Making Progress in Healthcare Reform for People with Disabilities

Disability Rights Advocates are slowly but surely making gains for people with disabilities and seniors in the continuing Health Care Reform debate.

Health Care Reform in America means a lot of different things for a lot of different people. For people with disabilities though, it means a lot of different things...and a whole lot more. Disability spans every race, sex, gender, ethnic group, political affiliation, socio-economic status, you name it...in other words, disability doesn’t discriminate. However, in the diverse pool of America’s vast disability population there is one thing that is for sure...people with disabilities, a long with seniors, make up a vast majority of our health care system’s customers and, therefore, also it’s expenditures. That is why the health care reform debate that our country is engulfed in is so vitally important for people with disabilities and also why it is so crucial that we all have accurate information about what is and is not being included in any of the five health care reform bills currently floating around the halls of Congress.

First, let’s dispel some myths. There has been a lot of talk over the past several months that by reforming our health care system, the Government would be creating death panels for seniors or people with disabilities who are no longer productive members of society, or that Medicare benefits and services are going to be cut, or that the Government will be making our health care decisions instead of our doctor’s, and that health care reform will only lead to the rationing of health care. These portrayals of the debate going on right now all across the country couldn’t be further from the truth and are only used as sound bites to try and scare seniors and people into opposing health care reform only for the purpose of opposing health care reform.

One good thing that has come from these though, is that they have gotten more Americans interested and exercising their political rights by joining in on the health care reform debate and asking very good questions and while we can’t and won’t tell you what to think about reforming our health care system, that decision... Continued on Page 2...
Making Progress in Health Care Reform  Continued from Page 1

most certainly up to you which is part of what makes and always will make this country great, we can provide you with some facts about health care reform to help you become better prepared to make that decision as well as to assist you to keep getting involved and asking tough questions.

So, let’s dispel those myths shall we. First, the rumors out there about “death panels” are flat out lies. Right now Medicare does not cover counseling for end-of-life care. The portion of the bill in question would simply start providing coverage for optional end-of-life consultations with doctors, something many people already do but have to pay out of pocket for. Second, Medicare services are not being ended or cut. The current proposals include savings in Medicare by cutting out fraud, abuse, waste, and inefficiency, disability advocates, along with AARP, are standing up and making sure benefits for Medicare recipients are not only fully protected, but are improved. Third, none of the legislation circulating in Congress have any provisions in them that would ration care or that would put the Government in charge of making your health care decisions. None.

Because our health care and health care insurance systems play such a big and important role in the lives of virtually all people with disabilities, disability advocates across the nation and here in Montana have been focusing our efforts on ensuring that strong long-term service and support, specifically home and community-based, provisions are includes within the larger picture health care reform. Just as disability doesn’t discriminate, we don’t want health care reform to discriminate either.

Since we last reported on the status of key long-term service and support initiatives in July, much progress has been made towards ensuring that people with disabilities and seniors will be able to access the long-term services and supports they need, in the setting that they themselves choose. The Senate Finance Committee included the Community First Choice Option in its healthcare reform legislation. The Community First Choice Option, originally proposed as an amendment by Senator Charles Schumer of New York, would give states an enhanced federal Medicaid match rate for providing attendant services and supports in the community as an alternative to placing people in nursing facilities or other institutions. The Community First Choice Option amendment was included in Sen. Baucus’ “Chairman’s Mark” which automatically incorporates the language into the legislation.

The Community Living Assistant Services and Supports Act (CLASS) Act, which creates a national, affordable long-term care insurance program to help adults who have or develop functional limitations to remain independent, employed, and a part of their community, was marked up on July 7, 2009 by the U.S. Senate Health Employment Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. The Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act and the Community First Choice (CFC) option are long-term services and supports reforms needed now.

Call Toll-Free: 1-800-828-0498 and ask for Senator Baucus’ and Tester’s office. Say:

"I strongly support the Community First Choice Option and the CLASS Act as a part of the final healthcare bill in the Senate. I am urging the Senator to support both of these priorities as the Senate Finance and HELP Committees merge their bills."

