



Quality of Life

The Hive House

The Hive House is a nonprofit organization located in Lewiston, North Carolina. The Hive House was established out of a growing need to provide opportunities for young people from underrepresented backgrounds in Bertie County the possibility to acquire the keys to success. Vivian Saunders, a life-long resident of Bertie County, is the founder of the Hive House. Ms. Saunders currently represents families on the following boards: The Bertie County YMCA Board, Bertie County Economic Development Board, Bertie County African American Caucus, the Z. Smith Reynolds Advisory Panel, and the Mid-East Housing Authority, which represents seven counties. She also is a national speaker representing at-risk African-American males.

Originally known as the Hive Alternative School, the Hive House was reinstated as a community resource center in 2009 after losing significant state funding. With the help of the North Carolina Community Development Initiative, the Hive House was able to acquire about \$149,000 from the Kate B Reynolds Charitable Trust and \$20,000 from the Arthur W. Perdue Foundation for renovations of the House. Today, the Hive House serves as an oasis within one of the state's poorest counties. It provides after-school programs, access to Wi-Fi through a technology and education center, a food pantry, a community garden, mentorship and tutoring, but most importantly, a place to learn and cultivate one's skills and capabilities.

Ms. Saunders provided more detail on the project below. For more information, go to <http://www.thehivehouse.org>.

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NCACC / Dominique Walker: What are your short- and long-term goals for your organization?

Vivian Saunders: The short term goal is to complete the renovations of the Hive House so that we can provide a safe and stable environment for the families and their children in our community. Our long term goal is to continue to provide the community with the access to computers and internet so that individuals can seek and find jobs in a county with no public transportation, provide tutorial services for children facing various levels of difficulty with reading and math, and create a safe space for community members to improve their quality of life.

DW: What role did the county play in the establishment of the Hive House and how does the county contribute to the ongoing operations?

VS: The Hive House grew out of a grassroots initiative and was previously the Lewiston Family Resource Center before it was converted to the Hive House. Several commissioners have provided personal support and investment to the House. Mr. John Trent, Chairman of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners has used personal funds to help cover field trips, snacks, hotel costs, and emergency housing assistance with helping families and students find jobs. Commissioner White has funded field trips for the students as well as baseball camps.

DW: What economic development impact does the Hive House have in your county?

VS: One of the largest hurdles for low income parents seeking to improve their quality of life is the growing cost of childcare. There are limited high-paying job opportunities in Bertie County, which forces the workforce to commute over an hour to be paid a decent living wage. This adds pressure on parents to account for car expenses, travel time--in addition to work hours--and most importantly childcare while they are away. The Hive House provides peace of mind with low cost and sometimes no cost for childcare to many of those families. This allows parents to spend their hard-earned dollars on critical needs such as food and shelter. Additionally, the computer lab allows small business owners to print business materials at low costs, provides a space for people to apply for jobs, and improve job skills.



DW: How can other communities and counties with similar needs replicate this initiative? Who should they involve in the process and what first steps would you recommend?

VS: First, you must have someone with the willingness and the fortitude that can take criticism and is willing to eat, sleep, and breathe with the families that they are serving. It is just as important to include the families that will be served in the developmental phase because if you do not have their input then the initiative won't be successful. Other key constituents would include elected officials, the educational system, and members of the justice system because it really does take an entire village to raise a child.

DW: Limited employment opportunities are a major concern for areas in Bertie County. How can county commissioners and other elected officials contribute to raising awareness about this issue affecting similar communities across the state?

VS: Many rural communities in North Carolina are facing similar difficulties with limited job choices. In order to improve these circumstances, it requires constant conversation at all levels of government to bring intentional investment in our communities. Collaboration and new innovative ways of planning are the only ways to bring forth sustainable change.