

EXPOSURE



FROM IDEA TO IMPACT

How following through on a simple idea gave Valley youth the opportunity for a new experience

Story by [Fresno State](#)

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From Idea to Impact: Giving Valley Youth the Fresno State Football Exper...



When Dario Calderon sent a mass text message to every contact in his phone earlier this football season – seeking donations – a few people responded and asked if he got hacked.

It was not spam. Rather, Calderon was taking action on an idea he and some friends hatched while tailgating at the season opening Fresno State football game.

“My friends and I decided to throw out a mass text message saying, ‘hey, we’re looking to raise as much money as possible to buy as many [Fresno State football] tickets for local students in the community, and we’d love to have your support,’” Calderon says. “I thought initially that it was going to be something that me and my group were funding, but in that short period of time we were able raise enough to buy 200 tickets.”

Bulldogs tickets have been in high demand in recent years, as the team is vying for its second straight Mountain West championship and has a chance to win 10 or more games for the fifth time in the past six full seasons. Fresno State is trending toward its fifth sellout this season when the Bulldogs host New Mexico in the home finale at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 18, at Valley Children’s Stadium.

As usual, Dario Calderon will be there. He has been attending Fresno State football games since he was a teenager – his uncle took him to his first game about 20 years ago with his cousins and it opened his eyes to everything Fresno State has to offer, from academics to building pride in the community.

There is no other event in the Valley that has the power to bring together 41,000-plus people from all walks of life and unite them behind one common cause like Fresno State football can

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Calderon and his friends were inspired to create a nonprofit—For the Valley, From the Valley—to raise money for similar causes related to Fresno State athletics and the community. Their hope is for more young people in the community to get the opportunity to experience the palpable pride and pageantry that surrounds campus on fall game days. They got that chance on Oct. 28 when Fresno State hosted UNLV for homecoming. Fresno State won 31-24 in a matchup of two of the Mountain West's top teams.

"A small gesture like this can go a long way," Calderon told students at Clovis Community College who were among 400 people to receive free tickets. After learning of Calderon's grassroots effort to raise money for 200 tickets, Fresno State's Director of Athletics Terry Tumey matched the total so the group could distribute 400 tickets to area youth.

Beyond the game, perhaps those who received these tickets would be inspired to one day attend Fresno State or to connect more deeply with the university and community – similar to the way Calderon's uncle exposed him to the university.

Calderon personally handed out tickets at Promesa Behavioral Health, Clovis Community College, Parlier High School, Orange Cove High School and Sanger High School, his alma mater. He spoke with recipients about his motivation to reach out to community youth.

"It was important to me to identify underserved students, but yet deserving, so we started working with community colleges, high schools and other groups."



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One such student who received tickets was Lily Drinnon, who grew up in Fresno but had never before been to a Bulldogs football game. Drinnon, who is the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, graduated from high school in 2018 but didn't start college right away. She now hopes to eventually transfer from Clovis Community College to Fresno State to pursue an engineering degree.

"I just feel like a part of something – something that I saw on TV all the time which is the game, and now it's surreal," Drinnon says.



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Calderon joined the group of new Bulldog fans in their section near the north end zone during the thrilling homecoming win, high-fiving them and cheering alongside them. “They’re probably the loudest section that was out there,” Calderon says, “so it was just a really neat experience.

“I’m just super hopeful that being able to go through that experience will continue to push and drive and motivate them to where they want to be.”



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Did you know? Fresno State football is averaging 40,213 fans per home game, which leads the Mountain West and ranks No.1 in the nation among all Group of Five institutions.

[Buy your tickets](#)

Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Video by Matt Mealer, Story by Eddie Hughes — University Marketing and Communications*

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