

YOUR VOICE

Help a family fight addiction and we all benefit

By Dabo Swinney and
Wallace Lightsey

Greenville has a special belief in the power of families. We believe they are the fertile soil from which all good things grow, and in many ways, we have shaped our community around these beliefs.

Today, the board of directors for The Family Effect would like to introduce you to a new mission designed to put these beliefs into action. We need your support, because our work addresses the No. 1 threat to families and children across the Upstate.

Recent data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation shows that in a typical year, more than 5,000 of Greenville's children are unable to live with their own parents because they can't get proper care at home. More than 1,300 of our children are abused or neglected, with half of those entering the foster care system as a result. And 2,400 domestic assaults are reported from within our family homes.

The costs of these shat-

tered families weigh upon us all. More than \$25 million in community investment and tax revenue is spent in Greenville each year by just a few nonprofits and government agencies working on the problem of family collapse, and they are overwhelmed.

Beyond the costs, however, lies an important question: How can so many families be coming apart, in a community that values families as highly as we do?

One finds a clear answer to this question by talking to the nonprofit program directors and caseworkers on the front lines. Day after day, these heroic people work with traumatized children, youth in crisis and the victims of domestic violence. When asked to identify the primary cause of so much suffering, their answers reveal that 65 percent to 85 percent of the problems stem from a common root cause.

That root cause is addiction in the family home. It is bringing our families to collapse in record num-

GUEST COLUMN



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bers, and Greenville's children are being lost in the rubble.

Our community has come to realize that addiction in the home creates more neglected and abused children, more unprepared first graders and more domestic assaults than any other sin-

gle root cause. It is a bottleneck issue for our collective family health, because no amount of nonprofit or government intervention can fix a household or a child when addiction is present.

The Family Effect is a new effort that is working to change these dynamics at their root. Put simply, our mission is to reduce addiction as a leading cause of family collapse and harm to children in the Upstate. We accomplish this mission by raising funds and recruiting volunteers for research-based programs at The Phoenix Center of Greenville that are focused on children and families.

And there is good news. When the bottleneck of addiction is removed for a family, many good things start to happen on their own, with far less intervention and at a far lower public cost.

Greenville is fortunate to have some extraordinary programs in place that bring healing and transformation to families every day.

Serenity Place, a treatment center for young

mothers and their preschool children, is a rare and effective program that was featured on CNN last year. Eighty-three percent of the women and children meet their treatment goals while in the program. In May 2010, The Phoenix Center also opened a comprehensive treatment academy for teenage boys facing early problems with addiction.

Both of these programs identify and treat households under threat of collapse through addiction, and both are writing some amazing success stories. Both programs are also a direct expression of our community's belief in strong families.

We invite you to put your own commitment for Greenville's families into action. Please join The Family Effect in our movement to reduce addiction as a leading cause of family collapse and harm to children.

You can give your time as a volunteer, and bring love and support to a child who has suffered the effects of addiction in the home. You can help teach our young mothers the

life skills they desperately want to learn, but have never been taught. You can bring sports or music to one of our teenage boys in treatment, and perhaps be the role model they've never had.

You can take a quick, no-obligation tour of Serenity Place, and see what transformation looks like first-hand. You can also make a tax-deductible investment in Greenville's families with a contribution to The Family Effect. Eighty-four cents of every dollar invested goes directly to treatment services for our families and children.

If you'd like to learn more, visit us at www.familyeffect.org, or call (864) 467-3944. You can also search for The Family Effect on Facebook and Twitter, and stay updated on the movement.

Addiction in the family home is a social and economic weight our community can no longer afford to bear. A family in treatment, however, represents an exceptional opportunity for moving forward.