

January 5, 2010

## Agencies display proven record of aid

BY SARA B. HANSEN

*SaraHansen@coloradoan.com*

Pathways Past Poverty provided money to prominent agencies in 2009 in an effort to showcase best practices for helping move people from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Pathways Past Poverty, an initiative of the United Way of Larimer County, provided \$35,000 for The Matthews House and \$50,000 to Project Self-Sufficiency.

Both agencies have a proven record of helping people become self-sufficient, said Marija Weeden-Osborn, Pathways Past Poverty coordinator and community investment associate.

The goal is to help them expand their reach, Weeden-Osborn said.

"When we look at this thing, we can show that we can move more people than Matthews House or Project Self-Sufficiency on their own," she said.

Matthews House serves 16- to 21-year-old residents who are aging out of the foster-care system and youths on parole who have virtually no family.

Project Self-Sufficiency helps low-income, single parents achieve economic independence by assisting with education, housing, child care, transportation, employment and health.

Matthews House first assesses the physical and mental-health needs, housing needs, employment experience, education and life skills of its clients, said Jerri Howe, executive director.

Then it works to create a program for participants and meets weekly with them to discuss their goals.

"We're not what I call a flop house," Howe said. "Don't just come expecting handouts."

The goal is to get the children to see they have a future outside of survival mode, Howe said. And Matthews House does that by getting its clients to help create an independent living plan.

The agency helps with finding housing, internships, apprenticeships and jobs.

Matthews House has the staff to work with 65 to 70 people at a time and tries to keep a balance of 16 to 20 participants for each staff member so they can build relationships, Howe said, and really work to help the clients develop solutions.

The agency also relies on volunteers.

"We have art teachers, music teachers, sewing instructors and more come to Matthews House to volunteer," Howe said. "The youths see these community members donating time, and they see that

sense of community. It means so much for them to see that people care for you even if they aren't being paid to care for you."

Mary Carraher, Project Self-Sufficiency executive director, said her agency can serve as a model to show best practices for moving people from poverty to self-sufficiency.

"We've developed methods over a 23-year period that show we are successful at getting people out of poverty," Carraher said. "We have a commitment to put in writing a description of our services so that if someone else wanted to replicate what we are doing, there would be a cookbook or recipe for what we do."

Project Self-Sufficiency provides its clients education and career development, guidance and support, practical resources and children's programs.

The methods Project Self-Sufficiency has developed might work, but they aren't short-term solutions, Carraher said.

The goal is to help people secure living-wage employment, but most of the clients the program works with don't have the skills or education to secure that kind of job and keep it, Carraher said.

"We want to help them put together a plan and then break it into manageable steps to help them get from the place where they are now - not able to pay bills, support their children - to the place where they can pay their bills, take a vacation, have life insurance. In other words, have a normal middle-class existence. For most of them, that means going back to school."

## Additional Facts

### Want to help?

> **Matthews House:** Donate at online at [www.the.matthewshouse.org/html/donate.html](http://www.the.matthewshouse.org/html/donate.html). Send checks to 726 Mathews St., Fort Collins, CO 80524.

> **Project Self-Sufficiency:** Donate online at [www.ps-s.org](http://www.ps-s.org). Send checks to 1000 Centre Ave., Suite 150, Fort Collins, CO 80526

> **United Way of Larimer County:** Donate online at [www.uwaylc.org/donate.html](http://www.uwaylc.org/donate.html). Send checks to United Way of Larimer County, 424 Pine St., No. 102, Fort Collins, CO 80524.