

Program links people not in poverty with those who are poor

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Circles Winston-Salem is working to help those living in poverty by connecting them with middle-class allies and working to address systemic issues.

Last year, Circles Winston-Salem started its first class of "Circle Leaders," the term used for low-income individuals because they know the most about the barriers that keep them in poverty. After 13 weeks of training, circle leaders are matched with middle-class allies, who support them and help them find ways to improve their situations. The local program, which operates out of the Shalom Project at Green Street United Methodist Church, is part of a nationwide Circles effort that began in 1992.

So far, 26 Circle Leaders have graduated from the Circles classes and are still in the 18-month program. Circles Coach Carol Wilson said that Circle Leaders are starting to find employment and raise their incomes. She said they're starting to deal with the "cliff effect," in which low-income individuals lose government benefits as their incomes rise.

"We're doing what Circles does, which is address things as they arise and moving forward," said Wilson.

Along with helping individuals, the program tries to identify the systemic issues they face and address them by mobi-



Terry



Wilson

lizing program participants and holding Big View meetings, which tries to get those outside the program to help. To address an issue some had with criminal records preventing them from getting employment, there was a criminal records expungement clinic held at Green Street Church that helped more than 70 people. There was also a big concern over the bus stop near the church being eliminated under new proposed Winston-Salem Transit Authority bus routes. Those in the program attended WSTA comment meetings and wrote letters on the issue. According to the WSTA, the proposed routes have been altered to now include service to Green Street Church.

Crishanna Cannon is 21 years old and has been in the program since February. She's been working two to four low-wage jobs for the last few years, along with raising her 16 month-old daughter. She said



Photos by Todd Luck

Crishanna Cannon (center) talks about her new job during a sharing activity at the start of last week's Circles meeting held at Green Street United Methodist Church.

she's formed a bond with her two allies, who are helping motivate and support her. Cannon spoke at a Winston-Salem Women's Fund luncheon last month about her experience with Circles.

"Circles has helped me a lot because I have become more motivated," she told attendees. "I'm better at managing my money and have set goals for myself."

Cannon said education has been a big barrier in getting a higher paying job and she plans to go back to Forsyth Technical Community College in January. She dropped out of after a semester while trying to work three jobs. She plans to major in Office Administration. She is also now starting a higher paying temp job.

Denise Terry began the program last year during a long stretch of employment after losing her job as a social worker. She said her two allies, along with giving her advice and referring her to resources, helped her deal with her depression and

anger from being unable to find work despite having a master's degree.

"They helped me get my attitude in check," she said.

She's now a part-time Circles Coordinator, recruiting allies and resources for the program, and is now starting her own business, selling pocketbooks and eventually costumes she makes herself. She said that it's a slow climb out of poverty as she's had to pay off her past due bills, deferred taxes and other expenses that piled up when she had no income. She said being able to actually buy the things she needs feels good.

"I feel part of the world again," she said.

People interested in being Circle allies can attend the weekly Circles meetings held Thursdays at Green Street Church, 639 South Green St. Dinner is served 6 p.m. and the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m.

Giving Tuesday helps local causes

BY TODD LUCK
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Money to help those in need, scholarship funds for college students and computers for young students are just some of the local successes coming out of this year's Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday is the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, which this year was Dec. 1, and is a social media initiative started in 2012 by 92nd Street Y, a non-profit cultural center in New York City, as a way to encourage giving after the shopping rush of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. GivingTuesday.org estimates that globally over 1 million donations were given on Tuesday, totaling \$116.7 million. The hashtag #givingtuesday had 1.3 million mentions on social media.

Winston-Salem State University participated as did nonprofits as varied as well as the North Carolina NAACP, Democracy North Carolina, Carolina Public Press, American Lung Association and New Winston Museum all had a push to get donations on Giving Tuesday. The Winston-Salem Salvation Army Commander Major James Alison got more than \$10,000 in kettle donations. Bell ringers with red Salvation Army kettles positioned at the entrances of major stores like Walmart or at the entrance of Hanes Mall are a signature fundraiser for the organization during the holiday shopping season. He said he was grateful that Giving Tuesday provided an extra boost to the Salvation Army's fundraising efforts.

