



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

Two IRC Clients Gain U.S. Citizenship

Local residents Beatriz Garcia Waddell and Donald Moon recently became U.S. citizens after completing the long application process and passing oral exams in Denver. They share their experiences here:

Beatriz Garcia Waddell:

In November 2015 I became a U.S. citizen. Prior to my naturalization ceremony I had been a conditional resident for two years, and for the last five years I have been living in the U.S. as a permanent resident. I know many people who live, or have lived, in the U.S. without legal documents, and for that reason, I have always felt extremely fortunate to have lived in the U.S. as a legal resident, and now, citizen. Still, despite my legal status, every time I reenter the country I am constantly reminded of the fact that I am not treated equally.

I began traveling frequently to the U.S. after meeting my husband in 2005. I have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border dozens of times in the last decade and nearly every time I have been sent to a secondary checkpoint. Once, when returning from my honeymoon in Argentina, DEA agents even took me to a separate room and patted my abdomen down to make sure I wasn't smuggling drugs. Another time, while traveling under a so-called "parole visa," I was taken to a separate room where people with

-See **Beatriz's Story**, Pg 2



Beatriz (who also serves on the IRC Board) celebrates at her naturalization ceremony in Denver with her son.

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Donald Moon:

On the day that my wife and I drove to Denver to take my citizenship test, I felt pretty confident that I knew the material. There



Donald (center) poses with his family and IRC director Flora Archuleta (second from left) in front of the IRC.

were still a few stubborn questions that gave me trouble, but I was sure that my 10 questions would not be filled with these.

We studied on the drive up as we had studied every evening for at least a month before my test date. Every evening when I came home from work, my wife would quiz me on all 100 questions. We started out rough but improved every day until it was time for the trip.

I got a good night sleep the night before and had a hearty breakfast. We practiced the test in the car as we waited outside the Federal building.

When the examiner called my name, I walked with guarded con-

fidence to the agent's office. Confidence that evaporated the instant she closed the door. I don't remember the questions themselves as I seemed to have gone into a trance listening to them. After I got the first question right, I started to relax and just kept my eyes on the examiner.

Suddenly, she stopped asking me questions. I had gotten six out of six right so there was no reason to continue. I hadn't even realized how many had gone by.

My advice to those taking the test is to study all 100 questions and know them as well as you can, then just relax - until that door closes.



IRC Assists With Holiday Celebrations

As the holidays approach each winter, many people struggle to pay for the expenses associated with family gatherings and celebrations. To help alleviate this challenge, the IRC partnered with Sacred Heart Catholic Church to distribute holiday food baskets to

local families in need. Among the recipients were 15 immigrant families.

In a similar initiative, staff from City Market coordinated the Sharing Tree Program to provide kids from low-income families with Christmas presents. The IRC referred more than 30 children from the immigrant community, who each requested one item. Alamosa community members donated the gifts to City Market, and employees transferred them to IRC staff for distribution. Thanks to these combined efforts, many smiles followed!

Before the year closed out, IRC staff also enjoyed as-

sisting with the annual Christmas party for the afterschool tutoring program at Alamosa's Tierra Nueva housing complex. Roughly 15 children are regularly attending the program this school year, a cause for celebration in its own right.

All three initiatives highlight one of the most rewarding aspects of the IRC's work — bringing people together to support and learn from each other. As always, we greatly appreciate these opportunities to partner with local organizations and businesses to address the needs of valley residents.

Children from several families show off their soon-to-be-opened Christmas gifts!



Beatriz's Story (cont.)

"uncertain migratory statuses" are left to sit until an agent looks through their case. Well after I'd missed my connecting flight out of Miami, an agent stood up and reminded the room that, "You are not under full U.S. jurisdiction here. The constitutional rights you have in the U.S. do not apply here. If you want to stand up or use the bathroom, you ask me first, and I'll let you know whether or not you have permission to do so." This was in Miami, Florida, at the International Airport.

As a result of these types of experiences, when I received my citizenship in November I was extremely excited to finally be a full citizen. In addition to being able to vote, I would finally be able to move to and from other countries without so many questions. No more stressing out before flying, missing connecting flights, or feeling as if I were a criminal entering the country I live in.

Or so I thought.

