

Progress Made in Poverty Fight

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On February 3, 2005, Nelson Mandela gave an inspirational speech to 20,000 people gathered in London's Trafalgar Square. His speech became a rallying cry for many who strive to end acute poverty. "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity," he said. "It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

To measure local progress on addressing poverty, we collected a comprehensive set of relevant data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey for San Angelo neighborhoods. The data examines changes between two five year time frames. The years from 2007 to 2011 when the nation sunk into the worst economic recession since the 1930s, followed by San Angelo's oil boom economy between 2011 and 2015. Changes over this span include good news and bad news for overcoming poverty in our corner of the world.

The Census Bureau uses a set of annually updated federal poverty thresholds to estimate the number individuals and families "living below the poverty line." In 2011, the threshold for one person under 65 was \$11,702. Five years later, it was \$12,331. The threshold for a family of four (two adults, two children) in 2011 was \$22, 811. This increased to \$24,036 in 2015. Federal poverty thresholds increased by 5.4 percent over five years.

Nationwide data from the 2011-2015 Census American Community Survey pegged the poverty rate for Texas at 17.3 percent, almost two points higher than the national average (15.5%). Only 12 states were higher. Mississippi recorded an abysmal rate of nearly 23 percent to lead the nation. New Hampshire recorded the lowest poverty level at nine percent.

The rate for San Angelo was better than Texas at 16.1 percent. Even more positive is that this rate for 2011-2015 represents a 1.3 percent decline from the previous five years from 2007 to 2011. Both the nation and state experienced increases.

Nevertheless, celebration of the reduced poverty level for San Angelo is moderated by the realization that the city's standard of living, measured by the inflation adjusted per capita income, increased by 10.6 percent during the 2011-2015 time frame compared to the prior five years.

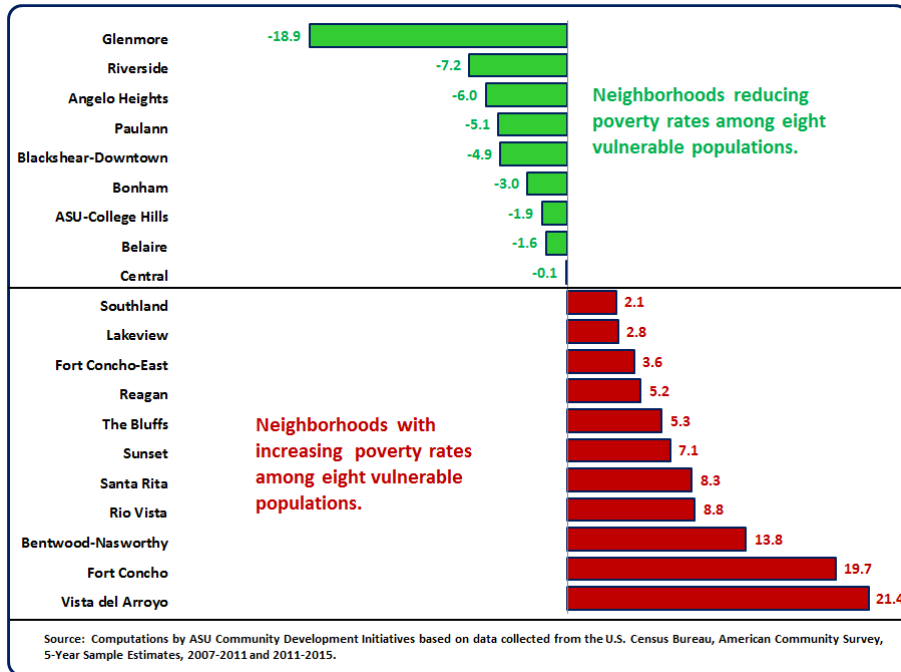
To dive deeper into progress on reducing poverty, we focused on eight vulnerable groups that run higher risks of falling into poverty. These include the non-natives, females, children, pre-school aged children less than five years old, seniors age 65 and over, African Americans, Hispanics, and persons over age 25 that did not complete high school.

The fact that the average rate of poverty for these eight groups in San Angelo was 21.1 percent over the five years from 2011 to 2015 illustrates their vulnerability. This was five percentage points higher than the city's 16.1 percent level during over the same five years.

In truth, one of the eight groups, seniors, had a citywide rate of poverty below that of San Angelo overall. The citywide poverty level for seniors in the 2011-2015 time period was 11.2 percent, or 4.9 points lower than the number for whole population. Nevertheless, we included seniors among the eight vulnerable high risk groups because their poverty level reached as high as 34.5 percent in one neighborhood, and rates in seven of the 20 census tracts exceeded the city's 16.1 percent level during the 2011-2015 time frame.

With focus on the eight vulnerable groups, we devised a straightforward method to assess progress toward reducing poverty in different areas of San Angelo. The method began by calculating differences

between the two five-year time frames in the poverty rates for each vulnerable group in the city's 20 neighborhoods.



A negative number from this simple math signals progress in a given neighborhood on reducing a particular group's poverty level. For instance, Census estimates show the child poverty rate in the Angelo Heights area reached an estimated 50.8 percent as the recession set in during 2007-2011. Then, it fell to 25.8 percent during the oil boom recovery years between 2011 and 2015. The negative 25 point difference indicates progress on reducing child poverty in this neighborhood.

The next step in the method was to determine the average progress, or lack of it, among all eight vulnerable groups in each neighborhood. The chart appearing with this article depicts the outcomes.

The Glenmore area heads a list of nine neighborhoods that achieved reductions in the average poverty rate of vulnerable groups. An average of approximately 7,800 members of the eight vulnerable groups lived in this part of town from 2007 to 2011. Their average poverty level over the five years was 30.3 percent. The number of vulnerable group members in Glenmore fell to an average of about 6,100 from 2011 to 2015, and the average rate of poverty also dropped to 11.4 percent. The area reduced poverty among vulnerable groups by 18.9 points as depicted in the chart.

It is particularly rewarding to see that the Blackshear and Downtown sections of the city are among the neighborhoods reducing poverty among high-risk residents. Gratitude for this goes to City leaders who have formed partnerships and networks to upgrade housing, promote economic activity, provide better healthcare, and a host of other neighborhood revitalization services in these parts of town for many years.

Taking note of the city's booming recovery after 2011, our Pathways column for December in 2015 pleaded, "Let's Get Serious about Reducing Poverty." On a broader scale, it is now genuinely heartening to know that several neighborhoods in addition to Glenmore, Blackshear and Downtown have made significant gains at reducing poverty.

On this broad scale, we know there are an uncountable number of people and organizations across the city serving the vulnerable women, children, seniors, minorities, and non-native members of our

community. These many unsung servants are the real champions to credit for getting serious about reducing poverty.

They are heeding Mandela's call from Trafalgar Square, "As long as poverty, injustice, and gross