Taos Community Foundation has served the northern region of New Mexico as a leader in philanthropic services for over 20 years. The work of the community foundation is twofold: to create relationships with donors to maximize their charitable giving goals, and to link those charitable efforts to the mission of local nonprofit programs. The result is to address the wide array of community needs in the most meaningful way.

The foundation has had another banner year reflecting financial outcomes and granting dollars awarded in the service area of Taos and western Colfax Counties. Over $1.22 million was awarded to nonprofit organizations and scholarships to local students for post high school educational support.

The work of Taos Community Foundation is complex. It encompasses donor goals, financial and investment services, nonprofit coaching and direct support for community projects. “There are so many aspects to our work,” stated Lisa O’Brien, foundation director. “I find a great deal of my conversations with people are spent clarifying what we do and don’t do. Folks still think we are just fundraise for grants and take fees off gifts received. That is not our business model at all,” O’Brien remarked.

At a recent convening of community members, a donor, a teacher grant recipient, a community partner and the director of a nonprofit program that has a charitable fund with the foundation each shared the different ways in which Taos Community Foundation impacts their work in community.

Florence Miera, a social worker with Taos Municipal Schools, shared: “Our first grant from the foundation was to be given to an anonymous informant so to speak on Fridays, a high absentee day. TCF found ways to fill in the money we needed for food, coffee and a support group. ”

Donors often consider the foundation’s ability to create a fund that is now over $50,000, “The initial gift of $10,000 produces a certain level of confidence. Two years ago, the foundation facilitated an anonymous gift to open a charitable fund that helps Stray Hearts exclusively,”

“One donor conversation has led to numerous others,” reported O’Brien. “The initial gift of $10,000 has blossomed to a fund that is now over $50,000, with very little effort. Donors appreciate having options for their charitable gifts and the foundation is a great partner in identifying those options.”

Lucas said: “For Stray Hearts, TCF has given us their backing and much more. I see them as a sounding board. I can call and ask for a brainstorming session on how to increase our revenue stream or where to get supplies. Or our board can attend training at TCF, and they always say to stay pragmatic, to stay within the bounds of the organization, to be diligent about following the rules.”

Laurie Dunn has many relationship points with the foundation and despite her recent move to a board emeritus position after serving nine years as a board member, she remains active as a donor and in several advisory roles. “The success of Taos Community Foundation is because it has a finger on the pulse of the community, and is aware of not only the array of issues in Taos, but also the resources that can address them.” Working with TCF provides a safeguard for a donor.

“I know how powerful a community foundation can be,” Dunn added.

Dunn has been involved in Taos School Zone, one of several special projects of the foundation. Taos School Zone aims to make a greater impact on public education with a collaborative or ‘collective impact’ approach. After several years of exploration and inquiry, she noted, “We were able to propose a ‘school community’ concept for Enos Garcia Elementary School, and raised money to hire a coordinator. TCF was able to leverage its own grant money as seed money for the project.” Thus, bringing greater strength to the project.

“To me,” said Dunn, “the foundation is very issue-focused. It sees the entire picture of the town. I like that they have been such a strong incubator for new nonprofits in Taos County – providing infrastructure and administrative support as needed.”

Dunn summed it up for the entire group. “Taos Community Foundation offers a template and support for nonprofits to get going. It is such a nurturing organization. I call it the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.”