

# THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES



## THE IC FUND:

Better Access for Better Health

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## Before Disaster Strikes

Emergency Preparedness  
for People with Disabilities

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## Signing the Times

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PANDEMIC PREP:  
Behind the Scenes at The IC

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## SAVING GRACE: Community Partnership Helps Patient Return Home

*Cover Photo: Steve Frost - Photo courtesy UCHealth.*

## HOME HEALTH Q&A





## CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO

Maya Angelou, the late Poet Laureate wrote, “When we know better, we do better.”

After the Waldo Canyon Fire, our community took those words to heart and acted upon them. In the midst of that emergency, many of us – both with and without disabilities – weren’t sure what to do, where to go, or what we needed to survive if we had to leave our homes. But once the imminent danger passed, our community went to work. Individuals and groups in our community came together to examine what we learned so that we would be better prepared for the next disaster.

Once we “knew better,” we started to “do better.” Emergency preparedness programs started coordinating across the region. Multiple alerting systems and better communication systems were put into place. Accessible shelters were identified and others were outfitted to accommodate our community. Information was widely distributed about what to have in our “go” bags if we had to evacuate and what we needed on hand if we had to shelter in place.

Just a year later, these preparations were put to the test when the Black Forest Fire erupted. Our new emergency protocols resulted in less panic and a better outcome. Sign language interpreters were at all the emergency briefings. The high school that served as a shelter for that community was far more disability friendly-it even had a roll in shower! Emergency managers got practice working and responding together. As a result, we now we have a regional Office of Emergency Response.

Today, we are in the throes of something completely new: the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of the lessons learned during other disasters are helpful, we are learning new ones. How do we navigate uncharted territory like getting food and medical supplies delivered? Or get access to reliable information? Or process paperwork for government benefits with a computer? Or what to do if a caregiver that we rely on is unable to come to our home? Or how to deal emotionally and mentally with prolonged isolation?

Of course, these are many of the same challenges that people with disabilities face every day – with or without a pandemic. And it is yet another reminder that equal access to critical infrastructure can make all lives better, safer, and more connected.

Now that the whole world understands the importance of communication and social connection, I hope we can do better going forward. It is my dream that, as part of this “brave new world,” Internet service will become an affordable utility and basic computers will be like telephones – something no household is without. If we make sure that everyone knows how to use that equipment to order groceries and medical supplies, to connect with community services, and catch up with loved ones, we will have gone a long way toward making the world truly accessible for all.

## IC Fund: Better Access for Better Health

At The Independence Center (The IC), our goal is to help increase independence and accessibility for people with disabilities. To do this, we not only work with people individually, we support a variety of other community projects and organizations through our IC Fund. Since 2014, the fund has granted monies to build ADA-compliant walkways, provide recreational trips for adults with disabilities, support American Sign Language interpretation and CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation), upgrade sports uniforms at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, and much more.

Over the last two years, the IC Fund committee has made the issue of accessible health care their focus. For some people with disabilities, something as simple as getting an accurate weight or a yearly physical can seem out of reach when offices aren’t accessible. So from 2018 to 2019, the IC Fund donated nearly \$150,000 in accessible equipment and other tools to Medicaid/Medicare health care providers in the Pikes Peak region who were nominated by their patients.

In 2018, nine Medicaid/Medicare medical practices in the region – including one in rural Cheyenne Wells – were awarded Hoyer lifts and UpLift accessible exam tables with built-in scales. Hoyer lifts easily and safely transfer patients to and from exam tables. The exam tables can be raised and lowered, allowing patients to sit down and then be raised for the exam. They also provide accurate weight and height measurements.

In 2019, the IC Fund awarded accessible dental equipment to four area dental practices. They received Versatilt wheelchair lifts, medical masks with clear windows that allow patients to read lips, a complimentary ADA accessibility audit, and complimentary disability competency training for staff.

The positive effects of this equipment are already being felt by people with disabilities on the Front Range.

“Knowing that you can easily get a thorough exam in a safe environment is a huge relief,” said Betty Jo Sjoberg, who nominated her doctor’s office for the equipment. “But it goes beyond that. It’s really comes down to being treated with the dignity and respect every patient deserves – regardless of whether they have a disability or not.”



