



FAITH PARTNERS

EL PASO, COLORADO

A Case Study





FAITH PARTNERS | EL PASO, COLORADO

1. Key Program Distinctions

Serving TANF individuals and families in El Paso, Colorado, Faith Partners is co-located in the Department of Human Services (DHS) TANF's Family Independence Unit. An advocate and source of guidance for TANF clients, Faith Partners helps clients develop their soft skills through a work preparation course known as Crossroads and a mentoring program, The Journey, which is designed for recipients who have stability in their lives. Barriers to work and client needs can be addressed by partnering agencies such as Goodwill and a local domestic violence program called TESSA, which are also co-located in DHS and only cubicles away from Faith Partners. These partnerships are supported by the numerous community volunteers who enable Faith Partners to significantly expand its capacity to serve the local community. Faith Partners provides a vital example of the benefits of colocating with partnering agencies, as well as the added value of work preparation courses and mentoring programs. With its strategic location, Faith Partners supports TANF clients through its mentoring resources, work-preparation classes, and access to community partners. A list of site visit participants consulted in developing this report is included as an appendix.

2. El Paso's Demographics

Faith Partners is a faith-based organization serving families in El Paso County, Colorado. As of 2007, El Paso County had a population of 578,779, of which 74,870 families had children under the age of 18.

The government and the military are the largest employers in El Paso County; in fact, the top four individual employers are military bases. Other major industries include retail trade, accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and professional and technical services. With a median income of \$54,839, in 2007, El Paso County's unemployment rate was 4.3 percent.

In 2008, an average of 21,478 recipients in the State of Colorado—including 8,816 families and 16,780 children—were

| Exhibit 1: Demographic Information for El Paso County^a | |
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| Population | |
| 2007 | 578,779 |
| Ethnicity (2007) | |
| White | 80.3% |
| African-American | 6.2% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 3.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino origin ^b | 12.9% |
| Age Composition (2007) | |
| 0-19 | 167,636 |
| 20-24 | 42,166 |
| 25-44 | 174,469 |
| 45-64 | 141,452 |
| 65 + | 53,056 |
| Median Age | 34.1 |
| Gender Composition (2007) | |
| Male | 287,795 |
| Female | 290,984 |
| Median Income (2007) | |
| per household | \$54,839 |
| Unemployment Rate | |
| 2007 | 4.3% |
| Colorado TANF Indicators (FY 2008) | |
| Recipients (average) | 21,478 |
| Families (average) | 8,816 |
| Children (average) | 16,780 |

^a Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey 2005-2007*. Retrieved September 2009 from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuid=&_lang=en&_ts=
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2008). *TANF Caseload Data*. Retrieved September 2009, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/caseload_recent.html#2008
^b Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories.

receiving TANF benefits. More information regarding El Paso County's demographics is presented in Exhibit 1.



FAITH PARTNERS | EL PASO, COLORADO

3. Faith Partners' Historical Background and Development

Originating out of community churches' concern that no safety net existed for TANF recipients who had exceeded their 5-year terms, Faith Partners was created 10 years ago through a coalition of 160 churches in El Paso County. Recognizing that, in one of its founder's words, "the faith community is set up to give people hope...", the coalition, with encouragement from DHS, identified mentoring as the best vehicle through which the faith community could serve TANF clients. Governed by the new legal guidelines in Charitable Choice, DHS provided a \$10,000 TANF grant to help build the initial infrastructure for Faith Partners. As part of this grant, Faith Partners agreed to be co-located in the TANF office's Family Independence Unit. A Faith Partners staff member noted that the director of DHS at the time "understood that if we were housed outside the TANF office, it would be difficult to build trust—and case workers wouldn't refer participants, since we were a faith-based organization. He said we needed to work within the TANF office—so we did."

Upon receipt of the initial \$10,000 TANF grant, the leadership of Faith Partners hired a consultant to research and identify best practices employed by other secular and faith-based mentoring programs across the nation. The goal was to understand and apply leading approaches that were effective in helping individuals and families break the cycle of poverty. An initial review of 50 organizations served as the basis upon which Faith Partners built, and now continues to operate, its mentoring program for low-income men and women.

