

# The Summit Independent

Western Montana's Disability News and Views



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

April 2008

## Get Out and Vote

It is that time once again when we will all have the opportunity to cast our ballots and let our voices be heard. On June 3, 2008 Montana will hold it's Primary Elections and not only will we be helping to determine who will have a shot at being the next President of the United States, but we will also be narrowing down the field of State Legislative Candidates who are aiming for a shot to represent us during the 2009 Montana Legislative Session.

"I can't run government. I am society. I am the government. Only when I change, will society and the government change. Each one of us is responsible. Each one of us must lead and each one of us must recruit new leaders. If I can be a soldier of empowerment, so can you. You have the power. You are one unit of society..."

~Justin Dart

One of the most important and fundamental rights we enjoy as citizens of the United States is the right to vote for the people who make and uphold our laws. This right is the foundation upon which our democratic form of government is based. It's a civic duty we should all feel privileged to perform.

The first step to voting is REGISTERING to vote. If you are not registered to vote and would like to register or if you have moved since you last registered and need to update your registration, Summit can help you with a new registration card. Or you can contact your local elections office (<http://sos.mt.gov/ELB/forms/elections/electionadministrators.pdf>).

If you are a person with a physical disability or are unable to read or write, you may ask an election judge to help you mark

your ballot for you. Or you can bring a friend or relative who, with the permission of the election judge, can go into the voting booth with you and help you vote.

Every polling place in Montana should have at least one specialized voting machine that will enable people with disabilities to vote independently.

If you would like to designate an agent to assist you with the voting process, contact your local election office (<http://sos.mt.gov/ELB/forms/elections/electionadministrators.pdf>) to ask for an application for the designation of an agent.

If you're unable to drive to the polls yourself, you have several options:

- You can vote by absentee ballot.
- You can catch a ride with a friend or neighbor.
- You can get a ride from one of numerous organizations and agencies that offer voter transportation.

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# Voice Recognition

As with many types of Assistive Technology (AT), voice recognition software has improved and become more commonplace and mainstream technology. With the public release of Microsoft Windows Vista last year, voice recognition became readily available to all consumers of this new operating system. Windows Vista owners are no longer required to purchase additional voice recognition software to advantage hands-free computing, as it is now built into the Vista operating system. However, many questions persist in comparing Vista to Dragon NaturallySpeaking, which has been the leader in voice recognition software.

Some main considerations in this comparison are price, initial training time, recognition accuracy and speed, and finally versatility. Price leaves no questions, as voice recognition is readily available in all Windows Vista systems whereas Dragon NaturallySpeaking requires an additional software purchase for up to \$200 (version 9 .0). Windows Vista also claims that no training is required whereas Dragon has a standard training protocol. However, having used both, it is apparent that training is required for accuracy in either. Dragon's years of existence and continual improvements have transformed speech recognition accuracy and speed, particularly with the past introduction of Version 8.0. Being said, Windows Vista's five-year development has resulted in an initial product with impressive recognition ac-

curacy and speed comparable to that of Dragon. Be aware, though, that the real-life utility of either program produces less accuracy and speed than either's marketing claims.

Voice recognition versatility presents some major differences between Vista and Dragon which also may separate mainstream and assistive technology. Beyond the above comparisons, and despite utility of both programs in multiple software applications, Dragon clearly excels in versatility. Dragon alone offers specialty vocabulary programs or upgrades to Medical and Legal versions as well as vocabulary importation to accommodate specialty terminology. Dragon also offers audible dictation playback which may be imperative to help users with learning disabilities in editing. Finally, Dragon offers remote dictation into a voice recorder which then uploads as a wave file and automatically transcribes for users unable to physically take notes.

Regardless of one's ultimate choice, MonTECH staff members encourage voice recognition consumers to be fully informed and consider their budget, functional limitations, purpose of use, and environments of use. New users and those considering an upgrade are encouraged to visit MonTECH's AT demonstration center to try Vista and Dragon in person. For more information, call 406-243-5751, 888-243-5511, or visit <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>.

