

Women shape displacement avoidance efforts



BACKGROUND

This case study highlights how Transform Fresno is committed to advancing equitable community development. Specifically, the study looks at the work of three individuals: Sabrina Kelley, Dr. Kathryn Forbes, and Dr. Destiny Thomas, who lead the displacement avoidance efforts in Fresno. For additional information about the Displacement Avoidance Plan, see [page 47](#).

Interviews for this story were conducted in July & August 2020.

“I’m involved because I want equitable, affordable housing and improvements for quality of life throughout the City of Fresno”: Sabrina Kelley at the groundbreaking of the Almy Street. Photo credit: The Fresno Bee

SABRINA KELLEY has deep roots in Fresno. Her family has a long history of community service and advocacy in Southwest Fresno, where she went to high school. Now, when Kelley is at Transform Fresno community meetings, she feels the presence of her grandparents, aunts and uncles.

“I feel like I’m picking up the family baton to advocate for affordable housing and for neighborhoods that are walkable and safe.”

SABRINA KELLEY

As the Community Relations Consultant and foundation manager for Wells Fargo, Kelley guides philanthropic investments for the Central Valley. She has led collaborative efforts to raise money for affordable housing, improved pedestrian infrastructure, and expanded public spaces, including the Almy Street Playground in Southwest Fresno. Her role also involves small business support for ethnic minority groups, as well as financial health and literacy for low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

Kelley got involved with Transform Fresno because of her personal and family commitment to advancing equitable community development, affordable housing, and livable

neighborhoods. She now serves as a member of the O&O Committee for Transform Fresno.

She became involved with the Displacement Avoidance Plan (DAP) as a member of the hiring committee for the DAP consultant. She focused on ensuring that applicants have demonstrated an understanding of equity, inclusion, and culturally appropriate community development strategies.

Kelley hopes the DAP will create opportunities for marginalized residents to share their ideas and have their voices heard. An example of why this is important can be found in the older neighborhoods south of Herndon Avenue, where residents continue to grapple with long-standing inequities that stem from historical issues like red lining that kept people of color living in low-opportunity neighborhoods.

“I’d like to see residents in the TCC footprint empowered to create the changes they want to see in their neighborhoods.”

SABRINA KELLEY

DR. KATHRYN FORBES is a professor at California State University, Fresno, and the program coordinator for the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department. Dr. Forbes is a member of the city's Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF), where she helps identify current and future areas of displacement, and the metrics and data the city needs to track to prevent displacement.

“The introduction of all the [anti-displacement] policy alternatives that residents could choose from was completely eye-opening for this region, both for city leaders, for advocates, and for residents ... to realize there are a bunch of different tools to address displacement.”

DR. KATHRYN FORBES



Photo credit: Fresno State Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Dr. Forbes believes that the process for developing the plan and the community engagement efforts for TCC have had an immediate impact on how the local government functions in Fresno. For example, the city started to consider anti-eviction and tenant protection policies after community advocacy around housing issues in the Transform Fresno project area.



Photo credit: Thrivance Group

DR. DESTINY THOMAS called Fresno home for six years after she graduated from college. She considers it a special place, saying it was easy for her to build community, relationships, and kinships. Dr. Thomas is the founder and CEO of Thrivance Group, the consultant leading the design and implementation of the DAP.

Dr. Thomas brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to Fresno's anti-displacement efforts. She has worked professionally in the environmental and transportation planning fields, and as a community organizer, social worker, artist, and creative. In every role she stays heavily rooted in a racial justice framework.

Dr. Thomas developed a method for interviewing and engaging with people experiencing gender-based violence and homelessness in Los Angeles, called Thrivance Project. Using this method, Thrivance Group is conducting a range of participatory civic engagement activities to inform the DAP. These activities include interviews with community stakeholders and local government officials and an oral history project to bring visibility and cultural recognition to historically marginalized groups in the project area.

“Through the strategies that we're offering, and through the collective engagement work across the project itself, the elected officials will see that the community actually knows what's best and that they don't lose any political will or power by listening to and honoring those needs.”

DR. DESTINY THOMAS

Thrivance Group has recommended a set of implementable anti-displacement policies to the Fresno City Council that reflect community needs and contribute to healing past institutional harms. These recommendations are summarized in a report titled, *Here to Stay: Policy-Based Blueprint for Displacement Avoidance in Fresno*, published in June 2021.