

Dalton Community Assessment

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The community a person comes from can make a huge difference in his or her life. The services available in time of need, the extracurricular activities available, the education and employment opportunities, et cetera make up the fundamental basics of a community. When a community is strong in these areas, the people within the community thrive. But when the community is lacking in one or more areas, the people within the community begin to have greater issues in their lives. I was born and raised in Dalton, GA, which is a very active community. Dalton has a lot to offer, and although it has some areas that can be improved, overall it seems to be a well rounded, growing community. In this paper, I will focus on the strengths and needs of the community of Dalton, and discuss ways it has affected my life.

Dalton is a very diverse and dynamic community. According to the United States Census Bureau (2015), the population in Dalton, GA in 2015 was about 33,853. About 29.5% of the population in 2010 was under 18 years old and 10.7% was 65 years old and over. The male versus female ratio in Dalton is about equal, where 50.7% of the population in 2010 was female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Since the age statistics were from seven years ago, we can assume that a lot of the people that were less than 18 years old are now in their early twenties. We can also assume that there has been an increase in the amount of people in the 65 years old and over category. There is a wide diversity of race in Dalton as well. The United States Census Bureau also states that in 2010, 65% of the population in Dalton was white, 6.4% was African American, 2.4% was Asian, and 48% was Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The education level in Dalton is surprisingly low for getting a higher education. The United States Census Bureau showed that from 2011 to 2015, about 61.9% of the population in Dalton graduated from high school, while 18.1% had a Bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Dalton has many strengths and weaknesses, and there are a lot services to accommodate some of the needs in the community. There are several health services available to people in Dalton. Hamilton Medical Center is the hospital in the area that is known for its excellent quality services. According to the U.S. News and World Report (2012), Hamilton Medical Center was awarded one of the “Best Regional Hospital” awards for 2011-2012 (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). There are numerous fundraising programs in the area to help with healthcare needs that people in the community may have such as the Alzheimer’s Association, American Cancer Society, Blood Assurance, etc. Although there are healthcare options available to people, many people in Dalton do not have health insurance, which makes it difficult for them to benefit from any of these services. The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) states that 27.1% of people under the age of 65 years old in Dalton do not have health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Dalton has Medicare and Medicaid offices in the area to help people apply for government health insurance, but many people may not qualify for state-funded insurance. The North Georgia Health District (NGHD, 2016) states that the MEDBANK program helps people get prescription medications for a more affordable price that may not have health insurance (NGHD, 2016). City of Refuge (2016) shows that the DEO clinic in Dalton is a volunteer clinic to provide medical treatment for people that do not have health insurance (City of Refuge, 2016). Another issue with healthcare services is transportation. Some people are unable to travel to and from the doctor’s office when they need help. The Whitfield Transit Service helps with some transportation needs, but even then patients may have to wait hours for the bus to come pick them up, and they may be late to or miss appointments.

As stated before, over 48% of the population in Dalton is Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The large amount of Latinos living in Dalton is due in part to the carpet industry. Places

like Shaw and Mohawk provide numerous minimum wage jobs for employees. Because of the large population of Latinos living in Dalton, there is a unique set of challenges brought to the community. Many Latinos in Dalton don't know how to speak English, and some have very limited education. There are organizations in the area that have tried to help the Latino community such as CLILA, Ayuda Hispana, Frontera Income Tax, and Servicios Latinos. Some of these places are businesses that provide social services for the Latino community on the side. For example, Frontera Income Tax provides tax services to Latinos, but they also help with translating, obtaining citizenship, and sometimes transportation. There are stores, bakeries, and recreation opportunities in the area that are specifically geared toward the Latino population, to meet their social needs. It helps them feel more like they belong in the community. Although there are many services available, it seems like it is not enough. There is still a large need for translating in the community, and we do not have the appropriate social structure for adults to go to classes to learn English when they have to work long hours to try to get out of poverty.

Spirituality and education opportunities both play major roles in the community here as well. The majority of Dalton is protestant, and there seems to be a church on every block. Local churches in the area try to help people that are impoverished in different ways. Some may have food banks, others may have members that are willing to help with transportation, and still others provide community service opportunities. Spirituality in itself can be a major source of hope for people. Not everyone believes as protestant Christians do, but there are other religious meeting places as well such as a Muslim mosque and a Catholic church. But because Dalton is mostly protestant, other religions may find it hard to fit in fully. There are also a variety of schools in the area, and according to Great Schools (2017), Dalton schools overall have a rating of 5/10 (Great Schools, 2017). There are six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in

Dalton alone. Dalton also has a college that is part of the University of Georgia system. Dalton State College is one of the most affordable colleges in the U.S. according to the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although the college is more affordable than most, there is still a low percentage of people with a college degree (only about 18% according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

In social work, a few different theories are used to describe and analyze different communities. Two theories that we can gain perspective from in Dalton are the social systems theory and the social-psychological theory. Kirst-Ashman (2014) states that the social systems theory looks at the community as a system with multiple subsystems that all work together. If one part of the community fails, other parts suffer as well. The community inputs resources, and individuals receive outputs from the community (Kirst-Ashman, 2014). This can be seen in the effect of the carpet industry in Dalton. When the recession happened in Dalton in 2008, the carpet industry took a hit. Because of that, large amounts of people were laid off and had a hard time finding employment. According to Kirst-Ashman, the social-psychological theory shows how community members interact with each other in the community (Kirst-Ashman, 2014). Dalton has multiple community events for people to attend, and these programs try to get the community involved. There are a lot of fundraisers such as the March of Dimes, Dancing with the Stars for Alzheimer's, etc. The United Way and Habitat for Humanity provide ways for people to give community support and join together for the greater good of the community. Churches in the area have programs to help those in need, and parks provide places for people to go to socialize with others in the community. Even the schools in the area have productions and sporting events that are open for the public to attend to feel some community spirit. This helps

individuals in the community feel a sense of belonging and like they are doing something to help better their community.

Being a member of the Dalton community has molded me into the person I am today. I am involved in my church, and I am very grateful that I have a church in my area to help strengthen my faith and give me a sense of hope in life. My church has been a large support system in hard times, and they have provided me with a sense of belonging and trust. My dad is part of the medical community, and I work in the healthcare system so I have benefited from the excellent care in various ways. I feel I am very lucky to have a hospital around that if I have an emergency, I can trust that I am in good hands. I have had anxiety and depression in the past, and I attend counseling services on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. This has helped me in extraordinary ways, and I may not even be here today if it weren't for those services. They have helped me grow into the assertive adult I am today and helped me learn ways of coping with my own insecurities and fears. I am also grateful to have a college near home. I went away for college for a couple years, but I came back because I wanted to be around family. I have felt more at home and more settled since coming back and Dalton State College has provided me with a good education at an affordable price. I know that Dalton is lacking in a few areas, but I personally have never had a need that was not met in my community. I am lucky to have a community where I can be involved and feel a sense of belonging. And when I am working as a social worker, I hope to be able to help others feel this sense of involvement and belonging just as I have.

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