



Jennifer, 6, carefully stacks Jenga pieces at Boulder Housing Partners' Red Oak Park development. The after school program is a part of Dream Big, which aims to close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more prosperous peers by 2040. Foothills United Way was in on the initiative from the beginning, partnering with the "I Have A Dream" Foundation of Boulder County and several other nonprofits and government agencies to extend "I Have a Dream's" successful program to preschool children.



Kids at Dream Big are encouraged to express themselves.

Among those involved in the far-reaching effort are the Boulder Valley School District, City of Boulder Parks & Recreation Youth Services Initiative, City of Boulder Human Services, the Community Foundation Boulder County, Boulder County Housing and Human Services and Boulder Housing Partners.

In addition, Foothills United Way helped move the project forward with the awarding of a key grant, which is providing funding for a project manager.

"We are all acting together, surrounding young kids and their families with services to help them become successful," Yeiser says.

How does that look on the ground? Before the outdoor activities at Red Oak Park, the kids began their after-school hours in the community building, where they were welcomed by staffers and an after school spread of apple wedges and chocolate milk.

Jeff Bayard, program coordinator, says the after-school program at Red Oak Park is a time for kids to relax and have fun, while also having time work on homework.

Bayard watches as 6-year-old Jennifer builds a tall tower out of Jenga pieces.

"How did you do that so quickly?" he asks.

"I'm magic," Jennifer replies.

Some kids play Uno with a staffer, and a couple of middle school students work on homework.

"How do you make a decimal?"

Alexandra, 11, calls out.

"Take the top number and divide it by the bottom number," Bayard says.

While stacking blocks, playing tag and doing homework are everyday activities for kids whose parents can afford after-school care, some of the more than 16,800 low-income children in Boulder County come home after school and park themselves in front of the television or play video games while family members work.

"Boulder Parks & Recreation is thrilled to partner with Dream Big," says the agency's director, Yvette Bowden. "Through this collaboration we are able to serve more children as we help to enhance after school programming with evidence-based physical activity. The children we serve together are important community members and their health counts."

Such seemingly small advantages such as physical exercise, nutritious snacks and enrichment activities after school accrue over time to positively affect academic performance and self-esteem.

While the goal is ambitious, Canova says she has confidence in the various community organizations involved.

"We are finding creative ways to work with partners," she says. "We are looking at innovative opportunities to seek funding together. We tap into each other's areas of expertise."

Yeiser of Foothills United Way says his group's particular skill set is knowing the local organizations and facilitating cooperation in unique ways.

"Our collaboratives – combining nonprofit, government and organizations across all sectors – are able to bring the fight to these tough issues," he says. "When you donate to Foothills United Way, you are providing a powerful funding incentive for organizations to bring their knowledge, assets and talent to a joint table. As a team, we all deliver a better solution than any one group could alone."

THE CHANCE TO SUCCEED

By Cindy Sutter. Photos courtesy of Foothills United Way.

Dream Big helps all children reach their potential

Late fall sun pours over the Flatirons as more than a dozen kids ranging in age from preschool to middle school chase each other in a game of tag on the playground at Boulder Housing Partners' Red Oak Park development in Boulder.

The kids play out the game in which they must do 10 jumping jacks after being double-tagged. Some are expert jumpers; others don't quite get the sequence. But all are running, jumping and laughing.

The fresh air and exercise are a small part of an all-encompassing initiative called Dream Big. The idea is a simple one: To give every Boulder County child the chance to succeed and thrive. While it's easy to articulate the goal, achieving success is anything but. Fortunately, there is a successful template: the "I Have A Dream" Foundation of Boulder County program in which students receive carefully targeted academic and emotional support to achieve their goals. Dream Big takes the program

further by working with kids and their parents in the years before they begin school and offering support to them and their families as they continue forward. That requires the input and help of many local groups.

"Ultimately, we plan to close the achievement and opportunity gap by working with our key partners," says Lori Canova, president and chief executive officer of "I Have A Dream" in Boulder County.

Those partnerships in both the nonprofit and government sectors are key to the comprehensive approach of Dream Big, which aims to achieve its goal by 2040. Foothills United Way has been involved in Dream Big from the beginning, says Doug Yeiser, president and CEO.

"It started small with Boulder Housing Partners, 'I Have A Dream' and Foothills United Way. Then we expanded to more partners," Yeiser says of Foothills United Way's role as a connector of local groups and efforts.

MARKETING FEATURE

Foothills United Way's goals look to the future

Foothills United Way focuses on three crucial areas of need in Boulder and Broomfield counties: attainable housing, early childhood success and community resilience.

"We spoke to over 60 groups and individuals across the community to ask 'What is important right now?'" says Doug Yeiser, Foothills United Way president and CEO. "These three kept coming back."

Identifying the three focus areas has helped reinforce Foothills United Way's strategy of connecting groups and working in tight collaboration with other nonprofits and government agencies.

"Complex issues require more attention than any single organization can give," Yeiser says.

Attainable housing

In Boulder and Broomfield Counties, long-time residents struggle to pay rent, firefighters and teachers can't afford to buy a home and seniors find themselves house-rich and cash poor. These problems have an undeniable effect on the next generation.

"Nearly 700 children in our school districts have no place to call home," Yeiser says.

