

# THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES

A PUBLICATION FROM THE INDEPENDENCE CENTER

SUMMER 2018

## Seeing Life in a Whole New Light



*Daniel Wearing His  
New eSight Glasses*

Imagine losing your eye sight at a young age and growing up without it, and how different your life might be. You would likely have a very different perspective of yourself and your relationship with the world around you. Now imagine what it might be like to regain your vision in an instant, after spending all of your adult life, and most of your childhood as a person experiencing blindness. That is exactly what happened to Daniel Ratcliff, The IC's Independent Living Benefits Coordinator. I know, this sound like something out of a science fiction movie, and ten or twenty years ago, it would have been. But today, we're living in a time where technological advancement is leading to many new and innovative assistive devices to help people with disabilities.

Daniel, who was diagnosed with Stargardt's disease at a young age, began losing his vision as fatty deposits accumulated in his eyes, damaging the light sensitive structures, called macula, in the back of his eyes. This process eventually led to the total loss of Daniel's central vision. Imagine holding a small circular plate in front of your face, where you can see everything around the plate, but nothing where the plate sits. This is what Daniel sees.

After learning about a new technology from a company called eSight that manufactures electronic glasses for people experiencing certain types of blindness, Daniel had the opportunity to give the e-glasses a try. If you haven't seen the eSight glasses, they look like a thick band of plastic that sits on the face, similar to pair a of conventional glasses. They have forward looking cameras on the front, and screens

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# CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO

After providing in-home health services to persons with disabilities in the Pikes Peak region for over thirty years,

we decided to stretch our reach further into

healthcare. We asked ourselves a few questions. Is it accessible and useable by persons with a wide range of disabilities? Can we “disrupt” the pipeline of people with disabilities going into nursing homes after being in the hospital? Why don’t more people with disabilities use primary care anyway? That might be able to prevent a trip to the hospital or emergency room... What is it with healthcare and people with disabilities?

Over the years, we have conducted several focus groups in our community to learn about barriers. A consistent barrier we heard about was “I can’t get on the table, nor can I get weighed!” And we also heard “The medical staff are uncomfortable around me, and that makes me uncomfortable.” As a result, The IC Fund purchased a hi-low table with weight scale and other accessibility features for Mission Medical Center late last year. In fact, there is an article in this edition of the Independence Times on page 3 that talks about this collaboration. The IC Fund Committee saw what a difference the addition of this accessible table made and decided that we need more Medicaid primary care providers to be accessible for people with disabilities. So in June, we kicked off a campaign to purchase accessible exam tables, Hoyer-style lifts, and hearing loop system to install in primary care providers’ offices. As part of the process, ADA site audits and disability etiquette training will be provided to ensure

better accessibility and understanding for people with disabilities. We asked people with disabilities who are on Medicaid or Medicare to nominate their primary care provider, who would receive this accessible exam room equipment. By the time you read this, the contest will be over, but you can <http://bit.ly/theaccessiblehealth> to get an update. By the end of the year, we should have all awardees identified and best of all, a map of where all the accessible medical equipment is located. Check the page often and go get a complete health exam - please!

Our community transition program, the one that works to get people out of nursing homes, often finds that a fair number of people in nursing homes don’t really need to be there! The lack of affordable, accessible housing is such a problem, that it takes significant time for people to transition out. This started us thinking about how we might disrupt the flow of people going into nursing homes from the hospital in the first place. Often, it is a medication administration problem, or a cooking/cleaning problem, or an understanding/managing diabetes problem. No one should go to a nursing home for those reasons! So we put together the Hospital to Home pilot program to see if we could change this phenomenon. In May of this year, we started the pilot program at UC Health Memorial Hospital Central, and I am happy to report that we have redirected four people back home, who were on their way to the nursing home. With our Home Health staff, the Independent Living staff, and 4 to 5 community agencies or for-profit providers, we are able to support these individuals so they can recover at home. The IL staff provide a bridge for getting back into community life after their hospital stay.



# MAKING HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBLE

## One Exam Table at a Time

In partnership with The Independence Center, Mission Medical Center unveiled their first accessible exam table this past February. With help from The Independence Center's IC Fund, Mission Medical was able to purchase this important piece of equipment, expanding desperately needed services to people with disabilities. According to Barb Cronin, Executive Director of Mission Medical Center, "This exam table opens Mission Medical's services to a large portion of our community's disabled population. This is an exciting collaboration between Mission Medical and The Independence Center."

