



## SOUTHEAST COLORADO RURAL PHILANTHROPY DAYS

### LISTENING TOUR REPORT

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## Executive Summary

The Southeast Colorado Rural Philanthropy Days (SERPD) Listening Tour allowed executive level staff from statewide grantmaking foundations to learn more about the broad challenges and issues facing Southeast Colorado communities. The SERPD region is comprised of eight counties<sup>1</sup>. The Tour was conducted in preparation for the SERPD Conference, which is scheduled for September 24-26, 2014 in Trinidad, Colorado.

**Where did we go?** The Listening Tour took place on April 28-30, 2014. The delegation visited seven counties, hosting meetings in Walsenburg, Trinidad, Ordway, La Junta, Fort Lyon, Lamar, and Springfield. The Kiowa County meeting was held via teleconference due to severe weather. The delegation also visited the Ludlow Massacre Memorial site south of Walsenburg, met with *El Corazón de Trinidad* Creative District representatives in Trinidad and toured the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community.

**What did we do?** In open discussions, community leaders described the region's character, existing needs, and efforts currently underway to address them. Representatives working in the arts and culture, business and economic development, education, agriculture and environment, government, health care, and housing sectors participated.

**What did we hear?** While there are clear differences among communities in the region, there are also many similarities. A number of participants used the same terms to describe the character of the region and its inhabitants: *supportive and welcoming, tight-knit, fiercely independent, traditional, diverse, and resilient*. At each stop on the tour, participants also spoke of five common regional needs: economic diversity and job creation; improved health resources (specifically provider access, behavioral health care, and substance abuse prevention and treatment); youth and community recreational opportunities; alternative and vocational education; and public transportation.

**What is next?** Each of the regional needs explored in this report is important and significant. The SERPD Listening Tour delegation selected two issues to explore in greater depth at the upcoming SERPD conference, given the sufficient groundwork that exists to aid in advancing community solutions. They include:

- 1) **Workforce Readiness:** Supporting Local Industry through Vocational and Alternative Education, and
- 2) **Downtown Revitalization:** Preserving History and Community on Main Street.

On September 25, 2014, the second day of the SERPD conference, the Steering Committee will convene a gathering of executive directors, topic experts, funders, and state and local government officials to foster collaborative dialogue and opportunities for regional success. Representatives from approximately 20 Colorado foundations will join the discussion on the topic that most resonates with their funding priorities and interests. Participants will identify potential resources and discuss regional successes and challenges, learning from their local counterparts as well as statewide experts and stakeholders. This session will explore vital regional partnerships and potential collaborative solutions. The sessions are designed to strengthen relationships and encourage dialogue across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries. Recommendations will be summarized and added to this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Baca, Bent, Crowley, Huerfano, Kiowa, Las Animas, Otero, and Prowers counties

## Introduction

The purpose of the Southeast Rural Philanthropy Days (SERPD) Listening Tour, which took place from April 28-30, 2014, was to provide an opportunity for executive level staff from statewide grantmaking foundations to learn more about the broad challenges and issues facing Southeast Colorado communities. On November 28, 2012, at a Rural Funders' Forum hosted by Sue Anschutz-Rodgers, Chair and President of the Anschutz Family Foundation, funders expressed a desire to better understand the region's overarching needs and the actions underway to address these issues prior to attending a RPD conference. The Listening Tour concept was developed as a means to address this information gap so that grantmakers would arrive at a RPD conference better prepared to collaborate with nonprofit organizations and local governments to support community needs.

Chris Wiant, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Caring for Colorado Foundation, and Susan Steele, Executive Director of the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, co-chaired the SERPD Listening Tour. In addition, senior leaders from Anschutz Family Foundation, The Colorado Trust, and representatives from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Serve Colorado—the Governor's Commission on Community Service, the Community Resource Center, and SERPD Steering Committee members attended the tour (Appendix B).

The goal of the Listening Tour was to allow funders to hear from community leaders—in open discussions—about the characteristics of the region, existing needs, and efforts currently underway to address them. Two primary questions were asked at each meeting:

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**1. How would you describe the personality and culture of your community?**

**2. What do you see as a key issue or need in your community?**

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The SERPD Steering Committee organized and hosted the Listening Tour with substantial support from the local nonprofit community, including: the Bent County Development Foundation, Crowley County Chamber of Commerce, Partners for HOPE Center, Inspiration Field, the National Park Service, Southeast Colorado Hospital District, Spanish Peaks Library District, and Trinidad State Junior College (Appendix C). Community leaders working in the arts and culture, business and economic development, education, agriculture and environment, government, health care, and affordable housing sectors were invited (Appendix D). The delegation met with more than 120 people across eight meetings. It visited one community in each of the seven counties: Walsenburg (Huerfano), Trinidad (Las Animas), Ordway (Crowley), La Junta (Otero), Fort Lyon (Bent), Lamar (Prowers), and Springfield (Baca). The Kiowa County meeting was held via teleconference due to severe weather. The Listening Tour delegation also visited the Ludlow Massacre Memorial site south of Walsenburg, met with *El Corazón de Trinidad* Creative District representatives in Trinidad, and toured the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community.

This report summarizes the community characteristics, issues, and needs that were heard in these meetings. It is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of all regional characteristics and needs.

## Characteristics of Colorado's Southeast Region

### **Supportive and Welcoming Communities**

While the Southeast region is not rich in financial resources, local communities are enriched by hard working residents that are committed to helping each other in the face of adversity. The success of each community is dependent upon the tight-knit relationships that residents have developed over multiple generations and which foster strong commitments to others' well-being. Struggles are commonplace and these communities encourage neighbors to help neighbors. There is a common sense of volunteerism and community engagement, with citizens contributing an enormous amount of resources, time, and energy for the betterment of their communities and one another. A common sentiment exists among many of the region's communities that Southeast Colorado is a great place to raise children. Families are devoted to educating their children and the region's K-12 education system appears strong, with few exceptions. Of the twenty-six school districts in the region, 18 have graduation rates above 80 percent. The state average was 76.9 percent in 2013. Despite economic hardship, Southeast Colorado communities have remained strong throughout history.

### **Rich History and Agricultural Tradition**

A core group of the region's residents are descendants of original homesteaders, whose families have lived in Southeast Colorado for multiple generations. These homesteaders and miners migrated to this part of the state at the turn of the century, during a time when agricultural, ranching, and mining resources were rich. A strong Hispanic culture exists, with six of the eight counties having a Hispanic population between 30 to 45 percent. Currently, the region's agrarian-based economy is severely affected by drought and a decline in several primary industries due to the closure of mines and an expanding international commodities market. Nevertheless, the region's agricultural tradition and pioneering spirit result in a strong work ethic. These values encourage resiliency, self-reliance, and a "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps" mentality. There was a generally recognized sentiment that: "We are always buckled down. Things do not get worse here when they are bad in the state because they are always bad." Yet these survivors, or descendants of survivors, of the Dust Bowl are eternal optimists who believe their future can be as vibrant as their past.

### **Journey towards Creating a New Future**

Southeast Colorado is trying to diversify its agricultural and traditional resource extraction economies to include a new economy based on tourism and other service sector industries. The cyclical and drought-stressed agricultural, ranching, and post-boom mining industries have resulted in a loss of identity and the depopulation of many communities. These economic issues are driving communities toward collaboration and away from independence. There is a general movement towards seeking creative business and tourism opportunities that take advantage of the region's unique features and history, which currently are not widely or cohesively marketed. For example, *El Corazón de Trinidad* Creative District is working to revitalize downtown Trinidad by supporting creative businesses, defined in part as those businesses which have been able to survive despite continuing economic hardship. The need for water conservation—which is a pervasive and common threat to local families and businesses and which requires money and collaboration to solve—has united certain communities.

