



The Independence Times

FALL 2021

**PATRICIA YEAGER
RETIRES AFTER A
DECADE OF CHANGE**

ADA
Celebrating
Independence

**FINDING
YOUR
NEW JOB**

**PUTTING
VETERANS
IN CHARGE**

**CREATING A
WELLNESS PLAN**

CEO CORNER

One Last Time

By the time you read this, I will have officially retired after 10 years as CEO of The Independence Center. Ten years! How did that happen? Before coming to The IC, I had never been in a position that long. There was just something about this organization, its mission, its people, and the people we serve that made me excited to come to work, day after day, year after year.

In 2011, I walked into an organization that had grown so much from its beginnings. Vicki Skoog and her late husband, Ted, founded The IC in 1987 as a consumer-directed and led home health agency. Their goal was to provide personal care that would allow people with disabilities of all ages to live independently at home. This model built the economic engine that became the foundation of this nonprofit. Funds from home health and other fee-for-service programs allow The IC to provide life-changing services through our Center for Independent Living. I cannot emphasize how innovative this model is and how many lives we've been able to touch because of it.

When I arrived, The IC's rapid growth meant that it needed to both modernize its systems and shift its focus more toward independent living and disability civil rights. Together with an incredible, dedicated team, we revamped existing programs, started new programs, offered new services, almost doubled our staff, remodeled our building, and purchased an additional building when we outgrew the first one.

At the same time we were creating change inside the organization, we were also making waves in the community. We barked, hollered, and made lots of noise to draw attention to the needs of our disability community. More importantly, we empowered individuals with disabilities to do the same. The IC, alongside passionate and



Patricia Yeager, CEO Emeritus

determined citizen-advocates, created lots of "good trouble" to ensure that there is "nothing about us without us." I often say that when I first arrived in Colorado Springs, the Americans with Disabilities Act seemed to have stopped at the Palmer Divide. But boy! How things have changed!

Ten years after I first walked through The IC's doors, I'm so proud of how the community has demanded and received more and better accessibility in public transportation, housing, public buildings, health care, and emergency preparation planning. The City of Colorado Springs has an ADA office of four or more staff that is actively working on an ADA transition plan. El Paso County is doing the same, having just announced the funding of the ADA self-evaluation that leads to an ADA Plan. Other cities and counties in the region are looking to our local governments as a model to follow. I think the Southern Colorado "accessibility ship" has turned and is going in the right direction.

What an immense honor and pleasure it has been to be a part of such seismic change.

Now it's time for more change as our own Indy Frazee steps into the CEO position. The board and the staff are delighted/tickled/breathing



a sigh of relief that she is taking this role. She started with us seven years ago as our Chief Financial Officer. She then went on to lead and grow our Home Health division, which includes the Veteran in Charge and Hospital2Home programs. Indy is smart, energetic, and strategic, and she understands our organization inside and out. More than that, though, she is as passionate about our mission as I am and I know that she won't miss a beat as she leads The IC to even bigger and better things.

As for me, I will be here through the end of the year assisting in the transition and then I plan to take some time to relax, travel, and

just "be." I'll be staying here in the Springs so if you see me out and about, come up and say hi!

I want to close this final CEO Corner by saying thank you. Thank you to the staff, community leaders, local advocates, our partners, our board, our consumers, and our clients who have created so much needed change. Thank you for helping turn my early vision into a reality. Thank you for growing The IC and our community in ways I could only have imagined a decade ago. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for making these last 10 years so rewarding. What a ride it's been!

Patricia Yeager

MEET NEW CEO, INDY FRAZEE



Filling the shoes of Patricia Yeager is a tall order. But new CEO Indy Frazee is up to the challenge!

As Patricia put it, "Indy has a deep understanding of The IC and is passionate about its mission." In fact, it was Patricia who recommended Indy for the job and, after an interview last June, The IC's Board of Directors unanimously selected her as CEO.

Indy joined The IC in 2014 as its CFO, where she built a responsive, efficient accounting, I.T., and facilities team. In 2018, she became home health administrator. Once again, she built a solid, cohesive team that provides crucial in-home health care services to the region.

As CEO, Indy is looking forward to expanding The IC's mission, message, and reach. "I'm excited and humbled to lead The IC into the future and I look forward to building on Patricia's legacy," she says.



