

A Continuing Series on Nonprofits in Colorado Communities

Montrose Community Foundation Encouraging Collaboration in Western Colorado for 25 Years

Sara Plumhoff, Executive Director, Montrose Community Foundation, Member since 2010

In 2014 Montrose Community Foundation (MCF) celebrated our 25th Anniversary. MCF began as a vision of four Montrose residents who donated \$300 and in-kind legal services to create a vehicle for funding community projects. From humble beginnings in 1989, MCF has experienced remarkable growth.

MCF serves Montrose County which is home to 41,000 people and more than 2,200 square miles in the Uncompahgre River and Paradox Valleys. After the Gunnison Tunnel was completed in 1909, which provided irrigation water from the Gunnison River, the area became an agricultural hub known as the “bread belt” on the western slope. Home to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Gunnison Gorge National Recreation and Wilderness area, the county is flush with recreational opportunities such as national forest, BLM and National Park lands. Tourism and recreation are important economic factors to the area. MCF also works with organizations in – and has served – the populations in Delta, Hotchkiss and Ouray.

Demographically, Montrose County is 85 percent white and 20 percent of the population is Hispanic. The majority of the Hispanic population consists of first generation immigrants from Mexico. Montrose County is a retirement destination, with 18 percent of its residents over age 65, higher than Colorado’s 11 percent overall rate. Homelessness and unemployment rates have risen, as the median household income in Montrose County lags behind the state average. And in less than 5 years the number of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients has increased by 54 percent and food bank recipients by 48 percent.

While Montrose County’s population is relatively small and rural, there are more than 200 nonprofits. Though the local population is passionate about meeting needs and improving their community, the large number of nonprofits can result in duplication of efforts and donor fatigue. The challenge for our community and for MCF is to encourage and facilitate collaboration to efficiently utilize resources and to maximize nonprofits’ impact.

An excellent example of collaboration can be found in the formation of Montrose Coalition on Homelessness (the Coalition). Sincere compassion and volunteer spirit

have always been evident in the transitional living programs, food pantries and other shelters that support the homeless or near homeless in Montrose. But in 2010 MCF helped put together the Coalition to meet the needs of homeless individuals, children and families by assessing housing issues, creating education programs and acting as a facilitator between service providers. Today more than 15 organizations make up the Coalition and it has been publicly recognized by Colorado’s Governor. Through August 2014, Coalition members tracked 9,600 shelter nights, 1,966 emergency shelter nights, more than 40,000 meals, transitional housing for more than 30 individuals including veterans, and services and programming for more than 1,000 children.

There is a continuous need for training and development for staff, board members and volunteers. MCF works with organizations like Colorado Nonprofit Association and Community Resource Center (CRC) to bring relevant, current and affordable workshops to the Montrose area. In 2013 MCF participated in Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD) and was encouraged by the quality of the dialogue that took place between the funders and the grantees. MCF is currently collaborating with Western Colorado Nonprofit Council to provide a series of trainings for nonprofits in Western Colorado for the next three years leading up to the next RPD.

Not unique to Western Colorado, but still a very real issue for our local nonprofits is a decrease in sustainable funding. More and more organizations rely on fundraising and grant writing. By creatively using matching fund campaigns and multi-media fundraising campaigns, our rural nonprofits can save on costs and offer convenient payment options to their donors. At the heart of MCF is our annual grant cycle that has historically taken place in the fall. Grants are awarded for projects and causes that focus on the youth or help the neediest of populations in the community that are innovative, exemplify collaboration. Since its inception, MCF has granted more than a million dollars to local and regional nonprofits.

The vision of MCF is to build a strong community by building partnerships, developing leadership and encouraging innovation. It is our privilege to be a part of the nonprofit community in Western Colorado.



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Montrose Community Foundation connects charitable donors and volunteers to community causes that matter. In addition the Foundation serves the agenda of the community by providing training opportunities for nonprofits, scholarships to deserving students, youth leadership classes, community service recognition programs, partnerships for community initiatives and grants to nonprofits.

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