## Cross-Cutting Regional Issues

### Economic Diversity and Job Creation

There is an immediate need for **Downtown Redevelopment and Main Street Revitalization** projects throughout the region's cities and towns. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Main Streets of Southeast Colorado were bustling commerce and activity centers. Today, various vacant buildings line the streets of many downtowns. Due to a lack of retail shopping, potential weekend commerce is regularly redirected to Pueblo and Colorado Springs. It is often challenging to operate a farm or ranch without easy access to parts and supplies. For example, in Baca County, "Owners of green tractors can go to Walsh, but red tractor owners need to go to Kansas." There is a common sentiment that it would be advantageous to educate community members about the existing resources that are available to improve downtown viability and repurpose existing spaces. Capacity gaps to design and implement redevelopment plans are also an issue. Updating central downtown space is key to attracting young families and wage earners back into the region.

**Vacant, historic buildings pose a challenge and an opportunity to each community.** Many towns are looking to capitalize on their inventory of historic buildings. Yet, these old structures are often vacant and neglected. For example, the City of Trinidad has a 60 percent occupancy deficit on the ground floor of its downtown buildings. This rate rises to 80 percent on the top floor. Rehabilitating this footprint can help revitalize downtown but requires extensive capital, substantial local government and community support, and a willingness to take risks. Independent contractors or vocational school groups could support these projects. Durango and Salida serve as examples of cities where this goal is being successfully achieved.

**A strong desire among all sectors to revitalize each community to make it a more appealing place.** There is a general willingness to redevelop unused buildings into new multi-use spaces and community centers. Two successful examples of repurposed buildings that are now thriving community spaces include the Bent County/Las Animas Community Center and the Famous Performing Arts Center in Trinidad. There is also an opportunity to repurpose unused railways into bike paths using a suggested "Rails to Trails" model. Throughout the region, grassroots citizen efforts to renovate town centers, when supported by local and state government, are creating economic and community opportunity. Some of these projects include:

- ***El Corazón de Trinidad Creative District***, which is a designation focused on the belief that if the downtown heart of Trinidad can be saved, the greater body of the city will thrive. The designation as a certified district, one of eight in the state, led to Urban Renewal Authority status and Main Street candidacy.
- **Huerfano County's Town of La Veta**, with its hardy 700-person artist colony and six galleries, has the potential to follow Trinidad in obtaining a Creative District designation. Inexpensive housing and studios are attracting artists to relocate from outside the region and are supporting downtown re-development. An Arts Council was formed, but it lacks the capacity to submit a Creative District application.
- **The Pedal of the Plains Bike Tour**, which rallied the small community of Eads to prepare its Main Street for thousands of visitors. Collaboration between city and county government, state agencies, historic preservation groups, business leaders, and local community members has made it possible to update some of the community's remaining historic buildings. These buildings will serve community needs and function "as a vehicle for new social activity and sustainable employment in Eads."

**Additional capacity is needed to move potential revitalization projects forward.** There are a thinly spread number of professionals in the region, as the younger generations typically do not return after college. Additional grant writers and planners are needed. A lack of modern housing and amenities poses an additional challenge to workforce recruitment efforts.

**Heritage tourism is seen as an economic opportunity throughout the region.** The region has a unique place in America's history. Economic development ventures to promote these stories can attract and keep visitors in the region and provide opportunities to infuse outside dollars into the economy. However, it is challenging for many communities to prioritize the spending of their scarce capital to invest in tourism infrastructure before the visitor base is established. For example:

- The U.S. National Park Service (NPS) recently opened facilities at the **Sand Creek Massacre National Historic site**, outside of Eads. The site was authorized by Public Law 106-465 in 2000, in order to "*recognize the national significance of the massacre in American history, and its ongoing significance to the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the descendants of the massacre victims.*" The law authorized establishment of the site once the NPS obtained sufficient land from willing sellers to preserve, commemorate, and interpret the massacre. The site currently welcomes about 5,000 visitors/year. The NPS estimates that 30,000 visitors/year can be attracted with increased marketing and visitor services.

**The region's size, diverse landscapes (mountains to plains) and economies (natural resource extraction to agriculture), creates a challenge in establishing and branding a regional identity in an area comprised of insular and independent communities.** While economic and tourism offices have begun this task, there is an immediate need to bring the many communities of this vast region together to shape a future that is less dependent on natural resource extraction. Tough questions must be commonly addressed, such as: *Who are we? Where are we headed? What resources do we need to get there? What large redevelopment projects need to be brought in? What are the existing barriers? What aspects of history, athletics, arts and the natural environment can be marketed?* To be successful, economic development strategies should serve the region, as well as individual town and county missions. Efforts toward accomplishing this goal include:

- **The Canyons & Plains of Southeast Colorado Regional Heritage Taskforce** is a six-county<sup>2</sup> organization that provides education and assistance to the public on the unique historical and cultural assets of the region. Its composition includes local elected officials, preservation commissioners, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, tourism-related businesses, the Colorado Welcome Center, the National Park Service, Colorado State Parks, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and interested citizens.
- **The Southeast Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction (SEBREA)** program assists area businesses in finding the financial and operational support needed to thrive in the region. It is governed by a board of directors representing county agencies, economic development organizations, and funding and resource partners. The board meets monthly to discuss the economic conditions of the region, receive progress updates on initiatives and make decisions on future courses of action.
- **The USDA Rural Development Stronger Economies Together** program has worked with Colorado's Las Animas and Huerfano counties and New Mexico's Colfax County to create a Raton Basin Regional

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<sup>2</sup> Baca, Bent, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero, Prowers, and east Las Animas

Economic Development plan. It sets forth a comprehensive economic strategy based on common strengths, as well as stand-alone strategies for each county.

- **Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community**, in Bent County, has revitalized a vacant space and brought new jobs to the community. For more information, please see the Bent County Case Study in Appendix A.

**An immediate need to diversify the region's economic base because "we cannot make it rain."** A prolonged drought, a lack of irrigation water, water rights controversies and sales, and a rise in the purchase of international agricultural commodities, have led to the decline of the agricultural and ranching sector, which is still the region's largest economic driver. For example, Crowley County, which had approximately 50,000 farmed acres several decades ago, is down to 3,500 farmed acres today. As a result of this shift, there is significant willingness and effort to develop employment opportunities that are not based on agriculture.

**Most of the region's current non-agricultural jobs are centered on health services, government, private prisons, and education.** State and private prisons were brought to many counties as a solution to supplement the lost tax base from declining agricultural profitability. While this economic endeavor did bring jobs, the state facilities do not pay taxes and the employees often do not buy goods and services locally. The private prison in Crowley County comprises 54 percent of the tax base. Similarly, the Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center employs 50 percent of the working population in Huerfano County. These stimulus situations allow for unsustainable growth and single sector dependency. Prowers and Baca counties invested heavily in the panacea of wind energy, but landowners are limited in their ability to capitalize on this abundant natural resource due to long distances from transmission substations. Efforts to recruit telecommuters and small businesses have also proved challenging because of distance from services and lack of amenities.

**Slowing the relocation of young families out of the region due to lack of job diversity and opportunity is a common desire.** Each county has experienced a tremendous population loss in the last few decades, ranging from 15 to 30 percent. This drop is centered on the "key wage-earner" age bracket of 18 to 54 years old, which is causing the qualified workforce to diminish rapidly and significantly. The region's lackluster economy cannot attract young people back after college. A common sentiment was, "If we are successful in education, that success leaves the community. We want our children to come back as educated citizens and to support the community." In a region where a healthy community is defined by hearing laughing children in the streets, school enrollment is declining. Listening Tour participants recognized that young families are looking for strong education systems, quality health care, and good jobs, as well as entertainment, cultural, and shopping amenities. There is a desire to fund educational programs that continue to expand a child's vision but also that help them understand that you do not have to leave town to realize a dream.

**The effects of generational poverty are overwhelming the region's social service infrastructure.** A high number of non-working, low income individuals and families are moving into the region because of the low cost of living and strong social welfare system. These new residents are able to access local social services and welfare programs but are often unemployable or unemployed, have large families, cannot afford to pay rent, lack transportation, and have no family or connections in the community. There is also a significant "transient" population that has little work experience, connections, or networks. It is difficult to engage these populations in programs that allow them to receive needed services, including medical and dental. The free and reduced lunch rates are high in nearly every county. Typically, up to one-third of children are raised by families in poverty. Over 25 percent of families participate in assistance programs in Huerfano County and 18 to 20 percent in Prowers County. Generational poverty is a social determinant for many issues, including teen pregnancy, school dropouts, low graduation rates,



unemployment, low paying jobs, and generational fatherlessness. Prowers County has had one of the highest teen birth rates in Colorado for some time. Individuals frequently go to the Department of Human Services with limited, if any, financial literacy skills.