ADA Celebrating INDEPENDENCE

The Oxford English Dictionary defines independence as “The freedom to organize your own life, make your own decisions, etc. without needing help from other people.”

This is the foundation of the Independent Living movement, which emphasizes that individuals with disabilities should be able to decide for themselves how to live, work, and take part in their communities. Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the barriers that keep people with disabilities from making these decisions continue to fall. As life becomes more accessible, individuals are able to create their own definition of “independence” as it relates specifically to their wants, needs, hopes, and dreams.

This idea was the theme of The IC’s 2021 ADA Celebration. The annual event commemorates the anniversary of the passage of the ADA, which was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on

July 26, 1990. It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and guarantees that they have equal opportunity to participate in American life, including employment, access to goods and services, and the ability to take part in state and local government programs and services.

This year’s fully-accessible online event, which was streamed on YouTube, featured powerful stories from people with disabilities, including the barriers they’ve faced, how they’ve overcome them, and what the word “independence” means to them.

Patricia Yeager, CEO of The IC, was joined by Amelia Dall, a Deaf archaeologist; Jeremy Chatelain, educator and board member of The IC, who uses a wheelchair; and Stephanie Symonette, a writer and advocate with an invisible disability. (See “Telling Their Stories” for more.) Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers also made a special appearance to give an update on the progress made in our city.

This year’s event, as well as previous ADA celebrations, can be viewed on The IC’s website at <https://bit.ly/ada-event-vids>.



Board Chair, Rich Lewis, welcomes viewers to the 2021 ADA Event



Telling Their Stories

AMELIA DALL ARCHAEOLOGIST



Amelia is a Deaf archaeologist and the creator of a project called Amelia the Archaeologist. A graduate of Gallaudet University, Amelia specializes in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and has helped create ASL signs for archaeological terms used in the classroom and while working in the field on archaeological digs.

During her career, she hopes to uncover more information about Deaf people in ancient cultures. "I feel I have that obligation to work hard and find history of Deaf people over time, documenting it and recording it," she said through an interpreter.

For Amelia, independence means having a strong support system of the friends, family, and mentors who helped her make her dream a reality.



**STEPHANIE
SYMONETTE**
WRITER, ADVOCATE

Stephanie lives with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that she sustained because of a childhood fall and multiple car accidents as an adult. Because her disability isn't visible, she has encountered judgment and impatience from others who don't understand why she has memory and processing challenges.

Stephanie urges others to look for the commonalities we share, rather than the differences. She believes that independence means advocating not only for oneself but for others, especially those who may not be able to advocate for themselves.

"It's taken me a while to know that I have that right to advocate for myself," she said, "and if I speak up for needs that are not being met, that allows me to have more independence."



JEREMY CHATELAIN

BOARD MEMBER, THE INDEPENDENCE CENTER



As a young man, Jeremy dove into shallow water, severing his spinal cord and leaving him with quadriplegia. Since then, he has encountered people who have either created additional barriers for him or helped take them down.

He related the story of a woman who had parked her car in an accessible spot and then claimed she “didn’t know people actually used these.” At the same time, the support and encouragement of many others has been instrumental in helping him live independently.

Part of that independence, he says, comes from making sure that “I get my wheelchair dirty.” And thanks to a new mobility chair called the TerrainHopper, he and his family now have new ways to fulfill that mission together.



PATRICIA YEAGER: SPARKING CHANGE

Sometimes there's a spark that changes everything.

The spark could be a chance meeting or an exceptional teacher or just a different route home. Whatever it is, once the spark is lit, your life takes a new direction.

For Patricia Yeager, the spark that ultimately led her to become CEO of The Independence Center was a conversation with an acquaintance.

"I lost a good part of my hearing at the age of two-and-a-half when I was given the antibiotic Terramycin," she says. "He knew I had a disability, so he told me that West Virginia University had scholarships for people with disabilities to go through the vocational rehabilitation program and become rehab counselors."

It was the mid-1970s and although she had earned a bachelor's degree, she wasn't sure what she wanted to do. When she learned about WVU's program, she thought, "Well, it's free. I should go look at it."

"That decision changed my life," she says.

The program was based in counseling, with a medical rehabilitation component. The counseling piece of it resonated deeply with Patricia.

"It gave me a foundation of why people behave the way they do and how to help change that," she remembers. "It was fun! I really enjoyed it."



