



CONNECTIONS

Challenge Barriers. Build Independence.

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2024



[Image Description: Three Connections consumers at an outdoor Connect with Friends event. Left: Wearing a hat, mask below chin, and blue zip-up jacket. Middle: Wearing a black sun hat, glasses, and a floral sleeveless blouse. Right: Wearing sunglasses on his head, an oxygen mask, and a blue Colorado State logo shirt.]

Who We Are.

Connections provides much needed services that assist people with disabilities to remain independent in their community. Connections is one of nine state certified Independent Living Centers providing services in Colorado since July 5, 1985.

Serving consumers in northeastern Colorado including Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, Weld, and Yuma Counties, we also provide additional services and programs in parts of Nebraska and Wyoming. Our services are no-cost and voluntary for our participants.

Connections challenges barriers, both physical and attitudinal, which restrict the rights and personal development opportunities of people with disabilities. Our mission is to promote the full inclusion and integration of people who live with all types of disabilities into all levels of society.

Our staff and board of directors include multiple persons who live with disabilities; through personal knowledge and experience, we are effective in promoting independent living and empowerment.

Core Services:

Advocacy, Independent Living Skills, Information & Referral, Peer Support and Transitions



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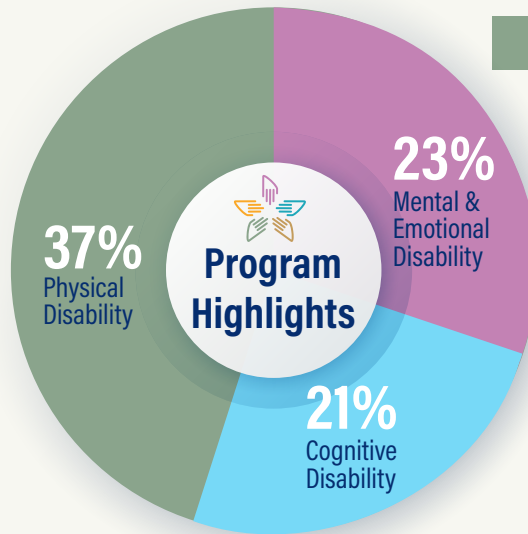
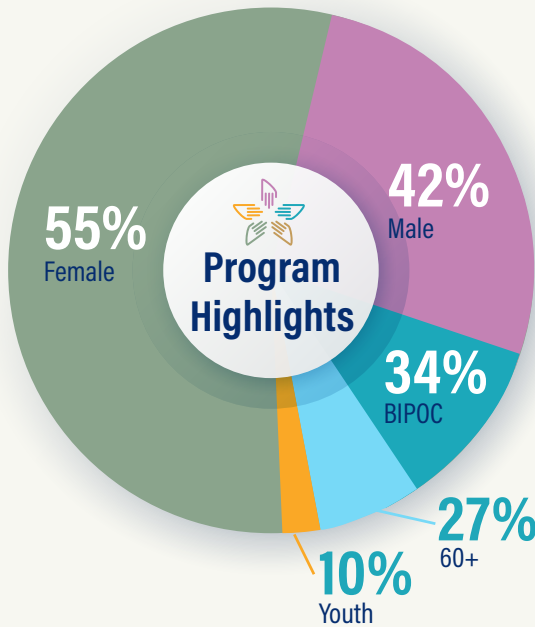
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2024

By the Numbers



543 Active Consumers

138 New Consumers

52 Closed Cases Due to Completed Goals Set

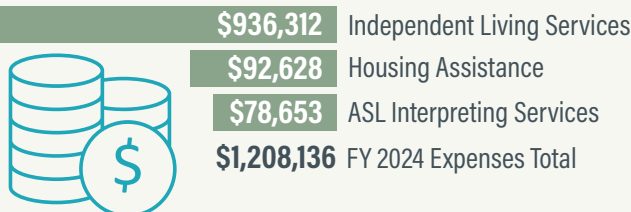
2,952 Individuals Assisted with Independent Living & Life Skills Training

