

# HERO

Homeless Engagement Resource Outreach

# TEAM



**Ordinary People doing Extraordinary Things for  
the most Vulnerable in the Streets of Fresno**

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**FEBRUARY 2019**

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***“Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy.”***

***-Thomas Merton***



## INTRODUCTION

“Homelessness is the single most significant quality of life issue facing our community, which is why we launched the Street2Home initiative this year, a county-wide collaboration to address homelessness compassionately and intelligently,” said Mayor Brand. “We all know the best way to stop the cycle of homelessness is to put a roof over someone’s head, whether it’s permanent or temporary. This funding will help us and we will continue our successful efforts to connect Fresno’s homeless to the resources that will bring comfort and stability to their lives.”[1]

The 2018 Point in Time Count showed 1,874 persons experiencing homelessness within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care (FMCoC), a 5% increase from the 1,745 persons reported in the 2017 Point in Time Count. Nationally, there was a 3% increase in homelessness, with data collected demonstrating that 35% of persons experiencing homelessness are in unsheltered locations, including the street and other places not meant for human habitation. [2] While this data reflects that 65% are in sheltered locations, where they are more likely to be provided with a range of essential support services, that is not always the case for persons in unsheltered locations. The percentage of persons experiencing homelessness in unsheltered

[1] Fresno Declares Emergency Homeless Shelter Crisis, <https://www.fresno.gov/news/fresno-declares-emergency-homeless-shelter-crisis/>

[2] Meghan Henry, Anna Mahathey, Tyler Morrill, Anna Robinson, Azim Shivji, and Rian Watt, Abt Associates, The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress (<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>) 1.

locations within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care is roughly 89%. [3] What this means is that on any given night in 2018, there were 1,669 unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. One thousand six hundred and sixty-nine persons sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. For many years, the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care has been coordinating street outreach in partnership with its member agencies. Through this coordination of street outreach, the community was able to identify the gap that existed in street outreach and engagement. With a percentage of up to 89% of persons experiencing homeless being unsheltered, the need for outreach that would bring services to them became top priority. In partnership and through funding from the City of Fresno, the Homeless Engagement Resource & Outreach (HERO) Team emerged to equip the City with a team of 8 dedicated Outreach/Navigator positions. WestCare California, Inc., and its subcontracted partners, Turning Point of Central California, Poverello House, and Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission, employ Outreach/Navigators to work alongside the Fresno Police Department Homeless Task Force to respond to requests for street outreach and assessments generated from the City of Fresno and coordinate with all MAP Points and other housing and support services. These services and interventions focus on removing barriers and connecting people experiencing homelessness to supportive services that will facilitate housing stability. This same team provides the ongoing support to persons experiencing homelessness, as they navigate them through the process that ultimately leads them to permanent housing



## BACKGROUND

It is close to 7:00 am and as many people are getting ready for their jobs or school, there are those among us who are already hard at work. They are canvassing the streets to engage individuals experiencing literal or chronic homelessness. They walk alongside the Homeless Task Force on the streets surrounding the Poverello House, as it is an area known to have one of the largest concentration of unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. As the team walks through the encampments, they are greeted and, greet by name most of the people they encounter. Through their daily contacts, they have formed connections and built relationships based on trust, dignity, and consistency. They strive each and every day, through their

[3] Melissa Mikel, Point-in-Time Count CA-514 Fresno City & County/Madera County CoC, 1.

***“At any given moment, you have the power to say: This is not how the story is going to end.”***

***— Christine  
Mason Miller***



work to provide hope where there is none. They not only realize that every single person experiencing homelessness has their own story, but empower them to find their voice, and more importantly work in partnership with them towards reintegration into mainstream society and permanent housing.

The HERO Team has been in operation since July 1, 2016 providing the City of Fresno with a team of extraordinarily compassionate individuals who literally walk the walk when it comes to caring for those less fortunate. They begin by canvassing the city to provide information, engagement, assessment, linkages to services, and most importantly hope to Veterans, individuals, and families experiencing literal and chronic homeless in Fresno. The goal is to build rapport, assess each person's situation, navigate the process of attaining vital documents needed, locate housing options and quickly provide stability in permanent housing.

