

Helping Children of Poverty Succeed

On Sunday, February 15, Grace Covenant Church hosted its fifth community forum with Jo Bruce, Director of the Oak Ridge Schools Family Resource Center, and Mardee Miller, Principal of Willow Brook Elementary School, speaking and leading a discussion on *Helping Children of Poverty Succeed*.



Bruce and Miller dismantled some of the myths about poverty, beginning with the myth that poverty is not a significant issue in our community. Most of those present were shocked to learn that 70% of the children enrolled in Oak Ridge's own Willow Brook Elementary School are economically disadvantaged. Jo and Mardee spoke to the tragic toll poverty takes on the lives of children and families, including inadequate nutrition and sleep, a stressful home environment, a lack of

opportunities most of us take for granted, and parents who often feel intimidated by the schools. Rather than pity, however, Jo and Mardee stressed that what families struggling with poverty need is access to opportunity and high expectations. To the credit of the Willow Brook staff, children in the school are functioning on the same academic level as children in Oak Ridge schools not encumbered by the high level of economic disadvantage.



The work of the Family Resource Center, relying on significant community support, together with the school's Kids of Promise emphasis, Food 4 Kids, reading tutors, clothing and school supply closets, and dental and immunization clinics make a significant difference in the lives of children. We are grateful for Jo and Mardee's good work and for the practical avenues they have opened up in our community to meet the needs of at risk children.

The ball, so to speak, is now in our court.