Today, Faith Partners operates on a budget of just less than \$350,000. Between 70 and 80 percent of its annual revenue comes from TANF funds, and between 20 and 30 percent is donated from local congregations—primarily churches. However, the primary support from congregations and the community-at-large is not monetary: Faith Partners employs 6 full-time staff members and is supported by more than 2,000 volunteers, mostly from local churches and universities.

Faith Partners' program is focused on just one audience: it exclusively serves TANF recipients. The Crossroads program is offered to all TANF clients in El Paso County. Faith Partners' mentoring program serves between 17–25 families at any one time, offering mentoring services to 45–50 families each year. To date, Faith Partners has mentored more than 800 families throughout El Paso County—and, according to its leaders, approximately 80 percent of the families it has served have been able to successfully transition off of welfare and into work.

4. Programmatic Information

Faith Partners' most recognized program is Crossroads, a 1-month program designed to offer TANF recipients community work experience through a human development curriculum and a series of work-related classes. Dovetail Consulting, LLC, sells the license for the curriculum to counties interested in implementing Crossroads in their communities.

The classes offered through Crossroads include topics such as self-discovery, healthy relationships, and purpose assessments—and each unit is aimed at preparing individuals to re-enter the workforce and make a commitment to a life of self-reliance. The Crossroads course is also designed to increase participants' willingness to invest in themselves through education and employment skills.

When speaking about the program's success, for instance, one caseworker cited a specific client who was dyslexic and lacked confidence. With help from someone in the class, the client completed the course and gained a part-time job—and this client is not an anomaly. Caseworkers have noticed that many participants in the Crossroads program have transitioned off welfare after finding jobs or enrolling in school. When discussing the impact of Crossroads on their clients, one caseworker commented, "When clients come in, they can feel worthless and incapable. After Crossroads, they feel they can go out, get that job they want, and go to school."

This is in part because Faith Partners staff help participants focus on their underlying life patterns. Many participants



FAITH PARTNERS | EL PASO, COLORADO

realize that the relationships they are in are unhealthy, and as a result of classroom content, “they decide to move on to healthier relationships—this is true not only of their romantic relationships, but their relationships with kids, co-workers, and school guidance counselors.” The value of Crossroads is also recognized by the clients, who often bring friends or family members to enroll in the program.

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Individuals who need mentoring services while enrolled in Crossroads can sign up for Faith Partners’ follow-up long-term mentoring program. The Journey is a 12-month program in which families are matched with mentor *teams*, typically consisting of four to six adult mentors. In order to be eligible to participate in this program, an individual must have completed Crossroads, have stable housing, and be free of any substance abuse. Families who are interested but not yet eligible to join the program can be mentored by Faith Partners’ staff members, until they meet all of the program’s requirements. Before they are matched, both the mentor team and the participating families sign a 12-month agreement, and complete pre-mentoring training. The Journey’s curriculum is divided into five 10-week semesters, each focusing on a specific issue or area such as personal development, family relations, or vocational and educational training.

Faith Partners introduced mentoring teams to address the complex family needs of those living in poverty—and do so in a way that keeps mentors from early burnout. Based on the wrap-around theory, each mentor is assigned a different area of focus, linked to their skills sets and the family’s own unique needs. For example, if a child is struggling in school, one of the mentors will focus on tutoring that child.

Volunteers also recognize multiple benefits to mentoring in teams. As one volunteer commented:

You need more than one volunteer because most of the families don’t have good relationships. The larger the team, the better it is for that individual or family, because they learn about different personalities...It also allows the mentors to have a life—they can go out of town for 2 weeks, a month, or whatever and know that the family isn’t freaking out because there is no one to help them in a crisis.

