



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

## Drivers’ Licenses a Critical Need

Obtaining a drivers’ license continues to be a challenge for undocumented people in Colorado. Under the 2014 Colorado Road and Community Safety Act, people without legal status may make a special appointment at one of three office locations: Denver, Grand Junction, or Colorado Springs.

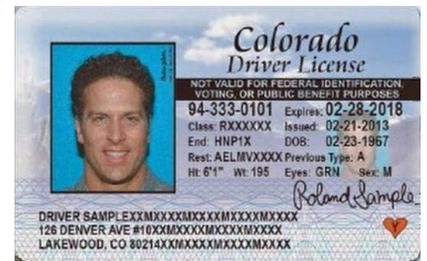
Unfortunately, these appointment slots are backlogged by three months and extremely difficult to obtain through the online registration

system. Only a few slots open each day, so the IRC has been providing assistance in this process to clients without computer access or English literacy skills.

For Valley residents who have managed to secure an appointment, travel to the office, pass the test, and receive a license, the benefits have been significant. They can drive with more security and confidence, a critical need in rural Colorado where public transportation is lacking.

For example, one IRC client who obtained her license has been able to drive her child to medical appointments in Colorado Springs and Denver without additional anxiety.

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A Sample CO-RCSA Drivers’ License

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## New Housing Coordinator for Crime Victims

The IRC will welcome a new full-time staff member in May! **Angelica Raya Trejo** will serve as the IRC’s new Crime Victim Housing Advocate and Coordinator, a position created as part of the statewide Housing for Crime Victims Special Project. The IRC was one of eight organizations in Colorado selected for the project, which is funded by the Office for Victims Program in the Division of Criminal Justice.

The program will help survivors access and retain secure long-term housing, as well as provide them with

supportive services for their individual needs. Angelica is soon to graduate from Adams State University, with degrees in Spanish and



**Angelica Raya Trejo,**  
**IRC Housing Coordinator**

Business Management. Originally from Mexico, she received her U.S. citizenship in 2016.

Angelica notes that “My family has been connected with the IRC ever since my dad first came to Alamosa, and recently I used the IRC’s services to obtain citizenship. I know this is a good place for immigrants to get information and participate in the programs here. I’m very excited to be part of this organization to assist the immigrant community.” We are thrilled to welcome her back as the newest member of our team!

## New Mental Health Counselor

The IRC recently received funding to develop and sustain a small mental health program. We are excited to work with **Carmen Gutierrez**, a bilingual National Certified Counselor based in Colorado Springs, to make therapy sessions available several times per month to IRC clients.

Due to the traumas often associated with migration, as well as an uptick in fear and anxiety among the immigrant community in recent months, we have identified a strong need for

accessible, bilingual, and culturally competent mental health care in the San Luis Valley.



**Carmen Gutierrez**  
IRC Mental Health Counselor

Carmen says, “I believe every individual deserves to receive mental health services from a holistic perspective that addresses the mind, body, heart, and soul, and stems from their unique cultural values and world views. This perspective is what led me to name my counseling practice *Camino a la Dignidad*, which translates to ‘Paths to Dignity.’”

We are grateful to Carmen for offering her skills and experience in response to this local need.

## IRC Coordinates Sanctuary Response with Community Partners

Since January, the IRC has been working with wide variety of faith-based groups in the San Luis Valley to respond to mounting concerns among the local immigrant community. Following the lead of the national network of sanctuary coalitions (see [sanctuarynotdeportation.org](http://sanctuarynotdeportation.org)), the IRC and representatives from local faith communities have been engaging in conversations with members of the immigrant community about ways to best match available resources (time, skills, building space, money, etc.) with current needs.

In response to a meeting with nearly 50 members of the Guatemalan community in attendance, the coalition set up a Family Fund managed by the IRC. This fund is available to assist immigrant families with children’s

passport fees, transportation costs for attorney visits or fingerprint appointments in Denver, or other immigration-related fees.

The IRC is also responding to questions about emergency planning and helping families prepare for possible deportations and family separation. During the past several months, we have been hosting Know Your Rights workshops and notarizing Power of Attorney forms for undocumented parents as they make guardianship plans for their children.

In considering ways to prevent family separation and raise public awareness, several churches have discussed the possibility of offering up their sanctuary spaces, in the case that

someone receives a final order of deportation and requests a safe place to stay while a legal team advocates for them. Although none of the SLV faith communities have made the decision to do this yet, we hope these important discussions will continue to inspire tangible action.