***Homelessness, while bleak, does not define the person, and the HERO team works tirelessly to provide the linkages to services needed for an individual to change their circumstances.***



***Not everyone experiencing a housing crisis can access a physical social service location.***

## **ROLE OF HERO TEAM**

Fresno has and continues to make huge strides in increasing services and making such services easier to access for persons experiencing a housing crisis. The implementation of a Coordinated Entry System through the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care, which includes various access sites such as the MAP Points in the City and County of Fresno is a testament to the amazing work and collaboration that is possible. However, even with all the progress that has been made, many individuals experiencing homelessness still find themselves disengaged from services. They may have developed, for various legitimate or non-legitimate reasons, a lack of trust in the public system designed to provide the essential services they need. In a recent article by Laura Tsutsui, it was stated that in 2018 alone, the Fresno Police Department's Homeless Task Force made over 9,000 contacts with people experiencing homelessness. In the article, Lieutenant Rob Beckwith reported that of the 9,000 contacts made by the Homeless Task Force, only 1% of the contacts resulted in linkages to services being accepted. [4]

Their reluctance to seek services is a barrier that street outreach teams, such as the HERO Team work to overcome through the building of strong relationships with them. These efforts can take

[4] Laura Tsutsui, Fresno Camping Ban 18 Months In: Few Arrests, Homeless Dispersed, <https://www.kvpr.org/post/fresno-camping-ban-18-months-few-arrests-homeless-dispersed>, February 6, 2019

several months or even years of persistent engagement. The HERO Team works endlessly to transform the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness in the City of Fresno through empowerment, advocacy, and comprehensive street outreach. Through their efforts, they restore dignity and hope, while providing linkages to vital resources within the community. Utilizing motivational interviewing techniques and a strengths based approach, they partner with them to reach their housing and life goals. Coordinated street outreach allows the community to provide direct services to people experiencing homelessness, who would otherwise not have access to these services at physical sites. By literally meeting people where they are, the team is able to build client-centered relationships and are able to establish essential community partnerships that eliminate barriers to necessary mainstream services.

HERO Team street outreach efforts cover the City of Fresno's geographic area to reach out to as many individuals experiencing homelessness as possible. Duties of the HERO Team include but are not limited to:

- Respond via social media, phone, email, and in person to requests from Fresno Police Department, City Council members (by district), the Mayor's Office, partner agencies, Office of Education, Faith Based Community, Business owners, concerned citizens, and self-referrals;
- Locate, engage, and build rapport with individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness and are not being served, adverse to services, and/or are underserved by existing community service delivery systems;
- Completion of Literally Homeless verification forms for all the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care's housing and supportive services only providers to ensure compliance to federal record keeping requirements set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD);[5]
- Ensure client safety;
- Advocacy;
- Assist in housing search;
- Landlord engagement;
- Transport and refer clients to appropriate services as well as navigate clients through the documentation gathering process;



[5] At a Glance Criteria and Recordkeeping Requirements for Definition of Homeless,  
[https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition\\_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf](https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf)



***"Loneliness and  
the feeling of  
being unwanted  
is the most  
terrible poverty."***

***-Mother Teresa***

- Provide basic survival supplies when available i.e. hygiene packs, blankets, water, snacks, etc.;
- Connect clients to physical health, mental health, alcohol and other drug services/programs in the community;
- Keep updated zip code maps, report new "hot spots" and serve as team leads during the Annual Homeless Point in Time Count;

The goal of the HERO Team is to get people off the streets and into housing. Through progressive and creative engagement, they attempt to assist in overcoming any and all barriers to housing. They operate under the Housing First philosophy.

"Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life." [6]

While strictly adhering to the Housing First approach, the HERO Team does not practice "housing only". They coordinate to provide connections to service providers that will increase the likelihood of long-term housing success for persons with higher acuity.