120 Individual & Systems Advocacy

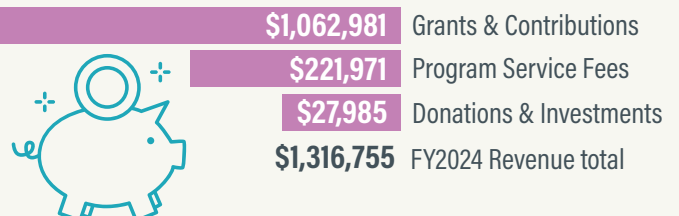
2,210 Information & Referral Services Provided



Expenses: Fiscal Year 2024



Revenue: Fiscal Year 2024





Fair Housing Forum

Oct. 25, 2023

Connections, in partnership with our sister Center for Independent Living (CIL) Disabled Resource Center and Denver-Metro Fair Housing Center (DMFHC), hosted a “Fair Housing Forum,” open to Larimer and Weld County residents and property management companies/owners. The Fair Housing Forum welcomed 23 participants, including tenants, property owners, property management professionals, and case managers. Presenters were John Paul Marosey from DMFHC, Kelly Wesolosky from Colorado Civil Rights Division (CCRD), and Ericka Welsh from Colorado Poverty Law Project. This event covered the importance of your rights as a tenant, requesting reasonable accommodations, and how to file a discrimination complaint with step-by-step instructions.



[Image Description: Group of people sitting at a long table watching a presentation about housing discrimination.]



[Image Description: Groups of people sitting at round tables watching John Paul Marosey from DMFHC present about fair housing rights.]



Weld Project Connect

Oct. 2023

Connections proudly participates in the annual Weld Project Connect event each October. This one-day event provides on-site health and human care services to adults and families facing challenges due to household and financial insecurity, job loss, health issues, and other critical life events. This year, 750 people attended the all-day event and received multiple services.



[Image Description: Team member AJ at Weld Project Connect. AJ has short dark hair and facial hair wearing a purple shirt.]



[Image Description: Team members Maria and Amber at Weld Project Connect. Maria has a dark skin tone, medium length dark hair, glasses, and a purple shirt. Amber has purple bangs, glasses, and is wearing a purple shirt.]



Disability Rights Advocacy Day at the Capitol

March 7, 2024

Since 2023, Connections has participated in Disability Rights Advocacy Day at the State Capitol. This event was created to give individuals with disabilities a direct platform to inform much-needed policy changes at all government levels. Independent Living Centers with disability advocacy organizations, and the Association for Colorado Centers for Independence, rally each year to bring forth people with disabilities to speak their truth about their experiences and explain how specific Colorado legislation can impact their lives. The event was held March 7, 2024 and brought Connections together with the Arc of Colorado, Center for People with Disabilities, Association of Colorado Centers for Independent Living, Alliance, PASCO, CU JFK Partners through the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Speaking for Ourselves Colorado, and the Rocky Mountain Orthotic & Prosthetic Coalition.



[Image Description: Connections CEO Rochelle Mitchell, in the light blue with Representative David Ortiz, in a suit and tie in a wheelchair with a microphone, speaking on a bill about prosthetics. Representative Mary Young is in the background with white hair, wearing a tan dress with a white long sleeve blazer.]

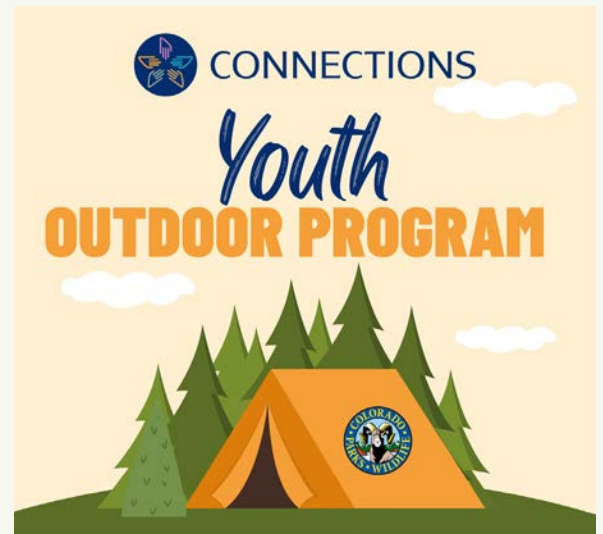


[Image Description: People standing and sitting at the Colorado State Capitol.]



