



# The RightsStuff

## Human Rights for All...No Exceptions

**Age Matters!** ~ *Lucia Guzman - Executive Director*

You will be hearing more and more about AGING and how and why it matters to Denver.

For two years now, the Denver Office on Aging has been moving us towards evaluating the way in which Denver serves its older adults as well as pointing towards the upcoming trends affecting all of us as we age well.

AGE MATTERS is an initiative of great importance for the City and County of Denver. The goal of the initiative is to make Denver an **AGE FRIENDLY CITY!** Some may think this does not speak to us because we are 35, 40, or 50. But each of us is aging every day and certainly we are hoping to age well and hope to become one of those 85 plus persons we know and respect for maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle. In fact, the fastest growing population today are those persons who are 85 years and older!

Soon, Mayor John Hickenlooper will name a task force to envision and implement the AGE MATTERS INITIATIVE.

Those named to this task force will be staff from the City and County of Denver agencies and departments. They will work closely with our newly hired Director on Aging and Community Relations, Anthony Aragon and Dolores Martinez Hernandez, who has been selected to a six month fellowship with the Office on Aging.

We welcome both Anthony and Dolores to the Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations team and look forward to advancing the AGE MATTERS INITIATIVE.

A web page will be developed soon so that all can be a part of the initiative.

We look forward to our days ahead!



## Community Advocacy Day ~ *Karen Fox, HRCR Graduate Intern*

On Saturday, April 5, the Mayor's Office on Boards and Commissions and the Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations (HRCR) held a 6 hour Community Advocacy Day for the members of its eight commissions. The eight HR/CR commissions are:

- ◆ African-American Commission
- ◆ Aging Commission
- ◆ American Indian Commission
- ◆ Asian Pacific-American Commission
- ◆ Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Commission
- ◆ Latino Commission
- ◆ People with Disabilities Commission
- ◆ Denver Women's Commission



The day was planned with four goals in mind:

1. Sharing information regarding the concerns and issues of different communities.
2. Helping commissioners gain skills to be used when working with each other.
3. Engaging in initial planning for addressing shared concerns.
4. Providing an opportunity for commissioners to build relationships with each other.

The day began with welcoming remarks from Anthony Aragon (Director of the Office on Aging), June Twinam (outside facilitator), Councilwoman Carla Madison, Councilman Doug Linkhart, Lucia Guzman (Executive Director, HRCR), and Mayor John Hickenlooper. Following these, a representative from each commission presented the strategic goals and issues of most concern of the commission. Dante James then facilitated an activity on Collaborative Leadership. Following this activity, the group discussed the common themes that had emerged. These included AWARENESS, ACCESS, and INFLUENCE. Chaer Robert, from HRCR, conducted an Advocacy Training, and the day concluded with each commission discussing its next steps as a commission in terms of advocacy efforts.



Commissioners' evaluations reveal that the day was a huge success with many attendees recommending that this become an annual or biannual event. Thank you to all who attended the day and especially to those who helped to make this day such a huge success! HRCR looks forward to increased advocacy efforts on the part of all commissions as a result of this day!

# WORKING HARDER, FEELING POORER

## Conclusion of 2008 Legislative Session

Work is not enough. One in ten Colorado families lives below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – about \$20,000 for a family of four. About one in five Colorado households live below the point of self-sufficiency. Expenses are increasing dramatically – food, child care, energy, transportation and housing. Even middle-class families are tightening their belts. In recognition of hard economic times, the U.S. Congress approved an economic stimulus package. While most of us have enjoyed our rebate checks, we should remember that low-wage families (those who earn too little to have an income tax liability) received \$300 less per adult than other families in their federal rebate checks, despite their greater challenges meeting rising costs. Too bad the government never “rebates” based on payroll taxes paid.

