

**Wyoming Tribune Eagle, June 30, 2016: “Give prisoners a fresh start.” Casper Star Tribune, July 2: “Larry’s Place needs community attention.”**

Ten years ago in Cheyenne, Joan Schwab and her husband dedicated themselves to aiding people who, after serving a prison sentence, have no where to go. When, six years ago, husband Larry passed away, Ms. Schwab wanted to carry on in his name. She conceived of Larry’s Place, a refuge for parolees who need help in the struggle to reenter society.

She began by offering her home to released sex offenders who had contacted her while serving time. At first she helped individuals to find work and housing and avoid violating parole, which is a big concern, since some parolees are bewildered and confused at finding themselves in the open. But, of course, Ms. Schwab’s home could serve only a very few individuals and on a limited basis.

Since then Larry’s Place has become incorporated. It has its own website and a slate of board members who hold monthly meetings. The goal is to develop Larry’s Place into a full-fledged facility; to this end, board members are currently negotiating a collaboration with Comea. While Comea is able to shelter some parolees, it lacks the means to offer guidance or teach classes.

“We have some resources,” Ms. Schwab recently told me, “while Comea has the people who need them.”

It’s been an uphill struggle for Larry’s Place, as it is for many non-profits who rely on donations and community support. These groups often step into a void left behind by former social-service agencies whose government commitment vanished with budget cuts.

Hence, Larry’s Place needs the attention of the greater Cheyenne community. “We need people to teach or help with transportation,” says Ms. Schwab. “It doesn’t take much.”

One person who has become her success story to the point of serving on her Board of Directors is Thomas Smith.

“I was in prison for 36 years,” Mr. Smith confided in a recent conversation. “When I came out, I couldn’t believe how much the world had changed.” While imprisoned he had heard of Ms. Schwab and contacted her. A friend drove him to Cheyenne.

While in prison in Illinois, Mr. Smith applied his time and energy to learn everything he could about the law. He took classes and passed exams, becoming what’s known as “jailhouse lawyer.” Not long ago Mr. Smith sent me copies of all the papers documenting his accomplishments—including his pro bono work for other inmates.

He was lucky. The penal institution that housed him In Illinois offered a variety of classes by which inmates could “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.”“The first step in budget cuts often means eliminating the classes,” he said.

Ms. Schwab concurs. She deplores Governor Mead’s recent cuts to Wyoming’s penal system. “The Rawlins facility is awful,” she says. She know because she has visited some of its inmates. “There’s nothing to do for them except watch television.”

How do her charges find jobs?

“They work all over Cheyenne,” says Ms. Schwab. “Fast-food places, motels and hotels hire them. The employers like working with former inmates, for they tend to be punctual. If they didn’t show up for work, it would violate their parole.”

It wasn’t only personal motivation but also lucky circumstances that enabled Thomas Smith to

turn his prison time to productive use.

“He earned the equivalent of a Master’s degree,” says Joan Schwab. “Unfortunately, to obtain the certificate, inmates must pay for their classes on their release. Needless to say, they don’t have the money. For Thomas Smith, the price tag is several thousand dollars.”

Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of that piece of paper, Mr. Smith has found ways to put his knowledge to good use. As a board member he has been active in shaping the cause and the future of Larry’s Place.

He also filed a law suit on his own behalf when a drunk driver ran into the city bus he was riding and caused injuries to several passengers, Mr. Smith included.

“The case will be mediated by a retired judge,” he told me.

Many challenges took many months to overcome. Learning to get around within the bus system was confusing and at times frightening. In grocery stores he watched how other people did their shopping and paying so he could emulate them.

“I am just now getting a learner’s permit to start driving,” he said.