

Nonprofits' value to community is immeasurable

By RUTH D. ANDERSON

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What would happen if all nonprofits in our county disappeared?

Ann Morelli's eyes opened very wide when I asked her: "What would happen to the families at Partnership Village if we did not have any nonprofits in our county?"

She started with the obvious: "Well, our families would have no place to live."

She explained the economic challenge for the formerly homeless families who come to Partnership Village, the transitional housing program run by Greensboro Urban Ministry. The hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Guilford County is at least \$13.09. Partnership Village provides affordable housing for two years to people earning minimum wages.

She told me a story of a man who is having trouble finding a job that pays more than minimum wage. He has a little girl and is trying to do the best he can, but when she was sent home because of lice, along with half the other children in the class, he had to purchase the solution to wash her hair -- several times. Because of these purchases, he was sure his phone would be turned off. Therefore, he would not receive callbacks for job interviews. The challenges for a formerly homeless family moving toward independence are staggering, and the nonprofit community, according to Morelli, is what helps these families "make it."

"Many of our families depend on our local nonprofits for bus passes and cars.," she said. "Our folks are often looking for work without transportation, and bus passes are needed. Goodwill Industries helps us get cars with their Wheels to Work program."

She listed the services provided by nonprofits to the adults and children at Partnership Village:

1 Housing Coalition provides programs on "Ready to Rent" issues.

1 Barnabas Network provides some basic furniture.

1 Habitat for Humanity has expanded the office/community center in the middle of the property and works to identify residents who may qualify for a Habitat home.

1 The Servant Leadership School provides tutors two days a week.

1 A&T and UNCG faculty and students have provided programs for the children.

1 HandyCapable is building a computer lab.

1 Greensboro Children's Museum provided camp scholarships.

1 Healthserve provides basic health care needs and medicine.

1 The public libraries provide access to computers and job information.

1 The Servant Center provides food through its Grocery Assistance Program.

With a big smile, Morelli concluded: "Let's just say our families, at this transitional time in their lives, could not survive without nonprofits. And let's not forget that without the nonprofit world, I and a whole lot of other people would not have a job!"

She is correct about the enormous impact nonprofits have on the lives of the residents of our county. Not only do nonprofits provide direct services to people, but they also include our local foundations, professional associations, the arts, health care, religious and social welfare organizations. Nonprofits generate \$2.2 billion of Guilford County's economy, according to the most recent economic data compiled by the N.C. Center for Nonprofits, and account for 20,000 full- or part-time jobs. Almost 600 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations exist in Guilford County alone.

The scope of the nonprofit sector in Guilford County impacts each of us. Donna Newton, director of the Guilford Nonprofit Consortium, a collaborative of nonprofit organizations in Guilford County that fosters mutual assistance and support within the nonprofit community to create a more efficient and effective sector, states that virtually every person in our county has been positively impacted by our nonprofit community. She says that the goal of the consortium is to help build the capacity of the nonprofits to make this vital sector as professional and robust as possible. She says that every one of us benefits from the continuous improvement of our nonprofit community.

November is North Carolina's Nonprofit Awareness Month. Next time you purchase Girl Scout cookies, walk through some of our art museums or go to the library, you may want to consider what your life might be like if the nonprofit sector did not exist in our community.

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