

A City's Battle with Unemployment

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By Lewis Pifer

As the U.S. unemployment rate continue to remain high, unemployment affects a variety of people in High Point, NC. Unemployment influences these people in a number of ways, including forcing some to become homeless.

The high unemployment in this area is caused by its major industries going away due to outsourcing and downsizing as well as the state of the economy. Unemployment is higher in this area than the national average. It affects people from all parts of the community, causing them difficulty in paying bills and maintaining a mortgage.

The Current Status of Unemployment

High Point, NC., is one of the cities across the nation suffering greatly from high unemployment. The city's unemployment rate remains slightly higher than the state average despite [a recent drop](#).

According to Ike Williams, manager of the local office for the [North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Employment Security \(DES\)](#), the unemployment rate for High Point is currently 10.3 percent while the state average is 9.3 percent. [According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national average is 8.6 percent as of last November](#). One of the reasons why the city's unemployment rate is higher comes from the city's traditional industries leaving the area.

In the past, the textile, furniture, and manufacturing industries were a major source for the city's economy. However, these industries are downsizing or leaving the area to go overseas. These dramatic changes are causing many to lose their jobs.

A worker in a furniture factory in High Point, North Carolina in 1937. Source: Lewis Hine in the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

The Effects of Unemployment

The unemployed become affected by their joblessness in a variety of ways. Some have to receive help from non-profit organizations.

These non-profit organizations include [Open Door Ministries](#), a local non-profit organization, which provides a variety of services to the low-income and the homeless, including providing shelter, meals, and financial assistance. Krysteline Davis is among the unemployed who needed

financial assistance from Open Door Ministries. “My husband had a stroke back in July, and therefore I am the only one... working the house,” says Davis, “I just happen to lose my job yesterday, and my light bill is due tomorrow. So that’s why I came in here to get help with my light bill and then work on trying to go find me another job.” Davis says she will continue to look for a job since other bills will be due soon and will go to the DES for help.



Open Door Ministries is a non-profit organization that provides a variety of assistance for the low-income including providing shelter for the homeless.

Some were impacted greatly by unemployment and became homeless. Kenneth Weldon is a case manager for Open Door Ministries’ substance abuse program. He says he went to Open Door Ministries in 2001 after becoming homeless and addicted to drugs after leaving the military. After receiving counseling and other assistance from Open Door Ministries, he became an employee in 2003. Weldon says that he notices an increase since the economic recession began and unemployment has risen. He also notices a change in demographics. “There has been an increase,” says Weldon,” but here’s the thing. The demographics of the individuals who are needing the services of our ministry are not individuals who you would normally think... You have a new group of homelessness. We have individuals in our facility right now who are as young as 18 years old.” He explains that these young men come from families which were tremendously impacted by the recession.

The downsizing and loss of jobs in the furniture market caused some to become homeless. Mike Flora was a cabinet maker. He says he worked for his company for 15 years until his company went overseas. “As the jobs left and went overseas, it became tougher and tougher and more difficult as companies would start to downsize,” says Flora describing how hard it was to find work. “I’m 60 years old so the older got trimmed away... and I was one of those who got trimmed,” says Flora. He became homeless and an alcoholic. In March 2009, he started to see Open Door Ministries for shelter and help with his addiction. He is currently in a program called Cassell Transitional House which helps those who were once homeless obtain permanent housing and recover from drugs and alcohol. He says he is now on the board of Open Door Ministries and the Board of Trustees for his church. He also makes cabinets for local ministries.



Mike Flora became homeless after the cabinet assembling company he worked for went overseas.

Combating Unemployment

The need to help the unemployed find employment in High Point is being carried out by various organizations. The North Carolina government created a system of government agencies called [JobLink](#) to help reach this goal. Ike Williams of the DES explains that it is formed from various government agencies including the DES, the [Department of Social Services](#), and the [Workforce Investment Act](#). Williams explains the role of the DES to help achieve this goal. “We actually do unemployment benefits. We do what is called reemployment services which means we do

counseling for people trying to get them back to employment back to the market, and we also do job placement,” says Williams.

Williams explains that the DES works with non-profit organizations such as Open Door Ministries. “We do referrals to their facility, and also they refer people to our services,” says Williams.

Open Door Ministries also helps in this campaign in a variety of ways. Weldon explains that they are working with Guildford Technical Community College to create programs to help people receive their GED or Career Readiness Certificate. Also, they are creating courses to teach them how to write resumes and do interviews. Weldon explains that they do not do the job searching for the unemployed, but rather help them prepare for it. “We educate you... We are going to buy you or find clothing for you to present yourself as someone as serious in seeking employment,” says Walden, “but we are not going to do it physically for you. You have to do that.”

Regarding the loss in textile and manufacturing jobs, Williams explains that the city is working to provide different jobs. Williams says, “We have had to reinvent ourselves and I think we are starting to get some great development from different organizations and different companies coming into the area that’s changing the landscape of this area.”

For more information on the history of the unemployment rate in High Point, NC., please visit [the website of the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

If you want to help end homelessness in Guildford County, NC., or want to know more information about homelessness in the area, please visit [the website for Partners Ending Homelessness](#).