

Cheyenne dads help Habitat for Humanity



From left, James Bushrod, Vicente Gutierrez, Abel Ortiz and Joel Carabajal add the wall frames last Thursday on the second floor of the Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County Inc. ReStore building at 1804 Ames Ave. in Cheyenne. Hugh Carey/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

By **Becky Orr**
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

CHEYENNE—Five Cheyenne dads are making a positive difference in their lives and helping others at the same time.

They are enrolled in the current Dads Making a Difference class in Cheyenne, offered through the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services.

The program helps fathers learn solid work and career skills for in-demand jobs. The goal is for them to get jobs that pay well so they can better support their children and

families.

The current Dads class is learning construction and carpentry skills. Abel Ortiz of the Wyoming Contractors Association's Training Center provides intense classroom and hands-on instruction.

These dads are putting their skills to work by volunteering at the Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County ReStore at 1805 Ames Ave. They are converting the ReStore's vacant top floor into offices and conference spaces.

Group members have built wooden wall frames and raised them into place. They will do drywall, and in-

stall doors and windows, and complete other jobs.

"I am extremely impressed with this program and impressed with the caliber of training from the Wyoming Contractors Association," Kate Wright, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County, said about the Dads Making a Difference program.

Volunteers in the nonprofit group she directs build homes for qualifying residents.

"The dads are hard workers and very respectful," she said.

See Dads, page A2

Dads: "I definitely see a future"

Continued from A1

On Tuesday, the top floor of the ReStore was filled with that pleasant new construction smell of freshly cut lumber.

Dads worked together to fit windows into frames, their hammers echoing around the space.

Those in the program will earn certification from the National Center for Construction and Educational Resources.

"You can go anywhere with that certification and get a job," Ortiz said.

Joel Carabajal, 24, Cheyenne is one of the dads in the program. He said he had little to no knowledge about construction, but has learned a lot. He knows how to drive a forklift, operate a

man lift, build frames, install shingles and do roofing work.

He was there Friday when the group lifted the frames they made into place. "To see these walls come up and to be a part of that was just one of the best feelings I've ever had," he said.

"I definitely see a future with this in the long run," he said of the construction industry. He said that he wants to get a good job to provide for his 8-year-old son.

Vicente Gutierrez, 28, of Cheyenne has an extensive background in the construction business, but wants to learn more.

He applied for the Dads program to find a better opportunity for his family, which is made up of his fian-

At a glance

Students in the Dads Making a Difference program are building offices and conference spaces on the second floor of the Habitat for Humanity of Laramie County ReStore in Cheyenne.

Those interested in applying for the Dads Making a Difference program can pick up an application at the Cheyenne Workforce Center or log onto the website at www.wyomingworkforce.org/workers/employment/dads.

The job and life skills training program is for low-income dads who are 18 or older. They must be a custodial or non-custodial parent.

cée, Rhiannan, and son, Vincente Jr.

"I want to be able to give my son the option of college," he said.

"He's amazing. I love that kid so much," he said of his 14-month-old boy.

The program has taught him a lot, he said.

"If you apply yourself, if you put in 100 percent, the program will give you back 200 percent, by far," Gutierrez said.

Chris Wiederspahn is program manager for Wyoming Dads Making a Difference. Since it began in Wyoming in 2007, she said classes have taught students in several career areas, including welding and heavy equipment work. About 17 groups of dads have graduated in classes of five to 10 people.

The program is the brainchild of the Department of Workforce Services in partnership with the Department of Family Services, she said.

But the Habitat project is unique.

"The dads provide something valuable for Habitat and also get to work with a respected nonprofit organization," Wiederspahn said.

Dads in the 12- to 16-week program also take classes to help them improve their lives. These are courses in areas like money management, parenting skills and how to develop healthy relationships.

Classes run for eight hours a day every weekday, so the dads must have a part-time job or other means of support, she said, adding, "It is not an easy program."

A licensed counselor also is part of the program.

A high percentage of dads who have been in the program are on probation or parole or in recovery from substance abuse, she said. All of them are in the program to change their lives for the better.

When dads graduate, program officials help them find jobs. In 2015, about 90 percent of dads completed the program; 91 percent had jobs.

The Department of Workforce Services works with participants for at least a year after they graduate to make sure things are going well.

Dads who graduate earn a starting salary of about \$19.70 an hour, Wiederspahn said. In 2014, the average salary for those with one year on the job was \$3,400 a month.

"It absolutely works," she