

The Summit Independent

Western Montana's Disability News and Views



Summit Independent Living Center, Inc. 700 SW Higgins Ave., Suite 101, Missoula, MT 59803

January 2008

A New Year Means New Change

The start of the New Year is a time to reflect on the past, but more importantly it is a time to move forward. 2007 is now gone with the wind and now we need to get used to writing 2008 instead of 2007 when we date our checks and whatever else.

With the new year also comes many changes both here at Summit (many of which you will read about throughout this newsletter) and with programs such as Social Security. The following is a list of **2008 Social Security changes** as well as a couple of other notable items:

- Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits will increase 2.3 percent in 2008. The standard SSI payment will increase from \$623 in 2007 to \$637 for individuals and from \$934 in 2007 to \$956 for couples in 2008.
- The 1619b annual standard threshold amount for Montana will increase to \$28,212 for 2008.
- The Trial Work Period (TWP) monthly threshold for 2008 is \$670/month.

- The Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) monthly threshold for 2008 is \$940/month for non-blind individuals and \$1,570/month for blind individuals.
- The Medically Needy Threshold for Medicaid eligibility remains at \$595 after the \$50 increase that occurred on 8/1/07. This is the amount that you will need to spend down to if you receive SSDI and you need Medicaid.
- Information about Medicare changes for 2008 can be found at www.cms.hhs.gov.

The turning of the calendar also means MYLF recruiting season; this is the time of year that the **Montana Youth Leadership Forum** is charged with finding a new batch of youth with disabilities (grades 10-12) with leadership potential to attend the forum in July. For Mike Beers this means ROAD TRIP!! He'll be hitting the road covering most of western Montana to give MYLF presentations in the High Schools. Mike's always looking for help too so if you know any high school youth w/ disabilities who might be interested contact Summit and let us know or you can visit the MYLF website www.montanaylf.org.

In other youth news, Travis Hoffman and Mike Beers will be taking our newly formed, formatted, edited, and overall tuned-up **BALLS** (Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills) curriculum into the High Schools to empower and educate young people with disabilities.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!! Help Summit to make 2008 a truly great year and read within.

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Spotlight On . . .



Justin Roe - Summit Board Member

Hello, my name is Justin Roe and I am from Hamilton, Montana. I am currently 19 years old and I am a little person. I graduated from Hamilton High School in the spring of 2007 and I plan on attending the University of Montana starting next fall. I did not start this last fall because I wanted to take a year off so that I could recover from hip replacement surgery.

Two years ago, while I was still in high school, I had the opportunity to attend the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) in Helena, Montana. While I was there my peers elected me on to the MYLF leadership team and as a result, I have been given the opportunity to do some traveling and engage in various speaking events.

One day while I was sitting at home kicking back, surfing through the channels, and tipping back a tall one (Mountain Dew that is) I received a call from Mike Mayer. Mike asked me if I would be interested in serving on the Summit Board of Directors as a youth representative.

After thinking about this long and hard (oh I would say a minute or two, if that) I said yes and now here



I am, wondering what I've gotten myself into. Kidding of course!

Since being on the board and in between surgeries and recuperation time, I have attended a couple of board meetings and I am learning more and more about Summit and how the organization operates.

After having participated in these two experiences, MYLF and the Summit Board of Directors, I feel that I have gained the knowledge and the motivation I need to be a part of the disability rights movement and I hope that one day I will be able to travel around the country and teach people about disabilities and all that I have learned.



Missoula Assertiveness Training

Here at Summit, an array of classes are offered geared towards enhancing the independent living skills of those who are interested in improving certain aspects of their lives. These 25 modules confront a wide-range of challenges and are designed to increase self awareness, community awareness, and the integration of self into community. Managing the difficulties of living with a disability while realizing ones value to their community is not easy for many to accept. It's much easier to mute ones importance and accept being a burden to others, but this is not the correct assumption. Everyone can and must contribute to the greater good because without all, that good will never be as great.

The class in progress right now is assertiveness training. Currently, there are eight people who are enrolled. The class focuses on how to advocate for ones rights without infringing on the rights of others. From class discussion, we have determined that achieving this balance is far from simple. At times

we have been passive and have let others walk all over us; and at other times we have been aggressive and have done the walking. It's probably impossible to find a balance between the two all of the time and be purely assertive in every situation, but it should always be the intention of all. The collective well-being depends on this. If we all can strive to be assertive, issues will be dealt with and problems will be solved in a manner that is dignifying for all.

