2013 Session - A Fresh Opportunity
by Travis Hoffman

Now that the elections are behind us, our elected legislators will meet in Helena for the 63rd Montana Legislature (http://leg.mt.gov). The 2013 Legislative Session is set to begin on January 7 and will meet for 90 days, ending on April 27.

During this legislative session human service providers, including Montana’s Centers for Independent Living and personal assistance agencies, will be struggling to keep up with the cost of doing business as we are still receiving the same levels of funding as we did in 2009. There are additional concerns: personal assistance services will take a funding cut on July 1, the Montana Youth Transitions Project has been without state partnership since 2009 and there are still many people waiting to receive Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Services.

There is still hope! The budget proposed by outgoing Gov. Schweitzer contains positive suggestions, including an innovative approach to improve the current personal assistance program. The proposal would transform the existing program into what is known as the Community First Choice Option to better meet the needs of individuals who rely on personal assistance, increase payments to service providers so businesses can cover their increased costs and continue to help direct health care workers afford health care insurance.

During the 2013 Legislative Session, Montana’s Centers for Independent Living will work to protect the services that are essential for individuals with disabilities to live as independently as possible and lead active and productive lives. However, we cannot do this alone.

We need YOUR help!

We ask that you join with us to let your voices be heard about the importance of services you receive and what the impact would be if you were to lose them. There will be numerous opportunities for you to contact legislators regarding various bills and funding decisions that they will be voting on.

An excellent way for you to stay current with everything that is going on during the session and find out when to contact legislators on key issues is to join the Montana Independent Living Action Alert E-Mail Listserv.

To join the action alert e-mail listserv simply send an e-mail to montana-ilaction-alert-subscribe@googlegroups.com or contact Travis Hoffman at Summit Independent Living Center and ask to be added to the listserv.

You can also follow action alert on Twitter by following @mtilactnalrt or by going to http://www.summitilc.org and clicking the Action Alert Listserv link at the top of the page.
Upcoming Events

Missoula County

Unless otherwise noted, classes are held in Summit’s Conference Room

Every first Friday, 10 A.M. : Summit Orientation

January 7, 10:00 - 12:00 : Living Well Orientation

January 8, 10:00 - 12:00 : Working Well Orientation

January 9, 1:00 - 3:00 : Smart Money

January 10, 11:00 - 12:00 & 1:00 - 2:00 : Be Your Best-Diabetes Prevention Orientation

January 17, 1:00 : Legislative 101

February, Every Thursday, 10:00 - 12:00 : Independence and Gratitude

February 7, 1:00 - 2:00 : Be Your Best-Diabetes Prevention Orientation

March, Every Thursday, 10:00 - 12:00 : Advocacy and Mentoring

March 6, 1:00 - 3:00 : Be Your Best-Diabetes Prevention Class
(Must have attended one earlier Orientation)

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

Lake County

January 7-11, afternoon : Living Well, Salish-Kootenai College, Bookstore Building

Every Third Thursday : People First

Call Michelle or Scott at (406) 676-0190 for more information or to register.

Summit Board
Leanne Beers
Sylvia Carollo
Bob Liston
Gay Moddrell
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Mary O’Connell
Larry Riley
Randy Morigeau
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**Missoula County**
- Executive Director: Mike Mayer
- Program Manager: Jude Monson
- SDPAS Program Manager: Mike Giddings
- SDPAS Specialist: Nicole Auer
- SDPAS Assistant: Betsy Ames
- Advocacy Coordinator: Travis Hoffman
- Peer Advocacy Coordinator: Chris Clasby
- Missoula People First Advisor/IL Specialist: Andrea Dahl
- Independent Living Specialist: Darren Larson
- Youth Coordinator: Michael Beers
- Outreach Specialist: Cara Wherley
- Communications/Media Relations Specialist: Justyn Field
- Secretary: Kathy Boyer
- Bookkeeper: Libby Miller
- Assistant Bookkeeper: Sally Wahl

**Flathead County**
- Coordinator: Flo Kiewel
- IL Specialist: Dianna Kintzler

**Ravalli County**
- Coordinator: Joanne Verwolf
- IL Specialist: Elizabeth Varnum
- People First Advisor: Mary Millin

**Lake County**
- Co-Coordinator: Michelle Williamson
- Co-Coordinator: Scott Williamson

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**Upcoming Events**

**Flathead County**

- **January 12**: Ski Fest, Izaak Walton Inn, Essex
  Free equipment and lessons

- **January 15, 1:00 - 2:30**: Sign Language Class begins

- **January 30**: Working Well, Columbia Falls

- **April and May**: Living Well, Libby and/or Kalispell

  Call Flo at (406) 257-0048 for more information or to register.

**Ravalli County**

- **January 8, 1:00 - 3:00**: Summit and Social Security Orientation

  **Every Wednesday, 3:00 - 4:00**: People First Meeting

  Call Joanne at (406) 363-5242 for more information or to register.

