



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

Local Couple Gains Legal Status

The lives of Mateo Juan Tomas and Juana Lucas Ramon Juan have changed a lot since gaining status as legal permanent residents in the United States. They say that they no longer have to fear driving or the police, knowing that a small traffic violation could cause them to be separated from their family. Although Mateo and Juana are now proud to be legal residents of the United States, their journey was not an easy one.

Mateo and Juana had no legal status in this country.

Unfortunately, the event that gave them the ability to apply for status was Juana being brutally assaulted. Due to this, Juana was able to qualify for a U-Visa, which allows victims of crimes who cooperate with law enforcement to apply for a visa. Mateo was able to qualify as a derivative of her case. Both Juana and Mateo now have their Legal Permanent Resident Cards, better know as “Green Cards”, and can either apply for citizenship after five years, or renew their cards in ten years when they expire.



Mateo and Juana hold their Legal Permanent Resident Cards

Visa is rather intensive and can be incredibly expensive as well. Luckily, the immigration lawyer they originally went to referred them to the IRC.

-See Mateo and Juana, Pg 2

The process of applying for a U-

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Summer Education Program

Each year the IRC has played a part in a summer education program that takes place at the Tierra Nueva housing complex. In the past, this program has had a few different elements, including an exercise program and a summer reading program. Current Immigrant Education Coordinator, Laura Thompson, is playing a leading role in the organization this year.

Many people are making this

program possible this year. Norma Gomez, another main organizer of children’s activities at Tierra Nueva, is always a large help and driving force to promote education among the kids at Tierra Nueva. Zoila Gomez, local athlete and friend and role model of the children is again taking up a large role in the program as well. This year, Carmen Stevens, IRC staff member is also helping out.

Laura, Norma, Zoila, Carmen and the IRC are excited to be putting on the program again! This year the program consists of a few different activities and will last for about six weeks. As in the past, one of these is Run with Us, which is a running, nutrition and goal setting program led by Zoila Gomez.

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Another IRC BIA Accreditation Approved

“The IRC is proud to announce that...Carmen has now also been approved as an authorized provider of immigration law services...”

As many people know, it is illegal to practice law without the proper qualifications. How then, can the IRC staff practice immigration law when they are not lawyers? The answer is something called the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) Accreditation. This accreditation allows organizations like the IRC to practice immigration law without having to charge the same hefty fees as lawyers.

Any individual seeking the accreditation must be a part of an organization that is accredited. Previous employee Venus Valdez also was accredited, however when Carmen Stevens took

over her position, she then needed to apply to become



Carmen M. Stevens - Immigrant Advocate

accredited herself. This is a lengthy process with lots of requirements, and Carmen has been working alongside Flora Archuleta, the execu-

tive director of the IRC, to fulfill those requirements and complete necessary paperwork for the past two years. During that time, Flora was the only accredited staff member.

The IRC is proud to announce that after much hard work, Carmen has now also been approved as an authorized provider of immigration law services through the BIA accreditation program. This gives Carmen the legal authority to sign off on all of her own cases, and will be a large asset to the IRC and its clients.

Mateo and Juana (cont.)

Arturo Jimenez was very kind to them and told them that although he could help them, it would cost them a lot of money and the IRC would be able to help them for a lot less. Mateo and Juana say that they are very happy with the IRC and that at the IRC they found very kind people willing to fight

for them. They say they would recommend the IRC to any of their friends or family.

Mateo and Juana say that they never thought they would be able to get their papers and they hope that others who dream of being in the US legally can also

achieve what they have. Mateo and Juana can now live in peace with their three children without the anxiety of knowing that deportation or incarceration in a detention facility is a possibility at any time.

Summer Education (cont.)



Zoila Gomez with some of the Tierra Nueva children

Run with Us is happening three times a week. Laura meets with the kids twice a week to do a summer reading program which consists of reading with younger kids for about 30 minutes. With the older kids a specific book has been chosen which they all read and discuss together. Once a

week, Norma and Carmen are also leading an arts and crafts project. These staff and volunteers all enjoy getting to spend some time with these kids, giving them some activities to participate in over the summer, and hopefully helping them learn a little in their time off from school. If you are inter-

ested in volunteering with any of these activities over the summer or helping with the tutoring program during the school year please contact Laura Thompson, the Immigrant Education Coordinator, at (719) 587-3225 Ext. 12 or Laura@slvirc.org.



Continued Support from Salida Women

When the Rakhra Mushroom Farm went bankrupt and began letting go of its employees a couple of years ago, the Guatemalan community in Alamosa was faced with a very hard time. Many of the workers were Guatemalan, and the loss of jobs had a large financial impact on the community.

As that community faced this difficult transition, many people in the surrounding community stepped up to give a hand. Two of those people are Ellen Bauder and Betsey Downing. Ellen and Betsey were originally responding to a newspaper article in the local paper. These

women, along with a women's group they are a part of in Salida, had previous connections with Guatemala. When they heard



Betsy and Ellen with supplies they brought

that this local Guatemalan community was struggling, they came to the IRC, offer-

ing their aid.

Ellen and Betsey in conjunction with the women's group have now been offering support to the Guatemalan community for over two years. They have been bringing food and other valuable supplies for the families affected consistently since they first contacted the IRC.

This past February they were given an award at the annual Santa Eulalia Festival at which the Guatemalan Community in Alamosa celebrates their patron saint. Both the community and the IRC are extremely grateful for the wonderful deeds of these women in a most needed time.

“When they heard that this local Guatemalan community was struggling, they came to the IRC, offering their aid.”

An Easy Way to Support the IRC

The IRC offers many important service to immigrants in our community, and we can't do that without a little financial support from people like you. Recently, the IRC has come up with an extremely easy way to do that.

As you gear up for holiday shopping, in the coming months, or just your regular purchases, please consider using AmazonSmile

to purchase gifts and support SLVIRC! Through AmazonSmile, .5% of every eligible purchase you make will be donated to SLVIRC at no extra cost to you. To sign up,

visit smile.amazon.com, log in using your normal Amazon account, and select San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center as your supported charity. When shopping, you will see eligible items marked as “Eligible for AmazonSmile donation” on the product details page. As always, SLVIRC appreciates your continued support!



Staff Reflection - Laura Thompson

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!

For the past seven years, I have worked in Denver and Virginia with refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world. This work sparked my interest in immigration, and I was very excited to have the opportunity to see another aspect of the immigration system when I began volunteering for SLVIRC in November of 2014. I became an employee in March, and since then I have been teaching English as a Second Language, tutoring young students in math and reading, and assisting with grant writing and editing. I am very fortunate to be able to work for an organization that strives to reduce barriers and open up opportunities for people who have long

been disenfranchised by an imperfect system. I have seen firsthand how the services offered by SLVIRC en-



Laura Thompson - Immigrant Education Coordinator

able immigrants to experience positive outcomes in many aspects of their lives, from employment to education to community involvement, despite the many challenges that they face. Flora and Carmen work incredibly hard to ensure that each client is treated with dignity and respect and to ensure that the organization is seen as a trusted partner to the immigrant community in the San Luis Valley and beyond. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with the extraordinary staff, board members, and clients of the SLVIRC and look forward to continuing to build relationships with the community.



Thank you to the Diocese of Pueblo for awarding the IRC the Rice Bowl grant through Catholic Relief Services in the amount of \$500!

The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center (SLVIRC) is a unique organization and has a long history of working with immigrants. It has been 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 has three programs working towards our 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 of the IRC is Punto de Vista, which provides English tutoring to immigrants, Spanish courses to community service providers, and an after school tutoring program for immigrant children.



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