## BEYOND OUTREACH

***"It's an all too familiar situation for people experiencing homelessness: the staggering amount of paperwork, appointments, box-checking, and jumping through hoops required in order to access housing help. In many cases, just one inaccuracy or missed appointment can send someone to the end of the line, on their own again as they try to get back on their feet." [7]***

Within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care's Coordinated Entry System the HERO Team, in addition to engagement and assessment, navigate clients through the housing process. Especially in communities like Fresno, where the population of unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness is so high, the role of street outreach/navigators is extremely critical to the work required for people to acquire and more importantly, sustain housing. The goal of Navigation is to assist clients in breaking the cycle of homelessness by moving from the street to interim housing (when available), accessing necessary social services, and ultimately obtaining permanent housing. Through navigation, persons are assisted with the collection of the documents that will be required for housing. From birth certificates to proof of military service, people experiencing homelessness must secure a variety of documents to move into housing, and these documents can often be difficult to acquire for those without the contacts or system knowledge to know how to get what they need. Whether it is helping them fill out applications, acquiring fee waivers and/or financial assistance for forms, and providing the transportation and support to appointments, the HERO Team walks with them every step of the way through this entire process. Even when a person attains permanent housing, the HERO Team continues to provide periodic check-ins to ensure housing stability.

[7] Gibbs, Adam *Navigation, Case Conferencing and Housing Referrals*, <https://www.community.solutions/blog/navigation-case-conferencing-and-housing-referrals> February 21, 2015

# DATA ANALYSIS

**According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, on a given night in 2018, 553,742 people experienced homelessness in the U.S. This number includes:**

- \* 180,413 people in families, including children, experienced homelessness.**
- \* 372,417 single individuals experienced homelessness.**
- \* 88,640 individuals had chronic patterns of homelessness.**
- \* 37,878 veterans experienced homelessness. [8]**

**During the 2018 Point in Time Count for the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care (FMCoC), on a given night in 2018, 1,874 people experienced homelessness in the FMCoC geographical region.**

**This number includes:**

- \* 258 people in families, including children, experienced homelessness.**
- \* 1,874 single individuals experienced homelessness. [9]**

With the lack of available low barrier shelter beds within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care geographic region, on any given night, a person who is experiencing homelessness will most likely be unsheltered, and therefore not have essential support services made available to them. By providing street outreach, our community is able to reach them and begin the process that leads to housing, stability,



and wellness. Whether it is providing a hygiene kit, assessing their vulnerability, transportation to medical appointments, and/or even just a rapport building conversation, street outreach workers are the crucial front line staff that empower them to begin the journey to recovery. Without this critical component of an effective Coordinated Entry System of homeless service providers, the likelihood of up to 89% of the persons experiencing homelessness in our community not having access to support services is high. While street outreach alone is not the answer to solving homelessness, it is and continues to be a necessary and vital part of our community's effort towards achieving that goal.

The dangers of homelessness are very real, and can be fatal. Which makes the efforts of those working to end homelessness more than just a social cause to promote the right to housing for all. It elevates this issue to one of life and death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "compared to the general population, people who experience homelessness are at greater risk of infectious and chronic illness, poor mental health, and substance abuse. They are also more often victims of violence, prior to and once homeless. Homeless persons also have a mortality rate four to nine times higher than those who are not homeless." [10]

In November 2017, a memorial service was held outside the streets of Poverello House for persons that had died on the street that year. "Forty-three people who died homeless on the streets of Fresno were remembered during a memorial service Friday outside the Poverello House homeless shelter. All died during 2017 except for one who passed away the previous year." [11] Members of the HERO Team were in attendance, as they had worked with some of the individuals whose lives were being remembered.

[8] <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/faqs/>

[9] Melissa Mikel, Point-in-Time Count CA-514 Fresno City & County/Madera County CoC, 1.