As we move into 2008, Summit will be doubling its effort to bring people together on a common ground and our upcoming classes, along with the peer training in the summer, will provide a good atmosphere for people to discuss what issues matter most to them. So come and join Summit in one of our many available classes and let's pursue the greater good together.

~Darren Larson

Summit Staff Addition

I 'Serenity' - Independent Living Specialist

Hi, I am Serenity and I am the new Independent Living Specialist for Ravalli County. I have lived in the Bitterroot since 1998 moving here after 14 years in San Francisco Bay Area and growing up in the Phoenix area. I am a graduate of Arizona State University with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Business and a Master's degree in Industrial Engineering. This summer I married Mark Kosterman, a long time Bitterrooter, and we live 5 miles northwest of Hamilton.

Since 1991, I have worked in various aspects of "Human Potential," advocating for people who are elderly, people with disabilities, women, children, singles, and people of different color, cultures and capabilities. I feel privileged to be with Summit coordinating their various services, teaching groups and individuals, and assisting our consumers with whatever they need. I have an open door policy and I welcome you to call or stop in the Hamilton office anytime.



2009 Legislative Priorities

A new year also means that the next legislative session is getting even closer. That is why Summit Independent Living Center is working with the Statewide Independent Living Council as well as the other Independent Living Centers in being proactive and preparing for the 2009 legislature now. The following is a list of legislative priorities that have been identified and that we will be focusing on throughout the year and into the legislative session.

- Establish a **Medicaid buy-in** option in Montana so consumers have an avenue for maintaining Medicaid coverage after employment
- Support implementation of **Health Care for Healthcare Workers** initiative to provide health insurance benefits for personal assistants
- Advocate for increased funding to restore personal assistance services cut back during past legislative sessions
- Secure additional state funding to equalize the core funding of Montana's CILs and to expand IL services across the state
- Change state law in Medically Needy program to tie **spend down limit** to annual SSI level
- Establish a **Disability Education for All** curriculum in the public schools
- Secure additional funding for youth programs including transition services and services that foster independent living and leadership skills

If you are interested in becoming involved in any of these topics please let Travis Hoffman know by e-mailing him at thoffman@summitilc.org. You can also join the **Montana Independent Living Action Alert System** and be kept up to date on local, state, and national issues that affect people with disabilities by sending an e-mail to MTILActionAlert-subscribe@yahogroups.com or by letting Travis Hoffman know you would like to be added to the Action Alert System.

Missoula County By Jude Monson

I am excited to share with you our 2008 plans and who the trailblazers will be in the Missoula office for this new year!

Marsha Cummerford: Summit Secretary

Marsha is probably the first person you will talk to if you call or come into our office. Marsha is a caring person and will listen to your needs so that she can make sure that you are either given the initial information you need or referred to the right staff person who can assist you with your question(s). If someone at Summit can not answer your questions, or if we don't have the resources to assist you, we will lead you to the community resource that can. Marsha also has a very creative side to her, so when you come to our office you may notice the little ways in which she makes our office and conference room welcoming and inviting!

Darren Larson: Independent Living Specialist (ILS)

Darren is one of the newest professionals to become involved in the Montana disability movement, his degree is in political science. Darren is very mindful of what needs to get done in our community and balances this with his keen sense of humor. He is available to assist you with information about the local, state and national resources you may be looking for. He is also presenting to local schools about disability awareness and facilitating the current Assertiveness Class. Darren will also be one of your presenters for the upcoming communication class and Beginning Peer Advocacy Training. Darren is very excited about assisting students with youth transition questions.

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Andrea Dahl: Independent Living Specialist (ILS)

Andrea has moved from a Peer Advocate to People First Advisor and ILS role. Andrea's experience and knowledge of local resources has been invaluable to folks who stop by our office with questions about how to fill out all that massive paperwork you receive in the mail. Andrea meets with over a dozen local People First members on a regular basis as they plan their activities and decide what they want to advocate for. One of the exciting connections with our national People First Membership and Montana Advocacy Program is that they are leading the charge to change the Social Security loss of benefits for people with disabilities who want to become legally married. Stay tuned for news on this challenging and exciting advocacy progress. Contact Andrea if you want to know more about how the marriage issue is being addressed.

