

Physical and Mental Health Committee

- 1. People who are economically disadvantaged experience competing demands (i.e. food, housing and transportation) that make it difficult to pay for health services. There are inadequate resources to serve the primary and specialty health care needs of the uninsured and underinsured.**
 - There are few primary health care providers available to the uninsured and those on Medicaid. Existing providers are under-funded and unable to meet the needs of the increasing number of clients.
 - There is a need to remove barriers that prevent willing physicians and dentists from volunteering their expertise.
 - A growing number of people who suffer from chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, cannot afford to buy medications to control their condition.
 - Immediate prescription needs are going unmet.
 - Transportation can be a serious obstacle to accessing health care for the economically disadvantaged.
- 2. Health providers, and county and state agencies, have yet to develop joint strategies to address the health needs of those in poverty.**
 - Funds for indigent care have been shrinking. Federal and state assistance to community health clinics has been reduced and \$660,000 formerly provided through property taxes is no longer collected. Budget cuts at the state level may further reduce funding for indigent care by \$2.5 million in 2006 for Athens.
 - People with no access to primary care use the emergency room for conditions that may not require emergency care.
- 3. A central source of up-to-date information is lacking for health services available to the economically disadvantaged, as is communication and collaboration among service providers.**
 - There are inadequate resources for people suffering with substance abuse, dental care issues, and physical therapy issues.
- 4. Lack of adequate prevention education and services, such as teen family planning, obesity prevention and early treatment of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, contributes to poverty in Athens.**

Housing and Transportation Committee

- 1. There are many barriers to affordable housing for people with low incomes in Athens-Clarke County.**
 - Existing affordable housing is being lost as neighborhoods are re-developed with higher-priced houses and apartment complexes.
 - New affordable housing is difficult to develop due to rising property values, "Not In My Back Yard" attitudes, and shrinking federal housing funds.
 - Working families are having difficulty finding homes they can afford to buy (\$80,000 to \$115,000). To be considered affordable, housing costs should be no more than 30% of income. For an \$80,000 home in Athens, an individual would need an annual income of \$24,000 to

afford monthly homeowner costs. Approximately 17,250 households in Athens could not afford to buy such a home.

- Working families can't afford rising rental costs, and rental assistance programs are strained. Nearly 13,000 renter households in Athens (56% of those who rent) pay more than 30% of their income on rent.
- Housing agencies and government programs lack the funding, support, and coordination to meet the affordable housing needs of people in Athens.

2. There is not enough affordable housing and support services for people with specialized housing needs.

- Athens lacks enough affordable housing that can accommodate and/or support the needs of senior citizens, people with mental illness and/or drug addictions, people with disabilities, people getting out of jail, undocumented workers, and homeless people.

3. The lack of affordable, reliable transportation creates real barriers to escaping poverty in Athens.

- Without reliable transportation, it is very difficult to find and retain a steady job, go to school activities, get necessary health care, etc.
- The Athens public transit system is under-funded, leading to a lack of service to many areas of the county, inconvenient timing and layout of routes and limited hours. This means that many people can't rely on the bus to get to work, doctors' appointments, school events or grocery shopping.
- According to the American Automobile Association, it costs on average \$7,834 per year to own and operate a car. A family of 4 living at the federal poverty level only earns \$20,000 per year, so owning a car could take up to 40% of their income.

NEXT STEPS

At the August 28 PPA Community Meeting the focus of our process will change to addressing three areas related to these learnings:

- 1. Verifying and elaborating on the issues surrounding these Learnings.**
- 2. Organizing a second series of community conversations to engage the broader community in formulating recommendations.**
- 3. Beginning to develop recommendations to implement strategies that address issues of poverty.**

Partners for a Prosperous Athens meetings are on the fourth Monday of the month, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Check www.prosperousathens.org for details. Everyone is welcome!

Poverty in Athens: What We Have Learned



*Poverty is an ongoing problem that affects all segments of our community. We must continue to work together to address the many issues associated with poverty. This document, **Poverty in Athens: What We Have Learned**, is an update on the progress of the Partnership for a Prosperous Athens.*

Over the last several months we have had conversations about issues of poverty in Athens with many citizens including religious and business leaders, service providers, parents, children and others most directly impacted by poverty. This report is based on information obtained from these conversations and meetings.