# Fishing Access for People with Disabilities

The spirit of cooperation is alive and strong in the Bitterroot Valley. One of the Ravalli County peers, Susan Butchart, had a dream of an accessible fishing spot for people who really like to fish but could not thrash through the underbrush to get to good fishing spots. The People First advisor, Mary Millin, found out about a small grant through the Rural Institute to encourage People First and Kiwanians to work together on a project. Susan and Mary took the idea of an accessible fishing site and the possibility of obtaining grant funds to Abby Kirkaldie, the disability consultant for the Bitterroot National Forest and asked for her input. She really liked the idea and expanded it further by offering to make a presentation to the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) for additional grant funds.

The Ravalli County peers went to work and found a good location for the fishing access: the Spring Gulch Campground south of Darby, which is right on the river, has an accessible campground and

fishing pier, and a short path along the river. It seemed the most logical location for the project. It would cost less to revamp and expand the existing fishing access rather than start from scratch at another campground.

The plan was presented to the Resource Advisory Committee in August of 2007 and grant funds were awarded in September. In January of 2008, Bitterroot Valley People First applied for the Expanding Networks through Recreation and Empowerment (ENTRE) grant, which was awarded in February. Now, having secured the two grants, construction is scheduled to begin on the 1st of June and the project is due to be completed in November of 2008.

This coordinated effort among Ravalli County peer advocates, Bitterroot Valley People First, Kiwanis International, and the Bitterroot National Forest is impressive and we all look forward to the completion of the project!

## SCI Volunteer Opportunity

Volunteers With Spinal Cord Injury for at least 6 Months needed for a research study

The Montana Spine Center and the Montana Neuroscience Institute are conducting a research study to evaluate an investigational drug to treat spasticity (increased muscle tone upon movement) due to spinal cord injury (SCI).

If you are between the ages of 18-70, with spasticity due to SCI, for at least the past 6 months you may be eligible to participate Your participation involves:

- 8 clinic visits over an eight week period
- Physical exams, blood and urine tests

All study related care, lab tests and the study drug will be provided to you at no cost, and you will be compensated for your time and travel.

This study is being conducted at the Montana Spine and Pain Center and the Montana Neuroscience Institute in Missoula, MT.

If you are interested in additional information about this study please contact us at:

Contact Name: Pamela Meek, RN

Contact Phone: (406) 329-2664

# 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](mailto: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 [montana-il-action-alert-subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:montana-il-action-alert-subscribe@googlegroups.com) or by letting Travis Hoffman know you would like to be added to the Action Alert System.

## Bitterroot Valley People First

Soon to be

### BITTERROOT VALLEY PEOPLE FIRST AKTION CLUB

On March 6, 2008, almost two years after we began the process, the Kiwanis Club of Hamilton Bitterroot Valley voted to sponsor the Bitterroot Valley People First as a chartered AKtion Club affiliated with Kiwanis International.

Since the mid-nineties, our local People First group has been in existence, but it wasn't until Summit ILC became its sponsor in October, 2005 that our group became an official People First Chapter. On March 31, 2006, the group was voted in as an official People First Chapter by the Montana People First Senate. In April, the advisor and members began attending the weekly Kiwanis lunch meetings. The chapter asked the club to sponsor them and they agreed. People First members began volunteering to work on Kiwanis projects and were slowly included more and more. As the 2 groups got closer, barriers came down.

On Feb. 20, 2008, Nancy Maxson, the People First Senate coordinator and Ray Rischo, the Kiwanis advisor for the Missoula People First AKtion Club visited our local Kiwanis club and explained the benefits of the groups working together. Two weeks later the Kiwanis board agreed to sponsor the charter. It takes about six weeks to process the paperwork and get our chartering materials from the head office so we are anticipating becoming an official AKtion Club sometime in May. To celebrate, we are planning a chartering dinner where the local Kiwanians will present the People First members with the charter and buttons.

# Missoula County Update By Jude Monson

Summit would like to recognize the following two national groups this spring:

- The annual **Paralyzed Veterans of America Awareness** week, April 13th - 19th, is a celebration of achievement. We thank the Montana veteran's for our ongoing freedom.



- **ADAPT celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> year** of disability action with a gathering of activists in Washington D.C. in May! Members of our local ADAPT will be involved in advocacy actions with other people with disabilities. When they return they will share their knowledge, experience and photos!

## The Missoula Caregiver Conference – contact Lorna Palin

- May 15<sup>th</sup> at the First Lutheran Church, 2808 South Ave West
- 8 am registration
- topics including fraud, mental health, team building and humor! Even better is the networking among all the local caregivers!

