

Finding a home Program helps people with long-term illnesses

by Clarke Reader

October 13, 2011

To most people walking through their front door is no big deal. It's something they've done so many times in their life they don't even think about it.

So what happens when the front door can't be reached, or it is just a little too small to fit through?

That's the very problem that Kathryn West faces.

West lived with her daughter Darlene Dennison in Lakewood until she was taken ill in 2008. Three surgeries later, she went to a nursing home to recover in August of 2008, but since she now uses a scooter, she can't get into her home.

"She's really active and busy, and she's at the Christopher House in Wheat Ridge right now," said Dennison, who owns the house they both live in. "Even though the staff there is great, the plan was never for her to always stay there. We wanted her to rehabilitate and come home."

After making some calls to see what groups could help her get a ramp built, Dennison was referred to the Home Builders Foundation of Metro Denver.

"We're a nonprofit home improvement organization for people with long-term illnesses," said program manager, Beth Forbes. "We look at four criteria: accessibility need, financial need, home ownership and the home must be located in the Denver metro area."

According to Forbes, they do a range of projects from ramps and bathroom remodels to replacing floors so it's easier to move. The volunteers who make up the organization's board and gifting committee — which reviews applications for builds and approves projects — are all made up of people involved in the building industry.

Over the past several months Forbes noticed that the list of applicants was not getting shorter, and had an idea.

"I thought, why not see if we could bang a whole bunch out in a day, and it turned into three," she said.

That's how the first Build Blitz was born. Over the course of Oct. 6 through 8, the organization built accessible ramps for seven homes across the Denver area.

One of those homes is Dennison's.

On Thursday, Oct. 6, volunteers were on hand to build a ramp into the home, which will allow West to return home.



"It's important for home builders to give back to the community," said Brent Guetz, who was the building captain for the project. He is also a board member of the HBF and works for ProBuild, which donated the lumber and labor to the effort. "We try to help where we can, since this is what we do."

"Once they got involved, they made life so easy for me," said Dennison. "That they would take the time to volunteer their time to help in the community means more than words can say."

The estimated cost for the entire Build Blitz would normally be \$35,000 for all seven homes but thanks to donations from various groups, including OrePac and TimberTech, which donated the decking material, it will only cost around \$1,500.

"There's no cost ever to the recipients, and because so many people in the organization have ties to the building industry, we have huge cost-saving measures that allow us to stretch the money," Forbes explained. "In 2010 for every \$1 raised, we're able to stretch it to \$6 in retail value."

The ramp is just the beginning of the process to get West back home with her daughter, but it's a pivotal one.

"If it wasn't for these guys, I don't know how long it would take for her to get home," Dennison said through tears. "They have made it possible for her to come home."

For more information on the HBF, visit www.hbfdenver.org or call [303-778-1400](tel:303-778-1400).