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Passage Home targets cycle of poverty

[Todd Cohen](#) | March 20, 2012

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RALEIGH, N.C. — In the Garner Road community in southeast Raleigh, median household income is \$11,308, 52.5 percent of residents live below the poverty line, and 42.7 percent of residents age 25 and older do not have a high-school diploma.

Passage Home, a nonprofit formed in 1991, is working to try to break the cycle of poverty in the community.



Passage Home

Operating with an annual budget of \$3.5 million, a staff of 18 people working full-time and six working part-time, and over 590 volunteers, the agency serves about 1,000 individuals a year.

Passage Home provides housing and support services, for example, for about 130 families a year in housing units it owns and manages.

It also serves roughly 25 women a year through its prison re-entry program, and about 50 youth through its after-school program.

And last year it gave 500 book bags to kids, a total it aims to double this year.

Now, to keep up with growing demand for services, and to support new initiatives such as a plan to develop community gardens, Passage Home is stepping up its fundraising efforts.

"We're really looking to capture more individual and corporate donors, and not have to depend as much on state funding and other grants," says Karis Lovett Tomkins, who joined the agency in October as chief development officer after working as head of global sales for Cmed, a contract research organization that focuses on clinical research.

Passage Home, for example, operates the Raleigh Safety Club and Community Center, which provides after-school tutoring and enrichment and other programs such as job workshops for the Garner Road neighborhood.

Last fall, in partnership with Strong Women Organizing Outrageous Project, or SWOOP, Passage Home opened a community garden across the street from the community center.

While the garden serves mainly as a teaching tool for neighborhood kids, it also represents a pilot project for a larger urban-agriculture initiative Passage Home plans to launch this year.

In a partnership with the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation, the philanthropy created by the Olympic gold-medalist, Passage Home plans to create community gardens throughout the community.

This year, in partnership with Bayer Crop Sciences, for example, it plans to create a garden near property it owns at the Brown Birch Apartments.

"The idea is to create community gardens, and also create a path for the community itself to take part in other urban-agriculture initiatives," Tomkins says.

The gardens would provide micro-business opportunities for local residents, teaching tools for students, and sources of healthy food for the community, she says.

The effort also reflects the emerging fundraising strategy at Passage Home, which aims to expand its individual donor base and develop more corporate partnerships.

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Two of the agency's biggest supporters, for example, are Bayer Crop Science, and Cargill, Tomkins says.

Passage Home also just opened a thrift store at 2418 Crabtree Boulevard, and plans this year to launch a program for homeless veterans.

"I really want people to experience what we're doing here and what our mission is," Tomkins says, "and that's to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness, one family at a time."

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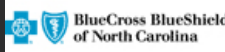
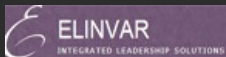
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