



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

New Citizens Reflect on Voting in 2016

IRC clients Virginia and Angelica Raya Trejo, who are sisters, became U.S. citizens just in time to vote in the 2016 election. It was the culmination of a long process, beginning when their father received his green card in the 1980s and moved to Alamosa to work at a ranch. He applied for them in 2001, and they arrived in 2007 with other family members once the applications were approved.

V: I was 20 when we came and I started working at the mushroom farm, where everyone spoke Spanish. Now I'm taking English classes through the IRC and I'm a student at Adams State University studying art. I also work full-time as a cook at



Virginia and Angelica Raya Trejo

the elementary school.

A: I was 14 and I had to start school three days after I got here. I didn't speak any English, which was horrible! But I had cousins who helped me so then it wasn't so bad. Meeting friends made the process easier. Even when I graduated from high school, I didn't speak English very well. Now I'm a student at ASU studying Spanish and Business Management and I'll be graduating in December. I decided to become a citizen because my resident card was about to expire, and I felt that the 2016 elections were very important.

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Challenges and Visions in the New Year

As we venture into 2017, new challenges have surfaced with the administration that defines itself through walls and hate. The IRC remains firmly committed to maintaining our current legal services and educational programs, and we will focus on several priorities in the coming year:

Supporting DACA recipients. Over 700,000 young immigrants are in jeopardy of losing work authorization and protection from deportation. Although it

appears that the Trump administration may not prioritize cancellation of the DACA program right away, we are closely monitoring this possibility.

Preparing for raids. We are making "Know Your Rights" information widely available to help people protect themselves if the need arises.

Advocating for critical resources and services. We are preparing for the
See "Challenges," pg. 2



IRC Immigrant Advocates Carmen Stevens and Elsa Goossen present on new challenges at Tu Casa's January Lunch-N-Learn program for local service providers.

Local Kids Receive Christmas Gifts

Continuing an annual tradition, the IRC partnered with City Market's Sharing Tree Program to distribute Christmas gifts to local kids in the immigrant community. Together, the IRC and the Migrant Program referred 57 children. With the help of individual donations, City Market employees transferred the wrapped gifts to the IRC for distribution.

The IRC also helped connect families to the food basket program through Sacred Heart Catholic Church, which provided holiday fare to many community members. We appreciate our local partners and their efforts to make the holidays enjoyable for everyone!



Local kids get ready to open their presents from the Sharing Tree Program.



New Citizens (cont.)

V: My co-workers convinced me to apply for citizenship, but I also had the same reasons as Angelica.

A: We applied in June 2016 with Flora's help, before they raised the application price for citizenship, and went to get our fingerprints in Denver in July. We studied a lot during this time. Our interview appointment in Denver was in August. Waiting was the hardest part, but once I was in the interview it was easier.

V: I was really nervous. I passed the history and civics questions but they told me to come back and try the

English part of the test again. So I studied for two more months at the IRC and went back to Denver and passed it!

A: The naturalization ceremony was very relaxed and some of our family helped us celebrate there. I was very proud to give the oath and say the pledge of allegiance for the first time as a U.S. citizen.

V: I also felt proud to vote for the first time. I was a little confused about what to do, because neither of the candidates seemed very good to me. There was a lot of information to absorb. But when I

became a citizen I felt very happy, like I could do anything!

A: Voting is very important because a lot of people have that right but don't appreciate it. And then there are many people who can't vote because of their immigration status, but they really care about what happens. Besides getting to vote as U.S. citizens, we also have U.S. passports now so we can travel and visit our family in Mexico more easily.

Congratulations, Virginia and Angelica!

Challenges and Visions (cont.)

possibility that mixed-status families (such as undocumented parents with U.S.-citizen children) could lose access to certain benefits for low-income families. Additionally, access to

multilingual and culturally competent mental health services continues to be a challenge.

Encouraging an inclusive community. Through

community education and consciousness-raising efforts, we hope to create a buffer against hateful rhetoric and help shape a more welcoming society. Please join us in this important work!

Food Program Continues for Guatemalan Community

Two volunteers from Salida have been bringing bulk food for distribution to Alamosa's Guatemalan community for the past four years, ever since the local mushroom farm closed and many local Guatemalans lost their jobs. Although the farm has since reopened, the volunteers—Ellen Bauder and Betsey Downing—continue to

bring the supplies for families experiencing financial hardship. Their most recent delivery included large quantities of masa flour, chicken, eggs, bananas, and dried beans.

In addition to distributing these regular items, the IRC also put together Thanksgiving food boxes in

November, complete with turkeys. IRC board member Francisco Lucas is a leader of the local Q'anjob'al Mayan community and has been instrumental in facilitating the distribution of this food to families who need it.

Many thanks to Francisco, Betsey, and Ellen!



Members of the Guatemalan community prepare to distribute food in the IRC classroom.

Immigration Fees Increase for 2017

Clients at the IRC are absorbing a significant increase in immigration fees for applications, due to a price hike at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that came into effect in December 2016. Many application forms have doubled or tripled in size during the past few years, which has overburdened legal representatives, contributed to

the backlog of applications at USCIS, and prompted the government fee increases.

Common applications include family petitions at \$535 (previously \$420), green card renewals at \$540 (previously \$450), and naturalization at \$725 (previously \$680). These increases affect many families who already struggled to pay the previous prices, on top of

other immigration-related costs like legal fees. Furthermore, fee waivers for low-income people are not always available or accessible, particularly for those who cannot work legally and are unable to show proof of income to qualify. With these challenging developments, IRC's services remain critical as we strive to meet people's needs with minimal legal fees.

Thank You to Our Holiday Donors!

We received a strong showing of support during Colorado Gives Day and the holiday season. A huge thank you to all of our donors for stepping up during this critical time!

If you are financially able to contribute and haven't done so already, we need your support now more than ever. Please consider making an online donation at www.slvirc.org.

As always, thank you for your support of our mission and our diverse community. We are here to stay, and hope you will continue to stand with us.

Board Member Reflection - Aaron Prieto

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!

All things happen for a reason, and my story begins just like all the migrant people that the IRC helps daily. As the son of two hardworking parents with land and cattle in Mexico, the plan was never to migrate to the United States. What pushed my parents to the U.S. was medical attention for my younger sister. She was diagnosed with polio at the age of two, and my father did what he could to get us all here.

Once here, he did what he could to get us all legalized. It took 9 years, but in 1994 my four sisters and I, along with my mom, became legalized. That was the same year

that my sister would start treatment at Children's Hospital in Denver. Although she is not completely healed, she is able to walk with a cane.

This is just a brief summary of my story, and just like I have a story,



Aaron Prieto
IRC Board Member

each one of the people that IRC helps has their story. Most of the time because of unplanned events, or unforeseen circumstances.

When Michelle Salazar approached me about becoming a board member two months after becoming a U.S. citizen myself, I did not hesitate. Michelle was my Spanish teacher in high school, and after not keeping in touch for more than ten years she thought of me. It has been an honor serving as a board member for a great cause. Things do happen for a reason, we must believe there's a plan.

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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