



National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Each October, the United States observes National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), a time to recognize the contributions of workers with disabilities and to promote inclusive employment policies and practices. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), this month-long observance serves as a national call to action to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to meaningful employment opportunities.

A Historical Look: Where It All Began

The roots of Disability Employment Awareness Month trace back to 1945, when Congress declared the first week of October as “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” Over time, the language evolved—reflecting a growing understanding of disability—and the focus expanded to include all types of disabilities, both visible and invisible. In 1988, Congress officially extended the observance to the full month of October and renamed it National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The evolution of this observance mirrors broader changes in society’s understanding of disability—not as a deficit or limitation, but as a natural part of human diversity. Today, NDEAM is not only a time to celebrate the talents and achievements of workers with disabilities but also to examine the barriers that still exist in workplaces and to strive for greater equity.

Why Disability Employment Awareness Matters

Employment is about more than just a paycheck. It provides a sense of purpose, belonging, and independence. For individuals with disabilities, access to meaningful work can also play a critical role in shaping one’s identity and self-worth.

However, despite advances in policy and public awareness, people with disabilities still face disproportionate levels of unemployment and underemployment.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024 data), the employment-population ratio for persons with disabilities is just over 22%, compared to 65% for those without disabilities. These numbers reflect a persistent gap that stems not from a lack of ability, but from systemic challenges like workplace inaccessibility, bias in hiring practices, and limited access to education and job training programs.

NDEAM serves as a reminder that inclusive employment is not charity—it’s good business and a matter of civil rights. When organizations embrace the talents of all workers, including those with disabilities, they benefit from a more diverse, innovative, and loyal workforce.

The Value of an Inclusive Workforce

Hiring people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do—it’s a smart business move. Studies have shown that businesses that prioritize disability inclusion are more likely to outperform their peers in terms of profitability, innovation, and employee retention. Some benefits of a disability-inclusive workplace include:

(continued on page 2)

In This Issue...

- Summer Shenanigans..... 3
- Vote in November..... 4
- County Updates..... 5
- Good Business Access..... 6
- BASE Activities..... 7
- Election Dates..... 8
- Become an Advocate..... 8

- **Improved problem-solving and creativity:** Employees with disabilities often bring unique perspectives and adaptive thinking skills.
- **Increased employee engagement:** Inclusive workplaces foster a sense of belonging for all employees, leading to higher morale and productivity.
- **Better alignment with consumer values:** Consumers are increasingly expecting brands to reflect social responsibility and diversity in their practices.

Many companies—both large and small—have demonstrated the business case for disability inclusion. From tech firms designing accessible software to manufacturing companies adjusting workflows to accommodate different physical needs, the possibilities are endless when we approach inclusion with intention.

Breaking Down Barriers

Despite growing awareness, many barriers to employment still exist for people with disabilities. Some of the most persistent challenges include:

- **Attitudinal barriers:** Misconceptions and stereotypes about disability often lead to assumptions about capability.
- **Inaccessible hiring processes:** Job applications, interviews, and onboarding processes may not be designed with accessibility in mind.
- **Lack of accommodations:** Some employers are unaware of their legal obligation or overestimate the cost of reasonable accommodations.

Part of the mission of NDEAM is to educate employers, coworkers, and the public on these issues—and to provide resources and strategies for creating more inclusive environments.

How We Can All Take Part

National Disability Employment Awareness Month is more than a commemoration—it's a chance for

action. Whether you're an employer, coworker, educator, or advocate, there are many ways to get involved:

- Host disability inclusion trainings or webinars at your workplace.
- Review your hiring and onboarding processes to identify areas for improvement in accessibility.
- Partner with disability-focused organizations to connect with potential talent and gain insights into best practices.
- Highlight employees with disabilities in newsletters, social media, or events to celebrate their contributions.
- Ensure digital accessibility of websites, apps, and communications.

The theme for NDEAM 2025, as set by ODEP, is "Advancing Access and Equity: Then, Now, and Next." This theme underscores the importance of building on past progress while continuing to push forward toward a truly inclusive future.

Looking Ahead

As we move through October, it's important to reflect not just on the challenges, but also the successes. More workplaces than ever before are adopting inclusive practices, more leaders are sharing their own disability experiences, and more voices from the disability community are being heard in shaping policy and culture.

