AL DOHANY AWARD FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

Alpha Fowler Bryan, MD
James E. Crissey
Gail Webb

Clayton County Archway Partnership

Despite exponential growth over the past three decades, Clayton County has maintained a rural level of services in many respects, particularly regarding access to healthcare. The county has one hospital, Southern Regional Medical Center. Also, the absence of a robust healthcare infrastructure and economic decline has discouraged many healthcare professionals from setting up practices in the county. In July 2008, Clayton County leadership partnered with the University of Georgia (UGA) Archway Initiative to comprehensively solve these problems, establishing the Clayton County Archway Partnership. Through collaboration and perseverance, the Clayton County Archway Partnership successfully acquired Clayton County's designation as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) on June 7, 2012. In addition, the partnership established the county's first Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in September 2012 in Lovejoy, Georgia. These actions have greatly improved the county’s healthcare infrastructure, increased the county’s eligibility for health-related federal aid, and enhanced the county’s ability to attract talented healthcare professionals. The accomplishments of the Clayton County Archway Partnership are the result of the work of many individuals; however, a great deal of the work has been accomplished through the coordinated efforts of three individuals: James E. Crissey, President and CEO of Southern Regional Medical Center; Alpha Fowler Bryan, MD, Clayton County District Health Director; and Gail Webb, Archway Professional, Clayton County.

Archway, a forward-thinking initiative established by UGA, connects counties facing infrastructure and economic development challenges to the knowledge, expertise, and resources of the University System of Georgia. The Clayton County Archway Partnership represents Archway's first and only partnership in metropolitan Atlanta. Never before has there been such a coordinated effort in Clayton County to address economic and healthcare disparities. The Clayton County Archway Partnership Executive Committee is comprised of various change agents and leaders within Clayton County who shepherd policy, system, and environmental changes in the county. The committee membership includes the chair of the Clayton County Board of Commissioners, the Clayton County District Health Director, the president of Clayton State University, the president of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce, the president and CEO of Southern Regional Medical Center, and five city mayors. This committee meets on a regular basis to identify problems and determine where the university system can be of assistance. Through grassroots needs assessments, strategic planning, community forums, and informant interviews, the Clayton County Archway Partnership has provided the county with a mechanism to address health infrastructure and economic development.

It is estimated that 17.5 percent of Clayton residents have no health insurance and an estimated 15.1 percent of children less than 18 years of age lack health insurance. Many of these uninsured or underinsured residents utilize the emergency room at Southern Regional Medical Center as their primary care facility for the fact that they cannot be turned away. This has resulted in an enormous burden of uncompensated medical care falling upon Southern Regional, the only hospital located in the county. According to state data, Clayton residents—particularly African Americans—are using the emergency room far too often for uncontrolled diabetes, hypertension, and preventable primary care visits. On June 7, 2012, after three years of effort, the Clayton County Archway Partnership successfully acquired HPSA designation. In September 2012, it established the Lovejoy Clinic, the county’s first FQHC, located in Lovejoy, Georgia. The City of Lovejoy is geographically isolated from Southern Regional and the rest of Clayton County. The clinic represents a new, affordable healthcare option in an area traditionally underserved. As uninsured and underinsured residents can utilize the clinic for primary care without the fear of being turned away, the clinic ensures residents a medical home and supports the financial solvency of Southern Regional by relieving its burden of uncompensated medical care. The partnership’s accomplishments and the establishment of a FQHC in Clayton County have been recognized by metro area community leaders, local media outlets, and the University System of Georgia.