The Colorado Health Foundation™



Building up Families in Burlington

Rural Health: Innovating Out of Necessity

At the Prairie Family Center in Burlington, Deena Ziegler and her team have learned to look on the bright side.

When a family in need arrives at their brick storefront office in a town of about 4,000, it might be easy to focus on what's wrong, including generational poverty and fallout from a tough economy. But the staff at Prairie Family Center turn the family's attention to what's working:

A two-parent home. Supportive extended family members. A high school diploma. Even the ability to care for a pet.



Burlington locals help to box and transport items for local senior food drive.

Then they strategize with the family about how to build on strengths they may not have recognized, connect them with vital resources and help them set goals for getting back on their feet. Staffers check back after three months to keep the family moving forward.

“We want to educate and build and support families to be healthy and functional,” says Ziegler, a Burlington native who joined Prairie Family Center after returning home with her own family.

Prairie Family Center is a beacon of hope and help in this frontier area on Colorado’s far Eastern Plains, just 13 miles from the Kansas border. A broad range of communitybased programs target all ages. There’s a monthly food distribution; health, nutrition and cooking classes for toddlers to seniors; parenting programs; a food pantry and thrift store; summer food programs for children; and referrals to health care, mental health and emergency services. Teens can also sign up for the popular Girl Talk or Cool Dudes life skills classes.

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>
> Deena Ziegler

And families sometimes carpool 90 miles to reach the center, the only one of its kind in the area.

Prairie Family Center is funded by state grants, foundation grants, individual and business donations and fundraising. It served 645 people in 2015, down from a couple years ago, when that number was closer to 1,000. For Ziegler, that’s good news. It means fewer families need help.

But that doesn’t stop Prairie Family Center from dreaming big. It is in the planning stages for a community walking and biking program to attack obesity and chronic health conditions

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