

# THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES

A PUBLICATION FROM THE INDEPENDENCE CENTER

SUMMER 2017



Yolanda at The IC

## A CAREGIVER'S PERSPECTIVE WORKING AT THE IC

Working as a caregiver for The Independence Center can be a difficult but rewarding job for those who find joy in helping people with disabilities. For many, making the decision to become a caregiver is based on the search for a fulfilling and stable career. For others, the decision can be because they feel an obligation or desire to help a loved-one with a disability. In both cases, the on-the-road and in-home work environments can be very different than the traditional office environment that some are used to.

With the majority of employees at The IC working in locations away from the main office, sometimes it's hard for them to get an idea what it's like here. Yolanda Ruiz, who has worked at The IC for a year and a half, and as a caregiver for the majority of that time, has had just that opportunity. Ruiz, who was the primary caregiver for her mother-in-law, transitioned to working in the office at The IC after her mother-in-law passed away this past October. With The IC's expansion into the Spanish speaking community, Ruiz was a perfect fit with her background as a licensed practical nurse and fluency in Spanish. Since starting her new role, Ruiz's main focus has been translating training and testing materials used at The IC from English to Spanish. When I ask her what she thinks of the work, she tells me "I feel proud. I feel so helpful for doing this." I can tell by the way she smiles that she loves what she does – it really shows.

When discussing her experience working at The IC and the impact it has had on her, Ruiz says "It's been an amazing experience". She goes on to tell me "When you're out there in the field, you don't imagine how hard people at the office work." She is especially impressed to see how well people communicate and work together to find solutions to tough problems. She tells me that all around, her experiences here have been wonderful, especially the people who are all so friendly and caring. She's made many new friends and learned valuable skills, but most of all she has earned an appreciation for the other side of The IC that she didn't know working as a caregiver.



Check out our Facebook Page!

[www.facebook.com/  
TheIndependenceCenter](https://www.facebook.com/TheIndependenceCenter)

**Interested in becoming a caregiver?**  
**Visit us at [bit.ly/theiccaregiver](http://bit.ly/theiccaregiver)**

## THE BUILDING IS BRAND NEW BUT I CAN'T GET IN!

This is a story of systems change in the Pikes Peak region that has been years in the making. For 25 years, Pikes Peak Regional Building Department (PPRBD) has refused to review construction plans for exterior path of travel access compliance with the International Building Code and the Americans with Disability Act. PPRBD is the quasi-governmental entity that checks proposed commercial construction plans for Colorado Springs, El Paso County, Monument, Manitou, Green Mountain Falls, Fountain, Woodland Park, and Palmer Lake. PPRBD makes sure construction complies with all sorts of building codes as well as interior disability access, such as accessible doors, bathrooms, hallways, emergency signals, etc. - but not the exterior path of travel from the sidewalk, through the parking lot, to the front/back entrances.

The consequence of this refusal is that there are quite a number of buildings in our area that are perfectly accessible on the inside, but if you use a mobility device, you cannot get in. There are barriers (steps, poorly constructed ramps, poles and street furniture in the path of travel) that keep you out...of a brand new building. This is illegal and discriminatory.

PPRBD says that exterior review is not a part of their work contract with the municipalities who contract with them. In fact, it is PPRBD's perspective that each of the municipalities



should be doing exterior review so that the look of buildings in that town meet the town's requirement. It seems that PPRBD has confused aesthetics with access. Unfortunately, until last summer the municipalities named above didn't know they were supposed to be doing this review. This is a recipe for disaster for building owners and persons with mobility limitations, and makes our region ripe for drive by access lawsuits.

After watching Springs Rescue Mission build a completely new building on South Nevada with no front door access, just steps from the bus stop, The IC stepped in. Fortunately, Springs Rescue Mission resolved the issue, however, Drew Wills, our board chair who happens to use a wheelchair,

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Pat Going, retired director of Rocky Mountain ADA Center, and I spent several frustrating months with PPRBD trying to get them to take on the exterior path review. When it became apparent that we were going to have to go to each of the municipalities one by one, we started with the City of Colorado Springs as some 70% of PPRBD's review of commercial plans is for Colorado Springs. With the help of their Planning Director, Peter Wysoki, and Tim Siebert, President of Home Builders Association, we developed a process that has been operating since last fall. Its simplicity will surprise you...it did us!

