Somewhere in Missoula, just off Mullen Road, on a quiet street called Shindig Lane, at the end of a little drive, sits an exceptional home.

The home isn’t uniquely colored. It’s gray and tan with maroon doors and common white gutters. It isn’t especially large, nor is it a strangely shaped. No, this little home is exceptional because anyone who visits can enter. Anyone can share dinner and chat with the family inside. And anyone, when they are full on cookies and drink and need a break from chit-chat, can use the bathroom. People can do this, at this exceptional little home, because it is Visitable.

It is one of two homes that Habitat for Humanity of Missoula has built this year. Both are Visitable, which means they have a zero-step entry, 32-inch wide doorways and a bathroom on the main floor that someone in a wheelchair could use. In short, it’s a home that everyone is welcome in.

After building an accessible home for a family last year, Missoula’s Habitat for Humanity chapter started speaking with Summit’s housing advocate Darren Larson about building all homes with basic access. Larson has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair to get around. He told them about growing up in Eureka and not being able to visit certain friends or go to their birthday parties because of inaccessible homes. He also told them about the statewide Montana Housing Task Force that is working toward expanding affordable/accessible housing. That conversation led to Habitat for Humanity examining how to make future homes Visitable.

“Our site supervisor saw how simple the changes were, but how important they were for the future,” said Habitat for Humanity of Missoula’s Executive Director Frankie Olson. “Little changes were easy to make in our building and so we implemented them and we’re going to do them for all future homes.”

See, making a home Visitable is pretty easy and cheap—as long as you do it while the house is first being built. Trying to make a home Visitable after it already has steps, small doorways and a tiny bathroom is much trickier. And more expensive.
A Visitable home isn’t just useful for someone who currently has mobility difficulties—it’s for anyone. Anyone who wants to have friends and relatives over for the holidays, including ones with wheelchairs and walkers and canes. Anyone who wants to stay in their home as they age and gradually become less able to climb flights of stairs to get in or around their home. Anyone who is planning to sell their home to someone who does plan to retire in it, keeping in mind that most people stay in a home for an average of seven years while most new homes are built to last eighty. And such a home is useful to anyone who wants to have big furniture. It’s a lot easier to move a couch up a soft incline and through a 32-inch doorway than it is to haul it up steps and try to angle it through a 28-inch wide opening.

Like the exceptional home on Shindig, where a family will be able to have friends and family over for the holidays regardless of their level of mobility, another Visitable home will be built in Missoula by Habitat for Humanity next year. And, hopefully, more homes the year after that. And the year after that. Because, like Olsen said, “It’s important for everyone to have access. You never know what happens in the future or what kind of friends you’ll meet. Having everyone be able to be welcome in your home is wonderful.”

To find out more about Habitat for Humanity of Missoula, please visit: http://www.habitatmsla.com/

And to find out more about exciting Visitability news and other Housing issues, turn to page 12!
Mathalia

Mathalia was featured as an Emerging Leader in the 2010 Emerging Leader Showcase. Her story highlighted all of her inclusive recreation activities: swim team, violin lessons, high school orchestra and recitals, theater, and her first few volunteer jobs in the community.

As she finished her sophomore year of high school Mathalia’s team gathered at the invitation of her mother to discuss what a summer job could look like for her. Her team consisted of her Developmental Disabilities Case Manager, Bonnie; the Vocational teacher for her junior year, LanAnn; a job coach who had supported her in the community, Sandi; her mom, Jan; and a staff person from the Rural Institute Transition Projects, Ellen. The school had videotaped her performance on various in-school work experiences and her mom and Ellen had videotaped her performance on her community volunteer jobs. This helped all team members learn about her skills, interests and supports, as well as the conditions that worked best for Mathalia. She was now 17 years old and most 17-year-olds have summer jobs. Ideally we wanted something she could walk or take the bus to and a job that would be a good enough match for her to work independently once she was trained.

Mathalia is quite independent if her schedule is consistent or written in a list of familiar tasks. She works at her own pace and is very precise. We wanted to avoid tasks where she would be rushed or interrupted within her routine.

