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The 2017 Montana Legislative Session is now upon us. This session is shaping up to be a very busy one and not necessarily in a good way. Due to state budget constraints, many of the programs that Montanans with disabilities rely on every day are in jeopardy of having their budgets slashed. These programs include the Community First Choice program, HCBS Medicaid Waiver programs, Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living, Mental Health, and others.



As always, we will be following this legislative session closely and asking for your help to prevent budget cuts to these vital programs as well as to address serious issues in current programs, such as the Medically Needy Income Limit (spend down), provider rates and direct care worker wages, and affordable housing opportunities.

We cannot do this alone, we need your help. To stay up to date on the 2017 Montana Legislative Session please register to become an advocate on our action alert system. You can register on our website at www.summitilc.org or on our action alert portal, which can be found at <http://cqrcengage.com/summitilc>.

As an advocate, you will receive hearing notices and have opportunities to contact your legislators on issues that are important to the lives of Montanans with disabilities.

We will not have a full-time lobbyist at the 2017 Session so your help is needed more during this session than ever before. **We will be counting on you to help make a difference.**

Summit Has a New Look!

We are proud to introduce our all-new look! We have spent months designing and implementing several new logos (see below). The new logos bring a fresh look to Summit's name. Along with new colors and a redesign of logos, we completely renovated the Summit website with many new features to better serve our community. Check out our new website at www.summitilc.org to see what Summit has to offer and explore the new layout and new features.



Community Column

The Art of Advocacy - By Shelby Humphreys

Recent Facebook Post:

Sometimes advocating for your health care means staying diligent with meds, tracking symptoms, and recruiting coping skills. Sometimes it means reaching out, activating your support network, and contacting your care team. And sometimes it means showing up to your doctor's office unannounced, in tears, and staying until someone really listens, making them understand, and being taken seriously.

I posted that after an extremely hard day of managing my mental health. "You are my last stop before the emergency room," I blubbered to the receptionist. She stopped typing to hear my stunted words. She showed sympathy. "Hold on," she cooed. "I've got someone you can talk to."

Advocacy is an art. At best, it demands responses and awakens folks. At worst, it seems I'm using my disability to be an ass. I wish there was language for advocacy, but there isn't. Still, I can do things. Providers can do things. Hopefully, we meet in the middle. Unfortunately, that day at the doctor's was not so ideal.

A week earlier, I emailed for help. The new drug stopped working; symptoms returned. I expected a dosage increase. However, this was my doctor's his first work with my team, and he balked. A routine response: A missed a dose? (Nope.) Take meds at the same time daily? (Yep.) He was being diligent, but 20 years of questions makes this patient impatient. I don't get a pass that says, "She knows her condition; trust her instincts." In my next email, I pressed the issue: I'm dosing correctly. I need a med change.

Email works because I become nonverbal when symptoms spike. Plus, I have a fiery trigger from botched med trials. I'm engulfed in med problem panic attacks. I hoped my second email would cinch that dose increase.

The next day a different doc replied (one I would see in a week - for a pap smear). Are hoo-hoos part of mental health care now? The confusion didn't stop there. She reviewed the normal side effects of birth control and suggested I buy a pregnancy test. My husband had a vasectomy and my only swinging is between panic and depression. Obviously, she 'didn't read the previous emails. I had to advocate as clearly as possible, even teetering on the edge of panic.

I started my reply: "Really?! All I need is to wave a prego dipstick and someone listens?" Delete... Instead, I wrote, "I can be clearer about my symptoms." And I was. Sparing none of the gory details, I referenced my 5 years' work with their colleague in the behavioral health unit, our agreement to include my medical doctor, and the birth control issue. P.S. I'd like a dose increase. Panic struck the next morning. Hubby called, but the nurse 'needed permission to talk to him. I gave it; retching words out while I could. I eavesdropped as hubby updated her. "The doctor is out until Monday," she said. "Hold on over the weekend. He'll see your chart Monday and call you."

Monday a hurried office aid called. "There is no higher dose," she announced. "How about working with our behavioral unit?" "Before I could process the loop I had landed in, she rushed to finish. "You can follow up at your next visit." "Wait," I yanked her back. "Are you responding to my email or the call to the nurse?" "Oh," she said. "We don't do email."

