



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

## Local DACA Recipient Shares Story

*Many undocumented people who entered the U.S. as children qualify for President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, initiated in 2012. This temporary benefit offers work authorization and protection from deportation. The IRC helps qualified individuals apply for DACA and renew their applications every two years.*

*Local resident Esther Gamboa Mendoza, a three-time DACA recipient, shares how the program has impacted her life:*

“Don’t stop running.” These words have marked my life ever since I crossed the Rio

Grande into the United States. My guide spoke these words as he held my hand. I was only 14 years old and could hardly comprehend the journey that I was about to begin. I was traveling with my brother from Durango, Mexico to meet our dad on the other side. At 2:00 in the morning, we arrived in an unknown place along the river, where we had to swim across as fast as we could. It was freezing and scary. Afterwards we ran for several miles through fields.

The ten people in our group found a doghouse, where we spent the remainder of the night.

After that, a woman picked us up and took us in. She fed us, gave us dry clothes, and provided a temporary place to stay.

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Esther shows the work permit she received through DACA.

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## Carmen Stevens Honored with Colorado Visionary Voice Award

Carmen M. Stevens, an Immigrant Advocate at the IRC, recently received the 2016 Colorado Visionary Voice Award in recognition of her work serving survivors of sexual violence. The award comes from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, which aims to “recognize the creativity

and hard work of individuals around the country who have demonstrated outstanding work to end sexual violence.” The Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) nominated Carmen for the award, which she accepted at the Capitol Building in Denver.

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Carmen (right) celebrates at the awards ceremony with the staff members from CCASA who nominated her: Agueda Morgan, Director of Programs (left), and Brie Akins, Executive Director (center).

## IRC Receives Grant for Fundraising Expansion

The IRC recently received a joint grant from the Latino Community Foundation and Hispanics in Philanthropy. The purpose of the funding is threefold: to strengthen the organization's fundraising strategies, improve evaluation of services, and provide support for staff members with Board of Immigration Appeals accreditation.

To begin expanding its fundraising capacity, the IRC partnered with Julie Mordecai, a specialist in nonprofit operations, to hold a day-long training for board members. They brainstormed about ways to build stronger relationships with donors and educate a wider audience about the IRC's work.

Board member Michelle Salazar observed that "our fundraising training helped to bond us together as board

members. We got to know each other better and were reminded that fundraising is facilitating collaboration." By the end of the day, training participants collectively pledged \$5,100 in donations for the IRC's 2016 budget. Board member Beatriz Garcia Waddell emphasized the importance of giving back to her community, noting that "money has value when we work with passion and with the heart."

The IRC offers legal services on a minimum-fee basis (where no one is turned away due to inability to pay), and provides English and citizenship classes for free. Without these accessible services, community members would be forced to choose between attorneys' high rates and the tempting offers of immigration scammers for their legal needs.

In order to keep fees at a minimum, individual donations are crucial for maintaining daily operations. To support the IRC's programs, please consider contributing your own donation. Visit [www.slvirc.org](http://www.slvirc.org) to donate online, or contact the office at (719) 587-3225 for more information.



Members of the IRC Board pose together during their fundraising training.

## Esther's Story (cont.)

We went from safe-house to safe-house, until we eventually ended up in Denver and met our dad. Then we made the final drive to Monte Vista, where I started my new life.

That was the summer of 1999. I started ninth grade without speaking any English, but gradually started to pick it up. I graduated from high school four years later and found jobs in the lettuce fields and potato warehouse. My first son was born in 2005 and I had to continue working in the

fields right away. I eventually had three more sons and became a single mom. Then in 2012, I found out I was eligible for DACA and became one of the first recipients in the San Luis Valley. This changed my life.

