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**The Summit Independent**

*An Advocacy and Resource Center for Montanans with Disabilities*

**Western Montana Disability News and Views**

Summit Independent Living Center, Inc. | 406-728-1630 | www.summitilc.org

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**2010: A Peer-Riffic Year in Review**

Summit peer advocacy coordinator Mary Olson gives us an in-depth look at several Missoula peer advocates and all that they were able to accomplish in 2010.

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62nd Montana Legislature Convenes in Helena

With the elections now well behind us, the 62nd Montana Legislature ([http://leg.mt.gov](http://leg.mt.gov)) is set to get down to business. The 2011 Legislative Session kicked off on January 3rd and promises to be 90 days of non-stop action scheduled to end on April 22nd.

As many of you are well aware, Montana, like many other states, is strapped for cash because of the slowed national economy and revenues coming up short of projections. As a result, we had to endure a barrage of budget cuts and freezes during the interim and are staring face to face with more potential cuts during the session. In human services, we are also facing the elimination of the one time only funding that was allocated during the 2009 session and that means the potential loss of 80 HCBS waiver slots and a reduction in provider rates for Medicaid services including personal assistance services. We will work hard during the session to try to minimize any human services cuts, which could have devastating effects on the thousands of Montanans and their families who have no choice but to rely on these much needed services. We will advocate to maintain current levels of services and we ask that you too join with us to let your voices be heard about the importance of the services you receive and what the impact would be if you lost them.

Other priority issues we will be following during the session include funding for the MYTransitions transition coordinator position, a resolution to study the feasibility for the state to opt into the Community

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"The thing that makes advocacy such a powerful movement is the inner commitment, the passion of the people for good."

~Burton Blatt
Women’s Safer and Stronger Program – Western Montana

Summit has recently contracted with Portland State University to participate in a research project called the Women’s Safer and Stronger Program along with two other centers for independent living, Sources in Fayetteville, AR and ABIL in Phoenix, AZ.

The project will last three years and women from western Montana who have experienced abuse are welcome to participate. The program is an online education tool that is designed to help women with disabilities learn to be safer from abuse and to provide them with information about local resources where they can get assistance if they are experiencing abuse.

Jude Monson, program manager; Susan Morris, outreach specialist; and Leanne Beers, board member, will be taking the lead in this project for Summit. In addition, we will have the opportunity to work with staff at the Rural Institute, including Rosemary Hughes and Rebecca Goe, and their valuable resources. We will be recruiting volunteers from the seven counties in western Montana to participate in this program so if you or someone you know may be interested, please contact Jude or Susan at the Missoula Summit office 728-1630.

Right to Know Heads to Hamilton

Please note the change in date for this event. The kick off date for the Right to Know campaign in Hamilton is now January 17th, 2011 at 5:30-8:30 PM at 401 N 1st St (empty building next to Gas and Grub). Hamilton partners Summit Independent Living Center, the Relay for Life, and the Montana Disability and Health Program will be holding the kick off for the Relay for Life, and for Montana’s media show “Every Woman Matters” in conjunction with CDC’s Right To Know campaign. The exhibit features portraits and stories of 12 women with disabilities from the state of Montana, some of which are breast cancer survivors, all of which are advocates. There will also be resources available to help you and your health care provider make the best of your mammogram experience as a woman with a disability. Take the time to know the facts about breast cancer and why you need to make screening a regular part of your health care.

If you would like more information, please contact: Mary Millin at 363-5242 or Deena Boyd at 363-3521

“Every woman counts, everyone is important. Every woman has the right to get the screenings they need; every woman matters!” Connie Leveque, Disability Advocate, MILP, Helena MT.
Basic Access for All New Home Construction

The Montana Independent Living Centers – Housing Task Force is actively promoting Visitability at a local, state, and national level. We would like to see the day when all newly constructed homes have the visitable/minimum accessibility standards. They are:

1) one zero-step entrance
2) doors with 32-36 inches of clear passage space
3) one bathroom on the main floor with maneuver space for a wheelchair

If a home does not have Visitability design features when constructed, the cost of home modification to accommodate someone who has acquired a disability can be overwhelming. Many of these people are forced from their homes into the restricting confines of nursing homes. This is inhumane and could be addressed in the way we build our homes. In addition, being able to access the homes of family and friends defines the meaning of community, but for people with a mobility impairment accessing a home with steps is either impossible or very difficult. Whether you’re someone in a wheelchair or on crutches, with a permanent or temporary disability, or someone in the later years of your life, these three features of Visitability are a must need.