FROM WEST VIRGINIA TO THE WEST

After earning a Master of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling, her first job was with Disabled Student Services at the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Two years later, a position working with students with disabilities at the Auraria Higher Education Center took her to Denver, Colorado.

From there, she became an appointee of then-Mayor Federico Peña as Director of the Commission on People with Disabilities for the City and County of Denver.

Patricia then stepped into the world of nonprofits, working to enhance the effectiveness of Centers for Independent Living (CILs), eventually running the state association of CILs in California for eight years.

"I loved the people I was working with, but the job was a little like herding cats," she jokes. So, she decided to come back to Colorado and pursue her Ph.D. at the University of Northern Colorado.

Around the time she was defending her dissertation, another spark changed everything.



COLORADO SPRINGS CALLS

“I’m sitting in my condo in Greeley and I’m thinking about ‘what do I want’? I want a job where I can be helpful, my skills can be useful, and where people are fun,” she recalls.

Right on cue, the phone rang. On the other end was Pat Going, a board member for The Independence Center of Colorado Springs. The IC was looking for a new CEO to replace its founder, Vicki Skoog, who was retiring. Was she interested? When she told him no, he said, “Well, just come down and talk to us.”

This meeting led to a job offer, which she promptly declined, offering consulting services instead. Thanks to Skoog’s vision and leadership, The IC had grown rapidly into what was primarily a home health agency. It was well-funded and had around 160 employees. However, its infrastructure, operations, and programs were sorely in need of revitalization. Most importantly, it needed a strong vision for the future.

Patricia put together a to-do list of sorts, both for herself and for the next CEO. However, within about six months, she realized that the job she had envisioned in her condo was right in front of her. She became CEO of The IC in October 2011.

SPARKING CHANGE IN THE PIKES PEAK REGION AND BEYOND

Over the next 10 years, Patricia not only completed that initial to-do list, she helped change the physical and social landscape for people with disabilities in the Pikes Peak Region.

Under her leadership, The IC has grown into a trusted community resource and a national model for Centers for Independent Living. Thousands of individuals have received information, resources and support to help them live, work, play, and participate fully in their community. Many others have been able to remain in their homes with assistance through The IC’s Home Health and Veteran in Charge programs.

More broadly, Patricia’s passion for advocacy has helped empower people with disabilities to use their voices. After all, change can’t happen unless they are included in conversations about accessible housing, employment, transportation, health care, parking lots, emergency planning, and more.

Even she seems amazed at what The IC has become and what the staff has accomplished during her tenure.

“I really couldn’t have thought that this is what The IC would look like in 10 years. This is way bigger than anything I imagined.”

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Recently, another spark led to yet more change. While on vacation, her traveling partner broke her hip in a fall. At that moment, Patricia realized she was ready to retire. “Life is short and there are other things I’d like to experience while I can,” she says.

Although she will miss the day-to-day challenges and joys that come with being CEO, she is excited to see where new CEO, Indy Frazee, takes the organization next.

“Indy will empower people in a more sophisticated way,” Patricia says. “She has a vision for how to create social capital for people with disabilities so that they can leverage their unique abilities in all parts of our community and be part of everything.”

In other words, she’ll create a spark.

Teacher's Donation Makes a Difference

For people with low vision, reading a book, a label, or a printed work document isn't as easy as throwing on a pair of glasses. However, assistive technology like closed circuit televisions (CCTVs) can help them bring the world into focus.

A CCTV is a stand-mounted or handheld video camera to project a magnified image onto a video monitor, a TV screen, or a computer monitor. Cameras with zoom lenses provide variable magnification. Costs for these units can range from \$1,800 to \$4,000.

