environments that ignore the larger issues regarding homelessness altogether, particularly those faced by transgender people.

Kern County, a county with a similar population to Fresno, seems to be facing similar obstacles regarding transgender homelessness. Almost all the websites for shelters that serve homeless individuals have no mention of the LGBT population, let alone the transgender community. Similar to Fresno, they have recently been putting more resources into aiding the homeless population, but not specifically the LGBT homeless population. Sacramento and Los Angeles have LGBT Community Centers, but they are only able to offer services for the trans homeless population and are unable to provide housing or shelter.

NAVIGATING HOMELESSNESS THROUGH POLICIES

Though cities nationwide are working to mitigate homelessness, there does not seem to be a concerted effort for the trans community. It is clear from the statistics above that the trans community is one of the most marginalized communities, yet there are not enough resources for them anywhere in the U.S. Transforming the resources available for trans homeless or houseless individuals is of ultimate importance. Creating new and better services or policies could better impact community providers. This could also help bridge a much-needed gap between service providers and the LGBTQ+ community. Homeless shelters must become more conscious of the ways they can improve their services for trans individuals. They must also be aware of the ways their current intake policies, and reporting procedures can actively harm trans homeless individuals.

Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Equal Access Rule dictates that shelters receiving HUD assistance cannot discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Facilities receiving HUD funding cannot isolate or segregate transgender residents or demand confidential medical information. California's Fair Employment and Housing Act provide protection from discrimination, retaliation, and harassment based on sex, gender expression, or sexual orientation. It also prohibits discrimination in renting, sales, mortgage lending, insurance, and advertising.

The recently passed California SB 396 requires employers to train supervisors on identifying and preventing harassment based on gender identity, expression and sexual orientation including the use of proper terminology, preferred names, and pronouns. It is also mandatory that employers display the Department of Fair Employment and

Housing poster that lists transgender rights in an accessible location.

Other policies such as Prop 2 in California sets aside funding to build more housing for the homeless, but shelters must apply for the funds by submitting applications through the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care. Shelters that do not serve the trans population effectively submit applications and receive the funding to continue their current practices.

It is also crucial that organizations who serve transgender individuals practice and facilitate HIPAA training in their programs. Fortunately, under HIPAA, trans individuals' gender identity is protected. If outed, the individual's rights have been violated. This ensures transgender clients will not be outed or put into unsafe situations. While these policies are a great step in the right direction, their enforcement is irregular and unsatisfactory. We need a committee focused on the needs of transgender individuals facing housing insecurity that can see to the proper and consistent enforcement of these policies. Fresno has a long way to go in addressing the needs of the transgender homeless population, but steps can be made in the right direction.

**26% OF TRANS PEOPLE WHO ARE
HOUSING INSECURE AVOID USING
SHELTERS FOR FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION**
2015 U.S. TRANSGENDER SURVEY



ALTERNATIVES AND MODELS TO EXAMINE



Because many shelters in Fresno are not accommodating or safe for trans homeless people, an alternative could be to establish an LGBT shelter. Having a shelter whose purpose is to help LGBT homeless people would ensure that trans homeless individuals have a safe place to go to that will provide services specifically for their needs. Most of these services are provided in many Fresno shelters, but what they provide for cisgender individuals will not help trans individuals who experience a different set of challenges. The Los Angeles LGBT Center acknowledges this by providing these services but adjusting them to meet the needs of the trans homeless population.

The Los Angeles LGBT Center would be an ideal model. Not only for developing an LGBT Center, but also for current Fresno shelters to learn from. The Los Angeles LGBT Center offers services specifically for trans people. They address mental health issues by providing therapy group sessions for trans people. They also provide health services for hormone therapy, surgical care, and even trans-sensitive health exams. To help trans homeless people find employment, they created the Transgender Economic Empowerment Project to provide them with counseling and workshops to prepare them for interviews and new jobs. This program also ensures that they connect trans individuals to employers that are trans-welcoming.

While Fresno may not be able to implement these more comprehensive models overnight, there are some smaller steps that can be taken to better help our trans homeless population. Some simple improvements can be made to pre-existing services to accommodate our LGBTQ+ population while more extensive, large-scale changes are still in progress.

WHILE FRESNO MAY NOT BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT THESE MORE COMPREHENSIVE MODELS OVERNIGHT, THERE ARE SOME SMALLER STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO BETTER HELP OUR TRANS HOMELESS POPULATION.

THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

1. MAKING SHELTERS SAFE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

It is vital that transgender clients feel safe and comfortable in shelters. More shelter policies must be created and implemented that promote a safe environment for transgender clients including policies around gendered facilities and protection from discrimination. Enforcement of existing policies is vital to the safety of the trans community in shelters and the success of service providers. Funding needs to be earmarked so more shelters can specifically provide more services for the LGBTQ+ community. Current shelters should provide a wide range of resources for transgender clients indicating their rights and the different service opportunities available to them.

2. CREATING SHELTERS, COMMUNITY CENTERS, AND HOUSING FOR THE LGBTQ+ HOMELESS

We want to see community centers, shelters, and housing for the LGBTQ+ community with a focus on trans individuals to better address their unique needs. Shelters can better serve their clients by providing more comprehensive services to address the multiple factors that cause homelessness including mental health, substance abuse, rehabilitation, legal representation, and trans-specific health care. Legal services need to be taught to the trans community so they know their rights regarding housing and discrimination and can better advocate for themselves.

3. IMPLEMENTING MORE IN-PERSON SENSITIVITY TRAININGS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS

We must address the issues surrounding the lack of sensitivity training for both staff and volunteers. Some options for training could include in-person lectures, workshops, and hands-on presentations that ensure the staff is truly engaged. Face to face training would be more helpful when assisting transgender populations as opposed to the popular e-trainings that fail to have sufficient impact or improve staff's awareness. Many service providers do not know how to properly refer to trans individuals by their preferred name or pronouns which is vital to make trans clients feel safe and respected. These training opportunities should not be e-trainings, but hands-on opportunities to work directly and hear from the very trans communities that they serve.

4. CREATING AN ONLINE DIRECTORY THAT RATES ACCOMMODATION OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE BY SHELTERS AND SERVICES

Creating a local online directory can also provide a useful and easy way for homeless trans people to screen shelters and services based on whether or not they are trans-friendly. With this, a rating system and additional comments/reviews can help determine which shelters are either safe or unsafe for trans-individuals. It also provides a way of holding service providers accountable for their discriminatory practices. Members of the community who identify as LGBTQ+ with this rating system could mention their experiences, or refer others through reviews the best places available. The online directory could be implemented through social media or as an app that is easily accessible to individuals with technology. Moderators would serve as facilitators for this directory to ensure transphobic persons do not spam the comments, add fake reviews, or target people who choose to use the app. Shelters and services should prioritize promotion of this resource to ensure that LGBTQ+ clients are aware that it is available to them.

5. CREATING A HOTLINE TO CONNECT LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS WITH LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SHELTERS

For those without access to technology, we should create a hotline to refer clients to local LGBTQ+ Service Providers. This hotline would be given to all local service providers or homeless shelters. The hotline would be run by local community members who serve such populations. This hotline would provide information for the best local mental health services, rehabilitation centers, homeless shelters, trans friendly doctors or health centers, and the best places to get clothing, food, and basic living necessities. This hotline would be used as a bridge for the trans community and for LGBTQ+ individuals not knowing where to go within our local community. The operator for the LGBTQ+ hotline would serve as a liaison bridging knowledge of accessible services for individuals and service providers.

SPECIAL THANKS

This project would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of community members who shared their knowledge and time with us. We sincerely appreciate the hours you spent talking to us and helping us understand this issue. We want to show gratitude to those who shared difficult stories of abuse and harassment. We respect your fortitude and perseverance and your continued advocacy for Fresno's trans community. You inspire us to work harder as allies and advocates.

We would also like to thank members of the Economic Opportunities Commission, The Living Room, Fresno Barrios Unidos, Planned Parenthood, Pink Panthers, and Centro La Familia for their time, expertise, and encouragement. We learned so much about the work you do and the challenges you face. We appreciate the important knowledge you provided to us.

THANK YOU TRANS-E-MOTION!

A special thank you must go to Trans-E-Motion. Trans-E-Motion gives its blood, sweat, and tears in advocating and supporting the trans and gender non-conforming community in Fresno. The work they do is incredibly valuable and everyone benefits from it. Trans-E-Motion served as our mentors on this project and organized the community discussions. Without them this report would not have been possible.

For more information about the great work that Trans-E-Motion does, please check out:

www.transemotion.com

[facebook/transemotion](https://www.facebook.com/transemotion)

Phone: 559-464-5806

Email: transemotion@gmail.com



AUTHORS

THALIA ARROYO

ANDREW GREEN

BRIANNA MORA

SARITA CRUZ

TIANA HARTSOCK

DELANEY OLMO

JUSTINE ESPARZA

SHAWNA IRISSARRI

ALEKS RODAS

CHERIKA GAMBLE

ELVIA LOPEZ

ALYSSA SOLIS

ALEXIS GOMEZ

MELISSA MUNOZ

DR. KAT FOBEAR