

# The Summit Independent

Western Montana's Disability News and Views



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

Oct./Nov. 2007

## APRIL Comes and Goes...

It was an APRIL to remember...in October. On October 5th through the 8th the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) held its annual national conference at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula. This year's conference theme was *We Were Rural, Before Rural Was Cool*.

The main part of the conference kicked off on Saturday, October 6th and thanks to Gary Stevens, Summit's Lake and Sanders County Coordinator, and Michael Beers, Summit's Missoula Peer Advocate, conference participants were treated to a little Native American culture at the APRIL Welcome and Sending Ceremonies by two elders from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Alec Quequesah offered a blessing along with the Missoula Yelloweagle Drum group's Flag song to kick off our conference, and Tony Incashola offered a native sending to follow us peacefully to our homes.

This conference marked a new beginning for APRIL as they introduced Billy Alton as the new

APRIL Executive Director. Billy was also the opening keynote speaker for the conference where he incorporated live music into his speech. The closing Keynote speaker was Andy Imparato, the first full time President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). Working together, Billy and Andy are two people who will confidently lead us into a new era of advocacy, training, policy, political and economic empowerment!

There were numerous presenters from Montana as well. They included Travis Hoffman and Michael Beers; Meg Traci, Bob Maffit, and Tom Osborn; Marsha Katz; Catherine Ipsen and Craig Ravesloot; Bob Liston; June Hermanson; Tom Seekins and Ken Hoff.

We would like to thank the Missoula VSA Choir for graciously performing various songs during the Friday night dinner reception after the APRIL Annual Meeting, the band *Blue to the Bone* for providing a live bluegrass musical performance during the Sunday night dinner banquet, and the Same Difference Inclusive Theatre Company for performing during the APRIL Fool and Follies.

Last but not least a big hand goes out to Elissa Ellis, Kathy Hatch, and the rest of the APRIL staff as well as all of the APRIL Board of Directors for all of their hard work in putting everything together for this highly successful conference.

It's not often that a national independent living conference lands in Missoula, so we took advantage of the opportunity and sent a total of 20 Summit staff members, peer advocates and board members to the conference. It was a great opportunity for networking with our IL colleagues from around the country!



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## Summit Welcomes New Staff Members:

**Leanne Beers — Peer Advocacy Coordinator**

and

**Darren Larson — Independent Living Specialist**

### Leanne Beers

#### Peer Advocacy Coordinator

Hello, my name is Leanne Beers and I am the new Summit Peer Advocacy Coordinator in the Missoula office. I was raised here in Missoula and am the proud mother of two beautiful children, Jessica 9 and Thomas 7.

I graduated from the University of Montana in 1996 with degrees in Psychology, Early Intervention and Teaching. I also recently received my Masters Degree in Health Administration and Public Relations. I enjoy being very involved with the community and working with the public. My passion is my family and being involved with my children.

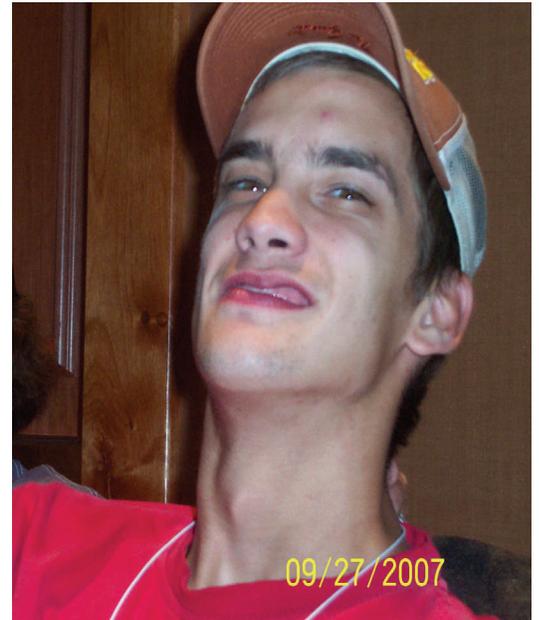
It is my distinct pleasure to be one of Summit's newest staff members and I welcome the opportunity to help make a difference any way I can.