Travis Hoffman: Advocacy Coordinator

Travis just finished a report for the State's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant which focused on gathering information from people with disabilities who want to work and not lose their health care benefits. This will be used to show the need for a Medicaid Buy-in program which is one of the major legislative priorities that Travis will be involved with in preparation for the 2009 legislation. If you are not on our Action Alert email system and you are interested in understanding what the statewide IL legislative agenda is as well as receiving other disability related issues, contact Travis and get involved in making a change in Montana! In addition to Travis' original role, he will now be taking responsibility for the Summit ILC website at www.summitilc.org. You will find out not only about our services and legislative preparation, but what disability training and advocacy events are coming up in the future! Travis and Michael Beers will also be taking the newly upgraded disability curriculum called Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills (BALLS) out to our local high schools.

Lorna Palin: Self Direct Personal Assistance Services (SDPAS) and Big Sky Bonanza Program (BSB)

Lorna is the coordinator of the Self Direct Personal Assistance Services program as well as one of the Independence Advisors for the BSB service as well! Lorna is a conscientious provider of personal assistant services and was instrumental in the development of Summit's new safety program that ensures that our consumers are receiving quality care in a safe and appropriate manner. Lorna has a new assistant, **Joline Walker (part time)**, whose experience and desire to work in the disability movement will help Summit to be a more efficient and focused organization as we continually grow.

Libby Miller: Financial Manager & Sally Wahl: Assistant Bookkeeper

Libby and Sally work in tandem to make sure operations at Summit Independent Living Center keep chugging along. Without these two, work at summit would simply come to a standstill. Together, they worked to ensure that the bills are paid, that staff members receive a paycheck, and that the books are kept. They also handle all of the Medicaid billing for the Self-Directed Personal Assistant Services Program as well as maintain Summit's data management system; the database where all of our service information that is used to do our year end reporting to the federal government is kept.

Jude Monson: Program Manager

It has been great to have Mike "back in the saddle" in our Missoula office and leading our center with his brand of mentorship as our executive director. I will continue to advocate along with Travis and the rest of the staff, peers and board members for the 2009 legislative issues such as encouraging the BSB program (that I have just spent a couple of years helping develop!) to expand with the intent that it remains an advanced consumer direct personal assistance and waiver program throughout Montana. I also will follow up with the five Medicaid related concerns that the consumers brought forth at the Community Service Bureau conference. I will continue to coordinate the Missoula Senior Companion program along with Andrea's assistance with the consumers. I will work with the Rural Institute's Women and Abuse Council and the Missoula Aging Services Aging and Disability Resource Center as well. It is with gratitude and excitement that I get the opportunity to continue to work directly and along side the best staff, both in the Missoula office as well as Summit's satellite offices.

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Ravalli County

By Joanne Verwolf

Ravalli County has a very high senior and disabled population and remains one of the fastest growing counties in the state.

Summit services in the Ravalli office are widely used, receiving referrals by word of mouth and from other social service agencies. We serve many consumers in accessing needed benefits, programs, or services, such as Social Security disability, affordable housing, energy assistance, Medicare/Medicaid, and personal assistance services, to name a few. We also field many phone calls from individuals and local agencies seeking information on resources available in this area.

We have a small, yet active, group of **peer advocates** who stay abreast of community issues that may impact people with disabilities. They consistently advocate for accessibility and are currently targeting medical facilities, including physician, dentist, optometrist, etc. They are also working with the Fair Manager and County Commissioners in improving our Ravalli County Fairgrounds. As we all know, change is slow, but we must persevere. The peer advocates and Bitterroot People First, along with the U.S. Forest Service, have secured funds to develop an accessible river trail near the site of Spring Gulch Campground south of Hamilton.

The **Bitterroot People First** is another active group, contributing to many community events, as well as getting together among themselves for fun social activities. They recently hosted a Christmas party for the Missoula People First members and a great time was had by all. They are advocates as well, having recently written a letter to the editor asking that drivers be "good neighbors" and look carefully before backing up their vehicle or pulling out of a parking spot and into traffic.

The **Ravalli County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)** continues to work on transit issues to improve and expand public transportation to Missoula and around the valley. TAC members have participated in the Five Valley's Regional Transit Study forums, have contributed to the development of the local transit coordination plan, and continue to advocate for legislative change to remove transit barriers and ensure all types of passenger service is safe, reliable, dependable, and accessible to all.

In the coming year, we will be focusing on outreach to youth, setting up classes and informational forums at **local high and middle schools**. We look forward to having several student leaders identified to attend the Montana Youth Leadership Forum next July in Helena.

We also provide outreach to the community, for example, at the Bitterroot Spring Fair we have a booth with a different "theme" each year. In the past we have addressed such issues as accessibility, public transportation, and dispelling myths about people with disabilities. We have also provided information on benefits and resources, including Medicare, adaptive equipment/assistive technology, building an accessible home, and the **Regional Access Mobility Program (RAMP)**. Our theme for the 2008 fair will be Accessible Recreation. We invite you to stop by on April 12th.

