

25 YEARS OF SERVING SUMMIT COUNTY

FIRC Family & Intercultural
Resource Center



The Families of Summit County

A Community that Cares

Scott and Gaylynn Parker spent their first 50 years of life in California raising three adopted children and giving them the best start to life that they could. They had never visited Colorado, but in 2010, Gaylynn got a job in the Front Range, and on a leap of faith they decided to make the move. They packed up the moving trucks and their dogs and headed east, seeing the Rockies for the first time. As they came through Frisco on the interstate, they remarked to each other, “Wow, it would be amazing to live here someday”.

Seven years later, the dream of living in Summit County became a reality when Scott was offered a job as a science teacher at Snowy Peaks High School. Gaylynn had previous experience teaching preschool and she was thrilled to have the opportunity to work as a PARA at Dillon Valley. The two decided they would make the move back to the place they had been awestruck by.

“This place is so beautiful,” said Gaylynn. “I have to pinch myself sometimes because I can’t believe we actually get to live here. It was meant to be.”

During their time in the Front Range, the couple had become parents of young children, once again, as they made a decision to raise their grandchildren Ella, age 9 and Charlotte, age 2. When they moved to Summit County, they quickly realized the financial struggles families face in this community.



“We pay \$3,000 a month in rent,” said Scott. “That’s 75% of our income. On a teacher’s salary, it makes it really hard to afford anything else.”

Scott and Gaylynn aren’t the only ones struggling to make ends meet. Most families in Summit County are spending 50% or more of their incomes on housing alone. The steep housing costs and limited rental market force many professionals, such as educators, to move elsewhere, where their dollars will go further. For all the difficulty in housing that the Parkers are experiencing, they know they want to remain in Summit County and continue providing a quality life for their kids.

“We are really hoping to win a spot in the second phase of the Smith Ranch Neighborhood,” said Scott. “If we can get our housing costs down, it will make everything so much easier.”

Parenting and Early Childhood Support

In addition to dealing with the high cost of living, Gaylynn and Scott were parenting two young children in a new place. One place that made the transition into a new town easier for the Parkers was Dillon Community Church. They were welcomed with open arms into a church family full of caring and kind people who have helped in many ways. Through the school community, Gaylynn heard about the Family & Intercultural Resource Center’s (FIRC) free home visitation program for parents with young children and she decided to sign up. The Parkers wanted to provide every opportunity for the girls to learn and be connected to resources. The family was placed in the Early Head Start program and for the last year they received weekly visits from Denisse at FIRC.

“We knew what it was like to parent in the 90’s but a lot has changed over the years and you can always learn more,” said Scott. “I feel like doctors and educators have learned so much more about a child’s development since then and why children act in certain ways. I don’t get frustrated anymore like I might have when I was a younger parent because now I can recognize that these behaviors are just the girls trying to explore the world.”

FIRC’s home visitation program utilizes the Parents as Teachers curriculum with the goal of teaching activities that parents and caregivers can use, in order to help with their child’s development. Connection is a big part of the program as it offers a chance to meet other families, play with other kids and connect to other FIRC programs and resources. The home visitation program also offers screening tools to assess child development. It was through this evidence-based screening that the Parkers realized Charlotte’s development was delayed. Denisse, the parent educator, was able to connect the family with Early Intervention for further testing. Charlotte was able to access an occupational and speech therapist and was able to qualify for free preschool, saving the family over \$600 each month.

“I couldn’t believe the support from FIRC and these other groups,” said Gaylynn. “Their expertise and care has been so beneficial to Charlotte. It’s amazing how everyone is looking out for the girls and helping our whole family succeed.”

As Denisse got to know the Parkers better, she was able to help with other areas that were making living in Summit County difficult. As the Parkers struggled to provide the basic needs for their family, they felt many of the needed amenities for two children seemed out of reach.

“Denisse helped us prepare for winter and helped us get winter jackets,” said Gaylynn. “She told us

about the rec center scholarship so the girls could take gymnastics and swim lessons. Denisse also helped us lower our energy bills. We had a very cold house and when the wind would blow, soot from the chimney would cover the living room.”

The family was facing a monthly energy bill of \$600 so Denisse connected them with FIRC’s Family Support program. Their situation qualified for an energy efficiency CARE grant through High Country Conservation, which allowed for some efficiency improvements and their energy bills were reduced. In addition to the help with costs, the Parkers finally have a warm place to come home to.

“It’s been a totally different feel from California. Everyone that we have worked with in Summit has been so friendly and genuinely happy to help us,” said Gaylynn. “We consider Denisse a friend and if we didn’t get involved with FIRC there is no way we would be able to live here. We feel very blessed to be able to raise the girls here and never want to leave.”



Photography by Priscilla Balderas with Love, Pris