

The Red & Black

The Athens community should be main source of poverty aid

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Being a part of a country that has the abilities to help those in need makes citizens of the United States fortunate. There are many countries that do not have those luxuries. Unfortunately, U.S. citizens have become accustomed to these luxuries, and they can sometimes be taken advantage of. Due to these problems, we should rely on community initiatives, rather than government aid, to combat poverty.

A family household of four making less than \$25,000 per year is considered as living in poverty. A family of three is considered as living in poverty if they make around \$20,000 per year. This means families in poverty must survive on \$6,500 per person. No one can live off of \$6,500 a year.

Government assistance has been implemented for these situations. These families won't have the means to support themselves without the help from the government, and they depend on the government's support. However, the government is not helping.

Since the 1960s, the American government has spent over \$15 trillion fighting poverty. However, a 2012 study by the Cato institute found this spending has done little to improve poverty. According to the National Poverty Center, since the 1960s, the poverty rate has fluctuated around the same area and even increased by four percent overall.

This lack of effectiveness arises because people take advantage of the system and its benefits. Government assistance programs have been implemented for those that have jobs yet still need help making ends meet.

However, many on welfare remain unemployed. According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, in 2015, only 33% of people receiving welfare under Temporary Assistance for the Needy program held jobs.

A lot of people will argue that life on government aid is better than life in the working world because they do not have to worry about how much money they will receive each month. These people know what money the government is going to provide them.

Some people may also avoid weening themselves off using government aid because of the amount of taxes they will pay working a full-time job. By staying on government aid, they end up having more money in the end. These are just a few of the reasons government aid is being abused.

With a 38 percent poverty rate, Athens Clarke County is one of the poorest counties in the state of Georgia. Excessively high poverty levels exist in part because of the abuse on the system. There simply is not enough aid to go around.

There are better alternatives to government aid out there. For example, Athens has recently followed many other cities around the U.S. in establishing the Little Free Pantry. The Little Free Pantry was set up by the community to help those that need help without utilizing government funding.

Athens is also home to so many nonprofit organizations designed to help its community members. The problem is the organizations are not being utilized to the best of their abilities.

“Adaptability and flexibility are really important because of the nature of nonprofits, and as I’ve said, the nature of the work sort of requiring that everyone be willing to pitch in and do a little bit of everything,” said Leslie Hale, executive director of the non-profit organization, Books for Keeps.

Like Books for Keeps, which enables underprivileged children to have the opportunity to read, Athens is flourishing with alternatives to relying solely on government aid. While putting in the effort to reach out to these organizations may not be the easiest, in the end, it will be the most rewarding option.