Furthermore, Visitability is better design for all. Wider hallways, no steps to the main floor, and a bathroom with more room are necessities anyone can enjoy and create a safer environment in which to live.

Goals to Initiate Policy Change – Outreach to Centers of Independent Living & Other Disability Advocacy Groups

1) Collect a database of Visitability personal testimonies

With assistance from the Rural Institute at the University of Montana, we have created a personal testimony guide designed to offer people an opportunity to answer questions about why Visitability is important to them. We hope to capture stories from across Montana to illustrate why policy change is necessary. So far we have collected a dozen stories and used them during the Montana Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) public hearing to get a “no step entrance“ requirement into the plan. The stories worked well, especially for people who couldn’t be at the hearing. Our long term goal is to develop a white paper to show Housing and Urban Development (HUD) why Visitability should be included in their requirements for all new home construction. The paper will include statistical evidence supporting Visitability along with these stories. The collection of these stories could also help with the passage of the Inclusive Home Design Act. Please help us collect more Visitability personal testimonies to be used to promote basic home access at a local, state, and national level.

Here’s the web link to access the Visitability testimony guide: http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/390040/visitability-interview

2) Connect via Facebook

We have created a Facebook page to update our Montana housing advocates of our progress as a task force as well as connect with advocates from others states to share ideas and newsworthy items. Visit our page and click to “Like” us. We would love to hear about the housing advocacy work you are doing! Here’s the web link to access our Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Montana-Housing-Task-Force/143550692358230

For more information, contact: Darren Larson at (406) 728-1630 or by email at dlarson@summitilc.org.
Youth Update: An Action Packed Year

Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills (BALLS) classes were offered to five high schools this past year and almost 100 students took this training in three Missoula High Schools as well as in Frenchtown and Florence. Disability and IL History, Movement and Culture training was also given to junior and senior history/government classes at Big Sky, Alberton and Upward Bound. Mike Beers, Youth Coordinator, and Mary Olson, Peer Coordinator, continue to offer these courses and will be in Hellgate and Sentinel High Schools again this winter!

Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy (YODA) is a group of young people with disabilities ages 14-30 who want to get together for social and recreational opportunities. Cara Wherely, our new Missoula Youth Specialist is facilitating this group. Cara is an excellent addition to our Youth Team, and is also recently trained as a Living Well facilitator (See our list of classes on page 6).

Western Montana Regional Transitions meetings are held quarterly in Missoula in the Rural Institute conference room. If you are interested in transition outcomes for students leaving high school, please contact Mike Beers.

Montana IL Youth Task Force teleconference meetings are held once a month. The main priorities are transition funding through the 2011 legislature for a coordinator position, student led IEPs and for Vocational Rehabilitation to have a statewide consistent age for student involvement in their transition planning process. This task force also coordinated the Montana IL Youth Symposium in Missoula this summer with 40 people of all ages representing the four Centers for Independent Living (CIL).

The Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) held its annual training in Helena in July. Every year new students come for this training and past alumni like Mike or IL staff like Mary, come back to assist with this training! Applications are available for the summer of 2011, please consider this as an excellent opportunity to connect with others youth from across the state and to learn the skills necessary to be successful in your adult life.

The MYTransitions transition coordinator facilitated the National Disability Mentoring Day event in Montana along with Mike and Mary who facilitated the event in the Missoula area. 40 students with disabilities from Big Sky, Sentinel, and Frenchtown High Schools were placed in job shadow opportunities with a mentor for one day.

