



helping today, building hope for tomorrow

**Friends of
South End Community Outreach Ministries (SECOM)
Newsletter
January 3, 2011**

Dear Friends,

Awhile back I mentioned that poverty is being experienced more often in the suburbs than was the case the past. More evidence of that came out recently with the announcement of the increase in students at Grandville schools who qualify for free or reduced school lunches. (See bit.ly/eQibR5).

There are a couple of reasons for the migration of poverty to the suburbs. The first reason is the that the great recession has taken its toll on families that were once middle class as well as the traditionally economically disadvantaged families. The second reason is due the gentrification of Grand Rapids. Both reasons are being considered as SECOM and other human services agencies devise our anti-poverty strategies.

Even with the end of the recession earlier this year, the unemployment rate nationally and locally far exceeds the 5% that is generally considered full employment. If the economy was to grow at a 6% rate unemployment would fall to 5% sometime in 2012. If it continues to grow at the current 2% rate, unemployment is projected to climb to 11.9% by 2020. The first scenario seems unlikely and the second is frightening. (Follow this link to the Washington Post for more projections: <http://wapo.st/e3oXL3>).

Assuming a moderate growth rate over the next few years means there will be above average needs in the community for an extended period of time. It also raises the possibility that there will poverty in areas that are outside of SECOM's neighborhood. It isn't that there isn't enough for us to do in our neighborhood. Unfortunately the greatest capacity for helping the poor has been built in the city where the greatest concentration of poverty is located.

Revitalization of urban areas presents a more permanent obstacle to addressing poverty. The benefits to gentrification are higher property values and beautification of cities. The drawback is that it reduces the amount of affordable, albeit substandard, housing for low income families. Too often low income families end up moving to an area where housing costs absorb a larger percentage of their income. In addition, they frequently have less access to public transportation and social programs at their new residence in the suburbs.

For the time being gentrification is not an issue for SECOM. The industrial area to our north and east provide a barrier to encroachment by residential developers. We expect that the residential neighborhood to our south and west will likely remain a destination for families of limited means for the foreseeable future. That is an opportunity and also a responsibility for us. While some families will escape poverty and move away, we anticipate that others will move in to take their place. Location is everything even for human services agencies, even if the reasons are different than that of for-profit businesses.

So while poverty may be increasingly becoming a suburban concern there is still more than enough to be concerned about here in the Buchanan and Burton neighborhood. Schoolwide reading scores at Buchanan Elementary are 55.3% and 48.7% at Burton Elementary versus 84.8% at East End Elementary in Grandville. Those numbers are not surprising when in light of 98.9% of children at Buchanan Elementary come from economically disadvantaged homes. Poverty and low test scores often go together for a myriad of reasons.

There may be more poverty creeping into the suburbs, but it still doesn't compare to parts of the City. The concentration of poverty in our neighborhood means there is plenty of work for us without having to expand our reach. And if you met the people in our area, you would know why we are happy to be a part of the neighborhood. Their resiliency in the face of adversity is inspiring.

On behalf those we serve, thank you for your support and being part of our neighborhood.

Best Regards,

Robert

Robert Heys
Development Director

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