### What did the 2008 Colorado Legislature do to help struggling families?

Legislation passed and signed by the Governor in this legislative session includes:

- SB 177- This bill includes a 20% **increase in the monthly TANF cash grant**, effective January 2009, for the 8,700 Colorado families on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families caseload. This raises the grant from \$356 per month for a family of three to about \$420 per month -- the first cost of living adjustment in 20 years.
- SB 123 – This bill would eliminate to 40 cent co-pay for **reduced price school lunch** for children in kindergarten through second grade using funding from the State Education Fund.
- HB 1388- The Schools Funding Bill adds \$39 million to funding of full day kindergarten, and about \$1 million for **additional preschool slots**. Perhaps 15,000 children will be newly served with **full day kindergarten**.
- HB 1387- Renews the diversion of \$12-\$13 million per year from the Severance Tax Trust Fund. About half would be used as **utility payments** for those with incomes under 185% of Federal Poverty Level.
- SB 160 expands eligibility for Child Health Plan from 205% of FPL up to 225% of Federal Poverty Level.
- HB 1265- This State Department of Human Services Bill allows counties to **subsidize child care** for families up to 85% of state median income. It raises the current income ceiling from 225% of FPL to 309% of FPL.
- HB 1356- **Tenants** would have a right to “habitable” space in exchange for their rent under this bill. Elements include the right to heat, electricity and running hot and cold water, extermination of rodents and vermin.

### What opportunities to help low wage families did the Legislature miss this year?

- HB 1362 – This bill would have paid the **State Earned Income Tax Credit**- up to \$471 to 264,000 low wage Coloradans for two years.
- HB 1310- As approved by the House, this bill would cap interest on **pay day loans** at 45% APR and allow people 30 days to pay off their loans.

For the longer version of this legislative wrap-up, go to [www.denvergov.org/women](http://www.denvergov.org/women)



## Denver Coalition for Integration ~ *Eva Cosyleon, HRCR Graduate Intern*

This summer I was given the opportunity to research resources that are provided in the Denver area that help alleviate the sometimes difficult adjustment experienced by newcomers. The main goal for the Denver Coalition for Integration (DCI) is to help the city's diverse immigrant and refugee population integrate into the community. In order to facilitate that goal, my first assignments were to gather information on English as Second Language (ESL) classes and health resources that are located within the City and County of Denver, and create matrixes on this information. Once these matrixes become available on the DCI website, they will help immigrants and refugees locate a resource near them. The ESL locations have been put into GIS which allowed me to overlay their locations on a map of immigrant populations in Denver. This map will help locate possibilities for future sites of ESL programs and a welcome center. DCI strives to create a sense of "belonging and opportunity for everyone" which encompasses the existing community.

Much of my research was given to developing several different fact sheets that will be available on the DCI website. These fact sheets are created to help educate the Denver community and new Denverites. One of the fact sheets I

created is about refugees, asylees, and asylum seekers. The information that is presented on the fact sheet is based on 2007 statistics and information about refugee resettlement populations as well as links to organizations that help refugees and asylum seekers. Along with acknowledging some of Denver's notable immigrants the *Immigration in Denver* fact sheet identifies key moments in Denver's history that make it such a diverse community.

I also created the DCI newsletter that will be underway within the next couple of months. This document will feature DCI news, highlight non-profit organizations, as well as have a special feature that identifies people in the community who are making a difference, called **I Am Denver**.

I feel confident that the work I have done will help strengthen and educate the Denver community's knowledge of its beautiful diversity that enhances each of our lives.

If you are interested in viewing or downloading our factsheets or ESL location information, please visit our website at [www.denvergov.org/community\\_support](http://www.denvergov.org/community_support) and click on Denver Coalition for Integration.





## Accessibility and the Democratic National Convention (DNC)

Well the DNC is almost here and the time is fast approaching to get everything finished and completed! In the terms of accessibility, we have prepared a number of items to ensure the needs of the disabled will be met. Denver's 311 system now has information ranging from accessible downtown transportation, deaf access, blind information, service animals to information on disabled parking.