### Darren Larson

#### Independent Living Specialist

I'm Darren Larson and I'm from the northwest corner of Montana; where hair grows a little faster and grass grows a little slower. Eureka is a beautiful town with people who take great pride in their work, but employment is mainly constricted to those with brawn and facial hair; of which I have neither. I knew I had to relocate, so I came to Missoula and attended the University. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science; a science which is completely unscientific. Then after several months of not having any direction in my life, I discovered the wonderful people of Summit and they have now given me the privilege of working as an Independent Living Specialist. So I have gone from cloudy confusion to a specialist. The American dream. I looking forward to working hard every day and making a difference.



## October 2007 Transportation Update

One of the transportation needs in Montana has been the challenge of getting Veterans with disabilities to Helena for the free medical treatment they have earned and deserve. The vans run by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) were put in place to transport veterans to medical appointments. However, the vans are not accessible, and they are driven by volunteers with no training to work with people with disabilities. Consequently, many veterans with serious disabilities have difficulty getting to medical appointments.

In recent weeks, the staff with the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) have been meeting with members of Congress and their staff, national veterans groups, US Department of Veterans Affairs officials, and countless others in an effort to improve mobility to all of America's veterans. As well, CTAA members in Montana recently participated in a Veterans Affairs Field Hearing in Great Falls to discuss veteran's transportation needs, issues, and barriers with Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester from Montana and Senator Ken Salazar from nearby Colorado.

From these efforts several pieces of important Veterans legislation have emerged. For the first time community based public transportation (with accessible vans) will be eligible for VA transportation investment. In addition, public transportation drivers will be trained to work with people with varying disabilities.

Alvy Chapman, Commander of the Disabled American Veterans of Montana, presented at the Montana Transportation Association's (MTA) fall business meeting in Kalispell on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Following this presentation was a roundtable discussion with MTA members and various veteran groups for the purpose of incorporating DAV vans into local transit coordination plans.

Grassroots advocacy is always needed to initiate change. If this is an issue you may be passionate about, please get involved, share your ideas and experiences, and work directly with those agencies such as CTAA that are working towards increased mobility for veterans with disabilities.

## Missoula Valley People First By Andrea Dahl

The Missoula chapter attended the "Charter Your Future" conference in Helena in September. The keynote speaker was Norman Kunc. Norm spoke on several issues relating to self-advocacy. The entertainment for Monday evening was the CBS movie titled "Profoundly Normal". The special guests for the evening were Ricardo and Donna Thornton, the couple that are the main characters in the movie. They met while residing in an institution for people with developmental disabilities in Washington, D.C. They both gradually moved out into the community. They married and have a son. The movie describes the social barriers that they were able to overcome. It was a great experience to meet Ricardo and Donna. Their son Ricky is in his junior year of college, majoring in business.

In the last few months People First of Montana has been going through a transition period with changes such as financial revisions and not renewing the contract with the agency that founded People First. These changes have caused frustration

among the members and the advisors with feelings that members didn't have adequate input into the decision. Rocky Hughes, the People 1st Senate President, has written a petition requesting more input and communication with the Senate and the members on all of the future decisions.

The Missoula chapter still enjoys some recreational time too! Part of the People 1st activities is social time with other chapters. The Missoula chapter will be meeting with the Hamilton chapter to spend an afternoon at "Quivals". The main feature is a walk through a corn maze with a Halloween theme. It is a great way to get better acquainted with the Hamilton members.



## Social Security Announces 2.3 Percent Benefit Increase for 2008

Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits for more than 54 million Americans will increase 2.3 percent in 2008, the Social Security Administration announced today.

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits increase automatically each year based on the rise in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers* (CPI-W), from the third quarter of the prior year to the corresponding period of the current year. This year's increase in the CPI-W was 2.3 percent.

The 2.3 percent Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits that nearly 50 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2008. Increased payments to more than 7 million Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries will begin on December 31.

Some other changes that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$102,000 from \$97,500. Of the estimated 164 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes in 2008, nearly 12 million will pay higher taxes as a result of the increase in the taxable maximum.

Information about Medicare changes for 2008 can be found at [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov).

## Youth Corner By Michael Beers

This was the fourth year that APRIL has held a youth pre-conference the Friday before the start of the main conference. The theme of this year's pre-conference was, *Disabilities, Arts and Media: Taking it from the Streets*. There were 18 youth from all around the country and Montana that attended the sessions.

Our first speaker of the day was Michele Reinhart, a Legislative Representative from Missoula. She welcomed the youth to Montana and shared with them some of the things she has been able to accomplish in the State Legislature and how important it is that we have more young people getting involved in politics.

