



Transforming Neighborhoods.
Changing Lives.



26%
of Savannahians live in poverty



JUST SHY OF 14 years after moving to Savannah, my husband and I are leaving the sub-tropical climate of the South and relocating to the land of the frigid (consider this latitude: 44° 59' N).

I have been honored to spend the last nine-plus years working with a diverse and sharp group of community leaders to help build an effective organization from the ground up. For more than a decade Step Up has focused, first as a largely volunteer city initiative and later as an independent nonprofit, on an entrenched poverty rate that's been perversely high for over 40 years. For the record, working to increase the economic mobility of the nearly 38,000 residents who are living at or near the poverty threshold in this Southern city is the most daunting challenge I've ever taken on.

I do not leave with a sense of failure or even regret, however. For one, the rate has in fact gone down a bit and then, post-recession, shot up to 26%. Still, the Step Up collaborative has been effective in:

- Forging powerful partnerships with direct service providers;
- creating an effective workforce development program that has helped hundreds to find employment;
- developing innovative work-place based financial literacy initiatives that regularly receive national attention; and
- advocating for policies that remove barriers and change lives.

The hard truth is, there is no straight path out of poverty.

We know location matters. Here in the South we face some of the worst odds in the country if we have the misfortune to be born poor. Those who come into this world in the lowest economic quintile in Savannah have a 70 percent chance of staying there for the rest of their lives. We know, too, that our city's segregated neighborhoods contribute to maintaining the status quo. Add to that a web of interwoven issues that contribute to maintaining income inequality: An economy built on low-wage labor; a lack of safe, decent housing that is affordable to much of our workforce; a transportation network dedicated to moving people around in personal vehicles; the chronic shortage of quality early learning centers that every shift worker can afford; and a culture that historically has accepted low educational attainment.

But the difficulty isn't just in trying to unravel the systems that can keep people from moving up the economic ladder. One of the more insidious challenges is that our poor residents are largely invisible—not like the homeless men and women we may see sleeping on benches or standing in breakfast lines. Families in poverty may literally be one step away from those lines but typically most of us don't know how close to the edge our own co-workers or those with whom we go to church and school might be.

Still, what has made the work most vexing for me is that too many in our community continue to hold onto myths and images that "The Poor" are lazy, irresponsible individuals who have simply made bad personal choices and are supported comfortably by a safety net of social services.

None of this—even these largely unspoken, unchallenged judgments—should keep us from acting. And Step Up has been all about action. The range of commitments made at last year's annual meeting is inspiring—from serving thousands of low-income individuals who need professional counseling, to stabilizing the dedicated funding to Savannah's Affordable Housing Fund, and spreading the word about Bank On Savannah and the power of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, plus countless important neighborhood projects that often go un-noticed.

I leave offering a challenge, Savannah. We live in a community that cares. We give a lot each year. But we need to shift our focus from funding direct service programs to the exclusion of advocacy. Let's advocate to spend more resources, time and attention on systems and policy change. Even relatively modest procedural changes can make a real difference in people's lives.

Our direct service programs are a critical piece of the puzzle but without demanding a hard look at some of our foundational issues, we'll remain stuck in the same patterns. Help our local funders understand how important real systems change is.

Ever onward,
Suzanne Donovan
Executive Director

33%

of Savannah's kids live in poverty



ELEVEN YEARS AGO, our community put a stake in the ground and said “no more”. No more will we accept that a large percentage of our community struggle to remain financially solvent. No more will we let poverty strangle the potential of so many of our fellow Savannahians. And, no more will we let them think no one cares.

To answer that call to action, our community created Step Up Savannah. From its inception, Step Up has been an innovative think tank, a collaboration of organizations, and a partnership of neighborhoods and neighbors all focused on reducing

poverty and lifting all of our citizens. We knew it wouldn't be easy and that has proven to be true. The barriers are many and long held but there have been many successes and we all rejoice with each person who has been able to create a better future for themselves. They are why this work is so important.

I am proud of the work that our community and Step Up has done. We have put into action our belief that for any of us to truly succeed, we have to all succeed. And, if you haven't done so already, join us...we still have work to do.