It is urgent that we contact our Senators to ask them to support keeping the Community First Choice option and the CLASS Act in the final Senate health reform bill.
And Summit listened. This summer, Summit embarked on an outreach initiative as part of our organization’s goal to expand peer support opportunities for people with disabilities.

For years Summit has provided formal peer counseling services in which a trained peer advocate is matched one-on-one with an individual who needs a positive role model, emotional support, or could benefit from practical information on adaptive equipment options, community resources, self advocacy skills, etc. However, we have also learned that a lot of informal peer support happens whenever people with disabilities get together, whether that be in a workshop, meeting, social event, or other activity where people have an opportunity to get to know each other. People have fun, share information, learn from one another, make friends, and begin to develop a sense of community.

We began our outreach efforts by facilitating a conversation with consumers throughout our service area in order to find out what it is people want and need from us.

Almost unanimously, people said that they wanted more opportunities to socialize and have some fun. Most people reported having transportation barriers, lack of finances, and that they either did not know of events going on in the community, or that those events were not accessible to them.

So, in order to help serve our population better, we decided to try our hand at facilitating some fun.

The first event that we held was a barbecue/concert at Bonner Park, the First Annual Mike and Mary Wanted to Get Paid to Eat Potato Salad. We had no idea what to expect, but as soon as the event began, we quickly became aware that this is something that people want, need, and were highly responsive to. We had three nursing homes bring residents, along with consumers living

You Asked for More Social Activities... By Mary Olson

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. And living with a disability does not make you immune. If you’re over 40, check your breasts regularly, and have a mammogram and a clinical exam every 1–2 years. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/RightToKnow or call 1–800–CDC–INFO (232–4636), 1–888–232–6348 (TTY).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BREAST CANCER</th>
<th>GETTING SCREENED</th>
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<tr>
<td>Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. And living with a disability does not make you immune. Know the facts about breast cancer and why you need to make screening a regular part of your health care.</td>
<td>As a woman living with a disability, you may face a number of challenges that make it difficult to get a quality mammogram and clinical exam. Here are some tips to make it easier.</td>
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<td>An estimated 200,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in American women this year.</td>
<td>When scheduling a mammography, ask:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women with disabilities are just as likely to be at risk for breast cancer as women without disabilities; the biggest risk factors are being a woman and aging.</td>
<td>• How should I dress?</td>
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<td>The chances of getting breast cancer increase with age. One out of every 8 women will get breast cancer at some point in her life.</td>
<td>• How do I prepare if I use a wheelchair or a scooter?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding breast cancer early increases chances of survival. If breast cancer is caught early, 9 out of every 10 women survive more than 5 years.</td>
<td>• Can the machine be adjusted so I can remain seated?</td>
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<td>Getting tested regularly for breast cancer is the best way for women to lower their risk. Mammography can help find cancer early when it’s most treatable.</td>
<td>• How long is the appointment and can I have additional time if I need it?</td>
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October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month
Missoula County Update by Jude Monson

October 24th - Diabetes and Chronic Kidney Disease Screening:
If you are interested in a free screening and have high blood pressure or family history of diabetes or kidney disease, contact Kathy Boyer for more information.

October 26th - Missoula’s Halloween Party: This is an open invitation to people with a disability their family and friends to come to Hellgate High School main level gym from 6-8 pm for a fun filled evening of trick and treats! There will be food, drinks, music, massages & booths! Come in costume or not! The University of Montana will be represented by their science department Spectrum that will make freeze dry ice cream and show us how to blow up pumpkins. You can save a pumpkin by carving or drawing your favorite design on one! Monte will be there from 7-7:30 pm! Its free fun & doesn’t get better than this!

Fall Classes: Summit lead off the season with the following training courses. The Living Well with a Disability training is about setting personal goals & learning how to address problems along the way. Co-facilitated by Andrea Dahl & Darren Larson.

