

New Fresno social media campaign calls for ‘no more slumlords’

By Andrea Castillo



A home with boarded windows appears to be vacant but also showing a for rent sign on Thesta at Grant in the downtown area of Fresno last August.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — Fresno Bee Staff Photo [Buy Photo](#)

A group of Fresno volunteers is targeting young people with a new social media campaign to improve the living standards of low-income properties around the city.

[No More Slumlords](#), an advocacy group with a core team of 12 volunteers (mostly young professionals), has worked for the past three years on the campaign called, “Reclaim Fresno.” It started Tuesday with the launch of an 8-minute video and online petition urging city officials to help improve subpar properties. Wednesday night, they held a launch party at Peeve’s Public House.

[RECLAIM FRESNO // NO MORE SLUMLORDS](#) from [NO MORE SLUMLORDS](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Sergio Cortes, who started the organization along with his wife, said their members talked to several hundred tenants, neighbors, churches, property owners, police officers, firefighters, current and former city staff and elected officials. Cortes runs a media production business in Fresno and helped train his fellow volunteers to be community multimedia journalists.

“We realized no one is doing this in Fresno: documenting these stories, putting them online,” he said. “We recognized the power of social media and the power of multimedia to compel people to action.”

Cortes said he’s targeting young people because 42% of the city’s population is under 25. In Fresno 26% of residents

live below the poverty level and many are renters.

Armed with smart phones, volunteers took photos of various properties and documented tenants' stories. Some described issues such as gas leaks, exposure to mold, broken heaters and leaking roofs, which they said landlords refused to fix.

Cortes wants the city to bolster its [code enforcement department](#) and hold property owners accountable for substandard or neglected properties.

Other organizations, such as Faith in Community, are also working to address the issue of neglected properties. City leaders [created a task force](#), which by March could present the City Council with an ordinance to change some of the city's policies and codes.

Cortes knows about the issue he's campaigning against firsthand. After he and his wife moved to Fresno five years ago, he said, they lived in a low-income apartment managed by JD Home Rentals, one of the Valley's largest property management companies that has been sued in a class-action suit over code violations.

Though Cortes moved, he said low-income residents shouldn't have to choose between living on the streets or in slum-like conditions.

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