[10] National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, <https://www.cdc.gov/features/homelessness/index.html>

[11] George, Carmen Forty-two people died homeless in Fresno this year. A solemn ceremony remembered them, <https://www.fresnobee.com/living/religion/article185308658.html>

## OUTCOMES

As with any provision of services, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of any project/program to determine the success and the need for the continuation of it. When the local and national data surrounding homelessness demonstrates an increase in persons experiencing homelessness, it is clear that with that increase, there needs to be an increase in services. Since its inception on July 1, 2016 through October 31, 2018 the HERO Team made 7,964 contacts with individuals experiencing homelessness within the City of Fresno, through street outreach. This figure references the actual number of contacts that can include several contacts for any one (1) individual. For example, if a HERO Team member met with a person twice a week in a four week period, for the purposes of this data, a total of 8 contacts would have been made for that individual in that time period.

During the same reporting period, a total of 776 VI-SPDATS were conducted on individuals experiencing homelessness.

A VI-SPDAT, or a Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool is a survey that assists the HERO Team in determining the vulnerability of each individual and/or families experiencing homelessness. This tool is used within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care's Coordinated Entry System to help in the prioritization process. **The highlight of this data is that through the work of the HERO Team, 234 individuals obtained permanent housing during the reporting period.** This means that of the 776 VI-SPDATS completed on 776 individuals experiencing homelessness during the reporting period, **30% obtained permanent housing.**

Following engagement and assessment, the HERO Team works to provide individuals experiencing homelessness linkages to necessary services. In a period of 10 months, from January 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018 the HERO Team provided a total of 1,606 linkages to various services connecting individuals and/or families to emergency shelter, food, healthcare, permanent housing, and other mainstream services. Below is a graphic that outlines the data reported during that timeframe.



**234**  
**HOUSED**





From February 1, 2018 to October 2018 the HERO Team assisted individuals experiencing homelessness to retrieve 535 vital documents including but not limited to:

- \* Birth certificates \* State Identification \* Disability Verification \* Proof of income
- \* Verification of homelessness \* DD214 (for Veterans) \* Housing applications
- \* Immigration status

From June 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018 the HERO Team provided 298 transports to individuals experiencing homelessness in an effort to obtain the vital documents listed above as well as attend appointments for disability verification, appointments social services such as general relief, CalFresh, appointments for medical, mental, and/or behavioral issues, and transports related to housing searches.

## OUTCOMES CONTINUED

When HERO team conducts outreach, each individual's needs are assessed and connections are made to the following services:

- Dept. of Behavioral Health
- Shelters
- Food banks
- MAP Point
- Utility assistance
- HealthCare Providers
- Residential Treatment
- Outpatient Treatment
- Employment/Staffing
- Low income housing
- Mainstream services

On average, HERO team makes 160 linkages per month.



***"A Hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."***

***-Joseph Campbell***



## CONCLUSION

Fresno's Homeless Engagement Resource & Outreach (HERO) Team is comprised of 8 people who strive every single day to empower people experiencing homelessness within our community. When asked why they do the work that they do, one HERO team member answered, *"My favorite thing in the world is walking around our city and reaching out to those that society generally overlooks, ignores, and misunderstands. Seeing the look of astonishment and joy that registers in their eyes when they realize that you are indeed addressing them simply as one human being to another brings me such fulfillment. I love being part of the HERO team!"* Another member adds, *"It has been truly humbling to be part of the HERO team. I've definitely learned to appreciate even the smallest things in life..."*

The goal in the line of the work that the HERO Team does is to work themselves out of a job. With the number of people experiencing homelessness increasing within the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care, and with 89% of those persons being unsheltered, it is evident that the need for dedicated street outreach is higher than ever.

It is a strong belief that every single person in the community deserves a safe place to live, with the necessary supports to sustain that housing and given the opportunity, they will not stop until they accomplish that goal. **One person at a time...one HERO at a time.**

# Attachment HERO Team Monthly Report

## MONTHLY OUTREACH

JANUARY 2019

### CONTACTS



445

\*Not all contacts are/were identified by district.