Mathalia’s mom set up an appointment with the Math Department at the University of Montana to talk to them about some of their clerical needs and how Mathalia might be able to make a contribution there. Mathalia’s dad, Karel, is a professor in the Math Department so Jan relied on their connections to get in the door. Jan shared information about Mathalia’s skills and tasks she could do for the department through her visual résumé/portfolio. A list of tasks that the department needed and Mathalia could perform was created. The list included alphabetizing student and faculty time cards for payroll, making copies and collating packets, and delivering mail to the Dean’s office across campus. Mathalia is now working one day a week at the Math Department with the support of a paraprofessional. It is an unpaid vocational experience through her high school at this time.

Another opportunity developed for Mathalia during the same time period. The Transition Projects Director happened to strike up a conversation on a plane ride that led to Mathalia’s first paid job. It began as the typical conversation: “What do you do?” Ellen shared that she worked with families and youth with disabilities around employment in the community. Sheena, the owner of Prudential Missoula Properties wanted to know more. Ellen explained the approach of matching the skills, abilities, and contributions of people with disabilities to the unmet needs of employers. She explained that many of the youth she knew didn’t compete well and thus were oftentimes overlooked for employment in the community. When Sheena wanted an example, Ellen asked her what tasks she did as the owner that took away from work she could be doing to promote more business and income for Prudential.

Sheena talked about the property management service Prudential offered that was time consuming and not as profitable for the agency as the sales component. Property management included making sure the bills for all of the properties were paid on time and then the information entered into the QuickBooks accounting system. Then Sheena asked Ellen about the students with whom she was working. Ellen described Mathalia as a young woman who is very active and involved in

Read about Mathalia and other Emerging Leaders at:
http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/EmergingLeaders.asp
Missoula County Update

Missoula has a number of services and meetings that we want to make sure are highlighted this winter!

Blind and Low Vision Education and Support Group meets every second Tuesday from 1-2:30 pm in the Summit conference room. Anyone with a vision loss is welcome to come check out this group.

Senior Companions are trained volunteers who go into people’s homes. We have six Senior Companions who work with elders with disabilities once a week. A huge thank you to our senior companions: Rose Blick, Karen Bollinger, Mary Montgomery, Eva Warthem, John Weig and Betty Zander for their energy and commitment.

Missoula Valley People First Fundraiser: The chapter held a fundraiser with Herberger’s Department Store. The chapter members sold coupon booklets for Community Days in November. The chapter received a bonus check for the number of coupons that were used, which made this the most successful fundraiser for the chapter.

Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy (YODA) will hold a January focus group to help build the vision for The Playground Project. YODA youth will discuss the traditional playground experience as they have lived it and respond to inclusive playground designs and equipment. The group will also brainstorm ways to realize the community building potential of the new playground, to be sited in McCormick Park in 2013.

Please share your opinion by completing The Playground Project survey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/G7N5NPF

Thanks to Jenny Montgomery of The Playground Project for contributing to this update!

Jude Monson, Program Manager

2012 Winter classes:

January 9-13 is our orientation for Living Well and Working Well classes.

Come hear about the classes and sign up if you are interested.

Working Well starts Tuesday, January 17 from 10 am to noon and runs every Tuesday through February 28.

Living Well class starts Monday January 23 from 10 am to noon and runs every Monday through April 2.

The second young adult Empower Me II class will start on Thursday February 2 and run through March 29.
Flathead County Update

Flathead County Peer Advocates participated in the first Disability Health Fair at The Wave in Whitefish on November 12. Several other agencies participated as well and there was a demonstration of adaptive exercise equipment provided by The Wave personnel. We look forward to participating in this fair on a yearly basis as it provides a great opportunity to network with other agencies and make our services better known in the north valley.

A Men’s Support Group is meeting the third Monday of every month at 6:30 PM at The Summit Medical Fitness Center conference room; this group is led by Rich Heitz. The next Working Well with a Disability Workshop begins January 25 and will be facilitated by Claudette Byrd-Rinck with Rick Heitz co-facilitating. An Independent Living Skills Training class will begin January 17. Both workshops will run for approximately 8 weeks and meet from 2:00 to 4:00 PM. Please call the office at 257-0048 if you would like to participate in any of our groups, or if you have a suggestion for a new group you would like to see started.

Our Ho, Ho, Homicide murder mystery party took place on December 3 and was a great success. We had 38 people for an afternoon of fun and laughter. Although we all know that the Flathead staff and consumers are very sharp, no one was able to solve the mystery and name the suspect correctly—except for the murderer herself! We look forward to seeing you at our next social event.

