Empowering People With Spinal-Cord Injuries
by Britt Biscone

The Independence Center has earned a grant from the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) to create new programs for people with Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI). The grant, worth $20,000, will be used towards new support groups, activities, and supplying people with adaptive equipment necessary for their independence. Teri Ulrich, Director of Development at The IC said, “The Independence Center wants to directly impact those who are newly living with a Spinal Cord Injury.” This amazing grant allows this dream to become a reality.

Support groups are led by Tim Ashley and Paul Spotts, who work at The IC, and also have spinal cord injuries. They have started the new groups to provide an opportunity for people with spinal cord injuries to engage in fellowship with one another. Additionally, the activities being offered bring these people out into the community to participate in activities, such as skiing, basketball, cycling, horseback riding, bowling, movies, dancing and so much more.

By reaching out to physical therapy and rehabilitation facilities in Colorado Springs and Denver, The IC hopes to bring many new people with spinal cord injuries to participate in these incredible new opportunities. No matter what services people with SCI’s want to use, The IC is here for them. The fellowship, adaptive technology and engaging activities are just the catalyst for people with disabilities to build community.
It’s a new day in Colorado Springs! We have a new mayor and several new council members. It’s time to educate them about the contributions that persons with disabilities can make…IF we can participate. In order to participate, our community buildings have to be accessible, transit has to be more frequent and cover more of the city, sidewalks must be accessible and useable by people of all disabilities and ages, and most importantly, the community needs to be comfortable enough to include us. That will occur when people get to know us as individuals and not just that “blind person down the street with a friendly guide dog.”

Over the last several years, people with disabilities have worked with others to increase and improve our bus system, a #1 issue for many people in Colorado Springs. We have worked together to convince the County and the City to hire their own ADA coordinator and start to make significant access changes. Hearing loops in City Council chambers? Check! Improving access to City parks and recreation? Check! While only 25 years overdue, both Colorado Springs and El Paso County are surveying municipal facilities and making a list of what access issues need to be fixed and by when. So local government self-evaluation and transition plan? Check! Emergency preparedness plans that address the needs of people with disabilities? Check!

While we are not finished with the issues above, what others are on the horizon? Fixing the Regional Building Department so they not only provide plan-checking services for interior access, but also the exterior path of travel. We have a number of new buildings in town where the interior is perfectly accessible, but you can’t get in if you have a mobility problem. The City of Colorado Springs has the power to fix this issue. Therefore, if you meet Mayor John Suthers ask him about it.

We also want to create an accessible health-care system in our region. By that I mean doctors’ offices and clinics that people with disabilities can easily get in the door, onto the exam table and get weighed. We want health-care professionals who understand and are comfortable with us. The Regional Care Collaborative Organization (Community Health Partners) will start to collect this data after July 1, and hopefully put it up on their website so you will know ahead of time which doctor’s office is useable for you.

Finally, and this is a big one, Carrie Baatz, our community organizer will be forming a coalition to create change in our housing stock. More specifically, we want more accessible, affordable apartments and homes on bus routes throughout the city. If this is of interest, please contact Carrie at The Independence Center. With the new mayor and new council members and our community getting organized to speak out about what we need, I am feeling very optimistic these days! I invite you to get involved and join us in creating a new, accessible community whether you live in the county, or the city…there is work to be done.
UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENTS CALENDAR

May 13: Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Group at The IC; 5:30 PM — 7:00 PM

May 21 to June 19: The StoryCorps MobileBooth; This is a mobile-recording studio traveling the country to record the stories of everyday people. To participate, R.S.V.P: storycorps.org/mobile-tour Ivywild School, 1604 S. Cascade Ave, 80905

May 27: SCI Group at The IC; 5:30 PM — 7:00 PM

June 10: SCI Group at The IC; 5:30 PM — 7:00 PM

June 12: Bowling with Peers at Harmony Bowl; 2:00 PM — 5:00 PM

June 16: Consumer Appreciation Event Baseball at Sky Sox Stadium; 7:05 PM

June 19: Picnic with Peers at Memorial Park near Prospect Lake; 11:00AM — 1:00PM

June 24: SCI Group at The IC; 5:30 PM — 7:00 PM

RECURRING EVENTS

Cross-Disabilities Support Group; Every Friday; 11:30 AM — 1:00 PM

Family Caregiver Encouragement Group; Every Thursday; 5:30 PM — 7:00 PM
[NOTE: No group on May 28 and June 4]

Achilles Int. Walk or Run; Meet at the Colorado Springs Running Club on North Nevada; Every Monday at 6:15 PM. Everyone welcome. Go at your own pace.

Women’s Support Group; 1st and 3rd Tuesdays; 1:30 PM — 2:30 PM

Men’s Support Group; 1st and 3rd Mondays; 1:00 PM — 2:30 PM

For more information about any of these events, please contact the Peer Support Department: 719-471-8181 x123.
The IC Gives Back to Other Nonprofits
by Britt Biscone

The Independence Center is offering $75,000 to local nonprofits who are providing new programming that will benefit people with disabilities. This is the second year The IC will be offering these grants. In 2014, Amblicab, Blue Star Recycler, El Paso County Parks, Lake George Community Park and Colorado Veterans Resource Coalition received over $75,000 in grant monies.

To apply, a letter of inquiry is needed by June 12. Final awards will be distributed Sept. 30. Instructions can be found on The IC’s website, The-IC.org, or by email, TheICFund@The-IC.org.

