

THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES

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Assistive Technology Opens Internet to Man With Quadriplegia



Tony Wilkins surfing the internet with his Jouse 3 system

In this day and age, it's easy to take technology for granted. For people with some disabilities, however, assistive technology can mean the difference between being able to access a computer or not. Consider the ordinary computer mouse; it can be purchased for \$30. For someone unable to use a handheld mouse, a mouth-controlled mouse like the Jouse 3 can be substituted. The price tag on this: \$1400. For most, that price point puts computer accessibility out of reach.

Tony Wilkins hasn't been able to use a computer since he became a person with quadriplegia many years ago. It didn't stop him from searching for a way to make the computer accessible to him. When speaking about the Jouse 3, Tony says "I came across a video on YouTube of this guy who was a quadriplegic and he had this mouth-controlled joystick-operated USB mouse. When I saw the video it really inspired me. I thought Wow. That would be awesome."

However, the price point on this particular piece of assistive technology kept it out of reach. A grant from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation through a National Council on Independent Living grant, allowed The Independence Center to purchase assistive devices for people with Spinal Cord Injuries.

As a member of the Spinal Cord Injury group at The Independence Center, Tony Wilkins was approached by Tim Ashley, Spinal Cord Injury Group facilitator. Wilkins qualified for grant monies that would cover the purchase of the Jouse 3.

In one moment, Wilkins was shut out of all forms of computer communication and information. In the next moment, as if a lock had been opened, he was in—thanks to the Jouse 3. "It was so easy. Literally plug and play. As soon as we got it set up I started moving the mouth stick and the cursor started to move. It was really exciting," Wilkins says. "I found an on-screen keyboard that I could use with the mouse. That's when the internet opened up to me and I could go anywhere."

To learn more about The IC's support groups and services, call 719-471-8181 or visit us at <http://bit.ly/icskills>

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CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO



There is a “whole lotta shakin’ goin’ on” in healthcare and in The IC’s Home Health division. In 2018 we will spend a great deal of time figuring

out the impact of a change the state has initiated in our Region’s healthcare system for Medicaid and Medicare/Medicaid (Dually Eligible) recipients. The state has put out a call for one organization (or collaboration) to provide both physical and mental health services in a coordinated system. As of July 1, 2018, The Regional Accountability Entity (RAE) taking over the management of physical and mental health services for the 170,000 people on Medicaid or Medicare and Medicaid in El Paso and Teller is the Colorado Community Health Alliance. Centura is the major health care partner.

In our own Home Health division, we have a new Director/Administrator, Gayle Royal. She comes from Tucson, most recently working with Brookdale Home Health. She has quite a record working with Home Health agencies to help them streamline processes, set up new services, and enhance the home health administrative team’s ability to work together. All of this leads to better and faster services for our consumers. We will also offer our services to new payers such as Managed Care companies, insurance agencies, and even private pay. We are working to increase skilled services under Medicaid (CNA level and above) and of course, maintaining the unskilled or In Home Support Services program. This program remains our most popular as it pays family members and friends of consumers that qualify. People love the flexibility of it and some really like having agency support of their independence.

Another service we are planning is a “disrupter” service. We hope to disrupt people with disabilities transitioning from the hospital to a nursing home, if they can recover in their homes with plenty of medical and community services support. We have put together a team of organizations and services called the Disability Network for Hospital to Home Transitions. Memorial Central has agreed to pilot this project with us, first quarter of 2018.

Next year, The IC will intensify its advocacy efforts on creating disability friendly healthcare locations across the Pikes Peak region. This includes having accessible, 508 compliant websites, alternatives to print information from your healthcare provider, including (and making easier to get) sign language interpreters at all appointments, disability culturally competent healthcare staff, and... a network of accessible offices where there are hi/low exam tables, wheelchair weight scales, accessible diagnostic equipment and listening loops for persons who are hard of hearing. Everyone deserves a full and complete examination in the healthcare provider’s office!

For now, though, did you know that Medicaid recipients can document and complain about lack of disability access by calling 719-645- 8070 at the Community Health Partnership. This number should work until June 30, 2018. July 1 will see the system transition to Colorado Community Health Alliance and a new process for filing complaints. We will keep you posted on any changes. If you feel you did not get a complete exam or have issues/concerns about the healthcare you received, I encourage you to call that number. It is anonymous and the RCCO staff will investigate. This is the first step in letting our medical establishment know that we want full examinations just like everyone else.

Happy Holidays; they are fast approaching...and let 2018 be the year that you get a complete health exam!



ADA

Celebrating Progress in THE PIKES PEAK REGION

On July 26th, The Independence Center celebrated the 27th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as the 30th anniversary of The Independence Center's opening in Colorado Springs. An estimated 320 people attended the event and everyone seemed to have a great time. Employees from various departments at The IC spoke at length about their work with people with disabilities, and the impact that work has had on their consumers.