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**Kalispell**

- Peer Advocate: Robin Idol takes up kayaking for the first time

- Peer Advocate: Claudette Byrd-Rinck also works for the Forest Service

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**Former Kalispell**

- Peer Advocate: Marty Wheeler now works at the Montana Department of Revenue
INDEPENDENT LIVING AND THE 2013 MONTANA LEGISLATURE

Every legislative session Montana’s four Centers for Independent Living (Summit, NCILS, MILP and LIFTT) along with the Statewide Independent Living Council sponsor two events at the state capital to provide an opportunity for legislators to learn about the issues affecting people with disabilities all across the state of Montana.

Legislative Day will take place on Friday, January 25.

Legislative Day activities will include a morning workshop on the legislative process and an outline of current bills that are a priority for people with disabilities. The morning workshop will be followed by a potato bar luncheon with legislators in the rotunda of the Capitol. The luncheon will provide an opportunity for attendees to communicate with their legislative representatives in person and observe the legislative session.

Rally Day will take place on Friday, March 8.

Rally Day will be an opportunity for the Independent Living Centers to continue communicating to legislators and addressing policy concerns so we can keep working to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Montana. Rally Day activities vary from session to session depending on what issues need to be addressed but usually consist of educating legislators on who we are and what issues are important to people with disabilities.

If you are interested in attending Legislative Day in January or Rally Day in March, please contact your local Center for Independent Living to get more information.

2013 Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Adjustments

Cost of Living Adjustment: +1.7% for Social Security and SSI Recipients

Social Security Disability Thresholds:

- Maximum Social Security Benefit: $2,533/month
- Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA): $1,040/month (non-blind) & $1,740/month (blind)
- Trial Work Period (TWP): $750/month

Supplemental Security Income:

- SSI Federal Payment Standard: $710/month (individual) & $1,066/month (couple)
BULLETIN BOARD
See our website at: newsletter.summitilc.org for more ads

**Vestil 1000lb capacity lift** Model #ehlt-6678-1-43. Operates on 115V, rain proof operation controller, 36 inch lift height, 2 removable rails, hinged ramp for easy loading/unloading, hardly used. $3700 OBO. Call 531-8588

**Set of ramps for wheelchair/atv's**, a sliding bath/shower chair and a power hospital bed. To learn more about these items, call Tony at (406) 546-1570

**Jazzy 600 Wheelchair**. Great condition, $1500 OBO. Call (406) 676-0190 and ask for Summit’s Scott or Michelle.

**Wanted to Buy**—Used accessible van for transporting passenger in a wheelchair. Van must be an automatic. Call David or Patty at 257-8922

Have something you want to sell or give away or are you looking for a hard-to-find piece of equipment? If so, list it here by contacting Justyn Field at (406) 728-1630 or e-mail jfield@summitilc.org.

Or, list and find those hard-to-find items on the Montech item exchange website at: http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/mtdb/

**Office of Public Assistance**

**Computer Glitches Causing Medicaid/SNAP Denials**

Across the state, some Montanans are being incorrectly denied SNAP benefits and Medicaid after being approved.

If you are experiencing this problem, please do the following:

1. Contact your OPA Office and let them know you believe you have been incorrectly removed from benefits

2. Visit this website: http://citizensadvocate.mt.gov/ to file a complaint with the State of Montana Citizens’ Advocate Office

3. Contact Summit. We can help you work with OPA or, if you would like, get your story to the media to help illuminate this issue

**Web Comedy ‘My Gimpy Life’ Up For Awards**

The series ‘My Gimpy Life’ has been nominated for Best Comedy, Best Female Performance, Best Writing and Best Directing by the International Academy of Web Television.

The series, which focuses on the life of actress Teal Sherer, can be seen at: www.youtube.com/user/mygimpylife

The IAWTV Awards Ceremony will be January 8 and can be viewed live at: www.youtube.com/user/lawtvorg

Tips from Tom

We all need to manage stress in our lives. Stress can negatively affect our health and cause depression. Stress is caused by having too many obligations or too few. To be fulfilled we all need to feel useful. Accepting a certain number of obligations, but stopping before you start feeling overwhelmed, can help manage stress. Only you can determine your limits, of course!

Another way to manage stress is to engage in a routine exercise program. Many experts recommend at least 20 minutes of exercise three times a week.

There are definite signs your body will give you that indicate high stress levels. Some indicators include abnormal body functions like heavy periods, hives, fatigue and even dental issues like bleeding gums. Crazy, vivid dreams can also be a sign of stress.

Don’t ignore stress and take steps to address the stress in your life.

Tom Thompson can be emailed at tomskilaw@gmail.com
Be Able to Better Your Life: How the ABLE Act Could Improve the Future for Millions
by Justyn Field

Thomas Waldrup wants to go into nursing. Sidney Watson is thinking about becoming a web designer. Caysee Reinholz dreams of teaching children how to dance. All three of them want to own their own homes one day—but for many young adults with disabilities, like Thomas, Sidney and Caysee, government rules can bar them from becoming independent.

