



“To connect and empower immigrants with resources to achieve legal documentation, fulfill their economic needs, and integrate into the community.”

IRC Client Receives Green Card

Jenny Balderrama, an Alamosa resident, recently received Legal Permanent Resident status with help from IRC staff. She first obtained a U Visa (available to crime victims) several years ago, making her eligible for a green card this year. She shares her story here:

I arrived in the United States in 1995 and have not left the country for 20 years. My mother had a visitor’s visa and was able to see me but the last time she came was 8 years ago. Now my mother needs to have an emergency surgery and I am very relieved to be able to go back to Mexico as a U.S. legal permanent resident. Now I am able to leave the country, help my mother, come back without any problems, and continue my life here with my children.

I am thankful to have received my permanent residence this year, especially now that my mother is sick because I cannot

imagine the desperate moment I would be going through if I didn’t have my documents to travel. When I was informed that I qualified to apply for the U Visa, I was very motivated to continue bettering myself and show immigration that I was deserving of this help. I enrolled in ESL classes at La Llave Family Resource Center and was told I could get my GED at Trinidad Junior College. I completed all the work required for the GED program and obtained it in August 2010. I received my U Visa in 2011, as well as a work permit, and got a good job that I loved. I was comfortable working there without any fear. I also got my driver license and was able to drive without any fear of being stopped by an officer and getting harassed for not having documents.

This year in June I received my permanent resident card and thanks to that I have been able

to live peacefully with my children without worrying about getting deported and taken away from them. I am very happy and grateful to the SLVIRC staff for their help and also for the opportunity to obtain my permanent residence. I am very excited to apply for U.S. Citizenship in five years.



Jenny celebrates her Legal Permanent Resident status

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Citizenship Classes Begin

A sixteen-week citizenship preparation class is the latest offering of the IRC’s Punto de Vista education program. Based on curriculum created by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the course will develop participants’ knowledge of U.S. history and government topics as they prepare to apply for citizenship and undergo the

required exam.

Passing the naturalization test is no easy feat—applicants must attend an oral interview with a USCIS officer and correctly answer six out of ten questions randomly pulled from a larger list of 100 U.S. civics questions. In most cases, the applicant must also demonstrate an ability to read and write in English. Given

this requirement, students wishing to take the IRC’s preparatory class must already have a solid understanding of the language. At the end of the course, participants will have the opportunity to practice their interviewing skills and apply their new knowledge during mock interviews at the IRC.

-See **Citizenship**, Pg 2

Recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness Month



In observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month this October, the IRC has partnered with Tu Casa, Alamosa's victim advocacy center, to highlight the legal intersections of immigration and domestic violence. The following article, which was published in The Valley Courier this month, raises awareness about how undocumented survivors of domestic violence can receive legal support here at the IRC.

Under the immigration provisions of the Violence against Women Act, there are two ways in which an undocumented immigrant victim of a crime may obtain legal status: the U Nonimmigrant Visa and the VAWA self-petition. Congress created the U Visa with the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (including the Battered Immigrant Women's Protection Act) in October 2000. The legislation was intended to strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate and

prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking of immigrants, and other crimes, while simultaneously offer protection to victims of such crimes. In order to qualify, the affected individual must report the crime, assist with the investigation, and obtain a certification signed by the agency that investigated the crime. Submitting an application for a U Visa is a lengthy process and the approval can take up to two years, as there are only 10,000 visas available per fiscal year. Among the most common qualifying crimes are domestic violence, sexual assault and felonious assault.

Alternatively, immigrant victims of domestic violence (as well as child abuse or elder abuse) can file a VAWA self-petition for lawful permanent resident status without having to rely on their abusive family member. This process mirrors the visa application procedure for immigrant spouses of U.S. citizens and

Legal Permanent Residents, and allows the applicant to receive employment authorization. VAWA self-petitions provide domestic violence survivors with critical resources to escape the violence and begin to live safely and independently. Since successful applications depend upon proof of the couple's relationship and the ensuing domestic violence, self-petitioners must provide detailed evidence of these circumstances. In addition to verification of status regarding both the self-petitioner and the abuser, specific requirements include evidence of a bona fide marriage based on emotional ties, proof of subsequent battery or extreme cruelty toward the spouse or children, documents indicating joint residency, and statements regarding the self-petitioner's good moral character.

-See **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, Pg 3

Citizenship (cont.)

Why become a U.S. citizen?
The benefits include:

- Voting rights and the ability to run for office
- Access to a U.S. passport
- Protection from deportation
- Expanded ability to petition for the immigration of

family members

- Eligibility for federal employment
- Transfer of citizenship to children who are Legal Permanent Residents under age 18
- Equal access to public benefits like Medicare

To receive more information about the class, contact Laura Thompson at laura@slvirc.org or (719) 587-3225 ext. 12.



Staff Attends CIRC Assembly

The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) is gearing up for its annual statewide assembly, which will take place this year on Oct. 23-25 in Silverthorne. As organizational partners of CIRC, the IRC staff will join more than 200 other Colorado leaders and activists for a weekend of movement-building and celebration.

On the table for discussion is the development of the movement's 2016 Strategic Plan, which will highlight policy priorities for the advancement of immigrant justice in Colorado.