Still, there's much work to be done. Disability employment should not be a once-a-year conversation. NDEAM is an opportunity to recommit—collectively and individually—to building a workforce that values every person's potential, no matter their abilities.

In the words of disability rights advocate Judy Heumann, "Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to provide the things we need to lead our lives." Employment is one of those things—and everyone deserves the opportunity to participate.

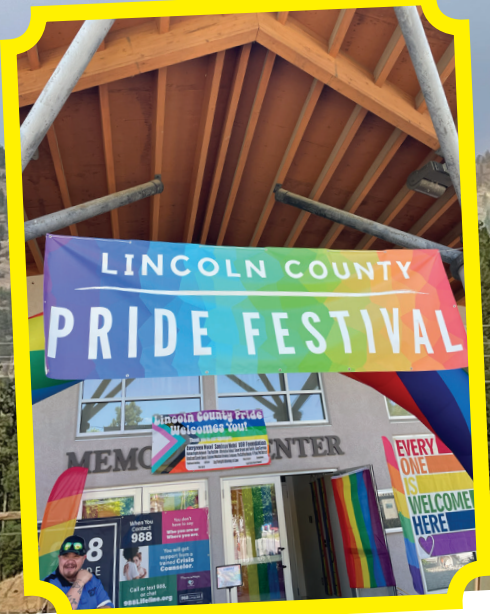
SUMMIT'S SUMMER SHENANIGANS



Summit hosted a table at Missoula's Out to Lunch to commemorate the 35th Anniversary of the ADA



Summit Hosted Disability Pride Night with the Missoula Paddleheads



Summit was on hand for Lincoln County Pride in Libby, Montana in July, connecting with folks of Lincoln County talking about independent living, Summit, and our services



Summit joined Five Valleys Land Trust to celebrate summer and accessibility at the Rock Creek Confluence



SUMMIT BOARD

- Molly Blair
- Sherene Ricci
- Gabrielle Broere
- Kelly Sellars
- Tom Seekins
- Randy Blevins
- Jodine Tarbert
- Lori Abramson
- Anita Santasier

SUMMIT STAFF

Missoula County

Executive Director
Tami Hoar
Policy Director
Travis Hoffman
SD-CFC/PAS Program Manager
Carrie Dyrud
SD-CFC/PAS Coordinator
Patti Montgomery-Stewart
SD-CFC/PAS Coordinator
Devon Harris
SD-CFC/PAS Administrative Assistant
Jessica Workman
IL Specialist & Peer Coordinator
Tyler Stosich
Program Support Specialist
Theresa Martinosky
IL & Recreation Specialist
Brenden Dalin
Executive Office Manager
Solveig Gasner
Independent Living Specialist
Sabrina Quimby
Communications Director
Blake de Pastino
BASE Coordinator
John Howard
Youth Transitions Coordinator
Gavin Workman
BASE Advisor
Michael Beers
Financial Officer
Scott Fels
Accounting Assistant
Kellie Morrison

Flathead County

County Coordinator
Dianna Kintzler
Program Support Specialist
Katie Newman
SD-CFC/PAS Specialist
Aleyna Raymond

Ravalli County

Deputy Director
Alan Fugleberg
Independent Living Specialist
Jenny Monson
Independent Living Specialist
Darcy Curry

Lake & Sanders County

Deputy Director
Alan Fugleberg
Independent Living Specialist
Susan Morris
Independent Living Specialist
Teresa Nightingale

Summit Office Updates

Polson Office

Summit's branch office serving Lake and Sanders counties in Polson is keeping busy. Teresa "Tess" Nightingale is staffing the Polson office 32 hours per week now. Over the summer months, Tess completed the Community Living Skills Facilitator training, and she is presently enrolled in the Living Well in the Community Facilitator class. We expect to be offering classes again in Polson soon.

Tess continues to lead the Youth Opening Doors to Advocacy on the third Thursday of each month. Arts and Crafts meets on Wednesdays from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. Mail & Munchies is being offered from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of each month beginning October 25. Summit staff will assist people with letters from Social Security or Medicaid, etc. on a walk-in basis.