Participant experiences seem to mirror this in constructive ways. As one mentee said in describing The Journey:

I have often times felt so neglected, when people didn’t respond to my questions, or people didn’t call me back. With Faith Partners and the Journey there is constant communication. That is something that makes me feel very good. Sometimes single parents need things to happen immediately...and it has a domino effect on how we deal with our children. Knowing that there is someone on the other side—a mentor, a chain of people—makes all the difference.

The success of this mentoring program is also reflected by the size of its waiting list, which typically consists of 12–15 families.

Another initiative, the Fostering Hope Program, was previously linked to Faith Partners but has since developed into its own 501(c)(3) organization. Fostering Hope is a program that recruits volunteers from local churches to assist foster parents. These volunteers become foster aunts and uncles to local foster youth, helping the foster parents in very practical ways. Volunteers provide emotional support, transport children to their various activities and appointments, tutor and coach children, take them on outings, and provide meals for foster families two to three times a week. This program has been so successful in reducing the average number of placements children experience that it is currently being replicated in Milwaukee.



FAITH PARTNERS | EL PASO, COLORADO

5. Partnerships and Community Engagement

Both current Faith Partners initiatives rely heavily on partnerships. One key dynamic, as noted above, is the fact that Faith Partners is co-located within DHS, which means staff members interact with TANF caseworkers on a daily basis to provide services to TANF recipients. By operating inside DHS and having local ties to various congregations and volunteers, Faith Partners has a broad knowledge base and can make referrals, conduct cross-training, and participate in team decision-meetings.

“While these formal communication systems are critical for client and data tracking, the majority of communication between Faith Partners and TANF staff occurs on a much more informal basis. Faith Partners regularly shows its appreciation for TANF caseworkers by holding luncheons, purchasing gifts (such as a popcorn maker for the break room), and sharing thank-you cards from Crossroads graduates.”

Structurally, this is reinforced by an information-sharing agreement: when clients apply for TANF, they sign a waiver enabling TANF caseworkers to share information with Faith Partners’ staff members. The two staff teams communicate in both directions: caseworkers send forms to Faith Partners when clients enroll in Crossroads, and Faith Partners employees send emails to TANF caseworkers to assist in the tracking of client hours. While these formal communication systems are critical for client and data tracking, the majority of communication between Faith Partners and TANF staff occurs on a much more informal basis. Faith Partners regularly shows its appreciation for TANF caseworkers by holding luncheons, purchasing gifts (such as a popcorn maker for the break room), and sharing thank-you cards from Crossroads graduates. Both Faith Partners and TANF caseworkers mentioned these gestures as examples of fostering and maintaining a healthy partnership.

When asked about ways that this partnership could be further enhanced, one caseworker indicated an interest in obtaining copies of the Crossroads curriculum, and learning more about the organization’s other programs, such as The Journey.

In addition to supporting TANF recipients, Faith Partners collaborates with other organizations co-located in the El Paso County DHS. One example of this is Faith Partners’ collaboration with TESSA, a community organization that serves domestic violence and sexual assault victims/survivors. These organizations frequently make cross-referrals, and TESSA employees recognize an increase in empowerment among their clients who have participated in Crossroads.

Other co-located organizations have also collaborated with Faith Partners: one example is Goodwill, which works out of the same DHS office. With a caseload of about 700 TANF recipients. Goodwill partners with Faith Partners to serve TANF individuals who are deemed work-ready. Goodwill employees say that Crossroads is highly beneficial for their clients, especially in that it “has been very good at knocking down participants’ hesitancy with respect to government agencies. It starts that thinking pattern of—it’s okay, I can share information.” According to Goodwill staff, after graduating from Crossroads, recipients no longer seem to carry “a chip on their shoulders,” which makes it easier for Goodwill to work with them.

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Perhaps most important, as a faith-based organization, Faith Partners works closely with the local churches throughout El Paso County. Through these congregational partnerships, Faith Partners’ staff frequently visit churches to recruit volunteers, a number of whom have since become active board members. Local congregations also provide Faith Partners with a vehicle for information-sharing within the community and fundraising.



FAITH PARTNERS | EL PASO, COLORADO

Additionally, Faith Partners works with several local universities, whose students serve as volunteers and interns in the program.