Flo Kiewel, Flathead County Coordinator

Women’s Safer and Stronger Program

Summit is now recruiting participants for the Women’s Safer and Stronger Program pilot. 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. Participants will need to plan to spend 2-3 hours and will be compensated for their time. Compensation is also available for childcare and transportation expenses.

If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact Susan or Jude at the Missoula Summit office: 1 (800)398-9002 or 728-1630.
Ravalli County Update

Hello from Ravalli County. It has been a challenging couple of months for our office due to health issues with some of our staff and Peer Advocates. It is great to have Joanne Verwolf back to work after successful hip surgery, Mary Millin is recovering from her back surgery in October, LaRoy Williamson is ready to return to his Peer duties after successful cancer treatment and Velda Vial is home after taking time off for family health issues in Alaska. Special thanks to Elizabeth Varnum and our Peer Advocates for holding the office together.

In October, we held a Harvest Dance which was a huge success. Thirty-four people laced up their dancing shoes as we danced the night away to music provided by the “The Montana Kids.” In addition to tired feet and full tummies, we showed off our artistic talents with a pumpkin decorating contest! A great time was had by all.

Our calendars will be full this winter and we hope you will join us as we will once again offer our “Living Well with a Disability” workshop (January to March). We are pleased to announce two new workshops, Self-Awareness (February to March) and “Working Well with a Disability” (March to May). Call our office at 363-5242 to sign up or for more information.

Being involved with Summit is never dull--watch your mailbox for information about Movie Night and get those bowling arms warmed up as we are planning a Wii Bowling Night for February.

The Bitterroot Valley People First Aktion Club has been a little quieter since Mary has been out. However, we did have elections and will have our installation of officers at Perkins Restaurant on December 19 and are planning to help Kiwanis with food boxes on December 16. We are also hoping to get together with members of the Missoula People First sometime soon.

Thanks to all of you that help make our office amazing and our social events the place to be. Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Joanne Verwolf, Ravalli County Coordinator

Sanders and Mineral Counties Update

We are interested in hearing from Sanders and Mineral County residents about what community issues they would like to see Summit address in their county. We are also looking for peer advocates in both counties. We would like to offer skills training and disability awareness and history classes in both Sanders and Mineral County.

If you are interested in classes, becoming a peer advocate with Summit, or if you are aware of a community issue that affects the disability community in your county, please contact Susan at the Missoula Summit office 406-728-1630 or 800-398-9002.

Susan Morris, Outreach Specialist

Lake County Update

We have begun discussions with Salish-Kootenai College Student Support Services to see if we are able to schedule “Living Well” and “Working Well” courses to be set within their student lab. Student Support Services has nearly 200 students with various disabilities. These classes are targeted for mid-January. Also, our local People First chapter is looking to do fund raising activities in early next year, so we’re hoping they do great!

Michelle Williamson, Lake County Co-Coordinator
her community. Ellen talked about her reading and math skills, her amazing dexterity while playing the violin and making potholders, and her preciseness and drive to create tracking sheets to self-monitor her violin practice. Ellen explained that we were looking for her first job. Sheena asked Ellen to call her and set an appointment for Mathalia’s mom and Ellen to come in to talk more.

When Jan and Ellen met with Sheena she showed them the process of how to pay the property management bills online. It involved identifying different information on each of the bills (property name, vendor, amount due, date due); searching for specific property names on the computer; entering the amount due and date due; and adding notations about the service. The checks to the vendors are then printed out for the owner to sign. The other piece of the job was to enter the same information into QuickBooks so the property management account was up-to-date and balanced.

Sheena looked over at Ellen and Jan and said, “Stop me if any of this is too hard.” Jan replied, “She can do all of this. It is structured into steps and basically is matching letters and numbers. She will just need training and practice about how to find the information on the bill and the computer.” Mathalia is now working two days a week for 2½ hours a day in addition to going to school, volunteering at the library, swimming and acting in plays. She rides the bus from school to work and then rides it home. She received her first paycheck in October and will be receiving raises and reviews along the same time lines as her coworkers. She still has a job coach with her for part of the work shift but this support will fade as she learns all the steps of paying the property management bills.

What worked about this story was having the vision that Mathalia belonged in her community and could make a contribution to an employer, using connections to introduce the concept of a negotiated job, and being very clear about Mathalia’s skills, tasks and conditions needed to be successful in a workplace.