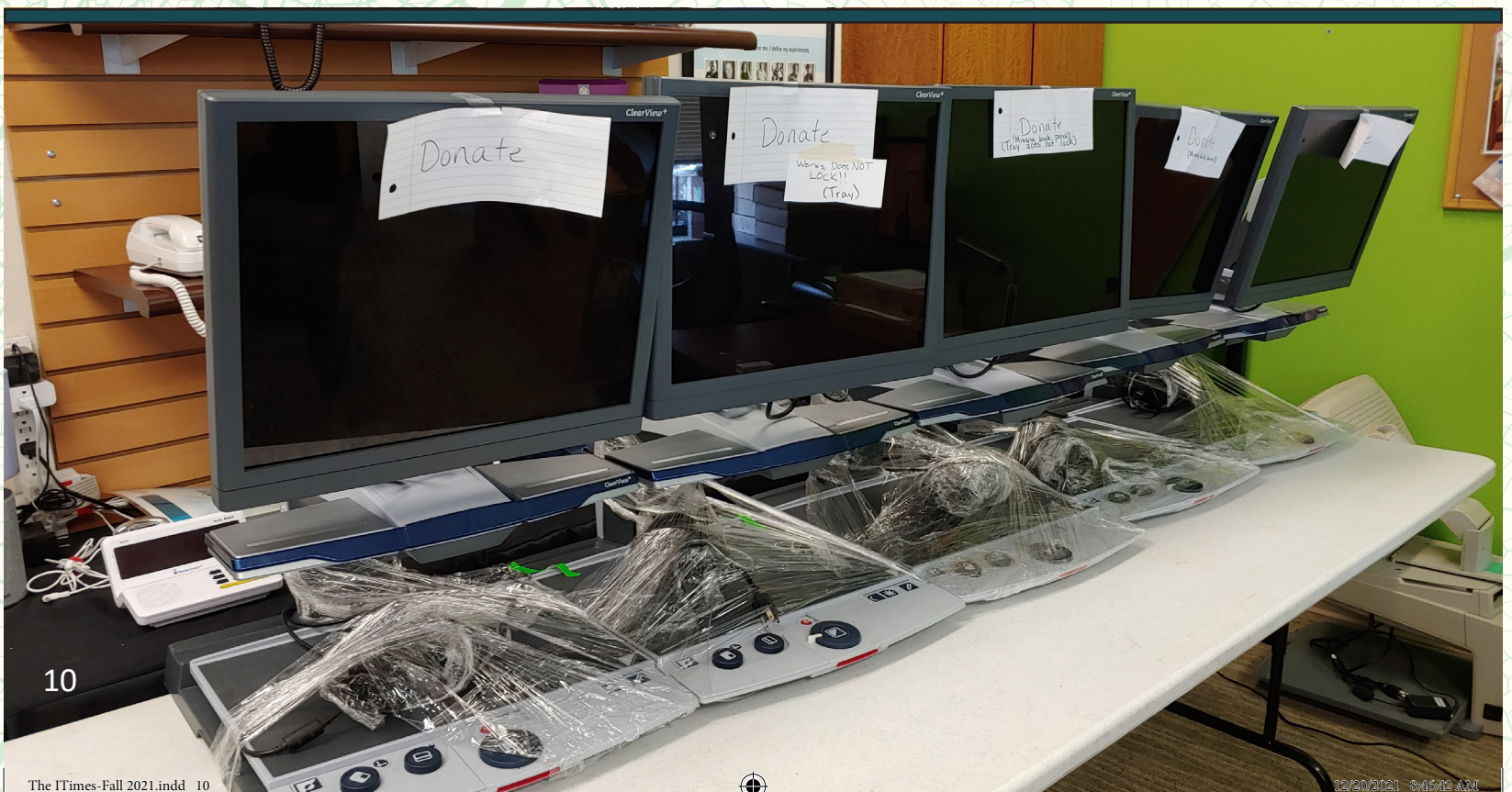
So The IC's staff was thrilled and grateful when Dana McMullen, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) in the Douglas County School District, contacted the organization about donating seven used CCTVs. The units in her classroom were being replaced and she wanted to make sure that they went to people who could use them. In her previous position with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Dana had learned about The IC's Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) program and thought it would be a perfect fit.

"It can be hard for older individuals who are blind to get access to CCTVs for financial reasons," Dana says. "I knew that by donating our old CCTVs to the OIB program, they would continue to get used by people who need them!"

The CCTVs are already being put to good use. "They are in almost perfect condition and once Jeannette (Fortin, OIB Specialist) found out about them, she spread the word and we started donating them out within a couple of weeks," says Paul Spotts, Assistive Technology Specialist.

Bethany Monk, Development Specialist, who helped facilitate the donation, says that she receives a lot of calls about donations but this one was truly special. "Dana drove them all the way down here herself," says Bethany. "It's just so humbling to know that she thought of us."

If you would like more information about CCTVs or other assistive technology, call 719-471-8181.