**An immediate need to improve the region's substandard housing inventory.** The region's housing stock is aging, and small railroad and "Sears" homes are common. Many single family homes have not been updated since they were built in the early 1900's and are in such disrepair that they are not worth renovating. This situation causes many problems. For example, old electrical wiring recently caused at least three homes to burn down in Huerfano County. Additionally, young families often cannot obtain homeowners insurance or mortgage loans because the existing housing inventory is often too old and in too much disrepair to qualify. Unfortunately, because of the economic concerns outlined above, it is very difficult to motivate private enterprise to invest in developing new housing stock in the lower Arkansas Valley. There are also a limited number of housing rentals. While there are some organizations providing affordable housing options and resource navigation, there remains a deficit of service providers. For example, there is no Habitat for Humanity operating east of Las Animas County. However, the Tri-County Housing Authority of Bent, Crowley, and Otero Counties is successfully working to provide affordable housing to area residents, manage several apartment complexes, and provide funding for rehabilitation. Until this problem is addressed, the attraction of new industries will remain a challenge.

**Maintaining municipal infrastructure through economic decline is proving challenging.** Extremely small communities like Two Buttes (population 37) are held to the same regulations as other communities throughout the state, even though they cannot afford the upkeep of such infrastructure. For example, they must maintain a water treatment system and a landfill that meet the same codes as large cities and provide routine and adequate testing. Similarly, Otero County maintains a regional landfill site for four counties but is challenged to meet Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's drinking water quality standards. Water processing system upgrades are very expensive and there is a struggle to meet other basic needs.

### Improved Health Resources

There is a strong county-by-county network of rural hospitals and medical service providers. Southeast Health Group and Valley-Wide Health System are major regional providers. General health care services are often accessible, but non-compliance with medication and appointments is an issue. There is also a challenge to provide quality care that is focused on behavioral health, substance abuse treatment and prevention, and wellness. Additionally, most specialists are located outside of the region and may only visit once per month. Many aging residents do not have access to reliable transportation for appointments and rely on volunteer and family support. It is difficult to attract general practitioners and nurses to the region. This results in expenses to the patient and a loss to the local economy. Additional challenges to providing high quality, local health care include:

**Access to providers is limited in many counties and requires extensive travel.** In Baca County, there are very few service providers. There is no obstetrician/gynecologist, and there are limited opportunities for telemedicine services. There is only one pharmacy. This dearth of services requires many residents to travel to nearby clinics in Kansas for medical treatment, but Medicare/Medicaid often require patients seek treatment in Colorado. There is a high number of emergency room visits in every county in the region, which results in higher expenses for both the provider and the user. The Mount San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad has provided over \$10 million in charity care in the past three years, which has resulted in significant operating losses. The community of Walsh passed a mill levy to update health care equipment, but still cannot afford it. This budgeting challenge does not allow a

substantial financial allocation for wellness care. There is a desire for more local wellness programs to improve walkability and biking opportunities. There is a strong presence of LiveWell Colorado and certain specialty providers exist, such as the Mount Carmel Health, Wellness, and Community Center in Trinidad, but these opportunities are not widely available throughout the region. Additionally, projects such as the Healthy Places Initiative work in collaboration to improve built environment and create opportunities for citizens to be healthy.

There is often an issue of parental non-compliance and non-participation in school and community based programs and resources. There is a high no-show rate for school wellness checks. School nurses, whom often work part-time with no assistance, frequently serve as the primary caregivers for low-income children. Yet, school-based health programs are being cut throughout the region. The Lamar High School center was active for five years but closed due to a loss of funding and a lack of community support. The Baca County School District also cannot provide on-site health care.

The region's aging population is dependent on a volunteer base to provide transportation to most medical appointments, including local trips and those to Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo. The majority of health care providers own their practices and therefore cannot easily access grants to support the upgrade and purchase of equipment. The Eads Medical Clinic nearly closed its doors last year when both physician assistants were no longer available. After a major cut back on services, the community rallied to keep it open. The number of new clients increased by 35 percent in one year. The clinic is considered a cornerstone of the town and is its number one employer.

**Providing behavioral healthcare strains local resources and is often nonexistent for youth.** Mental health patients often require the attention of at least two nurses and multiple law enforcement staff prior to being transferred to a facility. They are often held at a rural emergency room for up to 72 hours prior to relocation. The closest psychiatric beds are located in Pueblo, and it is very difficult to get a spot in the facility. If a patient cannot be placed elsewhere in the state, they may be sent home. School counselors, where they exist, are often not equipped to deal with major social and emotional issues. Families often will not seek out counseling for children. For example, in Crowley County, the school superintendent had to bring a child through truancy court to mandate counseling.

**Substance abuse is prevalent throughout the region with few dedicated resources available.** Assessments show that drug abuse and youth suicides are major issues. There is a rising incidence of teens using "hard narcotics," especially heroin and methamphetamines. Yet the overwhelming substance abuse issue for teens and adolescents is alcohol abuse. Nearly every county in the region has voted against medical marijuana dispensaries, which are commonly credited for spurring increased use of more illicit drugs. As a result of marijuana legalization, parents and children are often non-compliant with school and city rules and regulations. Recently, a six year old went to the hospital for marijuana intoxication. There is a recognized need for more education around substance abuse, especially for teens and adolescents. There are many third and fourth generation families with untreated abuse problems. The Crowley County Substance Abuse Coalition provides vouchers to those who need counseling, as recommended through the judicial system. In 2013, the coalition provided 50 vouchers within a population of 3,000 residents.

## Alternative and Vocational Education

**The region has three well-respected post-secondary institutions and several vocational educational schools:** Trinidad State Junior College (TSJC), Otero Junior College (OJC), and Lamar Community College (LCC). TSJC's nationally top-ranked gunsmithing program, established in 1947, continues to train gunsmiths and entrepreneurs across the nation and TSJC's line-tech program places graduates across the region. OJC's nursing and law enforcement programs are strong, with the former recognized as one of the best in the state. Both programs are successful in placing students with good paying, local jobs after graduation. OJC's leadership program prepares its most promising students to move on to a four-year institution. LCC is recognized as having one of the nation's premier equine programs. The school recently began offering an associate's degree in historic building preservation and technology.

The region's post-secondary school systems work to break the cycle of generational poverty by providing an affordable education close to home. There is a strong partnership between local high schools and community colleges within counties, but there appears to be little interaction among the three institutions, due to proximity. However, TSJC and OJC have worked collaboratively on multiple federal grants.

**Alternative educational resources are limited.** There is a dwindling availability of special needs services in the region's K-12 school system, even while many low-income children have severe developmental or learning disabilities. For example, in Crowley County, there are two special needs teachers that serve more than 50 children. Two years ago, in the same school system, three teachers served 30 children. Due to budget cuts, school districts are struggling to send students down alternate pathways to success when a traditional school environment proves ineffective. Additional vocational education programs, such as automobile repair and nursing home care, are needed for at-risk populations, specifically Hispanic males, who are often found to be at high risk for not graduating.

LCC's successful GED program was recently terminated because the college could not upgrade its systems to meet new state Department of Education standards and regulations. The program was previously recognized for its proven ability to provide tools to help individuals successfully overcome this main barrier to escaping the welfare system. Many students started the program through court ordered services. Obtaining their GED provided an alternative pathway to remaining in the judicial system. The new computer-based state mandate is a model that often does not work for GED learners who do not thrive in normal classroom settings. Throughout the region, it was heard that, "*[Adult education services] cannot make it rain and end the drought, but they can teach the region how to better use the rain. It cannot make our youth rich, but it will teach them to manage their money better.*"

**Early childhood education and child care opportunities are non-existent in some areas.** The only child care facility in Walsh, located in Baca County, had to close due to lack of funding and is currently trying to reopen. The only child care facility in Eads, located in Kiowa County, also recently closed its doors. The shortage of facilities that operate outside of business hours challenges parents who work evening and weekend shifts. Access to quality early childhood care and education is integral to future success. In April 2014, the Colorado Departments of Education and Human Services invested Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge funds for scholarships. As the demand for early childhood degrees is growing, both TSJC and OJC have participated in these scholarship challenge opportunities to help their students.