*Upscale*

**For a full list of medical and dental practices with accessible equipment, visit <http://bit.ly/accessiblemed>.**



*Versatilt*



# Saving Grace: Community Partnership Helps Patient Return Home



In the Spring of 2018, Steve Frost had an epileptic seizure while driving. He went to UCHealth Memorial Hospital Central, spent three months there, got out, had another seizure a month later and was back in the hospital for three more months. During his second stay, squatters broke into his modest, one-bedroom mobile home in Fountain. When a social worker checked to make sure the residence was safe, she found disaster. Frost, who was medically fit to leave the hospital, had nowhere to go.

Frost has had pancreatic cancer, multiple fractures in his back, and severe epileptic seizures. He didn't want to go to a skilled nursing facility upon his release from the hospital. With a little help from the Hospital to Home (H2H) program, he's able to be home.

Mandi Strantz, The Independence Center's (The IC) transition coordinator for the H2H program, worked with another organization in Colorado Springs to rebuild a shower in Frost's home, through a long-term Medicaid waiver, making his ability to shower on his own possible. The IC also sends helpers who go to the grocery store for Frost and prepare meals that he is able to heat up.

"They were just a saving grace sent by God, literally," Frost said. "Mandi, she was an angel when she came in the room that morning because I didn't know what I was going to do. They were telling me that I couldn't come home because I couldn't take care of myself."

## Two agencies come together to create Hospital to Home program

Strantz's position is paid for by the partnership with UCHealth, through a \$120,000 award from the Memorial Hospital Foundation. Services include meals in the home, transportation, setting up home health care, occupational therapy, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, setting up homemaking services like housekeeping and grocery pickup, receiving and setting up durable medical equipment, and helping with medication delivery and funding. Social workers call on The IC when a patient is medically ready to go home, but can't because of living conditions. The IC provides case management and resources to improve living conditions and help keep patients out of the hospital.

"This is a clever program and shows how we're seeking ways to help people and reduce costs at the same time," said Joe Foecking, director of the inpatient rehabilitation care unit at Memorial Hospital Central. Foecking also serves as chairman of the board of The IC. He presented the pilot program to Memorial leaders who recognized how it would improve patients' lives.

"We are freeing up resources for other people in our community who are acutely ill and need a hospital bed, and we are accommodating individuals in a most humanitarian way," Foecking said.

*Article adapted with permission from "Breaking down barriers to a safe hospital discharge through a new community partnership and Hospital to Home program," written by Erin Emery and originally published at UCHealth Today. Read the original article at [bit.ly/h2h\\_uchealth](https://bit.ly/h2h_uchealth).*

## Transitioning people from the hospital to their home

Patricia Yeager, CEO of The Independence Center, said, "There's a lot of research around 'Why doesn't health care work?' and usually it's social determinants of health, like housing, having a job, having transportation, food, security and all of those kinds of things. So that's our specialty, the social determinants of health."

Strantz said the patients that she helps are often referred to her by discharge planners who work at the hospital.

"If there are barriers to a safe discharge, then they'll reach out to me and we see if we are able to help out. In Steve's case, the planner talked to him and then reached out to me," Strantz said.

"This is a clever program and shows how we're seeking ways to help people and reduce costs at the same time."

Joe Foecking

Steve Frost and Mandi Strantz  
Photo courtesy UCHealth

## Low-cost assistance after hospitalization

Frost said the program has made a huge difference in his life.

"They got me home. Now that I can't drive or anything, I'm dependent on them," he said. "So, there's always some paperwork to fill out, or if I need to go somewhere or something, Mandi makes it happen."

Frost has had hernia surgery and gallbladder removal surgery in the past year, but he has not been readmitted to the hospital after each event because of the low-cost assistance provided through H2H and other community programs.

Through this important partnership, dozens of people will be helped – people like Frost who, like anyone else, just wants to be home.

For more information on the H2H program, call The Independence Center at 719-471-8181.







Indy Frazee



Tracy Hiester

# HOME HEALTH

# Q&A

The Independence Center (The IC) is widely known in the region for its Independent Living Services. However, its commitment to people with disabilities doesn't stop there. Through its Home Health division, it helps senior citizens, as well as other adults and children with disabilities, live full, independent lives in the community by providing in-home health care. But not everyone understands what Home Health is or how it can benefit them or a loved one. So we sat down with Indy Frazee, Home Health Administrator, and Tracy Hiester, Home Health Operations Manager, to learn more.