Creating Connection Through Conversation

In the U.S., around 61 million adults – or one in four - have a disability. That means that the odds are good that a high percentage of police interactions will involve someone with either a hidden or visible disability.

There is no reliable database that tracks how many people with disabilities – including those with mental illness – have negative outcomes during their interactions with law enforcement. However, studies have shown the numbers are substantial. For example, a white paper by the Ruderman Family Foundation states that, “Disabled individuals make up a third to half of all people killed by law enforcement officers. Disabled individuals make up the majority of those killed in use-of-force cases that attract widespread attention.”

Often, the first step to solving a problem like this is to have an open, honest conversation about it. So last September, The IC hosted a disability-related conversation between members of the disability community and law enforcement. Over 50 citizens and 11 Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) representatives gathered at The IC to share experiences and learn from each other.

“This event was an opportunity for CSPD to hear directly from people with disabilities about their experiences and concerns, to ask questions, and to develop relationships,” said Deb Walker, Director of Strategic Partnerships for The IC. “We hope that events like these will advance trust between people with disabilities and CSPD, in addition to helping people with disabilities advocate for themselves safely while engaging with law enforcement.”

Officers shared tips for safe interactions, but they also learned as much – if not more – from the community members in attendance. According to Jason Newton, Community



*Photo courtesy
Colorado Springs Police Department*

Relations Sergeant with CSPD, the event helped officers improve and enhance how they communicate and connect with people with disabilities.

“For far too long members of the disability community have gone out of their way to accommodate the world around them, including the police,” he said. “We wanted the opportunity to connect with these community members and let them know that we care and that it should be our burden, not theirs.”

Both Walker and Newton hope that this is just the first in a series of conversations that will make future interactions between law enforcement and the disability community safer for all.

To learn more about how to advocate for yourself and others with disabilities, call The IC’s Community Organizer at 719-471-8181.



VETERAN IN CHARGE Q&A

This country and its citizens owe so much to our veterans. No matter the branch, no matter how long they served or where, our veterans made a vow to defend and protect our way of life. It's only right that we do what we can to return the favor.

The Independence Center's veteran-directed Veteran in Charge (VIC) program aims to ensure that disabled veterans can continue to lead the lives they want to live.

VIC was launched at The IC in 2016 by program manager, Marsha Unruh and veteran coach, Ashley Billington. Since that time, it has served 291 veterans and has grown its staff of Veteran Coaches to support them.

Recently, we sat down with Kim Howell, Veteran Coach Coordinator, to talk about the VIC program and how it empowers veterans with disabilities.

In a nutshell, what is the Veteran in Charge (VIC) program?

Kim Howell: VIC is a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (Veterans Health Administration) and The IC that allows veterans to stay in their homes and communities.

How does a veteran qualify for the program?

Because the program is designed to keep veterans in their home instead of a nursing home, there are certain criteria they have to meet. There are 12 tiers of funding from the VA and the amount of funding a veteran receives varies depending on what dependencies they have and how much assistance they need with activities of daily living. Veterans who need more support are placed in a higher tier and receive more funding.

Do veterans have to be a certain age or is there minimum time of service to qualify?

No. As long as they meet the criteria, they're eligible for the program. The youngest veteran in the program is in their 20s and the oldest is 101 this month. We have a wide range of service time, ages, and both males and females.

What is The IC's role in this partnership?

Basically, The IC is the middleman, if you will, between the veterans and the VA. We get the referral from the VA and then we go out to their home, do an assessment to help determine which tier they will fall into, and enroll them in the program. Once they're part of VIC, one of our Veteran Coaches does an in-home visit to determine how the veteran would like to use their funds. A financial management company takes care of paying for everything, including taxes, so the veteran doesn't have to worry about that piece. We then do monthly check ins, whether it's in person or by phone.



What can the veteran use their funds for?

The nice thing about the VIC program is that it really is veteran-directed. So, for example, if a veteran can no longer do lawn maintenance due to a disability, they can put money towards that. If they're using the funds to hire a caregiver, they can even choose to pay a family member to do that. We see a lot of veterans who have kids who quit their job to take care of their parent and because of VIC, they don't have to make that hard decision whether to move their mom or dad into a nursing home.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I really enjoy the families I work with. I'm a Veteran Coach Coordinator now, but this is a fairly new role for me. I started as a Veteran Coach in 2017, so I have families on my caseload that have been with me since the beginning. You know, you become like a grandkid or another daughter to them and you learn about their family, so it's not just business. It's nice to see over the years your accomplishments and how you've been able to contribute to their family. Meeting their kids and they thank you for allowing mom or dad to stay in the house, it's just nice to see that you actually are making a difference.

