



By Matthew Fox

# Providing Shelter

Finding yourself and your family in a homeless situation can lead to desperation. Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) offers hope to these families and provides an alternative to ending up on the streets of Colorado Springs.

IHN partners with more than 30 local faith communities to provide shelter, meals, support services and hope to families in homeless situations. While IHN provides a Family Day Center and other services to get people back on their feet, the local partners provide temporary shelter, clothes, goods and other needed items.

First Pres is proud to be one of IHN's local partners, providing monetary support and serving as a host site to IHN families four weeks a year. Serving as a host site means more than providing shelter, it requires providing volunteers to make First Pres feel like home to families in need.

Brad Gillispie provides that welcoming presence for First Pres, serving as volunteer coordinator. Brad first got involved with IHN after learning First Pres needed volunteers to serve as overnight hosts. He felt drawn to get involved, and now feels

## IHN serves families in homeless situations

that working with the IHN families is a blessing. It's a ministry close to his heart.

"Early in our married life, my wife and I endured a situation that could well have resulted in us being homeless if not for the assistance from our church Deacons to help us make ends meet," Brad said. "There was nothing we did to put us in that situation, and we made every effort to get out of it without immediate success. That kind of experience is really humbling and humiliating, and it gave me an empathetic and compassionate heart for those who are in a like situation."

Shelter provided by IHN partners offers a much needed refuge for these families. During his time as a volunteer, Brad has witnessed how the program blesses IHN families.

"The families are grateful that we open our doors and provide a safe environment and hot meals for them," he said. "More than that, they are always excited about our facilities and the great activities we bring in for them. It encourages me and serves as an example when I see parents who are in a homeless situation able to put aside the stresses that situation creates and devote themselves to loving and giving attention to their children."

Programs like IHN fill a vital role in Colorado Springs. According to a report compiled by the United Way of the Pikes Peak Region, one in six children in El Paso and Teller counties lives in poverty. Additionally, El Paso County has experienced a gap in the need for and availability of affordable housing. The wait time for most remains more than five years.

Brad said one of the benefits of volunteering with IHN is seeing those in need in the community in a new light.

"People who have only seen the face of homelessness as the chronic abusers who panhandle around our city will be surprised and humbled to find that a large percentage of the homeless in our community is comprised of families who sincerely want to get out of their situation but need a helping hand to assist them in getting back on their feet," he said. "Most of us are only a circumstance or two away from finding ourselves in the same situation, and serving at IHN reminds us of that and helps us be grateful for how God has provided for our needs. Our volunteers tell me how blessed they are to be able to spend time with the guest families, get to know a little about them, and serve as a host to them while they're staying at First Pres."

There are plenty of volunteer opportunities with IHN. There are opportunities for people who want to shop for groceries and bring those in to families being sheltered, those who want to cook and bring hot meals, for people who want to serve dinner to guest parents and children, lead them in activities, sit with them in the Manna Grill and chat or spend a night at the church with them to ensure everything goes smoothly.

Matthew Fox is the Manager of Communications at First Pres.

The next IHN host week is  
Sunday, April 20  
to Sunday, April 27.  
For more information  
on volunteering, contact the  
Missions department at  
**719-884-6233.**