Patti Lyons, Board Chairman

4,381

tax returns prepared in Savannah/Chatham by Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites



\$478,800

loaned through **357** small loans offered through the Life Line Loan Program



288

individuals participated in a poverty simulation



5,579

individuals attended CCCS/ Step Up financial education workshops, counseling sessions, or public education events regarding financial literacy



927

Bank On Savannah accounts opened



72

individuals volunteered for a poverty simulation



17

individuals trained in the Neighborhood Leadership Academy



120

adults received job training through the Chatham Apprentices Program



13,176

individuals served by the Step Up collaborative



A CAP Success Story

DONALD GATES STRUGGLED to find a job because of his criminal background. As a husband and father, the weight of providing for his family grew heavier by the day. When he heard that the Chatham Apprentice Program (CAP) was offering their E3 (Educate, Empower, Employ) class coupled with a forklift safety certification, he jumped at the chance to participate. Donald thought a certification would make him more appealing to employers, so he filled out an application and attended the first class of 2016.

At E3, Donald learned new skills such as resume writing and interview techniques. He found the record restriction portion of the class, provided by Georgia Legal Services Program, to be especially beneficial. Now he better understands his criminal record and confidently explains his past to potential employers. "And confidence," says Donald, "is the best thing I gained from the program. Honestly, before CAP I struggled to present myself as a responsible and respectable person. Now I feel proud of who I am."

After graduation, Donald secured a job at a local warehouse at \$10.00 an hour. However, he felt he could do more, so he started his own business, Gates Lawn Care. It wasn't long before he could focus on his business full-time and Donald credits this success to CAP.

"With the help of CAP, I became aware of how a potential employer sees me. I learned how to answer questions and approach people with confidence. Now I use those skills when I'm handing out my business cards or flyers. I can knock on a door and sell myself."

Today Donald proudly says, "I feel like I'm setting a good example for my kids. Now they see that I'm able to make my own way and that I will turn around and give others the opportunities that I didn't have."

And when he is ready to hire more employees, he knows the first place he will look – the Chatham Apprentice Program.



"I feel like I'm setting a good example for my kids. Now they see that I'm able to make my own way and that I will turn around and give others the opportunities that I didn't have."



A Neighborhood Leader

TOMMIE WEST GREW up in a close-knit community near Wells Park. As a student at the historically black Alfred E. Beach High School during de-segregation, he watched his community change. He recalls even more drastic changes in the 1990's when criminal activity significantly increased in his childhood neighborhood. Several friends were incarcerated, including a close friend who spent 31 years in prison. He credits these experiences as shaping his approach to both his personal and professional life. As an energy service rep with Georgia Power, he works hard to assist families in Savannah find energy efficient solutions, often going above and beyond to help low-income older adults reduce their utility expense. In addition to his commitment to company customers, Tommie is heavily involved in various community service projects. Every year, he helps to organize the "Ready, Set, Go Back

"If you want to know more about your community and desire guidance to help you lead- this is where you need to go."



to School" event, which directs low-income students to the resources they need to be successful at school. It was this project that caught the attention of Georgia Power Regional Vice President and past Step Up Board Member, Cathy Hill, who encouraged Tommie to apply for the Neighborhood Leadership Academy (NLA).

Tommie graduated from NLA in December excited to apply his newly acquired skills to his current community projects. Knowing more about various community resources has been invaluable. Tommie also found a group of like-minded individuals who want to bring community resources to low-income seniors.

Through NLA, Tommie learned how to inspire others to work together to complete projects. He encourages others to apply for NLA, repeating often, "If you want to know more about your community and desire guidance to help you lead - this is where you need to go."

Step Up and AmeriCorps VISTA



IN AN EFFORT to support local organizations in building capacity, Step Up Savannah acts as an intermediary organization to place AmeriCorps VISTA members with nonprofit partners.

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) was founded in 1965 as a national service program to fight poverty in America. VISTA members make a one-year commitment to serve at a nonprofit organization.

