

RED FLAGS: Our Progress So Far

Red flags have been presented in *Community Focus* reports as a means of identifying issues needing attention within Springfield and Greene County. The fifth anniversary of *Community Focus* provides a unique opportunity to provide an in-depth assessment of the progress made in addressing red flags presented in previous reports.

As discussed in the 2007 *Community Focus*, progress has been made in responding to previously published red flags through initiatives, volunteer commitment, grants and legislature. However, our community continues to face challenges regarding access to health care, child abuse and neglect, education funding, and basic issues such as housing and hunger.

Access to Health Care

Springfield-Greene County has been recognized for its excellent medical arts facilities and professionals. However, all previous *Community Focus* reports have acknowledged problems low-income and uninsured citizens face accessing behavioral, medical and dental care. Unfortunately, uninsured and poverty rates have continued to rise, overshadowing many local and national health services. In addition, middle-class citizens are facing similar challenges due to high coverage payments, difficulty getting in to physicians, and a low citizen/physician ratio in



Springfield-Greene County. Although initiatives (including the Springfield-Greene County Regional Health Commission) have been developed to respond to access issues for the medically underserved, this continues to be an area of concern for our community.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Since 2004, *Community Focus* has identified higher child abuse and neglect rates in Greene County than state averages. In response, multiple educational programs and initiatives have been developed to address this concern in Springfield-Greene County including Isabel's House Crisis Nursery, Operation US, Child Witness Protection Act, Ambassadors for Children, and the Strengthening Families Initiative (see more initiatives in the report). Although substantiated child deaths due to child abuse/neglect rates have decreased slightly, hotline calls/reports remain high. Therefore, child abuse and neglect continues to be an issue and necessitates our community's attention.

Education Funding

Education budgetary concerns have been a top priority in all previous *Community Focus* reports. According to the 2007 report, Greene County districts have continually faced the challenge of receiving equitable and adequate state, federal and local funding. Currently, school funding remains a challenge with the percentage of state, federal and local revenue continuing to vary drastically



between districts and percentage of total state revenue continuing to decrease for all Greene County districts. Results of such cuts will require districts to rely more significantly on local revenue funding, including developing and maintaining a strong local tax base to fund schools and pay staff.

Home Issues

Issues related to home life have played an important role in each *Community Focus*. Although housing and hunger have been highlighted in the past, they have become more important concerns due to our current economic conditions.

Housing challenges have increased for citizens of Springfield-Greene County. In the last four years housing permits have decreased, homeless statistics have increased and housing costs continue to rise despite falling average wage rates and per capita income levels. A more recent problem is the rising foreclosure rates in this area. Although several initiatives have been developed to address foreclosure rates and affordable housing needs, such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and Housing Counseling for Springfield and Greene County, several issues continue to be areas of concern, including vacancy rates due to foreclosures, homeless children and adolescents, and shrinking financial resources needed to address homelessness and housing.

As annual income rates decrease, unemployment rises and job growth stalls, hunger issues have grown in the Springfield-Greene County community. As discussed in this year's report, more Springfield Public School students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program than in the past. In addition, the rising



numbers of individuals served and pounds of food distributed in Greene County each month by Ozarks Food Harvest Member pantries and congregate feeding sites function as strong indicators of the hunger issue in this region.