The VIC program currently serves veterans who reside in the counties of Alamosa, Arapahoe, Chaffee, Cheyenne, Conejos, Costilla, Custer, Douglas, Elbert, El Paso, Fremont, Huerfano, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Park, Pueblo, Saguache, and Teller.

For more information about the program, call The Independence Center's VIC line at 719-476-3178.

Boosting Mental Wellness

It seemed that the world turned upside down in March 2020. Suddenly, our entire lives were altered in one way or another. Whether it was working from home or finding ourselves out of a job or helping kids with remote learning or dealing with health issues brought about by COVID, we had to adjust, adapt, and overcome.

Almost two years later and we're continuing to adapt to this new normal. Stress, isolation, loss, and burnout have taken a toll on our mental and physical health.

So how do we regain our equilibrium?

Start a Wellness Plan!

Below are some wellness tools that can help shift us away from how we currently feel (e.g., *stressed, anxious, exhausted*) to how we want to feel instead (e.g., *calm, joyful, in control*). The purpose of these resources and activities is to help us calm stress, soothe pain, energize us, and inspire us. Remember, everyone is different so look for the tools that resonate with you. Then, pick one or two and make a plan to incorporate them into your day, week, or month. And because everything is more fun with a friend, you might even invite someone to practice with you!

Calming Tools

- Time in nature
- Organizing or cleaning
- Tapping
- Gentle movement
- Slowing the breath
- Sipping tea

Energizing Tools

- Brisk movement (walking, dancing)
- Socializing with others
- Laughter
- Creating (art, crafts, poetry, etc.)
- Engaging in outdoor recreation
- Practicing acts of kindness

Soothing Tools

- Spending time in or near water
- Stretching
- Massage
- Expressing gratitude
- Journaling
- Talking with an ally

Inspiring Tools

- Reading
- Taking in art
- Exploring interests
- Tracking goals and accomplishments
- Participating in community events
- Engaging in play

Want to learn more? The IC hosts a variety of wellness classes for our consumers and the public. For more information, call 719-471-8181.

STILL STRUGGLING? IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP.

While the tools here can make at least a small difference for most people, sometimes we need some extra help. Reach out to a mental health professional if you experience any of the following:

- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Extreme anxiety or depression
- Drastic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Addiction or substance misuse
- Suicidal feelings or thoughts

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. If you are having a mental health crisis, call the Colorado Crisis Line at 1-844-493-8225 or text "TALK" to 38255



Grow Your Arsenal of Wellness Tools

CREATE



Art



Craft



Build



Photography

PLAY



An
Instrument



Music



Audiobooks



Games

LEARN



Read



a New Language



Trivia



A New
Skill

WRITE



Creative
Writing



Poetry



Journal



Letters

MOVE



Fitness



Swim



Sports



Yoga

RELAX



Drink
Tea



Watch a Movie



Take
a Bath



Have a
Spa Day

Employment Classes: From search to success!

Did you know that right now, there's more than one job opening for every American who wants to work?

Despite this, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to finding a job that offers a livable wage, good benefits, and reasonable accommodations. The good news is that new avenues are opening up due to the demand for workers and more accepting attitudes toward remote work.

However, wanting a job and getting hired are two different things. That's why The IC's Employment department offers a variety of classes to help individuals navigate through their career search. The classes, which are held both online and in person, are led by Sandie McBroom, Employment Specialist for The IC.

"Each session offers information on a variety of workplace topics and scenarios; from knowing their rights with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to using job

search platforms to understanding how to fill out important documents," Sandie says.

A few of the classes offered are:

- Interviewing in a Virtual Environment
- Utilizing Job Application Technology
- The ADA: Knowing Your Rights
- Advocating for Reasonable Accommodations
- Using Job Search Platforms Like Indeed and Facebook

Sandie says that participants not only get valuable information and resources from the classes, they walk away feeling empowered and encouraged.

"I enjoy helping people to see a bigger picture for their own lives," she says. "There's nothing better than watching someone start to feel hopeful about finding a job and improving their situation."

For a class schedule and to learn more, call 719-471-8181 and ask for the Employment department.