Jan added that the team was ready and waiting. Mathalia’s visual résumé/portfolio had been produced; team members had generated a list of ideal working conditions needed for Mathalia to be successful; the vision of her being a contributing community member had been created; a broad range of team members had been included; and community connections were being utilized. Mathalia’s skills were also in place. She is active in the community and able to get around independently. She enjoys work and being productive and exhibits a strong work ethic.

It is an exciting adventure. All eyes are on Mathalia developing confidence in her tasks and moving away from needing a job coach. Employees at Prudential Missoula Properties enjoy Mathalia’s presence and are finding more work for her to do. In the middle stands Mathalia and she is simply taking it all in stride. Mathalia will be acting in the Missoula Community Theater’s production of “Rapunzel,” playing the part of a gremlin. Her coworkers, Gina and Sheena, want to come and watch her perform, which is even more exciting to Mathalia than the fact that Sheena just handed her her first paycheck.

ASHLEY BOYD - SUMMIT’S NEW SDPAS ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Ashley is a veteran who has served overseas in Iraq and Kuwait. She now lives in Missoula with her boyfriend of 5 years and their two dogs.

Ashley enjoys watching football, and is a fan of the Montana Griz and the Philadelphia Eagles. She enjoys traveling, especially to visit family in Great Falls and eastern Washington.

Ashley holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Montana.

Welcome aboard Ashley!
Youth Updates

Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills Update

I can’t believe it’s not butter! Oops wrong article... I can’t believe the first semester is already over. A big thanks to Laura Coulter and her Independent Living class at Sentinel High School for inviting us to their stone soup gathering; the food was delicious. We can’t wait to come back for round two with Sentinel next year! And if you are a student from Sentinel reading this, we would be happy to come back sooner if you have another stone soup feast! The class welcomed us like a part of their family!

Also, as a follow up to the last article on advocacy at Sentinel High, they have made huge steps forward into making the lunch room equal to all... good work Sentinel! Lead on!

Although we miss our Sentinel students, we have been busy at Michael Beer’s old stomping ground, Hellgate High School! We are teaching Ms. Zinke’s Independent Living Skills class, and we can honestly say we are learning as much from them as they are from us. They are our first class to complete a PowerPoint to self-direct their own IEPs (Individualized Education Programs). They are mostly freshman and sophomores, and so we can’t wait to see the super advocates that they will become! They keep us thinking and have really stepped up to the challenges we have set forth for them. Thank you to all of our students (Ballers) thus far this semester. It was a duty, and truly an honor to get to know you all.

After the holidays, we will return to the classroom—this time in Frenchtown High School and Big Sky High School. If you see us in the halls, stop and say hello!

In other youth news, we are currently surveying high school students to decide what kind of service we can offer to best fit their transition needs. If you are interested in completing the survey, please contact molson@summitilc.org.

YODA: Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy Update

Happy New Year from the Missoula YODA group! The year of 2011 was full of activities for us. We gained many new members. As a group we did a lot of new things. We watched an episode of Glee that illustrated some important points about disability perception. We got involved with the 2011 Legislative session by talking about issues related to youth and writing letters to legislators. We even had two youth testify in front of the Appropriations Committee in favor of continuing funding for the Montana Youth Transition Project.

We had some fun times too!

We went to a men Griz basketball game. We also played a rousing game of Nerf capture the flag, and some of our high school members helped in the planning process. The Nerf activity had the most members in attendance to date. In the summer we did our annual accessible fishing trip and BBQ in the Bitterroot. We also attended a Griz football game that was sponsored by Griz Kids, and we went to Summit’s Halloween Social. Thanks to Greg and Justin for helping us set up at the Social, run the cake walk and take the non perishable food items that were collected to the Missoula Food Bank.

On December 14 we had a Christmas Party. We played games, watched a movie and had a pot-luck.

We’re looking forward to another great and productive year in 2012. Our goal is to do more social advocacy work as a group. In January we are going to participate in a focus group for the all-abilities playground organizers. They are planning to build an accessible playground at McCormick park for all children to use. Of course we will have a lot of fun also. Thank you to all of the YODA members for a fabulous year, let’s have another fabulous one next year!

To follow the Playground Project visit: www.facebook.com/ThePlaygroundProject

or go to

http://missoulaspecialneedsfamilies.com/the-playground-project

Mike Beers, Youth Coordinator

Cara Wherley, Youth Specialist
Do you have a job or are you thinking about getting one? 
Do you have a disability?