Grant for Diabetes Education Will Help People with Disabilities
by Britt Biscone

Healthy living is a topic frequently discussed in this country. People everywhere are trying to find ways to prevent and treat diseases like Diabetes. The Independence Center has received a grant of $7,500 from The Myron Stratton Grants Program to provide Diabetes education to staff and consumers at the agency.

The new program will help people with disabilities, who have a higher incidence of Diabetes than the general population, to learn how to prevent or control the disease through diet and exercise. The IC hopes this kind of education will help people with disabilities live more independently. A new class will be offered at The IC that will focus on healthy eating. This class is just another opportunity for people with disabilities to better themselves.

Along with the new class, a peer-support group will also be held for seniors who have low-vision and also are living with Diabetes. Christine Gardner, IL Manager, says, “The group will provide an opportunity for participants to speak with each other about their Diabetes and share their experiences.” Contact The IC for more information about these new programs.
Social Change for a New Political Climate in Colorado Springs
by Britt Biscone

With the mayoral candidate race just wrapping up, many people in Colorado Springs are hungry for local governmental changes. The Community Organizing department of The Independence Center and Midwest Academy from Chicago teamed up to bring community organizing training to nonprofit and governmental staff, The IC staff and citizens who advocate for disability rights. Topics regarding public transit, fair housing, building accessibility, healthcare and equal opportunity for employment are concerning people with disabilities in Colorado Springs. Community organizing is the tool that will enable them to make important advances in these areas. Carrie Baatz, a Community Organizer at The IC says community organizing is about, “…bringing people together who all share a similar struggle with a broader social problem and empowering them to create change and advocate.”

During the two-and-a-half day training, attendees examined a range of topics, including: understanding power, developing campaign strategies, recruiting community advocates, facilitating meetings with decision makers, and more. This training prepared community members for a structured and long-term change to social justice. Matthew Ruggles, a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Coordinator at The IC and a person who is deaf, said, “If you really want to make social change work, you really have to think ahead and plan. This training taught us how to do that. It taught us how to be a catalyst for change.”

The IC hopes to bring more community organizing trainings to Colorado Springs. Please check The-IC.org for more information about trainings, such as the one above.
Disaster Training for American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters in Preparation for Wildfire Season
by Britt Biscone

Thirty-five American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters attended an Emergency Training Workshop on March 13-14. Interpreters were exposed to the federal incident command system and gained knowledge on how they can integrate into, and aid in communication with, people who are deaf during a public emergency. The Independence Center decided to host this workshop after seeing a need for the coordination of interpreters. The training is an opportunity to kick off a statewide project to formalize a network of interpreters, and how they will be implemented, during future disasters.

The training is the first step in a multi-series project to prepare interpreters for their role during disasters. Nick DeSutter, Emergency Program Manager for The IC and project administrator, said, “It is important for communities to think about the various ways in which to communicate with diverse populations of people during a disaster. We are truly excited that the Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, partnered with us to fund this event.”

The workshop offered ASL Interpreters continuing-education credits and was held at the El Paso County Emergency Operations Center. Naomi McCown, Staff Interpreter for The IC and lead workshop coordinator said, “It is really awesome to see such a wide participation from colleagues across the state. This training is a great example as to how various organizations like The IC, Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and El Paso County work together to prepare for threats that face our communities. This sort of inter-organizational training is important — not only for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, but also for a wide range of people with various disabilities.”

Above: Interpreters attending Emergency Training Workshop.
Self-Advocacy Class Wrap-Up
by Courtney Stone

In a partnership between the Community Organizing and Life Skills programs, The Independence Center is proud to have offered our first Self-Advocacy Class!

The class was designed to teach people with disabilities to speak up for their needs and advocate for their individual rights. Students in the class learned the basics of self-advocacy, their rights as people with disabilities, and how to effectively present their needs to the outside world.

As part of the class, students went on a field trip to City Hall and gave speeches about issues that were important to them — from employment to transit! They learned about the history of the disability rights movement and how much progress has been made to empower people with disabilities. On the last day of the class, a video was recorded of each student speaking about what self-advocacy means to them and what they learned from the class.

“Self advocacy is important to me, because I always struggle in life; but, I learned that a lot of people will help me if I ask for it. People won’t always help you if you don’t ask questions and help yourself,” said Nick. John Smith said, “Self advocacy is when you speak up for yourself. It’s important to me because that’s how I’m going to meet my expectations in life.”

The class will be offered again in the fall of 2015. Please stay tuned for more information, we’d love to see you there!

Left: Community Organizing at a rally to thank the Mayor for increased funding to local transit. Right: Students from the Self-Advocacy Class.
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Grant Money Available
by Britt Biscone

The Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments Area Agency on Aging has awarded The Independence Center with an incredible grant. It's available to seniors, 60+, with low vision or blindness. The grant's goal is to improve the quality of life and independence for seniors living with low vision and blindness — living in El Paso, Teller and Park Counties — through the purchase of material aids and assistive devices.

Qualifying equipment includes: talking watches, clocks, timers, scales, magnifiers (all kinds and strengths), Braille writers, canes, adaptive kitchen items, as well as iPads and iPhones.

Please contact our Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) Specialists for more information or to begin the process of qualifying for this grant.

Jeanette Fortin 719-471-8181 x126 jfortin@the-ic.org
Frances Dorrance 719-659-3635 fdorrance@the-ic.org

VIDEOS TO CHECK OUT

The Independence Center is sponsoring the wheelchair accessible seating sections at the Security Services Field, where the Sky Sox play. Come out and support your local team and enjoy the new companion seating provided by us!

Above: Sox Fox communicating through ASL in the beginning of The IC/Sky Sox commercial. Watch the video at: http://bitly.com/icsoxfox.