



Spring 2020

POWERFUL TIMES

Melanie's selfpower

Melanie came to Project Self-Sufficiency in September of 2009 hoping to fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. Each of her previous attempts to go back to school had been stalled by significant barriers. She was questioning how she could afford childcare for her youngest daughter while attending school.

After completing career planning and confirming that nursing was the right choice, Melanie received assistance from Project Self-Sufficiency with childcare, educational and living expenses, and emotional support. Her Advisor, Bethany, went above and



beyond in advocating for and assisting Melanie. Project Self-Sufficiency arranged for housing for Melanie and her daughters at Willow Place where she met other single parents enrolled in Project Self-Sufficiency and has since sustained many lifelong friendships. Melanie worked very hard to successfully

“Their support has been a godsend to me and I will forever be grateful for all they have done for me. I would not be where I am today without the help of Project Self-Sufficiency.”

complete the difficult Bachelor of Nursing program at the University of Northern Colorado. She graduated Summa Cum Laude and was awarded many scholarships from Project Self-Sufficiency, WISP, WomenGive of United Way of Larimer County, Philo, and UNC. Melanie has also been a speaker at Project Self-Sufficiency and WomenGive events. Melanie graduated from Project Self-Sufficiency in 2015 and began a career in nursing.

Melanie is a true hero during this current pandemic, caring for COVID-19 patients on the medical floor of a local hospital. She and her team are part of a national story about a COVID-19 survivor who was on a ventilator and has recovered. Thanks to Melanie and the other nurses on the unit, he is now home with his wife and young children.

During the three years that Melanie has been with the hospital, she has been nominated for the Daisy Award a dozen times by patients and their families. This

special award goes to nurses who have been nominated for their caring and extra effort. One of her nominators had this to say about the care she received from Melanie, “From the get-go Melanie was confident, assertive, and available. On the spot for meds and answered questions and when she didn't have the answers, she would research to get the answers needed. Never did I feel like I was a burden. The out-of-her-way compassion was granting my desire to have a shower. She made it happen in her busy, exhausting day! Melanie made me feel important. I could write every nurse's name down that I had during my stay, but I am nominating Melanie.”

Melanie valued her time with Project Self-Sufficiency, “Their support has been a godsend to me and I will forever be grateful for all they have done for me. I would not be where I am today without the help of Project Self-Sufficiency.”

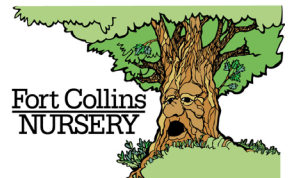
Melanie is happily married to husband Brett, who owns and operates his own business. She is an amazing mother to Preston, Ariana, and Kaydence. She is also a loving stepmother to Ezra and Jade. Melanie is a devout Christian and loves both contemporary Christian and country music.

Project Self-Sufficiency Welcomes Our 2020 Right Size Giving Business Sponsors

Right Size Giving provides a platform for businesses to maximize their social impact and community exposure at the same time. Businesses sign up and give once each year, with recognition and benefits provided throughout the year, based on their "Power Level," or level of investment. Our Right Size Giving Sponsors are dedicated to our community and the important work we do because they know that every investment in Project Self-Sufficiency:

- Is an investment in human capital; education and training create a qualified workforce that is essential to business growth and success;
- Perpetuates a positive cycle in our community; educated and employable families become self-reliant, thrive, and are able to participate fully in all this community has to offer;
- Changes the course for multiple generations; education and career become the norm and not the exception. We see our children pursue the same level, or more, of education as their parent.

For information on becoming a Right Size Giving Sponsor, contact Ricki at 970-635-5904 or ricki@bringthepower.org.



Bringing the Hope

Project Self-Sufficiency's Response to COVID-19



Dear
Supporter,

At Project Self-Sufficiency, we usually talk about **selfpower** in the context of

our program Participants. But during COVID-19 times, it has also become about Team Awesome, our staff. We define **selfpower** as the power and confidence that comes from deep within the human spirit. **Selfpower** is what pushes someone through a challenge, even on their worst day. **Selfpower** is intangible; you can't actually see it, but you can see the results. And **selfpower** is essential to write new future stories.