Very few people understand how difficult the process of transferring from a wheelchair to a standard exam table can be. Fear of falling or being dropped during transfer has led to a significant lack of care, and in too many cases, individuals with limited muscle control or dexterity, have been unable to receive proper exams or be weighed for years and even decades. The use of equipment such as accessible exam tables and Hoyer lifts for transfer, creates a safe and comfortable means for people with disabilities to receive the medical services they need, and address the related issues.

The UpScale exam table, built by Medical Accessibility, LLC, features a built in scale and measuring tape for taking important measurements, the ability to raise and lower to necessary transfer height, heavy duty grab bars, high weight capacity, and foot stirrups for pelvic exams, among other features.

Here at The IC, we're actively advocating for medical providers to make accessible exam tables part of their standard equipment. Anyone would be infuriated if their doctor was unable to provide a comprehensive medical exam, but this is the normal reality

for so many with disabilities. Please join with us in congratulating Mission Medical for recognizing the problem and working with The IC to expand medical access to all their patients. And please, if you have the opportunity, talk to your medical professional about the issue. Information is key, and if we all work together, we can get the message out and change the medical experience for our neighbors, friends, and family members with disabilities. To learn more about improving healthcare accessibility for people with disabilities, download our issue brief at <http://bit.ly/theichealthcare>.

*Loretta Hausman trying out the UpScale exam table with inventor, Jeremy Polster*



**For more information on why accessibility is important in healthcare, please check out The IC's video at <http://bit.ly/theicaccessiblehealth>**

# ADA CELEBRATING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES



## 2018

Each year, The Independence Center (The IC) hosts a luncheon to celebrate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The celebration is always held on the 26th of July, which coincides with the signing of this important legislation into law back in 1990. On that date, sitting with a group of people with disabilities, George H. W. Bush signed the ADA into law. In doing so, a legal framework was established to protect people with disabilities from discrimination in employment, ensuring that buildings and paths of travel are accessible, and working to make sure reasonable accommodations are available.

Each year, with the ADA as a central theme, we approach the celebration from a different angle, emphasizing a topic that is near and dear to our hearts here at The IC. Over the past two years, we've focused on Transit and then Progress in the Pikes Peak Region. This year, our emphasis is on Veterans with disabilities. The military is a huge part of our culture here, which gives a different flavor to Colorado Springs that you just don't see in most American Cities. At The IC, we work with Veterans with disabilities all the time.

I think this is something that most people aren't aware of. But in reality, Vets make up a significant portion of the people we serve.

In this year's celebration, several individuals who have been impacted by The IC will share their stories and speak about the programs that have helped them along the way. In addition, five deserving organizations will receive awards for their contributions to improving the lives of Veterans with disabilities in the Pikes Peak region.

ADA: Celebrating Veterans With Disabilities will be held at Hotel Eleganté on July 26th from 11:45AM to 1:00PM. If you would like more information about the event, visit the official event webpage at <http://bit.ly/celebratingvets>. If you're interested in attending next year's ADA Celebration, keep an eye on our website in the spring of 2019 and check out our 2018 ADA Celebration photos and video. Under the "Get Involved" drop-down, you'll find a link for next year's event and photos and videos from the previous year.





# Sponsors



# THE ART OF ACCESSIBILITY

When The Independence Center's Courtney Stone and Tim Gore approached others at The IC about participating in the "First Friday Downtown" art walk, it was a no brainer. What a great opportunity to showcase the artwork of individuals from within the people with disabilities community. Art provides a historical record of our past, drives curiosity, inspires innovation, and brings us together. And historically, a great number of famous artists have had disabilities. The presence of people with disabilities in the arts has a rich history. It was in this spirit, and in the hope of making art accessible to everyone, that we at The IC named our art exhibit "Art of Accessibility".

The Art of Accessibility is about creating a deliberate space for artists with disabilities to be the source of knowledge, by sharing their stories, vision, and creations. From oil paintings and photography to dance and music, the diverse perspectives of people across and beyond disability are shared in this space. Many people see it simply as a lovely work of art. We see it as advocacy and a road to access and inclusion.

The IC has held Art of Accessibility twice as part of First Friday Downtown, and will most certainly continue to do so going forward. With a festive atmosphere and foodie oriented theme, it's hard not to have a good time. The most recent event, the "Haute Chocolate Hop", was fantastic, with significantly more visitors coming to The IC than the original event. There were numerous delicious desserts to be found including chocolate bacon brownies - yum. The number of artists displaying their artwork has increased as well. It was so great to see the halls and conference rooms at The IC lined with the work of such amazing artists. To the right, you can see a few of the photos from Art of Accessibility.

This inclusion of diverse voice in the narrative of Colorado Springs & El Paso County nourishes and strengthens our community. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity." We all benefit from welcoming and engaging with the full breadth of visions from our community's past, present, and future - because from difference comes innovation.

