

# THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES



*Alphie Omar*

## ART OF ACCESSIBILITY:

### Finding Empowerment Through Modeling

Looking to find a job here in the Springs, Alphie Omar began visiting The Independence Center's (The IC) Employment department close to seven years ago. Over that time, he's worked with Yvonne Bacher and Starr Vahsholtz to develop marketable job skills, update his resume, and to look for employment. After getting a little advice from Yvonne and Starr, he also earned a certificate in Microsoft Office from the Pikes Peak Work Force Center, then secured a data entry job. Yvonne tells me that "Alphie has incredible, incredible drive and has overcome enormous challenges." Like many other men of his age, Alphie likes watching football, going bowling, visiting the park, and participating in various other activities in his free time. What makes Alphie different, is the fact he has no arms or legs, and has a learning disability.

This being the case, Alphie seemed like the perfect person to model in The Independence Center's Art of Accessibility event. We started Art of Accessibility last year as a way to share the creative and artistic work of people with disabilities to the public. The event, which coincides with the First Friday Art Walk in downtown Colorado Springs, serves as a venue to display both traditional and performing art. Since starting Art of Accessibility, much focus has been placed on painting, drawing, and even dance. For the most recent Art of Accessibility though, we thought we would take a slightly different track by focusing on the design of clothing for, and modeling by, people with disabilities. The more traditional forms of art such as painting and drawing that have been displayed at previous Art of Accessibility events, were still present, but the fashion show was the headliner.

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# THE ART OF LETTING GO!

## CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO



In August 2017, Tim Gore, our Development Director and Courtney Stone, IL Senior Manager came to me with a hare-brained idea to put on an art show featuring local artists with disabilities, the first Friday of September, which was four weeks away. It was a great idea to pull our artists into the thriving First Friday Art Walk held every month in Colorado Springs, but four weeks? I shook my head and started to say, "You two are old enough to know that you can't pull off something like that in four weeks!" I stopped for a moment and thought, "Well, rather than me telling them, it would be better if they found it out on their own. A painful lesson for sure, but at some point in everyone's career, they have to learn to plan ahead."

Later, I found out they left my office laughing and saying, "Was that a challenge? We'll show her!" And just like that, The Art of Accessibility (AoA) was born in exactly four weeks! Now we are changing the art world in the Pikes Peak region to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities. People came to all 4 events we put on over the past year. Artists with disabilities showed their art, received feedback, and sold their work. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College decided, with a little prodding from Tim and Courtney, to purchase an accessible pottery wheel. Paul Spotts, our assistive technology staff person with quadriplegia, had to be dragged to the pottery class to try out the wheel. Once there, he was the one who enjoyed it so much he had to be

dragged away! This reaction

- so inspired the Fine Arts Center staff, that they are
- starting to market their
- classes to persons
- with disabilities.
- Next, we noticed
- the van used to
- transport people
- to and from various
- art venues was not
- accessible to patrons
- who used mobility
- devices. This might

explain why galleries were not really seeing people with disabilities during the First Friday Art walks.

Tim and Courtney informed Art Walk staff of the need for an accessible vehicle to serve First Friday patrons. After several months of discussion an accessible van showed up at the Art Walk venues!

Meanwhile, back at the Art of Accessibility events, staff started to add exhibits. We had a dance troupe of persons with intellectual disabilities and the most recent event, held in September 2018, featured a fashion show of sharply dressed men and women with disabilities. Each person's attire was described by the MC and each told a bit of their story. One person in particular surprised me as I had never heard him speak a full sentence. There he was chatting away with the audience while showing off his beautiful jacket, tailored just for him, thanks to the Men's Exchange! Who knew this little event could be so life changing?

In October, Art of Accessibility won best gallery exhibit at the Pikes Peak Arts Council awards. The IC was the only non-art focused organization to be nominated, let alone win. It was a big deal! Now our event has been selected to receive the 2019 Business for the Arts Award presented by Colorado Business Committee for the Arts. While we are thrilled to be noticed, it is really about showcasing and empowering artists with disabilities across the state. Perhaps other communities will look at our event and think of ways to include their local artists with disabilities.