The Self Awareness Class is about getting to know yourself better and is facilitated by Leanne Beers, with the assistance of our social work student Susan Morris.

The Healthy Relationships three series teleconference training for people with learning disabilities is facilitated by Andrea Dahl.

The Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills (BALLS) for high school students has been held in both Big Sky High School and Sentinel High School. Mike Beers, Mary Olson, and Darren Larson have co-facilitated youth training in the high school classrooms.

November and December Classes:
Powerful Tools for the Caregiver training will start at Summit on November 18th at Summit. November is National Caregiver Month and what an outstanding time to take some time as a caregiver for yourself. This course has a number of sessions that will help you understand more about the role of a caregiver and meet others who have a similar experience as you do. Contact Lorna Palin or Mike Giddings about this training.

Attendant Management Training: This training is for people who hire personal assistants to come into your home. If you would like to “beef” up your recruiting, interviewing, hiring, training and maintaining employer skills this is the class for you. Lorna Palin and Mary Olson co-facilitate this class, you can contact Lorna for more information.

Winter Classes: Looking ahead to January 2010, Summit will offer the Working Well with a Disability Class, Self Esteem Class and in the spring a class on Addressing Depression. Contact Jude Monson anytime about future classes.

Disability Awareness Panels: If you are interested in a panel of people with disabilities giving you information to your school, business or group, please contact Mary Olson, Darren Larson or Jude Monson.

The contact number for any of the above classes in 406-728-1630
The Flathead County peers participated in the Health Care Reform rally at senator Baucus’ office on July 2nd. There was a great turnout and everyone felt connected in a common goal. Recent developments show their efforts were successful.

On August 21st Summit hosted a fishing event at the Somers fishing access. MATOR was invited from Missoula to demonstrate an array of outdoor equipment. Pizza was donated by Pizza Hut and Dominos. Everyone had a great time even though the fish were scarce.

On September 2nd the Flathead Peers had lunch at Lake McDonald Lodge and enjoyed a slide show presentation created for the Glacier National Park Centennial celebration. The peers offered some suggestions on how to make the slide show more accessible.

The YODA youth group has been brainstorming transportation issues and what changes they might advocate for to make the system better meet their needs. They have also explored ways to be more independent using the existing bus system. They have plans to hike the rails-to-trails on Oct 4th.

A Work Incentives Seminar event (WISE) was held in July. Flo explained what work incentives are available for people receiving Social Security benefits. Work incentives can help you return to work full or part-time by providing an easy financial transition. If you need help understanding how work can affect your benefits, contact Flo at 257-0048.

Part two of The Four Deuces murder mystery is planned for November 7th from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. The scene is set in the Roaring 20’s; New Years Eve at A Speakeasy run by an Italian family. The “family” is a real bunch of Characters. If you want to play a role, call the office as soon as possible. If you don’t want to play a role, you can still come and have a rip-roaring good time.
As you know, Summit, along with independent living centers across the nation, have been advocating for the healthcare reform bill to include long-term care services and supports, asking Congress to pass the Community Choice Act and end the institutional bias. We thank all of you that have shown your support by attending the rally in Missoula and/or writing letters to Senator Baucus. To keep this issue in the forefront during the debate over healthcare reform, Ravalli County staff have attended the healthcare reform sessions being held here, including the “Emergency Drive Ambulance” Health Care Tour on August 6th at the Bitterroot Public Library, and the Denny Rehberg town hall meeting on August 21st held in the Performing Arts Center.

Joanne and Mary continue to attend the Community Advisory Committee meetings for the Hamilton Area Transportation Plan, which is really starting to take shape. We are very excited that this plan will be a comprehensive plan, to include all aspects of transportation planning. In addition to highways, byways, bridges, intersections, traffic lights, etc, this plan will include sidewalks and curb cuts, public transit, and connecting pathways for non-motorized vehicles, such as bicycles, wheelchairs, etc. We are very pleased to have been selected to participate in this planning process and encourage any of you to give us input, let us know of any problem areas you may have encountered, or areas that may need improvements.