Training has also been addressed and the DNC volunteers are learning the appropriate ways on how to interact and communicate with disabled visitors during the convention. The training includes information on disability etiquette which is being provided by the ADA Regional Technical Assistance Center in Colorado Springs. A website pertaining to the needs of the disabled is being developed called "Accessible Denver" or "Mile High Accessibility" has been delayed a few weeks in order to provide the best website possible. Expect to see it up and running by the middle of August.

Currently in the works is a mobile wheelchair repair service. We are working on securing street spaces to park a mobile wheelchair repair service. This service will provide aid to anyone who is having problems with their mobility aides whether it be a wheelchair, walker, cane or crutches.

There has also been a big push to provide a bike program during the DNC week for the dis-



abled. In response to this effort accessible hand cycles will be incorporated into the mix. Allowing someone with limited leg use the opportunity to participate and ride around town using one of these hand cycles. Both of these initiatives have been spearheaded by David Kennedy with the DNC Host Committee.

As you can see there is a lot of information and people involved in making the DNC a good experience for people with disabilities visiting the downtown area. Coordinating these efforts between City departments, the Denver Office of Disability Rights, and the DNC Host Committee has been challenging but the outcome looks like it will set a standard by which all visitors and citizens will reap its benefits!.

## Ending Poverty ~ *Chaar Robert, Director of the Denver Women's Commission*



What if poverty were the latest thing? What if people were shocked to learn that 10.6% of their fellow Coloradans lived in poverty, with a family of four, for example, earning less than \$21,200? And that's not counting another 10% of Colorado households who earn above the poverty level, but don't earn enough to pay for basic needs--who are below self-sufficiency. Now that even the middle class feels like they are falling in poverty, perhaps we can get a fresh view of this issue.

Ending poverty is not impossible. We even know how. It is first and foremost a matter of political will and priorities. What if claiming the title to "the State with the Biggest Increase in the Childhood Poverty Rate" could shame us into action? In 2000, 9.2% of Colorado's children lived in poverty. In 2006, 15.7% of Colorado kids lived in poverty. In 2000, in Denver County, 14.9% of our children lived in poverty. In 2006, 29.4% of Denver kids lived in poverty.

Two new blueprints for how to end poverty have been released recently. "*From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half*" by the Center for American Progress is a compilation of national strategies to reduce poverty (former Mayor Wellington Webb served on the task force that developed the plan. In May 2008 the national *Campaign to Cut Poverty in Half in Ten Years* kicked off. With former Senator John Edwards, the lead organizations of this new campaign include Coalition on Human Needs, ACORN, Leadership Conference for Civil Rights and The Center for American Progress Action Fund. Their 12 strategies include:

- ◆ Raise and index the **minimum wage** to half the average hourly wage.
- ◆ Expand the **Earned Income Tax Credit** and **Child Tax Credit**.
- ◆ **Promote unionization** by enacting the Employee Free Choice Act.
- ◆ Guarantee **child care assistance** to low-income families and promote **early childhood education** for all.
- ◆ Create two million new "opportunity" **housing vouchers** and promote equitable development in and around central cities.
- ◆ Connect disadvantaged and disconnected **youth** with school and work.
- ◆ Simplify and expand Pell Grants and make **higher education accessible** to all residents of each state.
- ◆ Help former **prisoners** find stable employment and reintegrate into their communities.
- ◆ Ensure equity for low-wage workers in the **unemployment insurance** system.
- ◆ **Modernize means-tested benefits** programs to develop a coordinated system that helps workers and families.
- ◆ Reduce the **high costs of being poor** and increase access to financial services.
- ◆ Expand and simplify the Saver's Credit to encourage **saving** for education, homeownership and retirement.

Childhood poverty alone currently costs the nation an estimated \$500 billion per year. The total cost of implementing these recommendations is about \$90 Billion, or about ¼ of the costs of the tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003. It would cost less to end poverty than to continue current practice.

