

# Addressing Unemployment, the New Segregation

By Tonya Jameson

The pockets of poverty that ring the center city have long been an ugly stain on Charlotte's reputation, but Charlotte Works CEO Patrick Graham sees the problem as more than a stain. He calls it segregation.

In November, Charlotte Works spearheaded an effort to address this segregation with the workforce development initiative Careers4All. Graham's organization and community partners will target zip codes, and their unemployed and underemployed residents, that have been left out of Charlotte's major economic development and infrastructure projects. The clusters are right outside the center city. The disparity in unemployment among the county's zip codes has increased by 71 percent since 2000, according to Charlotte Works.

"Too often, you hear people minimize our segregation issues down to a social capital argument," Graham said. "While people need access to greater social capital, nothing will fully change in regards to economic mobility unless we address segregation head-on."

To address this disparity, Charlotte Works will invest \$4.2 million in workforce development and expand availability of training scholarships to moderate-income families in Mecklenburg County. Graham and community partners, such as Carolinas HealthCare System, Accenture, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and others, support the initiative that was announced during a press conference at the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.

"Many Charlotte-Mecklenburg residents are being pushed farther away from employment centers and infrastructure projects, including transportation and internet, due to rising housing costs," Graham said in a statement. "We've developed strategies to reach people in these unemployment clusters, which is an untapped talent pool for local employers. This will also take some private investment from the business community and foundations."

Careers4All will employ the following strategies to address economic segregation and unemployment clusters:



- Increasing access to education and training scholarships
- Increasing outreach career advisors for unemployment clusters
- Increasing scholarship funding to provide advancement for existing entry-level employees
- Increasing pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships
- Creating a centralized job coordination and placement initiative for people with barriers to employment

Since the initiative was announced last year, announcing the initiative last year, Charlotte Works has hired a job coordination unit director for its collaborative effort with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Providers Council, an advisory group of 14 partner agencies that are providers and funders of the local workforce system. The director will work with the partner agencies to coordinate job development activities for the benefit of individuals who live in high clusters of unemployment, identified by the U.S. Census. This will help identify and coordinate prospective jobs.

Charlotte Works has gained attention from several stakeholders, including

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potential private partners, government and businesses.

## Next steps:

- Identify partners and employers in unemployment cluster zip codes
- Align career advisor and partner agency activity for unemployment cluster deployment
- Align apprenticeship funding with current youth organization partners
- Launch pilot program of job coordination and placement unit with partners

In previous years, Charlotte Works was more focused on providing services, but the Careers4All platform examines workforce system's effectiveness and addresses segregation, which before was not examined as a potential barrier to employment.

"As a community, we must find innovative and direct ways to address economic and social segregation," Graham said. "While changing housing segregation and infrastructure should be a long-term goal for our community, Careers4All strategies address the immediate concerns of training and job access for people living in the shadows of segregation." ■