If you or someone you know is interested in displaying your artwork at our next Art of Accessibility event, contact The IC's Nina Kamekona at 719-476-3129 or by email at [nkamekona@the-ic.org](mailto:nkamekona@the-ic.org).







Keep an eye out for  
our next Art of Accessibility  
event on

**September 7, 2018**

on our Facebook page at  
*[bit.ly/theicfacebook](http://bit.ly/theicfacebook)*

**CALL FOR  
ARTISTS!**

Submit your  
artwork and/or  
attend - hope to  
see you there!



*Photos from Art of Accessibility (February 2, 2018)*



# FINDING SUCCESS THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

This past December, with the help of The IC's Employment department, Skylar Sypher began searching for a job. At the time, she wasn't particularly concerned about what the job was, she just needed something to help pay the bills. For someone who is Deaf and mostly nonverbal, finding meaningful employment can be a difficult prospect. Some employers hold preconceived ideas about what it might be like working with someone who has a disability. In fact, Skylar was initially expecting to accept a job stocking shelves or working as an airport ramp person.

Yvonne Bacher, of The IC's Employment department, worked with Skylar through the whole process, from applying for jobs to conducting mock interviews. With Yvonne's help, Skylar applied for several different jobs. Most of the jobs looked like they would be difficult work, but would provide the income that Skylar needed. The job that really excited her though, was at a dog breeder up in Larkspur. Gunbill German Shepards breeds and imports pedigree German Shepards, and has a large property out in the country for raising and training their dogs. As part of the training program, they needed someone to socialize their puppies and take care of other miscellaneous chores.

To Skylar and Yvonne's delight, the owner of Gunbill German Shepards liked what he saw on Skylar's resume and called to schedule an interview. The interview didn't go as planned, when a winter storm blew in. With road conditions unsuitable for travel due to the drifting snow, neither Yvonne nor the ASL interpreter were able to make it to the scheduled interview. Skylar was determined to land the job, and braved the storm to meet with Izzet, the owner, for the interview. He was impressed with her commitment, and they communicated the best they could without an interpreter. Though there wasn't a lot of communication, the message came through loud and clear – Skylar is a hard worker with great work ethic.

Izzet was so impressed, that he scheduled a second interview. This time the interpreter was there, so they were able to carry on a proper conversation. Izzet explained the job duties, got to know Skylar a little, and offered her the job. She was ecstatic, and promptly accepted. Since starting the job, Skylar has molded into her role and become a valuable member of the team. The dogs absolutely love her, and the owner is consistently pleased with her performance and dedication to the job. In a letter telling about her experience, Skylar says "I love working with animals. I grew up with animals all my life. I feel like I have a natural bond with animals". She goes on to express her appreciation to Yvonne and to The IC for helping her get the job. It's clear that she found the right fit.



The IC's Employment department can help anyone with a disability prepare to enter the workforce. Whether it's reentry into the workforce or searching for a job for the first time, we have all the tools that you or your loved one will need to get prepared. A few of the things you can learn are: creating resumes and cover letters, dressing for success, mock interviews, meeting job expectations, communicating with your supervisor, and numerous other essential skills necessary for finding meaningful employment. If you would like to learn more about The IC's Employment program, visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/theicemployment> or by phone at 719-471-8181.



## CREATE A LEGACY OF INDEPENDENCE

Leaving a legacy to The Independence Center is an enduring gift which will further our mission of creating independence for people with disabilities for years to come. Creating a will takes time and consideration, and we understand friends and family come first. Once your loved ones are taken care of, consider leaving a gift in your will to a cause close to your heart. If you'd like to further the mission of The Independence Center in your will, please contact Timothy Gore at 719-471-8181 or [info@the-ic.org](mailto:info@the-ic.org).

**FOR MORE WAYS  
TO GIVE VISIT**  
*<http://bit.ly/theicdonate>*



# Types of Electronic Glasses

There are two different types of electronic glasses that can be used to help people who are blind or have low vision to navigate the world around them. In the front cover article about The IC's Benefits Coordinator, Daniel Ratcliff, these types of glasses can be used for individuals with low vision, such as macular degeneration, or in Daniel's case, Stargardt's disease. For Daniel, though he doesn't have central vision, he does have his peripheral vision. This allows him to see the images being projected on the screens in front of his eyes, thus enhancing thru magnification, his eyesight. But what about people who are completely blind?

