



Greensboro NC, 58°

December 22, 2015 · Greensboro, North Carolina

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Hardship and hope collide in one of Greensboro's poorest ZIP codes

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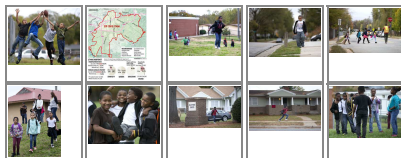
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Andrew Krech/News & Record

Jones Elementary School students (from left) Cameron Dozier, Jamarr Parker, Mysaan Foreman and Adrian Cooke jump for a pass during a pickup football game at recess on Friday. One in five people in the 27406 ZIP code live in poverty, considered \$15,000 for an individual or having an annual income of less than \$24,000 for a family of four.

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into the county.

Within its borders, there's a 20 percent poverty rate, a 14 percent unemployment rate

Posted: Saturday, November 7, 2015 10:00 pm

By Nancy McLaughlin
nancy.mclaughlin@greensboro.com

GREENSBORO — When Lisa Von S. Brown gets off work at 10 p.m., she waits 45 minutes for the city bus, which she then rides an hour to get home.

"If I had a car, I could drive there in seven minutes and be there in time to kiss my children good night or read them a bedtime story," said Brown, a single mother of five.

She said she knows a car, for now, is out of reach.

"And those snow routes? The buses don't even run near me on the snow route. I have to walk four blocks over," she said.

This is what life is like in the 27406 ZIP code — one of the city's poorest places to live.

It's an area that cuts a wide swath through the heart of Greensboro and extends well

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and one in five people don't have a high school diploma, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and a number of other organizations.

Here, 19 percent of households earn \$15,000 or less annually.

Here, a way out seems impossible.

But there is hope. The United Way of Greater Greensboro has launched a unique 18-month pilot program that

focuses on the root causes of poverty. One of the major struggles for the poor is being able to access services that could help but are spread throughout the city.

The Family Success Center, though, houses them under one roof.

Organizers, including lead agency Guilford Child Development, recognize that people in poverty want out — but don't know the way.

"I will gladly say, 'Here's your food stamps. Here's your Medicaid card. Here's your housing back,'" Brown said. "I would love to see that day. I don't know when. I don't know how. But it's going to happen."

This wouldn't be the first program to attempt to help.

Others have come and gone. Success in reducing poverty here has been as fleeting as the next paycheck for some residents.

When the United Way announced earlier this year that it would focus its work on breaking the cycle of poverty for the next decade and more, two years had already gone into the research and holding discussions on how to best help the community.

In those discussions, everyone pointed to poverty as the top concern.

The situation in 27406 wasn't always as dire. People lament the high-paying textile jobs that left the area and sent the local economy into a spiral.

Now, one in five people in the ZIP code live in poverty. That's considered \$15,000 for an individual or having an annual income of less than \$24,000 for a family of four.

"It's people who are working two, three, four jobs to try to make ends meet," said Greensboro City Councilman Jamal Fox, who represents parts of 27406.

Many are second and third generations of families steeped in poverty.

Much of that poverty is concentrated in pockets of 27406 and three other surrounding ZIP codes: 27401, 27403 and 27405.

Collectively, nearly one in four residents in these areas doesn't have a high school diploma, and the unemployment rate is as high as 20 percent.

Franklin McCain, the United Way's vice president of community investments, recalls driving through a section of town and noticing a home with a blanket covering a part of a window with the pane missing.

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Two weeks later as he passed the same home, he noticed it was still there.

"That's because they can't afford to have the window fixed," McCain said.

Still, some of the neighborhoods in 27406 could be found anywhere in the city.

At first glance, you wouldn't know that these areas are struggling.

It is behind the doors where differences emerge.

Many families are living paycheck to paycheck.

Some are like Brown, who lives in a rental house and whose gas has been turned off all summer. Now that it's getting colder, she has to come up with the money to get it reconnected.

In 27406, the landscape also includes three public housing communities and the mostly working-class Arlington Park and Asheboro neighborhoods on the edge of downtown.

The ZIP code is predominantly black with an almost equal ratio of men to women.

The unemployment rate is a stunning 13.9 percent, compared to the county average of 5.5 percent.

Poverty and survival are the reality of daily life here. Living without fear of where the next meal or paycheck will come is the dream for many.

The Family Success Center's program will try to fulfill it — but in a novel way. It's taking 100 families and giving them access to a variety of services so they can overcome the traditional barriers to finding good jobs, such as criminal records and lack of education.

It's kind of like one-stop shopping.

Part of the challenge in serving the poor is that services to help are spread across the city. Many don't have transportation to access them — or just don't simply know where to look.

The Family Success Center puts many of them all in one place.

The center is housed at United Child Development, which provided space for agencies and is a familiar partner for many of the area's families. United Child Development has honed a reputation in the community for helping change lives through Head Start and a program that's become a model across the country for sending nurses in the homes of low-income, first-time moms.

