

Greeley Centennial and Estes Park Rotary Clubs Support La Puente

La Puente was established in 1981 by 5 women who recognized the need to provide shelter for the homeless migrant workers and families. Over the past 39 years, there have been many additional services added to make the lives better for those living in poverty in the surrounding area.

Colorado's San Luis Valley is a vast isolated region that experiences some of the highest rates of poverty in the United States. Poverty begets hunger, homelessness and other crises that destabilize families. The organization of La Puente was created to address the effects of poverty by providing a safety net of services, where individuals and families get what they need to stabilize, heal, strengthen, and ultimately thrive.

The financial support comes from group donations like the Estes Park Rotary Clubs, Greeley Centennial Rotary Club, Churches and individual donations. In addition to Rotary District 5440 Grants, two volunteer work trips are scheduled each June and October.

One of the La Puente programs is PALS, Positive Activities Lead to Success. PALS is an after school and summer day care program for kids ages 5-9. Their care comes from parents who do not have a stable lifestyle. The parent use of drugs and alcohol puts the safety of the children at risk through physical and mental abuse. The abuse these children have endured has created a distrust of adults. The PALS program provides these traumatized children the experience of safety, stability and other services so they can have fun while growing up to be strong, healthy and productive. As a collaboration between La Puente Services, Alamosa Department of Human Services (DHS), and Alamosa Schools, PALS is uniquely designed to serve children who evidence severe social behavior challenges and home safety risks.

PALS children are either homeless or referrals of Alamosa DHS, with academic, social and emotional deficits due to physical and or emotional abuse, neglect and poverty. The PALS curriculum is designed to focus on the child's academic success and their emotional and behavior growth. Providing academic tutoring, life and social skills coaching, community service, artistic expression, fields and experimental opportunities with community partners, PALS empowers each child to cultivate confidence, self-efficacy, positive peer and adult relationships become rooted in healthy living habits in their larger community. PALS aim is to empower the children as agents of change for themselves, and the community to reduce the child maltreatment rate in Alamosa County which ranks #3 out of all 64 Colorado counties.

To accomplish these goals, the PALS program activities include:

Cooking lessons	Children library visits
Art expression	Dance instruction
Homework-tutoring assistance	Outdoor adventures
Health and first aid classes	Field trips
Building relationships with big buddies	

Children are picked up and dropped off for the daily school programs unless otherwise arranged. The transportation is provided with small busses, which are also used for some of the activities. The buses are not equipped with cameras to assist the driver to view the safety of the children approaching or leaving the bus.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church is the host of an annual fundraiser called SSKIDS, Simple Suppers for Kids in Distress, to support projects all over the world. Each year the SSKIDS Board selects an organization as the beneficiary of the Soup Supper donations. The La Puente PALS Program has been chosen as the beneficiary for 2020. Very simply, restaurants donate a variety of soups and community members prepare desserts for the event. Members of Greeley Centennial Rotary, Long's Peak Rotary, Estes Park Rotary and Sunrise Rotary Clubs encourage community support for the SSKIDS fundraiser by attending the supper and by making a financial contribution. If you are unable to attend the supper, donations may be mailed to SSKIDS, c/o Greeley Center for Independence, attention Serita Reddy, 2780 28th Avenue, Greeley CO 80634. Make checks payable to SSKIDS and put La Puente on the memo line. There is no charge for the supper, however a generous donation is encouraged. The Simple Soup Supper will be held at Our Savior's Lutheran Church February 25, 2020 at 6PM located at 1800 21st Avenue, Greeley.

The PALS program requested a SSKIDS grant to fund several needs for the safety of the children: back up cameras for the buses used to transport students, PALS kids often come to school in soiled clothes so a washer and dryer would provide them with clean clothes, a drinking fountain in the PALS building for students to hydrate as needed and smart cell phones to provide communication between bus drivers, parents, PALS staff members and to access and use the database of information for the children in the PALS program.

PALS is one program, however, annually over 16,000 individuals and family members receive at least one of the La Puente services, including emergency shelter, nutritious food from the areas 15 food pantries, housing with support services, youth-stabilization services, homeless prevention resources, soup kitchen meals, home outreach visits, and more. With the

objective of meeting the needs of the homeless and community members in crisis, La Puente's services both restore and strengthen people's lives, to empower them to live independently, with dignity.

The shelter's few professional staff members are supported by volunteers like the work groups from Estes Park, Greeley and other communities. Estes Park Rotarians started group trips in 2002. One Estes Park Rotarian made his 40th trip in October 2019. The work trips are now each June and October and have 15 to 20 workers on each trip. There are several volunteers who make additional trips to deliver donated food to food pantries. Donated clothing and household furnishings are either given directly to families or are placed in one of the thrift shops where local residents are able to find clothes and household furnishings at very reasonable prices. All funds are used in support of the La Puente programs.

The above PALS program information demonstrates the need to reach out to the children to help them start the rebuilding of their tattered lives. There is a need to expand the program which requires more funds, so, consider supporting the SSKIDS Soup Supper February 25, 2020.

More information about La Puente is available by contacting Gary Wallace, 970-481-9133 Estes Park; Bill Kehl 970-302-7681 Greeley; Pastor Backhaus at Shepherd of the Mountain Luther Church, Estes Park, 970-586-3900.