## Training Options

Summit ILC is involved with a number of classes and training options this spring and summer. If you are interested in any of the following topics contact the Missoula office at 728-1630.

- Youth Teleconference through the Rural Institute: Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills curriculum by Travis Hoffman and Michael Beers.
- Assertiveness, Communication, Living Well and Working Well classes by a combination of Missoula staff.
- Women's Abuse and Safety Class in conjunction with the Rural Institute starting June 24<sup>th</sup> by Jude Monson and Leanne Beers.

# RAMP Continues to Grow

The Regional Access Mobility Program of Montana started operations August 1, of 2006. From the very beginning Summit Independent Living Center has been a major supporter and partner. From an initial grant for the pilot program, to donating office space, RAMP of Montana would not be what it is today without this support. Summit ILC and Missoula Aging Services, during this time have overseen financial accountability and RAMP has worked under their non-profit umbrellas. RAMP has grown and matured

and now the Summit ILC board and the RAMP oversight committee are helping to move RAMP to the next level. Beginning June 1st we will be a 501c3 corporation. Our close work with Summit ILC is continuing and our offices will remain there. Legend Builders has contracted with RAMP for construction services and insurances. June 1st RAMP will be a registered contractor with the State of Montana. We thank Legend Builders for all of their support in growing our program.

RAMP continues to build all types of access features from single grab bars to complete bathrooms along with ramps, stair lifts and elevators. Solving safety access and mobility problems to keep individuals in their home is our goal. With growing numbers of seniors with limited incomes, finances are always a problem. If you would like to contribute send a donation to RAMP of Montana, 700 S.W. Higgins, STE101 Missoula, MT 59803

# Ravalli County

By Joanne Verwolf

The last week of February Joanne spent a week in Portland, Oregon where she participated in the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) training, followed by five weeks of testing after her return to become a Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC). This program focuses on serving SSDI and SSI recipients who are actively engaged in the employment process in transitioning from dependence on public benefits to paid employment and greater economic self-sufficiency. CWIC's provide work incentives counseling and will assist in the development of an individualized work incentive plan to help individuals reach their employment goals.

Mary is our advisor of the Bitterroot Valley People First and determined advocate for improving transportation services throughout Montana. On March 26, 2008, the Bitterroot Valley People First submitted the charter application to become an official Kiwanis AKtion Club. This has been in the works since 2006. Congratulations to Mary and the People First members for their perseverance in reaching this goal. On the transit side, Mary is a member of the Montana Department of Transportation Capital Assistance Review Committee and will participate in prioritizing the vehicle requests of transit providers across the state. Joanne and Mary also plan to attend the Montana Transit Association (MTA) conference in Bozeman April 16-18<sup>th</sup> to stay current with

statewide transportation issues and goals.

Serenity has been organizing meetings with school representatives and adult service providers in planning how to better serve and prepare students with disabilities in Ravalli County's middle and high schools in transitioning from school to community. The participation has been enthusiastic and we've all jumped on the "self-determination" bandwagon. To further educate ourselves to the needs of students, a representative from the Office of Public Instruction will be offering a "brown bag lunch training and Q&A session" on April 21<sup>st</sup> at Hamilton High School to discuss the IEP requirements and IDEA 2004. Another big part of Serenity's job is information and referral services and advocating for Social Security and other benefits individuals with disabilities may need to remain independent. To that end, she will be attending the State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) and Information & Assistance (I&A) training in Polson on April 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>.

Also in April is the *Bitterroot Spring Fair*. The Ravalli County peers are very busy preparing the Summit booth on RECREATION FOR ALL. Put April 12<sup>th</sup> on your calendar and stop by the Ravalli County Fairgrounds to see what we've done. You'll be amazed at what accessible recreational sites are available in Ravalli County and around the state, yet there are still

many areas in which we'll be advocating for improved access.

As you can see, April is going to be a very busy month, so please bear with us as we get up to speed on the new services that will be available to you.

We are very pleased to announce we have secured funding for this year's Caregivers Conference, which is scheduled for September 18<sup>th</sup> at the Bitterroot River Inn. We're still in the planning stage and can use lots of help to provide a great program to support and recognize Ravalli County caregivers. If you are interested in donating some of your time to this worthy cause, give us a call at 363-5242.

