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Part 3: Community Options good works

By Lisa Young Staff writer
Jan 22, 2020



Clients at Aspen Crest enjoy instruction time where they learn practical skills, history and social skills
Lisa Young/Delta County Independent

Editor's note: This is the third article in the three part series on Community Options, Inc., what the organization provides to its service communities, its history, its financial situation and what is being done to attempt to keep it running. To read the whole series, visit deltacountyindependent.com.

One trip to Community Options' Aspen Crest in Cedaredge is more than enough to prove the entire organization's worth as staff and clients touch lives both inside and outside of the large beige building on Second Street.

Program Director Georgiana Russell has worked for Community Options for over four decades. In fact, she's the longest tenured employee for the non-profit which serves six Region 10 counties.



Russell, whose brother had intellectual and developmental disabilities, began working for the organization right out of high school.

"I applied and got a position as a team leader in Montrose at that time. When it was still known as the Uncompahgre Workshop," Russell said. "We also had a small program up on Chipeta, that's where my brother went. There was also the Sunshine Pre-school too."

Russell reminisced about the days at the Uncompahgre Workshop where clients made some pretty impressive gift cards.

"It was a good seller, the director at that time would go all out over Colorado and sell the stationary. We'd get big orders so, we'd go out and pick wildflowers and press them and then make stationary and note cards. I was a big part of that," she said.

The large facility in Cedaredge where Russell works is buzzing Monday through Thursdays with a plethora of activities for the 52 clients. Clients and staff work side by side to create a monthly activities calendar. Activities range from exercise programs to day trips and a whole lot more.

"The move to Cedaredge about 11 years ago really helped so, clients didn't have to ride the bus from Paonia and Hotchkiss to Delta. It did cut their transportation down a bit," Russell said. "It also gave us a lot more opportunity in a small town. We have two clients who work for the town of Cedaredge. They plant the flowers in the summer and go out and water them too."

Aspen Crest is the primary program site which provides meaningful activities for Delta area residents as well as providing vocational training and skill development enabling employment or meaningful volunteer opportunities. The day programs run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

Eileen Childs son Brian lives on his own with two roommates in Delta thanks to the help of Community Options. He continues to use the services at Aspen Crest where he participates in Special Olympics, enjoys various activities and volunteers.

For Childs and other families, Community Options have given their children meaningful lives full of opportunity.

"He goes to the Horizon Nursing Home and sings to the residents and every Monday he assists them with Bingo so, he helps them put the dots on the numbers and he works at the Shelter Shop in Cedaredge which raises money for animals. He also does Meals on Wheels, he loves that and he works part-time sweeping at the bank in Delta," Childs said.

The thought of Community Options no longer existing is very upsetting to Childs.

"You can imagine my fear and dismay when I saw the first article in the Delta County Independent, because I didn't know how bad it was. I mean you know that organizations like this are always scrambling but, I had know idea it was that serious. I just worry to death about what's going to happen if these programs don't continue," Childs said.

When asked what she thinks needs to happen in light of Community Options' financial problems, Childs replied, "First, in light of how much other communities spend to support their programs, I think maybe we could step up to the plate a little bit more. Secondly, if you want these people (clients) to be productive members of society versus a drain on society you need to support the programs that allow them to do that and thirdly, this program is facing all kinds of challenges which are outside of their control and have a lot to do with the Front Range politics and it's another example of the Western Slope not getting its due, so as a local community we need to pull together and make sure that these programs continue to exist for the lives of the disable and the community."

The clients at Community Options are very active and integrated in the community thanks to the tremendous amount of volunteer they provide in the area.

"We do a lot of volunteer work here. They deliver meals to the seniors who live at home on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Everybody who is here has that opportunity to go out and deliver meals. We also volunteer at the animal shelter. It's important so the clients know there's more than getting paid to do a job, it's helping the community. So, they're learning that giving back is really important," Russell said.

A number of clients at Aspen Crest hold down part-time jobs. Robert works at the Delta Building Center cleaning, Sara has worked 24 years at Ace Hardware in Delta helping with bookwork and Marty has worked 30 years at McDonalds washing dishes.

“Their employment is really meaningful because when they get wage money they can buy whatever they need with it, new clothes, personal items. It makes them feel valued just like us,” Russell said, “They have a great work ethic. Their work increases their self-esteem and they’re dependable. They don’t miss a day of work unless they are sick or have an appointment.”

Russell said she’s concerned about the current financial situation at Community Options citing the inadequate rates from Medicare and Medicaid as well as the state wide waiting list that has depleted the number of clients many rural organizations can serve.

“We’re not getting the money and the rates that we get really don’t support the people that we’re serving. With that, we have to buy food, housing, over the counter medications not covered by Medicare or Medicaid, all the utilities, transportation and salaries,” Russell said, adding “and we aren’t able to replace clients who die or move out of the area because of the statewide waiting list. If they would just let the rural areas take some of these people, we would be able to house them, but we also need a rate increase.”

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In order to survive, Russell said they cut back on their budgets only buying what is necessary while providing adequate care of clients. She said they often have to wait to replace some items like worn out flooring, refrigerators or stoves until they become critical.

Russell said she would like to see more community donations as a way to help support Community Options through this tough economic time.

The question, “What would happen if Community Options folded?” Leaves the longtime employee searching for an answer.

"I don't know what would happen. I really don't. Because who's going to step in and what are families going to do who depend on host homes and group homes. And our PCA's what are they going to do? So, everybody needs to talk to the legislators and senators and ask them to help...because what will they do with the people (who depend on Community Options)."

From the community:

I was very dismayed to learn of the financial situation of Community Options in the Independent dated Jan. 8.

My son, Michael, was born at full-term in June of 1994. At 6 months of age, we attended a Child Find clinic sponsored by Delta County Schools to assess the development of both of my children. At that time, it was suspected that Michael may have a delay in his development. After seeing several doctors, it was determined that he was, in fact, delayed due to a malformation of his brain in utero. Via Child Find, we were referred to Community Options. It was frightening to face an uncertain future for my son with a damaged brain. Would he walk, talk, or be "normal?"

Michael first received developmental therapy from a darling woman, Barbara, who came to our home each week. She instructed me in how to work with Michael every day. From the moment I made contact with Community Options until Michael "graduated" from their program, the people and programs there could not have been more helpful. "What do you need?" was the question they always asked. His personal coordinator remained in close contact with me, and we would meet to evaluate his progress and set new goals. From the age of 6 months until 3 years, we relied heavily on their staff for guidance and assistance.

Through the years, Michael was in developmental, occupational, speech, cognitive, vision and hippo therapies. That was a lot of appointments each week. He was in special education for a few hours each week until third grade, when he "graduated out" of that. He caught up developmentally, and very few teachers at the high school even knew of his challenges.

With the exception of some right-handed weakness, Michael is a healthy, normal man of age 25. He graduated high school and then graduated from Colorado Mesa University. He is currently attending DeVry University online. No one would ever know what he has overcome and how hard we worked.

I served on the Board of Directors of Community Options for several years to give a “mom’s perspective” to the group. I can assure you, the volunteer board members, staff, and Tom Turner are very dedicated to keeping Community Options viable. Not all clients of Community Options require life-long assistance. They offer invaluable help to families who face developmental challenges of all kinds. We cannot thank them enough for their guidance and help.

Donna Deleff



Letter by Heather to COI
By Heather 10 hrs ago

Lucky_Charm

Dear

community options

I Just would Like
to say a big Thanks
to community options
for opening these doors
to me. Because without
community options I
would be host Thanks
so much. And A big
Thanks to all staff
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