Our offices have been closed since March 17th and our entire staff has been working remotely to continue to provide important supports to our families. This new reality is hard. We miss each other. We feel alone and sometimes scared. Then our colleague, Connie, lost her husband tragically due to a car accident. And during the most painful time of her life, we could not hug her. These times are heavy and difficult, on so many levels.

And, at the same time, we are blossoming in new ways. I am seeing fabulous attributes on this team like vulnerability, tenacity, grace, love and solidarity. Along with grit and determination, these traits have always been there, but now they are at the forefront. We are all fully engaged in this opportunity to transform our service delivery and our model to do even more good in the community, and we are writing a new future story for Project Self-Sufficiency. Team Awesome has successfully transitioned to holding remote Advising sessions with Participants

and help sessions with community members. We fully transformed and executed our annual Strengthen Scholarship grants committee process from in-person to virtual using newly created orientation videos and Zoom meetings, awarding \$141,450 to 47 students to help them stay on track with education and career goals in the 2020-21 school year. We have provided technology to families unable to complete their children's distance learning and to those unable to continue with their own online learning expectations.

We have supported families experiencing financial hardship due to layoffs and reductions in work hours with gas cards, grocery cards, car repairs, car donations, and utility and rent assistance. We are bringing new families into our program by conducting virtual interviews as the final step in vetting candidates, and have already brought in seven new families. More importantly, we have maintained solid, consistent, grounding support to our families during a time of unprecedented uncertainty. We are committed to "business as usual" and are using creativity and technology to do so.

With the economic downturn, we anticipate that we will see an increase in demand for our program and the supports that we provide, and intend to be positioned to serve despite social distancing. We know that our work is more important now than ever.

Right now, we are working hard to anticipate and procure additional resources to support our families as they deal with the impacts of COVID-19. As this pandemic continues, things will worsen as families utilize the resource allocations already made and require additional supports. Our annual

budget relies on substantial individual contributions, roughly 40% of our total income, to meet the needs of our families. If decreased values of donors' investment portfolios, job losses, and business closures significantly influence year-end giving, this could negatively affect our ability to meet our families' needs this year and next. There is an enormous amount of uncertainty we are facing as we assess how to not only support our families, but also maintain our program and our team.

Looking ahead, in addition to an increase in supports to cover the needs already shared, we know that high unemployment also brings challenges for job seekers. There will be increased competition for lucrative positions and companies may be reluctant to hire because of continued uncertainty. These impacts will affect our Program Graduates' success in landing a position that will pay that self-sufficient wage needed to support a family, and could warrant further supports from Project Self-Sufficiency while they seek appropriate employment. High unemployment also tends to drive more demand for our program and I think it is safe to say that we will experience an increase in Applicants to Project Self-Sufficiency.

During this time, grit and determination are stronger than ever at Project Self-Sufficiency, not only for our families, but for Team Awesome. I am beyond proud of this team, and our work. And I am eternally grateful to each of you for your partnership and dedication to our work and mission.

Love and gratitude,
Tracy

Welcome to Our Newest Board Member. . .



Ray Black is the son of a single mother, college drop-out, US Air Force veteran, father and husband. Dr. Ray Black is currently an assistant professor of African American Studies in Colorado State University's Ethnic Studies department. His primary academic focus is on how students of color, from early childhood through graduate school, succeed in higher education. Dr. Black has taught early childhood education (Head Start), has been the coordinator for a non-profit program seeking to keep young men of color in high school, and has led campaigns for reform-minded school board candidates. He uses his interests and experiences in mentoring current and former students, listening to and speaking up for African American and other communities of color, stressing entering their spaces respectfully, and honoring cultural and ethnic heritages and strengths.

BOARD & STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Farewell to stellar Board Member, **Amy Kolczak**. In her two years of service, Amy's impact was impressive and her commitment to single parents inspires us. Thank you, Amy, for playing an important role in our work!

Welcome New Members of Team Awesome!

