

THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES

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WINTER 2017

LIFE SKILLS CLASS GIVES STUDENTS A TASTE FOR COOKING

As a group of students in The Independence Center's Wednesday cooking class prepare for their lesson, instructor Edgar Morales asks them what the first step is when preparing food. In unison, the class enthusiastically responds with "wash your hands." Then the fun begins. On the menu is baked ham, mashed potatoes, and macaroni and cheese. Most of the students have been in Edgar's cooking classes before, so there is a real sense of community. As you would expect, the students joke around with each other when not cooking, and overall really seem to enjoy learning how to cook.



Instructor Edgar Morales teaching Kyle and Melissa how to prepare food.

Melissa, a shy girl who tells me how much she likes football, seems especially involved in the class. She tells me how much she has learned in her time in the class and proudly explains that when she goes home now, she knows how to cook for her family. She seems especially proud of making a homemade lasagna recently for a potluck at her church.

When it's time to start cooking, everyone

plays a part. Edgar directs the show like the conductor of an orchestra. Everyone takes turns working together as the meal comes together. In the process of preparing the mashed potatoes, there is a minor problem. The boiled potatoes don't seem to be mashing with the hand held potato masher. Quick thinking saves the day as the class decides the potatoes need to be chopped up and mixed with an electric mixer. In the end, everything turns out great and students are able to sit down and enjoy the meal that they worked so hard to prepare. CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



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CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO

With 2016 in our rearview mirror, I want to take a few words and talk about two very significant events for The IC out of many. These two events impact the people we serve which is why I chose them. First, the success of our CNA school and second, the Veteran in Charge (VIC) program.

The CNA (Certified Nursing Assistants) School was a gamble we took in late 2015. We purchased a very successful and respected CNA school with the hope that we would be able to hire more CNAs to provide services to consumers we were having to turn away. And, in fact, we have been able to do just that. We worked to upgrade the school and the training so that now we graduate nearly 40 people a month. In addition, we provide first aid and CPR training which has been a big hit. This career path is one of the fastest growing careers in the US right now and we are pleased to graduate well trained CNAs to work in people's homes, nursing facilities, and go on to pursue nursing or even medical degrees. It all starts with a CNA certificate.

The VIC program is another wonderful service that we are pleased to be able to provide. Funded by the Veterans Administration, it is their version of Home and Community Based Services that allow a vet to live successfully in the community with a disability. In addition to attendant services in the home, this program provides funding for services around the house, transportation, and purchases of household items that create independence. Currently, the VIC program is our fastest growing service; we started in July with 3 people, and by the end of December were



servicing 36, and have since hired a second staff person. Given the number of vets in the Pikes Peak region, this could be a very large program. We are delighted to finally have a way to serve the veterans in our community who have given so much. Helping them stay at home comfortably is a heartfelt joy for all of us.

Now, in early January, we are speeding down the new highway of 2017! We're looking forward to even more successes that will make housing, transit, health care, and jobs accessible to people with disabilities so that all can reach the goal of independence.

Ready or not, here we go down the road of 2017 into the future! I hope it is a good one.

MAKING VOTING EASIER FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



On November 7th and 8th, The Independence Center made history after opening as the first “Highly Accessible Polling Place” in Colorado Springs. Turnout was better than expected with close to 800 voters showing up to cast their ballots. There were scores of first time voters, including a group of students from the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB). After learning that The Independence Center was going to be serving as a voting location this year, CSDB made the decision to bring a group of voting age students to The IC to participate in a training session by the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder’s Office. Students were able to try out the accessible voting machines, before coming in on Election Day to vote.

First time voter Daniel Ratcliff, who works at The Independence Center and is blind, tells me that he was initially nervous going in to vote. When I ask him what he thought of the process, he tells me “It was well put together. It was very easy. I hadn’t even registered yet, and I was able to come into the room, register, and vote in the same place. And it only took me about 10 to 15 minutes, total.” He was especially happy that the voting machines were able to read his ballot in an audio format. Daniel says that voting is something he has wanted to do for years, and he’s happy to have finally been able to participate in the election process.

Here at The IC, it was great to see democracy in action, and it was especially remarkable to see such high participation among people with disabilities. According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, in the 2012 general election, people with disabilities voted 5.7% less than the general public. That is a huge discrepancy when considering the number of American’s with disabilities and the small margins that often determine the outcome of elections.



For people with disabilities, there are obstacles to voting that most people just aren’t aware of. For example, the lack of transportation to and from the polling place or the lack of polling workers trained in disability etiquette could mean the difference in whether or not someone votes. These factors are why it is so important to have highly accessible polling locations.