On January 12th, 2016, I got off the plane in Houston and proceeded to the citizen kiosk with my family. We scanned our passports and took our respective photos. All the slips printed out without any problems, until mine came out. It had a big X through it. The assistant nearby said I would have to go through a secondary check point. My heart sank. She motioned us to a series of lines that were substantially longer than any of the others. As I looked around I couldn't help but notice that the majority of people in line were brown. In fact, my husband and another man traveling with a dark-skinned woman were the only white individuals in the extensive line. When we finally picked up our baggage in customs, a USDA agent came by, asked us a few questions, and indicated that we needed to go through another checkpoint so that agents could individually search our bags for illicit goods. After agents muddled through our stuff and asked us a few questions, we proceeded to the final security check. To our surprise, TSA deemed it necessary to search my 3-year-old daughter's backpack. After they dusted off her little ponies and etch-a-sketch for explosive material, they let us gather our stuff and go about our business.

Over the years I've tried to convince myself that this type of treatment was related to my legal status or that it was simply random. But now, as a U.S. citizen, I find it hard to believe that certain types of people randomly receive this type of treatment much more frequently than others. The value of everyone's citizenship is weakened by the unequal treatment of non-citizens, and until we realize this, our own citizenship will continue to be at risk. For this reason, as a U.S. citizen I intend to continue to stand up for people that are treated as less simply because of the color of their skin, their country of origin, or their legal status printed on a sheet of paper, because at the end of the day, my future is vested in their future.

National Political Updates

Administrative Relief:

Ever since November 2014, when President Obama announced his commitment to a program that would provide deferred action from deportation to nearly 5 million undocumented people, the immigrant community has been waiting for courts to clear the way. More than a year later, future implementation is still uncertain.

In November 2015, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ban on Obama's program following a lawsuit by Texas and 25 other states. The Depart-

ment of Justice subsequently appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, requesting a review of the 5th Circuit ruling. If the Supreme Court chooses to take the case this term (which will likely be announced early this year), a ruling could still come in June 2016.

If implemented, Obama's executive action would include the Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) program and an expansion of the existing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. A positive ruling

would temporarily protect the parents of approximately 6.3 million children from deportation and provide them with work authorization, in addition to similarly benefiting a subgroup of people who came to the U.S. as children.

If you think that you (or someone you know) might be eligible for DAPA or expanded DACA, please request a consultation with IRC staff for more information. Although the application process has not yet launched, it's not too soon to begin preparing for possible implementation.

Recent Immigration Raids:

The IRC is also monitoring the onset of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids targeting Central American families with pending deportation orders. Although these particular raids have not yet occurred in Colorado, they have amplified fear within the San Luis Valley immigrant community.

This destructive initiative threatens some of the most vulnerable families in the U.S., particularly those who have arrived recently and would not qualify for Obama's deferred action program.

ICE's latest action unravels community trust, disinte-

grates families, and returns people to the inhumane and potentially deadly conditions that they originally fled. The IRC stands with immigrants and their allies who are resisting xenophobic policies and strengthening community ties through unconditional hospitality.

New at the IRC!

Bilingual Website:

Check out our updated website at www.slvirc.org, which now includes full information in both English and Spanish. We hope that this change will increase community knowledge about our services and improve clients' access to immigration-related resources. Please alert any other community members who could benefit from this updated resource.

Little Free Library:

Thanks to donations from the Alamosa Optimists' Club and the Alamosa Public Library, the IRC has a new collection of books in its waiting room. Most of the books are for children and teens, and include titles in English and Spanish. To encourage literacy at home, anyone may borrow, trade, or keep a book. We welcome donations; books in Spanish are especially needed.



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!

Reflection from the Board President - Nicolás Sarmiento

I worked as an Immigrant Advocate for the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center in 2007. At that time, I really did not know what to do with my life, but something told me that I should work for this agency. I'm grateful that I did. My days at the IRC consisted of working with victims of domestic violence, helping clients with immigration paperwork, and communicating with other agencies on a variety of issues. I worked at the IRC for a year, and we were helping an immigrant population that very few people can or want to help.

It's no secret that immigration is a controversial and divisive topic in this nation and across the world. There is an uneasy tension

between wanting to help our fellow humans and fearing the unknown. Immigration is a difficult and complex policy issue. Throughout the years, the IRC's mission has remained the same: to help the stranger among us. Every day, the IRC's staff meets a person who is seeking a better life and



Nicolás Sarmiento
SLVIRC Board President

who has the same trials and tribulations as everyone else. The IRC does its best to provide that person with resources, because if we don't do it, then who will? Through these interactions, we get to know and call our clients by name and not by their status in this country. More importantly, we let our clients know that we will help them to the best of our ability based on our shared humanity, and expect nothing in return.

I want to thank the IRC's supporters in helping us achieve our mission. Without your support, our organization would not exist and our clients would have to look elsewhere for resources that the IRC provides.

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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