And I learned to let go and let others do things differently than I would! There is always more than one way to accomplish a goal, as Tim and Courtney had so much fun in showing me!



Tim Gore and Courtney Stone photographed by AoA artist, Bryan York

For more information on Art of Accessibility please visit [bitly.theicaaa](http://bitly.theicaaa)





*Alphie Omar on The IC runway*

(continued from front page,  
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In the past, people with disabilities were forced to use the same clothing as everyone else, even if the clothing didn't function well with their specific disability. In recent years, the need for clothing that fits better and is easier to use, has become a growing trend. Clothing and shoes can be given larger openings, Velcro can be used in place of zippers and buttons, and other modifications can greatly increase the accessibility of clothing for people with all types of disabilities.

On Friday, September 7th, several examples of these wonderful designs were on display for the community to see. Several individuals, including Alphie had the opportunity to show off their new outfits, which were purchased by The Independence Center with help from the Men's Exchange and the Women's Resource Center, and modified by a seamstress in Denver. The models showed off the various accessibility features, and had a great time in the process. If you or someone you know would like more information about Art of Accessibility, or about accessible clothing, visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/The-IC>, or give us a call at 719-471-8181.

## HELPING PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS

Stacy Gibson, IL Specialist with Hard of Hearing Emphasis at The Independence Center was recently honored with the "Service to Mankind Club Award" by Woodman Valley Sertoma for her work connecting people with hearing loss with the help they need, through the Sertoma HEARS program. The HEARS program helps people with hearing loss, who are in need of financial assistance, to purchase hearing aids.

Stacy's award stems from her work with two local men who were having a difficult time and needed help with their hearing loss. One was a man experiencing homelessness, and the other was an elderly man with cognitive disabilities living at a local assisted living

- facility. The man was about to
- be thrown out onto the street
- because of the inability to
- control his behavioral issues.
- They contacted The IC's Hard
- of Hearing department and
- Stacy made arrangements for
- a visit.

- In preparation for the meeting,
- she brought a pocket talker,
- an electronic device similar
- to a hearing aid, but hangs
- around the neck and amplifies
- sound into a pair of earbuds.
- The man put the pocket
- talker on, and was able to

- have a conversation with the
- Director of the facility. They
- explained the rules and their
- expectations, and the man
- immediately understood.
- His behavior has improved
- drastically. It turns out he
- was acting out because of his
- frustration from not being
- able to communicate. Through
- The IC's Assistive Technology
- Program, Stacy was able to get
- the man his own pocket talker,
- and since then, he has been a
- whole different person.

- Congratulations to Stacy
- Gibson for this well-deserved
- award. To learn more, visit
- The IC's Hard of Hearing
- department webpage at
- <http://bit.ly/TheIC-HoH>.



Stacy Gibson receiving award  
from Hal Moffat, President –  
Woodmen Valley Sertoma

# Finding Your Way Home

## Hospital to Home Program

Mandi Strantz, Care Transition Coordinator for The Independence Center, works tirelessly to keep people with disabilities, who have landed in the hospital, from unnecessarily being transitioned to nursing homes. There's a disturbing trend when people with complex cases are hospitalized, and aren't recovering quickly enough. They are often transferred to nursing homes, where many patients find themselves trapped. After not being in their home for an extended period of time, bills can go unpaid, life moves on, and they lose the ability to move back home. Even if they are still able to live a life of independence, many individuals don't have the necessary network or resources in place to escape the clutches of institutional living. When speaking to Strantz about this epidemic, she tells me "That's how individuals get stuck there, and have a very difficult time getting back home, and end up losing everything they have. So we want to have a paradigm shift in thinking, to say let's get people home – it's better for them as a person, it's better for their health, and it's cheaper."