Amanda Orozco has a B.S in Psychology with a minor in Criminal Justice from Colorado State University. She strives for a career focused on improving the lives of families through culturally responsible advocacy and equity. After graduation, Amanda worked in residential treatment centers and community transitions programs and earned a CAC III Certificate. She continued her journey working with families involved in the courts. "I'm a first-generation college graduate and I did not get here alone. I recognize the importance of supports, resilience, and knowledge to navigate change. I am putting my passion in action by helping parents strengthen their selfpower to create generational change in their lives and children's futures."



Sarah Wooldridge graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a degree in teaching. While practicing teaching, she grew her passion for helping others overcome barriers and knew that she wanted to be impactful in other ways. In 2013, Sarah moved to Fort Collins and started her career in non-profits, always working with children, youth, or families. "I enjoy the creative problem solving of navigating systematic barriers and connecting with people. I love playing outside and challenging myself with new hobbies and skills. When I am not in the office, I can be found on the trails or in a coffee shop reading."



In Memory of Doug DeMercurio

The Project Self-Sufficiency Family fondly celebrates the life and mourns the loss of Doug DeMercurio.

When Connie DeMercurio was hired by Project Self-Sufficiency in 2003, Doug came with her as part of a fabulous package deal. He became 'Santa' for Project Self-Sufficiency's single-parent families at the Holiday Party and was a breakfast chef for the annual fundraising brunch. Doug was often on hand to help out as needed. His cheery disposition and upbeat attitude lifted those around him.

As Santa, Doug was so patient and kind. He warmly greeted children and parents, posing with them in the hot Santa suit for unending holiday photographs. At the brunch, former Project Self-Sufficiency Advisor, Michele Scheetz, recalls working side by side with Doug, "I fondly remember flipping omelets with Doug. He was always incredibly supportive of Project Self-Sufficiency's mission, staff, and fundraisers. His quiet smile warmed my heart."

We lost Doug following a terrible car accident in March. The day before the accident Doug had reaffirmed his intent to continue working at Trader Joe's in spite of the health risk he faced with so much public contact. He wrote in his journal "I believe my life purpose is to serve others. Part of that purpose is to be present in times of need, to be a calming influence in times of fear and panic." Doug so loved his family, friends, and community. He was a longtime active member of Rotary International.

Doug is greatly missed and always will be. Memorial gifts can be directed to Project Self-Sufficiency.



Doug and Connie DeMercurio



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bringthepower.org



Return Service Requested

Bring the power of education to single parents.

Donations to Project Self-Sufficiency are eligible for tax benefits. The following are just three ways your taxes can play a part in your impact. Consult your tax advisor for information on your situation.

1. Refund CO is a new program that allows you to donate some, or all, of your tax return to nonprofits of your choice. Enter **Project Self-Sufficiency of Loveland-Fort Collins** and our registration number **20023003527** in the Donate to a Colorado Nonprofit Fund line on your state income tax return or tax software - or just give this info to your tax preparer.
2. Donations of \$250 and more may be eligible for the Enterprise Zone Tax Credit. Call our offices at 970-635-5902 to claim this credit.
3. In response to COVID-19, the CARES Act allows for **individuals who do not itemize to claim an above-the-line deduction of up to \$300 for charitable contributions**; Individuals who itemize can deduct donations up to 100% of adjusted gross income. Business deductions limits have also increased.



New Tax Benefits and Programs

Since 2009, the Friends group has served an important function in supporting Participant needs at Project Self-Sufficiency. Each year, Friends provide for the Participants' Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts, prepare birthday cards for Participants, and organize and execute a fun summer event for families. These are small gestures, but mean so much to a single parent. The group also orchestrates the Holiday Plant Sale in support of the Project Self-Sufficiency Strengthened Scholarship Fund, which helps support single parents in their educational goals. \$31,525 has been raised for the fund since the group's inception! Friends meets every other month, on the second Monday, in south Fort Collins. If you have any questions, or are interested in joining us, please contact **Kay Williams** at **970-310-3093** or **buddyboy78@comcast.net**.

JOIN A GROUP THAT MAKES A BIG IMPACT!

FRIENDS OF PROJECT SELF-SUFFICIENCY