



# Beacon of Hope: Small Faith Collaboration with Big Results

**Featuring:**

Mercy's Gate

## Overview

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### Mercy's Gate: A Beacon of Hope

Mercy's Gate is an all-encompassing beacon of hope for many families in northern Colorado Springs facing hard times. It began very humbly, however, with just five churches coming together 30 years ago to create a simple food pantry called Northern Churches Care. Over the first few years the ministry had different homes and added programs as needs of neighbors surfaced. Jenny Kay, Director of Community Programs said, "As needs evolved we tried to find a way to meet them."

Today, Mercy's Gate has a bigger mission than supplying food: churches joining together to love their neighbors by helping with physical financial, emotional and spiritual needs. On a weekly basis, member churches, volunteers and staff provide a plethora of resources all while tending to their neighbors' spiritual and emotional health.

Kay said, "We are a faith-based social service agency. We do rental assistance, utility assistance, clothing vouchers, and have an enormous food pantry. We also have a faith community nurse and help with prescription and medical needs. We offer a little professional counseling, connect people to free legal help and make referrals for other services. As a faith-based organization, we offer prayer for people, too." Along with weekly human services, the organizations runs seasonal programs, like offering free tax

preparation, an Annual Health Fair, a Back to School Program, and both Thanksgiving & Christmas Projects.



Meet one of our CharityTracker champion volunteers, Pat Simmons! Pat is a Mercy's Gate volunteer & CharityTracker Administrator extraordinaire! Pictured here with Jenny Kay, Director of Community Programs at Mercy's Gate Northern Colorado Springs center.

the community (like other's profiled in this report), their single agency use has proved very beneficial to the organization.

## Measuring a Big Impact

According to Pat Simmons, faithful volunteer at Mercy's Gate for over 10 years, there are nearly 100,000 people in the database who have received assistance over the years. And Pat would know, as she is the administrator of Mercy's Gate CharityTracker database. "We have used CharityTracker since the end of 2010," said Pat. Prior to that, she was assisting the staff by entering data into an Access program. "I knew basically what I needed to do to get started. I have put in so many names. It's amazing! The 100,000 includes people of all ages," she continued.

When Mercy's Gate started using CharityTracker, they migrated all their previous data to the new system. Though the organization does not network their database with others agencies or churches in

Pat, as well as a few other volunteers, help to run reports of the good work for their neighbors. She runs a report for the organization's Executive Director every month on the rental assistance program and another volunteer is currently running reports for a large program audit. All this is information in compiled straight from CharityTracker. The reports tell them vital information. "For instance, we now know that most of the people we serve come in for assistance less than three times in their lifetime, 83%, in fact, have been here three times or less," said Kay.

When local churches receive benevolence requests, especially those outside of their congregants, Kay said the churches refer people to Mercy's Gate. "We can vet their requests and help them with a lot of potential resources. This helps not having people going from church to church getting a little bit of money from different places," said Kay. Mercy's Gate makes a big impact in the neighborhoods they serve. In one year alone, they reported helping in the following ways:

- 580 families received rental assistance, preventing homelessness for 1,580 people
- 865 families received utilities assistance, providing heat, electricity & water for 2,840 people
- 515 individuals received local transportation vouchers
- 1,768 individuals received clothing vouchers
- 5,107 emergency food & commodities packages were distributed to the hungry
- 1,079 individuals received legal, budget or mental health counseling
- 1,494 children and adults attended the annual Health Fair
- 2,258 tax returns prepared for low income households, returning over \$1.4M in tax refunds
- 399 families received Thanksgiving baskets
- 128 households displaced by the Black Forest Fire assisted during this community-wide crisis
- 1,286 medical services were given through our Neighborhood Nurse Center
- The Heart Training Center provided 9,000 services in life skills, teaching, training and prayer

## The Most Valuable Resource

Though having CharityTracker is valuable to Mercy's Gate, the organization's most valuable asset are its volunteers, like Pat, who turned 75 this year. She says finding the opportunity to serve at Mercy's Gate was a "God call." Pat shared, "We moved out here 11 years ago. I was looking to get involved in something and was reading the paper. They were having a Thanksgiving basket program and I responded to helping fill the baskets. I felt that God brought this to my attention and I am still here! Knowing that I am helping the staff in the background is important to me."

One of her most memorable experiences was as a hostess, serving a neighbor obviously is a bit of distress while waiting to receive assistance. "I don't know what her condition was, but I remember she could not sit in the waiting room. She was standing in the hallway and I went to her and asked her to keep the passageway open. She told me, 'I just can't go in there.' I gave her a hug and asked her where she would be more comfortable, then I took a chair outside for her. She was so appreciative. I'll never forget that. I just love being here at Mercy's Gate because it is a wonderful place with a lot of good help offered and good people serving. "