

Bold, broad vision for helping others in north Mecklenburg

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Lee Sullivan

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BREAKING BARRIERS
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
EMPOWERING ALL PEOPLE

DAVIDSON – In more than three decades of combined experience at the Ada Jenkins Center, Diane Means and Janice Hinton have not only seen the impact basic assistance can have, but they’ve learned about other people and agencies committed to making current lives, and future possibilities, better for others.

And that network of relationships – among service organizations, churches, businesses, nonprofits, schools and more – is the foundation for the newly established North Mecklenburg Economic Mobility Collaborative (NMEMC).

Means, director of impact and engagement at the Ada Jenkins Center in Davidson, and Hinton, the center’s director of workforce development, are part of the growing team of individuals and institutions engaged in establishing the NMEMC as a regional collection of service professionals, faith, justice and community leaders, educators and citizens dedicated to enhancing economic and self-improvement opportunities – and subsequently quality of life and optimism about the future – for neighbors facing with economic limitations or other societal hurdles.

The areas of focus include affordable housing, access to health care, improved transportation options, better connections to education resources, childcare availability and a unified effort to provide more living-wage jobs along with career training and apprenticeship opportunities.

It's a blanket approach, Means and Hinton explained, with an emphasis on making the program innovative, equally accessible to all and centered around the needs of neighbors while building better relationships throughout all of north Mecklenburg.

"The goal is to work together to overcome the barriers that can often prevent individuals and families from getting the help, the boost, they need," Means said.

"It's about working across all sectors," Hinton added, "working as one organization on many topics with the shared objective of getting as many people as possible involved to help as many people as we can reach."

"One agency, no matter how dedicated it is, can't reach everyone," Hinton continued. "But what can we achieve if we unify our resources?"

The organization, with a kickoff launch party planned Jan. 30 at Cornelius town hall, has already made significant strides toward those goals by compiling a steering committee illustrating the composite nature of the NCEMC vision.

In addition to Means and Hinton, founding members of the committee include: Sara Fortner from Caterpillar Ministries; Stacey Reimer from Davidson College; Ruby Houston from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools; the Rev. Alexis Coleman from Davidson United Methodist Church; Jessyca Tovornik from Dunkin Donuts; Barbara Randolph, an immigrant justice advocate; and John Quinn, from the Sinapi Foundation international aid agency.

Greg Eastman, from American Advisors Group, and Anna Robinson, from Atrium Health, were also part of the initial organizational efforts and other current steering committee members are Kristin Booher from Davidson College, Anna Washington from the Davidson-Cornelius Childhood Development Center, Steve Justus, a healthcare advocate, Liesl West from Novant Health and Kathryn Firmin-Sellers with the United Way of Central Carolinas.

And, according to Means and Hinton, that's just the start.

Encouraging engagement

The upcoming launch party, according to Means, will be a chance to celebrate the organizational efforts that have been completed, but it will also provide a time to stress the NMEMC's goal to attract more participation.

"We want to bring more people to the table," she said. "We want to hear what people need, and we want more businesses and organizations involved."

Means and Hinton said the Ada Jenkins Center, for years a provider of a evolving health, education and employment programs for north Mecklenburg residents, served

as the “incubator” for the NMEMC, but the objective is for the newly hatched collaborative to branch out to every part of the region.

“The plan is not for this to be a Ada Jenkins-based program,” Means said. “I don’t know if we’ll need any type of headquarters because we want businesses, groups and people throughout north Mecklenburg to be part of this.”

And, by design, the next step for the NCEMC will be determined by those in need of services, and those committed to help.

“Part of the plan is to not have too much of a plan before we get feedback and input from the community,” Hinton said. “The first step is opening eyes and ears about the needs in this area. Then we have to all come together and work with each other.”

The organization plans to launch its website, northmeckemc.org, soon.