During the month of January, HERO team made 445 contacts with individuals experiencing homelessness.

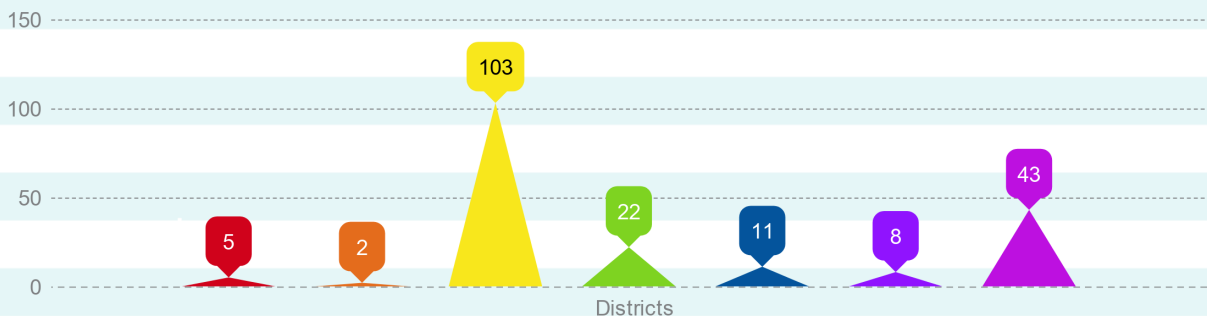
HERO team administered 10 Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) surveys to determine the vulnerability of each individual and/or family experiencing homelessness.

### VI-SPDATS



10

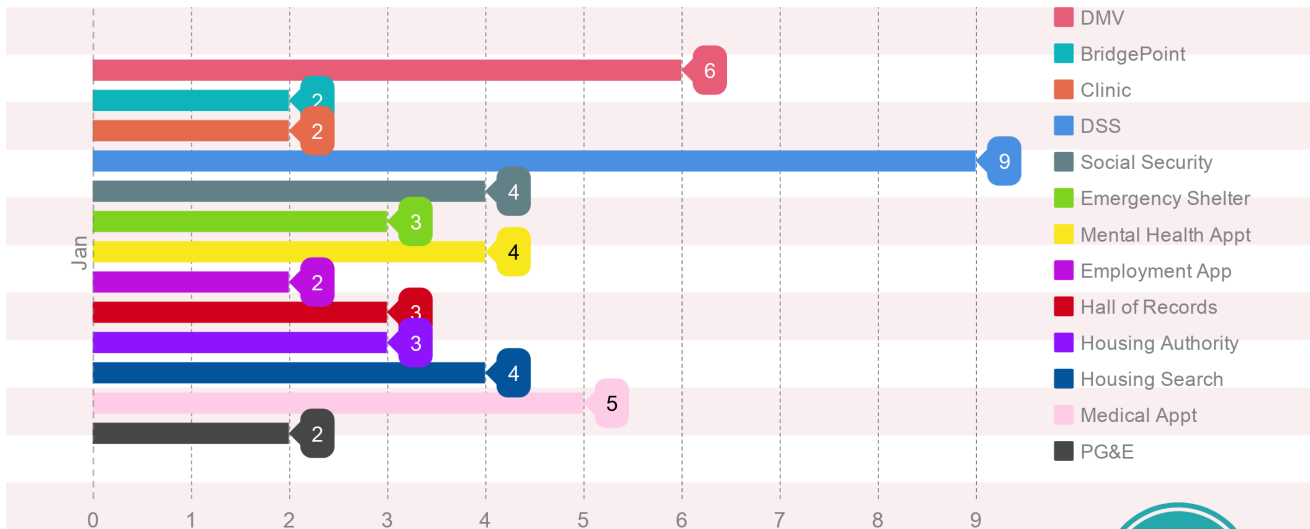
### Contacts by District



194

194 un-duplicated contacts were made by HERO team throughout the City of Fresno. The chart above reflects the district in which the contact was made.