What comes next? Colorado Springs Municipal Elections will be held on April 4th and will provide another opportunity to have your voice heard. In some respects municipal elections are more important than both general and midterm elections, because the outcome directly impacts the community you live in. In this election, all City Council member District Seats will be on the ballot, and there will be a host of other matters that will be decided. So don’t miss this opportunity to help shape the direction of your community.

EMMA CRAWFORD COFFIN RACE



Each year, as locals and tourists join together for the annual Emma Crawford Coffin Races in Manitou Springs, people watch the spectacle as outlandishly-themed coffins race down Manitou Avenue. This year, The Independence Center's coffin racing team chose The Purple People Eater for their theme to show their support for our community. Fringed with purple lace and sporting giant gnashing teeth, this year's rolling coffin was a huge hit. The IC's team had a great time, and spectators surely enjoyed the scene as nearly 100 festively decorated coffins took over the streets of Manitou for a day.

COOKING CLASS CONTINUED FROM COVER

Though friendship and fun are one of the byproducts of the class, The IC's cooking class was started for the purpose of giving people with disabilities the knowledge and skills they need to live independently. In the case of this class, most of the students are young adults transitioning into adulthood. When I ask Edgar Morales what the purpose of the class is, he says "If their parents are not in the house, or if they want to live independently, they can be able to cook and live, and to be able to do things without their parents doing it for them." By teaching real-world skills, The Independence Center prepares these young adults for living on their own.

Aside from the cooking class, there are numerous other independent living skills classes taught at The Independence Center. Some of the classes include Full Life Ahead, Healthy Relationships, Living Well with a Disability, Positive Attitude and Overcoming Barriers, Art Expression, and Money Management. This is just few of the many classes that are available, and new classes are being added all the time. If you or a loved one is interested in taking classes at The Independence Center, call Edgar Morales at 719-471-8181 x168.

THE IC PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AMBASSADOR

On October 26th, The Independence Center hosted a discussion on Multiple Sclerosis (MS) with Tom Falconer, Ambassador for the Colorado-Wyoming Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Falconer, whose wife has MS, has been the primary care giver for his wife for the last 27 years. During Falconer's presentation, he discussed the symptoms, diagnosis, challenges, and long-term prognosis for people with MS. He explained that MS is by no means the end of life as you know it, and in fact can present relatively mild symptoms for some. For Falconer's wife, though, the disease was debilitating. Within three year of her diagnosis, she was completely dependent on a wheel-chair for mobility.

“ It helped me out tremendously, and everybody that went said it was just awesome.”

Carol Johnson

When discussing Falconer's presentation, Carol Johnson, Independent Living Specialist at The Independence Center, who has Multiple Sclerosis herself tells me “It helped me out tremendously, and everybody that went said it was just awesome.” She goes on to tell me that based on something Falconer said in his presentation, she was able to talk to her doctor and figure out that one of her medications was not working correctly.

Though much about MS is still unknown, one factor that all MS patients have in common is the degeneration of the myelin sheathing surrounding the nerves that transmit signals throughout the body. Falconer explained this complex process by comparing it to an electrical wire with worn out insulation. As the insulation becomes thinner and is eventually missing, the electricity is diverted from its intended location and terminates in the wrong place along the way. With MS, this results in mental degradation and the inability to effectively control the muscles. If you or a loved one has Multiple Sclerosis, or you would like to know more about this complex disease, The IC can help.



To learn about our MS support group go to <http://bit.ly/mssupportgroup> or contact Carol Johnson at 719-471-8181 x116.

Pictured above from left to right: Tom Falconer, Ambassador for the Colorado-Wyoming Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society; Carol Johnson, Independent Living Specialist at The IC; Kevin Corrigan, Independent Living Specialist at The IC.



CARE GIVER TIPS - WINTER SAFETY

Even though you care for others as a caregiver, there are things you can do to care for yourself that will keep you safe and help to make your job easier. Wintertime can be challenging to everyone, but when you're regularly driving from location to location to care for consumers, the likelihood of running into trouble can be greater. Below is a short list of tips to help keep yourself safe and healthy during this long winter season.



1. COMBAT DEPRESSION CAUSED BY WINTERTIME

During the grey of winter, it can be an especially lonely time for many. Dangerous conditions can make it difficult to get around and sometimes isolation and frustration can lead to wintertime depression. Check in and visit with your loved ones more often during this time if possible. If not, phone calls and written letters are the next best thing. If distance is an issue, arrange for neighbors or friends to check in from time to time.