[Image Description: Connections CEO Rochelle Mitchell with The Independence Center's CEO Indy Frazee. Rochelle has medium length brown curled hair and a light blue shirt with the Disability Rights Advocacy Day logo on it. Indy has shoulder length curly hair and red glasses and a blue shirt that reads The Independence Center.]

[Image Description: Connections Youth Outdoor Program flier art. Text that reads Connections, Youth Outdoor Program. Below the text is artwork with green trees behind an orange tent with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife logo on it.]



Youth Outdoor Program

June & July 2024

Connections wrapped up the second summer session of the Youth Outdoor Program, made possible by a generous grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. This program ensures accessible, outdoor adventures for youth living with disabilities in northern Colorado. This social workshop reached over 45 participants that visited 13 accessible locations. Some of those locations included Colorado State parks, Colorado Youth Outdoors, and Horsebuds, Inc. Activities included hiking, kayaking, basic survival skills courses and equine therapy. Connections partnered with Centennial BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services) to bring youth with all levels of disabilities to participate in day trips that included transport, lunch and snacks.



[Image Description: Group photo of participants from the Youth Outdoor Program. Youth are smiling or making a funny face while outside in the shade at Horsebuds, Inc.]

[Image Description: Participants sit around tables in a horse shoe design with Co-Executive Director Julie Reiskin, in the center, hosting the listening session.]



CCDC Listening Tour Sept. 4, 2024

Connections partnered with Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (CCDC) to host their annual Corner to Corner: Listening Tour in Weld County. Community partners like Arc of Northeast Colorado, Arc of Colorado and the Department of Human Services, alongside community members, brought their concerns to Julie Reiskin and Hillary Jorgensen, CCDC's Co-Executive Directors, about Medicaid, transportation issues, and other issues that are under federal control.

Medicaid transportation services were a huge topic of discussion. Other concerns included the wait time to get mental health care after an intake, the time it takes for people to transition from nursing homes, and the need to increase asset limits for those who receive Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) benefits.

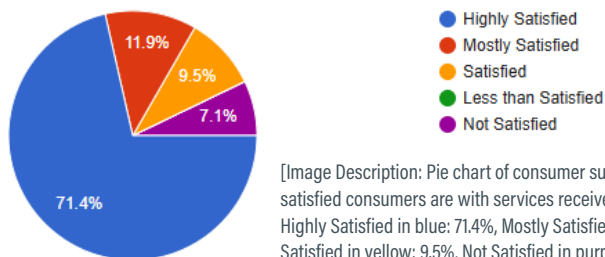


[Image Description: A participant talks to Co-Executive Directors, Hillary (left) and Julie (right).]

Graphic 1

Overall, how satisfied are you with the services you received at Connections?

42 responses

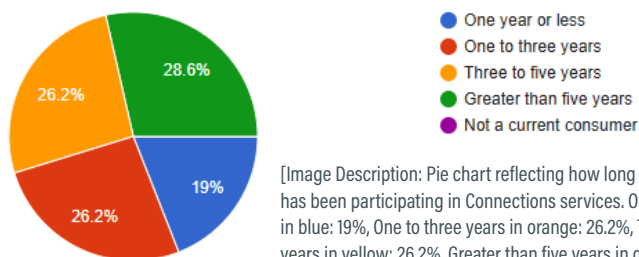


[Image Description: Pie chart of consumer survey results on how satisfied consumers are with services received at Connections. Highly Satisfied in blue: 71.4%, Mostly Satisfied in orange: 11.9%, Satisfied in yellow: 9.5%, Not Satisfied in purple: 7.1%]

Graphic 2

How long have you been a consumer with Connections?

