

From the Birmingham Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/birmingham/news/2018/09/06/new-birmingham-nonprofit-making-strides-in-ensley.html>

New Birmingham nonprofit making strides in Ensley - one house at a time

Sep 6, 2018, 2:23pm CDT



Students and contractor mentors are renovating two homes in Ensley to kick off work with the new nonprofit Build UP

In addition to hitting the books, 20 high-schoolers are transforming Ensley one house at a time.

A new nonprofit is taking a stab at blight in the Birmingham community, giving teens a lucrative career option and keeping a steady pipeline of talent feeding into a trade.

Build UP, the brainchild of Mark Martin who returned to the region after 14 years away, kicked off with eight employees and kids from Jackson-Olin High School coming over twice a week, two hours a day as part of an after-school pilot program to learn about architecture. Then it was a summer boot camp.

Now, 20 Ensley teens are in an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. six-year program to both get their high school diploma, associate degree and learn the construction trade by rebuilding houses in Ensley one at a time.

“We will have 20 students this year, and we will have that same number every year,” Martin said. “So, next year we will have 40 to 50 students.”

Right now home base for the two 501(c)(3) organizations, Build UP and Build UP for Prosperity, is a renovated space at 1402 Avenue E, while the group renovates the home next door that had become a squatting domain for the homeless.

Renovations have been ongoing since March with many Birmingham leaders getting on board. Professionals have been brought in for work in the high-skilled trades, Bruce Lanier with

MAKEbhm came out and spoke about architecture and design, and [Brasfield & Gorrie](#) is providing safety materials, field experts, OSHA 10 certification and more.

But what happens after the renovations is where a difference will be made in the community — families of each of the 20 teens in the program, some of who are currently in substandard housing or homeless, will receive two completed homes.

“We say that kids are rebuilding blighted abandoned homes into like-new duplexes, but in this case, this is going to be the owner-occupied unit, and the one next door is going to be converted back to residential once we’re done with it,” Martin said about the Avenue E homes. “They’ll own this one, rent that one, have the mortgages tied in together so they’re paying one mortgage, and they have a renter paying the majority of the mortgage. That’s the power of real estate investment and why being a landlord is better than being a tenant. Each child is impacting two different units in the neighborhood, bringing stability.”

Build UP is teaming with the Birmingham Land Bank Authority on which homes to bring on. Next up will be two side-by-side homes at the intersection of 16th and Avenue F. Families in the program will determine the order of who gets the homes as they are completed in the coming years.

“We’re purposely going for homes that have been five years tax delinquent, blighted, abandoned, boarded up, kind of a drag on this neighborhood but also a drag on public resources,” Martin said. “There’s no economic incentive for people to keep homes fixed up, because the rent here is so depressed.”

It isn’t all brawn, though. The 16 boys and four girls will receive paychecks every month, with some guidance on how to save for their futures both as adults and as potential contractors. They’ll also be graded on changing out the air filter, maintaining the yard, changing a light bulb, taking care of the home, fixing holes in the dry wall, etc. Build UP is also partnering with Restoration Academy in Fairfield for oversight and guidance on academics.

Within two years, Martin hopes to launch at least one additional site in Birmingham and another additional site outside of the state. The next site could be somewhere needed in Birmingham like Norwood, Woodlawn or East Lake.



Stephanie Rebman
Managing Editor
Birmingham Business Journal