Joanne Verwolf

Ravalli County Coordinator

Jack's Small Engine Service will repair and service durable medical equipment, including power chairs and scooters. Being disabled himself, Jack provides excellent customer service, and is very honest and dependable in meeting the needs of each individual.

Jack's Small Engine Service  
203 Marcus Street  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
406-363-4009

## Lake/Sanders County By Gary Stevens

Hello everyone out there in Western Montana can you believe three months have already gone by this 2008 year-WOW! And what about the weather too isn't it something one day nice-warm-enjoyable then snow the next day with chilly coldness; another -WOW! I hope things are going well and continue to go well for all those consumers presently receiving services from Summit ILC or any other agencies. As well as my prayers to those past consumers who have benefited from services they have received. It is with pleasure and honor that I welcome all the new staff I wish you the best while providing your expertise during your tenure at summit ILC.

Since the last newsletter for the Lake/Sanders County services are still slowly moving. Not too many people are coming into the office or calling in to benefit from the services we have to offer. So I ask you to assist me in helping those individuals you might personally know

that may be in need of services from Summit ILC. Your help would greatly be appreciated, especially by those persons who are unaware of the services that we provide. Please spread the word; news does travel quite quickly though word of the mouth. While you are having coffee, grocery shopping, or just visiting with them, let them know about Summit in the Lake/Sanders County office.

I will be attending the State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) and Information & Assistance (I&A) training in Polson on April 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>.

As you know change is coming again soon with a newly elected president we must prepare ourselves for whoever is elected, Will it be McCain, Obama, or Clinton? Regardless, many events will continue to occur including the Olympics this August, crime in the news, wars in foreign lands, concerns of global warning, and of course the continued health issues

many of us face on a daily basis like: Autism, Depression, Alzheimer's, Cerebral Palsy, Quadriplegia, and many more. What will the newly elected President offer us? What will Congress give? What will the States receive to be able to provide needed services for you? How will the local agencies continue to operate if funds are not appropriated adequately? There will be many legislative issues affecting us in the future but we must continue to help each other on the grassroots level - advocating-advocating and more advocating so that there is more community awareness and consumer services for individuals with disabilities.

If you have any ideas of how we can work together, please call me at my office in Ronan-(@ 676-0190 or 1-866-230-6936) be well, be safe, and take care...thanks!

Gary

## New Missoula Staff

Hello, I'm Mike Giddings, the new SDPAS coordinator assistant located at Summit ILC in Missoula. When not working at Summit, I pursue my art career and enjoy rock hounding in the area. I moved here in May of last year from Palm Desert, California. While in the desert region, I spent some time working with peer advocacy in the mental health area. Proposition 63, the mental health services act, was just passed. This proposition created changes in the mental health area allowing consumers to direct resource

distribution amongst the services offered.

Also, consumer positions were opened on county and state committees, allowing for continual input. It was great to see consumers being empowered and having the ability to exercise their right of choice. I found this to be a very rewarding experience. I am happy to be working for Summit and being able to continue my efforts in the areas of advocacy and independence for others.





## Flathead County By Flo Kiewel

The Flathead office continues to participate in a strong referral system with human service agencies in the valley. The number of consumers seeking services increases steadily and there is seldom a quiet moment.

County Coordinator, Flo Kiewel, has been managing all services alone for the past three months. We had an extended search for a new Independent Living Specialist and only recently hired Deanna Shepard (see introductory bio). Deanna is off to a running start and is already taking on some of the workload. Welcome aboard, Deanna.

There is new communication equipment available for loan

from our office. Two Ubi-Duo units have been donated; one by Round-up For Safety and another by two area Masonic Lodges. Communication can take place between two individuals by typing back and forth on two separate keyboards; similar to a chat room session. The units may be borrow by anyone with a communication disorder for appointments with doctors, lawyers, or other professional services. So far the units have been loaned out to consumers three times. Contact the office at 257-0048 for more information or to schedule a loan.

Working Well with a Disability, a 10 week health promotion

workshop similar to Living Well with a Disability, is scheduled to begin a session April 15th. The workshop is being provided as part of a research grant and criteria for participation is very specific. We hope to provide more of these workshops in the future. Call the office if you would be interested.

