Hunt Foundation partners with border faith group to help families struggling with poverty

By Maria Cortes Gonzalez - Nov. 19, 2020

The Woody and Gayle Hunt Family Foundation is investing $500,000 in a partnership with El Paso County and a nonprofit organization that will help families struggling with poverty.

"Our family has been for 100 years in El Paso and our headquarters of our business is here, and even though most of our business operations are outside of El Paso, our focus from a charitable standpoint is the Paso del Norte region, which includes Juárez and Southern New Mexico," said Woody L. Hunt, chairman of the Woody and Gayle Hunt Family Foundation.

The partnership brings together one of El Paso's wealthiest family foundations with a border faith organization that works "across religious, racial, ethnic, economic, generational and neighborhood lines" for the greater good of the community.

Aside from the Hunts' contribution (which will be over five years), the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Assistance Fund is receiving $275,000 from El Paso County and $175,000 from anonymous national funders.

Hunt said the partnership will allow low-income families within the county but outside the city limits to get much-needed help, especially during the COVID-19
pandemic. Officials envision 1,000 families will be able to access $500 in cash to cover any expenses or financial obligations.

“Families in El Paso are resourceful, innovative, and bring so many assets to the fight against poverty, but have lacked the support and investments needed to turn their financial goals into reality,” Hunt said in a news release.

Hunt said the partnership also brings in the nonprofit Family Independence Initiative, which uses a social platform to help families connect and reach their financial goals.

"My hope is that we’ll have some national donors that are willing to continue the FFI program, and EPISO/Border Interfaith, the local sponsor, will help identify and deliver the funds to the individual families," Hunt said. "But we do expect to have all the funds distributed by the end of the year."

Ivanna Neri, partnership director for the Family Independence Initiative, said the organization has been in existence since 2001 and had worked with families in 14 states before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, it has been able to distribute funds in all the states, as well as Puerto Rico.

Neri said their approach is to let people decide for themselves what is best for them to improve their financial status. They also use a social media platform, uptogether.org, which helps families network with others that can help them achieve their goals.

"When people join our platform, we tell them to invite other people in their community, friends, family, neighbors, people from faith-based communities, etc.," Neri said. "After that, they work together to be able to accomplish milestones in line with their goals. We are able to provide them with a wider network of people in line with their goals. At the same time, they can tap into offers that we make so they can accelerate whatever milestones they set."

Goals can range from buying a home to starting a business.
“There is no one who can stretch a dollar further than a single parent trying to make ends meet,” said the Rev. Pablo Matta of EPISO/Border Interfaith. “Now more than ever, we must invest in our people and ensure that they don’t only have the resources to weather the current pandemic, but that we walk with them on their journey out of poverty in the long term. With this partnership, we intend to do just that.”

How to apply for the $500 funds

Funds are now available.

To be eligible, families must live within El Paso County but outside the El Paso city limits; have an income at or below 80% of the area median family income for the El Paso County area or show eligibility for or enrollment in means-tested benefits programs such as SNAP; and provide documentation that they have experienced a financial hardship due to COVID-19.

Note: The median income was $43,958 in 2018, according to the U.S. census.

To apply, visit https://fund.uptogether.org/elpaso. Note that while the fund is available for residents of El Paso County who do not live in the El Paso city limits, it is available to people in areas including Canutillo, Vinton, Anthony, Westway, Socorro, San Elizario, Clint, Fabens and Tornillo.