Here is a bit of information to consider...

Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS)

A PASS is a way for someone to save money to spend on things they need to get or keep a job, such as:

• Vehicle • Equipment • Attendant care • Uniforms
• Child care • Dues • Vehicle modifications • Licenses

PASS candidates include:

• People who are receiving unearned income, such as SSDI
• People who have too many resources to receive SSI
• People who are working and need SSI/Medicaid to reach job goal
• People getting SSI and SSDI
• Students receiving or thinking about using rehabilitation services (such as Vocational Rehabilitation)

Learn more about PASS at: www.passplan.org

Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities (MWD)

Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities is a Montana state program that allows workers with disabilities to pay for Medicaid, even if they haven’t received SSI or SSDI before.

Applicants must be considered disabled by Social Security Act criteria, or would be considered disabled if not for current work activities. However, the MWD program allows for much higher income and resource limits than standard Medicaid programs.

Enrolling in this program can also be a great way for some applicants to avoid an expensive incurment, or spend-down, to become Medicaid-eligible.

Learn more about MWD at: www.summitilc.org/mwd.html

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Vocational Rehabilitation is a state agency that helps people with disabilities who want to work in numerous ways by providing a variety of services, including:

• Career counseling • Adaptive equipment for work
• Funding job training, including school
• Assisting with job searching • Support services

Learn more about VR at: www.dphhs.mt.gov/vocrehab/

Working Well Class

This is a class for people who are interested in setting career goals while maintaining their health. You may have a goal to start college or look for a job or keep the job you are in now but with less stress.

Class orientation starts at Summit on Jan. 10.

To find out more about this class, contact Jude Monson, Program Manager or Kathy Boyer at Summit at 728-1630.

Not what you’re looking for? Check out these other handy employment links on Summit’s resources webpage:

http://www.summitilc.org/resources.html#employment
What do the Little Rascals have to do with standing up for yourself?

Well, if you ask advocate Jason Billehus – a lot.

Jason is a member of the Missoula Valley People First chapter and is part of the Montana People First Senate. He sits on the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) board and is also on the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities (MCDD). He’s worked on a variety of advocacy issues – from defending Medicaid to trying to end Social Security’s marriage penalty.

And it all started with the Little Rascals.

“I had friends in a group called People First,” Billehus said. “I always thought of it like Little Rascals. You know, the club. It sounds kind of cool—being in a club.”

So, back in the ’90s, Jason was roped into a club that some of his friends were in. The club, People First, was an advocacy group that gave people a forum to speak up for themselves. And it was just what Jason needed.

The group was fun, but it also provided Jason an opportunity to stand up for things he believed in. He gave speeches on the importance of providing supports for and being respectful to people with disabilities. He attended rallies defending Medicaid, a program that provides medical supports for people that need them. He worked toward getting fair pay for working people with disabilities. And as Jason’s advocacy skills grew, so did People First.

After serving a maximum two consecutive terms as President, Jason kept working as an advocate to fight for things he believes in at local, state and national levels. And he continues to do so with the help of his friends, old and new, in People First, SABE and MCDD.

Although he’s done a lot, Jason knows that there is more work to do and that he, and other advocates like him, need to work with people with and without disabilities to succeed.

“When we all work together, they get a chance to know a person with a disability,” Billehus said. “They can know what we want. They can hear what we have to say and it’s new for them.

“A lot of people that don’t have disabilities are looking at us like we’re children. They speak for us, and tell us what we want. But when they hear us speak, they start to change and see. Whoa. They learn to work with a person with a disability.

“And when we work together, it’s communicating. That’s how I make friends with people that don’t have disabilities.”

In 2001, People First chapters across Montana convened to form the People First Senate. And Jason Billehus, who had originally joined a club to hang out with his friends, saw himself elected as the first President of the People First Senate.

Want to learn more about People First?

Contact Andrea Dahl at (406) 728-1630 or visit: http://peoplefirstmt.org/
During the Holidays we need to remember our weight will increase if we eat everything put in front of us. We will be tempted with the most sinful and tempting food and drink on the planet.

I decided to list my ten worst Holiday foods. Remember weight is calories in minus calories out; most of us eat 1500-2500 calories per day. Unless you plan on running a marathon, you probably won’t burn any additional calories. So unless you wish to gain weight over the holidays watch your intake. Don’t forget to sip on water to eliminate dehydration, which you may be mistaking for hunger. Water also fills your stomach temporarily.

