

2024

GOVERNOR'S REPORT



— Montana —
**Statewide Independent
Living Council**

MISSION:

Promote the self-determination
and full inclusion of people
with disabilities in Montana.



DEPARTMENT OF
**PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

SILC HAPPENINGS

A word from the SILC Chairman:

On behalf of the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council (MTSILC), it has been my pleasure to have served as the SILC chairman this year. The SILC had a busy year, this includes holding a 3-day in-person Independent Living Symposium, hosting a virtual IL Town Hall meeting, traveling to Poplar to sponsor an ADA Celebration & Resource Fair with Ft. Peck Community College, and the writing and approval of the 3-year State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) by the Administration of Community Living.

Additionally, we had a Board member speak at the Capitol Rotunda for Developmental Disabilities Awareness month, attended and present at National Conventions, testify on the Capitol on HB872, and represent the SILC at several conferences within Montana.

As well, the SILC continues to work in conjunction with the Centers of Independent Living (CILs) to expand the State Olmstead plan so that it is integrated within all Departments across the State. An updated Olmstead Plan is vital to assure those with disabilities the right to live, work, and play in the community of their choice. Likewise, the SILC is working with the CILs to develop a new data collection and satisfaction measurement system to better serve individuals with disabilities across the state.

Without a doubt, the MTSILC Board is proud that it continues to play an integral role in guiding the future of Independent Living in Montana.

Sincerely, Scott Williamson

CURRENT MEMBERS

Scott Williamson, Chairman, Ronan
Mike Manhardt, Vice- Chairman, Missoula
Jean Schroeder, Secretary, Great Falls
Tami Hoar, CIL Representative, Missoula
June Hermanson, Advocate, Helena
Nichole Lowrance, Advocate, Billings
Savanah Smith, Parent of Child with a Disability, Poplar
Heather Giese, Parent of Child with Disability, Bainville
Hannah Thompson, Advocate, Missoula
Melanie Beagle, Person with a Disability, Billings
Chris Johnsrud, Person with a Disability, Havre
Tom Thompson, Person with a Disability, Missoula
Julie Williams, Representative from Rural Institute, Livingston
Allyson Talaska, Representative from State DPHHS, Missoula