People with disabilities who receive certain forms of government assistance, such as Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid, are forbidden from having more than $2,000, $3,000 for couples, in assets. This means if someone who receives this assistance is able to save money, whether it’s through smart spending, family assistance or employment, that person can never save for an education, vehicle or even their own home without leaping through government hoops to ask for even more assistance, or having to hire a lawyer and spend a fair amount of money to maintain a Supplemental Needs Trust. Caysee Reinholz said she doesn’t believe that’s right.

“It’s not fair,” Reinholz said. “I have a job. I work at Opportunity Workspace.” Caysee said she wishes she could save the money she makes from work and have her family open a bank account so she could save for the things that she needs. That way she could trust her money was being handled properly without having to go through complicated legal steps.

“I don’t want to have a lawyer,” she said.

Sidney Watson agrees that the current system is unfair, and would like to contribute what she can to her future, even if she needs government assistance as well.

“Just because you’re getting help doesn’t mean you can’t contribute what you can,” Watson said. “If someone’s giving you assistance, you should be able to help that along.”

That’s where the ABLE Act comes in. Currently a bill in Congress, S. 1872 and H.R. 3424, ABLE would allow people with disabilities to save for needed expenses—such as education, housing, transportation and health care—without jeopardizing government supports. Similar to the 529 Plan, an existing tax-free account that allows people without disabilities to save for future expenses, the ABLE Account would give people with disabilities an option already available to other Americans.

The ABLE Act has numerous backers from a variety of groups, including Montana Sen. Jon Tester and The Arc, an organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Mary Caferro, coordinator of The ARC Montana Chapter, said she believes this bill will help people with disabilities stay independent and remain in their communities.
“It’s important to allow people upward mobility and the opportunity to move up the economic ladder: become self-sufficient,” Caferro said. “It’s tricky, because some people will always need public assistance because of who they are. To discriminate against those people is wrong—those people can contribute to society. And we need to do everything we can to help foster independence.”

ABLE Accounts, unlike the Individual Development Accounts that help people with and without disabilities save for a home, wouldn’t come and go depending on grant cycles. They could be permanent tools that would help people plan for their futures, and allow people to use their own money to become independent. There is a payback provision for ABLE Accounts: if the account holder dies, money not spent on allowed goals must first repay Medicaid before other interests. However, passing ABLE into law wouldn’t prevent a family from opening a Supplemental Needs Trust if they felt it would better suit their needs.

Although ABLE hasn’t received much opposition, there is also no guarantee it will be passed in the near future.

Sidney Watson poses with her dog Hunter. Sidney is thinking about being a web designer. She wants to be able to save money so she can keep her car running, and maybe one day pay for her own prosthetic hand.

Thomas Waldrup said not making the accounts available as soon as possible is a mistake.

“The quicker they pass it, the quicker disabled 18-year-olds graduating from high school can live independently,” he said. “Once they are on their own, they would have their own house, their own vehicle.”

Most importantly, Thomas said, is that it would allow people who might need some assistance to make their own way.

“Being able to tell people, ‘I can use your help, but right now I really don’t need it because I can do this on my own.’ If I need your help, I’ll ask,” said Waldrup.

Thomas Waldrup is a highschool student who wants to go into nursing because he likes helping people. He says it’s important to feel the accomplishment of earning your own way, instead of having to have everything be given to you.
AN ADVOCACY AND RESOURCE CENTER FOR
MONTANANS WITH DISABILITIES

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

Summit Electronic Newsletter Challenge!

Did you know that you can sign up to receive our newsletter via e-mail? That’s right. You could be a YouTube star! (Or at least get a chance to hang out with award-winning comedian Mike Beers for a day.)

Last quarter, Summit sent out over 1,800 hardcopy newsletters—and only 36 electronic ones! If you win but don’t want to be in the video, you could also get a chance to receive a giftcard to an as-of-yet unknown location.

So we decided to up the ante... So what are you waiting for? Get your friends and co-workers signed up for the FREE newsletter with disability news from Western Montana and switch your subscription to electronic. We know you have the stuff to be a YouTube star!

...And make a fun “Disability Faux Paus” YouTube video, featuring some of the best comedians from Western Montana! Community Prize: For every 50 people that sign up for the electronic version, we will add 1 minute to our video, up to 250 people for a 5-minute comedy extravaganza!

There’s a catch, though. The video is currently zero minutes long—and it will only increase in length if we get more people signed up for the electronic newsletter!

But that’s not all!

Personal Prize: If you call or e-mail Kathy at Summit, 728-1630 or kboyer@summitilc.org, and SWITCH your subscription from hardcopy to electronic-only, you will have a chance to get a cameo in our video!

Note: Summit staff and boardmembers are not eligible for the awesome Personal Prize—but if you work with Summit, you’re already awesome!

Please let Kathy know that you want to be entered into the prize pool if you switch subscriptions (or if you don’t want to).