

Texas can ‘do better’ through Community Partners, Everett insists

December 3, 2015

TYLER—Texas can improve its response to the poor, and churches can join other Community Partners in helping their most vulnerable neighbors gain access to government services, said Jeremy Everett, founding director of the [Texas Hunger Initiative](#).

Everett spoke at an appreciation luncheon at Friendly Baptist Church in Tyler for East Texas participants in [Community Partners](#), a statewide network of organizations that help eligible Texans apply for and manage Health and Human Services Commission benefits.

The Texas Hunger Initiative—a project within Baylor University’s Diana Garland School of Social Work, launched with support from the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission—joined Texas Impact and the Texas Association of Community Health Centers in sponsoring the luncheon.

How the program works

“I love the Community Partners program. It exists because the state realized the great thing about partnering with faith-based and other nonprofits is their sense of mission in caring for the whole person,” Everett said. “Because of your concern for the whole person, you connect people not only to a job and to benefits but to a sense of belonging.”

The Community Partners program helps Texans overcome barriers that prevent about 2 million eligible people from receiving help through federal assistance programs.

The program enlists churches and other nonprofit organizations to give people in need access to a computer so they can visit a website, YourTexasBenefits.com.

Some Community Partners offices provide volunteers or staff who are trained to help people navigate the website and complete the application process.

Since the Community Partners program launched two years ago, 1,300 partner organizations have assisted with 95,000 applications for benefits, said Andrea Earl, director the Community Partners recruitment initiative at Texas Impact.

More work to do

But Community Partners have plenty of work to do, Everett insisted. About 20 percent of the households in Smith County are food-insecure, he told the Tyler-area group.

“There are 4.8 million Texans who are food-insecure. One in four of our Texas children is food secure. We can do better,” he said.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid and other government safety-net programs actually serve as “work-support programs” for people who are employed but cannot earn a living wage, he noted.

“We can do better. Every generation is judged on the basis of what it does or does not do for the cause of justice,” Everett said. “May we be on the right side of history.”