Since 2002, CIRC has worked to make Colorado a more welcoming state through educational initia-

tives, civic engagement projects, and advocacy for more humane public policy. The IRC staff looks forward to continuing their participation with this important coalition and strengthening relationships with other immigration service providers and activists across the state.



Domestic Violence Awareness Month (cont.)

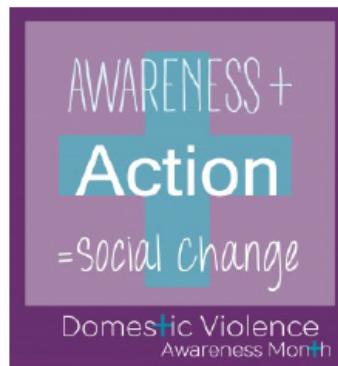
Verifying the joint residency of the couple (which may be confirmed through utility bills, rent receipts, tax returns, or other documents addressed to both individuals at the same residence) often proves challenging. Undocumented partners without social security numbers are less likely to receive official documents in their name, and patriarchal conventions frequently favor the husband as the primary household resident. In abusive relationships, the offender may purposely dominate household transactions as a way to diminish the power available to his partner.

Psychological abuse can also be difficult to prove for immigration purposes. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), non-battery cases must meet the standard of "extreme cruelty." Situations involving verbal control require evidence of "a continuous pattern of emotional abuse, humiliation, degradation, and isolation." While advocates of domestic

violence survivors recognize that abusive power and control often surfaces as daily micro-aggressions, USCIS sometimes dismisses these claims as merely signs of "marital tensions." As advocates at the Immigrant Resource Center, we have to navigate the discrepancies between these understandings of domestic violence and determine if a case has a high likelihood of success by USCIS standards.

U.S. immigration law is an imperfect and complex system, and people frequently fall through its cracks. Obtaining visas for legal entry is often impossible for prospective immigrants, given the lack of options for low-skilled workers and inordinate waiting periods that disregard the urgency of their situations. Many people journey here to reunite with family members and escape poverty, violence, and/or climate change, yet fear the possibility of deportation when faced with domestic violence. Fortunately, the VAWA self-petition and U Visa options

empower qualified applicants to speak up and help prevent perpetrators from continuing the cycles of abuse. While these immigration remedies are limited, they provide a critical legal window into the protection of immigrant crime victims. As survivors of domestic violence and their advocates continue educating the public, improving protective laws, and inspiring systemic grassroots change, the VAWA self-petition and U Visa processes offer a starting point for undocumented survivors' safety and healing.



Staff Reflection - Elsa Goossen

Want to help support the mission of the IRC? Go to www.slvirc.com and click on the Donate online link or drop by our office!

I recently arrived in Alamosa to work at the IRC as a long-term volunteer with the Mennonite Voluntary Service. After becoming acquainted with the diverse immigrant community in Minnesota's Twin Cities during college and spending a semester studying immigration and border justice in Tucson, Arizona, I am thrilled to join the IRC's important work in the San Luis Valley.

Although I was born in the U.S., I feel that my citizenship here comes with the responsibility to advocate for humane border policies and extend hospitality to all people who find their way to the U.S. It is disheartening to observe the current political discourse

regarding immigration, which typically ignores how U.S. foreign policy creates the conditions of forced migration in Latin America. We pour endless money into border enforcement and militarization abroad, yet fail to invest in the humanity of the millions of people who are



**Elsa Goossen -
Immigrant Advocate**

displaced by violence and the devastating economic impacts of the United States' free trade policies.

Working at the IRC, I feel renewed hope that local organizing and community-building will continue to chip away at this unjust system. Since arriving, I have been lucky to assist with the IRC's educational outreach programs, immigration services for crime victims, and document translation. The organization's clients, staff, and supporters continually inspire me with their dedication to the local community's wellbeing in all of its diversity. I look forward to learning and working for justice with all of you!

About Our Work:

The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center (SLVIRC) is a unique organization with a long history of working with immigrants. It has served as an informal resource center for immigrants in the area since 1987. One of several programs created by San Luis Valley Christian Community Services, the Immigrant Assistance Program grew out of low-income immigrants' need for assistance in filling out essential applications for political asylum, amnesty, and other legal status. In February 2003, the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center received 501 (c) (3) status with the Internal Revenue Service, and is currently an independent non-profit located in Alamosa, Colorado, serving the entire San Luis Valley and beyond.

SLVIRC serves a geographically remote area in south-central Colorado, which is roughly the size of Connecticut. The area is home to more than 40,000 residents and 10,000 migrant and seasonal workers. The population is almost 50% Hispanic, and there are more than 400 Q'anjob'al Indigenous Mayan Guatemalans living in the San Luis Valley. It is one of Colorado's poorest regions, with much of the population living below the poverty level. Two of the valley's six counties are the poorest in the state and among the poorest in the nation. The majority of the clientele served are of Mexican or Guatemalan descent.

The IRC currently offers three programs in line with its mission. The first continues to be Immigration Legal Assistance, which assists immigrants in completing essential immigration paperwork. The second is Por ti Misma, through which the IRC assists battered immigrants and crime victims in achieving legal status. The third program is Punto de Vista, which provides English tutoring to adult immigrants, citizenship preparation classes, and an after school tutoring program for immigrant children.



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