Within our small community, the extensive networking and collaboration with other agencies is a bonus to the consumers we serve, coordinating services to enhance their quality of life. From the very beginning, Summit has been an active participant in bringing the annual **Ravalli County Caregivers Conference** to the Bitterroot. This conference provides recognition, support, and education to those providing personal assistance, which often provides the consumer the opportunity to remain independent in their own home. Currently, we are in the planning stages for the next Caregivers Conference to be held in the spring of 2008.

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Mike Mayer: Executive Director

Mike will be busy in 2008 with both administrative and advocacy priorities. On the administrative level, he will be working with the staff and board of directors to finalize Summit's new three-year plan, develop ongoing funding sources for the RAMP program, and working to update the policy and procedure manuals. On the advocacy front, he will be very involved with the 2009 legislative initiatives along with ongoing transportation advocacy in Missoula and Sanders Counties. Judging by the long list of activities described in this newsletter, 2008 is shaping up to be a very busy, and hopefully productive year!

Lake/Sanders County By Gary Stevens

First, hope everyone had a great holiday(s) and this upcoming New Year brings nothing but goodness though-out the year for you and your families. As we know here in Montana the weather changes so rapidly from cold to hot, from rain to snow, from summer to winter in a blink of an eye. It seems at times change can occur so rapidly but again at times it seems to take things forever to change—as slow as a turtle. Especially when you are attempting to seek services or benefits from agencies or the government with all the paperwork/red tape you have to go through it seems it takes forever. Mother nature can change so quickly but man made polices and procedures seem to take forever when you need services now. Remember “Summit ILC is an **Advocacy & Resource Center for People with Disabilities.**” If you have any questions regarding consumer services or community services I urge you to call and ask. If you need help with Housing issues, Energy assistance, Medicare/Medicaid, Social Security Benefits and much more please call. Sometimes there is no simple answer because of the complex laws and polices regarding benefits and/or services. Even a small error in the paperwork or not following

the correct process can be devastating and set you back for months. The application process can cause endless confusion and leave you with more questions than answers. Let us at Summit be the ‘bridge’ to provide you clear direction and assistance with your concerns and issues with the benefits/services you are seeking.

During this past fall Summit ILC conducted a survey in eight (8) western Montana counties that Summit provides services in. In **Lake County** twelve (12) surveys were completed in **Sanders County** only three (3) were done. From the eight (8) counties: Lincoln, Flathead, Sanders, Lake, Mineral, Missoula, Granite, and Ravalli what stood out from my perspective was people wanted more awareness-information about the types of services we provide. Information is knowledge, I believe in the last Census the percent of population twenty-one (21) years and over with a disability in Lake County was 24.1% and in Sanders County was 29.3%. This would equal to appropriate about 4,309 people in Lake County and 2,169 people in Sanders County again according to the last Census. Now either people don't know about

Summit ILC services or their personal needs are being met though their own advocacy or by some other service provider. It is your personal choice & preference to ensure that appropriate services are being delivered to you. We at Summit ILC wish to ensure that ongoing services and follow up services are maintained once you initiate any type of service though an agency. We encourage individual independence and want to help to ensure the highest levels of quality services are being provided.

If you want to help others as an advocate we can provide you with **peer training** so you can provide others with emotional support and guidance. If you want more personal skills training for yourself Summit ILC can offer assertiveness, communication, self advocacy, and or self-esteem training with group classes or one on one session. Summit has a lot to give you just need to call or tell a friend about our services remember we work with ...people with disabilities through advocacy, education, and the advancement of civil rights. If you have any questions give your local office a call. Thanks, Gary

Montech - Sensory Additions

MonTECH, Montana's statewide AT program, has added new hearing and vision devices to the inventory available to all Montanans on our MATP Equipment Loan website.

Our newly acquired Nano XP and BigNano XP Digital processing hearing aids, which must be programmed by an audiologist, change high frequency speech

sounds to lower frequencies to make consonants more audible. The MyLink multi-frequency FM system with neckloop receiver amplifies speech from a speaker's microphone to hearing aids with telecoil options or standard headphones. The versatile LightSPEED 705iR amplification system provides a wireless microphone for a main presenter to wear and another to pass around

which transmit to a tabletop receiver/speaker to amplify sound.

