

2019

IMPACT REPORT





Dear friends,

As the Independent Living Director, I deeply appreciate the supporters who have helped us lay the foundation by which we empower people with disabilities to grow in their independence.

For the past 30 years, The Independence Center has empowered individuals with all disabilities through our five core services: information and referral, individual advocacy, peer support, independent living skills, and systems advocacy. Our programs are rooted in independent living philosophy, which honors consumers' rights to determine their needs and develop their own goals. Our consumers achieve their goals with the assistance of our staff, 80 percent of whom live with diverse disabilities and understand the journey of overcoming barriers.

Over the past year, we continued to open doors that made a strong impact in our disability community. In this impact report you will read just some of the highlights from an impactful year (July 2018-June 2019). The work we do would not be possible without the strong foundation laid through state and federal funds. Leveraging these funds enables us to support people's choices to live independently in the community. In the last year, our Community Transition Services program transitioned eight individuals from nursing homes into a home in the community where they can live independently, enriching their lives and saving the state approximately \$352,000¹.

I am proud to say that we have built upon our foundation to expand our five core programs by providing our disability community with housing and employment services. Additionally, we served 134 veterans with disabilities in this past year, supporting their independence in the community. By doing this, we add irreplaceable value back into the community.

We are excited to continue creating independence in the community.

Thank you for your support!

Dixie Herring
Independent Living Program Director

¹Resource – M. Kitchener et al., "Institutional and Community-Based Long-Term Care: A Comparative Estimate of Public Costs," *Journal of Health and Social Policy*, 22, no. 2 (2006): 31-50.



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

The IC's H2H Program Helps Patient Recover in His Own Home

After being shot in the abdomen, Darioun McCune faced numerous surgeries and a long road to recovery. After being released from his several-month hospital stay, The IC's Hospital to Home (H2H) transitions pilot program stepped in. The grant-funded program started in 2018 to help patients receive support needed to recover in their homes without having to be institutionalized. With the assistance of the The IC, along with Darioun's Aunt Sonya, the young man was able to do just that.

Through The IC's Home Health department, Sonya became Darioun's caregiver. In addition, The IC's Benefits department assisted him with getting the benefits he needed to pay for his care and arrange for transportation to and from his high school. Darioun said he's very thankful

for the program. "I got a chance to meet so many people at The IC," he said. "They have helped me understand that everybody with disabilities aren't helpless." The H2H pilot program was launched in partnership with UCHealth – Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs with help from Joseph Foecking, Director of Rehabilitation at UC Health Memorial Health System and a Board member at The Independence Center. Under the program, the Home Health department transferred more than 20 people to their homes, nearly twice the amount required under grant funding.



Michael Jackson

Better Than I Was Before

On May 22, 2012, Colorado Springs resident Mike Jackson was struck by three grand mal seizures, one of which left him clinically dead for a time. Although his prognosis was grim, Mike woke from his coma a little over two weeks later and was released from the hospital three weeks after that.

That same day, Mike and his mother stopped at The IC to learn how to apply for disability benefits. Because the nerves in his eyes had been irreparably damaged, he was now legally blind.

When they arrived, they found an entire community ready to help him regain his independence. "We walked in and Jeff (Henderson) met us," Michael recalls. "Me and my mom were still trying to figure out what I'm going to do. All I really knew my entire life was sports and my kids."

After learning that Mike is a lifelong athlete, Jeff, former Benefits Coordinator, told him, "You have to play a sport." Soon after, Jeff called Mike and said, "We found a sport for you. We're taking you to a tryout." The tryout was for the Colorado Storm, a beep baseball team based in Denver. Despite never having played baseball before, he won a spot on the team and has since played in six Beep Baseball World Series. He is also a volunteer beep baseball coach at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, thanks to a connection Tim Ashley, former Peer Support Coordinator, made for him.

To this day, Mike remains part of The IC community and continues to receive supports and services. Reflecting on The IC's role in helping him regain his independence, Mike says, "I now know that I'm not going to be the same as I was before. I'm going to be better than I was before."

Advocacy Highlights and Testimonies Events in 2019

Disability Integration Act (DIA) Watch Party

Community members watched as the bill was introduced to Congress and learned about how the bill would allow people with disabilities to have more control over their services and require communities to address the need for affordable, accessible and integrated housing options.



*Rebecca Michael, Stephanie Symonette,
and Elle Livengood*

Communication Access During Weather Emergencies

During the “Bomb Cyclone” on March 13, 2019, the Deaf community was unable to access news updates from the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management because American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters were not provided during their news conference. After addressing the El Paso County Commissioners and the Colorado Springs City Council about this violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, The IC received confirmation that the issue would be corrected moving forward.



About a month later, during preparations for a second weather emergency, El Paso County reached out The IC to get resources for ASL interpreters to ensure communication access for persons with disabilities, so that these individuals can obtain emergency-related information in the language they can understand.

Zappo's Adaptive Fashion Show Watch Party

During this first, nationally live-streamed fashion event for people with disabilities, models with disabilities showcased clothing and footwear options that make getting dressed easier. Small, yet impactful adaptations to clothes transformed challenges to vibrant displays of fashion and function.

Deaf Community Event

A healthy discussion on community accountability was hosted in partnership with Dove: Deaf Overcoming Violence through Empowerment.

Colorado Springs At-Large Candidate Forum

This forum gave people with disabilities the opportunity to meet the candidates running for At-Large seats in the April 2019 Colorado Springs City Council election. Candidates answered written questions from the audience so that attendees could learn about their positions on important issues in the election.

