MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Since 1994, Duke University and Self-Help have worked together to revitalize Durham’s urban neighborhoods with a focus on homeownership and affordable housing. The partnership began in Walltown when Duke provided a $2 million loan to allow Self-Help, with support from Habitat for Humanity of Durham and community residents, to build and sell dozens of high-quality, affordable homes. Along with other neighborhood efforts, Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership (DDNP) efforts, the homes have helped to return community cohesiveness, local development interests of the neighborhoods.

In 2004, building on the success in Walltown, Duke doubled its loan commitment to $4 million. The new funds allowed Self-Help and Habitat, along with Builders of Hope and Durham Community Land Trustees, to expand their work to Southwest Central Durham. The non-profit housing organizations worked through the Southwest Central Durham Quality of Life Project (QOL), a coalition of community members, facilitated by DDNP staff, that advocates on behalf of the housing and economic development interests of the neighborhoods.

With the Duke loan and in partnership with DDNP and Self-Help staff, QOL formed a land bank that has become a model for re-development, even as Self-Help was working to make it all happen. Slowly progress has been made. Self-Help and QOL rehabilitated a house on the strip that had become known for illegal activities, removing it and renting it to the Duke Chapel Pathways program. They worked with the city to implement sidewalks and landscaping projects, and a bike path to improve accessibility.

In 2011, when Duke doubled its loan commitment and set aside $1 million for the West Chapel Hill Street corridor, Self-Help had the knowledge and buy-in to put the significant new funding to good use.

Southside
Revitalization of the Southside neighborhood, just south of the American Tobacco Campus, has become a priority for the City of Durham, Self-Help and other non-profit developers. To support the collaborative effort from the beginning, Duke and the City of Durham organized door-to-door surveys and neighborhood retreats to solicit input from Southside residents about the future of their neighborhood. That work helped to produce a blueprint for re-development, even as Self-Help was working to develop a land bank of properties strategically located within the neighborhood.

The newly expanded Duke loan commitment will allow Self-Help and a coalition of non-profit housing developers to replicate the successful land bank model as they re-develop those properties at the direction of Southside residents and their vision for their neighborhood.

To guarantee a stable homeowner base at the neighborhood’s vacant properties are re-developed, DARA is organizing an affordable housing initiative, including a unique forgivable mortgage loan program for low- to middle-income university and health system employees. When it begins this year, the Housing Incentive Program will provide forgivable five-year loans of $10,000 for eligible Duke employees.