

## **Partnership Village helps people get lives back on track**

By Jeri Rowe

Greensboro News & Record

Sunday, November 22, 2009

GREENSBORO — They bring with them tales of addiction, violence, loss and bad luck. Some bring children. Some bring simply the clothes on their backs. And they had nowhere to go.

Until Partnership Village, PV for short.

It's a place of red bricks and yellow siding, in a working-class stretch of north Greensboro, where a former fullback at N.C. A&T handles cases, helps clients and offers a familiar greeting to anyone at his door.

"Livin' a dream," Larry King says.

They do. Or they try. They've been homeless and convicted, addicted and abused or simply down on their luck, KO'ed by an unforgiving economy.

James Scales, the grandfather. Tyrone Barber, the wanna-be college student. Michael and Bobbie Jane Bowman, the husband and wife from Montgomery County trying to raise two daughters.

They're trying to survive in a county where the most recent figures show more than 62,000 people live in poverty.

They came to this strip of land off Greenbriar Road to find a recipe to help get their lives on track. You'll find some of the ingredients in a 13-word phrase on a big quilt, made by PV kids and PV volunteers. It hangs just inside the community center's front door.

"Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we have learned."

"That is what life is all about," says Hugh Mann, PV's volunteer chaplain. "Jesus says, 'Love me first and love your neighbor as yourself.' And we all need to love, not the erotic type love, but non-judgmental love.

"Today, we judge people too much, and no one has been judged more than the homeless. They need to know how to succeed and move on."

Run by Greensboro Urban Ministry and supported by a small army of volunteers, Partnership Village started as a dream 11 years ago to help local homeless transition into permanent housing.

It was ground-breaking for Greensboro. It came together through a donation of property, a marriage of tax money and private funds, and a longtime commitment from Greensboro Urban Ministry and Habitat for Humanity of Greater Greensboro.

Today, it costs the ministry \$318,209 a year to run. Operated by four staff members, Partnership Village is a small neighborhood of 68 units where 150 people — including 75 children — try to find their future. This month, PV turns 10.

It's been a turnstile of angst and hope. At least 100 new people come in every year. According to Mann, they all battle some sort of addiction to escape what he calls the "pain of life." And it's not easy.

Once they move in, they can't smoke, drink or use drugs. They have to see their case manager once a month. They must have some sort of income. And they have to take part in workshops that aim to make them better people.

Some don't make it. But most do. Three of every four people remain up to two years — the maximum stay — and move on to something more permanent.

That's what they want desperately. You hear it in their stories.

Like Tyrone Barber. He's 38, a man who says he suffers from "mild MR," or mental retardation. He used to live in Durham with an abusive uncle. He came to Greensboro to, in his words, "change his life."

His first stop: the city's homeless shelter. His next stop: Partnership Village. For five months he's been living in a studio apartment; a federal government rental voucher allows him to pay \$133 a month.

He wants to study computer technology at GTCC and go on to A&T. But right now, he doesn't have a job, and he lives in an apartment full of donated and discovered things.

He found his TV on the curb and his stereo in a UNCG Dumpster. He got his microwave from a friend. On the three shelves in his refrigerator, he has three items: collard greens, sweet potatoes and a plate of Spam.

So begins his future.

"Here, you feel like you're in a position to achieve something," he says. "I'm dependent on myself and that's an awesome feeling."

Across the parking lot, in a three-bedroom apartment costing \$365 a month, Michael and Bobbie Jane Bowman try to explain their life.

They both smoked crack cocaine, went through rehab and lived estranged for four years as Bobbie Jane burrowed into what she calls "bad places."

She spent nearly three months in a jail cell for not paying money to support her son with her first husband, and she stayed away from her two daughters with Michael, her second husband, for two years.

She couldn't face them. She was too ashamed.

She and Michael eventually got back together, and they've gone through marriage counseling. Today, she's a peer counselor at a local rehabilitation center for women; her husband just got a job at a hosiery mill in High Point.

They live at PV with their daughters, Jodi, 7, and Destiny, 8. Both of them — Michael, 32, and Bobbie Jane, 29 — say they've grown up.

Every night in prayer, Bobbie Jane asks for the same thing: "Make me a better person, and be the wife and mother I need to be."

"I'm not there yet," she says from her kitchen table, "but I'm getting there."

So is James Scales. He's a former drug dealer, a father to three boys with three different women and a man who once spent two weeks in a coma after getting pummeled by five thugs looking for cash.

The beatdown still makes it hard for Scales to walk, talk and balance. But he's better. And after two years at PV, a place where he is called "The Mayor of Partnership Village," he now owns a townhouse across town.

It has two bedrooms, a washer and a dryer, and a front porch where he sits and waves to everyone he sees. That includes his three children and his 6-year-old granddaughter Darshawn, who calls him "Paw Paw."

"I made a promise to my mom on her death bed, 'I'll stop dealing drugs,' and I did," he says. "And I was tired of being tired. I'll be 60 in April and (Partnership Village) gave me a leg to stand on, a place I could afford.

"It was a nice apartment, and it was mine."

*Contact Jeri Rowe at 373-7374 or [jeri.rowe@news-record.com](mailto:jeri.rowe@news-record.com).*

## **WANT TO VOLUNTEER?**

Call Ruth Anderson (275-0447) of the Servant Leadership School if you're interesting in tutoring children at Partnership Village. For other volunteer opportunities, call Ann Morelli of Partnership Village (286-6401, Ext. 204) or Gail Gore-Lewis with Greensboro Urban Ministry (271-5959, Ext. 305 )