

Poverty Amid Plenty

Dallas Morning News, The (TX) - May 11, 2011

- Edition: 1
- Section: EDITORIALS
- Page: A14
- Column: EDITORIALS

In South Dallas, the neighborhood surrounding Fair Park, an estimated 1,000 children go to bed each night without one very important necessity: a bed. Some homes have no electricity, while others have no working stoves, as reporter Kim Horner recently wrote in The Dallas Morning News.

Statistically, South Dallas ranks worse than the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans in terms of education, income and unemployment. But unlike the outpouring of help when Hurricane Katrina raised the nation's awareness about the Lower Ninth Ward, conditions in South Dallas remain one of our city's little-discussed secrets - possibly because it belies the rosy success stories we all like to believe about Dallas.

Since 2010, the S.M. Wright Foundation has rallied churches and other donors to provide beds, sheets and other items to help ensure that children have the minimum requirements at home. After Horner's story appeared May 2, \$22,000 more in donations arrived.

Chances are that North Texas residents with good incomes and excellent educations are unaware that not so far from their secure homes live children who go to sleep at night without a bed, a cooked meal or basic parental guidance.

Children growing up in these conditions are far less likely to perform well in class, a fact consistently reflected in low ratings for southern Dallas schools. When schools under-perform, families who have the financial means to move elsewhere do so. Land values drop. Urban decay sets in. Employers leave. Parents must drive farther to get to their jobs, leaving even less time at home with their kids.

The children often grow up with the same outlook on life as their parents, repeating the same mistakes and feeling the same sense of discouragement about the future. This is how the cycle of poverty becomes self-perpetuating and why the city's political and business communities need to make southern Dallas a top priority.

Southern Dallas occupies an area the size of Atlanta, and, even though it represents 49 percent of the city's land mass, it accounts for only 16 percent of its land value. When fully half of our city is affected by this cycle, the other half - the north - winds up shouldering the tax burden.

For many reasons, those South Dallas children who sleep on the floor should generate outrage among residents throughout our city and region. Dallas' mayoral candidates certainly understand this, and all have made it a campaign issue in Saturday's elections.

Maybe you don't have the time or money to help these children. At the very least, you can join those of us who are keeping the pressure on city officials to get serious about addressing the north-south gap.

How to get involved

For more information about the S.M. Wright Foundation, visit www.smwright.org.

To register your voice at City Hall, visit www.dallascityhall.com, find your council member's site, and click the email icon.

READ previous commentary on Dallas' north-south gap.

dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth

JOIN the conversation at our north-south gap blog. gapblog.dallasnews.com

By the numbers

South Dallas

Citywide

2008 per capita income

\$12,529

\$23,912

Female-run households with children in poverty

57%

33%

Population with no high school diploma

59%

29%

Births to teen mothers

12%

6%

SOURCE: Institute for Urban Policy Research

• Caption: CHART(S): 1. By the numbers 2. Digital extra

• Index terms: BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

• Record: 19261321

• Copyright: (c) Copyright, 2011, The Dallas Morning News