There are **THREE MAJOR PURPOSES** for this document:

- 1. Identify problem areas that require further investigation and study. The next phase of our work will involve going deeper into the issues surrounding these identified areas.**
- 2. Provide a framework for constructive debate as ideas and solutions are discussed throughout the community.**
- 3. Further the process of setting the agenda for community commitment to change.**

POVERTY IN ATHENS

- 28% of the people living in Athens live in poverty. This means that a family of four lives on \$20,000 or less per year. Athens' poverty rate is the 5th highest in the nation for counties with populations of 100,000 or more.
- One in four Clarke County children lives in poverty.
- 33% of Athens-Clarke County high school students did not graduate on time in 2006.
- 65% of all Athens' families that live in poverty report that they work full- or part-time.
- 41% of people who work in Athens-Clarke County do not live in A-CC, and 60% of people who work at UGA do not live in A-CC. Much of the wealth generated in Clarke County flows into surrounding counties.
- Approximately 21% of the adult population in Athens faces challenges with literacy.
- Athens recently lost up to 1,800 potential new jobs due primarily to a lack of a skilled workforce when Novartis chose North Carolina over Athens.
- In 2005, Athens Regional Medical Center documented spending \$29 million on charitable care and care provided to uninsured Athens residents. St. Mary's provided \$18.5 million in uncompensated care to the greater Athens area. Uncompensated care helps drive up the cost of healthcare in the community.
- Athens-Clarke County's General Fund, together with HUD's Community Development Block Grants, allocates more than \$900,000 for support of community health clinics.
- The poverty threshold for an individual is \$9,800 per year. The cost to jail someone for one year is \$16,245.
- Per capita income for Athens-Clarke County is \$17,123, which is \$4,000 less than Georgia's average of \$21,154.
- If Athens-Clarke County's weekly wage rate was raised to match Georgia's rate, approximately \$6 million would be added to the local economy each week.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Prior to addressing some of the core issues and concerns related to poverty in Athens, it is important to acknowledge the positive participation we have experienced in this process.

- While Athens faces great challenges, it is clear from the hundreds of people who are participating in this process that this community has the capacity and the will to make things better.
- There are effective and successful service providers in Athens deserving of more community and governmental recognition, support and funding.
- Ministers of various faith-based communities have come together to address some of the core issues of poverty.
- Teachers and school officials have provided open access to their schools, where there obviously is a strong core of dedicated teachers and staff.
- We particularly thank the principals and staff at Clarke Central and Cedar Shoals for their willingness to open their doors for our meetings.
- Service providers of all kinds have joined in various conversations, offering support and sharing ideas about new collaborations and opportunities.
- The business community has stepped forward to provide information and help us address the needs and challenges of the work place as it relates to poverty.
- As we have gone into the communities to have conversations in faith-based organizations, community centers and other locations, the openness and honesty—and desire to help—have been very encouraging and supportive.

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS BY COMMITTEE *An Agenda for Change*

Economy Committee

1. **Athens' economy is not diverse enough, and this limits jobs and drives down wage rates.**
 - The economy is too dependent on UGA and the two regional medical centers.
 - There are inadequate strategies in place to encourage retention and expansion of existing businesses.
 - There are inadequate strategies to attract industries that will enhance the social, environmental, and economic quality of life in Athens.
 - Regional economic development efforts are inconsistent.
2. **Many jobs pay wages that do not meet the local cost of living.**
 - Livable wage estimates are determined by local factors such as the cost of housing, child care, transportation, health care, etc. In Athens, local estimates of a livable wage range from \$10.50/hr with benefits to \$14/hr without benefits.
3. **There is a lack of coordination and funding for strategies that prepare students and adults for the workforce.**
 - Students and adults do not have enough access to training in business skills, financial literacy and entrepreneurialism.
 - Lack of hope prevents students and adults from acting on career dreams.

Education Committee

1. **Quality early learning opportunities are critical to preparing children and families for educational success. There are insufficient resources available to meet all the demands for early learning.**
 - Children who receive high-quality care and learning opportunities during the preschool years tend to be more successful in school and later in life than those who do not.
 - The quality of parental care during the child's early years is the main reason for a child's school success.
 - There is a high correlation between education level and income level.
2. **Our schools do not do a good job of teaching children living in poverty.**
 - Only 28.6% of African American males who enter ninth grade graduate on time four years later.
 - Many teachers, parents and students have low academic expectations for children coming from poverty.
 - Students who are reading below grade level in 3rd and 4th grades are more likely to drop out of school.
 - Students who are retained once are 60% more likely to drop out of school, while students who are retained twice are 90% more likely to drop out of school.