## What is Home Health, in a nutshell?

**Indy Frazee (IF):** Home Health is long-term care for clients who need assistance in their homes. The IC is both a skilled and unskilled agency.

## What's the difference between the two?

**Tracy Hiester (TH):** Skilled care is physician-directed and defined as a function that can only be done by someone who is licensed, like a Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) or Registered Nurse (RN). This can include showering, bladder care, bowel care, wound care, and medication reminders. Unskilled care is personal care provided by a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) or a Personal Care Worker (PCW), who is not required to have a license. It is client-

directed and can include assistance with an individual's activities of daily living (ADLs), as well as tasks similar to a CNA.

## Can you tell us more about activities of daily living?

**TH:** Those are the things we all do on a daily basis. So, every day you get up, you get dressed, you bathe, you have to eat, you have to use the restroom. But depending on the situation, you may need some help doing those things, and that's where caregivers come in.

## What are the different types of caregivers and what do they each do?

**TH:** At The IC, we have CNAs, PCAs, PCWs, and Homemakers. CNAs are caregivers who are licensed by the state and provide care within their scope of practice. A PCA has duties very similar to a CNA, although they have more flexibility in the care they can provide. The duties of a PCW are more of a stand-by assist. For example, the client may be able to get dressed on their own, but they may have a hard time with buttons or zippers. A Homemaker does tasks like laundry, meal prep, general housekeeping, and going to get groceries.

## If someone is looking for a caregiver, do they have to use someone already on staff at The IC?

**IF:** Not always. Certain Medicaid Home and Community-Based Service (HCBS) Waivers allow a service called In-Home Support Services (IHSS), which are services provided by a family or friend caregiver and paid for by Medicaid. In fact, out of 250 caregivers at The IC, almost 200 are family or friend caregivers. We also have a veteran-directed care program in our Home Health department called Veteran in Charge that allows veterans to pay a family or friend as their caregiver.

## How do people pay for in-home care?

**IF:** At The IC, we mainly work with people who have Medicaid and Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers. But we have some clients who have long-term care insurance and we also accept private pay. Vets who are part of Veteran in Charge can have their in-home care paid for by the VA Health System.

## Is there a difference in working with a nonprofit like The IC versus a for-profit agency?

**IF:** Yes. We have a full array of Independent Living services that clients can access, including

peer support groups, assistive technology specialists, plus employment services and independent living skills classes. And from a caregiver perspective, we offer benefits that not every agency does.

**TH:** Our benefits package is very competitive. We offer paid time off, and those who work 30 hours or more a week qualify for health insurance. I also think we give excellent customer service and go above and beyond for both our clients and our caregivers.

## What do you like best about your job?

**TH:** The people! I love the population that we serve. My number one reason for why I do what I do is the impact we make. I love keeping people at home. And I love the caregivers, too.

**IF:** Like Tracy said, I enjoy being able to actually see the impact on the people we serve. I come from the finance world and you don't see that impact. It's the whole reason I moved into the nonprofit sector, to know that my role is contributing to a larger impact.

If you or someone you know is looking for in-home health care or would like to become a caregiver for a friend or family member, call The IC at 719-471-8181.

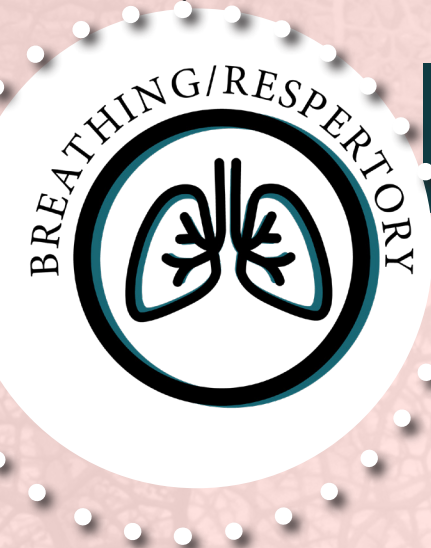


# Before Disaster Strikes

## Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities

Over the last few months, most of us have learned the basics of what we need to survive during a national or local emergency. But for people with disabilities, there are other things to consider. Although disability-specific items may not be included in typical emergency preparedness lists, they are just as essential for those who depend on them.