An occasional treat is fine, as long as you know when to walk away.

10. Spinach Artichoke Dip with Chips: 220 calories for a few servings. Scoop your dip with five tortilla chips and its over 300 calories.
8. Sweet Potato Casserole: 450 calories per serving. The sweet potato loses its nutritional value in this dish.
7. Eggnog: 350 calories per cup—before you add booze.
5. Pigs in a Blanket: 70 calories each. I ate 10 at Summit’s Halloween party for 700 calories.
4. Cream-Based Soups: 165 Calories per cup.
3. Pecan Pie: There is no pie that has more calories—800 calories per slice.
1. Chocolate Candies: 150-200 calories per each little sinful piece.

Now the good news. There are also wonderful foods. Things like turkey (white meat), sweet potatoes, pomegranates, pecans and cranberries are super foods—if they are prepared correctly.

Good luck and everyone at Summit wishes you and yours a warm holiday season.

Please send your own knowledge and column ideas in!

Tom Thompson can be emailed at tomskilaw@gmail.com
Advocating for Affordable Access
Housing Task Force

In October ’09, Montana Independent Living Centers gathered in Billings to hold their Symposium. Seven task forces were identified to address the various barriers facing Montanans with disabilities. The Housing Task Force (HTF), having representation from all four Centers, decided work towards expanding affordable/accessible housing.

Promoting and advocating for Visitability became, and still is, the driving force behind the work of the task force. Visitability, a national movement, advocates that every home be built with 3 basic access features:

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.

To counteract the cultural sentiment that accessible housing design is reserved for “specialized populations,” HTF joined the movement to argue that basic access benefits more people than just those with mobility difficulties; it benefits everyone. With help from the Montana Disability and Health program providing material and research assistance and the Montana Home Choice Coalition providing technical assistance, HTF has participated in resource and health fairs, conferences, state and local policy meetings and media opportunities to promote Visitability as a voluntary home building choice. It has also worked with state housing programs to establish Visitability as a mandatory requirement.

Using the momentum from achieving policy changes to require Visitability standards in several state housing programs, HTF has recently been meeting with State officials to explore ways of expanding affordable housing.

Visitability: Arguing for Common Sense

Whether you are moving furniture, bringing in wood or pushing two kids in a baby stroller, minimum home access features benefit everyone. They allow for a person to age in place and be prepared for the onset of a possible physical disability and the high home modification costs that will follow. Plus, it allows your friends and family to visit regardless of their physical condition. It makes sense.

Universal Design is a more recognized term than Visitability, but it encompasses more accessible features that go beyond basic access and can be argued to have more benefit for specialized populations, rather than the general population. It is better to begin by advocating for a need, rather than a want. The three minimum physical access features of Visitability can prevent an extended stay in a nursing home or homelessness. It is a need.

To advocate for these building practices, HTF has recommended that architects, builders, and homeowners voluntarily follow Visitability standards. HTF has also worked with policy makers to require these standards in various housing programs receiving state and federal grant funding. Here are some highlights of these actions within the last quarter.

Voluntary Actions

On 9/30, HTF was invited to present the benefits of Visitability at the American Institute of Architects fall conference in Great Falls. 50 architects attended the presentation and more visited the booth. The clear message given – architects offer everyone the opportunity to choose to build a home to reflect their desire to age in place and continue to invite family and friends to visit their home.

On 10/22, in Alaska, HTF presented at the Association for Programs of Rural Independent Living (APRIL) conference. The presentation centered on the need to advocate for Visitability and how to begin a Housing Task Force in other states. Visitability not being required in most or all housing programs exists in every state. 30 housing advocates attended.

On 10/31, Missoula KECl broadcasted a story during the evening news linking the difficulties for children with mobility issues to trick-or-treat during Halloween due to homes not being visitable.
Mandatory Actions

Over the past two years, HTF members have written numerous letters to the Board of Housing and Housing Division as well as have participated in public comment opportunities to recommend housing programs require Visitability standards. In addition, a database of Visitability personal testimonies is being collected and has been used to influence policy change.

On 10/17, the Montana Board of Housing adopted its 2012 Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP), including the visitable bathroom requirement. With that final inclusion, Visitability is now the minimum accessibility requirement for all housing to be funded through Montana’s Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program.

