

Fort Carson Head Start fundraising underway

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By Debbie Kelley (author/debbie-kelley) Updated: June 4, 2014 at 8:14 pm · 0

The local agency that operates Head Start preschool programs for low-income families wants to whittle down a waiting list of 50 kids who live on Fort Carson.

Community Partnership for Child Development hopes to open a second preschool classroom on the Army base in the fall for children ages 2-3.

"We have an empty classroom that's been donated to us and is just waiting for us to fill the seats," said Amie Bennight, communications manager.

A \$75,000 fundraising campaign that kicked off May 1 to pay for the expansion is more than halfway there.

As of Wednesday, the organization has accumulated \$52,500 through individual donations, a few small grants and a major event last month.

The organization is focusing on raising the remaining \$22,500 by Aug. 1, Bennight said.

The money will cover the costs of adding eight children and three teachers, she said.

The nonprofit organization runs three preschool programs: Head Start for ages 4-5, Early Head Start for 2- and 3-

year-olds, and the state-funded Colorado Preschool Program. All three programs each school year serve about 1,900 students in 60 classrooms around El Paso County.

But federal budget cuts have led the organization to reach out to the community for help in building "community classrooms" - which are supported by the community. Last year, for the first time, Community Partnership for Child Development appealed to residents and raised enough money to open a community classroom at its headquarters at 2330 Robinson St.

About 150 children from Fort Carson families already are enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, Bennight said.

Along with the schooling comes parenting advice, behavioral and mental health counseling, medical and dental screenings and other services that Bennight said military families with young children find helpful.

"Military families are a very important sector of our community in El Paso County, and with one or sometimes both parents serving abroad, there are a lot of issues at home that support the need for early childhood education," Bennight said.

The Early Head Start program for 2-3 year-olds works with physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language development of each child.

Bennight said studies show children enrolled in the program exhibit fewer behavior problems and develop more complex reasoning skills.

"Our whole mission is serving the family with comprehensive services, and the message we're really trying to get out there is that filling a seat now in a classroom helps them find a place in the community later," she said.

"We have all the scientific research and factual data to support that if children are able to attend preschool, the likelihood of they will drop out of school or commit crimes later in life is unlikely. It's a compelling message to the community.

For information about donating to help the Fort Carson classroom get off the ground, call 884-2906 or go to [www.cocdheadstart.org](http://www.cocdheadstart.org) and click on 2014 Fill a Classroom Project.

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