

Empty Stocking Fund: Senior finds salvation through Catholic Charities of Weld County

By Meagan Birely
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At 77 years old, Loretta Shaklee of Greeley found herself in a position she wasn't quite used to. She needed help. And she needed it quick. Shaklee's husband died four years ago. Between trying to pay off his medical bills and her own bills, she lost their house. She moved into an apartment but the rent was raised, and she struggled to afford it along with her \$400 monthly prescriptions and costly, weekly doctor visits for her heart condition. Someone mentioned to her that she should call Catholic Charities of Weld County. So, without knowing what to expect, she did. "And boy they were there in a heartbeat," Shaklee said. Catholic Charities of Weld County provides many services including the Guadalupe Shelter, emergency assistance and a safe and stable families program. It is also one of eight agencies receiving help from the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund, which provides resources for local human service agencies dedicated to helping community members struggling to meet basic needs. One of its branches of service offers help for seniors. "It can be anything from helping a client fill out an application for LEAP (Low-Income Energy Assistance Program) or more extensive case management," said senior service coordinator Connie Hermann, who has about 65 clients.

Or as Shaklee puts it, they cover her life. "If I need anything I call Connie, and she's there," Shaklee said. "Without them, I couldn't have survived this month." Shaklee's expenses were further complicated this month when she got pneumonia. Catholic Charities helped her pay this month's rent to keep her from being evicted and helped her pick out a cheaper prescription drug plan. Hermann also encouraged her to move into subsidized housing. "It just takes a lift off of you," Shaklee said. "I have nothing but good to say about them. I think the Catholic Charities is a wonderful, wonderful organization and some day when I win the Lotto I'm going to give them lots of money." She said Hermann is her angel. And Hermann thinks a lot of her, too. "I just really, really enjoy being around seniors and, of course, Loretta is a special lady," Hermann said. "It's a really good fit for me as far as my job goes. I'm around people I really enjoy being around."