The Independence Center's Hospital to Home Transitions (H2H) program is a pilot program that began in March of 2018. The program was started after two years of discussions and planning on how to best tackle the issue of unnecessary nursing home placements. H2H provides services such as meals in the home, transportation, setting up home health care, setting up homemaking services such as housekeeping and grocery pickup, procuring and setting up durable medical equipment, and helping with medication delivery and funding. By providing these types of services, patients receive the supports they need to get back in their home to focus on their recovery without being institutionalized.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the unnecessary transitioning of patients to nursing homes, is the astronomical cost. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2017, the average cost of a private room in a U.S. nursing home was \$7,698 per month, or roughly \$92,000 per year. By transitioning people back into their homes, it maintains the patient's independence and saves a fortune for everyone involved - from the hospital, to the insurance company, to Medicaid. When speaking about the cost, Mandi tells me that between the eleven individuals the H2H program has helped transition home, the cost has been significantly lower.

### **DO YOU NEED A DOCTOR WITH ACCESSIBLE EQUIPMENT?**

Check out our online map which shows which Primary Care offices and clinics have accessible exam equipment and what kind. Visit [their-accessible-offices](#)



# Darioun's Transition Story

One patient who has benefited from the H2H program is Darioun McCune. After being shot in the abdomen, Darioun faced numerous surgeries and an extremely complex and extended recovery. Several months after being hospitalized, Darioun was released, but was quickly readmitted with pneumonia. Upon his second discharge, the H2H program stepped in. Many cases with this level of complexity would have resulted in the patient being transferred to a nursing home, but with the persistence of his Aunt Sonya and the H2H program, Darioun was able to find the supports he needed to recover at home. Sonya was even able to become Darioun's caregiver through The IC's Home Health department. The IC's Benefits department was able to help Darioun get the benefits he needed to pay for his care, and to arrange transportation to and from high school, where Darioun is working to graduate and go on to college. When asked about his experience with The IC's H2H program, Darioun says he's very thankful, going on to say "I got a chance to meet so many people at The IC. They have helped me understand that everybody with disabilities, aren't helpless". Without the intervention of the H2H program, it's hard to say where Darioun would be in his recovery, but what is certain, is that H2H has helped to make the transition easier.

The H2H pilot program was launched in partnership with UC Health - Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs with help from Joseph Foecking, Director of Rehabilitation at Memorial Health System, and a Board Member here at The Independence



*Darioun McCune with H2H  
Care Transition Coordinator,  
Mandi Strantz*

Center. So far the program has been an overwhelming success, beating initial goals for the number of patients transitioned home, and for the small number of patients readmitted to the hospital. The results of the pilot program are clear, by providing needed supports for patients recovering in their homes, everyone wins.

The future of the H2H program looks bright, as the pilot program was recently extended for another six months. Going forward, we're hopeful other local hospitals will recognize the value of the program and adopt this more humane and cost effective philosophy. To learn more about the H2H program, visit The IC on the web at <http://bit.ly/The-IC>, or by telephone at 719-471-8181.

# BUILDING A SPACE WHERE ANYONE CAN LIVE

When Jeremy J. Chatelain moved to Colorado Springs for a new job last year, he knew finding the right house would be difficult. As a person with quadriplegia, Jeremy knew there were several features he had to have in his new home that wouldn't be easy to find. Zero-step entries, roll-in showers, lower light switches, raised electrical outlets, lever handle doors, lever knob deadbolts, pull faucets, and extra-wide interior and exterior doors were essential.

Owning other homes before, Jeremy and his wife have always had to make major home modifications in order for Jeremy to live in each of their homes. These modifications have ranged from building door ramps, to elevating the bath tub onto wooden beams in order to fit a Hoyer-style lift underneath so Jeremy could bathe. The process was painstaking, expensive, and often left much to be desired.

When Jeremy first began speaking to local home builders, no one seemed to have the combination of accessibility features he was looking for. When he came across Challenger Homes, things started looking up. As part of

their standard floorplan options, Challenger had a couple of homes that could be built to incorporate the principles of universal design. This was a game changer. Knowing this, Jeremy felt a sense of relief, and knew that Challenger would build his next home.

Universal design is a concept that is planned into residential or commercial design from the beginning and is intended to be useable by the greatest number of people. The purpose is to design a space that can be used by people with or without disabilities alike, without having to make alterations for an individual's particular needs. At first glance, a home designed using universal design principles is hard to differentiate from a non-accessible home.

