



Rural Development • Rural Housing Service • Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grant

## Natural Building of Homes and Partnerships in Utah

Heather Gallagher has traveled the world to rock climb in as many locations as she can manage. Even so, in all her travels she kept returning to Moab, Utah. In 2002 she decided to make the small town her permanent home. “I know this is the place I want to be at,” she said. The one thing that might have forced her out, however, is the community’s lack of affordable housing.

Heather has worked tourism jobs since she moved to Moab and has rented out housing each year. She struggled to find a house she could put equity into.

Fortunately Moab is home to the nonprofit Community Rebuilds. Through their program, homes are made of natural building materials like straw bales. To keep costs low, they recruit teams of interns to build the homes and learn natural building in the process. The interns earn college credit, dilapidated trailers are removed, and best of all someone gets a new home.

The Community Rebuilds method works because of a few moving parts. Applicants get a loan through USDA Rural Development and work with the nonprofit and interns to complete their homes. It’s a version of the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program unique to Community Rebuilds and championed by the desire of each organization to make affordable housing possible. In addition to interns working the build site, the homeowners themselves put in a percentage of the work and learn about building along the way. “I’ve learned tons!” says Heather, “I’ve learned how to work tools, I’ve learned how to plaster...I just can’t imagine a better program out there.”

Heather is confident in her home and the future she has in Moab. “I feel like I’m one of the luckiest people,” she said. “I have a house that’s built with love from all the interns that I got to custom design and it’s affordable.”



*Heather Gallagher stands in the living room of her new home that she helped build through USDA and Community Rebuilds of Moab. The earthen walls and floor create a warm glow throughout the house in the afternoon sun.*

**Obligation Amount:** \$199,680 grant

**Date of Obligation:** September 2012

**Congressional District:** Representative Chaffetz, UT-3; Senators Hatch and Lee

**Partners:** Community Rebuilds housing nonprofit

**Demographics:** Moab, UT population: 5,093

**Impact:** Two individuals gain building skills and become homeowners, 16 interns earn college credit and are educated about the natural building process.