SILC EVENTS

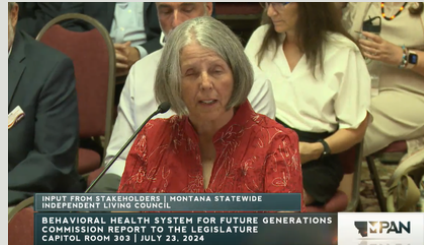
IL SYMPOSIUM



MYTRANSITIONS CONFERENCE



TESTIFYING ON HB872 AT THE CAPITOL



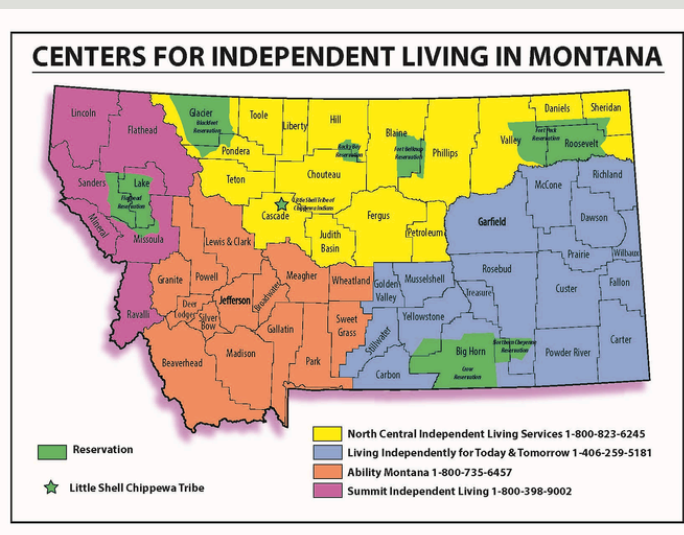
ADA CELEBRATION & RESOURCE FAIR AT FORT PECK COMMUNITY COLLEGE



DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES

Montana Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

The four Montana Centers for Independent Living (CILs) provide an array of services so individuals with disabilities can live, work, and play within the community of their choice. The CILs provide an array of independent living services to individuals of all ages in all Montana counties. CILs are consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, non-residential, & non-profit agencies. The four centers across the state are designed and operated within local communities by individuals with disabilities and provide the five core services. These services include information & referral, independent living skills training, peer mentoring, individual and systems-based advocacy, and transition services.



Total Number Served with
State-Appropriated Money: 2,715
General Fund = 1,351
Federal Part B = 1,364

Most frequent individual
services requested include:
Transportation, Access to Housing,
Health Care Issues & Accessibility



Summit continues to strive for unduplicated, intersectional, and welcoming programming in their four locations in western Montana. In addition to providing peer-delivered services that are unique in the world of human services, programs are designed to give people with all types of disabilities the tools and resources that are needed to improve independence, self-confidence, knowledge, skills, and access to community resources.

As a disability awareness effort, we hosted a free showing of the documentary film, *This Is Not About Me*, followed by a panel with the MT Innocence Project. The purpose was to engage in a conversation that emphasized the need to improve communication, increase awareness and training, provide advocacy and accommodations, explore alternative approaches like restorative justice, and proactively address systemic barriers that individuals with disabilities face, especially when interacting with law enforcement or the legal system.

In June, Summit collaborated with several local Adaptive Recreation providers to host an ADA Celebration picnic with free food, games, and information. It was a beautiful day for the Missoula community to make connections, and for families and individuals to try outdoor adaptive equipment.

This fall we held a Disability Roots event showcasing Independent Living as a culture and movement. We hosted original photos from documentarian Tom Olin at the Zoo Town Arts Community Center. The compelling storytelling through Tom Olin's photos and the interactive discussion facilitated with Marsha Katz, Tom Olin, and Stephanie Thomas provided a unique perspective on IL Civil Rights History. The audience was captivated, and we had many requests to hold similar engaging events.

Our biggest accomplishment this year was in securing new office space in three of our locations. In Kalispell we moved our office to the building complex where the Social Security office and other community agencies operate. We moved our Ronan office to Polson. Within the first few weeks of the move to Polson, we saw nearly double the consumer participation in classes, walk-ins, and community interest in collaboration. In Missoula we bought a building for our administration, IL, and CFC staff to exist alongside our all-abilities social engagement program, BASE. The building purchase has been a decades-long dream for Summit to have a permanent home. A home where we proactively provide an inclusive, accessible environment to create community, foster friendships, and promote self-awareness and self-determination.

North Central Independent Living Services, Inc. (NCILS) had a great year.

In addition to our day-to-day services working with people with disabilities, we facilitated the Living Well in the Community Workshop Series in Great Falls and Havre, Montana. Twenty-two individuals with disabilities participated in these Living Well Workshops.

Additionally, NCILS hosted meetings with local Legislators, Community Leaders, and Montana Citizens with disabilities to promote self and community advocacy. NCILS continues to support an individual's role in their meaningful decision-making process and their ability to live, work, and play in the community of their choice.

NCILS places a great commitment in the youth of our community. NCILS facilitated eight Region II Youth Transitions Committee Meetings to promote increased provider collaboration and develop resources for transition age youth and their families. Additionally, NCILS is the primary sponsor for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum, Step I and Step II and the Montana Youth Transitions Conference. These activities help empower students in grades 9-12 in their transition from high school to post-secondary life.

NCILS participated in the Independent Living Symposium in September 2024 and brought eight Consumers as well as eight NCILS Staff Members to the event in Helena, Montana. Furthermore, NCILS participated in a research project that originated from the Administration on Community Living (ACL). The purpose of the project was to help better understand how aging and disability networks provide services to adults aging with disabilities. NCILS and the Aging Services of Cascade County were one of only six locations chosen and visited.