The new UbiDuo Communicator allows deaf individuals to communicate personally and directly with other non-signing individuals as long as both are literate. This wireless, battery-powered device includes two units with keyboards and digital displays

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Flathead County

By Flo Kiewel

Last year was a busy year for the Kalispell office. We have seen a steady increase in referrals and walk-in consumers. In addition to the daily consumer work, staff keep busy in the community by serving on committees, attending networking meetings, volunteering at the flu clinic and attending conferences.

The Kalispell office offers services in several areas. **Benefits Assistance** provides help to consumers negotiating the application process for Social Security, food stamps, housing, and other benefits. The amount of paperwork involved can be overwhelming to people in already stressful circumstances, but the benefits can be lifesaving.

Work Incentives Advising is also available for people who are working, or would like to work, while on Social Security benefits. Flo is the Community Work Incentives Counselor specializing in assisting individuals to understand how work activity will change their benefits.

Workshops that are provided include: "Living Well with a Disability" and "Self Esteem for Women with Disabilities". These workshops are offered at least once yearly and are free to consumers. You can get your name on the waiting list at any time by calling the Kalispell Summit office.

Sign Language classes are also offered. These classes are taught by Leo Kanning either in a group, or one-on-one. There is a fee for sign language classes, but it is minimal.

The Kalispell office serves a large population of deaf individuals. Office employees are able to communicate in sign language with deaf consumers. We have a **video phone** available which consumers can use to make phone calls. Recently the office acquired a **Ubi-Duo** communication device with funds donated by Flathead Electric Coop. This device may be borrow by individuals with disabilities that challenge

communication for an appointment with their doctor, dentist, or other professional. The Ubi-Duo allows two people to communicate by typing in an open "chat" format between two devices.

Summit staff and Peer Advocates in Kalispell are available to give **disability awareness trainings** to groups or classes. Trainings may include panel presentations by people with a variety of disabilities, hands-on activities, general disability etiquette or presentations about specific disabilities.

Summit is always willing to sponsor disability **support groups** or **club activities**. If you are interested in joining or starting a group, Summit staff may be able to assist you.

Call the Kalispell Summit office today at 257-0048

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enabling both parties to see messages typed by either. The UbiDuo also functions as a portable TTY, providing deaf users with telephone access when connected to a standard telephone.

Our newly acquired Amigo, Nemo, Compact Plus, and Opal are a variety of portable video magnifiers for users with low vision. The devices offer a range of magnification, contrast, and function settings to meet the various needs of low vision users. The Sara is a stand-alone scanning and reading device

that reads scanned text aloud to those unable to see to read. For those with low vision, the Sara can connect to a computer monitor to display scanned text with type style, color, size, and spacing options.

All Montanans can access MonTECH's website at <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/mtdb/> to view these and all MATP Equipment Loan items, create an account, search for a specific item, and request a loan. Equipment is shipped to borrowers free of charge for trial before acquisition, and borrowers are asked only to pay return shipping expenses and complete a 4-question survey.

Do you own AT devices that you don't use? Is there a specific AT device that you wish to obtain? MonTECH's online Equipment Exchange platform may help you sell something or find what you are seeking. This free service provides a consumer marketplace for the sale, exchange, or giveaway of any type of AT or adaptive mobility device or vehicle. Please visit the above website to access this service, sell items you own, or view others for sale, giveaway, or exchange.

Call MonTECH at 243-5751, 877-243-5511 or visit us online at <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/>

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See our website at www.summitilc.org for more ads