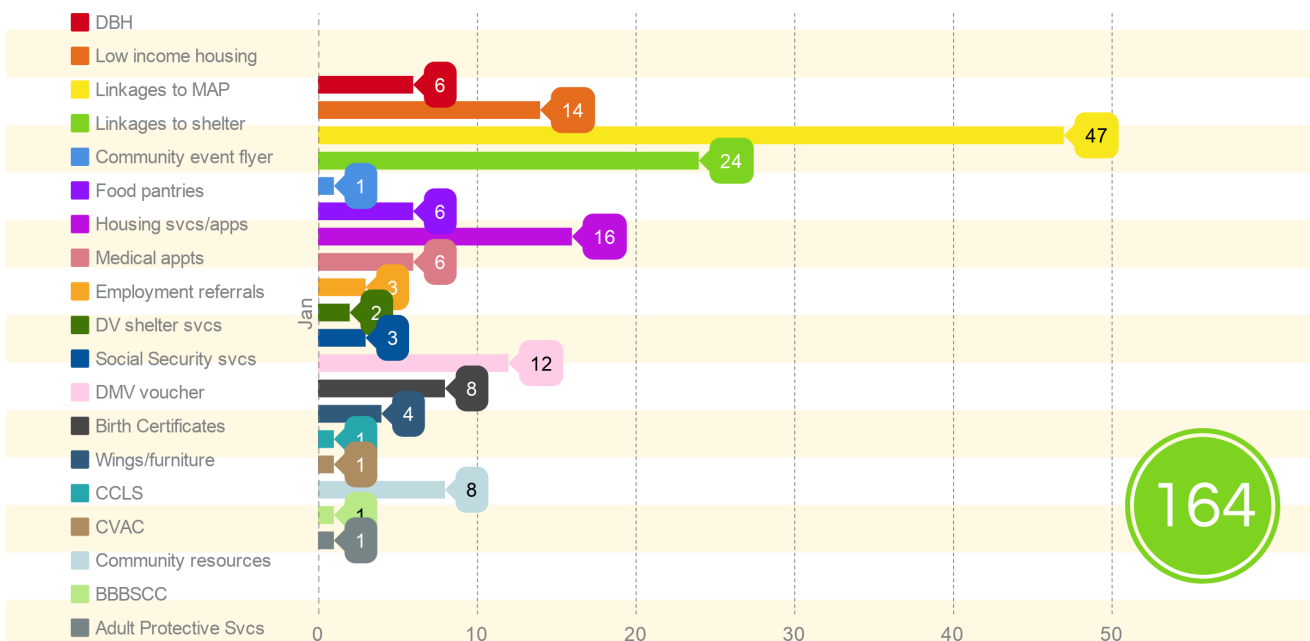
## Transportation



49 transports were performed by HERO team. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness are typically transported to more than one location each day in order to obtain vital documents and become document ready.