## Youth and Community Recreational Opportunities

The Future Farmers of America and 4-H programs are the region's major youth organizations. Outside of these opportunities and organized athletic programs, youth and community recreational opportunities are often "create your own." Where they exist, community and youth centers often serve as the center of town activity, but many are struggling to find funding to keep their doors open and expand programming. In these very traditional communities, people without a typical 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM work schedule are often challenged to find entertainment and services that are open in the evenings or on Sundays. When there are not games or events, youth are often seen hanging out on Main Street without anything to do. New recreation opportunities, such as pools and athletic fields, are sometimes seen as competing with industry by "taking water from agriculture."

Many small towns struggle to provide basic youth services, for example:

- The three schools in Baca County share one sports program.
- Outside of the Crowley County schools, there is no play area or community center for youth.
- There are limited summer activities for youth age eight to twelve, throughout the region.
- The City of Lamar has invested in a *Fourplex* baseball field complex for youth. Two fields have been complete, but the project is now on the back burner until additional funding is identified. Meanwhile, the community is often frustrated by the slow pace of the project.
- The citizens of Eads are planning to collaborate on a community wellness center that can meet economic development and health care needs. However, the pool, which is very popular in the summer, is in need of significant repairs. The community is also working to rehabilitate its theater building to provide a new source of entertainment and recreation.
- Varied youth programs in Las Animas County are available; however, the programs are not sustainable and securing funding is a continual challenge.

## County-wide and Regional Transportation

The Southeast region is comprised of geographically vast counties with small and dispersed population centers. Public transportation systems are generally seen as unviable given the inefficiencies of traveling large distances for services throughout the region. Many variations have been tried, with little success. On the other hand, volunteer programs and strong networks of families and friends, help transport residents to medical services. The Las Animas Helping Hands nonprofit provides 30-50 free transportation trips per month for health services. There is also a senior van in Bent County. There is no transportation service in Baca County. A lack of public transportation services is a huge barrier for low-income populations who need to access welfare services. Many low-income families with private vehicles cannot afford to pay for gas and often cannot cover the cost to drive their children to pre-school programs. Residents who are transported by ambulance to city centers often have no way of returning home after treatment.

## Next Steps

Each of the regional needs explored in this report is important and significant. The SERPD Listening Tour delegation selected two issues to explore in greater depth at the upcoming SERPD conference, given the sufficient groundwork that exists to aid in advancing community solutions. They include:

- 1) **Workforce Readiness:** Supporting Local Industry through Vocational and Alternative Education, and
- 2) **Downtown Revitalization:** Preserving History and Community on Main Street.

On September 25, 2014, the second day of the SERPD conference, the Steering Committee will convene a gathering of executive directors, topic experts, funders, and state and local government officials to foster collaborative dialogue and opportunities for regional success. Representatives from approximately 20 Colorado foundations will join the discussion on the topic that most resonates with their funding priorities and interests. Participants will identify potential resources and discuss regional successes and challenges, learning from their local counterparts as well as statewide experts and stakeholders. This session will explore vital regional partnerships and potential collaborative solutions. The sessions are designed to strengthen relationships and encourage dialogue across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries. Recommendations will be summarized and added to this report.

## Appendix A: Success Stories of the Southeast Region

### Baca County Case Study: Walsh Community Grocery Store, Inc.

#### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

On September 22, 2006, a terrible thing happened in Walsh. The local grocery store closed just a month after the community lost its pharmacy. The approximately 450 citizens were forced to travel 22 miles to the nearest grocery store for even the most basic of necessities. At times, even this was impossible, as the community suffered through two severe blizzards in December 2006 and January 2007 that left several feet of snow and poor road conditions for months.

The loss of the grocery store affected other businesses, the health care facility, and the school. It was harder to hire people to come to the community to live and work without being able to provide the basic needs. With the loss of two businesses in two months, the community decided to take action. Mayor Clarence Jones called a community meeting in October of 2006 to discuss what could be done. The answer was simple for this small, tight-knit community: “Let’s do it ourselves.”

#### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- A 5-person volunteer committee: Clarence Jones, Rick Mills, James Hume, Erroll Cook, and Judy Bezone
- La Junta Small Business
- Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade
- Baca County Commissioners
- National Resource Conservation Service
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs
- U.S. Department of Agricultural Rural Development
- Southeast Colorado Power Association

#### **3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?**

A community meeting was held in January 2007 with a great response and much enthusiasm. Different options of proceeding were discussed, and the majority wanted the store to be locally owned and operated. The hard work began with the community rallying together, investing, and donating over \$200,000—which came from more than 300 community members and businesses—to form the Walsh Community Grocery Store, Inc. These investments facilitated the purchase of the building and equipment and the building’s renovation. Volunteers were called to help with the work, providing many hours to get the building ready for groceries.

Persistence paid off, and on June 27, 2007, the Walsh Community Grocery Store opened for business. This is truly a community store, because community members invested time, effort, and money in order to own this store. Stock shares were sold at \$50 a share so that everyone had a chance to be an owner.

#### **4. How was the project financed?**

Southeast Colorado Powers Association became a part of the success story when, after surviving several delays along the way, the Association secured a \$160,000 zero percent interest loan through the USDA.

#### **5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?**

Today the store is thriving, staying open seven days a week, employing 18 part-time and full-time employees. Customers and new-comers alike love its fresh produce and meat, the cleanliness of the store, and its friendly employees. The store was even featured in People Magazine as *Heroes in Hard Times*, the Pueblo Chieftan, the Denver Post, USA Today, Skyland Grain, Colorado Country Life, Health Elevations, in a Heartland of America TV special, and in a story on National Public Radio.

The store replaced all the heating and air conditioning systems in 2013, without borrowing more money and has a goal to replace some older freezers and lighting in 2014. It just celebrated its 7<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, by serving 368 hot dogs, soda, cookies, watermelon, and homemade ice cream and featuring face painting, free swimming at the pool, turkey bowling, bubble blowing contests, sand fishing, piñatas, hanging off the town bucket truck, cheerleader line dancing, bake sales, a craft fair, and an art festival. The store is a success story because it cares about its customers.

#### **6. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Clarence Jones, President, Walsh Community Grocery Store, Inc.: 719-529-5479
- Helen Mills, Walsh Community Grocery Store, Inc.: 719-324-5421

## Bent County Case Study: Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community

### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

When the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) announced the decommissioning of the Fort Lyon Correctional Facility in 2010, Bent County immediately began working with the DOC and Governor Hickenlooper to explore ways to replace the lost jobs and mitigate the impact of the closure. After 14 months of struggling and not finding interest in the campus, Bent County offered to provide maintenance of the facility, if it was necessary, in order to find a tenant that could provide a service or benefit to the community. It was upon this offer for maintenance that the State began diligently looking at other options.

Meanwhile, and for a number of years, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless had operated various programs to address homelessness in the State. The idea to repurpose Fort Lyon to address homelessness was developed by Pat Coyle, Director of the Colorado Division of Housing, Bent County public officials, and the Coalition. They discussed the potential of creating, at Fort Lyon, a place where recovery-oriented transitional housing could be provided. They decided to combine these services with educational, vocational, and employment services for homeless Veterans and other chronic homeless individuals with substance abuse and mental health disorders.

### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- Bent County public officials
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
- Colorado Department of Corrections
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
- Colorado Governor Hickenlooper
- Colorado Division of Housing

### **3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?**

The project gained momentum through the many public meetings that were held, in which the partners explained the value of the project to the community, to Colorado Legislators, and to interested parties. Bent County was extremely involved in the legislative process, attending committee hearings and bringing the Joint Budget Committee and others to the campus.

### **4. How was the project financed?**

The project was initially funded through the Colorado General Fund and Mortgage Settlement dollars. Bent County has also contributed hundreds of thousands of General Fund dollars to the project.

