

Hi. My name is Mariano Marquez III. I'm a filmmaker from San Francisco, California who's doing a feature documentary on the homeless situation in Fresno, California. After working on this project for the last 5 years, I've met a lot of great people who are trying to end homelessness in Fresno. Out of all the people I've met, there's one person who stands out for me. That one person who I view as a game changer is Nancy Waidtlow. In July of 2012, Nancy, a 75-year-old retired teacher, selflessly purchased a 0.6 acre lot in West Fresno with money from her own savings, where she founded the Dakota EcoGarden in late 2013. That was the perfect time for the Dakota EcoGarden's grand opening.

In late 2013, the City of Fresno demolished all the homeless encampments located in downtown Fresno, which was home to as many as 500 homeless individuals. The City of Fresno has left many homeless people without the safety of their former encampment communities, leaving most with nowhere to go. As the City of Fresno destroyed the only homes these people had, Nancy went out in search of individuals that she could house at the Dakota EcoGarden. The Dakota EcoGarden includes a 4-bedroom, 2-bath home, which offers such amenities as a communal kitchen & living room, a computer room, a laundry room and an organic garden with many fruits & vegetables that residents tend to. Additionally, there's 1 eco shelter in the yard that houses someone and 1 eco shelter that's currently under construction; both are designed by award-winning architect Arthur Dyson. The yard also includes various solar-powered tents that provide warm and safe sleeping areas for several people as there's a long waiting list of individuals looking to get back on their feet.

Waidtlow is a board member of the Eco Village Project of Fresno, a non-profit 501(c)(3), which co-operates the Dakota EcoGarden, granting it non-profit status. Nancy and all board members are volunteers who don't receive any payment for their services. The Dakota EcoGarden is funded by Nancy, fellow board members and the generosity of private donors.

Nancy offers Fresno's homeless community a uniquely uplifting and democratic environment as she welcomes everyone, regardless of gender, race or creed. Nancy's goal is to see that her residents are rehabilitated and given the skills they need to rejoin society as happy, successful individuals. Nancy, with the help of others, provides her residents much-needed counseling, mentoring and employment opportunities. There are many formerly homeless citizens that can attest to how Nancy saved them from the mean streets of Fresno, giving them dignity and hope, and allowing them to become productive members of society once again.

If you want to learn more, please visit the pro bono website I created for the Dakota EcoGarden and the Eco Village Project of Fresno:

<http://www.ecovillagefresno.org/dakotaecogarden>

For specific information on formerly homeless individuals that Nancy has helped, please read stories written by former residents of the Dakota EcoGarden:

<http://www.ecovillagefresno.org/dakotaecogarden/stories>

Sincerely,
Mariano Marquez III