"I don't know where I would be without access to disability services and Medicaid. More than likely, I would be dead because the medication I take is imperative for my ability to function on a day to day basis. I also get home care and other services through my (BI) Brain Injury Waiver.

"Having a traumatic brain injury (TBI) affects so many areas of my life including, but not subject to: how I communicate with people, long and short term memory loss, organization, emotional and mental regulation, impulse control, social interaction, cognitive and executive functioning, and the list goes on and on.

"I am learning how to advocate for myself, so that I can be sure to get the assistance and help that I need.

"Thank you to The Independence Center for welcoming me into your family last year. Thank you for the great work you do advocating and provided us with the services to help us function better individually and collectively!

"I am truly blessed and grateful for all that you do!"

-Stephanie Symonette,
The IC Consumer

Health Care Access

The IC works to make all forms of health care more accessible. The advocacy team conducted a qualitative research study to learn more about the best practices, accommodations, and accessibility tools that are essential when seeking and receiving dental health care. The findings were shared with the Colorado Springs Dental Society and are now being used to educate dental providers, and to collaborate with them to find solutions.

Disability Trainings

Over 5,000 community members in the Pikes Peak region received training on disability topics, including disability etiquette, disability-friendly health care, assistance animals, emergency preparedness, advocacy, and community organizing.

"It was a very informative class and opened my eyes to how I was perceiving certain disabilities. I have a better understanding on how people should be addressed and treated depending on their disability."

-Disability
Awareness Training
Participant

Real Empowerment Podcast

Hosts Rebecca Michael and Daniel Ratcliff talk with community members about stories and issues impacting the disability community.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkmEKRpbIHY>



**Disability
Training**



Charlene Youngblood

“Living in a nursing home was horrible. Then someone said, ‘Why don’t you call The Independence Center and find out about getting back into the community.’ I never thought that was possible. I made the call and that is when my life turned around. The Independence Center walked me through all the steps necessary for my transition. It took about 14 months waiting for an accessible apartment but finally my big day came. With the help of The IC staff in the CTS (Community Transitions Services) program, I moved into my own apartment ready to start my new life. The IC helped me get set up with doctors, city bus, food stamps, and all the services I needed to get started on my way back to my independence.”

-Charlene Youngblood, The IC Consumer

Assistance Animal Open House

This event allowed people with disabilities to learn about their rights and responsibilities from a panel of experts. Topics included the difference between the types of assistance animals, which animals are protected under the ADA, assistance animals and emergency preparedness, and how to obtain and register an assistance animal.

Photovoice

Participants used photography to highlight elements in our community that facilitate inclusion or create barriers for people with disabilities. Exhibits were held in local libraries.

“Thank you for bringing me to The IC!!! I love you for giving me hope!!! It’s hard, but I’m still pushing through...”

-The IC Consumer



Bills and Legislation

Supported State Bill HB19-1118 – Time Period to Cure Lease Violation – in partnership with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless.

Supported State Bill HB19-1107 – Employment Support Job Retention Services Program through the Association of Colorado Centers for Independent Living (ACCIL).

Supported State Bill HB19-1069 – Sign Language Interpreters Title Certification – Allows for expansion of certification processes for ASL interpreters

Supported Renter's Rights, Employment Support Services, and Medical Support bills.

Several staff from The IC attended the bill signing by Governor Polis of **SB19-202: Voting Rights for Voters with Disabilities.**

By the Numbers

503 Independent Living consumers

receiving
3,079
services

8

Community Transitions from Nursing Facility to community

22

Hospital to Home (H2H) Clients

134 Veterans

receiving
1,085
services

569 Community Events

totaling
15,912
Attendees

100 Older Individuals with Blindness Consumers

receiving
804
services

4,048

Information & Referral Services

Information & Referral shares disability resources and services that are available to people with disabilities, their families, and the general public. Referrals are made both within The IC and to outside agencies as pertinent.

Advocacy in the News

KOAA News 5

Airlines and businesses see spike in “fake” service animals

<http://bit.ly/ic-svcanimals>

“Because of that (the confusion), we decided to have an open house to talk about both (service and emotional support animals) under the umbrella of assistance animals,” Independence Center Advocacy Manager Becca Michael said.

Taxpayers footing the bill to put people in nursing homes who don’t need to be there

<http://bit.ly/ic-dia>

“According to Yeager, it costs roughly \$7,000/month per person to put someone in a (Medicaid) nursing home (in 2018). Yeager says the health care treatment and costs outside of a nursing home can be reduced by as much as 50-percent each month (for an approximated cost of \$3,500/mo per person).”

The Independence Center will provide accessible polling machines and assistance for people with disabilities

<http://bit.ly/ic-polls>

The Gazette

Independence Center hosting town hall forum

<http://bit.ly/ic-forum>

“‘The forum fits with the center’s mission to empower people to advocate for themselves in the community,’ Carlton said.”

Colorado Springs Independent

Your Turn: Make affordable housing accessible

by Patricia Yeager, The IC CEO

<http://bit.ly/ic-oped>

“UD (Universal Design) is an architectural concept that makes living environments usable by all people without requiring further adaptation or specialized design. Best of all, UD doesn’t have to be expensive when incorporated at the design and planning stage.”

Fox 21 News

Survey suggests Pikes Peak region parking lots are not ADA accessible

<http://bit.ly/ic-parking>

“More than 100 parking lots across the Pikes Peak region were surveyed by the Independence Center through their ‘Better Access is Better Business’ campaign. The compliance assessments concluded that fewer than five parking lots were deemed fully accessible to people living with disabilities.”