Each family there gets a coach and career counselor, who assesses each of the needs of the family members and works with agencies.

And, an individualized plan for self-sufficiency.

Sometimes people are stymied, they say, because they just don't know where to start.

"People think it's because they are lazy, and they don't want to do better, and that's not it," McCain said.

Brown, 34, who once ran her own day care and has an entrepreneurial spirit, arrived in Greensboro still holding onto a domestic protection order issued in another state. She

makes many of her soaps and lotions.

"I left everything," she said.

She was new to the area and seeking help through nonprofits and community agencies, but one of the people interviewing her asked why she had so many children.

Brown was insulted and angry. She thought about the women, like herself, who have battled back from rape and situations that caused her to drop college classes.

"(They) just make the assumption that ... 'She's just one of those chicks who wants to be on welfare,'" said Brown, who finished a job-readiness program through the center and found a job.

McCain also understands that eyes often glaze over at efforts seeking to empower people through education, access and job training.

A lot of the projects have come and gone through the community, he said.

This time may be different. The effort's primary partners are names people already know and whose roots are firmly planted in the community. Goodwill. Salvation Army. Family Services of the Piedmont. UNC-Greensboro. Others.

Community leaders say the difference here is that the agencies will be talking to each other and have the backing of the United Way, which is investing upwards of \$500,000 in the pilot program. Two others are planned in other ZIP codes the next few years.

"You've got partners working in the community who usually wouldn't talk to each other and know what each other is doing, and now they are working together," said Fox, the Greensboro councilman.

And they hope to integrate services and link up with programs already working in the community.

Participants still have to put in the effort, which could mean working on their GEDs, showing up for financial literacy classes and going on job interviews.

For some, it's too much. In the first six months, some families have already dropped out.

For others, the classes have become a support system.

"Now people feel, like, 'I'm not out here by myself,'" McCain said. "People feel empowered."

He emphasizes the initiative will need support from the entire community. The United Way (www.unitedwaygso.org) needs partners, including donors and businesses willing to offer internships and possibly jobs.

That could come in the form of apartment complexes that set aside five to 10 units at half the rent so that families in the program can save money to get on sounder financial footing. That's a thought McCain had.

No one is calling the success center a quick-fix. Actually, the reality of poverty is that it's going to be a long-term struggle, said Robin Britt, the executive director of Guilford Child Development and a longtime children's advocate.

"It will take generations to make major strides," he said. "But that doesn't excuse a

failure to address the problem.”

Contact Nancy McLaughlin at (336) 373-7049, and follow @nmclaughlinNR on Twitter.

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Penny Brown · Trinity High

I COULD NOT DISAGREE MORE! I hope you realize what you are doing to the property value to those of us that live in and around the Forest Oaks Area. Every area in the 27406 zip code does not agree that we live in the city's poorest place in Greensboro

Like · Reply · Nov 19, 2015 7:08am



Mil Ruff-Patrick

Cost, cost, cost. It is shameful the poor and low income wage earners are expected to pay for the basic things that they clearly can not really afford. There is no equity in the cost of goods and services. A person making 15,000 or less does not have the means to pay what others whose income is 3 to 5 times more. Things like heating, housing, auto insurance, transportation, a car, clothing, food. If they apply for a loan they are assessed the highest interest rate yet expected to be in a position to pay on a timely manner. The system is rigged the credit score which was established to be a tool is now a weapon. Until there is true equity this type of article will continue to be written.

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Billy Jones · Partner at StolenMotorcycle.net

I have but one complaint about the article: The United Way, with all its vast resources, could be creating businesses to help target the reasons the poverty exists in the first place but instead the United Way chooses to continue to perpetuate poverty-- why?

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Ann Davidson · Summerfield, North Carolina

How would you want a writer to designate an area in a city that contains the population they are writing about?

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Torie Williams Crisp

I grew up in all of those zip codes. I believe if people would offer more daycare services, this would lead to better jobs. Without daycare a single mom can't go to work. Also financial management classes would be helpful as well as offering several ways to attend school.

Like · Reply · 1 · Nov 9, 2015 5:00am



Ziyar Jackson · James B. Dudley High School

I felt terrible about this article I use to live there my mother was not poor we moved from new your and was told about the place you wrote about check

Facebook people are upset and fill afended what are you doing to help families nothing this article need to come down its down grading people like you give people bad names

Like · Reply · Nov 8, 2015 10:48am



Arnold Rogers

As a REALTOR who sells houses in that zip code, I must say that was one of the most biased, and damaging articles I have read. Less we foget Nancy, Forest Oaks is also in that zip code, as well as many well built tract subdivisions! I have, maybe now HAD, buyers looking to buy there.

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Billy Jones · Partner at StolenMotorcycle.net

All you care about is your wallet. I have but one complaint about the article: The United Way, with all its vast resources, could be creating businesses to help target the reasons the poverty exists in the first place but instead the United Way chooses to continue to perpetuate poverty-- why?

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