In addition, Mike and Mary have been key leaders in national youth education, such as through the Association of Programs for Rural
Flathead County Update

Some big changes have taken place with the Summit Kalispell office. We have moved into our new offices at the Gateway Community Center (the old Gateway West Mall). You can now find us at 1203 Highway 2 West #35. The new office has a lot more room with space for peers to work and a computer in the reception area for consumers to use. We are enjoying our new space and all the activity that takes place in the mall.

We had our Grand Opening Ceremony October 22 with a ribbon cutting. Also on October 22nd the first Disability Resources Fair was held in the Gateway Community Center. The fair was put on in collaboration between several agencies serving people with disabilities. We had an excellent turnout for the first year and hope to do it again in the coming year.

We welcomed four new peer advocates into our group this year. We have three newly hired Peers: Claudette Byrd-Rinck, Debra LaVanway, and Bob Trudeau. We also have Rick Heitz who is currently on volunteer status.

In August, the Peer Advocates had a MATOR equipment demonstration and BBQ at the Snappy’s Sport Center fishing pond. Lots of people were able to catch fish in the pond and all had a great time.

Dianna helped to coordinate a collaborative Candidates Forum in October that was very well attended.

In November we had a Barn Dance at the Gateway Community Center with 35 to 40 people in attendance. There was a square dancing demonstration by the Flatheaders Square Dance Club and Western 10-step dance instruction by April and Sam from the Blue Moon. The Big Sky Fiddlers provided the music. Everyone who attended had a wonderful time and we look forward to seeing what the New Year brings.

Lake County Update

Here in Lake County activity has been picking up. We have been running a Living Well with a Disability workshop and it finished on January 6th. Then we are starting another cycle of Living Well on January 11th. In March we will be starting a Working Well with a Disability workshop, which we plan to finish up in mid May to early June.

If you are interested in either the Living Well class that starts on January 11th or the Working Well class that we’ll be starting in March, please contact Scott or Michelle here at the Ronan office at (406) 676-0190.

Also, Michelle is assisting with the Native American Task Force development of a workshop focusing on the needs of Native Americans with disabilities and the independent living philosophy. Meanwhile, Scott is working on getting the peer support group going in the early part of 2011.

Summit peers Betty Kelton and Owen Deardorff are both doing well and are excited to see what the New Year will bring. We are working with Betty on starting a support group for cancer survivors. Owen will be helping to develop an activity around Mack days and is also interested in talking to the Tribe regarding his opposition to having a new nursing home facility built on the reservation.

The People First group is busy planning different activities for the New Year. We are looking forward to this New Year and hope it brings many new beginnings.
Independent Living (APRIL) youth steering committee, which prepared and held Youth Peer-to-Peer trainings at both the APRIL pre-conference in Kansas City, Kansas and at a CIL in Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition, they were guest facilitators at the North Carolina YLF in Raleigh, North Carolina!

Summit is honored to have Mike and Mary represent our center as the respected and energetic youth leaders that they are in the local, statewide and national arenas! If you’re interested in participating in a one-day leadership training, they are also the co-facilitators for the LEAD ON training throughout western Montana!

Summit is also proud to announce that Darren Larson is the representative for the Youth Development Network on the Missoula Children’s Forum and Youth Oversight Committee. In addition to Darren’s youth transitions and work experience he will share his expertise in the access and housing needs of people with disabilities. Ask him about visitability and how it can benefit your community!

Missoula Classes and Workshops – Winter 2011

Please contact Kathy Boyer or Jude Monson about your interest in taking these classes.

Living Well with a Disability Workshop – Held on Mondays from 1-3 pm
Co-Facilitators Darren Larson and Andrea Dahl
A class to set your personal goals for 2011! Each class builds on the previous one so we ask that you commit to the 10 weeks of this class and receive the support for making positive change in your life. Orientation to class starts on January 10, 2011 from 1-3 pm. This once a week class runs from January 31st through April 18th.

Working Well with a Disability Workshop – Held on Tuesdays from 10 am to noon
Co-Facilitators Darren Larson and Jude Monson
A class for people who want to improve their career options or work life while maintaining your health! Each class builds on the previous one so we ask that you commit to this class as you would a job. Orientation to working well starts on February 1st from 10 am to noon. This once a week class runs from February 8 through March 29th!