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## CREATING ACCESS FOR ALL!

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Each municipality has a planning commission or staff person who receives the first drawings for a commercial project. There is a checklist for what must be submitted so that the designer makes a complete package and the plan checker doesn't forget to check. We added that there must be a drawing that explicitly shows the accessible exterior path of travel. We also added language to the checklist that states the owner of the property is the sole person responsible for ensuring that the building and exterior access is accessible; not the city. In addition, if the owner determines the building cannot be designed accessibly, then a written justification must be submitted and the city will keep it on file, in case of litigation later. Now, building owners and designers cannot say 27 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, "I didn't know!"

I am really pleased to report that on April 11, the City of Colorado Springs finalized City

**“Now, building owners and designers cannot say 27 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, ‘I didn’t know!’**

Ordinance 17-38 that makes this process legal and mandatory for those submitting commercial building projects in Colorado Springs! We hope this will be an acceptable model for the other municipalities to follow. This summer, we will be visiting with each city to explain the ordinance and ask their planning department to adopt it as well. We also will share the City's new accessible parking ordinance and the Department of Transportation's updated guidance on curb ramp cuts. Hopefully in the near future, all three access issues will be handled in the same way across the Pikes Peak region.

Hats off to the City of Colorado Springs for stepping up as a leader in solving this problem!

**WHAT ISSUE IS NEXT?**

[bit.ly/thehealthcarevideo](http://bit.ly/thehealthcarevideo)



# OUTREACH

## GROWTH IN THE OUTLYING AREAS

Laramie Cummings, IL Program Manager for Outreach at The Independence Center is optimistic about future growth in the unserved and underserved communities surrounding El Paso County. With a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management and a background in community engagement and rural outreach, Cummings is dedicated to expanding The IC's services to people with disabilities living in the outlying areas surrounding Colorado Springs. Along with Cummings, the department has four other dedicated team member, each of which is trained in all aspects of the services provided at The IC. When asked what drives her, Cummings explains that each community has unmet needs for people with disabilities, and that as an organization, The IC is able to meet those needs. A recent and important addition to the outreach team is Jesus Sanchez. Sanchez, who is a fluent Spanish speaker has made it possible for

The IC to expand outreach into the Hispanic and Latino communities. This is important considering the large number of Colorado residents that speak Spanish as their primary language. Independent Living services and programs at The IC such as benefits, peer support, assistive technology, home modifications, deaf and hard of hearing, blind and low vision, housing, employment, and advocacy, make it possible for people with disabilities to remain independent and to stay in the communities to which they belong.

When discussing consumers she has worked with, Cummings tells me about a man with a disability living in Cripple Creek. By his own choice, the man was living in a tee pee, and wished to remain there. One obstacle he faced was the lack of food and clothing. When discussing this, Cummings tells me