It's never too late or too early to prepare! Check out the lists below that pertain to specific disability types and make plans to update your emergency kit as necessary. For more in-depth information and guidance, download The Independence Center's Personal Emergency Preparedness Workbook at [bit.ly/ep-workbook](https://bit.ly/ep-workbook).



### BREATHING/RESPIRATORY LIMITATIONS

- Alternate charging source
- Alternate power source
- Extra batteries, alternate power source, or charging system for oxygen and breathing devices
- N95 rated particulate filter mask
- Rechargeable batteries
- Resuscitation bag
- Towels, masks, industrial respirators or other supplies you can use to filter your air supply

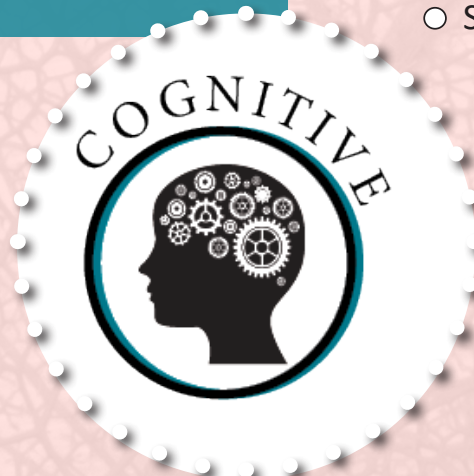
### COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

#### Organizational Aids:

- Color Post-it flags
- Color sticky notes
- Highlighter marker
- Highlighter tape
- Notebook

#### Prompting Devices:

- Picture prompting books
- Talking photo album
- Voice Cue



### CHEMICAL AND FOOD SENSITIVITIES

- Alternate cooking method
- Antihistamine
- Disposable hand wipes
- Disposable plates and utensils
- Epinephrine auto-injector
- Ready-to-eat foods
- Special dietary supplements



### COMMUNICATION OR SPEECH LIMITATIONS

- Dry erase board
- Laminated alphabet boards
- Laminated communication board
- Paper and pens



### DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

- Paper and pens
- Cell phone amplifier
- Extra hearing aid batteries
- Portable phone amplifier
- Vibrating watch
- Dry erase board
- Extra cochlear implant batteries
- Extra power cord for your smart phone or pager
- Amplification systems – pocket talker
- Alternate power source or charging system for your smart phone or pager

### MOBILITY LIMITATIONS

- Heavy gloves for wheeling over glass or debris.
- Bottle openers
- Cooling aids
- Dressing aids
- Drink holders
- Drinking aids – long straw, uDrink
- Eating aids
- Reachers
- Writing aids



### VISUAL DISABILITIES

- Big print address book
- Book light
- Cell phone magnifier
- Extra batteries, alternate power source or charging system
- Extra glasses
- High-powered flashlights with wide beams and extra batteries
- Liquid level indicator
- Magnifiers
- Mark disaster supplies with fluorescent tape, large print, or braille
- Signature guide
- Talking watch
- Talking clock/calendar





# State of Colorado: Signing the Times

During any emergency, all citizens should have equal access to information that potentially affects their lives. That’s why The IC has put such emphasis on emergency preparation for people with disabilities over the last several years. We not only created an Emergency Preparedness Guide, we have worked closely with state and local officials to ensure that shelters and alert and communication systems are accessible to all.

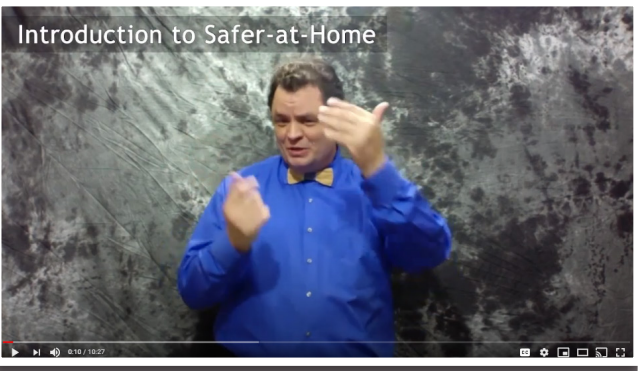
So we were only too happy to help when we were contacted by Sadie Martinez, Access and Functional Needs Coordinator with the Colorado Office of Emergency Management. Sadie wanted to know if we could produce a video of the Governor’s Safer-at-Home Order in American Sign Language (ASL) for the Deaf and hard of hearing community. Sadie said she thought of The IC because “The Independence Center has resources as well as experience in offering information in multiple accessible formats.”

