

# Mixing incomes in communities is a good idea

Neighborhoods become communities when people become neighbors.

In a recent column in *The Greenville News*, Thomas Sowell argues against efforts to integrate low-income housing with market-rate housing. His premise is based on his contention that “Individuals and groups of all sorts have always differed from one another in many ways, throughout centuries of history and in countries around the world. Left to themselves, people tend to sort themselves out into communities of like-minded neighbors.” He goes on to include mixing renters with homeowners as an equally bad idea.

His error, in my opinion, is to assume that efforts to propose integrating “low-income housing” is all about the housing, when in fact efforts for such integration is about “families,” not just housing.

One of the biggest mistakes HUD made over the past 30-plus years was to cluster all poverty and/or low-income

## GUEST COLUMN



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“housing” together. The other mistake was to build such housing at lesser-than-market quality, including design standards. We’ve all seen examples of those failures. Only recently has HUD realized this and is now encouraging the development of “mixed income”

communities, and requiring that the housing be equal-to-market quality, including energy efficiency.

At Homes of Hope we have developed several successful mixed-income communities. One such example is West Greenville where a formerly blighted and crime-ridden neighborhood has been transformed into a healthy neighborhood of choice, where renters and homeowners are indistinguishable and the housing quality is equal and energy efficient.

The idea that somehow income level is cultural is simply wrong. The communities we’ve developed have proven that. I remember growing up in a mixed-income community — but the irony is that I didn’t know it at the time, because nobody cared about anybody else’s incomes! We were just neighbors!

As a boy, my main concern was avoiding the neighbors who would tell my mamma if they saw me getting into trou-

ble! I certainly didn’t care how much money they made! But those were the neighbors my mamma wanted.

We have developed a successful model of community development that we continue to improve upon, and we are completely convinced on this element of mixing the incomes of the communities. Families become neighbors, not housing. And renters have proven to be great neighbors in our communities because we hold them accountable for it! We insist on our families being good neighbors in their community.

When we give tours of the housing we’ve built we always tour West Greenville and also Chicora Crest, another mixed income development located in the Haynie-Sirrine neighborhood just behind Scott Towers. During the tour I explain this concept and at some point I ask the people on the tour to tell me which housing is occupied by renters and which by homeowners; which ones are for

low-income families, which are market rate. They can never tell me. In fact, most of the time when they make a guess, they guess wrong.

These two examples of successful mixed-income communities have worked because the model works! We are now taking this model to other cities in South Carolina. We believe that it will work in any city, as it has here in Greenville, as long as all of the crucial elements are in place for this success. We are currently looking for partners to expand this model throughout S.C. with us.

Mr. Sowell’s contention that “people tend to sort themselves into communities of like minded neighbors” is correct! They do indeed. His error is assuming that incomes equate to like-mindedness!

Please don’t buy into this old idea that low-income “housing” has to be isolated. We’re talking about families — not housing, and neighbors — not numbers.