

# Anti-displacement engagement spurs advocacy, awareness, and government action



## BACKGROUND

This story highlights Transform Fresno's Displacement Avoidance Plan — a key TCC requirement that sparked groundbreaking conversations about tenant protections among residents, government officials, and others. Three women who shaped the process share how they and the broader community benefited. For more information about the Displacement Avoidance Plan, see page 54.

*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,"** said 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."

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 became 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. Through her involvement with the O&O Committee, Kelley has helped steer the development of the Transform Fresno's DAP, and has grown into a more informed advocate in the process.

**"Some of the skills I've been able to develop are diplomacy and active listening. You think you bring so many years to the table, but there's always a story and an opportunity to learn."**

SABRINA KELLEY

In addition to its \$X million TCC implementation grant, the City of Fresno received a \$X technical assistance grant for the development of its DAP. These funds allowed the City to hire a consultant with anti-displacement and community engagement expertise: Thrivance Group. As a member of the committee that selected Thrivance Group, Kelley focused on ensuring applicants demonstrated an understanding of equity, inclusion, and culturally appropriate community development strategies. For Kelley, Thrivance Group fit that bill. She remarked that "Thrivance Group is so committed to letting the community tell its story while also bringing resources and guidance to the process."

Kelley spoke of the importance of having women lead the DAP, asserting that women bear the brunt of pandemic impacts and poverty generally. As she put it, "With women leading our DAP — women who have lived experience with disenfranchised poor neighborhoods, who understand the narrative but also have professional experience of collecting data and storytelling — our hope is to build empathy and awareness so that our elected officials make better choices."

**DR. KATHRYN FORBES** is a professor at California State University, Fresno, and program coordinator for the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department. As a member of the city’s Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF), Dr. Forbes helps identify areas of displacement in Fresno and lends her technical expertise to help determine what metrics and data the city needs to track to prevent displacement. Like Kelley, Dr. Forbes helped to hire the anti-displacement consultant.

Through participating in the ADTF, Dr. Forbes has become more adept at navigating bureaucracy, which is relevant to her research at CSU Fresno. “This experience has forced me to understand at a more intimate level how to navigate those bureaucracies — what all the different constituents you have to bring in to affect some kind of policy change.”

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: Fresno State Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies

**“It was completely eye-opening — 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: 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. Dr. Thomas founded Thrivance Group, the consultant leading design and implementation of the DAP. With experience in environmental planning, community organizing, and social work, she brings a wealth of knowledge to Fresno’s DAP. In all her work, she stays heavily rooted in a racial justice framework.

Dr. Thomas developed a method for engaging with people experiencing gender-based violence and homelessness in Los Angeles, called Thrivance Project. Using this method, Thrivance Group is conducting participatory civic engagement activities to inform the DAP. These activities include interviews

with community stakeholders and government officials, as well as an oral history project to bring visibility and cultural recognition to historically marginalized groups in the project area.

Working with Transform Fresno has given Dr. Thomas the chance to do work she once would have thought impossible. As part of the displacement avoidance planning process, Dr. Thomas has been able to integrate restorative justice work, such as conversations about abolition and reparations.

**“We are doing work that the elders in my life told me would never be possible — you know, the stuff you sit at the dinner table and say, when I grow up, I’m going to fix this problem.”**

DR. DESTINY THOMAS

Dr. Thomas’ work on Transform Fresno’s DAP has also helped her grow as a professional working in the environmental justice space. As she put it, “I’ve learned so much from being in a setting like Fresno. It’s not quite urban, it’s not suburban — it’s its own type of land use. And it creates an opportunity to think outside of the box about the interconnectedness of impacts from one decision.”

By the end of its contract with the city, Thrivance Group recommended anti-displacement policies that reflect community needs and contribute to healing past institutional harms. These recommendations are summarized in a 2021 report entitled, *Here to Stay: Policy-Based Blueprint for Displacement Avoidance in Fresno*.