New Mind Over Mood! – Held on Thursdays from 10 am to noon
Facilitator Leanne Beers
Have you already taken an assertiveness or communication class but would like to keep working on these skills? This might just be the class for you! Come to the orientation on January 27th and learn about this eight-week class, which runs from February 3rd through March 25th!

LEAD ON – Specific Missoula and Ravalli agencies have requested this one-day disability leadership training. If you are interested hosting this training in your western Montana county please contact Mary Olson or Mike Beers to set up a date!
Ravalli County Update

Here we are at the beginning of a new year… and a new decade… Here’s hoping each and every one of you had a good year and that 2011 proves even better!

This past year four new peer advocates joined our group. We welcome aboard Brad Bauder, Ernest “Chip” Boyd, Elizabeth Varnum, and LaRoy Williamson. Each brought with them their own areas of interest and expertise… Brad truly enjoys being a panel member for disability awareness presentations… Chip is our “techy” and has developed some excellent PowerPoint presentations… Elizabeth has taken on the role of a co-advisor for the Bitterroot Valley People First Aktion Club, a co-facilitator of the Living Well with a Disability workshop, as well as working some in the office… LaRoy has been active in promoting “visitability,” advocating that all public buildings and paths of travel be made accessible, and collaborating with various agencies in support of more accessible recreational sites. They all joined our current team of peer advocates, including Deena Boyd, Scot Browne, Susan Butchart, Joan Marie Connor, and Velda Vial, and have participated in many community activities throughout the year, with the highlight being the 20th Anniversary of the ADA, with two memorable celebratory events… Bitterroot Glory Days & Parade here in Hamilton, and the ADA Celebration held at Fort Missoula.

The Bitterroot Valley People First Aktion Club has remained active this past year with community projects as well. In March, Mary and two members of the Aktion Club attended the People First Senate, which was a two-day conference held in Helena. Community projects included planting flowers at the Youth Home, helping out with the Kiwanis Fishing Derby, the Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast, and the Kiwanis food booth at the Ravalli County Fair, and collaborating with the Summit peer advocates in putting together various activities during Bitterroot Glory Days in celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the ADA, as well as attending the ADA Celebration at Fort Missoula. Social activities included hosting a Valentine Party for the members of the Missoula People First Aktion Club, and then joined the Missoula Aktion Club for the December Christmas party. The Ravalli County group had a couple of outings to Missoula on their own, and had a grand Halloween party here in Hamilton.

In addition to all the People First and peer activities, this past September we had the honor of having a nationally renowned speaker, Dr. Richard Pimentel, join us at the Pharaohplex Theatre to watch a documentary of his life, “The Music Within.” And the following day he gave an informative, entertaining, and inspiring presentation on overcoming attitudinal barriers, and provided information on employer training programs he developed to give individuals with disabilities the opportunity to become successful in the workforce.

Then in October, after months of planning and preparation to provide education, training, support and recognition to caregivers in Ravalli County, the Bitterroot Caregivers Conference was a huge success, with 65 caregivers and 20 staff participating in the event. At the end of November, we collaborated with Ravalli County Council on Aging in putting together an education forum for our returning and newly elected legislators, and I extend many thanks to those who participated and we look forward to working with them throughout the legislative session.

Here’s wishing you all the very best throughout 2011. As the 2011 legislative session begins, we’re faced with budget constraints, so I encourage each and every one of you to let your voice be heard so the services you need may remain in place.
2010: A Peer-Riffic Year in Review

2011 is now in full swing so now it is time to say goodbye to 2010 but as we do, we would like to take this opportunity to reflect on yet another successful year!!

We owe a lot of thanks to our peer advocates, who work hard in the office and in the community to make sure that we are doing all that we can for our consumers. Last year Missoula had seven peers who we would like to thank for their loyalty and passion for the disability movement: **Pam Davis**, **Bill Vinner**, **Lynne Kelly**, **Sierra Lode**, **Tom Thompson**, **Jessica Schambron**, and **Cara Wherely**. These sensational seven accomplished so much in 2010 that we couldn’t name them all, but we will try!

