

## Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Lending a helping hand to Harambee: Housing, education are targets for improvement

**Felicia Thomas-Lynn**

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It's not uncommon for Brooke Krueger to answer her home phone at night and hear the desperate voice of one of her students seeking help on a homework assignment.

Not only does she expect it, she encourages it.

As a high school teacher at Hope Christian Schools, she and others on the staff are on call around the clock.

"If students are struggling and there is no one at home to help them with geometry or junior-level English, what are they supposed to do?" said the English teacher, who has taught at the school since it began three years ago in Milwaukee's Harambee neighborhood.

The school's investment in the area and a string of other high-profile developments that have spurred economic growth there have caught the attention of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and its foundation, which will announce today a \$1.3 million grant for the neighborhood.

The grant - it appears to be the largest single private donation to a Milwaukee neighborhood - will be used to improve educational opportunities, housing and other community needs in the neighborhood.

Andrea Rowe Richards, communications manager for the city's Department of City Development, said Tuesday that she couldn't remember a larger grant given to a specific city neighborhood.

There are 11,671 people who live in 3,935 households in the neighborhood, which encompasses 114 city blocks. At least 44% of its residents have not earned a high school diploma, 38.4% are families in poverty and 43.7% are younger than 19, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"These initiatives are focused on improving the lives of children, families and the greater community of Harambee North," said Jim Fischer, managing partner of Thrivent's Southeast Wisconsin Region. "We are committed to working with community partners so together we can make a bigger impact to address critical needs."



Brooke Krueger teaches at Hope Christian Schools, where teachers are always on call.



Eric Kamanga works in his Latin class Tuesday at Hope Christian Schools in the Harambee neighborhood. The school is slated to receive \$562,500 in a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Hope Christian Schools, which includes a college preparatory high school, an elementary school and middle school, will receive \$562,500 of the grant money.

"We are incredibly excited about this," said Kole Knueppel, superintendent of Hope Christian Schools, who said the grant money will go toward the Hope Institute, an entity charged with strengthening faculty leadership development, retention and educational quality.

"Statistically, there is a high turnover rate for urban educators," he said. "We're working hard to create an environment that inspires teachers and students to achieve their best."

The schools, particularly at the high school level, enforce a no-nonsense policy that's infused with strong academics, including 90 straight minutes of math, as well as 90 straight minutes of English daily. It also offers guidance in religious values and keeps its students looking forward toward college.

All of the students have their teachers' cell phone numbers, and many of the teachers put in 10- to 12-hour days staying after school to tutor students, and coming back to work for a few hours to tutor on Saturday.

At least \$636,000 of the grant will go to Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity, which will build 10 new homes there.

"This is a great collaboration," said Sara Kierzek, Habitat's executive director.

Kierzek said the homes will be located in the 3100 to 3200 blocks of N. 6th and N. 7th streets.

The remainder of the grant - \$75,000 - will go to Local Initiatives Support Corporation and Habitat for neighborhood planning.

"This is not philanthropy in the usual sense. They are investing in people," said Leo Reis, of LISC, who said the goal is to engage or re-engage at least 500 residents and other stakeholders in discussions about the Harambee neighborhood.

Sherman Hill, executive director of Harambee Ombudsman Project, a community-based agency in the neighborhood, received news of the grant with caution.

"Any time there is some money being put into the community, it's a positive thing," said Hill, adding that he hopes his group and other residents will get to have input into the process.

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