

By Bridgett Weaver
For The Tribune

Sonia Gonzales saw her life start to crumble last year. After getting laid off from a job she loved, she couldn't afford to put a roof over her family's head. With help from friends and the Greeley Transitional House, she has pulled herself back together during the year and found a job and an apartment. Gonzales, 42, moved into the Transitional House in September 2010 with her daughter. "Living at the Transitional House was great," Gonzales said. "Everyone from the staff to the others living there were very supportive."

After only a few weeks there, Gonzales found a job and started saving money. She moved out at the very beginning of January 2011. The Transitional House has 12 bedrooms that each house one family that is in need of help to get back on its feet. While in the Transitional House, clients are expected to go out daily looking for a job, and children are required to study and go to school. "We're not just a band-aid," said Jodi Hartmann, executive director of the Transitional House. "We're a comprehensive program that is designed to help families leave homelessness permanently." The Greeley Transitional House is one of the eight nonprofits that will benefit from the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund this year. Clients are also asked to take classes while staying at the house as part of the program.

The classes are designed to help clients learn how to achieve independence and how to maintain it. "The classes they offered were very helpful," Gonzales said. The classes include everything from nutrition and finance to healthy cooking and proper budgeting to parenting and relationship classes that teach people how to build healthy relationships both within their own families and outside of them. The Transitional House also takes care of the children staying there by having staff members there specifically to talk to them and help them work through the worries of homelessness. Gonzales said she was thankful for the work the child advocate did with her daughter. "It was a very hard time for my daughter," Gonzales said. The child advocate "helped me quite a bit because she was beginning to fall apart on me." Gonzales had also received help from the Transitional House in 2000 and thought she would never need it again because she had been back on her feet for 10 solid years. "I hope I'm not back in another 10 years," she said. "If the recession wouldn't have hit, I don't think I would have been here again." Gonzales is part of the Champions program, which offers a case worker to help the clients for two years after they move out.

Gonzales meets her case worker monthly to discuss worries about the present and future. "Anything that might knock us down, like a medical emergency," Gonzales said. "That's what she's there to help with so that we don't become homeless again."