For individuals experiencing complete blindness, the inability to receive the necessary visual input, makes it impossible for eSight style glasses to work for their needs. Luckily, there is a whole different category of electronic glasses that were created to address this need. In 2014, a company called Aira (Aira.io) was founded when an innovative entrepreneur became friends with a communications professional who is blind. From the friendship, arose a revolutionary idea, to use Google Glass as a platform to help people who are blind. If you aren't familiar with Google Glass, it's basically a pair of non-prescription glasses with a built-in video camera to capture and record video of everything the wearer sees.



The way Aira works, is by relaying the live video feed being captured by the glasses, to a computer in another location. A person watches the video feed and explains to the wearer what they see. They can also see their location on a map from the GPS in the user's phone. This provides a significant amount of information to the wearer to help them better perceive the world around them. Imagine being in a restaurant without a Braille menu, trying to pick out what to eat. With Aira, the menu would be read to you, and you could easily make the decision on what to order. When standing at a street intersection, you could quickly learn what street you're standing on and avoid going in the wrong direction.

Both varieties of electronic glasses truly are an amazing advancement for individuals who have low vision or are blind. If you or someone you know would like to learn more about electronic glasses or other adaptive technologies, visit our "Tools for Accessibility" page at <http://bit.ly/tools4accessibility>.



# Seeing Life in a Whole New Light

(continued from front page)



that sit in the back, in front of the wearers' eyes. If you're wondering what they look like, and are an old-school Star Trek fan, think of the glasses that Lieutenant La Forge wore. They are amazingly similar. The user can adjust the image on the screens to the position that best utilizes their field of vision, helping them to see the areas they are normally missing.

For Daniel, trying the glasses on for the first time was life changing. He was able to see the world in a whole new way. He actually had the opportunity to see his wife and children for the first time, and immediately knew that he had to have a pair of his own. Because of the significant expense of the glasses, buying them immediately just wasn't an option. Over the next year, Daniel worked with The IC's Assistive Technology department to apply for grants, and saved up his own money. Eventually, the money came through and Daniel was able to purchase a pair of eSight glasses for himself.

When the glasses finally came in, Daniel was in awe of the world around him. He tells me, "Now I can look into the eyes of my children, and the main time I wear them is when I'm helping my children with their homework." For the first time, he could see the facial features and eye colors of people he had known for years. He was able to read street signs and actually see beyond the street block he was standing on, and commented that "It's a very emotional experience, being able to see individual blades of grass, and to see birds for the first time." The glasses have become a regular part of his daily routine and continue to serve him well as an assistive technology.

**To learn more about assistive technology, contact The IC's Assistive Technology Program at 719-476-3122, or by email at [pspotts@the-ic.org](mailto:pspotts@the-ic.org), or visit <http://bit.ly/tools4accessibility>**

## REACHING FOR THE SKY WITH ADAPTIVE CLIMBING

If you haven't heard of adaptive climbing, you're really missing out on something cool. Adaptive recreation is a blanket term for any kind of recreational activity that is modified in a way that makes it possible for people with disabilities to participate in activities that they otherwise would be unable to. In the case of adaptive climbing, participants rope in and climb up an indoor climbing wall, pretty much like anyone else would. By using slightly modified equipment and a little help from volunteers, voila! A whole new world opens to someone with a disability.

With a little help from a grant and a group of inspired individuals, The IC's Development department was able to secure the funding necessary to rent out a climbing wall at City Rock on a cool day in January. Achilles Pike's Peak, a local non-profit The IC regularly works with on recreational adventures, was there to show everyone the ropes - pun intended.

The atmosphere was electric as one-by-one, everyone had a chance to try out climbing. As people left their walkers and wheelchairs on the floor below, they ascended to a new sense of freedom. A few of the more adventurous climbers ventured away from the designated climbing wall, and tried their luck at more difficult routes. The IC's Tim Ashley, who is a person with quadriplegia himself, and who oversees The IC's Adaptive Recreation program, was clearly elated to see the Adaptive Recreation group experiencing something new and having so much fun in the process. You can see the smile on his face as one after one, his group scales the wall. He tells me "Witnessing so many consumers

*Various Photos  
from Adaptive  
Climbing event*

willing to get away from their comfort zone and putting forth great effort to attempt an adventure they never thought possible was so stimulating to me". And that's what is at the core of adaptive recreation. He goes on to say, "For many, experiences like this present an opportunity to exit the isolation of home and collaborate with others as they participate in physical activities which promote holistic health and wellness".

Far too many people with disabilities are told what they can't do, but the real story is what they can do. Sure, abilities can be different, but with a little understanding and accommodation, the sky is the limit. So if you have a dream, embrace the challenge and give adaptive recreation a try. For more information about climbing and other adaptive opportunities, contact The IC's Tim Ashley at 719-471-8181 x123 or visit <http://bit.ly/theicadaptiverec>