The keynote speaker was Regina Blye from the Texas SILC. Regina

has also worked as a television producer and radio DJ. Her talk centered around how disability is represented in the media and arts (TV, movies, music...) followed by a group discussion on the subject. After a lunch of chicken and vegetable medley, with a desert of chocolate doodahs (as Jude refers to them), Stephanie Sanford discussed how Centers for Independent Living could recruit unique populations into the Disability Rights Movement with the help of youth.

The day wrapped up with the youth discussing ideas for an IEP skit they would later perform at the annual APRIL Fools and Follies Sunday night, which was facilitated by Melissa Hansen who is the director of Same Difference Inclusive Theatre Company out of

Butte.

Fast forward to Monday morning. It has become tradition since the APRIL conference in Savannah, Georgia in 2003 to have a State of the Youth report on the final morning of the conference. This year I facilitated that report while the youth who attended the pre-conference came up on the stage to give their impressions of the whole APRIL experience as well as giving suggestions on how we can improve next year's conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. The youth left this year's conference excited and motivated to work alongside and learn from those who have been involved in the movement for years and eager to someday make their own mark on it.

# Community Service Bureau Connections Conference

**Community Service Bureau (CSB) Connections Conference At the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula Montana September 26, 2007**

## Consumer Dinner Report

Eighty one people who receive or who are interested in Medicaid and or Medicare services participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual consumer dinner and forum requested by the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and their new Senior and Long Term Care Program Manager, Abby Hulme. The forum was facilitated by Summit ILC Program Manager, Jude Monson, again this year. People attending use health care benefits such as nursing care, personal assistance services, and the two waiver programs called traditional – Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) or the new Big Sky Bonanza (BSB). For those of you not familiar with the BSB waiver service refer to the article on page 8 .

Conference participants met to discuss what is working and what is not working within these Medicaid programs. Their experience and desire to live a full life in the home and community of their choice is reflected in the brief description below. If you are interested in further discussion of these issues please contact your local Independent Living Center, Regional Program Officer, Waiver Case Manager or BSB Independence Advisor.

**Things that are working:** One consumer said that of the 25 years she has received Medicaid she has only had one complaint. She thought that was a pretty good track record for a benefit resource.

Other people with disabilities listed three main areas of appreciation such as:

Case management services give us the opportunity to express our needs so that we feel like we have control over our final choices and decisions,

Case management professionals who are good team players and have many years experience make working together more enjoyable and the same information does not have to be repeated over and over.

Self Direct Personal Assistance Services and Big Sky Bonanza make us very happy as we can choose our Personal Care Attendants— people who care about us and give us a smile!

### **Things that are not working and suggestions for improvement for people with disabilities who are on Medicaid:**

Participants identified 13 main concern areas:

Education is needed on employment transition and having adequate health care and other benefits in place to ensure a livable wage and a reasonable quality of life;

Rights and responsibilities training about the Medicaid services because it is a complex and slow grinding system for referrals, services and appeals process;

Extend specific eye care services and offer basic dental care;

Review and discuss Personal Care

Services and the number of hours allowed;

Review and discuss family or significant caregiver issues;

Training on how to understand complex programs like the Medicaid spend-down;

Learning about the new Big Sky Bonanza waiver program and where it will be offered next;

Review and discuss Non-Parent and /older worker benefits;

Review and discuss durable medical equipment process, paperwork and communication;

Review and discuss live-in Personal Assistants' hours that are cut back vs. prior non live in hours.

Review and get back more than three baths a week without having to give up other needed services.

### **A final suggestion and conclusion was that we need to start a self help group or a committee of consumers to help each other understand and advocate for these improvements.**

We need to start a group that would speak from the person with a disability's experience. A list was sent around this group for name and contact information. That list will be typed up and provided to the DPHHS and Summit ILC for follow up.

For a full report please contact: Abby Hulme at 1-406-444-4564 or Jude Monson at 406-728-1630

## Ravalli County Update By Joanne Verwolf

The Ravalli County Caregivers Conference, usually held annually in October, has been cancelled this year due to lack of funds. We hope to continue the event and will attempt to secure funds for 2008.

