

STOP INC.

Addressing the root causes of poverty and making a big impact

by Christine Knapp

STOP Inc. is a designated Community Action Agency with a 54-year history of addressing issues of poverty in communities throughout Hampton Roads. Focused on aiding the low-to-moderate income population, STOP (Supporting Transformational Opportunities for People) is funded by various federal and state sources as well as contributions from private foundations and individual donors. Working hand in hand with these partners, STOP attacks the root causes of poverty.

"We have four main departments," says Regina Lawrence, STOP's President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Having been with the organization for 45 years, she has held over a dozen roles ranging from executive assistant to grant writer to public relations manager and now, CEO.

"These departments cover health and wellness initiatives, homeless intervention and support, housing and economic development and management, support and special projects," Regina continues. "We embrace a total family concept- a two-generation approach. We go to every individual in a family to determine the needs of each member. During my entire tenure here, I've tried to develop, write, and implement programs that are going to have the greatest impact on the greatest number of people."

Health and Wellness is a new department focusing on nutritional education and training. It issues referrals for much-needed physical and mental health services, with an emphasis on preventing opioid use and abuse. Led by Vice President Christian Joyner, PA, the Health and Wellness Department provides substance abuse prevention training and educational programs to individuals and families.



Some of STOP's™ managerial and support staff. From left: Charnitta Waters, Christian Joyner, Regina P. Lawrence, Carlos Clanton, Madgie McRae and Michael Thomas

The team works with many local partners, including the Wellness Coalition, to host REVIVE training events. At these events, individuals learn how to administer NARCAN, an injectable or nasal spray that will help reverse the effects of an overdose.

The team also presents "Hidden in Plain Sight" demonstrations. These are interactive drug-educational programs for parents. A mock-up of a teenager's bedroom displays everyday items that can be indicators of drug use or risky behavior.

"Parents feel they need to give their teenagers space and some privacy, but that's where a lot of things fall through the cracks," Christian explains. "Parents need to be looking at their kids' phones. They need to be aware of the signs. These demonstrations provide valuable information to families in local Hampton Roads communities. We'd love to expand the forums into other jurisdictions where we can have the greatest impact."

Homeless Intervention and Support Vice President Charnitta Waters and her team provide supportive services to veterans and their families. These include a homeless veterans' reintegration program and housing counseling services. These services are

offered to the low-to-moderate income population experiencing a housing crisis due to eviction or other life-altering hardships.

**"It's in those moments
when a child tells me
who they want to become-
and they're talking about their character,
not just a profession-
that I realize the impact
STOP is having."**

- Regina Lawrence

"We interact with various homeless and housing service providers, as well as income support contributors, to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring," Charnitta says.

STOP is always seeking additional donations and partners to help create home environments for homeless veterans. They also work with the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) to assist veterans in finding gainful employment. Recently, the two organizations even hosted a hiring event in their Virginia Beach office.



Regina Lawrence, President and CEO of STOP

STOP welcomes volunteers, donations, and community support to help with items for the homeless that other funding sources don't always cover. These items include hygiene essentials such as toothpaste, shampoo, and other toiletries. Discretionary funding to purchase such items for those experiencing homelessness is always needed and appreciated.

"The need is always increasing, and sometimes we can't keep up with the demand," Regina explains.

STOP also seeks furniture donations to help provide furniture to homeless veterans who are in its program.

"A house is not a home until you put furniture in it and make it individual and unique," Charnitta says. "Companies like Vets on Track, led by Rick Ecker, work with STOP to make this happen."

Under its housing initiatives, STOP administers the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which is a federally-funded program. The weatherization program provides free energy-efficient measures to help lower utility bills and increase the efficiency of houses occupied by income-eligible individuals- particularly the elderly, the disabled, and families with children age six and under. Free energy audits are provided to those who meet specific criteria.

STOP offers additional services ranging from childcare financial assistance, employment support services, and employment training to consumer education and workforce preparation/development. During fiscal years 2014-2019, STOP addressed more than 11,500 conditions of poverty and barriers to economic security.

Other STOP programs include a mobile technology bus that provides training and learning opportunities to students from the elementary grades through high school. Stopping in cities throughout Hampton Roads, the bus gives young people access to computer programming, software design and robotics, as well as exposure to technology-related fields.

"We've had some of our students say, "I finally know who- not what- I want to become," Regina smiles. "It's in those moments when a child tells me who they want to become- and they're talking about their character, not just a profession--that I realize the impact STOP is having. Once you become of good sound character, you can pick any profession you want. I am so proud of that. And that's what our youth development team is doing."



STOP Inc. Technology Bus

STOP, Inc.

5700 Thurston Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

757-858-1360

www.stopinc.org

*

Original link to story:

http://theshopper.com/story_2021.8898_STOP_Inc