Once again, Summit was honored to participate in the Veterans Stand Down, held on August 22nd at the National Guard Armory in Hamilton to provide information on community resources and benefits. In addition to veterans helping veterans by providing free surplus clothing, blankets, and other supplies, there were many volunteers serving a free lunch, free haircuts, free blood pressure monitoring, etc. As usual, the event was very well attended!

Serenity, the Independent Living Specialist, continues to serve many consumers in providing information regarding community resources and guidance in securing benefits or services, and encourages each individual to enhance their independence by developing their self-advocacy, decision-making, and problem solving skills. We also offer an orientation training to learn about Summit services, the independent living philosophy, and information on the Social Security disability application process. If you are interested in learning more about Summit or applying for Social Security disability benefits, please contact Serenity at 363-5242 for the date of the next orientation.

Members of the Bitterroot Valley People First Aktion Club remain very active and have received much praise for their community service work, such as their diligence in passing out water and snacks for the Bitterroot Land Trust bike tour, and their good help at the Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast and the Kiwanis food booth at the Ravalli County Fair. Mary Millin, Advisor, along with two Aktion club members attended the Kiwanis Conference in Kalispell the later part of August. Probably the most exciting

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**YODA in the Flathead** By Amanda Edwards

Flathead YODA is in full speed! Those of you who don’t know exactly what YODA means, let me tell about it. YODA means “Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy.” It’s a group of us who meet once a month in Kalispell. We have great snacks and drinks and it’s a great way to meet other people in your community. We have gone fishing and bowling in the past months.

October 4th we will take a walk on the beautiful “Rails to Trails” in Kalispell. Everyone will meet in front of Albertsons at 2:00pm. We’ll have our snacks and drinks, get some exercise, and have a great time.

Not only do we have a ton of fun, but we also know how to advocate! Right now we are doing research on the public transportation issues in our community. We are using the Internet to conduct research on other rural communities that have had issues in this department and what types of things they have done to successfully resolve their transportation problems!

Working together as a team is really exciting and we hope to have new members soon! So if you’re interested in joining us and you’re in between the ages of 14-30, please call Summit Independent Living at 406-257-0048 and leave a message for Amanda Edwards. May the force be with us!!
event was on September 9th when they participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the newly constructed bathroom at Kiwanis Park. The Aktion Club had received a $5000.00 grant to be used to increase access for people with disabilities at a local recreational site. In coordinating with Kiwanis Club of the Bitterroot Valley and the City of Hamilton, this grant was used to pay for paved parking spaces, a sidewalk, and overall, an accessible pathway to be able to access the newly constructed accessible bathroom. And what a wonderful addition to Kiwanis and River Park! If you haven’t already done so, go check it out!

The cookout at the Larry Creek Group Camp was a huge success, and despite the very pesky hornets, everyone in attendance said they really enjoyed the good food, fun, and games. We hope to have an even better attendance at our next event with the D’S Guise Band performance at Claudia Driscoll Park on September 22nd from 6-8 p.m. After that, we will have a Christmas Potluck in the Conference Room at the Human Resource Council Building on December 2nd, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., so MARK YOUR CALENDARS, bring your favorite potluck dish, and plan on joining us for good food and conversation.

Hamilton Summit will be conducting the Living Well Workshop again this fall, with an orientation brunch being held on Thursday, October 15th from 11:00 a.m. to noon. Classes will be held on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s from 3-5 p.m. for four weeks; Oct 27th, Oct 29th, Nov 3rd, Nov 5th, Nov 10th, Nov 12th, Nov 17th, and Nov 19th. If you are interested in this workshop or any of our events, programs, or educational workshops, please give us a call at 363-5242, as we will continue to offer various activities, depending on the needs and interests of people with disabilities in our community.

Remember, knowledge is power, and there is power in numbers, so we encourage you to Learn and educate yourself, Empower yourself and others, Advocate for yourself and others, know your Disability rights, Organize, and Network… Use your abilities for the greater good and accept the responsibility of helping yourself, others, and the community as a whole... LEAD ON...