In attendance were Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers, Manitou Springs Mayor Nicole Nicoletta, and several members of the Colorado Springs City Council. KRDO's Jon Karroll emceed the event. In an award ceremony that paid tribute to organizations in the Pikes Peak region that have worked to progress the mission of the ADA, Mayor John Suthers presented awards to five deserving local organizations.

The IC is grateful for the contributions made in improving accessibility throughout the Pikes Peak region, and would like to say thank you to everyone who has supported The IC throughout the years. And special thanks to Doug Brauner of Holy Cross Lutheran Church and Matt Getze of UCCS, who shot our photos.



Patricia Yeager , CEO



Mayor Suthers presenting an award to Ben Bills for his work with text to 911



Tim Ashley and Board Chair, Drew Wills

MAKING COMMUNITIES BETTER FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

What is community organizing? The Community Organizing department here at The Independence Center serves a unique but important function in the journey to provide independence for our community and the consumers we serve. Courtney Stone, The IC's Community Organizing Manager & Jamie Muth, the Community Organizing Coordinator, work together to address issues that negatively impact the people with disabilities community. The hope is that by addressing these issues head on, they can help to remedy the negative impact on people within the community. A few examples of issues that they might address are access to homes, and transportation for people with disabilities.

The process, which requires a high level of participation from people within the community, involves empowering individuals to grow their skill sets, create

*Jamie Muth,
Community Organizing
Coordinator*



plans, learn about dynamics of power, and to grow as leaders who can identify and define problems that need to be addressed within their communities. It's extremely important that the people doing the organizing are themselves, directly impacted by the issues being addressed. This aspect of community organizing is different from systems advocacy, where people from the outside advocate on behalf of a group that is affected by an issue. Community organizing is generally recognized as getting its start during the worker's rights and civil rights movements, but has really been around for much longer.

Community organizing is important because it gives people who are disempowered a voice. Everyone has a story to tell, and sharing that story can create dialog that eventually leads to meaningful change. Community organizing provides a link between communities and the systems that they have to live within. Power is created and change is more likely to occur when someone affected by an issue becomes the public face of that issue.

Unfortunately though, it can be difficult to get people involved. As Jamie told me, "It's hard to expect people to be involved when they've

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*Courtney Stone,
Community Organizing
Manager*

been consistently ignored, or they've felt very defeated, or they feel that it's not their place to do these things." Plus, change happens slowly. This can be a major psychological challenge for anyone advocating for their community. It's easy to feel defeated when you don't see the resulting progress from your efforts, but change comes over time, like drops of water slowly carving a great canyon over the millennia.

At The Independence Center, the Community Organizing department has three main areas of focus, which include housing, transit, and training. Historically, housing and transit have made up the bulk of the efforts, but in

the last year, advocacy training has become a larger part of the team's focus. As part of the new focus, Courtney and Jamie are offering classes in Assertive Communication, Self-Advocacy, and Community Organizing. Between the three classes, community members can learn the skills necessary to address the issues facing their communities and affect positive change.

If you would like to learn more about the Community Organizing department or to sign up for training, please give The Independence Center a call at 719-471-8181 or visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/2vy4c0Z>.

ACCESSIBLE VOTING AWARD

On September 21st, The Independence Center CEO, Patricia Yeager, was presented with the Stars and Stripes award from the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's office. The award stems from a partnership last year between the Clerk and Recorder's office and The Independence Center (The IC) during the general election, where we came together to create Colorado's first "Highly Accessible Polling Place". During that election, nearly 800 people voted at The IC, many of whom were people with disabilities. Though all voting locations in El Paso County are accessible, The IC serves as a model of accessibility and was designed specifically with the needs of people with disabilities in mind. Many thanks to the Clerk and Recorder's office for this important award, and for being a partner in the

journey to make voting more accessible to the people with disabilities community. For more information on voting, visit our Election Resources webpage at <http://bit.ly/2k288Dy>.



Clerk and Recorder, Chuck Broerman, presents the Stars and Stripe award to Patricia Yeager.

EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The IC's Youth Advocate, Nina Kamekona, teaches youth with disabilities skills like self-advocacy, disability etiquette, coping strategies, and knowing your disability. All of her workshops are designed to help students build self-confidence.



Nina Kamekona teaches self-advocacy to youth with disabilities at The IC

"If you can show others what trusting in your knowledge and ability can do, they can realize that they are a whole person," Kamekona says. Nina has walked the journey of empowerment in their shoes, having overcome the challenges of living with low vision and post-traumatic stress disorder. Smiling, she says, "helping people just like me, who are a little weird and different, to see that they can be successful too. That's what I love to do."

Young people learn what it means to be successful from Nina's example. At 18 years old, Nina has molded her professional role as a youth advocate. Outside her job, she is going to college and is a successful artist. Her passion shines through in everything she does.