### **5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?**

The State of Colorado retained ownership of the buildings and the 500+ acre campus and negotiated an agreement with Bent County for management of the property. The Coalition entered into an agreement with the State for



funding of programs and services and has additionally been awarded a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Grant (SAMHSA), and a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Grant, among others. Bent County employs 11 full-time maintenance staff at Fort Lyon, and the Coalition has approximately 40 employees.

The Fort Lyon project has met or surpassed all program benchmarks thus far, including participant enrollment, statewide access, and the implementation of on-site education and employment programming. Lives are being changed as the residents address the issues that kept them on the streets. These men and women are also obtaining education, acquiring skills, and mostly, finding hope and purpose. In terms of ongoing maintenance, both the Coalition and Bent County continue to pursue funding streams for the programs and for maintenance of the facility, including identifying additional tenants to lease some of the buildings and space on the campus, thereby reducing operating costs.

#### **6. What very specific steps would someone take to recreate the effort?**

The first ingredient to creating a similar project is local commitment. Bent County was willing to go above and beyond in its efforts and commitment of dollars and personnel to the project. The second ingredient is the strong partnerships that were formed in the development and implementation of the project. The partners were, and continue to be, creative in the exploration of possibilities.

This project was not originally sought out or welcomed. Local support rose out of the needs of a community that had been rocked by the closure of its largest employer. Faced with this problem, Bent County looked at a variety of options and was willing to work hard. The County forged strong relationships with State partners, particularly the Department of Local Affairs. The Coalition seized the opportunity to create a setting where homeless individuals could find stability, success, sobriety, and the ability to be contributing members of society.

#### **7. Who should I contact for more information?**

- James Ginsberg, Director, Fort Lyon: [james.ginsberg@coloradocoalition.org](mailto:james.ginsberg@coloradocoalition.org)
- Bent County Development Foundation: [bcdf@bentcounty.org](mailto:bcdf@bentcounty.org)

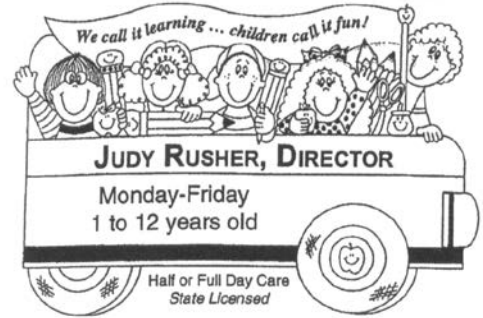
## Crowley County Case Study: Kids' Campus Preschool and Daycare Center

### 1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?

In 1997, the Crowley County Nursing Center completed a community assessment. The review stated that Crowley County would benefit from having a licensed childcare center, this spurred the development of Kids' Campus.

### 2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?

- Crowley County Nursing Center
- Crowley County Commissioners
- Crowley County Department of Human Services
- South Central BOCES
- Colorado Preschool Program



### 3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?

The Crowley County Nursing Center joined forces with the Crowley County Commissioners to research and open a childcare center to support the working families needing childcare services in Crowley County. Working together, they opened Kids' Campus in April 1999.

### 4. How was the project financed?

The funding to open Kids' Campus came from a Community Development Block Grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The Crowley County Department of Human Services also provided support. In 2000, Kids' Campus was able to secure Colorado Preschool Slots with the Crowley County School District. Kids' Campus also has a contract with South Central Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to serve children that have an Individual Education Plan.

### 5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?

Kids' Campus is currently funded by privately paying clients, the Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Colorado Preschool Program. Kids' Campus is also fortunate to have received grants from the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, the Daniels Fund, the El Pomar Foundation, and from the USDA Rural Development Program.

### 6. Who should I contact for more information?

- Judy Rusher, Director, Kids' Campus: 315 East 6th Street, Ordway; 719-267-3640

## Huerfano County Case Study: Spanish Peaks Library District Building Expansion Project

### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

When the Library District was formed in 1999 by a vote of the electorate, one of the promises made by the Friends of the Library was to expand the Children's area of the Library. After the initial efforts at organizing as a Library District, the Board of Trustees and the Library Director began to look for funding to expand the building that had housed the Library since 1951.

By the time the current Director arrived at the end of 2003, the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) had approved a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) with matching funds from several Colorado foundations, raised through the efforts of a paid grant writer. The Library hired an architect who quickly realized that the funds available could not do much to expand the facility or make the building handicapped accessible (one of the requirements of the CDBG grant). At about the same time, the local school district decided to raze the building housing the middle school on Walsen Avenue in order to put in a track and football field.

A group formed to stop this effort; members of the Save Our Schools (SOS) group contacted the State Historical Fund, which put them in contact with Colorado Preservation, Inc. Its staff worked for over a year to find funding to assess the building for other possible uses. In the meantime, the local DOLA representative suggested that the SOS group collaborate with the Library District and encourage the Board of Trustees to become an anchor tenant in the school building. This suggestion began an almost five-year project to rehabilitate the first floor of the Huerfano County High School for use as a public library.

### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- Library staff and Trustees
- Huerfano County Economic Development
- Save Our Schools committee
- Colorado Preservation, Inc.
- State Historical Fund
- City of Walsenburg
- Member of a local family who acted as Owner's Representative pro bono
- Voters of the Library District who approved a \$1.75 million dollar bond issue

### **3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?**

The project just kept moving: the architectural firm came and held public meetings and fundraisers, the newspapers published progress reports, and the Huerfano County Coalition attendees were regularly kept up-to-date on the project and its benefits to the entire community.

The Board of Trustees and the Library Director kept the project at the forefront of every conversation they had in the newspaper, at public meetings, and at City and County meetings. Spending two years talking with members of the community at the Coalition meetings about the project accomplished a great deal. Knowledgeable members of the community were able to talk about the project after hearing about it so often; they not only were able to convey accurate information, but also influence others.

#### **4. How was the project financed?**

The original fundraising for this project began when DOLA agreed to award CDBG funds of \$225,000, if the Library could match this amount. The Board of Trustees of the Library District had been saving funds for a building expansion project since becoming a district in 1999. The district hired a grant writer and by the fall of 2003, four Colorado foundations had agreed to help with the match: El Pomar Foundation, Adolph Coors Foundation, Boettcher Foundation, and Gates Family Foundation.

When the historic school building was suggested as a possible site for the new library facility, DOLA provided an Energy Impact Assistance Fund (EIAF) grant to fund a feasibility assessment. Colorado Preservation Inc. requested an emergency grant from the Colorado Historical Society of to purchase the building from the school district. DOLA was then able to award the project another \$225,000. As the project unfolded a number of other funding sources became available. Two additional grants were received from the State Historical Fund, an EIAF award for expansion to the second floor, grants from the Kenneth King Foundation, Anschutz Foundation, Kerr Foundation, and Virginia Hill Foundation, in addition to over \$40,000 in personal donations from current and former residents of the area. In August of 2007, the Board decided to go to the voters to authorize the issuance of general obligation bonds to complete the renovation of the building; the voters approved a bond of \$1,750,000, which obligated the citizens to pay for almost half of the final cost of the project over 20 years.

As the project became a reality, the Gates Family Foundation awarded the project an additional \$150,000; a USDA grant of \$25,000 was received to purchase furniture; and EIAF provided an additional \$60,000 to purchase new furnishings as well. A number of other in-kind donations were made during the course of the project and the library continues to receive small donations from friends and visitors.

#### **5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?**

The Library has continued to operate with the same mill levy funding that was approved in the 1998 vote to create the District. Considering the facility has tripled in size, the ability to continue to provide services with no increase in funding has been challenging. In the coming years, the Board of Trustees hopes to increase staff salaries and provide benefits. Public libraries provide vital services to their communities and continue to grow and change with the needs of the public. The citizens of Walsenburg and Huerfano County have proven their commitment to the Library and the need for its services.

#### **6. What very specific steps would someone take to recreate the effort?**

Rehabilitating a historic structure is a fairly unique process. Working with public agencies to secure funding is often tedious but in the end very rewarding. Reading about similar projects, talking with others who have been involved in similar efforts, and especially involving as many members of your community as possible to garner support are all important components.

