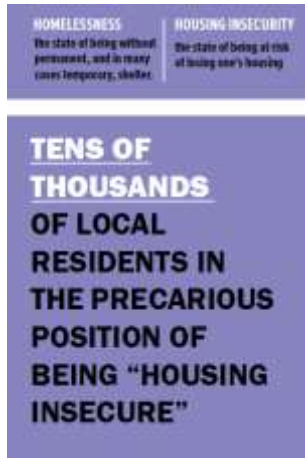


Homelessness and housing insecurity are daunting but solving problems

- Jay King - June 8, 2023

Even a casual glance at headlines in recent years reveals a sentiment most people seem to agree with: Greenville is a great place to live.

The word has spread far and wide and, depending on the source, estimates suggest 30 to 40 people a day are moving to the area to find out for themselves whether Greenville lives up to the promise.



The problem is that promise is not equally available to all area residents, both those newly arrived and those who have been here for generations. And with each wave of new arrivals pushing up demand for housing, costs have increased sharply with increasingly dire results for the community's most vulnerable citizens.

This is the reality organizations like Greenville Homeless Alliance and The Salvation Army deal with on a daily basis, and the number of homeless or people at risk of becoming homeless has been increasing steadily.

Brutal math, human cost of homelessness in Greenville

According to the S.C. Upstate Continuum of Care's 2023 State of Homelessness report, there were nearly 700 people identified as homeless last year. With about 450 beds in the area's emergency

shelters, most of those identified as homeless found shelter, but about 20% lived in areas considered unfit for human habitation.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, most homeless people are employed, often full time, but do not earn enough to afford even the most basic housing, according to Susan McLarty, director of Greenville Homeless Alliance.

To put that in perspective, McLarty says the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimate of fair market rent in the Greenville area for a one-bedroom apartment last year was \$871 per month. The average reported monthly income for people in emergency shelter was \$836.

HUD's rental-rate estimates help determine the value of a housing voucher, but McLarty says the shortage of affordable housing options in Greenville County effectively means there are dozens of individuals and families with valid vouchers competing for the handful of units available. The average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Greenville as of June 4 was \$1,427, according to rent.com.

Making the situation even worse is that voucher holders are not only competing against each other but against the influx of new residents whose numbers and financial means are driving rental rates steadily higher. The average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Greenville as of June 4 was \$1,427, according to rent.com.

"We have a growing deficit of housing options," McLarty says.

But the problem is actually broader than the number of people in homeless shelters suggests. McLarty says GHA estimates there are at least 30,000 Greenville County individuals and families who are paying more than 30% of their household income for housing — the rate HUD uses to determine what is considered affordable.

This puts tens of thousands of local residents in the precarious position of being "housing insecure," meaning a health crisis or other financial setback puts them at risk of losing their housing.

Out of sight, out of mind

Housing insecurity is not theoretical, and its devastating human toll cannot be adequately conveyed with statistics.

Every call for assistance to the Salvation Army of Greenville from an individual or family at risk of losing their homes — and there are hundreds every week — represents a human story of trauma to which the broader public too often pays little heed.

This is the reality Salvation Army of Greenville Social Services Director Lauren Stephens confronts every day.

Stephens says it's not that people of her hometown don't care, it's that their attention is diverted by a world full of distractions.

"We have too many ways to make ignoring (homelessness) easy," she says.

Beyond that lack of attention, most people simply don't grasp how traumatic being homeless or seemingly forever on the cusp of being homeless can be to the people going through it, Stephens says.



She says most people think of success as a ladder to be scaled rung by rung. For many people this analogy works, but for the community's most vulnerable facing often insurmountable-seeming obstacles — they can't even get on the ladder, much less start climbing to a better life.

Stephens describes this dilemma succinctly.

"You have to graduate from homelessness into poverty," she says.

Hope in action

Video: Salvation Army of Greenville Social Services Director Lauren Stephens

As dire as the situation is for the thousands of area residents dealing with homelessness and housing insecurity, the situation is solvable, McLarty and Stephens say.

"Greenville can solve homelessness," McLarty says. "We have the right players; we have the right compassionate, caring community."

The immediate challenge is expanding the inventory of truly affordable housing options so people can move out of needing emergency assistance and into stable, permanent housing. Because there is such a shortage of those housing options, McLarty says there are too many people effectively stuck in the system.

Stephens says in addition to building more attainable and equitable housing as a long-term solution, organizations like hers need more funding and community support in the short term to meet the needs of those facing homelessness.

"We've done so much with so little for so long, we can do practically anything with nothing," she says half-jokingly. "There is not a single nonprofit in Greenville that is overfunded."

Homelessness in Greenville: Chronic problem, novel solutions

Because of the array of challenges facing people dealing with homelessness or housing insecurity, finding truly affordable housing is often only the first step in improving their situation.

One idea gaining traction in Greenville and implemented successfully in cities like Charlotte is a concept known as a supportive housing campus.

The idea is straightforward: the centerpiece of such a campus is a collection of affordable housing units that provide safe, stable shelter for people trying to get back on their feet.

County councilman Ennis Fant, whose District 25 encompasses the Augusta Road corridor, says the plan designates the area as the county's first Urban Development District where developing a range of affordable, equitable housing is a priority.

He envisions an affordable housing campus as key to improving the lives of many of his constituents who are among some of the most economically vulnerable residents in the county.



The idea is straightforward

The centerpiece of such a campus is a collection of affordable housing units that would provide safe, stable shelter for people trying to get back on their feet.

SUPPORT SERVICES THE CAMPUS WILL PROVIDE

Support services designed to address the variety of needs people in those circumstances need to regain self sufficiency and improve their economic options would be provided and might include:



Located in that building or adjacent to it are support services designed to address the variety of needs people in those circumstances need to regain self sufficiency and improve their economic options. Such services can range from child care and mental-health and substance-abuse counseling, to job-skills and financial-literacy training. Charlotte's Supportive Housing Communities operates a number of such campuses, and such examples are among the reasons Greenville County's Augusta Road Corridor Strategic Plan calls for developing a supportive housing campus within the corridor.

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in the county.

Want to help with homelessness in Greenville?

Here are some of the organizations addressing homelessness in Greenville:

- Greenville Homeless Alliance
- United Ministries
- United Housing Connections
- Triune Mercy Center
- Salvation Army of Greenville County
- Miracle Hill Ministries
- Jasmine Road
- Front Porch Housing

Source: [Exploring Homelessness in Greenville - GREENVILLE JOURNAL](#)