2. WATCH CLOSELY FOR ICY SURFACES AND AVOID FALLING

Wearing non-skid soles or shoes with good traction will help prevent slipping, and removing shoes when first coming back indoors will prevent any ice from melting and causing dangerous conditions within the home

3. WEAR GOOD WINTER CLOTHING AND STAY WARM

When temperatures start dipping low, so dips body temperature, and too much cold can lead to dangerous conditions like hypothermia or frostbite. Keep the temperature indoors at a comfortable and warm level, and utilize gloves, scarfs, warm socks, waterproof shoes, and a snug hat when outside.

4. EAT A BALANCED AND HEALTHY DIET

Nutritional deficits such as Vitamin D deficiency are more common during the winter because people tend to eat a smaller variety of foods. It is recommended that seniors consume foods high in Vitamin D like milk, whole grain, and seafood like tuna or salmon.



5. USE UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS AND DON'T FORGET ABOUT FLU SEASON

Get your flu shot and make sure you wash your hands thoroughly. Protecting yourself will protect those you care about.

6. MAKE SURE YOUR VEHICLE IS PROPERLY PREPARED FOR WINTER

Maintaining wiper fluid and good tires can make all the difference when traveling in the unpredictable winter weather we have in The Springs. If the weather turns bad give yourself the extra time you need. It's always better to be a few minutes early. **Keep an emergency kit in your car just in case.** Blankets, candles, water, snacks, and warm clothes are a must for travel!

7. BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS:

Don't leave your car running if you aren't in it.

8. MAKE SURE SOMEONE KNOWS WHERE YOU ARE

If someone knows where you are and when you should be home, they can send help in the event that you don't make it home as planned.



THE IC RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION FROM FEMA

On September 16th, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) representative Carrie Roberts presented The Independence Center with the Outstanding Inclusive Initiative in Emergency Management Award. FEMA, a U.S. government agency best known for its disaster recovery efforts, also focuses on emergency preparedness training. The award was given to The IC for building eighteen Emergency Preparedness Kits to help people with disabilities during emergencies. The effort was led by The IC's Emergency Preparedness department. Contractor John Monteith and Board Member Pat Going accepted the award for their part in helping to pull this effort together.

The kits were developed with the help of a grant from the Daniels Fund. Each kit contains mobility and communication devices, personal heating and cooling equipment, eating and drinking products, and other items needed to address a range of disability needs. After completion, the kits were donated to the American Red Cross and other local groups.

When disaster strikes, each of these kits will make a huge difference for individuals in need. So congratulations to The IC's Emergency Preparedness Department and to everyone who made this award possible.

For more information about The Independence Center's Emergency Preparedness Department visit <http://bit.ly/theicemergencywb> or contact Dana Goldsmith at 719-471-8181 x146.

THE IC WINS OIB GRANT TO HELP PEOPLE EXPERIENCING BLINDNESS

The Independence Center is pleased to announce that we've been awarded a three-year Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) grant from the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The OIB grant will enable us to continue helping older individuals experiencing low vision or blindness to remain independently in their homes, and to continue their hobbies or activities. As of 2016, The Independence Center had 110 consumers actively participating in the OIB program.

As we age, the occurrence of vision loss becomes increasingly likely for everyone. For some, this experience can be isolating and extremely difficult, often times resulting in the loss of independence. Imagine going through your daily routine with limited sight, or the loss of sight altogether. For many, this transition makes it hard to maintain a job or live at home, and can lead to feelings of loneliness and separation from friends and family.

When discussing the importance of the OIB program with Jeanette Fortin, an OIB Specialist at The Independence Center who is blind herself, she tells a story about a consumer who she worked with a few years ago. After losing the ability to drive and read, the woman thought that she was going to end up in an assisted living facility. A friend referred her to The Independence Center where she attended one of the peer support groups. While there, she was able to meet other people, who like her, had lost part or all of their vision. By talking to these people and working with The Independence Center, she was able to learn ways to cope with her vision loss and gain knowledge about resources and programs available to help people experiencing blindness and vision loss. Also, with help from the Pikes Peak Area Council of Government (PPACG) grant, The IC was able to purchase a magnifier for the woman, which assisted her with reading. Now in her eighties, the woman is still independent.

When talking about the people that she has helped through the OIB program, Jeanette proudly says, "The whole point in what we do is to help seniors to continue to live independently, rather than feeling like they have to be put in assisted living."

The OIB program at The Independence Center provides people age 55 or older with peer support groups, home visits, public outreach and education activities, assistive technologies, Braille instruction, as well as independent living and self-advocacy training. For so many, the OIB program is an important lifeline, and we are grateful to the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation for potentially renewing funding through September of 2019. If you or a loved one is experiencing blindness or loss of vision and feel that The OIB program might be right for you, visit <http://bit.ly/oibsupportgroup> or call Jeanette Fortin at 719-471-8181 x126 for more information.



Kathleen Senn and Jeanette Fortin, OIB Specialists



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