



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

SLV Mayan-Guatemalan Community Celebrates College Graduate

Juan Geovany Francisco Cristobal graduated from Adams State University in May of 2016 with a BA in music education. He is of Maya Q'anjob'al descent and is one of the first Mayan-Americans in the San Luis Valley to receive a bachelor's degree. Juan shares his story here:

I was born in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, Guatemala in 1992 and came to the U.S. when I was a year and two months old. My parents fled an ongoing civil war that was threatening my homeland. The mushroom farm brought my parents to Alamosa, and I grew up going to the public

schools here. I remember my first day of preschool, when I only spoke Q'anjob'al. My primary education involved learning English and navigating between these two languages. Eventually in Jr. High School, I picked up some Spanish. I had always struggled with my English acquisition, but with perseverance, I overcame this obstacle later in my education.

My parents came to the United States of America so their kids could have a better future. During my mid-high school years my father, Lucas Lucas, became a naturalized U.S. citizen. It was through him that I became a U.S. citizen too. This privileged opportunity opened endless doors for

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Juan (center), celebrates graduation with his father, Lucas Lucas; his mother, Eulalia Sebastian; and his cousin, Ana Patricia Lucas.

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The Struggle for Immigration Relief Continues

Along with immigrant communities in Colorado and across the country, the IRC anxiously awaited the Supreme Court decision on Obama's executive action for deportation relief. The disappointing 4-4 stalemate on June 23 did not set a legal precedent, but it blocks implementation of the programs.

The initiatives in question (DAPA

and an expansion of the preexisting DACA program) were mainly intended to safeguard the unity of mixed-status families and help eligible applicants work legally without the constant fear of raids. Approximately 80,000 people in Colorado, and nearly 5 million nationally, had been expected to qualify.

Staff members at the IRC share the frustration and disappointment that has become all too familiar for immigrant communities. We stand in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors, and support grassroots efforts to continue the fight for immigration justice at the ballot box this November.

Tierra Nueva Students Enjoy Running Program

After-school tutoring has stopped for a few months, but children at the Tierra Nueva apartment complex are staying active through the summer running program. IRC volunteer Zoila Gomez, a local athlete, coordinates the program. Approximately 20 children of all ages meet three evenings per week for stretching, warm-ups, and running with Zoila. Built-in

time for snacks and playground activities add extra incentive.

Zoila provides this mentoring through In the Arena, a nonprofit organization that

connects professional athletes with youth in underserved communities. The running program encourages the kids to have fun outdoors, set goals, and build friendships.



Drivers' Licenses: Necessary But Challenging to Obtain

In 2013, the immigrant community won an important victory with the Colorado Road and Community Safety Act. The law permits undocumented people to obtain drivers' licenses, which are particularly critical for families in rural areas like the San Luis Valley. Securing DMV appointments, however, has proved extremely challenging for eligible

applicants. Appointments are only available in Denver, Grand Junction, and Colorado Springs, and are so backlogged that the online process to request an appointment is almost like playing the lottery.

The IRC assists clients with the process if they don't have computer access or cannot read. A few people have been

fortunate to receive their licenses, and emphasize how much safer it makes them feel. Instead of worrying about the immigration consequences of a traffic stop, they can simply focus on the rules of the road. The IRC calls on policymakers to remove the barriers to this process so that undocumented people can truly exercise their rights to transportation, safety, and independence.

Juan's Story (cont.)

me. I graduated from Alamosa High School in 2011, one of the first people in my extended family to do so.

Afterwards, transitioning to college at Adams State was difficult because my family didn't know the process nor did they have the college experience. I started out undecided, but my counselor and future professors guided me into the music department since I already played the Guatemalan marimba.

Playing the marimba is a strong tradition within my community. My uncle's compadre, Andres Pedro, coordinated the local marimba conjunto (group), and he was also my first marimba teacher. In Guatemalan culture you play music by rote (listening),

so when I was at Adams State I had to learn Western music notation. I also focused on learning how to apply pedagogical techniques to the Guatemalan style of music. I want to pass on that cultural tradition to the young Mayan-Americans growing up here in the U.S.

Last year I applied to grad school at UCLA and was accepted into their Ethnomusicology program, which I will start this fall. They are giving me a full fellowship for the first year, and the second year I'll get a teacher assistantship. Once I graduate with my master's degree, I am automatically accepted into their PhD program. I'm considering coming back to Alamosa after my program ends, but it's hard to

know what other opportunities might emerge.

I'm also looking forward to meeting more people in Los Angeles, which has a large Guatemalan community. Since the war, Guatemalans have come to many parts of the U.S. I want to preserve and document the history of the Mayan-American people, and show what our reality is like now.

The Guatemalan community in Alamosa sees me as a role model. A lot of immigrant families struggle and have a hard time imagining a positive future for their children. So I want to work with kids who are at risk, and help them find their own opportunities.

Latino Community Foundation Visits IRC

In July, the IRC hosted a visit from the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado. Five LCFC staff members traveled from Denver to meet with the IRC staff, board members, and representatives from the immigrant community. They came to gather information about how to best support Latino-serving organizations

like the IRC.

The highlight was an evening gathering with community members, who shared the ways that the IRC's services have positively impacted their lives. LCFC staff encouraged the group to envision how those services might evolve and expand as we apply for funding from

various foundations in the future.

The LCFC representatives also recorded short interviews with IRC clients for a video project that will encourage statewide investment in the Latino community. Thanks, LCFC, for visiting the San Luis Valley!

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition Holds Annual Assembly

Staff from the IRC will attend the annual assembly of the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) in late July. The gathering will occur in Longmont this year, with a special focus on the upcoming elections. Participants will discuss the recent Supreme Court decision on administrative relief and

mobilize around statewide issues such as drivers' license availability. Member organizations are also engaging in a push for citizenship applicants before November in order to get out the vote! We look forward to this weekend of collective organizing and advocacy work.



Staff Transitions

This August, the IRC will welcome a new intern from Adams State University. Gabriela Gonzalez, a political science major, will come one day per week to help with the IRC's legal services. Gabby states that "I chose to do the internship at IRC not only because I would love to learn more about immigration, but also because I love to help those in need. I am looking

forward to learning about everything, especially about the whole process to petition a spouse. Later on in the future I would like to pursue a career in immigration and I believe that this will be a great learning experience for me."

The IRC is also experiencing some transition as Laura Thompson will no longer serve as the Immigrant

Education Coordinator. She has taken a job in refugee assistance, but will continue to support the IRC through grant writing. Laura has handed the educational programs off to Elsa Goossen, so we are adapting but will miss Laura's daily presence.

We look forward to working with Gabby and continuing on with Laura in new capacities.

IRC Is New Member of ColoradoGives

In May, the IRC became a member of ColoradoGives, a resource for Colorado charities. Supported by the Community First Foundation of Denver, ColoradoGives.org offers an easy way to learn about Colorado nonprofits and donate to different

organizations online. As part of our efforts to boost our online presence and connect with individual donors, we developed our own profile and will maintain it throughout the year. We will also participate in ColoradoGives Day, an

annual initiative held each December to raise money for local nonprofits. As you plan your annual giving, please keep us in mind and check out our profile at www.coloradogives.org/slvirc.

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!

“In today’s political climate – where so much venom, hatred, and fear is being heaved towards our immigrant communities – a place like SLVIRC is essential to ensuring that those members of our society who may have been born in another country know that they are welcome, they are valued, and they are supported.”



--Amanda Hopkins,
IRC Board Member



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

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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