Looking at state level policies, the National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices issued their briefing "*State Strategies to Reduce Child and Family Poverty*" in June 2008. Recommended policy options include:

- ◆ **Expand safety-net** options for families in crisis- including family and medical leave, unemployment insurance, and welfare diversion
- ◆ **Increase the returns on work**- including creating or expanding state Earned Income Tax Credits.
- ◆ **Promote savings and asset accumulation**- including Individual Development Accounts, and mainstream banking opportunities.
- ◆ **Improve the consumer environment in poor neighborhoods** including curtailing predatory lending.
- ◆ **Increase access to education and training**, including financial aid and training opportunities for TANF and other low income clients.
- ◆ **Improve access to work supports**- including TANF, Child Care, the EITC, Child Health Plan, Medicaid and Food stamps.
- ◆ **Invest in programs for young children**- including pre-school and Nurse Home Visitation.
- ◆ **Strengthen family relationships**- including teen pregnancy prevention and responsible fatherhood programs.



Some States are beginning to act—forming anti-poverty task forces or commissions and establishing specific poverty reduction goals. In Colorado, Rep. John Kefalas formed the “Common Good Caucus” of legislators concerned about poverty and self-sufficiency. The Colorado Children’s Campaign published *Childhood Poverty in Colorado*. The “Pay Check Away” Tour documented the interrelationship of many issues throughout Colorado- housing, energy and food costs, health care, tax policies, etc. The All Families Deserve a Chance (AFDC) Coalition is questioning whether the TANF program (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) with its federal block grant to Colorado of \$140 million per year and its large reserves (exceeding \$100 million dollars) can be used to reduce the number living in poverty. The EITC Coalition is fighting for restoration of the State Earned Income Tax Credit which benefits low wage families in poverty. All these efforts and others are linked.

If you are interested in helping to end poverty, there is a community effort to match your interests. If you don’t know where to begin, email me at [chaer.robert@denvergov.org](mailto:chaer.robert@denvergov.org).

**CITY & COUNTY OF DENVER  
AGENCY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY  
RELATIONS**

**HOW TO REACH US**

**Agency for Human Rights &  
Community Relations**

Main Number - 720-913-8450,  
[www.denvergov.org/humanrights](http://www.denvergov.org/humanrights)

- ◆ **Denver Anti-discrimination Office**  
720-913-8458, [www.denvergov.org/discrimination](http://www.denvergov.org/discrimination)
- ◆ **Denver Office of Disabilities Rights**  
720-913-8480, [www.denvergov.org/disabilities](http://www.denvergov.org/disabilities)
- ◆ **Denver Women's Commission**  
720-913-8465, [www.denvergov.org/women](http://www.denvergov.org/women)
- ◆ **Office of Community Support**  
720-913-8471,  
[www.denvergov.org/communitysupport](http://www.denvergov.org/communitysupport)
- ◆ **Denver Office on Aging**  
720-913-8477, [www.denvergov.org/aging](http://www.denvergov.org/aging)



City and County of Denver  
Agency for Human Rights and  
Community Relations  
201 West Colfax Avenue, Dept. 1102  
Denver, Colorado 80202

**Upcoming Events**

***American Sign Language I Classes for Denver  
City/County Employees!***

Tuesday's, 11:00a.m. - 12:00p.m. or 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
**September 23 - October 28, 2008**  
Cost: \$20.00 for entire six weeks!  
To Register: [lorrie.kosinski@denvergov.org](mailto:lorrie.kosinski@denvergov.org); 720-913-8487  
Limited space available for each class, so register early!

***CPR Class for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People***

**Saturday, September 27, 2008**  
**1849 Emerson Street**  
**Denver, CO**  
Cost: Free

To register: [www.denvergov.org/oem](http://www.denvergov.org/oem), click on CERT Pro-  
gram then CERT Registration  
For more info: [lorrie.kosinski@denvergov.org](mailto:lorrie.kosinski@denvergov.org)  
720-913-8487, 720-913-8484 TTY

***Disability Awareness Week***

**October 8, Resource/Information Day**  
201 W. Colfax Avenue, Atrium  
**October 9, Sports & Recreation Day**  
201 W. Colfax Avenue, Atrium  
**October 10, Awards Breakfast**  
Colorado Convention Center