While The IC is not in the video production business, we felt it was important to be part of the solution and our team quickly jumped into action. During any other time, this project would have been as simple as setting up a colored backdrop, arranging the lights, and shooting video of an ASL signer while an ASL interpreter spoke into a microphone. But during a pandemic when everyone is working offsite, nothing is simple.

Gabe Taylor, The IC’s Marketing & Event Coordinator, had to do a little (well, a lot!) of problem-solving. With the help of our IT Generalist, Alex Witzenburg, Gabe worked through numerous technical issues to capture a remote video session with The IC’s ASL/English Interpreter Specialist, Naomi McCown, and Deaf interpreter, Kevin Harrer – who were miles away from each other in different cities. The video was then edited, captioned, and loaded to YouTube.

The state was pleased with the final product and The IC was thankful to be trusted with this important project. Of the partnership, Sadie said, “This is a true model to all of our Colorado communities, partners, and stakeholders related to opportunities about how we plan together, prepare together, and respond together.”

You can view the video at <https://youtu.be/mLaz1hb3TAA>.



# Colorado Springs Health Foundation: Training for Tomorrow

When COVID-19 struck, it not only left people without jobs, it put additional pressure on an already overburdened health care system. Currently, there are more than 800 open CNA jobs listed on Indeed.com in the state of Colorado; almost 10% of those are in El Paso County. At the same time, nearly 300,000 Coloradans have filed for unemployment since mid-March.

But thanks to a generous \$28,500 grant from the Colorado Springs Health Foundation (CSHF), The IC is helping to make a dent in both of these pressing issues. With these funds, The IC was able to provide a total of 38 scholarships to students in The IC’s Certified Nurse Aide Training Program (CNATP). These scholarships covered \$750 of the program’s \$950 all-inclusive tuition, leaving each student with a cost of only \$200. Newly trained CNAs will help alleviate pressure on the health care system while supporting their household and stimulating the economy.

“Colorado Springs Health Foundation is honored to support the work of The Independence Center,” said Cari Davis, Executive Director for CSHF. “Our grant to support the development of the CNA workforce is one way that we can help address the health care workforce shortage. COVID-19 presents the most recent example of how important these (and other) health care workers are to a healthy community.”

To learn more about the CNATP, visit [bit.ly/ic\\_cnatp](http://bit.ly/ic_cnatp).





## Comcast: Eye on Technology

Most of us don't think twice about grabbing the remote to change channels. But for people with mobility disabilities – like those with quadriplegia or ALS – it can be almost impossible. And without access to television programming, individuals can become isolated or find themselves without critical information during emergencies like COVID-19.

Now, a new eye-control technology from the cable company, Comcast, promises to change that. A few months ago, Alison Busse of Comcast invited The Independence Center to partner with the company to demonstrate the Xfinity X1 system. Paul Spotts, The IC's IL Specialist for Assistive Technology, took it for a spin as Nick Jimenez, Comcast's director of government and regulatory affairs in Denver, explained how it works.

The system connects through a tablet or mobile phone to a Tobii Eye Tracker. Then, after the individual calibrates it with their eyes, they can change channels, search for programming, and do other tasks just by looking at the tablet.

"It's really simple," Paul told KOAA News at the event. "It takes 10 minutes to basically get used to it with your eyes and then you don't have to rely on anybody else to...change the channel or holler for someone to come in and change the channel. It's all in your lap." There's no monthly service fee for this technology, but there is an upfront cost to purchase the equipment. To learn more, visit <https://www.xfinity.com/hub/customer-experience/xfinity-x1-eye-control>. If you'd like to find out about other assistive technologies that can help you or a loved one live more independently, call The IC at 719-471-8181.



*Patricia Yeager speaks about accessible technology.*

## AXIS Dance Company: A Moving Experience

It seems like it's been years since we were able to gather as a group and have an experience together. But it was only a few months ago that The IC partnered with the ENT Center for the Arts and Colorado Springs Dance Theatre (CSDT) to present a performance by AXIS Dance Company.

