

Number of Fresno homeless drops by half in two years

By BoNhia Lee
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The number of unsheltered homeless people in Fresno has fallen by more than half since 2013 when encampments spread across city streets, according to a preliminary report from the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#).

It's an accomplishment that "I didn't really think would be possible at this stage in the game," said Mayor Ashley Swearingin, who was joined by housing and community partners at a Monday afternoon news conference to unveil the numbers. "I'm so thrilled at how far we have come."

The report, compiled with data from the 2015 Point-in-Time count and survey conducted in January, showed only 814 unsheltered homeless — those not living in shelters — in Fresno. Last year, there were 1,534 homeless and volunteers counted 1,829 in 2013.

Statistics from Fresno and Madera counties are a little higher with 1,183 unsheltered homeless counted this year, compared to 1,882 last year and 2,537 in 2013. The final Point-in-Time report will be released later this summer.

"We had 300 to 400 people living in some of the worst encampments that anybody had ever seen in the United States," Swearingin said. "It really was just a festering wound and a deep a gash in our community and today we see those encampments cleaned up and a vast majority of people placed into housing."

MAP Point at Poverello House was recently created as a Multi-Agency Access Point for the homeless to find help with housing and other services.

How did they do it? It was a collaborative effort between the city and community agencies.

Swearingin has led a campaign to end chronic homelessness. One of the first steps included the creation of [Fresno First Steps Home](#) in 2010. The organization raises money and collects private donations to combine with federal and state funds to help support the community agencies that provide services to the homeless. First Steps Home has raised more than \$1 million, Swearingin said.

The [Fresno Madera Continuum of Care](#), a coalition of groups that provide homeless services and housing, coordinated the street count in January. The [Fresno Housing Authority](#) is compiling the data from the survey.

[WestCare](#), a nonprofit that provides health and human services, assigns case workers called "navigators" to the homeless to help them identify housing needs and gather the important documents, such identification cards and birth certificates, to get housing, said Shawn Jenkins, senior vice president at WestCare California.

321

adults served at MAP Point in the last six weeks

34

children served at Map Point in the last six weeks

One worker is stationed at the [Poverello House](#) as a point of contact. Another works at the housing authority where the data is, Jenkins said.

Over the last five years, the agencies have perfected assessment tools, reallocated money and opened communications “all in a commitment to bring an relenting focus to end homelessness,” said Preston Prince, executive director of the housing authority.

Swearingin expects to end homelessness among veterans in Fresno this year and to end chronic homelessness next year.

“The numbers will prove that those goals are in fact attainable,” Swearingin said. “It’s clear that when it comes to effectively addressing homelessness in our community, collaboration and communication are the keys.”

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Total homeless in city of Fresno

	2013	2014	2015
Sheltered Homeless	504	580	456
Unsheltered Homeless	1,829	1,534	814
Total	2,333	2,114	1,270

Source: 2015 Point-in-Time Count

Total homeless in Fresno and Madera counties

	2013	2014	2015
Sheltered Homeless	594	714	539
Unsheltered Homeless	2,537	1,883	1,183
Total	3,131	2,597	1,722

Source: 2015 Point-in-Time Count