

# Tidings

Spring 2020 Newsletter of the Durango Adult Education Center



Durango Adult Education Center  
*Serving Southwest Colorado*

## Teamwork Drives E-Learning Solutions During COVID-19

"Oh my gosh!" That thought dripped into Deb Pace's mind like the first drop from a broken fire hydrant. Soon followed a flood of how's, when's, and where's. Why? was the only question with a definite answer.

Due to the novel coronavirus, the Durango Adult Education Center and its Cortez site would have to shutter classrooms. All classes had to be converted to online platforms. Deb teaches HSE (High School Equivalency) classes for adult learners preparing to obtain a GED. She also instructs basic education courses which are designed to fill fundamental and early education gaps in reading and math.

With access to her actual classroom off limits, Deb quickly assembled a virtual classroom. At the same time, she and all teachers at the Center invested many hours personally contacting every student. They needed to identify any and all barriers to each student's ongoing learning.

"Some students did not own a computer. Others had no access to the internet at home," Deb explains.

She considers the Center's response to the evolving crisis a real success because absolutely everyone chipped in somehow.

She says, "Everyone was on board from the top down. Everyone just jumped on it."

For instance, Susan Hakanson, Executive Director, sought emergency grants. Program Director Libby Baumchen began working with state and federal funders to adapt how the Center could track the gains tied to funding. Meanwhile, Operations Manager Cori Andreatta turned into the Center's Tony Stark, doling out essential technology, setting up Wi-Fi-hotspots, and troubleshooting nonstop. BOOST Coordinators Mary Fuller and Danielle Beamer put on their PPE and personally delivered Chrome Books to students' homes.

Every question tied to these uncertain times has not been answered, but the teaching process is more settled. Deb sends readings and links over email. Her classes convene for discussions and activities. She continues to experiment with how best to teach math online.

*continued...*



Virtual Staff Meeting

# The Impact of Your Support

## Teamwork (continued)

Looking beyond the initial technical leaps and bounds, Deb points out the DAEC's unique and results-driven curricula has transitioned facilely to e-learning. It's a standout teaching methodology Deb never before encountered in over 15 years teaching adult education.

"We run an intensive 8-week block...kind of like boot camp. I was just very impressed when I came into it," Deb says, noting that in over 15 years of teaching adult education, she had never encountered anything like it.

"I think this Center and its approach is just brilliant!"

Deb has also found that teaching in the virtual classroom may have altered the tools and technology she needs, but it has not altered her core teaching philosophy. As she puts it, "With the adult ed population...for whatever reason the regular school system did not work for them. I just have a soft spot in my heart for them and I just really love working with them because it's life changing for them. They don't often have a very high self-esteem. You can just show them what's right about them instead of what's wrong with them."



Deb Pace

## OUR BELIEFS

We believe that:

- All people have inherent worth.
- A sense of belonging is a building block for a stronger community.
- All people have the potential to create positive change.
- Education empowers the individual to achieve positive character attributes, social and economic mobility, and self sufficiency.
- Literacy and cultural competency are essential to thrive in this interconnected world.
- Family and culture impact the development of each individual.
- The right of every person to have and make choices is basic to freedom.
- Each individual has unique learning capabilities.
- The entire community benefits from an educated populace.
- A top priority of humanity is to create a better, more compassionate world.

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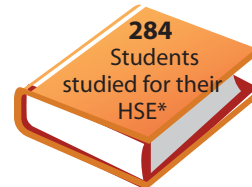
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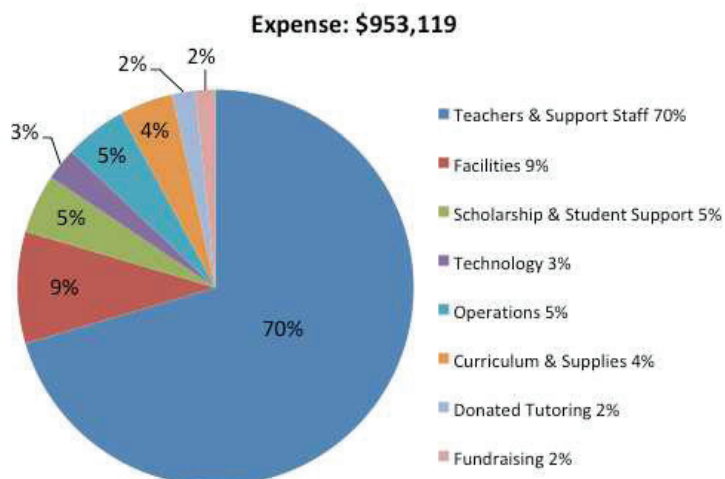
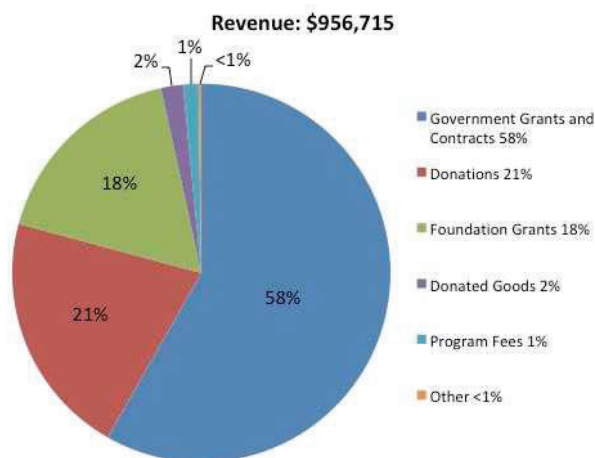


