

ARRA: Just a bunch of numbers?

Most everyone has heard about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Some people may have ringing in their ears from all the media coverage ARRA has generated over the past year. It's impressive to see massive statistics about jobs created, but often those statistics can seem ambiguous. Numbers are just that, faceless digits promoted for boasting or criticizing. I think it's important to add a local human element to all the hoopla. One of our new employees, Kristen, was hired at Opportunities with a twofold purpose. First, she is an example of one job created by ARRA. Her job is designed to supply Kristen with training and authentic experiences to become a well-rounded human service professional. Second, she provides vital services to low income county residents. Specifically, she helps people remove transportation barriers to work by helping pay for needs such as vehicle repairs, insurance, and gas cards. Where did the money come from to pay for these services? Well... ARRA of course.

Kristen has only been working for three months and states she has already assisted 34 people with more than \$40,000 worth of services including tires, brakes, fuel tanks, alternators, and "more hoses and belts than I would know what to do with". Working in human services can be a personal discovery as well. Kristen values the opportunity and remarked; "the experiences I've had in just the last 3 months have changed the way that I look at people and at life in general. I've been that person that was unemployed and felt like there was no where to turn". Kristen has looked into the faces of those in need and has witnessed resolve that often seems absent to others. "I've learned that there is no shame in asking for help. I've seen people with nothing happier than people I know that seem to have everything. I've learned from these people that life is what you make of it, no more, no less". As the agency moves further into 2010, many more people will be visiting Opportunities looking for employees like Kristen to help with a sometimes humbling need.

In conclusion, Kristen is a great example of ARRA funds in action. The practice of employing people to help others maintain employment is synergistic in scope, simple in practice, and a huge benefit for those needing a helping hand during this economic climate. Kristen is one of seven employees Opportunities hired with ARRA dollars, all of which are delivering similar quality services to low income individuals and families here in Lewis County. If you are in need, come visit and say hello to someone who might be able to help.

Scott Mathys, CEO