#### **7. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Monica Birrer, Library Director, Spanish Peaks Library District  
415 Walsen Ave. Walsenburg, 81089; 719-738-2774; mbirrer@spld.org

## Kiowa County Case Study: High Plains Theater and CrowLuther Cultural Events Center

### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

Flashback to 2004, when students of Eads High School in Kiowa County were looking for a place to “hang out” and 75 percent of buildings on Maine Street in Eads were abandoned and in disrepair. The Sophomore Class initiated a campaign to re-open the movie theater. With the support of their principal, Betsy Barnett, and their English teacher, Mary Vasquez, the students began an amazing project to research other movie theaters in small communities that had re-opened, including in Holly, Holyoke, and Julesburg. The latter is a Rural Philanthropy Days success story. The students passionately put together a business plan, incorporating historic preservation, oral histories from Eads residents, and renovation guidelines from government agencies at the local and state level. The community embraced the business plan for The Plains Theater, and by May 2006, the CrowLuther Cultural Events Center (CLCEC) was established as a 501(c)(3). The project has worked since 2006 to renovate three historical buildings on Main Street in Eads. CLCEC also proposed the establishment of the Kiowa County Historic Preservation Commission, which has now added 30 properties to its register.

### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- Eads High School staff and students
- Save Our Screens (SOS) – Colorado Economic Development Office

### **3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?**

The Class of 2006 had no expertise with grant writing, preservation techniques, running a nonprofit, or the Secretary of the Interiors’ building preservation guidelines. Yet their rich legacy lives on today in The Plains Theater and CrowLuther Cultural Events Center. These students learned to think critically and create partnerships, and not surprisingly, they scored very highly on the State of Colorado’s assessment tests. They also influenced the classes that followed; the Class of 2008 won a Governor’s Award for its Samletown project, which became the basis for many Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) projects. High school students continue to manage marketing for the organization.

### **4. How was the project financed?**

CLCEC has procured nearly one million dollars in grants from federal, state, and private funders. In 2014, volunteers and community supporters raised \$65,000 to purchase a digital projector and new sound system. Several Colorado foundations and organizations supported the project, including the Boettcher Foundation, the Gates Family Foundation, and the Denver Film Society. CLCEC has also fundraised through community events, such as a 5K run, concerts, and street festivals like the Main Street Bash.

### **5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project’s future?**

The Plains Theater shows classic movies with educational benefit on “Throw-Back Thursdays” and first-run movies on weekend nights, and is also adding plays and documentaries to its future plans. The theater also provides group viewing opportunities for sports games, from the Superbowl to the Girls Basketball State Championships. When complete, the three-building complex will include not only the cultural center and theater, but a drama production stage, recording studio, internet café, meeting areas, a commercial kitchen, and office space. This multi-purpose facility will provide services for the entire community and begin the long process of transforming downtown Eads.

CLCEC is managed by a rotating Board of Directors, and continues to collaborate with other community groups, including the local school district and Artists of the Plains.

**6. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Marcia Will-Clifton, National Park Service: 970-690-1123; marcia\_will-clifton@nps.gov

## CrowLuther Cultural Events Center Happenings

By Sharon Johnson  
In addition to the Maine Street Bash and the Kiowa County Fair Dance, CLCEC will be helping to host (along with the Eads United Methodist Church and the NPS) the Rocky Mountain Methodist Conference Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Tour on Friday, June 20. The Plains Theater will host the informational portion of this tour by showing video presentations and welcoming historian and author Jeff Campbell to the stage. Over 650 people are expected for this event for whom we also will provide sack lunches before they visit the site. On July 11, in conjunction with the Colorado State Girls' 10U and 12U Softball Tournament, CLCEC will present another fun-filled Maine Street Bash. For \$7.00 adults and \$3.00 ages 12 and under (3 and under are free), from 5:00 PM until midnight, you can enjoy a variety of entertainment. Local musical groups JUDY and GLASS APPARATUS will perform on the CLCEC street stage. The beer garden will include Budweiser, Coors and various wine coolers while delicious food will be prepared by CLCEC's Charlie Vasquez. KidZone will include the always popular jail and water elements. Lots of vendors will be present for browsing and shopping. If you are interested in having a vendor booth, please contact Cindy McCloud (691-0784), Connie Shotton (691-5424), or Laurie Musgrave (438-5665). A Movie Festival will be ongoing in the Plains Theater throughout the event. And, the competitive horseshoe tournament can be entered by contacting Roland Sorensen (438-2177). CLCEC strives to provide a fun, family atmosphere, so please come, enjoy and greet our future softball STARS!

## Las Animas County Case Study: Corazón de Trinidad Creative District

### 1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?

Trinidad is located on the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, and at one time, boasted a population of 40,000. It is home to one of the largest collections of Victorian architecture west of the Mississippi, the state's oldest Community College, the longest continually functioning Jewish synagogue, and a Carnegie Library. The area has drawn a large group of artists, artisans, and creative residents, is a National Historic District, is one of eight Certified Colorado Creative Districts, and is a designated Main Street Community Candidate.

When Colorado Creative Industries (CCI) initiated the Creative District Program in 2011, Trinidad was ready to supplement its boom-and-bust natural resource industry with a more sustainable, year-round economic driver. The idea of the Creative District Program was presented at a number of City Council and open community meetings. The opportunity was embraced by local government, residents, artists, and business owners.

### 2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?

- Carol Bolton, business owner, very positive City Council member
- Louis Feinberg, City Planner, mountain climber
- Marilyn Leuszler, artist, outspoken community activist
- Tara Marshall, Assistant City Manager, organizer supreme
- Harriet Vaugois, Southern Colorado Repertory Theatre Executive Director, community cheerleader
- Jim Vigil, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Board Member, rancher

### 3. How did the project gain momentum?

Trinidad first applied for the Creative District status in January of 2012, along with 47 other communities across Colorado. The community was designated as an "Emerging Creative District" shortly after, and received full certification in July of 2013. *El Corazón de Trinidad* Creative District went through a Downtown Community Assessment which delivered over 50 recommendations for future improvement. Public meetings through the summer of 2013 helped the community determine the first four goals to pursue, including participation in the Main Street Program, run through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. These programs help to create an economically diverse business environment while highlighting local character and history. Trinidad received designation as a Main Street Community Candidate later in 2013.

### 4. How was community support developed?

Grass roots efforts, dedicated volunteers, and a never-give-up attitude drove the planning, application, and implementation stages. Numerous presentations to City and County government, the Trinidad Tourism Board, the Chamber of Commerce, nonprofit organizations, and other groups helped the project gain community support and momentum.

### 5. How was the project financed?

Initially, there was no funding from any source. The City Planner worked through the City of Trinidad, but there were no other paid employees or staff. At the point of initial application, the City was required to commit funding

should Trinidad be granted Creative District status. The City also provided a proclamation of support for the application. When Trinidad was recognized as one of the Emerging Creative Districts in 2012, the community was awarded \$15,000 and 30 hours of consulting, funded by Colorado Creative Industries. The City then contributed an additional \$5,000 to support the effort.

Downtown Colorado, Inc. was contracted to do a Community Assessment, which detailed over 50 recommendations. The Creative District Steering Team narrowed the Community Assessment recommendations to the top ten it felt could be implemented in a relatively short time frame and would provide visible, tangible, and positive results for the community. During a public meeting, a group of 85 participants voted on these goals, narrowing them to the top four. This assessment has since been used to develop the plan of action. When the Certified status was granted in June of 2013, \$25,000 was received from Colorado Creative Industries and \$10,000 from the Boettcher Foundation, plus another 30 hours of consultant time, which will be used in 2014.

#### **6. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?**

The 2014 funds are being used in partnership with the Southern Colorado Economic Development District (SCEDD) to develop a Façade Improvement Loan Program, which will allow local building owners to apply for \$5,000 and \$10,000 low-interest loans to improve building façades in the district. Creative District grants will be awarded upon completion of the projects to off-set the interest paid on the loans. Qualifying projects must focus on exterior improvement and may include signage, awnings, repointing of brick and stone, and paint. Consultant hours are currently being used for website and Creative District logo design, as well as Streetscape, Tactical Urbanism, and Wayfinding project development. Partnering with numerous entities within the community will help to ensure success and sustainability for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as part of economic growth. Existing funds will be leveraged and used as matches for additional grants. The Façade Improvement Loan Program will grow as loans are repaid and can continue in future years. Consultant hours are being used in ways that will benefit business owners, tourism, economic growth, and the community in general.

