



N.C. Center for Nonprofits

NEWS RELEASE

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Davidson Housing Coalition Wins Nonprofit Stewardship Award

Sammy Sherrill and his mother needed a place to live in their hometown of Davidson. Rent in this college town near Charlotte was rising fast. When the Davidson Housing Coalition helped him find a house on Eden Street, Sherrill said, "I didn't just get a rental house, I joined a family. The DHC people watched out for me and my mom, and took care of us."

Years later, he took the organization's financial management class and qualified to move with his two sons into a brand new, two-bedroom unit in the Creekside Corners duplexes. A 10-year employee in Ingersoll-Rand's shipping and receiving department, Sherrill said the reduced DHC rent allows him and his boys "to keep our heads above water."

Then DHC asked Sherrill to serve on its Board of Directors. When he accepted, he said, "I'm glad to be able to give back to the organization. There's no place like home here in Davidson!"

The Davidson Housing Coalition is receiving the state's highest honor today from the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits. The annual Nonprofit Sector Stewardship Award recognizes organizations that use exemplary practices to be sure they earn the public's trust every day. The Center is presenting the award at its statewide conference in Greensboro with 700 nonprofit, business, and government leaders in attendance.

"The Coalition does a great job of providing affordable housing," said Jane Kendall, president of the N.C. Center. "But, it also takes on another role that nonprofits often play – being a force for much broader change in the community. The Coalition is inspiring the whole community to see that many more of Davidson's townspeople can become financially self-sufficient, not just have a roof over their heads."

DHC's board of directors and staff met over several months in early 2008 to chart the course for their nonprofit's future. They decided to focus on building linkages with other organizations that serve northern Mecklenburg County. They believed that this collaborative approach would help DHC to achieve its mission in affordable housing, and help the entire community to make better use of its existing resources.

And, they were right. The economic crisis struck later in 2008. "Families in need swarmed to nonprofits for assistance. Everyone at the local level had to work together to try to meet the skyrocketing demand for services," said Kendall. "It is almost as if DHC knew what was coming. It was already reaching out to a long list of area nonprofits and government agencies."

Examples of its diverse partners range from the Ada Jenkins Center, United Family Services, Davidson College, United Way, and the YMCA to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, area churches, state government agencies, and local services for seniors.

DHC had already helped to create the Lake Norman Community Development Council. This Council includes 50 nonprofits, government officials, members of the faith community, and residents that work together as volunteers to improve life for the people living in North Mecklenburg and South Iredell counties. Marcia Webster, executive director of DHC, chaired this council for six years.

"As many became unemployed or underemployed, we wanted to transform the employment status of our tenants, homeowners, and neighbors," said Webster.

DHC collaborated with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Board and the JobLink Career Center to create a local job search assistance program. Called the SHARE Network Access Point, this program has allowed DHC to serve more of its neighbors from a greater variety of racial, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds.

“The Davidson Housing Coalition took the time and the risk to step forward and connect with many other organizations. This approach has helped DHC and its partners make much more of a difference in people’s lives,” said Webster.

“Nonprofit leaders are in a unique position to be a force for positive change in our communities. As independent organizations, they don’t have to make a profit as businesses do or get re-elected every few years government officials do,” said Dr. Loleta Wood Foster, a Fayetteville psychologist who serves on the N.C. Center’s statewide Board of Directors. The board serves as the selection committee for the award. “The Center helps nonprofits learn from each other how to step forward and take this kind of leadership. It still requires a lot of courage.”

DHC was founded in 1996 after a committee report to Davidson’s Town Board said the town “should do more to maintain a socio-economic mix in the population.” The report recommended “that we should create housing options for the whole community; ...support cultural diversity and enhance unity; ...provide an inclusive range of housing types which serves renters, displaced persons, and those seeking ownership.”

DHC believes that “Davidson’s traditional mix of people of all income levels is fundamental to our community and distinguishes us as a town.”

In addition to affordable housing, DHC now provides home repairs, homebuyer education, financial literacy classes and counseling, and job search assistance. It also makes sure that builders follow the Town of Davidson’s Affordable Housing Ordinance. The ordinance requires at least 12.5 percent of all new residential developments to be allocated for affordable housing. The towns of Manteo and Chapel Hill have similar ordinances.

Through a combined effort with the N.C. Housing Finance Agency, it has completed its first four apartments designed for mentally and physically disable adults. Research is underway to determine if a similar housing opportunity can be created for veterans.

Like many nonprofits, DHC knows how to do a lot with limited dollars. Margo Williams, president of DHC’s Board of directors, said, “The Davidson Housing Coalition has only four staff members, but their tireless efforts have given our nonprofit a good name among donors, board members, stakeholders, and the general public.”

Williams added that DHC has a conflict-of-interest policy for both board and staff members. The board evaluates the executive director’s performance every year, as well as its own performance. These are organizational practices that the N.C. Center *for* Nonprofits recommends, and it helps organizations to follow them. The Center publishes *Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence*, a short guide with specific benchmarks to achieve.

Foster and Kendall presented the 2011 Nonprofit Sector Stewardship Award to DHC representatives Webster, Williams, board treasurer Ralph Quackenbush, founding board member Guydell Connor, and staff members Gail Brooks-Lemkin, Nancy Waldrop, and Emily Lytle.

The other 2011 Award winners are Disability Rights North Carolina and the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County. The winners receive recognition from nonprofit leaders across the state and from their elected officials at the local, state, and national levels.

Sponsorship of the awards by Prudential Financial, Inc. makes it possible for the Center to present each winner with \$500 to invest in professional development for their board and staff, and a commemorative work by Durham artist Galia Goodman.

The N.C. Center *for* Nonprofits’ mission is to enrich North Carolina’s communities and economy through a strong nonprofit sector and nonprofit voice. It helps nonprofits to lead and manage their organizations effectively, reduce costs, work together to solve social problems, and enhance the state’s communities and economy. With 1,560 member organizations, the Center serves nonprofits working in all 100 counties of North Carolina. For more information, go to www.ncnonprofits.org.