We are very proud to congratulate a Ravalli County Peer Advocate, Joan Marie Connor, as the 2007 recipient of the DPHHS Community Services Bureau *Pam Davis Award*. This award is to recognize an elderly or disabled individual whose leadership and determination has impacted the development and promotion of quality community based services. With the numerous letters of support that accompanied her nomination, it is quite evident this award is well deserved. Additionally, a Ravalli County Personal Care Attendant, Cindy Williams, was the recipient of the *Direct Care Award*. This award recognizes outstanding

work by direct care staff, including personal assistants, homemakers, habilitation trainers, nurses, transportation providers, respite workers, etc. Congratulations to both Joan Marie and Cindy for recognition well-deserved!

Bitterroot Valley People First are becoming more and more involved in Kiwanis and have participated in the Kiwanis Fishing Derby, the Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast, and helped at the Kiwanis food booth at the Ravalli County Fair. The Kiwanis annual conference held August 24-26 in Billings was attended by People First members and advisor, Mary Millin.

Ravalli County Peer Advocates and Bitterroot Valley People First have collaborated with the Forest Service in securing funds to construct a wheelchair accessible trail

along the Bitterroot River at Spring Gulch. People First will receive \$5000.00 through a grant from the Rural Institute and \$5000.00 has been appropriated by the Ravalli County Resource Advisory Council for this project. This has been an extensive collaborative effort on the behalf of peer advocates and it will be extremely rewarding to see this project through to completion!

Many thanks are extended to those who participated in the Summit opinion poll and provided information in developing our next three year plan for 2007-2010. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Joanne Verwolf  
Ravalli County Coordinator



## Flathead County Update By Flo Kiewel

The Kalispell office staff continue to be busy providing consumers assistance with benefits, housing, work incentives counseling, skills training and self-directed personal care services. Summit also continues to do ADA surveys and maintains community connections through participation in United Way meetings, the Community Management Team and collaboration with the Flathead One-Stop Workforce Center.

Office staff attended a SOAR training workshop June 18th & 19th, and a Food Stamp training workshop August 1st. Both workshops gave excellent information and feedback, allowing Summit to

provide better services in these areas to our consumers.

The Kalispell peer advocates have had some personnel changes over the past few months. Evelyn Pool has accepted a job as a school counselor in Lincoln, MT. Shelley Lang is looking forward to warmer winters at her new home in Florida. Lisa Moorhead has moved to Spokane. We will miss them, but we wish them the best of luck in their new and exciting ventures. Summit has hired one new Peer Advocate, Andy Creighton. Andy finished his peer training during the summer and is raring to go.

IL Skills training workshops are being scheduled in response to demand. Most of the workshops meet weekly for 6 to 8 weeks. Two Money Management workshops are scheduled to begin September 28th with one session in the morning and one in the afternoon. The afternoon session will be taught in sign language. A Living Well With a Disability workshop will be scheduled to begin in January 2008. Self Esteem for Women with Disabilities will be scheduled when there are enough sign ups. If you are interested in signing up for any of these workshops, please call the office at 257-0048.

## Lake/Sanders County Update By Gary Stevens

The Ronan Office is busy with continuous efforts towards reaching Summit's Mission & Goals by engaging in community activities with local community providers and consumers. This office has met with peers in Sanders County a few times during the summer months and will continue to meet with those peers during the upcoming year. In both Lake and Sanders County I have met with a few agencies to get re-connected with them to re-establish connections with those organization to address ways to implement Summit's mission. There has been contact with the Lake County peer plus efforts to establish a larger pool of peers in Lake County. It's has been difficult to reach the present consumers due to the change of coordinator in the past year- I send you my apologies for this inconvenience and I hope to develop a good working relationship with you as consumers if given the opportunity in the future. As the new coordinator I attended a

number of local conferences to be able to provide continued appropriate & quality services.

In Lake County there have been numerous people calling in for different number of questions regarding various services throughout Lake County. If any present consumers have a friend who they know is in need of services please refer them to the Ronan Summit office as we are available to provide assistance. Lake County Peer Owen Deardoff attended the ninth Annual Community Services Bureau Conference in Missoula on September 26-28 of 2007. I want to recognize him for his outstanding services and support of Summit's mission. Thanks Owen! We are still seeking more individuals for peers in Lake County to assist us to improve the quality of life for those individuals living in Lake County.

In Sanders County I would like to

give thanks to two wonderful ladies Sherrie Jackson and Sandra Davis for attending the "APRIL" conference. I know they enjoyed themselves; I was able to visit them at times during this wonderful experience. In additional I give many thanks to John Gallaher for his continuous support and being a local strong connection for Summit services and wish him with continued strong health. Thanks John!