On 10/27, the State HOME Investment Partnership program and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program introduced proposed changes to require Visitability design and other minimum accessibility features for all new home construction (HOME will also require these features for remodeled homes).

In November, the HOME Program accepted accepted the Visitability requirements, and Montana became the only state to require Visitability design in the QAP and HOME programs. CDBG was still accepting comments until 12/31.

On 11/10, Missoula Habitat for Humanity held an open house to showcase two new homes built with visitable design. All Missoula Habitat homes will be built this way.

Expanding Affordable Housing

Advocating for Visitability has given HTF a concrete concept to work towards. Task force members have taken ownership of continuing to expand basic access to all homes and look forward to sharing successes on monthly calls. In addition, it has given the opportunity to build a working relationship with decision makers to influence more complex housing issues.

The wait-list to acquire a Housing Choice Voucher (formerly known as Section 8) extends to 2-3 years. Without a voucher, to rent a 1–bedroom modest housing unit, an individual living on SSI may have to pay 80 percent of his or her check towards rent. Even the vast majority of rental units that are specified to be for low income individuals are targeted to individuals earning 40-60 percent of Average Medium Income (AMI). In Montana, individuals living on SSI are calculated to be 20.6 percent of AMI.

On 9/15, Steve Gold, a national housing advocate, was invited to join a monthly call and present on using a percentage of HOME funds as Tenant Based Rental Assistance to bridge the gap of acquiring a Housing Choice Voucher.

To capitalize on the momentum from Mr. Gold's presentation, HTF met with Jessica Rhoades – Health and Families Policy Advisor for Governor Schweitzer, department heads from Health and Human Services and program supervisors from the Housing Division to discuss the possibilities of using such a program. A second meeting will be held in January.

Ways to Help

1. Join HTF: Call Darren Larson 728-1630 or email dlarson@summitilc.org
2. Fill out your personal Visitability testimony guide: http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/453201/visitability
3. Ask a friend, family member or neighbor to fill out their Visitability testimony guide
4. Like us on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/MThousingtaskforce

Accessible Hunting in the Bitterroot by Chris Clasby

When the well-known Maclay Ranch south of Lolo was sold to a Minnesotan in December 2007, people wondered and feared what would happen. It was a last conservation stronghold in the northern Bitterroot valley where development and increasing traffic abound. The Maclay family had owned the land for three generations and enabled hunters, anglers and wanderers to enjoy quick access to nature just a short drive from Missoula. Those who had enjoyed that privilege wondered who, if anyone, would be granted similar access. New owner Mark Reiling had an unlikely group in mind.

As Reiling received inquiries from those who had historically hunted the newly-named Sapphire Ranch and asked for access, he tried to make a fair determination. Coincidentally, the generous Reiling had recently read about a hunter with a disability and recognized the unique benefits he gained. It was there that he found his answer. With that goal in mind, Reiling researched accessibility guidelines and designed accessible waterfowl blinds. He then approached Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to develop a Special Access program beginning in fall of 2008.

Using his own resources and help from volunteers, two accessible waterfowl blinds were constructed near the Bitterroot River. Hunters with the FWP limited-mobility permit were welcomed to reserve a blind and hunt waterfowl two days per week. Two years later, Reiling worked with Summit ILC to accept donations and purchase an accessible hydraulic lift to expand that hunting privilege to big game archery. He also opened part of the ranch to Block Management for deer and elk.

Many hunters with limited mobility have since enjoyed this unique access privilege and benefited from the opportunity. The programs remain and eligible hunters can call FWP for more information, to reserve a date to hunt waterfowl or have a chance at deer and elk.
Do you have a disability that started before you were 22?

If so, we invite you to help us with our research study about health and safety and people with developmental disabilities.

The Rural Institute on Disabilities at The University of Montana is doing this study. You may be able to participate if:

* You are at least 18 years old
* You have a disability or hearing impairment that started before age 22
* Your disability makes a difference in how you learn, or understand, or speak, or see, or move, or work, or live on your own without any help.

This study will take place all over Montana. The study is an interview and may take up to two hours. Part of the interview will be on a computer, and someone will be there to help, if needed.

Men and women who are a part of this study will be paid $40.

If you are in Montana and want to be in the study, or if you have any questions, please contact Kathy Boyer at (406) 728-1630 or 1 (800) 398-9002 / kboyer@summitilc.org.