

GENERATING EQUITY

Energy Outreach Colorado shines a light on the home energy needs of vulnerable households across Colorado.



PHOTO BY GLENDA CEBRIAN

During the harsh winter months of 2022-2023, approximately 16,000 Coloradans were calling a state helpline every week for assistance in paying their heating bills.

“Energy costs were shocking,” says Jennifer Gremmert, executive director of Energy Outreach Colorado (EOC), a statewide nonprofit that raises funds and forges partnerships to help low-income Coloradans afford their home energy. “Not only had the commodity price for natural gas soared, but Colorado is also in the midst of a move to cleaner energy, and the costs for new infrastructure as well as renewable energy and electrification programs were getting passed to the consumer.”

Always drawn toward helping people in need, Gremmert joined EOC in 1996 as the organization’s fourth employee. She has served as executive director since 2018, leading a 44-person team that’s passionate about helping every Coloradan afford basic household energy needs and bolstering energy efficiency across the state.

“One in four Colorado households struggles with energy insecurity, often cutting back on food or medicine to pay utility bills, lowering thermostats to unhealthy temperatures,

or living with the constant fear of disconnection,” says Gremmert. “The driving force of my career is equity. We partner with forward-thinking organizations and compassionate individual donors across the state to protect the economic health and physical well-being of all Coloradans. It’s our goal to ensure that everyone can afford and access the energy that powers their homes.”

MOMENTS OF CONNECTION

Partnering with outside organizations is key to EOC’s approach. In conjunction with the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments and local participating utility companies, the Colorado Affordable Residential Energy program provides income-qualified Coloradans in participating counties with free home energy upgrades—think insulation, lighting, air sealing, equipment replacement, and more. The Crisis Intervention Program supplies critical emergency heating system repairs or replacements to income-qualified households year-round. Coloradans experiencing energy inequity can also take advantage of the Community Solar Program and bill payment assistance.

Additionally, EOC partners with state programs such as the Colorado Low-income Energy Assistance Program, which uses federal funds to help people with home heating costs. In 2022, EOC’s broad advocacy impacted more than 35,000 Colorado households.

“Companies are increasingly focused on environmental, social, and governance investing. By joining forces with us, your company’s impact can be doubly powerful—helping people in need and reducing our carbon footprint,” Gremmert says.

She recalls a moment when she came face to face with the importance of her work. “Through a partner organization, a home had been donated and converted into six apartments for low-income people, and we’d provided a new energy-efficient refrigerator for each unit,” she says. When she stopped by to meet the new residents, an older woman approached her in tears. “She said, ‘I’ve never had a new refrigerator in my life! Now I can buy meat on sale and not have to chip ice out of the freezer.’ And I realized that we hadn’t just replaced an old appliance; this woman was feeling the grace that came from receiving something new. She’d be saving some kilowatt hours, but what it meant to her was so much more.”