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## OUTREACH

Since receiving additional State General Funds

= 882%

increase in consumers served outside of El Paso County



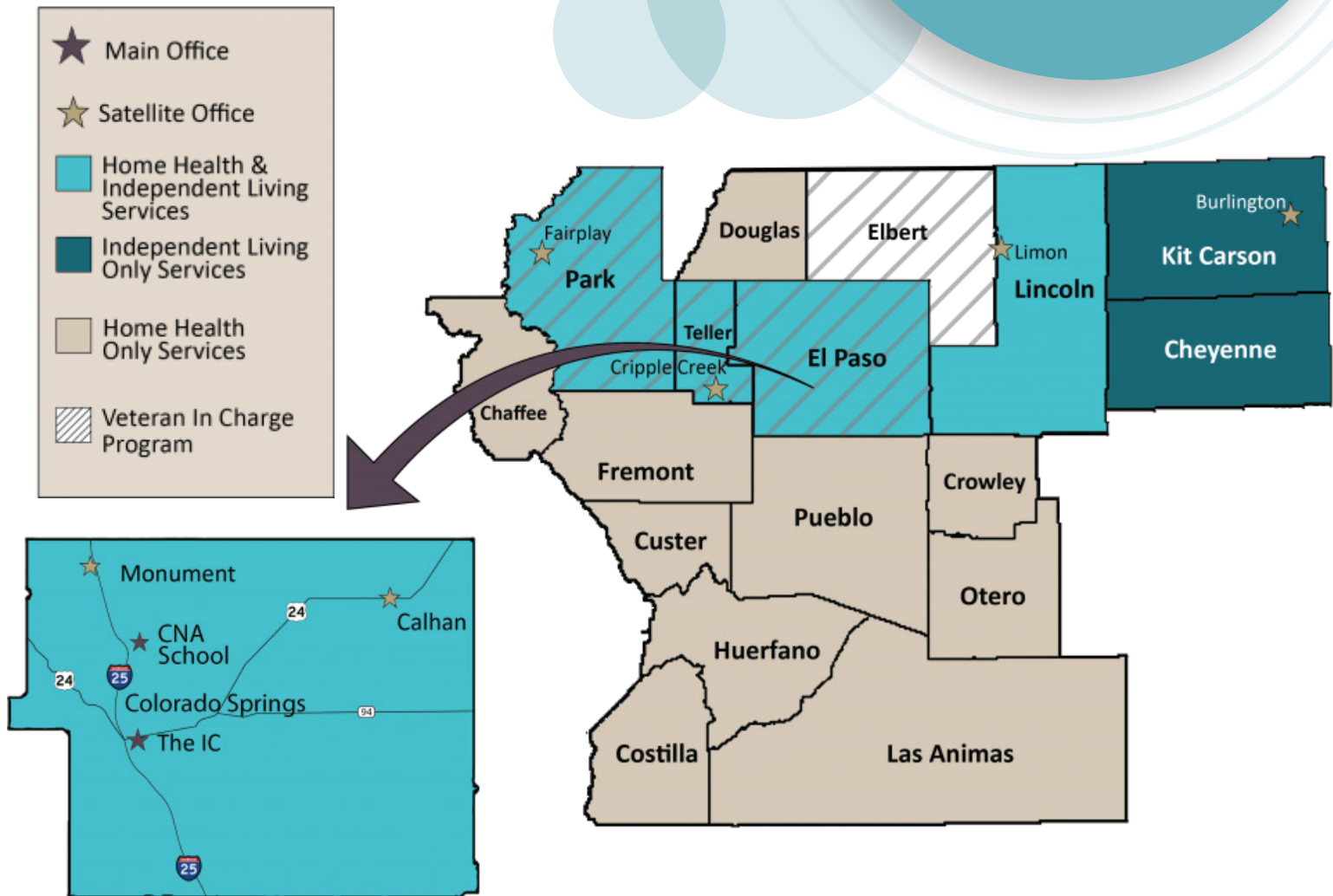
Increased Outreach staff to 5 employees.

### SATELLITE OFFICES

Burlington, Calhan, Cripple Creek, Monument, Limon, and Fountain

# WHERE WE ARE

Check out all of  
our Independent Living  
services at  
[bit.ly/theindependentliving](http://bit.ly/theindependentliving)



“We worked together to get him food delivered once a week, every Friday, and we referred him to Goodwill, where he was able to get clothes through a voucher.” For the man, this assistance has made a huge difference and has really helped to improve his quality of life. For Cummings, this is just another day in outreach.

Looking toward the future, The IC is committed to offering services to areas outside of our

main office in Colorado Springs. In addition to the offices in Cripple Creek and Calhan, over the past two years, The IC has added offices in Monument, Burlington, Fairplay, and Limon. Need within the outlying areas brought about this expansion, and further growth into other outlying communities is expected. If you’re interested in learning more about The IC’s Outreach program, call us at 719-471-8181.