#### **7. What very specific steps would someone take to recreate the effort?**

An important first step is to evaluate the creativity of your community. What buildings and space illustrate your town's unique personality? Fostering community conversations on how creativity is an important part of what keeps a community alive will develop support and collaborative thinking. These conversations become a visualization the potential for re-birth and renewal. Continue to verbalize this vision and potential throughout the community. It is integral to pick one or two visible actions that can be taken with available resources in order to continue moving forward in a productive and viable manner. Encourage representation from diverse groups to develop clarity and unity around this mission. This vision will lead to a cohesive brand for the community. When this community support and vision is developed, it is important to establish an action plan that outlines key stakeholders, an achievable timeline, available resources, and other needs.

#### **8. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Marilyn Leuszler: [lmleuszler@aol.com](mailto:lmleuszler@aol.com)
- Tara Marshall, Assistant City Manager, City of Trinidad: [tara.marshall@trinidad.co.gov](mailto:tara.marshall@trinidad.co.gov)
- Harriet Vaugeois, Executive Director, Southern Colorado Repertory Theatre: [harriet@vaugeoisfamily.com](mailto:harriet@vaugeoisfamily.com)



## Otero County Case Study: Idea Center

### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

Otero County is home to a variety of collaborative projects that have utilized the resources of several entities – both nonprofit and governmental – to benefit its residents. One such project is the Idea Center in Rocky Ford. This business incubator was developed in 2008-2009 through the efforts of Otero Junior College and the City of Rocky Ford, with support from several project partners.

The Idea Center was conceptualized to provide a variety of benefits in the community of Rocky Ford that would have an impact on all of Otero County. The applicant, Otero Junior College, partnered with other key players in the county to develop a center that would: renovate a building in downtown Rocky Ford, which was experiencing an economic downturn; create a business incubator to help cultivate future businesses in the community; and provide housing outreach services that would assist in rehabilitation of community homes.

### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- Otero Junior College
- City of Rocky Ford
- Small Business Development Center
- Tri-County Housing and Community Development
- Rocky Ford Growth and Progress
- Rocky Ford School District

### **3. How was the project financed?**

The partners contributed matching funds (in-kind and cash) to ensure the success of the project. The project was funded in part through a \$600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Hispanic Serving Institutions Assisting Communities Program.

### **4. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project's future?**

Today, the facility is thriving. It is home to Canyons & Plains, Tri-County Housing, Palmer Land Trust, Small Business Development Center, and the Southeast office for Congressman Cory Gardner.

### **5. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Dee Quick, RSVP Director, Otero, Bent & Crowley Counties  
719.383.3164, dee.quick@state.co.us

## **Prowers County Case Study: KaBOOM! Project at Northside Park**

### **1. What was the inspiration for this project? How was it started?**

In April 2013, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) visited the City of Lamar in an effort to formulate recommendations to assist the community in creating a built environment that encouraged movement, connection, fun, and health. To ensure a community voice was heard in the development of the recommendations, interviews were set up for more than 70 residents, asking them for insight into community needs and barriers. Residents were also asked for input prior to the ULI visit—more than 100 residents participated in this process. During these resident conversations, the planning team identified a deep need for investing in the people and infrastructure of a specific neighborhood in community—the Northern neighborhood.

Lamar’s Northern neighborhood is one of the older parts of town. On average, the houses are significantly older, smaller, and of lower property value than those of the rest of Lamar. The neighborhood is lacking in sidewalks, it has many more abandoned houses than the rest of town, and some of its roads remain unpaved to this day. This is the primarily Hispanic part of town. It is, on average: poorer, more obese, more prone to chronic diseases, and less able to access healthy foods and exercise facilities. It is also on the opposite side of town from the community’s largest park, swimming pool, and baseball fields. Compared with other neighborhoods in Lamar, the children of this neighborhood have a real deficit of safe, inviting play areas.

### **2. Who were the key players that came to the table to make it happen?**

- City of Lamar
- Lamar Parks and Recreation Department
- The HOPE Center
- Lamar residents

### **3. How did the project gain momentum? How was community support developed?**

The revival of the Northside Park depended greatly on a dedication to partnerships and community involvement. LiveWell Prowers County is very active in partnership development and had established many relationships and successful projects with key partners for the KaBOOM! project.

Residents of Lamar also played a vital role. Throughout the project, the planning committee set a goal of using this project to connect with the community and elevate residents to leadership roles. The planning committee for the project was 50 percent organization representation and 50 percent resident representation. The committee identified resident champions who could go into the neighborhood that was home to the park and the broader community to extend a personal invitation to their family, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors to be part of the inspiring process of bringing this park back to life. This process was a success—on “build day” for the Northside Park, over 300 residents rolled up their sleeves to breathe life back into the community!

The planning team also made a commitment to involve youth in the process. By connecting with youth at the HOPE Center, an after-school program housed in the northern neighborhood, they were able to participate in designing the park and voting on the “side projects” that were incorporated, including a mural, painted stepping stones, benches, planters, and an outdoor chalkboard. By providing an opportunity for youth to take an active

role, the group identified many young leaders in the community. Youth rolled up their sleeves alongside adults to create a play space they would use and in which they would take pride.

The “secret ingredient” that made this park makeover such a success was that the process was not kept secret. To develop strong community support the planning group went TO the people. Its members took time to listen to people’s stories and desires connected to the neighborhood park. They walked door to door, inviting people to be part of the process. They created opportunities to provide input into the playground design and other projects within the park and worked to make a very personal connection with residents in the neighborhood and the broader community. Bottom line: the project was a success because it met a true need in the community and was a community-led process!

#### **4. How was the project financed?**

The park makeover was financed through KaBOOM! and its funding partner the Colorado Health Foundation. The community was responsible for contributing \$8,000 to the project. The planning group also raised an additional \$6,500 through the help of local foundations to add an additional swing set. This additional swing set was added in response to listening to resident feedback.

#### **5. How was the project maintained over time? What is the project’s future?**

Lamar Parks and Recreation assists in maintaining the new and improved Northside Park. However, because this project was so deeply rooted in the community, the 300+ residents that invested their time, energy, and passion into the project have strong ownership of and pride in the park. This has resulted in residents also committing to maintaining the park.

This project invigorated the community and KaBOOM! continues to build on its success. This model of community engagement will be used in all of KaBOOM!’s projects centered around creating a healthier, thriving community. Improvements at the Northside Park are not complete; the group continues to listen to community feedback on needs in the park and the Northern Neighborhood and will create action plans to respond to those needs. In March 2014, lights were added to the park in response to resident input that the park needed lights to extend the hours of playtime and enhance the safety of the park.

#### **6. What very specific steps would someone take to recreate the effort?**

An integral factor in creating this project was the investment of time and energy into partnership development. Community buy-in and support was important in the success of the renovation, and has made a large return on the initial investment. These community residents were essential partners in the project and are experts in the needs of their own community. The project also provided opportunities for residents to become leaders. Don’t make the mistake of expecting interested parties to approach you; it is important to go to them for their input.

