GOVERNOR'S REPORT

2021

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

A word from MTSILC:

Independent Living philosophy emphasizes consumer control. The idea that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs. They a have crucial and valuable perspective to contribute and deserve equal opportunity to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities. This is particularly important in reference to services that powerfully affect their day-to-day lives and access to independence.

The Montana Statewide Independent Living Council strives to promote this philosophy. This year, as the council struggled through yet another year of the pandemic, the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council started to rebuild. Many of the members reached the end of their terms and several resigned so an aggressive consumer centered recruitment strategy was developed. MTSILC is happy to report that 5 new members were appointed, and 3 members are awaiting appointment. The Independent Living program also hired a new Program Manager who brought some fresh energy to the table. MTSILC also invested in some state-of-the-art technology, including an OWL meeting camera, to improve accessibility at our hybrid meetings for all members.

Despite low membership and less than ideal circumstances the Independent Living program was able to accomplish many of their objectives.

Council Members:

June Hermanson, Chair
Scott Birkenbuel, Vice Chair
Barb Davis, Secretary

Brent Morris
Carlos Ramahlo
David Hood
Joel Peden
Molly Kimmel
Michael Manhardt
Allyson Talaska
Tom Thompson
Richard (Scott) Williamson

MTSILC's first vendor table debuted at the 2021 Montana Youth Transitions Conference

Core Services

1. Information and Referral
2. Independent Living Skills
3. Independent and systems advocacy
4. Peer Support
5. Transitions

MTSILC Activities and Accomplishments

- ·Developed an aggressive recruitment plan aimed at consumers
- ·With increased membership, were able to restart working committee meetings on a regular basis
- ·In collaboration with the CIL, met the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) first year goals.
- ·Conducted meetings using a hybrid model. This model and technological investments have increased accessibility and have made it possible to meet the needs of all individuals on the council
- ·Participated in Task Forces with the CIL to promote access to transportation, affordable and accessible housing, stronger enforcement of ADA rules, and other efforts to achieve independent living and inclusion for people with disabilities.
- ·Continued participation in the Montana Youth Leadership Forum and Montana Youth Transitions Conference.

Centers for Independent Living (CIL)

Total Number Served with State-Appropriated Money

Total: 3286 (General Fund = 1795, Federal Part B = 1491)

Most frequent community change achievements experienced by those seeking services

- Transportation
- Health Disability Awareness
- Care Issues
- Legislative Collaboration
- Accessibility

Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT) - Carlos Ramahlo

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and all the challenges we faced, it has been a fantastic year of achievements for our agency. We served three times more consumers than last year, meaning we helped more people living with disabilities be independent. We made tremendous progress in building a positive image of LIFTT. Today many more people know about LIFTT and what we do than ever before. We have a television show on the C7TV, are publishing a bimonthly newsletter, are members of all chambers of commerce in our service area. We opened a new office in Glendive and hired four new independent living specialists to work there.

In the middle of the nation's worst public health crisis ever experienced, LIFTT has developed a comprehensive outreach program in the southeast area of Montana, reaching out to people in the rural communities who need independent living services. We achieved these accomplishments with one goal: empower, serve, uplift, and advocate for people with disabilities. For 2022 we invite you to join LIFTT on its diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility journey.

North Central Independent Living Services (NCILS) - Tom Osborn

In a collaborative system change activity with the Senior Long Term Care Division and the State Unit on Aging, NCILS developed and expanded on the required autonomy that must be in place for the office of the Montana State Long Term Care Ombudsman. That office is now held within NCILS and is on longer being administered directly within a state office. NCILS also is now housing two Local Long Term Care Ombudsman that provide long term care advocacy services within the counties of Cascade, Hill, Blaine, and Chouteau.

Montana Independent Living Project (MILP) - Scott Birkenbuel

mILp developed a “fee for service” model through outreach to rural school districts not currently served and developed diversified funding sources, utilizing fee for service to support the delivery of all services and the administration of the organization. mILp’s orientation and mobility (O&M) program transitioned into a standalone organization, Mobility Matters Montana, LLC. With the support of the state’s Blind and Low Vision Services, the systems change goal of creating a sustainable O&M service delivery organization has been achieved. mILp contacted Polson Taxi to have our accessible van again utilized in the Helena area through their taxi company. After many revisions in collaboration with MDT, we will again be able to provide accessible rides to consumers in the Helena area.

In the spring of 2021, mILp’s CEO of 19 years, Bob Maffit, made the decision to retire and become the Senior Consultant for mILp and Scott Birkenbuel became the new CEO of Montana Independent Living Project. Scott has worked for mILp in the past, most recently when in 2018 when he rejoined the organization as the Operations Officer. He served on the mILp Board of Directors for a combined total of about 7 years, chaired the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council (MTSILC) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Council, and he sat on the Governors Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Scott has been active in the disability community for many years, and we are looking forward to the direction that Scott will take mILp!

Summit Independent Living Center - Mike Mayer (written by Travis Hoffman)

As we continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to new ways of living, Summit rose to the challenge and found ways to continue serving consumers. Participating in the communities through collaboration with allied organizations, disability awareness and education activities. Summit is advocating for reduced attitudinal, architectural, and communication barriers resulting in increased independence, economic opportunity, and enhanced quality-of-life for people with disabilities. Summit was able to increase the number of consumers served over the previous year thanks in part to having put in place hybrid methods of offering services. One of Summit's primary goals during this past year was to increase name recognition in the community and make our services known to not only consumers but the public generally. We were successful in this endeavor having logged over 575 hours of time devoted towards collaboration, disability awareness/education, and public relations activities. On a systemic level, Summit has consistently provided leadership and participation towards efforts to increase transportation options, affordable and accessible housing opportunities, and to overall educate policymakers and elected officials so that disability related issues and access remain in the forefront of all community planning efforts.

Summit and the Montana IL community also overcame a double dose of tragedy during this past year. Summit said goodbye to Chris Clasby, who passed away on April 5, 2021. Chris had worked as Summit's peer advocacy coordinator since 2012 and was known for his hard work, friendly nature, and ability to connect with anyone he crossed paths with, both on a personal and professional level.

Then, on November 23, 2021, Summit lost its longtime Executive Director, Michael Mayer. Mike had served as Summit's executive director since 1998, making Summit the organization it is today, and will be remembered not only for his leadership and passion for independent living but for his courage, kindness, and wisdom. Each lived extraordinary lives and served as great examples to us all. In remembering these two disability warriors, Summit will strive to march forward to fulfill their legacies and make independent living in Montana a reality for generations to come.

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