# 2019 Accomplishments



- 92 students from other countries learned English
- 16 different countries were represented by our ESL students
- 25 children from 16 families participated in childcare
- 144 individuals received career & support services through the BOOST Program
- 52 additional BOOST participants received scholarships and training in Early Childhood Education
- 520 tests were administered at our Pearson Vue Testing Center
- 544 volunteer hours were donated

## 2019 Finances *(Budget)*



# The Impact of Your Support

## Virtual Learning Delivers Actual Well-Being Benefits

The colorful bags mysteriously appeared on doorsteps around Cortez right around Easter. Witnesses did not report seeing a bounding bunny brandishing a basket of eggs. Rather, they saw a woman wearing gloves and a cheerful face mask over her mouth.

Some called her the “Eesle Bunny.” Others called her the E-S-L Bunny—AKA Peggy Tennyson, English-as-a-Second-Language teacher at the Cortez Adult Education Center.

“So many of my students are coping. They have no internet at home or lack a computer and even though we can offer them a Chrome Book, they might not be able to use it [because of language barriers]. Some of them are working extra hours. I think they’re having a hard time coping with kids at home, and spouses out of work, and things like that,” Peggy says as she explains her efforts to provide learning materials to her students throughout the coronavirus chaos.

The CAEC halted in-person classes in the wake of state restrictions. Teachers at the Cortez and Durango sites promptly assembled creative distance learning strategies. Peggy’s ESL class now convenes over Skype, a program students already knew how to use without additional training.

“The new distance classroom is not that different from my old classroom. For me, the classroom still exists even though we aren’t meeting in it,” Peggy says. “I have tried to maintain the same feel...teaching them the same things we were working on before as a way to keep some of the semblance of normalcy.”

As if they were in their usual classroom, students practice speaking English, review grammar, and refine their pronunciation. Students then put their weekly homework assignments in a bag on the doorstep. Peggy dons her ESL Bunny costume and swaps the completed assignments for fresh worksheets and new reading materials. That Peggy is so well equipped to stage a convincing virtual classroom amidst challenging circumstances should come as no surprise. She spent many years performing in musical theater. She knows not only how to captivate an audience, but also how to assemble the imaginary into an extension of reality.

Life’s various plot twists eventually led her to teaching GED classes at a community college. Then, one fateful Friday, a colleague asked if she might ever want to try teaching ESL. “I was literally handed a pile of books about a foot high and they said: you’ll start on Monday.”

Luckily, ESL proved to be Peggy’s calling. “I loved it! I never looked back,” she beams.

And even though a theater background enables Peggy to straddle the line between fantasy and reality, she does not ignore the staggering truths tied to teaching and learning during a pandemic. While it is hectic and sometimes overwhelming to balance all the stressors piling up at home right now, coming to class is also a mighty comfort.

“All of my students value learning. I also think it is giving them some emotional stability, as well,” Peggy says. She explains that coming to class is a time to see friends. Students check in with each other. Even at a distance, they offer and receive support from one another. “It definitely is valuable to all of us that we can be together.”



The “ESL Bunny”



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Ways to support  
the Center:  
contributing through  
AmazonSmile,  
Kroeger/City Market  
reward programs  
or making a  
direct donation.

## Upcoming Events

### August 25

Fall Classes Start  
Cortez & Durango

### September 23 & 24

Literacy Luncheon Revisited! 2020  
*Durango Adult Education Cinema!*

### DAEC Mission

Durango Adult Education Center, a caring learning community, fills educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility.

## Announcements

### Mary Mullen

The Mountain Plains Adult Education Association awarded Mary Mullen top honors as Teacher of the Year in 2019. The MPAEA serves adult education teachers across nine Western states.

### Teacher Features

If you have enjoyed the profiles in this issue about how DAEC staff have adapted to the COVID-19 crisis, please visit [www.durangoadulted.org/blog/](http://www.durangoadulted.org/blog/) where we will post these and other "Teacher Features" on our Blog page in the coming weeks. Special thanks to Jenny Mason for compiling these inspirational profiles and for memorializing this important time in our organization's history!

### In Memoriam

In December 2019, the Durango and Cortez Adult Education Center's Board of Directors lost a devoted supporter and sage leader with Lon Erwin's passing. For years, Erwin fueled our students' success behind the scenes while serving on the Board. While his guidance shall be sorely missed, his passion must be always replicated.



**Durango Adult Education Center**

*Serving Southwest Colorado*

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