"Black Friday, Cyber Monday you're buying for family and friends," he

said. "On giving Tuesday it gives you the opportunity to share your resources with those who find themselves in need, whose life and whose situation is not as good as yours."

It was the Shalom Project's first year participating in Giving Tuesday, giving it a big push on its Facebook page. The non-profit located at Green Street United Methodist Church provides services to help those in need like a clothing closet, free medical clinic and food pantry. Shalom Project Executive Director Lynn Brown said that they'd gotten several online donations and \$4,500 through the mail as of last Thursday.

"I think it's a terrific concept and probably will continue to grow in popularity, but I think it's still probably in the incubation phase in terms of people really being aware of it and finding ways to participate in it," he said.

He said he estimates the Shalom Project may be able to raise at least \$10,000 during its year-end fundraising. He said a combination of the giving spirit of the season and taxpayers wanting tax write-offs for the year make December the perfect month for non-profits to raise money.

The Shepherd's Center of Kernersville, which serves the elderly and disabled, also kicked off its yearend campaign with Giving Tuesday, raising \$6,000.

"While only reaching \$6,000 of the \$15,000 goal for GivingTuesday, the day was a great way to kick off The Shepherd's Center's Year End campaign," said

Shepherd Center Executive Director Ruth Woosley.

While some used Giving Tuesday for general fundraising, others like El Buen Pastor Latino Community Services, used it for specific projects. El Buen Pastor raised \$3,600 to buy six laptops and a printer to be used by the 25 middle and high school students in its tutoring program.

Other organizations saw a tremendous increase in what they raised over last year's Giving Tuesday. Experiment in Self Reliance,

which provides a variety of services to help the economically disadvantaged, raised \$1,784 and collected five non-perishable food items last year on Giving Tuesday. This year ESR raised \$5,300 and collected 57 non-perishable food items.

Winston-Salem State University saw a five fold increase for its Giving Tuesday campaign, "Put a Bow on it," surpassing its goal of \$20,000. WSSU had 564 donors give \$35,100 that will go to scholarships at the university.

"WSSU supporters stepped up in a major way," said WSSU Chancellor Elwood L. Robinson in a news release. "Their generosity demonstrates to students how much we care about their success. I'm so pleased we were able to far exceed our goal. These gifts enable some deserving WSSU students to complete their education and begin contributing in important ways to our society."



Robinson

Nominations sought for Young Dreamers Awards

SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE

The Human Relations Commission is accepting nominations for the 2016 Martin Luther King Jr. Young Dreamers Awards. Nominations are open to the public and must be received by Dec. 11.

The Young Dreamers Awards honor two young adult leaders who have made a tangible difference in the lives of those who may have otherwise been overlooked, ignored, or

disadvantaged. The awards will recognize a man and a woman.

Nominees must be Winston-Salem residents between the ages of 18 and 40 who have done outstanding work in the Winston-Salem community that is in the spirit of how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived and encouraged others to live.

There must be a tangible result from their civic or community work. Nominees cannot already

hold supervisory or management positions in their organization. The members of the Human Relations Commission will choose the winners.

Nomination forms are available online at www.CityofWS.org or by calling CityLink at 311 or 727-8000. All nomination forms must be submitted to the Human Relations Department. For more information, call CityLink 311.

City Hall Holiday Music Series underway

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Traditional and contemporary holiday music performed by local school choruses is being presented during the sixth annual City Hall Holiday Music Series, to be held the week of Dec. 7.

Participating choruses this year are Reagan High School, Thursday; and Salem College, Friday. Earlier in the week, Kimberley Park Elementary School performed Monday; Glenn High, Tuesday; and East Forsyth High School, Wednesday.

Mayor Allen Joines is inviting city residents and downtown workers to hear the choruses from noon to 1 p.m. in the lobby of City Hall, 101 N. Main St.





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