Since I received DACA, I was able to apply for better jobs and get a drivers' license. I started working at Alamosa Head Start as a bus monitor, and later found a part-time job at La Llave Family Resource Center. I still work there, now as a full-time

parent-child educator. I love my job. I work with immigrant families that experience many of the same struggles that I have overcome. I have more time to spend with my children now and I'm better able to provide for them and transport them to their daily activities. I'm very thankful to the Immigrant Resource Center for helping me obtain DACA and renew it two additional times. I always remind my kids to never give up and always follow their dreams, as I have done.

## Visionary Voice Award (cont.)

Carmen serves as the coordinator of the IRC's "Porti Misma" program, which provides legal assistance to undocumented survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. Through the Violence Against Women Act and a program called the U Visa, there are several potential pathways for survivors to obtain legal status. Carmen shared that "I feel honored to serve the clients who come to our office, who can change their immigration status and continue their healing

process without the fear of deportation."

In conjunction with receiving the award, Carmen also attended CCASA's Latin@ Advocate Leadership Summit with other bilingual/bicultural service providers from around the state. This gathering emphasized community-building and support for Latina leaders in the field of sexual assault prevention. The events, which occurred in April, corresponded with Sexual Assault Awareness Month.



## Update on Administrative Relief

Along with the broader immigrant rights community, the IRC continues to monitor the pending Supreme Court case regarding Obama's executive action on immigration. If passed, the administrative relief program would benefit approximately 5 million undocumented immigrants (mainly parents of U.S. citizens), who would be eligible for work

authorization and temporary protection from deportation.

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments from both sides on April 18th, an event that corresponded with the convergence of thousands of immigrants and their allies in Washington D.C and other cities across the country.

Participants in the D.C. demonstration included a

delegation of five women from the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, who traveled to share their stories and show support on behalf of Colorado immigrant families.

Advocates of the program are awaiting a June decision and continuing to prepare for possible implementation.



## Welcome, Frida Angelina!

We are excited to announce the birth of Frida Angelina Stevens, to Carmen M. Stevens (IRC Immigrant Advocate) and Eric Stevens. Frida arrived on February 11, and takes her name from the groundbreaking Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Congratulations to the whole family!

## Board Member Reflection - Michelle Lankford Salazar

**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!**

I am fortunate to have served on the IRC board of directors for more than 11 years. We have a wonderful, hard-working staff, inspiring volunteers, and one of the strongest boards ever.

My grandfather came from Sweden at the age of 18 to avoid being drafted into a war with Norway. He homesteaded in North Dakota where my mother grew up. She and my father were both World War II nurses stationed in Denver. I am a Colorado native, granddaughter of an immigrant, and have lived in the San Luis Valley for more than 35 years.

I learned Spanish working at an orphanage in Mexico during college summers and later became a Spanish teacher at both the high school and college levels. When a colleague at Adams State learned I was conducting linguistic

interviews with Guatemalans and was concerned about immigrant issues, he recommended I join the IRC board.

I heard about the McAuley Ministry Fund, major supporter of IRC, for years before making the connection between it and the Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley in Dublin, Ireland. Following two years of prayer, discernment, and



**Michelle Lankford Salazar  
IRC Board Secretary**

study, I became an Associate of the Sisters of Mercy. No, I am not a nun! I am married with three grown children and three grandchildren. My grandson calls me a "minor nun." This association has deepened my spiritual life and strengthened the relationship between IRC and the Sisters of Mercy for whom immigration is a critical concern.

Human beings migrate. They always have and for a variety of reasons. Hundreds of Guatemalans have come to Alamosa because they didn't want to die in a war. Some of the first permanent settlers of the San Luis Valley descended from those fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. The work of the Immigrant Resource Center contributes to finding just and humane solutions for those who have migrated to this region. I feel happy and blessed to be a small part of this work.

### 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.



225 6th St, Suite B  
PO Box 1534  
Alamosa, CO 81101

Phone: 719-587-3225  
Fax: 719-587-0045  
E-mail: [irc@slvirc.org](mailto:irc@slvirc.org)