#### **7. Who should I contact for more information?**

- Emily Nieschburg, LiveWell Prowers County Coordinator  
719-688-1265, livewellprowerscounty1@gmail.com

## Appendix B: Listening Tour Delegation

**Co-Chair: Susan Steele**

*Executive Director, Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation*

**Co-Chair: Chris Wiant**

*President and CEO, Caring for Colorado Foundation*

**Karen Brown**

*Board Member, Community Resource Center*

**Reeves Brown**

*Executive Director, Department of Local Affairs*

**Lindsay Dolce**

*Executive Director, Serve Colorado*

**Scott Downes**

*Southeast Regional Program Officer, The Colorado Trust*

**Randy Evetts**

*Senior Program Officer, Caring for Colorado Foundation*

**Maria Fabula**

*Chief Executive Officer, Community Resource Center*

**Rachel Harlow-Schalk**

*Financial Assistance Director, Division of Local Government (DOLA)*

**Lee Merkel**

*Southeast Regional Manager, Department of Local Affairs*

**Leah Rausch**

*Rural Philanthropy Days Program Manager, Community Resource Center*

**Linda Reiner**

*Vice President of Strategy and Communications, Caring for Colorado Foundation*

**Christina Supples**

*Rural Philanthropy Days Program Manager, Community Resource Center*

**Chantal Unfug**

*Director, Division of Local Government (DOLA)*

**Abel Wurmnest**

*Program Officer, Anschutz Family Foundation*

## Appendix C: Major Listening Tour Supporters

**Monica Birrer**

Library Director  
Spanish Peaks Library District

**Jennifer Bradley**

Walsh Healthcare Center

**Wendy Buxton-Andrade**

County Commissioner  
Prowers County

**Maria Cocchiarelli-Berger**

Owner/Curator  
Museum of Friends

**Johnnie DeLeon**

Executive Director  
Inspiration Field

**Alisha Hall**

Event Coordinator  
Southeast Rural Philanthropy Days

**Lori Hammer**

Executive Director  
Partners for HOPE Center

**Matt Heimerich**

President  
Crowley County Chamber of Commerce

**Kim MacDonnell**

Executive Director  
Bent County Development Foundation

**Linda Perry (SE RPD Co-Chair)**

Development Program Coordinator  
Trinidad State Junior College

**Dee Quick (SE RPD Co-Chair)**

Director of RSVP  
Otero, Bent and Crowley

**Elaine Riegel**

Development Manager  
Southeast Colorado Hospital

**Carmen Simone**

President  
Trinidad State Junior College

**John Sutherland**

City Administrator  
City of Lamar

**Harriet Vaugeois (SE RPD Co-Chair)**

Board Member  
Corazon de Trinidad Creative District

**Jim Vigil**

Board Member  
Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission

**Marcia Will-Clifton**

Park Ranger  
National Park Service

## Appendix D: Listening Tour Attendees

Tom Acre City Manager City of Trinidad	Jay Brooke Executive Director High Plains Community Health Center	Donna Emick Founder Second Chance Animal Rescue
Tobe Allumbaugh County Commissioner Crowley County	Jackie Brown Primary Care Director Southeast Mental Health Services	LeeAnn Fabec Administrator Las Animas County
Spike Ausmus County Commissioner Baca County	Cindy Campbell LiveWell Coordinator Spanish Peaks Outreach clinic	Dale Fuhrmeister Pastor Salvation Army, Homeless Shelter
Jim Baldwin County Commissioner Otero County	Tammi Clark Director of Health & Environment Prowers County Public Health	Karl Gabrielson Chief Operating Officer Mt. Carmel Health, Wellness, and Community Center
Sharon Barber President Bent County Health Care Advisory	Maria Cocchiarelli-Berger Owner/Curator Museum of Friends	John Galusha County Administrator Huerfano County
Leif Berg President First National Bank of Ordway	Caitlin Coffield Community Relations Manager Inspiration Field	Gary Gibson County Commissioner Crowley County
Monica Birrer Library Director Spanish Peaks Library District	Jim Collins Council Member Las Animas City Council	Lynden Gill County Commissioner Bent County
Steve Block Reporter Chronicle News	Bill Cordova Business manager Trinidad School District	James Ginsberg Director of Native American/Veterans Services, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
Art Bobian County Commissioner Huerfano County	Anne Marie Crampton Executive Director Lamar Community College Fnd.	Elsie Goines Principal Las Animas School District
Carol Boltor City Council Representative City of Trinidad	Scott Cuckow Superintendent Crowley County School District	Keith Goodwin County Commissioner Otero County
Kirsten Bonds Caseworker Department of Human Services	Gaye Davis Board Member Walsenburg Downtown Development	Frank Grant County Commissioner Crowley County
Jennifer Bradley Walsh Healthcare Center	Cecelia Deen Director of Nursing Southeast Colorado Hospital	Donna Haddow Executive Assistant Trinidad State Junior College
Doug Brgoch Mayor Town of La Veta	Beaver Edmundson Chair - Huerfano County Planning Commission	

Byron Hall  
Chief Probation Officer  
15th Judicial District

Rita Hetrick  
Administrator  
Walsh Healthcare Center

Candi Hill  
Publisher  
La Junta Tribune-Democrat

Lynn Horner  
Mayor  
City of La Junta

Sheila Hudson-Macchietto  
Director  
Huerfano County Social Services

James Hume  
Board Member / Rancher  
Walsh Community Grocery Store

Gerry Jenkins  
Board Chair  
Voces Unidas

Nikki Johnson  
Superintendent  
Campo School District

Dave Johnston  
City Administrator  
City of Walsenburg

Clarence Jones  
Store Director  
Walsh Community Grocery Store

Tyler Karney  
General Manager  
Ordway Feedyard LLC

Kaye Kasza  
Director  
Colorado State Univeristy Extension

Steve Keefer  
District Wildlife Manager  
Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Anthony LaTour  
Special Programs Director  
Department of Human Services

Bree Lessar  
Superintendent  
La Veta School District

Marilyn Leutzler  
Board President  
Corazon de Trinidad Creative District

Ted Locke  
Director  
Economic Development Commission

Bill Long  
County Commissioner  
Bent County

Mack Loudon  
County Commissioner  
Las Animas County

Craig Loveless  
Chief Executive Officer  
Prowers Medical Center

Dale Lyons  
County Planning and Zoning

Debra Malone  
Chair  
Huerfano County Tourism Board

Joe Marble  
County Commissioner  
Prowers County

Mimi Marmon  
Recreational Director, Bent/ Las  
Animas Community Center

Tara Marshall  
President, Trinidad - Las Animas  
Chamber of Commerce

John Massarotti  
Board Member  
Trinidad School District

Roz McCain  
Retired Teacher  
Citizens for Huerfano County

Gary McCrea  
Police Chief  
City of Lamar

Lisa Mendenhall  
Lamar Domestic Safety Resource Cen.

Cy Michaels  
Las Animas County Tourism Board

Dr. Bob Morrow  
Dentist and Coroner  
Walsh EMS / Dental Clinic

Matt Neuhold  
Recreation Coordinator  
City of Lamar

Emily Nieschburg  
LiveWell Prowers County  
High Plains Community Health Center

Carol Noll  
Superintendent  
La Junta School District

Todd Oberheu  
President and CEO  
Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center

Dawn Olson  
Superintendent  
Huerfano School District

Dean Ormiston  
County Commissioner  
Baca County

Terri Patrick  
Project Director  
Huerfano Family Resource Center

Tom Perry  
Executive Director  
Bar NI Ranch Community Fund

Wayne Pritchard

Trinidad-Las Animas Economic  
Development

Bob Quist  
Chief Executive Officer  
San Rafael Hospital

Phil Rico  
Board President  
Trinidad Community Foundation

Alexa Roberts  
Bent's Old Fort  
National Park Service

Judy Rusher  
Executive Director  
Kids Campus

Catherine Salazar  
Department of Human Services

Karen Sandbeck  
Owner  
The Dog Bar & Grill

Laurie Schroder  
Rancher and Farmer

Lawrence Sena  
Mayor  
City of Las Animas

Bryan Simmons  
Senior Vice President  
First National Bank of Las Animas

Roger Stagner  
Mayor  
City of Lamar

Karen Tomky  
Nurse Practitioner  
Centennial Family Health Center

Lisa Trigilio  
Program Director  
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Victoria Valdez  
Director of Operations  
Valley Wide Health Systems

Jack Vallejos  
Board President  
Trinidad School District

Keith Varner  
Board Secretary  
Spanish Peaks Community Foundation

Max Vezzani  
County Commissioner  
Huerfano County

Priscilla Waggoner

Tom Wallace  
County Commissioner  
Bent County

Ruth Wallace Porter  
Director  
Department of Human Services

Donna Wood  
Town Clerk  
Town of Two Buttes

Darla Wyeno  
Town Clerk  
Town of Crowley