Universal design differs from accessible design in that accessible design addresses the needs of a specific disability or individual, such as Braille for a person who is blind or wide doorways for a person who uses a wheelchair. Many times, accessibly designed homes are retrofitted to become accessible after a person with a disability moves in. This can result in a home that was obviously modified to accommodate an individual with a specific disability.







*Jeremy Chatelain in his  
Universally Designed home.*

Upon entering Jeremy's home, it's hard to tell it's different than any other new home. You really have to search to identify what makes it a universally designed home. But when the features are pointed out, it seems obvious. Jeremy tells me, "The entry ways are such a needed point for somebody in a wheelchair." And he's right. The threshold leading from the exterior entryway of the home to the foyer is the same level, meaning that anyone in a wheelchair can easily enter and exit the home without having to traverse the several inch drop found in a standard home. The light switches are lowered and the wall outlets are raised, both to a level that is easier to reach for someone in a wheelchair. These are just a few examples, but really highlight how simple and inexpensive changes during construction can make life much easier for people with disabilities, without affecting usability for people who don't have disabilities.

For Jeremy, his universally designed home is everything he hoped it would be. I can tell he's proud when he gives me a tour. It's beautiful - and it doesn't look like it was designed for someone who uses a wheelchair. It's a home that could be used by a person of

any ability, now or in the future as one ages. I only wish that more home builders would realize there are plenty of people out there who would happily support the prospect of purchasing a home that was built using universal design principles. When discussing how you compel home builders to build more universally designed homes, Jeremy says "I would solicit a business that has specifically chosen to use universal design." And he has a good point. With nearly twenty percent of the U.S. population recognized as having a disability, that is a huge swath of the housing market that isn't being served. Seems like common sense to me.

To learn more about universal design, visit <http://bit.ly/TheIC-UniversalDesign>, or give us a call at 719-471-8181.

## LOCAL BUSINESS PARKING LOTS AREN'T ACCESSIBLE

Earlier this year, with help from disability consulting organization ADA Surveys and Plans (ASAP) and sponsorship from the Colorado Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, The Independence Center conducted a campaign called "Better Access Is Better Business." The purpose of the campaign was to help businesses identify elements in their parking lots that aren't in compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), and hopefully make the necessary changes to remedy the issues. ASAP conducted over one hundred parking lot surveys between El Paso, Pueblo, and Teller counties, checking for a variety of elements required by the ADA.

The survey results were not what we hoped for, but weren't all together surprising either. Findings showed far too many business parking lots in the Pikes Peak region fail to comply with the ADA. There were numerous infractions among businesses surveyed, but the top three most common issues were the complete absence or incorrect dimensioning of adjacent access aisles, the lack of parking spaces with access aisles for vans with wheelchair ramps, and the complete lack or improper placement of accessible parking signs.

The underlying problem is the rules established by the ADA cannot be directly enforced by local governments or Regional Building, since the ADA is a civil rights law. For the interior portion of local buildings, the Pikes Peak Regional Building Department enforces the ADA through a set of building codes developed by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), but they do not inspect beyond five feet of the building's entrance. This directly leads to the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. Cities and towns should pass their own ordinances laying out rules based on the ADA, which determine parking lot requirements. They can then use their Code Enforcement Officers to inspect and approve any parking lots that are being repaved or restriped. Without proper inspections, accessibility issues easily go unnoticed and business owners have no idea they're out of compliance.

The IC advocates for people with disabilities in and around Colorado Springs, and this issue has caused harm to far too many people to ignore. According to Patricia Yeager, CEO of The Independence Center, "Parking lots are a gateway to economic and civic activity in our community and the lack of accessible parking lots denies access to individuals with disabilities".

With proper inspections and educational efforts, this problem can be solved. Someone needs to be inspecting these parking lots; whether it be the municipality, Regional Building, or some other entity - to not do so, is unjust and puts business owners at risk of drive-by lawsuits. The IC plans to create a training program and provide training to asphalt and parking lot striping companies to improve their knowledge of accessible parking lot regulations. If you would like to learn more about The IC's community advocacy efforts, visit <http://bit.ly/TheICAdvocacy>