- ◆ **Three Wheel Rascal.** Used only a few times, like new. Upholstered seat with armrests. Very Comfortable. Easily breaks down for loading, or use the ramp that comes with it. Two batteries included. \$4,000 OBO. Must Sell. Call 837-3341.
- ◆ **2005 Jazzy 1103 Ultra Power Wheelchair.** Paid \$12,000 asking \$6,000. Call 721-0671
- ◆ **Various Items:** Everest & Jennings wheelchair \$400; Power standing Recliner \$200; 5" elevated toilet set \$15; Bath bench \$30; and many more. Call 406-251-4448.
- ◆ **Free:** 1990's era working wheelchair lift in a Ford Aerostar van. Call Bill 406-444-5340
- ◆ **Quickie V121** power wheelchair. Black, battery cases, headrest, oxygen tank holder, backpack. Rarely used. \$1,000 OBO. 406-531-7662 or 406-543-4521
- ◆ **2005 Buick LeSabre w/** passenger disability seat. Seat turns and slides out for better access. 13,000 miles. Excellent condition. Reduced to \$20,000. Call 406-728-2642
- ◆ **Quantum 1107** power wheelchair. Brand new, never used. Paid \$6200 for it, will sell for \$2500. Call 406-728-2642.
- ◆ **To Give Away:** 1) Padded Tub Bench, 2) Roho cushion w/various accessories 3) PERS Emergency Phone Dialer, made by Radio Shack (never used). Niki Hm#: (406) 273-9192.
- ◆ **Pride Mobility Go Go Elite Traveler.** One year old, used during the summer only. Black, excellent condition. Worth about \$1500, will sell \$700 OBO. Call 406-862-0755.
- ◆ **Invacare Storm TDX 3** power wheelchair. Purchased for \$5500 will sell for \$2800 OBO. Seat Size: width 18", depth 16". Delivery negotiable. Call (406) 752-6561.
- ◆ **2002 Dodge Grand Caravan** rear entry wheelchair van, lowered floor conversion with manual rear ramp, all q-straint equipped, silver exterior, gray interior, 74k miles, over 40k new, must sell \$12,900.00 obo. 270 634 1466 or rswilkerson@windstream.net
- ◆ **1990 Jazzy-mini deluxe** (purple) wheelchair. Never used outdoors and in excellent condition. Power elevator, new batteries. \$2200. Call 406-777-3550
- ◆ **Pride Revo 3 wheel scooter** purchased new 10/2004 for \$1951. Has not been used since 9/2006. Adjustable seat, armrests, and steering column. Includes cover, front and rear baskets. Price: \$750.00. Call (406) 544-8534 in the evenings or weekends.
- ◆ **Rascal** with extra batteries, asking \$300. In good shape, batteries all work. You can call (406) 251-3501. Missoula area.
- ◆ **Electric Mobility Scooter** for sale - Four wheel heavy duty model 305, 500 lb. capacity. Excellent condition, comes with trailer hitch mount electric lift. Cost \$ 5000 new, asking \$2000 or best offer. (406) 862-3960 or 862-2345
- ◆ **Redman power standup wheelchair.** Large size 200-250lbs. Used for 4 months. \$15,000 OBO. 903-434-9463
- ◆ **Light weight heavy duty** manual wheelchair. Used 2 months. Holds 425 lb weight. Asking \$500 OBO. Call (406) 270-2203.
- ◆ Have something you want to sell or give away? Are you looking for a hard piece of equipment? If so, list it here by contacting Travis at 406-728-1630 or thoffman@summitilc.org and on the Montech item exchange website at <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umn.edu/mtdb/>

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Ravalli People 1st & Bitterroot Therapeutic Event

The **Bitterroot Valley People First** chapter had a lot of fun decorating the conference room of the Human Resource Council building in preparation for their Christmas Party and guests. They invited the Ravalli County Peer Advocates and the Missoula Valley People First and on Wednesday, December 12th, the festivities began with 26 in attendance. The food was potluck style and oh so delicious. Everyone seemed to bring their favorite dish and by the end, very little was leftover. Beside visiting with old friends and meeting new ones, the highlight was singing Christmas carols. One brave soul even performed a couple of solos to the delight of all. Even when it was all over, fun was still had cleaning up, taking down all the decorations, and wishing everyone a Merry Christmas.

Thanks to Linda Olson, founder of **Bitterroot Therapeutic Riding (BTR)**, 13 tickets were gifted to Summit and on Saturday, December 8th, 22 of us representing Summit's Staff, Board of Directors, Consumers, Peer Advocates & People First, filled two large tables at the recent

BTR Winter Picnic. The event was held at the First Interstate Building at Ravalli Fairgrounds where a horse drawn sleigh transported participants from the parking lot to the party. Inside, the place had been transformed with live Christmas trees lining the perimeter, centerpieces of balloons, a play zone for the kids, and lots and lots of people. We began visiting with others, picking up a soft drink, and making bids on the silent auction. Then the eating began (thanks Grumpy's BarBQ!), followed by dancing gyrations to tunes of Shane Clouse & the Stomping Ground. What a blast it was to see young and old, wheelchairs and walkers, out on the dance floor having fun. During the band's break, Santa came by to "Ho, Ho, Ho" and "Merry Christmas" and even stopped for free photos. Everyone had a great time and we're ready to do it again. Also, thanks to Joel Gallob, a Ravalli Republic reporter, for being our guest and interviewing our folks for an upcoming series on "Issues People with Disabilities Face in Ravalli County." We look forward to reading it.