Recently we opened a branch office in Heart Butte, Montana and now have a Staff Member located in that region of the state. As outreach, NCILS continues to provide support to other organizations including providing fiscal management and collaboration to both the Hill County and Cascade County Ombudsman Programs.





Ability Montana has had a very busy year!!

We started a pod cast called Disability Voices, and this has been truly exciting! We have published 12 podcasts, with over 700 listeners. In October, we had the privilege of presenting at the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living Conference, where we shared insights about launching and managing the podcast. The feedback was very positive, and several Centers for Independent Living have since reached out for follow-up advice and collaboration.

Through their advocacy efforts, our Independent Living Team was able to obtain a ramp to better access Downtown Butte businesses where previously access was nearly impossible. Ability Montana successfully obtained this approval from the Butte-Silver Bow Council of Commissioners. Additionally, with this advocacy the Commissioners also moved to approve funding to update its ADA Transition Plan.

Our ADA Accessibility Specialist has worked with many different entities on housing, transportation, and attended numerous City/County meetings discussing accessibility. She attended the National ADA symposium, focusing on training governmental representatives and other professionals, including disability advocates, about how to effectively meet ADA requirements for engaging with the disability community.

Our Self Direct Team were trained on and subsequently trained consumers and PCA's on the Electronic Visit Verification program. Ability Montana volunteered to be the "testers", and this has been in the works since January. While there are still some issues, most of the big issues have been ironed out.

The Veterans Administration Self Direct program has exploded this year, from eight active consumers to 36 active consumers. These referrals come from the Veterans Administration at Fort Harrison in Helena.

Finally, our Recreation program has had a very successful year. January led with our first year of adaptive skiing, followed by an incredible season of fishing and floating on the Madison and Missouri rivers. We hosted groups at Camp Bullwheel, volunteer training, film festivals, and many resource development events.

LIFTT continues its trajectory of growth and innovation. This year, LIFTT served 853 consumers, representing a 7% increase from the previous year. By refining our strategies, expanding our staff, and focusing on service goals, we achieved an 88% increase in services provided. A remarkable 134% growth in consumer goals was accomplished. Additionally, our Information and Referrals (I&Rs) rose by 39%, reflecting our commitment to broadening outreach and accessibility.



On July 26, 2024, LIFTT celebrated the 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in Billings and Glendive. This year's theme, Disability Inclusion Through Transportation, highlighted the critical role of accessible transit systems in fostering independence and inclusion. Billings MET Transit participated, showcasing its accessible services as a model for equitable mobility.

Furthermore, LIFTT is working tirelessly to develop an ADA Accessible Rural Transportation Program within its service area. This initiative aims to address the unique transportation challenges faced by rural communities, fostering greater independence and accessibility for residents.

LIFTT's advocacy efforts have also been instrumental in addressing community needs. Notably, we partnered with Billings TrailNet to improve trail accessibility and supported initiatives in Dawson and Yellowstone counties to expand access to assistive technologies and essential health resources.

Thanks to a grant from USA Aging and the Administration for Community Living, LIFTT, in collaboration with Pharm406 and county health departments, organized vaccination clinics across all 18 counties of our service area. These clinics successfully vaccinated more than 10,000 individuals. This initiative ensured that aging and disabled populations in South and Central Eastern Montana were vaccinated.

Additionally, LIFTT's efforts to promote digital equity and inclusion across its service area have garnered national recognition from the Federal Telecommunications Agency. This acknowledgment underscores LIFTT's commitment to bridging the digital divide and ensuring that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in an increasingly digital society.

As we look ahead, LIFTT remains steadfast in its mission to eliminate systemic barriers, foster inclusion, and promote independence for all individuals with disabilities. Our progress reflects the dedication of our team and partners and reinforces our vision of empowering individuals to LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life.