

Starkville Bridges out of Poverty to launch 'Charity Tracker'

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If everything goes as Starkville Bridges out of Poverty Interim Director Roderick Holmes hopes, Starkville's charitable organizations will be more streamlined and connected than ever.

Bridges out of Poverty is using money from a \$20,000 grant from the Invest in Others Charitable Foundation to launch a Starkville network on Charity Tracker, a software program that allows different organizations to see what needs can be addressed in the community. The grant was given as part of a prize for SBOP Vice President and Founder Lynn Phillips-

Gaines being named the 2014 Volunteer of the Year.

SBOP held a meeting Jan. 29 to introduce the Charity Tracker concept to representatives of more than a dozen churches and charitable organizations. Holmes said the different organizations were very open to the idea.

"The reaction was really, really positive," Holmes said. "Everybody asked questions. It wasn't about each individual or organization. People we're thinking about the bigger picture."

Charity Tracker was created by Alabama-based Simon Solutions in 2006 when the group realized needs were not being met in an efficient way for Hurri-

cane Katrina refugees living the area, according to Joey Yarber, an implementation specialist at Simon Solutions. Charity Tracker was created as a way to organize efforts at the personal level and keep track of what needs different people have in the community.

Now, according to Yarber, Charity Tracker is being used in more than 821 communities.

John Breazeale, president of the SBOP Board of Directors, said interest in Charity Tracker first started when Holmes, a Louisville native, saw Charity Tracker in use during recovery efforts related to the



Starkville Bridges out of Poverty Interim Director Roderick Holmes speaks during a Jan. 29 meeting about Charity Tracker as founder and Vice President Lynn Phillips-Gaines looks on. (Submitted photo)

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tornadoes that hit Winston County last April.

When Phillips-Gaines won the \$20,000 grant, SBOP seized the opportunity to use Charity Tracker in Starkville.

"I am thrilled others share in our vision," Phillips-Gaines said in a press release. "I hope this event spearheads a new chapter within our community."

Yarber said Charity Tracker data is protected by the same type of encryption banks use for ATMs, so the data on individuals who are in need remains private and secure. Citizens must consent to having information used in Charity Tracker, Yarber said.

"Usually after a few months we see a tremendous amount of confidence once the initial fear goes away

and people start working together," Yarber said.

Charity Tracker will also make it easier for people in need to get pointed in the right direction, Breazeale said. He used the example of someone applying for a Habitat for Humanity house. That person might not be able to receive a house, but that person's information could be used to match them with help at a different level. Additionally, if it someone is visiting a food pantry every week, they would see that person isn't progressing and look into other services that could be provided aside from the food pantry that might help them overcome poverty.

"Our whole effort is to make a bridge from poverty to the middle class," Breazeale said.

Holmes said Charity Tracker will be up and running in Starkville within 90 days and possibly as soon as within 30 days.