Nina has worked with hundreds of students, and is right now working with four school districts. Many of these students are hearing positive words about disability for the first time. "We are teaching at a younger age that people with disabilities can truly be an asset to the community," says Jaime Harrell, Independent Living Manager.

program is designed to connect young people to the many options that they have. "They will grow up with us and know us as a resource." Perhaps the most important thing young people learn from us, Harrell says, is how to work through their mistakes.

In March, Nina facilitated support groups for students at the schools. She hopes to create safe spaces where youth with disabilities can learn how to be independent and support each other at the same time.

To learn more about advocacy programs at The IC, visit <http://bit.ly/2gMNB4s> or call 719-471-8181.

CREATING IMPACT WITH



*Melissa showing
her artwork*

LIFE SKILLS CLASSES

Edgar Morales is The Independence Center's Independent Living Skills Specialist. He tells me that what really excites him, is seeing the progress in his students after spending time in his skills classes. When I ask him for an example, he tells me about one student that stands out to him. Melissa is a young woman who has been in Edgar's classes for a couple of years now, and her progress has been quite remarkable.

When Melissa started coming to Edgar's life skills classes three years ago, he tells me that she was a very different person than who she is today. She was shy, lost, scared, and had little self-confidence. As a person with cognitive disabilities, Melissa was referred to The Independence Center by the Transitions Coordinator at her high school. As part of her path to graduation, Melissa was required to complete life skills classes before graduating on her 21st birthday.

After being a student in the independent living classes for a while, Melissa was making good progress. She really seemed to enjoy her time there, and she enjoyed all the new skills she was learning. As Edgar told me, "she was a great student, and she worked hard." Over the next few years, Melissa took classes in self-advocacy, money management, cooking, knowing your disability, self-awareness, exercise, and art. She was thriving in an environment where she was able to make her own decisions, which was much different than her past experiences. Before coming to The IC, Melissa had little control over her daily routine, because no one thought she was capable. The life skills classes taught her that she was capable and she could be independent.

Though most students only stick around long enough to compete their requirements for graduation, Melissa continued taking classes well afterwards. After a while, it became clear that without a little extra guidance, Melissa would continue repeating the classes indefinitely. So one day, Edgar and The IC's Nina Kamekona sat down with her and asked what she really wanted to do in life. Initially, she said she didn't want to do anything. But after a long discussion, she came to the conclusion that she could make her own choices about what to do with her life.

What she had learned in the skills classes had a significant impact on her. Along with the realization that she was an independent person who could establish her own path and have a career of her own someday, she was becoming more confident, interactive, and didn't have the fear she once did. Not long after her meeting with Edgar and Nina, she went to visit The IC's employment department, where she attended a series of Pre-Employment Transition Services workshops. Today, Melissa still comes to skills classes on occasion, but spends much of her time focusing on new aspects of her life such as volunteering at her church and at the YMCA.

If you would like more information on skills classes at The Independence Center, give us a call at 719-471-8181 or visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/2wMmvAT>.

James Wright, or Jamie as his friends call him, came to the Independence Center several years back to find help in his search for affordable housing. The IC's housing department helped Jamie through the process, and today he lives in a two-bedroom home here in Colorado Springs. As with many people with cerebral palsy, Jaime has a hard time with mobility without the help of assistive devices. Over the past few year, as Jamie's mobility began to diminish, he started using a powerchair, which helps him get around near his home. There was one big limitation though. If Jamie needed to go somewhere in his car, he wasn't able to bring his powerchair with him. This pretty much limited him to areas within a very close proximity of his car.

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY



The IC's Sara Callender, who works with Jamie, tells me that he's fiercely independent and takes great pride in that. So it's no surprise that his increasingly limited mobility was weighing on him greatly. In one of their meetings a few years back, Sarah mentioned that The IC had an assistive technology department that could help people with disabilities to get equipment necessary to become more independent. Jamie must have just stored this in the back of his mind for a rainy day, because almost two years later, he contacted Paul Spotts, The IC's Assistive Technology Specialist. He was interested in getting a trailer for his car that would allow him to bring his powerchair along with him when he left his home.

Jamie had done a lot of research, and was pretty sure he knew what he wanted, and shared that information with Paul. Paul began looking into

pricing and availability, and found a local business that could procure and install the trailer. Through the generous help of Friends of Man, the AV Hunter Trust, and The Independence Center's Assistive Technology Fund, enough money was raised to purchase the \$5,000 piece of equipment. When the trailer was finally installed, Jamie was delighted.



Jamie Wright with his new powerchair trailer

Since getting the trailer, Jaime's mobility has improved drastically. He can drive his car to the mall, unload his power chair, and have the ability to visit any store he likes. When I ask Paul what he thinks this means to Jamie, he tells me "I think it's opened up a new world to him." And I agree. This is what independence is all about. If you or a loved one is interested in housing or assistive technology, please call The IC at 719-471-8181 or visit our website at <http://bit.ly/2wpdnhZ>.

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