Foothills United Way is working to change this sad reality. For individuals, it offers the Personal Investment Enterprise program that teaches participants how to save money. Foothills United Way then matches their savings to jumpstart their efforts to buy a home, get an education or start a business.

Foothills United Way also supports leaders in each community as they work to find the best local solutions.

In Broomfield, for example, eight different faith communities came together three years ago to form the Broomfield Housing Opportunity Coalition. The effort includes the donation of land, as well as a commitment of continued support during development.

"For a long time, the need was easy not to see," says the coalition's facilitator Debra Meyer. "We don't see many people sleeping outside. A larger population is couch surfing, living with family. They can't get out of the basement. A family cannot afford housing



Volunteers do their part at Foothills United Way's Day of Caring at Community Food Share in September.



This family, which received assistance from Foothills United Way's Personal Investment Enterprise program, stands proudly in front of their new home. The program teaches participants how to save money. Foothills United Way then matches their savings for buying a home, getting an education or starting a business.

in Broomfield if their income is less than \$82,000."

Meyer says the whole community benefits from a diverse population that includes policemen, social services workers and city and county employees.

"The people who keep the community going can't afford to live here. We don't have the inventory to match their income," she says.

The work of the coalition, faith leaders and support from groups such as Foothills United Way have begun to address this crucial problem.

Early childhood success

Giving children a good start is crucial to their wellbeing.

"We are concentrating resources on the earliest years where the return on investment is more than \$7 for every \$1 committed," Yeiser says.

One of the ways Foothills United Way is investing in children's future is a partnership with Boulder Housing Partners, the "I Have a Dream" Foundation and others.

Support also means offering services that equip teachers, parents and students with skills to help them solve challenges.

At Pioneer Elementary in Lafayette, for example, school personnel are working with families to support children at home and at school.

Teacher Michelle Eubank says the school teaches conflict resolution, along with other

necessary skills.

"With conflict you go through a specific set of steps to regulate yourself in a complete way so as to not leave a bad feeling hanging," she says.

Last year, a Foothills United Way grant funded workshops for parents to teach them the same conflict resolution techniques their children were learning. That helped parents learn how to communicate desirable behaviors rather than blaming kids for acting out, Eubank says.

Community resilience

How do communities bounce back from catastrophic events such as the 2013 flood? One problem that became clear during the flood aftermath was a gap in communications systems. To remedy the problem, Foothills United Way worked with the Airlink Amateur Radio Group to strengthen the essential ham radio communication network for mountain communities.

"That means vulnerable residents will remain connected and get the assistance they need during times of crisis and disaster," Yeiser says. "They will be informed of approaching danger and escape routes."

In addition, Foothills United Way's continued efforts to bolster social infrastructure are helping to weave a truly strong safety net for those in need, from domestic abuse survivors to those experiencing homelessness.

"Our deep relationships in the community allow us to work effectively in these critical areas," Yeiser says. "These combined efforts make the community stronger."



Foothills United Way

You can help!

United Way needs your gift to build a community where all can achieve their full potential, where teachers, police, seniors and young families can find a place to live, and where we invest properly in the all-important first five years of a child's life.

Visit unitedwayfoothills.org to learn more.

United in a different way

A conversation with Doug Yeiser, president and CEO of Foothills United Way

Change is difficult, but sometimes essential

Foothills United Way knew their business model needed to evolve from the traditional model of taking in contributions and pushing them out to different charities. When we asked how we could be most helpful and relevant, people were in strong agreement on what we could do for the Boulder/Broomfield communities, and it was a very different role than we had played in the past.

The gap the community asked us to fill

Folks reminded us there are well over 1,000 service providers across these two counties, often working separately rather than in coordinated fashion. This community gave Foothills United Way a new role – and we're the only local organization dedicated to this model – to bring together nonprofits, schools, government agencies and others. We and the organizations we work with believe we'll see greater impact when we

all work together rather than separately.

What we can offer

Our history has allowed us to be the expert on who is doing the most effective work. People knew if they gave money to United Way, we'd already done the homework. We haven't left behind that practice and expertise. Each grant is carefully vetted. The difference is that now our grants bring groups together to combine talent and resources to solve problems more quickly. When you give to Foothills United Way, you drive multiple organizations to work together in partnership. That means your gift to Foothills accomplishes more than any nonprofit can do on its own.

What the 2013 flood taught us

We became the coordinating agency when the flood hit. No other group was willing, so we stepped up. With only 12 staff members, we were able to make a huge difference in tandem with our community

partners. Our flood recovery effort didn't end until last year. During the recovery, we helped more than 1,300 households, investing \$5.3 million plus \$3.8 million in volunteer efforts. We also learned how important it is for all sectors to work with each other. Together, we accomplished far more than any government agency, nonprofit or faith group could have alone.

How we bring groups together

The first thing we do is to make sure the right parties are talking to one another. Organizations have to be willing to step outside their box and beyond their traditional roles. Then, we urge potential partners to set a shared intention. That can be challenging, because in the beginning each group may have a different idea of how to define the problem. We embrace those differences, because the beginning of working together is hearing everyone's ideas and agreeing on what needs to be done. We have developed a process that brings together all the voices – nonprofits,



Doug Yeiser, president and CEO of Foothills United Way.

experts and residents who will be served. It includes envisioning the outcome, figuring out strategies to get started and regular communication and coordination to reinforce the relationships we have built. Lots of partnership models can work. The important thing is to get organizations around a table, willing to cooperate!