

In Utah, Affordable Green Homes Teach Green Build Skills

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image via Community Rebuilds

In Moab, [Utah](#), interns from all over the world are gaining an education in people-powered, sustainable housing, while helping to put a green roof over the heads of low-income area residents. [Community Rebuilds](#) is a [non-profit](#) organization with a mission to build [energy-efficient](#), affordable workforce housing through a volunteer-run program that also provides a basic education in straw bale construction for its worker interns. Call it the straw bale version of Habitat For Humanity.

Homeowners interested in having an old, inefficient or dilapidated home rebuilt through Community Rebuilds must meet a number of requirements. Their families must fall below the low income limits established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and must reside within Grand County (Moab) or La Plata County (Durango). One member of the family must have had a full-time job in the area for at least two years, and applicants must be income and credit approved via a loan pre-qualification process. Community Rebuilds also works with landowners to construct new homes on similar terms.

Community Rebuilds provides assistance during all stages of the build. Before breaking ground, the organization acts as a free consultant for interested families. It supplies stamped architectural

plans free of cost. And during the build, it manages both the building process and the budget, providing a labor force of unpaid volunteer interns. After the construction process is complete, Community Rebuilds provides families with a free consultation on the maintenance and repair their new straw bale homes.

The idea here is both to reduce the costs of construction and use the construction process itself to teach the art and craft of energy efficient straw bale building. Community Rebuilds connects families with low interest rate loans, uses volunteer labor, and constructs each home to spec based on a simple architectural plan, thereby limiting architectural and engineering costs. During the construction process, the organization also makes use of as many recycled and donated building materials as possible.



image via Community Rebuilds

As a result, the costs associated with building a new house are effectively cut in half. As an added bonus, the highly insulate properties of straw bale construction ensure that the home will cut utility costs for homeowners as well.

During the process of construction, it's not just interns who learn lessons in green building, but homeowners as well. Homeowners as well as staff members and volunteers get in on the act, working alongside one another to build the home — from foundation to finishes — in just four months. Building interns receive the most instruction on the process, however, working under licensed contractors and under the direction of natural building experts. According to Community Rebuilds, it is currently the only organization that provides this type of hands-on, green building instruction free of cost.

More information on the program is available online.
