

Coalition can help in search for decent, affordable housing

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Vivian Clarke, a housing counselor with the Greensboro Housing Coalition, specializes in helping highly-motivated people overcome enormous challenges in order to access decent affordable rentals.

When Clarke met a Grimsley High senior, referred by his counselor, in the fall, she knew that his trials were many. But also she recognized that the coalition had partners who could help this young man keep his siblings together.

The three siblings — two boys and a girl — were close to being split up into three different foster homes, and the oldest brother wanted to figure out a way to keep them together.

Clarke, impressed with his determination and dedication to his siblings, contacted Mike Greco, a landlord who works closely with the organization.

Greco, who owns Shiloh Investment Properties with his wife and brother, said he would talk with this young man and see if there was anything they might be able to do for him. Greco specializes in giving both old buildings and people a "second chance."

"Growing up, I did not make all the right choices, but I got a second chance," Greco said. "I like giving others a second chance, too."

Greco was impressed with young man's maturity and determination to keep the siblings together. Greco shared his own story and firmly outlined the rules for staying in one of his properties.

Greco said, "Second chances, yes, but I do not believe in third or fourth chances."

Clarke knew these young people needed more than a roof over their heads and contacted the Greensboro Congregational Assistance Network, an affiliation of several area churches who come together to provide some coordinated assistance to those in need in the community.

The Rev. Virginia Herring from Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, instrumental in GCAN, heard of the needs of this family and arranged to have a member of the church take the children out to purchase some basic clothing.

Other churches volunteered to be mentors for the children as they deal with "grown up" issues way beyond their young years.

The Greensboro Housing Coalition advocates for decent housing for low- and moderate-income people and those with special needs.

"Preventing homelessness is complex and most families in this situation need all kinds of support," said Skip Crowe, healthy homes specialist for the group.

"We provide information, referrals and education," he said. "We help find emergency shelter and rental housing or sometimes housing with support services. We might help with avoiding an eviction or foreclosure — which is expensive for the community as well as for the family."

Crowe has been reaching out to mortgage lenders, health care professionals, realtors, faith communities and rental property owners to talk with them about the ways in which safe, affordable housing benefits their goals and our whole community.

"We are a nonprofit housing advocacy organization," Crowe said, "and, as such, we find ourselves in the midst of issues of fair housing, healthy homes, foreclosure prevention, homelessness and sustainability and energy."

Beth McKee-Huger, executive director for the coalition, said Greensboro has become a national leader for sustainable housing.

The annual Housing Summit on Feb. 23 will feature Mercedes Márquez, HUD assistant secretary for community planning and development. Márquez will speak on finding effective strategies to preserve home ownership and neighborhoods in the face of the foreclosure crisis.

"The housing crisis demonstrated what happens when housing is not sustainable; making equal opportunities for affordable, healthy, and energy-efficient housing makes sense for the long-term but it takes the whole community working together," McKee-Huger said.

"Greensboro is already on the 'green path' to sustainable housing, and the Housing Summit will give everyone an opportunity to get involved with the city's five-year plan to move further towards that goal."

Details are available at www.greensborohousingcoalition.com.

Registration deadline is Feb. 16; click on www.guilfordnonprofits.org/calendar. Call 373-2723 to request scholarships.

Ruth D. Anderson is executive director of The Servant Leadership School of Greensboro and chairwoman of programming for the Guilford Nonprofit Consortium.

Learn more

Guilford Nonprofit Consortium: A collaboration of organizations in Guilford County that fosters mutual assistance and support within the nonprofit community to create more efficiency and effectiveness. 544-0565; www.guilfordnonprofits.org or dnewton@guilfordnonprofits.org

Greensboro Housing Coalition: www.greensborohousingcoalition.com