



Initiatives in Action: Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative



We can do more together.

Reaching Out For A Better Life

Rita was living under a bridge in downtown Denver, having walked away from a dangerously abusive relationship four months earlier, when she walked through the doors of INVESCO Field for Project Homeless Connect last October.

The enormous range of services available to help her and other homeless people live life off the streets was eye-opening for Rita. She had never fully realized the level of community support that is available to help her change her life.

While she was living under the bridge, she frequently visited The Gathering Place, a day shelter that provided her with a safe place to rest and escape from the stress of being alone on the streets. The Gathering Place also offers services to help women find housing and jobs, but Rita hadn't yet found the will inside her to change her life.

"I've been pretty independent for most of my life, but after this abusive relationship, I found myself floundering," Rita said. For single women, especially, living on the streets is dangerous, and Rita says the extreme stress it causes is draining and demoralizing.

"You feel lost, and then you get discouraged, and then you get depressed," she said. She was spending her time in the company of other homeless people who were content with their situation, many who used drugs and alcohol to help numb their senses.

During the warm nights of the summer, Rita, too, had been somewhat comfortable with her living situation, but she soon learned that living on the streets exposed her to all sorts of dangers. She was attacked several times, and with winter approaching, she began to think about the need to change.

The energy and optimism she felt in the room at Project Homeless Connect that sunny October day, together with the supportive community at The Gathering Place, created the spark that inspired her to reach out for a better life.

Rita set up a meeting with a case manager at The Gathering Place, who realized that she qualified for the Housing Stabilization Program of Denver's Road Home. The program provides people like Rita with the first month's rent and deposit for an apartment, along with furniture and other supplies they need to get started on their own.



Although Rita now has a home of her own, she still comes to The Gathering Place to be part of the community that helped her reach out for a better life.

In November of 2007, she moved into her apartment. It was the first time in her 59 years that she had her very own place to call home.

Through the Housing Stabilization program, along with the community of support she found at The Gathering Place, she has discovered the energy and the drive within herself to achieve and sustain a self sufficient life.

Rita is just one of the thousands of homeless people who have been assisted in their journey toward self sufficiency. Just two years into Denver's Road Home, Mayor Hickenlooper's 10-year Plan to End Homelessness, Mile High United Way and the City and County of Denver report an 11 percent reduction in overall homelessness and a 36 percent decrease in chronic homelessness.

Mile High United Way is the financial steward for Denver's Road Home. That entails raising funding in the community and using its 120 years of experience in human services to allocate resources to programs, like the Housing Stabilization Program, that create lasting changes for people who are homeless.

Denver's Road Home is part of Mile High United Way's Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative, which focuses on helping people attain the education and the as-

sets they need to live a financially stable life. The initiative supports programs that provide a safety net of services – such as helping individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or are in danger of becoming homeless – as well as programs to help people build savings, attain job training or post-secondary education to increase their long-term earning power.

Rita continues to visit The Gathering Place for an occasional meal and to spend time with her network of friends. Rita's picture has been added to the "Wall of Success" that every woman sees when they enter the building, and she has become a mentor for many of the women who come to The Gathering Place.

"I had nothing, and I had to finally decide to follow through," Rita said about taking the initiative to change her life. She now encourages the other women at The Gathering Place to take the next step to live life off the streets and work toward self sufficiency.

Rita is holding down two jobs, working hard to pay the rent every month. She says life isn't always easy, but she now has all the energy and motivation she needs to continue on her path toward self sufficiency.

For more information about our Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative, please visit our website at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

We can do more together.



Mile High United Way