In the meantime, we are also working with community partners to respond to related concerns, such as inquiring about immigration-related policies among the law enforcement and local schools to build community trust. As always, we welcome additional collaboration and suggestions for future work!

*To get involved or request more information, please contact Elsa Goossen at [elsa@slvirc.org](mailto:elsa@slvirc.org) or (719)587-3225 ext. 15.*

## Drivers’ Licenses (cont.)

She also recalls a recent situation when she noticed a state patrol car following her home. She says, “I got scared, but not as much as I would have been without a drivers’ license. Even though his

lights weren’t flashing, I decided to stop the car and talk to him. I felt safer because I had something to show him. I feel very lucky, and I know that many

people have drivers’ licenses thanks to the IRC’s help.”

We hope that eventually, these licenses will be more readily available to the people who need them.

## IRC Advocate Joins ASU Students' Border Experience

Immigrant Advocate Elsa Goossen recently joined a group of eight students from Adams State University on their alternative spring break trip to the U.S.-Mexico border region. The trip is an annual program organized by the United Campus Ministries at ASU, with the purpose of offering a reflective service-learning experience for students.

The trip began with a homestay visit in Naco, Arizona, where the group stayed with an immigrant family a few blocks from the border. Before heading south to Mexico, they visited Tucson to connect with Casa Alitas, an organization that hosts women and children released from ICE detention.

The group spent the majority of their time in Guaymas, a city in the Mexican state of Sonora,

where they were hosted by Casa Franciscana, an organization dedicated to serving and living in solidarity with low-income, homeless, and migrating people. The students had the opportunity to visit and volunteer their time at several outreach programs.

As a past participant in experiential learning at the border, Elsa enjoyed accompanying the ASU group and encouraging students to connect this experience with systemic issues—such as immigration—back in southern Colorado.



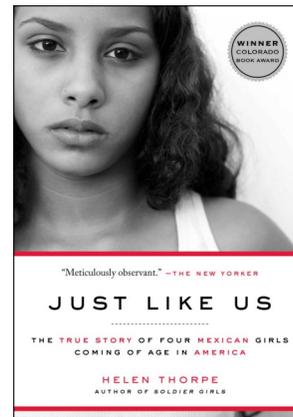
The ASU group celebrates with a family in Guaymas, after collaborating with them on a roof replacement coordinated by Casa Franciscana.

## Theater Production Coming Soon

The IRC is partnering with the San Luis Valley Theatre Company to put on a community production of the play, *Just Like Us*. The script—written by Karen Zacarias—is based on a book of the same title by Helen Thorpe, which won the 2010 Colorado Book Award.

This true story follows the lives of four young Mexican women in Denver, two of whom have documentation and two of whom do not.

The production is scheduled for August 25th and 26th in Carson Auditorium at ASU. Stay tuned!



## A Huge Thank You to Our Supporters!

Since the change in administration and onset of new anti-immigrant policies, the IRC has received an outpouring of support from concerned community members. We are grateful for

the offers of volunteer assistance, invitations to speak at events throughout the Valley, and monetary donations to sustain our work. As the only organization offering immigration legal

services in the San Luis Valley, this broad support sends a strong message of welcome and helps us adequately respond to the growing challenges facing the immigrant community.

## Board Member Reflection - Mary Valerio

**Want to help support the mission of the IRC? Go to [www.slvirc.com](http://www.slvirc.com) and click on the Donate online link or drop by our office!**

As a young child, my fondest memories are of my abuelita recounting the stories of her growing up in Zacatecas, Mexico and how she met my grandfather and moved to Chihuahua. They crossed into the U.S. from Juarez and my grandfather was hired to work the rail yards in Chicago.

They lived in a railroad car for several years before abandoning the cold and moving to New Mexico, where my grandfather started his own bakery and my father and his brother sold bread door to door. My father became a naturalized citizen and served in the Army during WW II.

My maternal grandfather was a Tarahumara from Chihuahua and came to the U.S. after Pancho Villa raided his village. He worked in a copper mine in southern New Mexico for many years where he raised his family.



**Mary Valerio**  
**IRC Board Member**

My grandparents never became citizens nor learned to speak English but still encouraged all of their grandchildren to get an education. I took this message to heart and was a teacher both in K-12 and the university level for over 30 years.

Later, I left Adams State College and worked as a Migrant Education Director here in Alamosa. During all these experiences in education, I was committed to helping English learners be successful. After retiring, I wanted to give back to this community. I consider myself lucky to be on this Board to help the immigrant population in the Valley.

### 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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