49

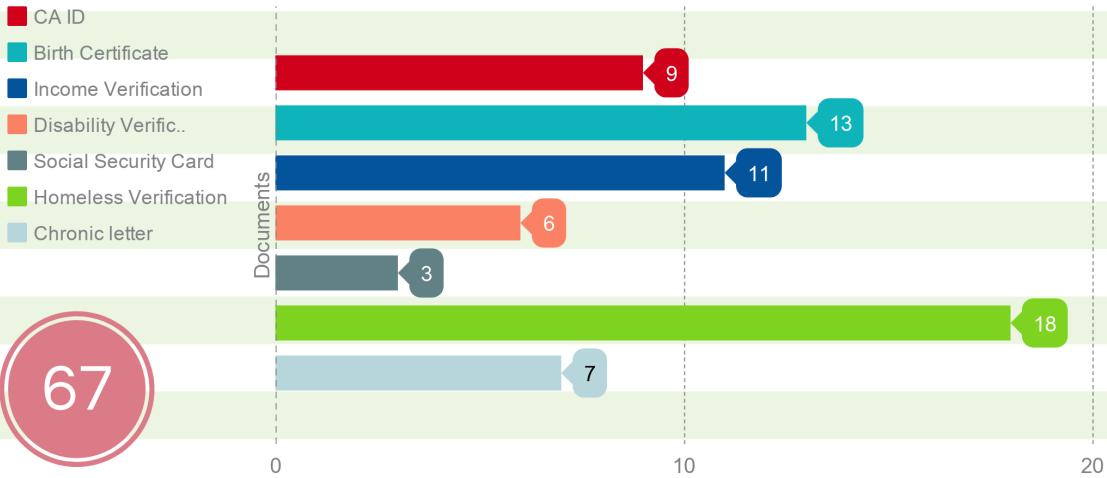
## Linkages



164 linkages were made by HERO team to the community resources listed above. More than one linkage is typically made each day in order to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness with obtaining vital documents and services.

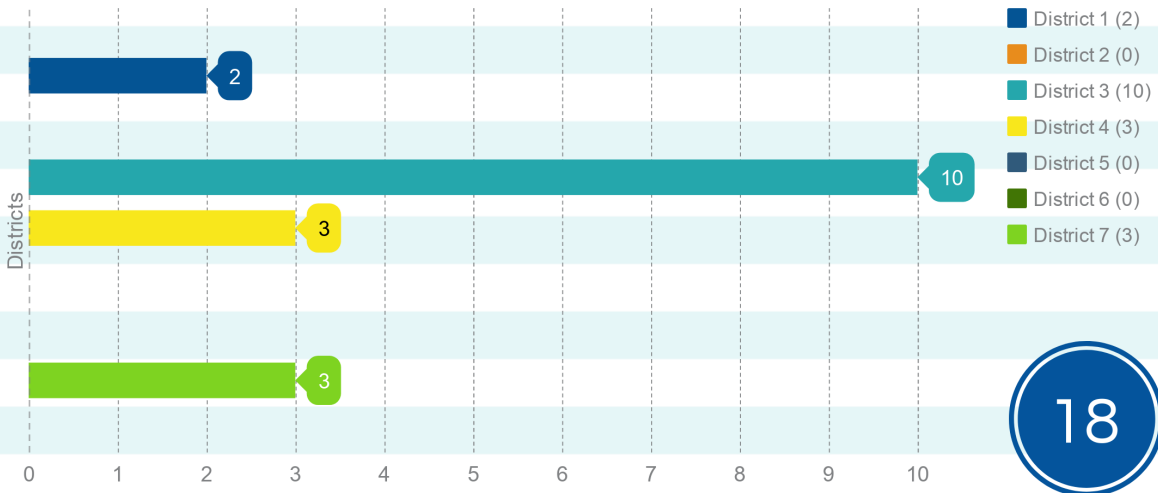
164

## Document Readiness



67 vital documents were obtained by HERO team in order to achieve document readiness for the individuals and families they navigate and case manage. After obtaining document readiness, HERO team can then match the individual or family to housing through the Coordinated Entry System (CES).