Beginning Sign Language classes will start April 16 from 2:00 to 3:30 at Ashley Square conference room. Call Deanna at 257-0048 to register, even if it is past the starting date.

Have a great summer!

## New Flathead Staff

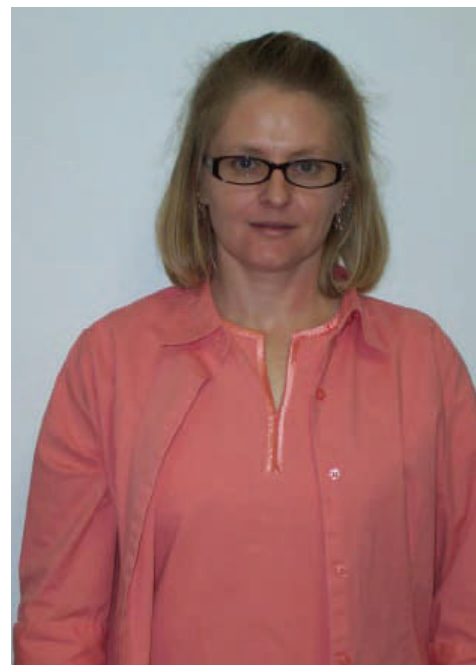
### Deanna Shepard

– Flathead County Independent Living Specialist

Hello Everyone! I am Deanna Shepard, the new Independent Living Specialist for Flathead County. I was born and raised in Kalispell, and have two sons (19 & 6). I lived in Montgomery Alabama for about 2 years while I finished my Bachelors of Science in Psychology, and then moved back to Montana to be closer to my family. I am currently working on my Master's degree through distance education at Amridge University in

Montgomery Alabama.

I have worked in a variety of "Human Service" settings, but my aspiration is to finish my Master's and go on to get my Ph.D. in Disability Awareness. I was a consumer of Summit in the 90's (shortly after I lost my hearing), and now I am ever so honored to be yet another Summit success story and be employed with the very organization that made it possible for me to get where I am today. Thank you to all for the warm welcome.




# BULLETIN BOARD

See our website at [www.summitilc.org](http://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.
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- ◆ **1988 Ford Econoline** w/ Ricon Lift. 108,000 miles. Good condition, excellent tires. \$1750 OBO. 406-676-3186
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- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **2000 Dodge Grand Caravan SE "ACCESS VAN"** 72,000 miles \$18,800 O.B.O. 406-251-4569;  
[montana.craigslist.org/car/624312387.html](http://montana.craigslist.org/car/624312387.html)
- ◆ **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](mailto: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](mailto:thoffman@summitilc.org) and list it on the Montech item exchange website at <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/mtdb/>

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## **YOUTH CORNER** By Michael Beers

It is with a heavy heart that I bring you this, my final youth corner article... That's right, after what has seemed like a lifetime, I am leaving Summit Independent Living Center. But don't worry about me, I'll be Ok, and if any of you would like to say your goodbyes you can find me at the Reserve Street off ramp with of course, cap in hand.

**APRIL FOOOLS!!!**

I had ya going didn't I? I can't leave. Who else would write this article? Now, on with the youth update. It is spring and for a lot of people that means baseball, here at Summit that just means B.A.L.L.S. (Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills). Travis and I, with assistance from Darren Larson, are currently teaching the seven-week class at Hellgate High School and will move on to teach the class at Big Sky and Sentinel in the Fall.

Other exciting events on the youth calendar include the Delegate and Staff applications for MYLF (Montana Youth Leadership Forum). The

deadline has already passed but if you are working on an application or know of someone that is (or should be), feel free to call the Missoula office and ask for Mike Beers and we will see what we can do about extending that deadline.

On June 2, 2008 Travis Hoffman and Mike Beers will be presenting a CSPD web conference entitled *Independent Living Centers as a Resource to Youth in Transition*. During the web conference we will talk about methods we currently employ to reach out to youth and let you know what we think all students with disabilities need to know in their time of development and transition. For more information regarding this web cast, please contact Kim Brown at [brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu).

Also, on September 15-17, the 1st Annual Montana Youth Transitions Conference will be held in Great Falls which will be an excellent opportunity for students—and their support teams—to network, explore resources, and discover pathways to meaningful futures!