IL Specialist Susan Morris continues to work remotely with consumers seeking to apply for Social Security disability benefits and helps with the first-level appeals process. Alan Fugleberg, Deputy Director for Summit, continues to work from the offices in Lake and Ravalli counties, and is working a day per week in Missoula assisting with Social Security disability applications and other independent living work.

For more information about activities at the Polson office call Tess Nightingale at 406-215-1604, Ext. 2.

Class sizes are limited so reach out as soon as possible.

Vote This November

Cast your ballot in this year's municipal elections to vote for local leaders like mayors, city council members, and school board members. These local officials make decisions about things like road repairs, school policies, and city services that often have large impacts on our communities.

Call (406) 447-8339 to find out if and where you're registered to vote, directions to your polling place, the status of your absentee ballot, and to view a sample ballot. Learn how to register to vote at votemt.gov if you haven't yet.

Summit Office Updates

Kalispell Office

Kalispell's YODA group is back to the usual schedule of meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at the office in Kalispell from 4-5:30 p.m. We will continue to promote team building with group activities that focus on collaboration, advocacy, and, of course, fun! If you are a young person with a disability who is 14-30ish, we encourage you to join.

Third Thursday Crafternoon, arts and crafts group, continues to meet each month on the third Thursday from 2-4 p.m. Participants can try a provided project or work on something of their own. Abilities of all kinds are welcome to join the fun!

Are you a person with a disability? Do you consider yourself a positive role model? Do you enjoy helping your community and others? Are you looking for a very part time job? If so, the Kalispell office is looking for peer advocates to join the existing Summit Kalispell peer group. Please reach out to find out more about being a peer advocate.

Summit's Kalispell Office is also taking applications for the Kalispell Independent Living Specialist position. This is a career opportunity for the right person with a solid background in social work or human services and a passion for working with people of all ages with disabilities. This is a 40 hours per week, non-exempt position. For more information and instructions on how to apply, please visit www.summitilc.org/about/employment.

For more information about workshops, peer group, or employment please contact Dianna at 406-257-0048 ext. 3 or go to www.summitilc.org/about/employment.

Hamilton Office

The Ravalli County office in Hamilton continues to be busy assisting consumers with disability applications, appeals, overpayments, and continuing disability reviews. Darcy Curry, our new full-time Independent Living Specialist, completed Community Living Skills facilitator training over the summer. She is now enrolled in Living Well in the Community facilitator training. We expect to be offering classes in these areas in the near future.

After a summertime hiatus, the Hamilton office Thanks Goodness It's Activities Friday will be offered again Fridays from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. beginning October 17. Mail & Munchies is being offered from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on the first and third Thursdays of each month beginning September 4. Summit staff will assist people with letters from Social Security or Medicaid, etc. on a walk-in basis.

Come join us on Tuesdays from 1 PM to 3 PM for Dungeons and Dragons, played in the fate accelerated system and led by a new DM (Dungeon Master) for beginner players. Experience vast fantasy worlds with all kinds of people and monsters of legend. Due to the level of maturity needed for the game, only adult participants 18 and older will be permitted to play.

If you have any questions about our classes and workshops, please call Darcy Curry at 406-363-5242.

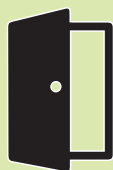
Are You a Business that Would Like to Learn the Next Steps to Improving Your Accessibility?

Try using Summit's accessibility self-assessment. Review the information below to do a basic self-assessment of your business or property.



Access to the Building:

- Is there accessible parking nearest to the building entrance?
- Is accessible parking properly marked?
- Is there a curb cut and a zero step entrance from the accessible parking into the building?



Accessible Doors and Door Handles:

- Does the main entrance have an automatic door opener or accessible ADA door button?
- If not, can the doorhandle be operated with one hand and doesn't require grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist?



Access to Goods & Services:

- Can people move easily throughout the space without barriers?
- Are aisles and doorways wide enough for wheelchairs and other assistive mobility devices?



(Reasonable)Accommodations:

- Have staff members received training on how to properly accommodate people with various disabilities?
- Are you allowing service animals in your business?



Access to Restroom:

- Is there an accessible restroom with adequate space to maneuver wheelchair/scooter?
- Do the sinks allow for an individual in a wheelchair to roll under?
- Are towel or hand dryers at a lower level?
- Are there grab bars, towel dispensers and hand dryers located properly?

