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Fixing Duval neighborhoods, lives needs two-way work, panel says

A panel at Edward Waters College agrees that residents could do more for neighborhoods.

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By [Steve Patterson](#)

Making Jacksonville's troubled neighborhoods safer and more prosperous will take a mix of self-help and thoughtful government action, a slate of political leaders seemed to conclude during a wide-ranging talk Thursday night at Edward Waters College.

And the politicians and event organizers said nothing will improve without ordinary residents working to bring change.

"It works both ways," said Dan Evans, a member of the committee that organized the second Northeast Florida Accountability Forum. "We are part of the problem. ... But on the other side of the coin, we are also part of the solution."

A panel that included the sheriff and public defender for Duval County, state lawmakers and City Hall administrators fielded questions on issues ranging from employment for felons to how the city spends tax money and whether a drug-treatment center should be permitted on U.S. 1 in Jacksonville's Northside.

The audience of about 45 people also wrote down questions about the county's schools, but no one from the school system showed up to answer, noted Henry Thomas, a University of North Florida professor who was moderator.

A theme that repeated during the two-hour talk was that government could help with some problems, but that personal commitment mattered at least as much.

"When you fall behind in a race, Dr. [Martin Luther] King made it very simple, you're either going to remain behind the rest of your life or you're going to have to work twice as hard to catch up," City Councilman Reginald Brown said during an exchange about job opportunities for people with criminal records.

"Until we understand it's a dual responsibility, we're going to continue to have this problem."

But officials also said the city has a policy of allowing felons to apply for some work, where they compete against other job-seekers.

Public Defender Matt Shirk said he's trying to spread information about the process some people can use to seal criminal records.

State Rep. Mia Jones, D-Jacksonville, talked about legislation she championed to let motorists who were prosecuted as habitual traffic offenders after not paying traffic fines mend their legal history and set up payment plans.

Another forum will be scheduled, Evans told the audience, which still had questions as the meeting ran to its appointed ending time.

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Personal commitment needed to fix the problem

By [jaxgal](#) | 06/04/10 - 07:38

To think that the government has an equal responsibility in "fixing" problem neighborhoods is a wrong thought. The government has been pouring monies into disadvantaged neighborhoods for years, and except for some minor changes, these areas remain the same. The brunt of commitment for change must fall on the community - the culture of the community needs to be redeveloped from within. (Bill Cosby has shared his thoughts far better than I on this topic.) There are wonderful people living in problem neighborhoods who are afraid of retribution if they work together to fight the problems. Then, on the other hand, there are families who enable or excuse the behaviors of their family members and are quick to blame others rather than taking responsibility for their actions.

Where the government can help is to work with and give support to those folks who take their responsibilities to clean up their neighborhoods - not by dumping money into bottomless pits thinking that that will solve everything. Change starts from within, not imposed from without.

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Excuse me!

By [educ8er](#) | 06/04/10 - 07:45

OK, who hired Corrine Brown to train Mia Jones on the fine art of deflection or spouting the irrelevant?



As for the others, just as jaxgal wrote, it requires that particular community/neighborhood to clean up the act. I would be upset should someone come in my neighborhoos and dictate what I should do and how to do it, especially someone not invited.

What are you doing today to improve yesterday?

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