

... Others are content where they are

Some county citizens lack chance to improve

By Holly Edwards
County Editor

Poor people in Brunswick County face more difficulties and have fewer opportunities to improve themselves and their lives than in many other areas of the state, said social services director Jamie Orrock. Compounding these difficulties are problems such as illiteracy, widespread unemployment and lack of transportation. "Being poor in Brunswick County means that you have trouble with trans-

'Some people don't feel like they should have to work, and the system allows them to function without being productive.'

Jamie Orrock

portation to access services, even if they exist," Orrock said. "Being poor also means there's very little opportunity to correct the problem.... Even the jobs available keep one at or near the poverty level."

Competition for skilled labor is very intense, he said, and most of the other jobs available tend to be low-paying clerical or service-industry jobs.

Of the 50,442 people in the county for whom poverty status has been determined, 7,775 people were registered below the poverty level, which is about \$9,190 per year for a two-member family, according to 1990 census statistics. And almost half of the people below the poverty level were children.

There are also thousands of people living just above the poverty level who lack the basic necessities of life, such as food, medical attention and clothing, Orrock said. And, he said, being poor is more accurately measured by one's standard of living rather than one's annual income.



"Being poor in Brunswick County doesn't leave much for the American dream," said Volunteer & Information Services, Inc. (VIC) director Pete Barnette. "We don't have the tax base to offer all the services that people could want or use.... The biggest problem in this county is unemployment. We (at VIC) just deal with the symptoms -- hunger, lack of clothing, loss of energy."

Barnette said that the latest figures show Brunswick County has an unemployment rate of 12.8 percent, compared to the state average of 5.3 percent and the national average of 7.1 percent.

"That's a pretty staggering stat to look at," he said. "Seasonal work and the illiteracy level contribute to even higher unemployment.... And the preponderance of unemployment and il-

literacy contributes to an absence. I mean a void, of life and health insurance. Persons with no dollars and no insurance are not seeing doctors. They're taking a Tylenol 2 and going home."

Even the people who qualify for Medicaid have trouble finding a doctor to treat them. Most local doctors refuse to treat Medicaid patients because of the amount of paperwork required, and because doctors are often not reimbursed for the full amount of a Medicaid patient's bill.

About one-fifth of the people in the county receive food stamps or Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Orrock said. And, he added, the biggest obstacles poor people in this county face in getting off social services are a lack of high-paying positions and the lack of transportation to access the jobs available.

County manager/attorney David Clegg said he believes part of the solution to the county's social ills lies in education.

"We need education in its largest sense, not only of the work force, but of the employers, to expand the existing labor and employ these people in meaningful jobs," he said. "Human services should not always be government trying to help people who stumble, but to keep people from stumbling in the first place."

While Orrock said he believes that everyone deserves respect and help in times of crisis, he also said that the human services system can sometimes impede an individual's desire to improve his life.

"The system has created a dependence on itself, and is now self-perpetuating. That was never the intent when these programs were created after the Depression. Such a large number of people have grown to believe that it's their right to be taken care of," Orrock said. "There's not a lot of opportunity in Brunswick County, but there are still opportunities available that people don't take advantage of. Some people don't feel like they should have to work, and the system allows them to function without being productive."

Orrock said he would like to see the entire social services system be over-

hauled so that benefits would gradually diminish over a period of time. He also said he believed recipients should perform some type of community service in order to receive benefits. In short, he said, it should not be more attractive to remain on aid than to be self-supporting. Many people are able to enjoy a higher standard of living with public assistance than with low-paying jobs.

"There's an intrinsic desire that an

individual acquires to want to secure certain possessions. There are certain items they desire or want to use to enhance their feeling of being important or successful," Orrock said. "One of the downsides of social programs is that they erode the desires of the general populous. And the discouraging thing is that even the policy-makers don't seem to understand that we need to encourage people to look elsewhere to support themselves."

In-home program cut might reduce services

By Holly Edwards
County Editor

About \$80,000 in county funding for in-home social services programs has been deleted from this year's budget, and some recipients of the CHORE program may find themselves without any services at all, social services director Jamie Orrock said Monday afternoon.

The CHORE program has provided domestic services, such as cooking and cleaning, for elderly or disabled people so they could remain at home rather than in an institution for as long as possible. Effective July 1, the program will be transferred to Well Care, a private agency that may or may not take all of the CHORE program recipients, Orrock said.

"We cannot guarantee that everyone will be provided the same service. Some may get more, some may get less, some may get none," Orrock said. "Well Care will do its own assessment, and the highest level of need will be considered first."

Two other in-home programs -- personal care services and community alternatives program (CAP) -- will continue to operate within the department of social services, but recipients will be billed for the services through Medicaid. The maximum amount that a person will be billed is a little over \$9 per hour, Orrock explained, and the department of social services will have to make sure that the costs of the program are at or near that level.

In order to qualify for the programs, recipients must qualify for Medicaid, and a doctor must recommend that the service is needed due to medical complications.

"All three of these programs have the same basic intent -- to enable an individual to remain in the home and in the community for as long as possible to delay or avoid the need for institutional care," said Orrock. "It's a real traumatic experience for a family to have to put mama or daddy in a home."

Orrock said it has been his department's goal all along to make these programs self-supporting.

"There's no reason that public agencies cannot be managed the same way as private agencies," he said. "It's a positive challenge."

In other business discussed by the board of social services Monday: Board member Judy Clemmons was awarded a plaque in recognition of six years of service on the board. New member Percy Woodard will replace Clemmons on July 1 as the state's appointee. Woodard lives at Supply and works for Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp.

Orrock announced that the board will be reorganized and the yearly totals for all DSS programs will be presented during the next board meeting.

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