Other Access concerns:

- If the main entrance is not accessible, a sign indicating where the accessible entrance is located should be placed at the main entrance.
- Sidewalks, ramps, curb cuts, accessible parking, and access aisle should be clear of snow and ice during the winter, and free of other barriers such as planters, trashcans, etc.

Tax incentives/Grants may be available to help make your business more accessible:

**For further information or assistance please reach out to
Summit Independent Living at 406-728-1630**

BASE SCHEDULE

725 West Alder, #4 Missoula, MT

For the following activities,
please call BASE for details:

- All Abilities Yoga
- Game Night
- Art Group
- Filmmaking
- Improv Workshop

Check out BASE films on the BASE YouTube channel BASE Film Extravaganza.
(see QR code below)



For BASE Schedule Updates and
Additional Events go to:

www.summitilc.org/calendar

or check the BASE Facebook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/base725>

To get involved or to share ideas of new BASE programs, contact BASE jhoward@summitilc.org.

Contact BASE:

www.basemissoula.org

Phone: 406-215-1080

CLASSIFIED ADS

Adult Symmetry Stander

\$300 obo, in good condition
call: Nancy 406-273-9012

Jazzy Pride Wheelchair

Make offer, only 2yrs old
call: Linda 406-531-4938

Shoprider power chair

300lb capacity. Needs battery & charger.
Free (406) 728-1630

Symmetry Stander, Quickie Powerchair, Invacare Powerbed, Hoyer lift

Comfortable, easy-to-use seat stander Call/
leave message: Tejeanne (406) 865-0221

Power Scooter

\$500 obo. Please contact Adrian:
(406) 263-8650

Adult Tricycle

Schwinn 26" tricycle, bike pump included.
\$500obo (406) 721-1698

Wheelchair Lift

Ricon wheelchair lift model #S1231
G00100100. \$400obo.
Contact: Cory (406) 471-3314

Silver Spring wheelchair ramp 10' L x 36" W

Made of high-strength light weight
aluminum. \$297obo. Contact:
tamera144@gmail.com or 406-363-4898

Smart Talker text scanner

Slightly used, \$700. Contact Larry at 406-
633-4036 or ketch1969@gmail.com

Nova Walker, Quontum 600 power wheelchair, Commode, 2 Transfer Benches, Beezy Manual Wheelchair. Call Gary (406) 224-5527 or garylee032051@gmail.com

To get listed contact Tyler Stosich at (406) 728-1630 or email tstosich@summitilc.org.

Or, list and find items on the MonTECH exchange: <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umd.edu/mtdb/>

Summit is funded in part under an agreement with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Any statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.



IMPORTANT DATES FOR 2025 ELECTIONS

REGISTRATION DEADLINES

- IN-PERSON DURING EARLY VOTING: OCT. 5 - NOV. 3***
- IN-PERSON AT YOUR LOCAL ELECTION OFFICE ON ELECTION DAY: NOV. 4***
- BY MAIL (POSTMARKED BY): OCT. 5**

ABSENTEE BALLOT DEADLINES

- REQUEST BALLOT (RECEIVED BY): NOV. 3 BY 12:00 P.M. MST**
- RETURN BALLOT BY MAIL (RECEIVED BY): NOV. 4 BY 8:00 P.M. MST**
- RETURN BALLOT IN PERSON: NOV. 4 BY 8:00 P.M. MST**

VOTING DEADLINES

- EARLY VOTING (IN-PERSON ABSENTEE VOTING): OCT. 5 - NOV. 3**
- IN-PERSON: NOV. 4 BY 8:00 P.M. MST**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VIEW THE STATE OF MONTANA’S VOTER CALENDAR.

***DISCLAIMER: SOME CITIES — LIKE BOZEMAN AND MISSOULA — HAVE MAIL-IN ONLY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL COUNTY ELECTION OFFICE FOR VOTING OPTIONS AVAILABLE IN YOUR AREA.**

BECOME AN ADVOCATE



Scan to sign up for email alerts, view posted alerts, or even see what legislation we are tracking.

The Montana Centers for Independent Living Action Alert system is an email listserv and online portal designed to inform you about current local, state, and national issues that affect the lives of people with disabilities.

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

Sign up to receive our newsletter in your email inbox at www.summitilc.org