Two hours later - a week after my first email - I showed up at their front desk. My unexpected visit meant I had to repeat the debacle 4 times with 4 people while sobbing and hiding my pain under a calm mask. I walked out with a higher dose.

Within 48 hours I was myself again. Within 72 I brainstormed advocating better. I wrote an Advocacy Action List. These tactics convey critical details in an accessible format in the provider's language so we can pursue healing right away.

Advocacy Action List

- Compile a master list of doctors' numbers, medications, symptoms, and possible actions. Make copies. When symptoms return, snag a copy and circle the relevant info.
- Organize circled info into SBAR - doctors' language. SBAR = Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation. Keep it short; 1-2 sentences max.
- Chart Symptoms. Data gets a provider's attention. Until a relationship forms, charts, graphs, dates, and lists can create trust.
- Rally people to chaperone an appointment. Another person in the room slows doctors down, so they listen better. Friends can present the SBAR, which makes it easier to sift through details and to decide on a solution.

What Providers Can Do

Providers must know their DMS and meds, but also understand the rollercoaster of mental health. They need to feel I'm being honest about my condition, but they should earn my trust as well. Here's what providers can do to build an effective relationship.

- Slow down and read the history. Every provider is super busy, but understanding the entire background is critical. In my fiasco, everyone was just trying to send that next email or answer that next phone call. That's how I ended up at their front desk in tears.
- Consult with colleagues. Much time and confusion can be averted by calling another provider who can fill in important details.
- Trust me. When I reach out - via any means - I've already struggled with even asking for help. I've checked in with care plans. I've recruited coping skills. Now I need your expertise.

For me, the hardest part about advocacy is that I need it most when I'm least able to do it well. I learned a lot this go-around. I know my body best. I'm the one who must make providers understand. I have to speak their language. After the storm passes, seeing me calm and well, they realize their trust was not in vain. For example, at that follow-up visit for my pap smear, the doctor started with a gentle check-in. I expressed my frustration. I stuck up for myself while remaining kind. As she reached for the pressure cuff, doc gave a confident nod. "Oh yeah, you just needed a higher dose."

EDITOR'S NOTE: After submitting the above article, the author wrote the provider describing her experience and requesting policy change. She received a response letter with an apology and gratitude for the feedback, which will be used to improve patient care.

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New Summit Staff

Jessica Vacca, Work Readiness & Employment Specialist, Missoula



I recently graduated from the University of Montana (UM) with a Bachelors of Social Work. My college internship placement was at Disability Services for Students at UM where I learned the importance of students' self-advocacy. In summer, 2016 I co-organized a transition camp at UM for high school students with disabilities called *Movin' On in Montana*. My focus there was on the importance of empowering students with knowledge of resources for success in post-secondary education. My introduction to formal Independent Living (IL) philosophy began when I started as a peer advocate at Summit in April, 2016 before being hired and starting as Summit's Work Readiness Employment Specialist in October, 2016.

I live in the Bitterroot Valley where I have a horse, dogs, and many more critters. In my free time I enjoy being outdoors bird watching, huckleberry picking, star gazing, and spending time with loved ones. I have been excited to join the Summit ILC team and look forward to developing and increasing Summit's involvement in employment with an emphasis on youth in transition.

Dayna Guffey, Independent living Specialist, Kalispell



Hello! My name is Dayna Guffey and I am so happy to be working at Summit's Kalispell Office as an Independent Living Specialist. Born and raised in the metro of Kansas City, I couldn't get to Montana fast enough after graduating from the University of Kansas! I earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology/Sociology and have a passion for working with people. My work history has included working in the hospitality industry, state offices in Helena, and eight years as a special education teacher. I have housed numerous homeless teenagers over the years and am proud to say many have stayed in touch. My daughter lives in Whitefish and my son is in Los Angeles. I make regular trips to Glacier, and Yellowstone holds a special place in my heart as well. For me, there is nothing more incredible than the mountains of Montana-hiking, camping, road-tripping and romping in the snow is a dream come true!