**Pam Davis** has been a leader with nursing home transition, working with consumers on goals to help them prepare for that day they move into the community, as well as one of our go to people when it comes to legislative and self-advocacy issues.

**Bill Vinner** tells his story to high school students, with a humor that they absolutely love! Also, if you have been to any of our social events, you may have seen Bill’s art work, he creates all of our posters, signs, and maps for events, a truly talented man!

**Lynne Kelly** has been our representative for the Right to Know Campaign at several conferences including Missoula, Pablo, and the Race for the Cure in Helena (not to mention her full size portrait you may have recognized at some of these events)! She also is our representative with Missoula Aging Services as a friendly visitor, going into the nursing homes to visit people and help them realize living in the community could be a possibility for them. You may also recognize Lynne at the front desk of Summit, or in the community providing information and referral services, presentations on her life in the high schools, and gathering donations and supporters for our fun Summit Social Events.

**Sierra Lode** presents her story to high school classes, and has read stories to preschoolers to help teach at a young age that people with disabilities are people too.

**Tom Thompson** and **Jessica Schambron** are our dynamic duo specializing in a little bit of everything! They started their own MS and Disability social group, inviting others monthly to movies, camping, and other fun activities while providing each other in the group some informal peer mentoring. They also are always ready to jump in and put on the larger social events; as well as soak up all of the disability training they can get! Tom has also been very active in the Housing Taskforce; speaking to architects, builders, and housing officials about the importance of visitability; visit with him sometime about everything they have accomplished, you will be amazed!

Last but not least, our newest peer, **Cara Wherely**, has taken on the youth programs in Missoula, and has taken a huge load off of our shoulders! She is now co-facilitating two of our BALLS classes (Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills), leading our YODA group (Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy), and got trained to teach one on one Living Well with a Disability classes to high school students who are interested.

This holiday season, we at the Missoula Summit office truly feel blessed to work with these folks!

Mary Olson, Peer Advocacy Coordinator, Missoula
No Social Security Increases for 2011

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are adjusted to reflect the increase, if any, in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

However, BLS determined there was no increase in the CPI-W from the third quarter of 2008, the last year a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) was determined, to the third quarter of 2010. Therefore, under existing law, there will be no COLA in 2011 and SSI recipients will continue to receive $674 per month. SSDI recipients will also not see an increase in their monthly benefit.

Also, because there was a decrease in the national average wage index for 2009, the substantial gainful activity (SGA) and trial work period (TWP) limits will also remain unchanged. The SGA level for 2011 is $1,000/month and the TWP limit for 2011 is $720/month.

For more information, please visit: http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/pr/2011cola-pr.htm

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First Choice Option, maintaining the Health Care for Health Care Workers program, ensuring an accessible mail balloting bill, and funding for the Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities (MWD) program, which, we are pleased to announce, has been a highly successful program since its inception on July 1, 2010. As of November 2010, the MWD program had 228 enrollees and had collected over $40,000 in premiums, $14,000 in November alone.

Travis Hoffman will once again be working in Helena as the statewide lobbyist for Montana’s four Centers for Independent Living during the session. If you are interested in following our work at the session, learning of opportunities to contact legislators when important issues arise please subscribe to the Montana Independent Living Action Alert email listerv by sending an email to montana-il-action-alert-subscribe@googlegroups.com. You can also follow action alerts on Twitter by following @mtilactnalrt or by going to http://www.summitilc.org and clicking the Action Alert link at the top.
Multiple Sclerosis Support Group

Summit Independent Living is pleased to announce a Multiple Sclerosis (MS) activity and support group in Missoula. Last year the group shared movie nights, went camping, enjoyed great barbeque, fine dined and even went Christmas tree hunting. The group also joined Summit in several outreach programs. All people with MS are welcome.

The group holds a movie night twice a month at the Copper Run Apartments, 2200 Great Northern (behind Albertsons on north Reserve Street; http://www.copperrunapts.com). The group meets in the community center in the middle of the complex in the evening.

For more information, please contact Summit at (406) 728-1630 or Jess at (406) 493-6868. You can also reach us by email at doublemsranch@bison-lee.com.