The nation's most highly acclaimed physically-integrated dance company, AXIS performed "Radical Impact" at the ENT Center for the Performing Arts in February. Through the artistry of dancers both with and without disabilities, the piece explored what it means to be human.

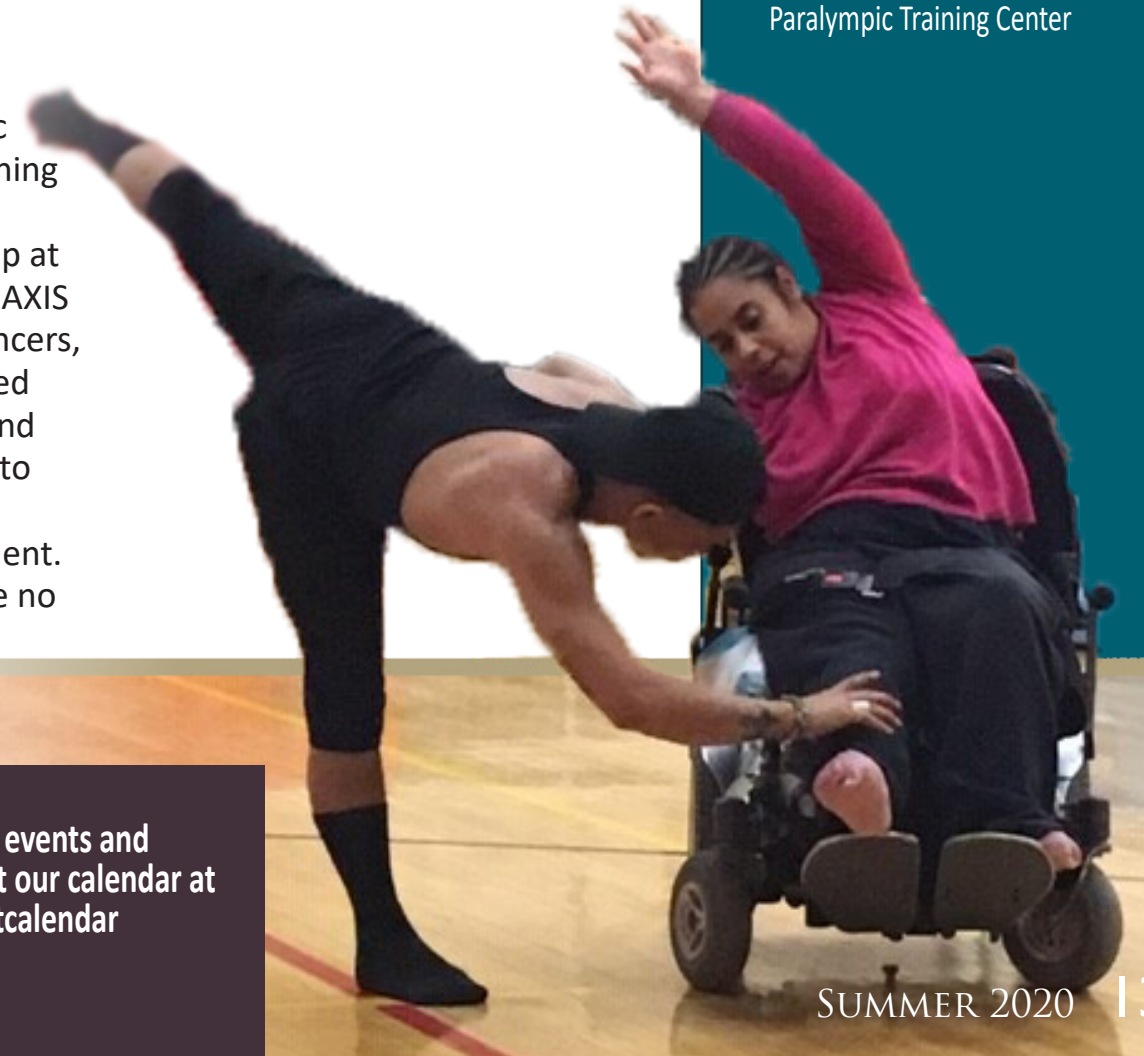
As part of this partnership, The IC also collaborated with the US Olympic and Paralympic Training Center to present a movement workshop at their facility. Led by AXIS Dance Company dancers, this workshop offered movers of all ages and abilities the chance to dance in a safe and respectful environment. It was an experience no one who was there will forget!



### THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS:

Ent Credit Union  
El Pomar Foundation  
GoodWheels  
Humana  
United States Olympic and Paralympic Training Center

To learn about upcoming events and peer support groups, visit our calendar at <http://bit.ly/peersupportcalendar>





# Pandemic Prep: Behind the Scenes at The IC

What do you do when life as you know it comes to a screeching halt? You take a cue from what people with disabilities have always done – adapt and overcome!

When the COVID-19 pandemic really started to take hold, The Independence Center (The IC) knew that we needed to take the advice we have been giving to our consumers for years. We needed to do some emergency prep.

Well before Governor Polis' Stay-at-Home Order was issued, The IC's leadership team began laying the groundwork for our "new normal." The priorities were clear: Keep staff and consumers safe while continuing to be available to those we serve. The most difficult part, as it has been for almost everyone, was the uncertainty about what was to come. So the leadership team prepared for the worst while hoping for the best.

Because we are in the “people business,” most of The IC’s staff is not set up to work offsite. This meant that Bill Wengert, Finance and Business Services Director, and Alex “AJ” Witzenburg, IT Generalist, had to get creative to make sure everyone had the right equipment and technology. AJ quickly put his expertise and problem-solving skills to work and by the time the official Stay-at-Home order was issued, the staff was ready. It’s not surprising that AJ won The IC’s internal “U Rock” award for his extraordinary efforts during this time.

Our Independent Living (IL) Division barely missed a beat, taking calls and assisting consumers with many needs that have become even more urgent with the pandemic. They continued to help people find housing and employment, apply for benefits, participate in online support groups and skills classes, access assistive technology, and provide services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community and those with low vision.



## Tim Mann- Front Desk Specialist

“One of the things that I’m very grateful for is how everyone works together to provide services to The IC’s consumers,” said Chris Robertson, IL Program Manager. “We are focused on keeping the needs of our consumers first!”

Of course, most of The IC's Home Health staff are considered essential employees so they continued to come into the office or work in the field. They worked tirelessly on the front lines to ensure that those who rely on in-home health care services continued to receive exemplary care. Our Veteran in Charge team, which is part of Home Health, continued their commitment to our Veterans with monthly check-ins, annual assessments, and completing training with VHA Train, Psych Armor, and the American Society on Aging.

Last but not least, the staff in our Administration division continued to support those who support our clients and consumers. Our Development department secured grants and funding, our Facilities department kept the building in working order for when employees returned, our Marketing department kept communications going both internally and externally, our Human Resources department kept on top of employee questions and needs, and our Finance department made sure everyone kept getting paid!

Patricia Yeager, CEO of The IC, is proud of how the staff pulled together during this once-in-a-lifetime event. "It seems like the world changed almost overnight," she said. "But one thing that will never change is our commitment to those we serve."

**If you need assistance or services, The IC is here to help. Call us at 719-471-8181 or email [info@the-ic.org](mailto:info@the-ic.org).**





# Virtual Event Invite



ADA   
Celebrating  
30 YEARS

**Tues., July 21, 2020**  
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

You are cordially invited to join us online for The Independence Center's 2020 ADA Celebration. This year, we are commemorating the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act with a special virtual event.

We are honored to feature a dynamic line-up of speakers – including a nationally renowned disability advocate – who will reflect on life before and after the ADA and discuss the challenges that remain. Visit [bit.ly/2020-ada-event](https://bit.ly/2020-ada-event) to see our full line-up of speakers and the day's agenda.

## Where?



To keep our community safe, we will be hosting our event online this year. See below for more information on how to join.

A recording of the event will also be available to view after July 22. To watch, visit [bit.ly/2020-ada-video](https://bit.ly/2020-ada-video).

**RSVP  
now!**



If you would like to join us for this virtual celebration, visit [bit.ly/2020-ada-event](https://bit.ly/2020-ada-event) to RSVP. One day prior to the event, confirmed guests will receive information on how to access it. The event video will be captioned and ASL interpretation will be provided.

## Questions?

Contact Gabe Taylor by email at [gtaylor@the-ic.org](mailto:gtaylor@the-ic.org).