If you feel you would like to address any issue please call anytime and please leave me a voice message if I am not in. I will return your call as soon as I can. The Summit office wants to ensure that the appropriate services are provided for your specific needs.

Enjoy the fall season, take care and be well from Gary at the Ronan Lake & Sander Office at 1 (866) 230-6936 or (406) 676-0190.

## Missoula County Update By Jude Monson

### **New staff!**

It is always exciting to bring in new staff and see how they merge with our Missoula team! It is especially exciting that Summit ILC has hired a previous Summit ILC board member, Leanne Beers as our Peer Advocacy Coordinator and a newly trained Peer Advocate, Darren Larson as our part time Independent Living Specialist! Please take time to read their introductions on page four (4) of this newsletter.

### **Living Well with a Disability class**

There are 6 people taking this class this fall. They have com-

pleted classes on goal setting, problem solving, healthy reactions, depression, and healthy communication. They have shared their wisdom and experience and have made this a rewarding experience for each other. They have five classes left that will address information seeking, physical activity, nutrition, advocacy and maintenance.

### **Future Classes**

If you are interested in taking any of the following two classes in the future, please contact Jude at the Missoula office at 728-1630.

### **Assertiveness Class**

Assertiveness Class will begin De-

ember 3<sup>rd</sup> from 1:00 to 3:00 pm and end in March of 2008. It will run on Monday afternoons. Because of holidays there will be three meetings per month.

### **Communication Class**

The communication class will begin on Monday, April 7th and run through May, 2008. It will build on the assertiveness skills previously mentioned or you can start with this class first.

**Continued on Page 8**

## Missoula County Update continued

### Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills (BALLS)

Look for more information in the youth section about the BALLS class to be taught in local high schools. If you are interested in hearing more about this program please contact Travis Hoffman at 728-1630 for more information.

### Beginning Peer Training workshop

The beginning peer training workshop has been set for the week of July 21 through the 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are someone with disability experience and would like to share your ideas and energy with others contact Leanne Beers, Peer Advocacy Coordinator at 728-1630.



## Big Sky Bonanza

### Big Sky Bonanza (BSB) Pilot Program completed BSB Waiver Service to be continued

I have had the privilege to work with the BSB pilot program the last three years. To watch the consumers of traditional Medicaid waiver and Self Direct Personal Assistance Services (SDPAS) use the person centered planning process and work in partnership with the home and health care agencies has made this independent living representative feel proud of what has been accomplished and eager to see where we will go next. Truly our Big Sky is vast and awesome, both figuratively and literally in the BSB program!

Summit ILC has two final roles this fall as we get ready to send the final reports to the Federal Government. One was for me as Summit representative and long time educator/advocate to facilitate a consumer dinner and forum at the Community Service Bureau conference. See the article on page 5 for more details.

The second and final role is to visit the nine consumers within eight families who took the risk to step up to the BSB pilot plate. Summit director Mike Mayer developed a BSB Consumer Evaluation with main areas of assessment for the consumers to reflect and report on. These areas are:

**Satisfaction with Consumer Directed Features** such as Person Centered Planning Process, Support Brokerage (the two partners - Independence Advisor and Financial Manager - that work with peo-

ple who signed up), Individual budget process, developing and maintaining their Support Service and Spending Plan (SSSP), supervising workers and managing services, and commenting on how to maintain a Quality Assurance Process.

**Transition Process onto the BSB Waiver** in regard to each persons experience in the level of simple to complex, timeliness, case manager's knowledge, and any suggestions they may have.

**Training and Support Needs** questions include should we continue with initial training of people interested in this waiver, are training materials useful, and suggestions for alternative methods of training.

**Suggestions and Feedback** offers a final opportunity to express ways we could improve the BSB program or make it more consumer-friendly for current and future participants.

If you would like a final report or more information about how to receive more information about the BSB waiver please contact

**Robin Homan , DPHHS at 1-406-444-4131  
Or your local Regional Program Officer**

Submitted by Jude Monson,  
Summit ILC Program Manager

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- ◆ **Vanguard communication device** Model VG. It is touch screen machine with several pages of icons and a speaker. Call (406-257-7433) with any basic questions. New machines like this sell for over \$7000. Make a reasonable offer if you're interested.
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- ◆ **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)

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Contact: Vernon Weiss/Program Director  
700 S.W. Higgins, STE 101  
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406-523-3953  
Email: [vern@rampnw.org](mailto:vern@rampnw.org)

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