



Leadership Montgomery helps feed children Cheryl Carter

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In reference to a recent article on homeless children appearing in the *USA Today* section of the Advertiser, I would like to bring attention to the work Leadership Montgomery is doing to help address this critical issue in Montgomery.

Three years ago one of the Leadership Montgomery project committees learned that over 500 children enrolled in Montgomery's public schools were homeless. These numbers, and numbers like them in other Alabama communities, have helped propel Alabama to the top of the nation in child homelessness. (Report from the National Center on Family Homelessness.) However, action taken by Leadership Montgomery three years ago resulted in its raising funds to purchase food from the food bank for a number of these children. Backpacks were donated by local merchants, and the homeless children reported to a designated area of the school each Friday to pick up their food-filled backpacks before leaving for the weekend.

Homeless children receive a balanced meal at school, but on the weekends they go hungry.

Today, three years after the completion of the first *Feeding the Hungry* project sponsored by Leadership Montgomery, two pilot schools are continuing the program. In the subsequent second and third years, Leadership Montgomery has added more schools, and it continues to serve as the conduit for funds flowing into Leadership Montgomery and then into the food bank, finally serving many of the children who need the food most.

No child in this city, state or country should ever go hungry. Throughout this nation of plenty, 2.5 million children, or one in 30, are homeless. Fifteen percent of these are teenagers who are forced to balance being a teenager with being an adult. They can't begin to do homework because students cannot complete homework assignments in the back of cars, in abandoned buildings, under bridges or in shelters. So they aren't being educated, and they cannot climb out of their pitiful situations.

Despite the fact that I love my state, I am ashamed that Alabama is a state of firsts for most of the wrong reasons. I urge the Legislature to quit its bickering and to do something meaningful for the people of Alabama. It should be the goal of every legislator to adopt at least one of the issues on which Alabama ranks at or near the bottom and to lead the charge to address it.

And as voters, we should have two goals. One goal should be to arm ourselves with the information and discernment needed to vote only for progressive legislators. And the second goal should be to examine our positions on the current tax structure to see whether we as voters can't afford quality services or whether we just vote no on every tax issue, regardless of how badly it affects our citizens.

Cheryl Carter is executive director of Leadership Montgomery.