42 responses

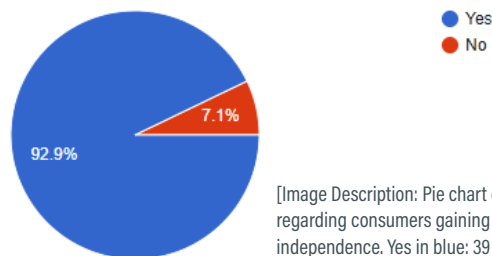


[Image Description: Pie chart reflecting how long a consumer has been participating in Connections services. One year or less in blue: 19%, One to three years in orange: 26.2%, Three to five years in yellow: 26.2%, Greater than five years in green 28.6%]

Graphic 3

Working with Connections has helped me be more independent or to maintain my independence.

42 responses



[Image Description: Pie chart of consumer survey results regarding consumers gaining and/or maintaining their independence. Yes in blue: 39 responses, No in red: 3 responses.]

Consumer Survey Results

Forty-two consumers participated in our annual consumer survey. This survey is used to measure how Connections performs with our consumers.

Participants have the option to remain anonymous for this survey or submit identifying information. We welcome all forms of feedback as we're always trying to enhance our programs, delivery of services, and making sure that Consumers are always in control of their Independent Living Plan and goals.

Questions were centered around consumer satisfaction levels with services (see *graphic 1*), how long someone has been a consumer (see *graphic 2*), and how a consumer found our services and if Connections has helped consumers be more independent and/or helped maintain their independence (see *graphic 3*).

Twenty-four consumers were referred to Connections by another agency, family member, friend, or a person with a disability. Three consumers received a flyer or mailer from Connections.

When asked what services consumers received from Connections, twenty-one consumers have received independent living services, twenty have received housing services, seven received technology services, seven received transition services and six consumers participated in peer support services.

As we are consumer-led, consumers provided feedback around wanting to learn more about independent living skills like job search skills, interpersonal communication skills, low impact workouts and chair yoga, time management skills, education/career goals, grocery shopping on a budget, and finance planning.

New Board Members



James Childress

[Image Description: James is a fair skinned man, with a shaved head, light blue eyes and a huge smile. He has a red goatee. James is wearing a pink button up shirt.]



Norma Barraydy

[Image Description: Norma has a smiling expression with medium-length, dark brown, curled hair. She has olive skin tone. She is wearing a black ruffled top with a white-beaded necklace. She is sitting in a blue chair holding a book.]

New Staff Members



Kimberly Kravig

[Image Description: Kimberly is a fair skinned woman with shoulder-length light brown hair with a straight face.]



Yendra Ruiz Tencza

[Image Description: Yendra; an olive skin toned woman with a warm smile wearing a light beige turtleneck sweater, outdoors. A blurred background of trees and a grassy field.]

Certified Benefits Enrollment Center

National Council on Aging

Connections is aware of the struggle some people with disabilities face while living on a fixed income or low-income. It's a monthly stress of wondering how they'll get by trying to cover all of the necessities like groceries, utilities, paying for medications, and covering other monthly costs. Many people require assistance to navigate the government programs available to help.

Benefits Enrollment Centers (BEC) focus on connecting older adults and adults with disabilities with limited incomes to core benefits such as; the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LEAP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps), Medicaid (Health First Colorado), Medicare Part D Extra Help, and the Medicare Savings Program.

Connections has steadily provided this service on a limited basis to the community. As a certified BEC, through funding made possible by the National Council on Aging, Connections will now provide a higher level of expert assistance.



The Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Program (NEEP)

Energy Outreach Colorado

This program from Energy Outreach Colorado (EOC) helps nonprofits in Colorado save energy and reduce costs. It provides funding to upgrade their buildings with things like better lighting, insulation, water-saving fixtures, and heating/cooling systems. EOC staff also help assess energy use and find the best improvements.



Technology & Cyber Security Infrastructure Grant Department of Local Affairs

These grant funds allow for a stabilized approach for equipment rotation, cyber security evaluation and the implementation of increased security measures both at our physical location and any other location where an employee can serve consumers. This also allowed Connections to contract with an expert Internet Technology/Cyber security firm, Rocky Mountain Tech Team, to perform a full audit of processes. Staff will work with subject matter experts to implement a plan of sustained security for our systems.

This includes maintaining HIPAA compliance, work-from-home audits, a full assessment and final report with recommendations, securing the infrastructure including a storage migration, new equipment, and a staff support policy.



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ConnectionsColorado.org



Collaborations