# THE IC AWARDS



*Tim Ashley Proudly Displaying  
His Chuck's Ducks Award*

On January 24th, Tim Ashley, Independent Living Coordinator at The Independence Center, received an award from the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's Office for his work leading up to the 2016 general election. As part of the partnership between The IC and the Clerk and Records Office, Tim played an instrumental role in evaluating local polling locations to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities. For his efforts, Tim was bestowed with the "Chuck's Ducks" award along with a rubber ducky. Though silly in name, the award serves an important purpose by recognizing individuals for their hard work. Great Thanks to Tim Ashley for his hard work and dedication. Tim, it is people like you that make The IC's important work possible.

On Saturday, May 20th, The Independence Center's Dimitri Lucas and Ashley Billington received awards at The Arc of the Pikes Peak Region's Annual Dinner and Awards Ceremony at Hotel Eleganté. Dimitri, who has autism, was given the "Achiever of the Year" award for the outstanding progress he made after joining The Independence Center (The IC) as a volunteer in 2016. Dimitri joined The IC after attending skills classes, going through the employment program, and participating in a 6-week assessment. As a volunteer, Dimitri made incredible progress, and today works with the Veteran in Charge program and Independent Living (IL), providing much needed assistance with office tasks. For her work with Dimitri and within IL, Ashley was given the "Resource Coordination" award.



*Dimitri and Ashley with Awards*



*Jeremy, with The IC's  
Dixie Herring Displaying Award*

One of The IC's board members, Jeremy Chatelain, recently served on another Center for Independent Living's (CIL) board, Roads to Independence in Utah. They recognized Jeremy for his outstanding work and dedication as a board member. Jeremy spent many hours representing their CIL with local legislators and ensured they could sustain their funding and operation. The IC is thankful to have Jeremy's expertise and contributions on our board now!



*Gail receives her  
Teller County Cares Award*

On February 14th, The Independence Center's Gail Melton was awarded the Teller County Cares award for her work supporting people with disabilities in and around Cripple Creek. Through her support groups, Gail has made a world of difference in the lives of veterans, people with traumatic brain injuries, and other individuals with disabilities. Most recently, Gail has coordinated with the local school district in Cripple Creek, and is getting local youth involved with people in her support group. Recognizing the meaningful impact that Gail's work has had on the community, the county showed their gratitude with this award. Great job Gail! We appreciate your hard work and are happy for your much deserved award.

# “TEXT TO 9-1-1”

## A Milestone for the Deaf Community

During fires, crimes, and life-threatening emergencies, the ability to communicate can make the difference between life and death. Now in El Paso and Teller counties, you can text to 9-1-1 if you are unable to talk on the phone.

This is a huge milestone for members of the Deaf community, who historically have had little to no communication options with emergency responders.

In January this year, Colorado Springs received 66 texts, and the whole region of Teller and El Paso counties received 82 texts, says Ben Bills, Public Information Officer for El Paso-Teller County 9-1-1 Authority.

To use “Text to 9-1-1”, you need to have a cell phone with a data plan that covers text messaging. Follow these steps outlined by the El Paso Teller 9-1-1 Authority:

1. Open text messaging
2. In the “to” field, enter 9-1-1
3. Push the send button
4. Answer the questions
5. Include your address, or as much detail as you can about your location.

Keep in mind that photos and video cannot be texted to 9-1-1, and the service will not work in a group message.

Our region’s “Text to 9-1-1” service is still in its infancy, and has potential to improve technologically over the next few years. For Ben Bills, the next year will bring a focus in public education. This is an important next step, says Matthew Ruggles, Independent Living Specialist (Deaf Services) at The Independence Center. Stay tuned for workshops and demonstrations coming up here at The Independence Center.

**The more people are aware of the service and know how to use it, the more impact it will have on the people who need it.**

**Watch the Launch of  
“Text to 9-1-1”  
Press Release at  
[bit.ly/theicexttto911](http://bit.ly/theicexttto911)**

