

# Advance Gaston

**Proverbs 31: 8-9:** *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

## Gaston County Information and Statistics

- **About 18% of our population are below the poverty line.**
- **Nearly 21% are eligible for SNAP (Food Stamps) and Medicaid.**
- More than 50% of students in Gaston County Schools are eligible for free or reduced meals and a large percentage are educationally challenged in various ways.
- **Overall, almost 74% of those in poverty are members of minority groups.**
- Despite considerable economic activity and growth, median family income in Gaston County is about \$42,000, 10% below the NC average.
- Income inequality in America is growing and will ultimately threaten our way of life.

**Our Vision is: No one in our community lives in poverty.**

Generational Poverty is defined as a family having lived in poverty for at least two generations.

## When People Don't Work

A lack of work contributes to poverty, crime, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies, divorce and suicide.

***NOTHING ATTACKS ONE'S DIGNITY LIKE A LACK OF WORK***

## Criminal Justice

Over 10,000 prisoners are **released** from jail every week in the United States, according to the Department of Justice. Two-thirds are **rearrested** within three years. They are much less likely to go back to prison if they are gainfully employed. It costs \$31,000 yearly on average to incarcerate an individual in prison.

## Crime

Researchers at Ohio State University examined national crime rates and found much of the increase in crime can be explained by falling wages and rising unemployment among men without college educations.

## Homelessness

Climbing out of homelessness is virtually impossible for those without a job. The U.S. pours almost 5 billion yearly in public funds into addressing the needs of over 500,000 chronically homeless.

## **Poverty**

According to the Brookings Institute, most people are poor because they either do not work or they work too few hours to move themselves and their children out of poverty. Over 3 billion people live in poverty around the world.

## **Depression & Suicide**

In addition to a diminished sense of self, those exposed to unemployment exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and lack of sleep. According to the American Association of Suicidology, there is also a relationship between suicide and unemployment. Unemployed people are two to four times as likely to commit suicide.

## **Effects on Youth**

For many youths, attaining employment signals the start of real adult life. Unemployment can result in shattered dreams, loss of personal identities, and lack of zeal for life in general.

## **Domestic Violence**

An extensive report by the National Institute of Justice found that the rate of violence against women increases as male unemployment increases.

## **What are our Next Steps?**

1. Have a Symposium of organizations that are committed to helping individuals escape poverty and share best practices to ensure there are no duplication of services.
2. How many people have been moved out of poverty in the past month? This past year? We need to build a database that tracks clients and gathers data over a period of years in order to test strategies and observe what programs are actually moving people from poverty to self-sufficiency.

## **Closing Thoughts**

To reduce child poverty, our community will need to make improvement on many fronts — child care, education, racism, physical and mental health, housing, transportation, family support, neighborhoods, and job opportunities.