New BASE Staff



John Howard, BASE Coordinator

John works with youth between the ages of 13-24 finding job shadow experiences, mentors, and internships. He also facilitates BASE programs and teaches Communication through improv to high school students. BASE programs include: YODA (Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy), BALLS, Poetry Workshop, All Ages Comedy, 4Real Dance, Adaptive Yoga, Game Night, Podcasts, Base Improv, and Base Art Group

New BALLS Facilitators

BALLS (Building Advocacy and Leadership Learning Skills)

Lauren Venaglia, BALLS / BASE Art Group (BAG) Facilitator

Hello! My name is Lauren Venaglia. I run the Base Art Group with Cara Wherley and I am the art curator for BASE's art gallery. I'm excited about BASE's mission of building community for people with and without disabilities. Recently I've been hired by Summit as a BALLS facilitator and working with high school students on the topics of disability history and advocacy. I'd like to thank Jude and Michael for giving me this opportunity to be more involved in making our community a better place.



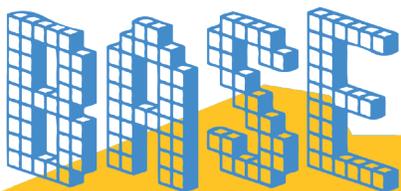
Kirsten Neihart, BASE Dance Teacher / BALLS Facilitator

Hello my name is Kirsten Neihart. I am the dance teacher at BASE and I also was hired by Summit Independent Living Center to be a BALLS facilitator. I just graduated from high school, am pursuing college, and looking forward to joining the workforce. I am happy for what I am involved in.

Tiara Lee, BALLS Facilitator

Hi, I am a 2016 graduate of Big Sky High School (BSHS). This is where I was first introduced to the BALLS classes. I knew that I wanted to work with people with disabilities after high school and was interested in working with Summit. After graduation, I talked with Mike Beers and my vocational rehabilitation counselor. In August I completed the BALLS facilitator training and have since co-facilitated in BSHS and Hellgate High.





725 West Alder - Suite 10 • 406-215-1080

725 West Alder, #10

BASE STANDS FOR HOME BASE, LIKE IN BASEBALL. IN LIFE, YOU NEED A BASE. THATS WHERE WE COME IN.

BASE Updates:

On Friday, December 9th, BASE held its 2nd Annual Showcase at The Roxy Theater. The show was intended to provide all participants an opportunity to share their creativity. The wide variety of performances included poetry, sketch comedy, dance, improv comedy, and stand-up comedy. All the acts were developed through weekly BASE workshops over the past few months. BASE Art Group also had a table set up to display and sell various art pieces.

Several children who have regularly attended the monthly all-ages comedy open mics at BASE participated in the showcase. "Working with everyone was the best thing ever," said Aidan Margolis, an 8-year-old who performed stand-up comedy.

John Howard, BASE Coordinator, plans to improve and expand this event in the future. Next year he looks to add more sponsors and include additional community partners. Thank you to everyone who participated in the showcase. It was a great night!

BASE EVENTS

- **Game Night (GN)** - Thursdays weekly, 2 p.m.- 6 p.m.
- **Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy (YODA)** - 2nd & 4th Wed monthly, 3:30 p.m. - 6 p.m.
- **Base Art Group (BAG)** - Fridays weekly, 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.
- **Adaptive Yoga** - Wednesdays 4 p.m. - 5 p.m.
- **BASE Improv** - Thursdays 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Programs at BASE are open to everyone – all ages and all abilities.

For more information visit www.basemissoula.org

CLASSIFIED ADS

2014 OpenBook book reader
Never been used and has the camra with it asking \$750 OBO. Contact Larry at ketch1969@gmail.com or 406-633-4036

Summit Pinnacle Chair stair lift
Gently used, works great. 2 remotes. Straight line - mount rope L. Pick up in Missoula. \$1,300 OBO. Call Diane at 360-4061.

Garaventa Super-Trac Portable Wheelchair Lift for stairs. Great for accessibility where lifts or ramps cannot be installed. Can accommodate all types of wheelchairs. Purchased new for \$12,000 and used only a few times. Will sell for \$5,000 OBO. Contact Jacob Francom, Troy Public Schools, jfrancom@troyk12.org, (406) 295-4520.

