

Crossroads helps during holidays

By Alex Gustafson

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Crossroads Ministry of Estes Park has served 459 households, 1,144 individuals and 417 children since 1982. It provides food pantry and emergency services, assistance with rent, utilities, medical, gasoline and other basic human needs.

“At present, we are serving an increased number of younger families with children who have become unemployed, have used up their savings and are unable to find jobs,” Good said.

Crossroads Ministry, which is one of the agencies receiving funds from the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund, also provides referrals to other community resources, classes in money management and energy efficiency for low-income residents, said program director Virgil Good. “We also are serving an increased number of people in catastrophic situations: months in arrears in their rent and utility payments, at risk for eviction and utility cutoffs, with serious medical issues and with few to no personal resources left.”

Crossroads Ministry was founded and continues to be sponsored and supported by the 15 churches of the Estes Valley. The agency, however, is not considered a church but a service organization. Annually, Crossroads provides about 6,000 food boxes for people to take home and use to prepare meals for their families.

The nonprofit helps those in about 250 households pay rent and another 325 households pay utility bills. The costs of prescriptions and other medical expenses are supported for about 200 households, and more than 400 households receive gasoline costs for essential travel.

Additionally, Crossroads provide families with clothing, household goods, laundry and shower essentials. Good remembers a couple who came for help: “(An) elderly couple came for assistance on a below-zero evening. She had a serious cancer condition. They were without insurance.

“To pay treatment costs, they had sold first their business and then their home,” Good said. “They were living in a camper and running electric heaters to keep from freezing. They were out of food.

“Crossroads referred the wife for disability benefits, provided food and gave assistance with other basic living costs until they began to receive disability assistance,” Good said.

Crossroads Ministry provides short-term assistance to low income people, ongoing services to people on low fixed incomes and encourages self-sufficiency through educational opportunities. In November, Crossroads Ministry is seeing up to 31 families and individuals per day, Good said. “I think of the young mom with two children who worked at a low wage job,” Good said. “She could not afford both to buy groceries and to pay for child care for the hours she was working. Weekly, we provided her with a quantity of food, reducing her grocery costs. She then was able to pay for child care. “Later, her car broke down and she was worried how she would get to work,” Good said. “Crossroads Ministry helped with the car repair costs and she did not miss any work.”

Those who work for Crossroads Ministry dedicate time and passion for those who need help with the essentials in their lives. Because of people such as Good and volunteers at Crossroads, people are cared for and find hope once they step through the door.

Alex Gustafson is a Colorado State University student who wrote this story on behalf of the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund.

NORTHERN COLORADO EMPTY STOCKING FUND

Since its founding in 2007, the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund has raised over \$333,000 to support health and human service agencies in Larimer and Weld County. With matching funds provided by El Pomar Foundation, every dollar grows by 33 percent. United Ways of Larimer and Weld County cover all administrative costs for the campaign, meaning every dollar donated goes directly to the recipient organizations. This year's recipient agencies include: Catholic Charities of Larimer County, Catholic Charities of Weld County, Connections for Independent Living, Crossroads Ministry of Estes Park, Food Bank of Larimer County, Greeley Transitional House, House of Neighborly Service, and Weld Food Bank. For more information, please visit www.nocoemptystocking.org