

IFSS AND UNITED WAY MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN LARAMIE COUNTY

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United Way
of Laramie County



Interfaith Family Support Services (IFSS) is a program of Community Action of Laramie County that helps families get back on their feet and provide security and stability for their children. Multiple, Interfaith, faith based communities band together to provide all services necessary for a family. This includes hospitality based shelter, nutritious food, enrichment and education for both the parents and the youth, and unconditional support from as many as a few hundred volunteers. The volunteers provide the family with countless benefits including a shoulder to lean on, role models helping the parents learn how to develop a feeling of camaraderie within the family through appropriate dinner conversation and the tools to foster the child's growth and development. The volunteers provide these services at no cost to the families or program, allowing IFSS to continue providing these necessary services to the community and the funding and donation dollars are able to be used providing the direct services benefiting the homeless children and their family.

One example of the work through IFSS is a young family of five who sought shelter with our program after financial hardship forced them into homelessness. The family was accepted in the program and immediately began working on regaining self-sufficiency. This work included searching for part-time employment for the mother while she finished her degree in medical assistance, budgeting and money management, and credit recovery. The family also worked to provide nurturing care and services for their children. Two children were in elementary school and the third child participated in Head Start. The parents participated in parenting and relationship classes to build a stronger relationship amongst themselves and their children. The family successfully graduated the IFSS program and are living in their own apartment. And, the mother is graduating from school at the end of the year. This family bonded with one of the participating churches during their stay and has joined that church and volunteer as a member of the church during their IFSS host week. This family is a testament to not only the immediate support and benefit IFSS provides for families but also the lasting effect this program can have on our community.

The program not only benefits our homeless families but also all who volunteer. This experience brings our community together, young and old. In one church in particular, a 9-year-old little girl began volunteering and was the driving force behind the rest of her family volunteering. We have another volunteer who is 93 years old who plays with the children and families. This illustrates the wide array of volunteers partnering with the

program. It is an indescribable feeling, watching a family rise above their struggles, learn, and make changes in order to care for their family. Helping children to learn a new way of life not only affects the world today but in the years to come.

We are blessed to be recipients of not only funding through United Way of Laramie County but also the other countless benefits they provide. United Way has provided support throughout our triumphs and tribulations. In addition to their unending support, they also offer us the ability to reach potential community supporters and volunteers we may not have the opportunity to reach any other way. At one of my last speaking engagements with United Way, I met a young woman with a background as a chef and the passion to teach others about living and eating healthy within a budget. Through subsequent meetings, she has agreed to volunteer - offering individual nutrition counseling with our families. I am convinced that without United Way this relationship would not be taking place today. United Way also assists us in building collaborator relationships with other agencies in the community in order to offer the most comprehensive services possible to our families. IFSS is a small program with two paid staff, without these other programs, we would not have the abilities to offer many of these services to those who need them the most. Laramie County offers impeccable comprehensive services, however; without collaboration amongst the agencies, our clients do not receive all the potential we have to offer. United Way helps make this collaboration between agencies and those in the community possible. We thank all who support our mission, United Way, and our supportive community for helping those most vulnerable in the community, homeless children, and their family.