Acorn Stair lift
For going up to 6 stairs while seated. \$750 OBO. Call John at 546-7003.

To get listed contact Tyler Stosich at (406) 728-1630 or email tstosich@summitilc.org.

Or, list and find items on the MonTECH exchange:

<http://montech.ruralinstitute.umn.edu/mtdb/>

Summit is funded in part under an agreement with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Any statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MISSOULA

700 SW Higgins, Suite 101

Missoula Office Closed

- January 2, 16 February 20

Summit Orientation

- First Friday monthly, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

SSA Orientation

- Jan 13, Feb 10, Mar 10, Apr 14 from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

- Jan 24, Feb 21, Mar 21, Apr 25 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

People First

- Jan 4, Jan 18, Feb 1, Feb 15, Mar 1, Mar 15, Apr 5, Apr 19 from 4 p.m. - 5 p.m.

WRAP - Wellness Recovery Action Plan

- Jan 9 - Apr 3, Mondays weekly 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Working Well with a Disability

- Jan 10 - Feb 28, Tuesdays weekly 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Work Soft Skills

- Jan 12 - Mar 2, Thursdays weekly, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Alzheimer's Support Group

- Second Wednesday monthly, 12 p.m. - 2 p.m.

Blind Low Vision Support Group

- Second Tuesday monthly, 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Epilepsy Support Group

- First Monday monthly, 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Spring break U of M and Missoula schools, Mar 20 - 24

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at Summit's Conference Room

700 SW Higgins, Suite 101, Missoula

Call Kathy, (406) 728-1630, for more information or to register.

RONAN

124 Main St./PO Box 434

Ronan Office Closed

- January 2, 16 February 20

Communication & Assertiveness Class

- Starts Jan 5, Thursdays weekly, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Beginners Yoga

- Thursdays weekly, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m.

Activities (arts, crafts, card/board games, darts, foosball, movies)

- Thursdays weekly, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Hot Soup and Bread

- Thursdays Weekly, Hot by 12 p.m. (Please take part in activity)

UPCOMING EVENTS

KALISPELL

1203 Highway 2 W., #35



Kalispell Office Closed

- January 2, 16 February 20

Social Security Orientation

- Second and fourth Wednesdays monthly.

Please call 257-0048 ext. 141, to register and get location.

YODA

- Youth group meets once a month.

Living Well with a Disability

- Call Lynae to sign up.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at Summit's Conference Room:

Gateway Community Center

1203 Hwy 2 West, Kalispell

Call Lynae, (406) 257-0048, ext. 142, for more information or to register.

HAMILTON

299 Fairgrounds Road #4

Hamilton Office Closed

- January 2, 16 February 20

Social Security Orientations

- First Tuesday Monthly 1 p.m.- 3 p.m.

- Please call the Hamilton office at 363-5242 to sign up

Man Cave Cookout

- Beginning spring/summer, Third Thursday monthly

People First

- Tuesdays weekly, 3 p.m.- 4 p.m.

Women on the Move

- Third Wednesday monthly, 1p.m.- 3p.m.

TGIAD - Thank Goodness It's Activity Day

- Fridays, 1 p.m.- 3 p.m.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:

The Refuge, 317 N 3rd St., Hamilton

Call Becky or Mary, (406) 363-5242, for more information or to register.



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Building Awareness, Advocating Change

THE SUMMIT INDEPENDENT

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This publication is available in alternative format on request. Please call 1 (800) 398-9002.

2017 SOCIAL SECURITY COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENTS

Social Security (Retirement and Disability):
.3% increase

Medicare Part B Monthly Premium:
\$134 (or higher depending on your income)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI):
.3% increase
Individual - \$735 Couple - \$1103
Essential Person - \$368

Substantial Gainful Activity Guidelines:
Blind - \$1950
Non-blind - \$1170

Trial Work Period Threshold:
\$840

For more information on
Medicare changes:
www.medicare.gov

For more information on adjustments:
www.ssa.gov/cola

To check or create your online Social
Security account:
www.ssa.gov/myaccount

Remember, you can always sign up to receive our newsletter by email by contacting: missoula@summitilc.org