

## Cause Marketing — A Tale of Bridging Two Cities

### Situation

Southwest Fresno has been the victim of neglect and disassociation for decades. In 2000, when Fresno was ranked the worst among the country's 50 largest cities in concentrated poverty, southwest Fresno was identified as "ground zero." Residents experience a third of the city's murders, a gang population that is five times the national average per-capita, failing schools and lackluster programs that fade as funding does.

### Approach

Because of its proven record mentoring leaders in Fresno, Gleason Group was asked by a core group of seven Pastors and Christian leaders, to help them build infrastructure and capacity around their community-based programs. Referring to themselves as the "Magnificent Spiritual 7" — after the movie with a similar title in which seven men came together to take back their town — these local leaders had recently made a twenty-year commitment to rebuilding the streets of their neglected community. Collectively having spent 145 years ministering to these streets they once corrupted, these men understood that if change was going to come it needed to start with them. After years of seeing resources come and go, they saw in themselves a resource that wouldn't leave. These are their streets and their children. They needed to develop strong and sustainable programs that solved a myriad of problems including: after-school needs, pre-school development, mentoring, summer youth leadership, food resources, job readiness and helping the community work through trauma and grief in an existing program called Grief Share. These leaders were already touching upwards of 100 lives, providing an alternative to gang membership and opening their eyes to opportunity. What would it look like if they could reach out to the community tenfold?

Working from a relationship of trust and mutual admiration, Gleason Group began by recommending naming the organization based on the book titled "Street Saints" authored by Barbara Elliott and featuring Brian King, the new CEO of what is now the Fresno Street Saints [www.fresnostreetsaints.org](http://www.fresnostreetsaints.org). Gleason Group developed a strategic communication process, founded on strong marketing outreach, relevance and a compelling message with a public affairs approach. In this approach, influencers throughout the city had the chance to meet this team of seven and share their perceptions of the issues surrounding the overwhelming statistics. From conference rooms to coffee shops, business CEOs and institutional leaders found themselves sitting with people who so often before had been separated by a gulf of misperception. The conversations were powerful and with time, the bridge between the two cities, north and south Fresno was being built.

The community leaders were trained to articulate their circumstances, vision and plan and to create opportunity based on community needs. With leadership development and mentoring by Gleason Group, the community is learning how to strategically plan, build capacity, scale their efforts and document their outcomes. Project results are sent in consistent marketing messages to the community influencers to keep them engaged and aware of the process and progress.

Gleason Group has partnered with Summit Software to build software that will allow the Fresno Street Saints to document and manage their community network. Using web-based technology, the residents working with the Fresno Street Saints evolve from aides, managers and volunteers

into case managers as the documentation takes place on laptops and ultimately scanning devices right inside the community.

Fresno Street Saints will document their initial encounters with youth and their families and continue to track that client over time, as it is the organization's intention to interact with each of their clients more than once. As the clients benefit from several interactions through the network of community programs, the project can also record the progress from a sociological perspective.

## Results

Today, Fresno Street Saints is an organization that continues to build and strengthen its community-based programs and build out the model of their work. With programs that address education gaps, health issues and job readiness, the residents will begin to set new benchmarks for themselves as a community and within their families. The technology that Gleason Group's associates have developed will allow participants to record, measure and communicate progress. True success will be an empowered social network within southwest Fresno that will foster new habits of civic participation, thus transforming a once isolated community.