The **Learnings** that are included in the remainder of *Poverty in Athens: What We Have Learned* reflect efforts to capture the essence of the work of each of the committees and subcommittees. This document contains only learnings. Recommendations will follow in a report to be issued later. The entirety of each committee's learning statements can be found on the PPA website (www.prosperousathens.org) and at the Fanning Institute (1240 S. Lumpkin St.).

Recurring Themes and Challenges

1. **The notion that there exists a welfare system that "pays people not to work" is a myth. Welfare reform has required that low income families with dependent children must be transitioning to employment in order to receive benefits.**
 - The total number of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families cases in Clarke County has decreased by 40% over the past two years.
2. **High levels of poverty are a burden to those who live in poverty and work to undermine the economy of the entire community.**
3. **Our institutions and systems have failed to develop collaborative strategies that adequately address the challenges of poverty.**
 - There is a culture of poverty in Athens that passes from generation to generation.
 - There is little innovation in developing new programs, opportunities, and collaborations to break the cycle of poverty.
4. **A good education is one of the major factors in helping to overcome poverty.**
 - An incomplete education—lack of high school diploma, GED, literacy in English, workforce skills, etc.—is a serious challenge to decreasing poverty in Athens.
 - Persons who drop out of school have few job options in Athens-Clarke County.
5. **Athens has an unskilled workforce that is a barrier to economic development.**
6. **There is a lack of effective coordination and collaboration among faith-based organizations, non-profits, schools, universities, and government agencies.**
 - There are serious problems getting information to the public about existing assistance programs.
 - There is a lack of specialized support for immigrant populations.
 - There are gaps in services.
7. **Effective strategies to address racism and class issues are lacking.**
 - In Athens-Clarke County the consequences of poverty fall mostly on African Americans and, increasingly, on our growing Latino population.
 - There is a hesitancy, by all races, to have honest dialogue about the impact of race and class as they relate to poverty.
8. **There are disincentives built into various systems that make it difficult to break the poverty cycle.**

3. Parents and mentors are critical to a child's education.

- There are mentoring programs in the community but these programs do not have sufficient resources and volunteers to meet the demand.

Workforce Committee

1. **Athens' workforce is not competitive and lacks needed skills.**
 - There is a deficit of "soft" skills (i.e. interviewing, timeliness, communication, and commitment). Soft skills are considered by some employers as the most valuable skills.
 - There is a deficit of "hard" skills (i.e. reading, writing, math, technical skills).
 - Language barriers including literacy and English as a Second Language limit job advancement.
2. **Sufficient resources are lacking to meet the training needs of the workforce.**
 - There is a need for increased vocational and technical training resources for adults and teenagers.
 - Lack of transportation, lack of child care, lack of job skills, lack of employment information, lack of immigration documentation, substance abuse, and life-work balance issues can be barriers to seeking and gaining full employment.

Dependent Care Committee

1. **Caregivers for elders and people living with disabilities need support with emergency care, respite care and transportation.**
2. **There are not enough options and resources, such as housing, transportation, services, prescriptions and non-medical supplies for elders and people living with disabilities.**
3. **Zoning restricts the number of non-related people living together, limiting opportunities for elders and people with disabilities to have non-related caregivers live with them. Zoning also limits the creation of Personal Care Homes.**
4. **The availability of quality child care is lacking for parents living at or near poverty in Athens.**
 - The average cost for licensed early care and learning centers in Athens for an infant is \$118 per week or approximately \$5,900 per year.
 - Young children who are in families challenged by teen parenthood, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, poverty or parent's history of childhood maltreatment need resources and support to address these challenges.
 - 41% of parents who called Child Care Resource and Referral reported that they could not find child care that met their needs. In March, the waiting list for Pre-K was 198 (520 children enrolled); for Even Start 75 (163 children enrolled); and for Early Head Start 154 (80 children enrolled).
 - Parents of children with disabilities have few choices and limited access to after-school activities, summer camps or enrichment programs for their children.