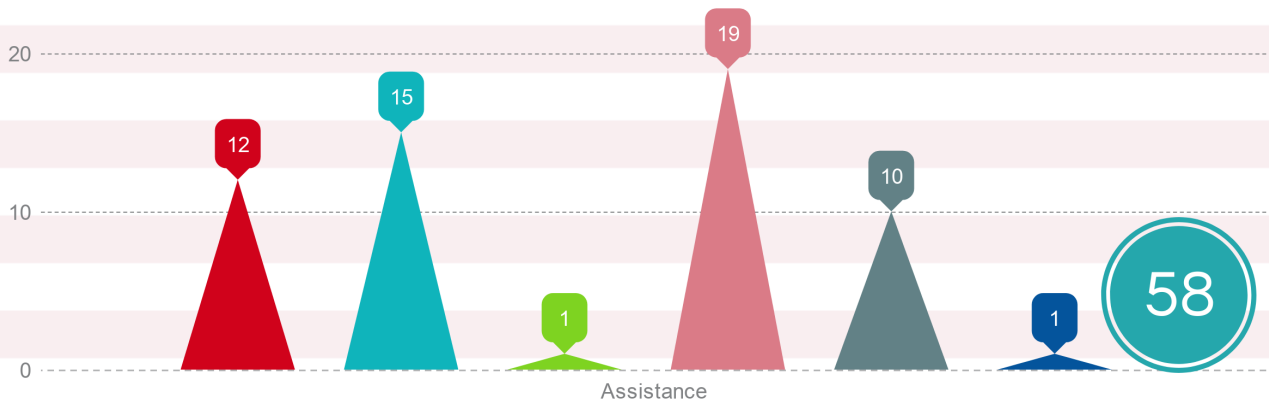
## Homeless Verifications



HERO team completed 18 verification's of homelessness. The chart above shows the district in which each verification was obtained. Verification's of homelessness are necessary for individuals and families entering the Coordinated Entry System to become document ready and receive a match to housing.

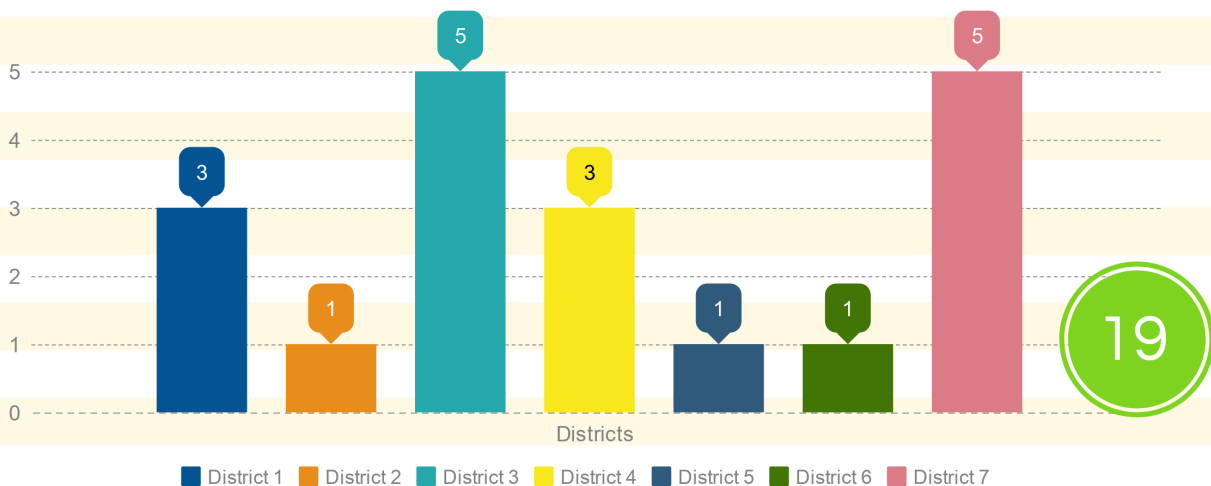
## Assistance with Housing Search

■ Online housing search 
 ■ Landlord engagement/phone 
 ■ Viewed apts w/client 
 ■ Filled out housing apps 
 ■ Turned in housing apps 
 ■ Low income housing list



HERO team assisted individuals and families experiencing homelessness with 58 online and in-person housing searches. Each housing search requires building rapport with the individual or family experiencing homelessness as well as educating landlords throughout the City about the benefits of working with FMCoC agencies.

## Encampment Referrals



HERO team received 19 referrals and requests to visit encampments by concerned citizens, business owners, law enforcement, faith based organizations, Fresno City Council members and Fresno City Council staff. The chart above references each referral by district.

## Housing

Through HERO team efforts, there was a family of 5 individuals housed this month. In addition there are 9 individuals experiencing homelessness at Bridge Housing working on document readiness, 16 individuals are matched to housing through CES, 11 individuals are searching for housing and 4 are awaiting final move in dates from landlords. Overall, HERO Team is actively Navigating 66 individuals from the Master By-Name-List.