You Asked for More Social Activities... Continued from Page 3

in the community and their families totaling numbers over 160!

Now that it is apparent people want and need social activities, we have decided to try to make this something we provide quarterly for people.

The next fun activity is October 26th at 6:00 PM in the lower Hellgate High School Gym. Dress up, bring your families, your friends, or your supports! We are going to have SpectrUM there blowing up pumpkins and nitro-freezing ice cream for us. There will be a special bear from the University of Montana making an appearance at some point in the night as well! There will be music by James Green and Isaac M. (James also made an appearance at Bonner Park), facemask making with a VSA artist, pumpkin carving/decorating, massages with Virginia Bazo, CMT, food, fun, and more!

You won’t want to miss all of this fun, and it is completely free!!

If you would like more information, or would like to help with the event with planning, donations, or you have some great ideas, contact Mary Olson at 728-1630. There will be a donation can available at the event itself as well. We hope to see all of you ghosts and ghouls there!
Youth Corner  by Mike Beers

YODA first: As many of you may know, Summit’s youth advisory group, Youth Opening Doors to Advocacy (YODA), has identified more social activities and access to recreation as one of their goals as a group. So, we took their advice and went bowling and fishing this summer!!

For the YODA meeting in July, a group of around 15 went bowling at Westside Lanes in Missoula and at least one of us was dumb enough to bet on one of these games. No money was wagered but to make a long story short, Mike Beers lost and had to sport a Pho-hawk hair-do for a day and, thanks to Mary and Jude in the Missoula office in helping to apply massive amounts of hair gel and their styling expertise, the new hair-do was a big success and a great conversation piece.

For our August meeting, we teamed up with Montech to go fishing. Montech was able to bring some of their adaptive outdoor recreation equipment they have from their Montana Access To Outdoor Recreation (MATOR) program http://recreation.ruralinstitute.umt.edu.

Thanks to Cara, one of the YODA members, and her grandparents, we were able to spend the day checking out the adaptive recreation equipment while eating burgers and potato salad at their private pond. Between everyone in the group, we must have pulled 15 little Pike out of that pond.

The catch of the day though, definitely went to Mary Olson who, after spending most of the day baiting hooks and untangling other peoples lines, stepped up to the pond and like Babe Ruth, called her shot! Mary pointed to the middle of the pond and said “I’m catching a big one right there.” It wasn’t two minutes later that she reeled a six-pound trout up onto the shore!!

Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills (BALLS) is in full swing! The school year is only a month old and by October 6th we will have start and finished 6 BALLS classes in Missoula 5 at Big Sky (Thanks Mrs. Bryant) and 1 at Sentinel (Thank you Mrs. Coulter). Classes will continue on throughout the school year at various high schools and this spring we will be teaching our inaugural class at Frenchtown High School.
The Missoula Valley People First/Aktion Club was busy with recreational activities during August. On August 8th the Missoula chapter met with the Hamilton chapter at the Fort Missoula Historical Museum for a Saturday picnic and a tour of the Museum. Everyone enjoyed the sights and displays! Several of the members attended the Summit BBQ at Bonner Park. When the invitation includes food and entertainment, People First members are sure to be there.

The members also volunteered to help the Kiwanis Club at the Western Montana Fair. They helped with collecting tickets and parking. Some helped more than once.

Earlier this summer was elections for officers for the People First Senate. Connie Lewis of the Missoula chapter was elected secretary. She will be replacing Barb Willis of Missoula who is stepping down after two terms.

Chapter members are also participating in teleconferences on relationships and some will be taking the Women Be Healthy class.

People First is a self-governing, self-directing, self-advocacy organization. It is about people with disabilities working together and helping each other take charge of their lives. It teaches people with disabilities how to make decisions and choices that make them more independent.

For more information about People First, please visit http://peoplefirstmt.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/index.asp

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent!”

~Eleanor Roosevelt

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An Advocacy and Resource Center for Montanans with Disabilities