Currently six VISTA members are serving with Step Up, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Savannah, the United Way of the Coastal Empire, Georgia Legal Services Program, the Forsyth Farmers Market, and Wesley Community Centers. Over the past year, VISTA members helped leverage over \$425,000 in cash resources, recruited 245 volunteers, and assisted 275 Chatham County residents to access job readiness training.

The Chatham Apprentice Program

OVER THE LAST year, 114 unemployed or underemployed residents have completed intensive job-readiness training through the Chatham Apprentice Program (CAP). Each developed employability skills to compete in the workforce and secure a sustainable-wage job. CAP hosted classes at Savannah Gardens, the Department of Labor, and the Moses Jackson Advancement Center.

In 2016, CAP introduced new hard-skills training classes in partnership with Savannah Technical College. Since January, 31 participants have received forklift safety certification training and an additional 9 received their

Transportation Worker Identification Credentials (TWIC) card. The hard-skills component has increased CAP placement rate to 62% and the average wage has increased to \$10.12.

Perhaps most importantly in the success of this program are the local employers such as Bramli USA, ABC Waste, Lucky's Market, Port City Logistics, and Gulfstream who not only hire CAP graduates but also offer wages above \$10 an hour. Without employers committed to investing in their employees, CAP would struggle to place participants in jobs that would move them out of poverty. In 2017, CAP will continue to build relationships with additional employers to place more graduates in higher paying jobs.

CAP plans to build upon the success of the hard-skills training by introducing additional classes next year. Working with local employers to identify needed skills, CAP will feature both jockey truck training and an office administration class. Eligible participants will continue to receive TWIC cards and forklift safety certification trainings as well.



Step Up Hosts Cities for Financial Empowerment Coalition

IN DECEMBER OF 2015, Step Up hosted the Cities for Financial Empowerment Coalition convening. Step Up represents Savannah in this coalition, which meets 2-3 times/year to share best practices about municipal-led financial empowerment strategies. Other member cities include: Boston, Chicago, Hawai'i County, Lansing, Los Angeles, Louisville, Miami, Nashville, New York City, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Francisco, Seattle and St. Louis. Step Up received a grant from the FINRA Investor Education foundation to host the conference, and was able to highlight its employer-based financial education work to the 11 cities that were in attendance. Representatives from the FINRA Foundation, Kresge Foundation, FDIC, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the National Consumer Law Center also presented to the group. Member city representatives were welcomed by Alderman Van Johnson at a reception at city hall. Our partners at the city of Savannah housing department provided a tour of Savannah Gardens and our friends at DIRT Environmental Solutions also hosted the group for a tour and refreshments. The convening was a wonderful opportunity to show off the great work and collaboration happening in Savannah.



Steven Allison, Executive Director, Union Mission
Sr. Pat Baber, Director, St. Mary's Community Center
Arthur Best, Workforce Development Director, Economic Opportunity Authority
Latoya Brannen, Care Coordinator, Safety Net Planning Council
Scott Center, treasurer, President, National Office Systems Inc.
Curtis Victor Cooper, President, Cloverdale Neighborhood Association
Tabatha Crawford Roberts, Neighborhood Leadership Academy graduate
Stephanie Cutter, City Manager, City of Savannah
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Eddie Deloach, Mayor, City of Savannah
Cheryl D. Dozier, DSW, President, Savannah State University
Terry Enoch, SCCPSS-Chief of Police, Chatham County Public School System
Erma Fulcher, Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association
Matt Gignilliat, Director of Economic Development & Regulations, Georgia Power
Carl Gilliard, CEO, Feed the Hungry
Holden Hayes, vice-chair, President, South State Bank
Diane Jackson, Founder, Young Men of Honor
Betty Jones, Neighborhood Leadership Academy graduate
Timothy King, Executive Director, SEAL Savannah
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Frances Tukes, Eastside Concerned Citizens, Neighborhood Leadership Academy Graduate
Gloria Williams, Neighborhood Leadership Academy graduate
Diane Weems, District Health Director, Coastal Health District

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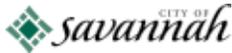
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