6. Lessons Learned

- **Taking time at the outset to study best practices can enhance program implementation.** The founders of Faith Partners invested time and resources in researching effective faith-based mentoring programs that help families transition from welfare to work. After gleaning best practices and digesting lessons learned from more than 50 programs nationwide, Faith Partners implemented a carefully developed team mentoring approach, which volunteers cite as a major attraction and program benefit in the lives of participants.
- **Comprehensively educating staff and volunteers about the reality of poverty and the “working poor” can help strengthen service delivery.** Staff members—and particularly volunteers, as in the case of the Faith Partners’ program—who have not lived below the poverty line are often woefully unfamiliar with the cultural and behavioral standards, and other expectations, of those living in poverty. But by educating these individuals about the stark realities of poverty, staff and volunteers can become better suited to interacting with and effectively serving TANF recipients.
- **Political and community leaders play a critical role in encouraging and supporting partnerships between faith-based organizations and TANF agencies.** When local officials strongly encourage collaboration between faith-based organizations and TANF agencies, it can have an enormous impact on their development and enhanced visibility. This is highly evident in Faith Partners’ history with the El Paso County DHS, where Charitable Choice was employed as a critical vehicle to financial support for Faith Partners, and over time, its emerging programs, which have served hundreds of local TANF and low-income families.
- **Colocation within DHS generally strengthens partnerships between faith-based organizations and TANF agencies, in that it enhances service delivery and**

cross-program referrals to TANF recipients. Colocation allows workers to communicate frequently and develop strong relationships across agencies. It encourages referrals to partnering programs—by TANF caseworkers and among various “outside organizations” that are housed within DHS—and this in turn encourages a more holistic approach to serving TANF recipients.

7. Conclusion

Based on participant feedback, DHS perspective, and the viewpoint of volunteers, Faith Partners has had a unique and positive impact on the Greater El Paso community. Community members, participants, and local officials recognize the Crossroads curriculum as a critical element that has motivated many individuals to transition from welfare to work. Its core concepts have helped many TANF recipients and low-income men and women reconceptualize their vision for community life and the value of work. Moreover, many individuals who have graduated from the program comment that friends, including TANF recipients and others, could benefit from Faith Partners’ curriculum. Several neighboring counties have also purchased the Crossroads curriculum and are implementing it in their own communities.

One partner reflected on Crossroads’ strengths-based approach to job training and equipping participants with life skills:

There are internal changes that happen with TANF families in terms of how they think about themselves, and the success they can have throughout their lives. Crossroads really helps people to build upon their strengths. It gives them internal skills that are necessary to really be successful in their journey toward self-sufficiency. You can teach people job skills but, unless their mindset is different, it’s difficult to get beyond that. Faith Partners and the Crossroads class have helped advance that future planning, by encouraging a sense of investment in families.



List of Site Visit Participants – Faith Partners

Jackie Jaramillo, Executive Director, Faith Partners, Department of Human Services (DHS)

Observation, *CrossRoads* Class, Faith Partners

Becky Jacobs, Dir. Employment & Family Support, El Paso County DHS

Cheryl Schnell, Colorado Works Manager, El Paso County DHS

Denni Pineda, Supervisor of TANF Case Managers, DHS

Focus Group, TANF Case managers—with Colorado Works and Goodwill Industries representatives

Ross Thomas, Lead Volunteer, *Elevate* Group (local faith partner)

Michelle Swanson, Executive Director, *Good Works* (local faith partner)

Rev. Eddie Boykin, Chairman, Board of Directors, Faith Partners

Rena Burns, Board Member, Faith Partners

Mary Maynard, Board Member, Faith Partners

Melissa Terry Melone and Rebecca Lorenz, *Crossroads* Instructors, Faith Partners

Delrece Moore and Deb Loundenback, Coordinators of Mentor Services, Faith Partners

Focus Group – Volunteer Mentors and Mentees

Barbara Lara, Coordinator of Fostering Hope Program, DHS Administration

TANF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INITIATIVE

