

ALABAMA

Turning the Tide on Poverty

Creating Vibrant Communities Together

DALLAS COUNTY

Location:
West-Central Alabama

Population: 42,748

Estimated median household income: \$26,442

Estimated individuals below poverty level: 32%

Study Circle Participants: 19

PERRY COUNTY

Location:
West-Central Alabama

Population: 10,689

Estimated median household income: \$30,572

Estimated individuals below poverty level: 23.8%

Study Circle Participants: 24



"This was the first community process where I saw true community people making decisions about and for their community, not just organization and agency directors."
— Tide Committee Member

Through the Southern Rural Development Center's Turning the Tide on Poverty initiative, residents of Alabama's Dallas and Perry counties have found the motivation and assistance to improve their communities.

For these adjacent counties in the state's rural, underserved Black Belt region, fighting poverty starts with identifying and resolving current issues. Working with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, engaged citizens are making a difference.

SELMA

Turning the Tide on Youth Violence

After Selma residents saw community improvements in neighboring Selmont, concerned citizens and officials sought Tide facilitators to bring the initiative to their city to help stop the growing youth gang violence problem. By engaging youth to find solutions, they hope to significantly decrease the violent crimes in Dallas' county seat, where 37.5 percent of its nearly 19,000 residents live below the poverty line.

Over the summer, the city held three forums for adults and youth to openly discuss the causes of violence and brainstorm potential solutions. These forums set the stage for Tide youth violence Study Circles slated for the fall. Coupled with an Annual Youth Conference already in place, Tide addresses the needs of Selma's young residents.



This conference provides guidance, leadership, skills and knowledge in areas relevant to this generation. Each day focuses on building relationships between youth and their parents, the professionals that serve them, the community and, most importantly, their peers. In addition, the conference offers workshops and training for parents.

"Our young people are important to us and represent our leadership of tomorrow. We must take care of them today," said Ward 4 Councilwoman and Tide action team organizer Angela Benjamin.

SELMONT

Community beautification

For Selmont, a town of less than 3,500, increasing community pride is the first step in addressing poverty. Residents sought to beautify the community, creating an inviting environment for themselves and visitors.

The town started with three successful community-wide clean-up days, and a local church generously provided a dumpster. From these initial efforts, a Community Beautification Council emerged, as well as litter education programs in local elementary schools. A new committee addresses potential uses for abandoned properties.



Community Development Corporation

After seeing the effects of the community beautification efforts, another Tide action team explored the formation of a non-profit organization to offer services that neither the county nor city could provide.

To meet these needs, Selmont recently formed the Community Development Corporation, which meets on a regular basis to discuss necessary community improvements and potential projects. As a non-profit, the CDC is able to apply for grants to fund the projects that Tide action teams have envisioned.

Forming the CDC is a significant step for Selmont, where 33.1 percent of residents live in poverty. With organized support, the town has the potential to decrease poverty through increased community involvement.

Revitalization efforts

In an effort to utilize abandoned property, an old football field behind Tipton Middle School will soon be a place for healthy community activity. The Dallas County Board of Education recently wrote a formal agreement granting the community permission to renovate the vacant area.

The field will be a safe place for families to exercise and fellowship. The CDC received a \$4,000 grant to build a walking track made of recycled rubber, and playground equipment will also be added for the children.

With the nearest grocery store nearly five miles away, Selmont plans to transform the old field house into a farmers market where locals can sell their fresh produce, with support from the Dallas County Strategic Alliance for Health. In response to high obesity and diabetes rates in the area, the farmers market will offer a convenient and inexpensive source for nutritious fruits and vegetables.

UNIONTOWN

Community "win"

Uniontown residents have come together for years to cheer on the local high school basketball team, which boasts 11 state championships. However, coming together for community citizen-based conversation was a new concept for the town of 1,800, located in one of Alabama's poorest counties. People from all walks of life took their places around the Tide discussion tables, including retired elected officials and teachers. Committing to the five-week conversation was a tremendous win for Uniontown, where 45.9 percent live below the poverty line.

Extension educator Katrina Easley commented on the welcoming spirit of the Uniontown participants: "I looked forward to going down and

meeting with them each week. They really seemed to enjoy getting out and meeting with one another."

Uniontown residents did not stop with just talking. They took action to beautify the town. Soon, flowers bloomed in new pots under welcome banners along the community's main street. Coupling this project with an already developing farmers market, the town added beauty and value to its downtown.



TIDE IMPACT

Thanks to Tide, Dallas and Perry counties are effectively translating their growing community pride into projects that benefit residents of all ages. Bringing together a wide range of community members in seeking a place-based solution to poverty, the neighboring counties rely on local voices to identify local concerns. Working together, the communities are finding solutions and creating hope for the future.

Note: Statistics based on 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates from www.census.gov.