

# SILC Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2025

Virtual Meeting

Summary

## Attendees:

- Council Members: Jean Schroeder, June Hermanson, Chris Johnsrud, Julie Williams, Nichole Lowrance, Scott Williamson, Tami Hoar, Hannah Thompson, Alice Lewis, Gina Lytle
- Absent: Heather Giese, Savannah Smith
- CIL Directors: Sandi Dearman (representing Ability Montana), Margaret Keener, Carlos Ramalho
- DET Staff: Hannah Stokes, Julia Arnold, Chanda Hermanson
- Guests: Molly Kimmel (Rural Institute), Sandra Breitengross-Bitter (Rural Institute), Jeremy Morris (Rural Institute)

## Budget Report

- **SILC Budget – FY2024**
  - Consulting - \$0
  - Supplies/Materials - \$23
  - Travel - \$9,503
  - Honorariums - \$3,700
  - Meetings/Conference Costs - \$1,425
  - Education/Training - \$0
  - Communication - \$200
  - Printing/Pub& Graphics - \$902
  - Repair / Maintenance - \$0
  - Other Expense - \$418
    - Total - \$16,170
    - Remaining Balance to Spend: \$5,653.42
- **SILC Budget – FY2025**
  - Consulting - \$0
  - Supplies/Materials - \$223
  - Travel - \$0
  - Honorariums - \$0
  - Meetings/Conference Costs - \$0
  - Education/Training - \$0

- Communication - \$0
  - Printing/Pub& Graphics - \$0
  - Repair / Maintenance - \$0
  - Other Expense - \$180
    - Total - \$403
- Part B Contracts with CILs are 45% spend as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.
  - General Fund contracts are 68% spent as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.
  - IL Program Manager Administrative Costs \$46,388 as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.
  - ARPA funds are 100% expended as this is one-time funding & will not to be renewed.

### Reports/Planning:

- Reports were given by the CIL Evaluation Survey break-out groups. Chris Johnsrud asked Board Members to let Julia know if interested in serving on a committee to explore further this topic. Further discussion will be held at the August meeting.
- Molly Kimmel, Sandra Breitengross-Bitter, Jeremy Morris provided information on the Independent Living Technology & Technical Assistance Center now housed with in the University of Montana Rural Institute.
- Chanda Hermanson provided an update on Legislative happenings and the newly introduced and explained the Vocational Rehabilitation Order of Selection that VR is pursuing approval for.

### Motions:

- A motion was made in January SILC meeting to accept November meeting minutes as written. Vote was held in this meeting and the motion to accept the November minutes as written was approved.
- Jean Schroeder made the motion to accept the January minutes, Scott Williamson made a motion to second the January minutes, an all-in-favor vote was cast, and the January meeting minutes were accepted as read.
- Discussion was held to use monies from the 2025 budget to pay the expenses for one Board member to attend the NCIL Conference, on individual to attend the APRIL Conference, and one individual to attend the MyTransitions Conference. Tami made the motion to send one individual to each conference, Jean Schroeder made the second, and an all in favor vote was cast by the SILC Board members.

## **SILC Committee Reports:**

- Time did not allow committees to report

## **CIL Reports:**

- Tami Hoar, Summit

Tami Hoar shared that Summit has peers involved in numerous Task Forces. One group just completed a session with the paratransit bus service, Mountain Line Transportation. The director at Mountain Lion Transportation reaches out to the Peer Program Manager every time they have a new group of bus drivers for training. A similar program is happening in Kalispell with the bus system. Summit-Polson is also spending a lot of time and energy helping the ballpark become ADA accessible.

In Missoula our staff and a board member are working with a group called Common Good. This Committee is working on the city zoning to require any new construction of any dwelling to follow the visibility standards. Dwellings would be required to have a zero-step entrance, a thirty-two-inch-wide door, and one bathroom on the ground floor is accessible. The Committee will meet with the Missoula mayor in the next couple weeks.

Summit started a project called Community Connect with the Missoula Library. Once a month they host a Resource Fair. It mainly serves veterans, unserved and underserved individuals, and unhoused individuals. The Summit staff distributes Summit and local service provider information and resources to upward of 75 individuals.

Summit staff participate in other community meetings. In Kalispell Summit staff are making stickers and recognizing businesses that already are accessible by awarding window stickers that say 'good access is good business'. Accessibility checklists are being reviewed with other businesses to promote accessibility and distribution of these stickers. Staff is involved in accessibility audits with businesses, most recently with the Rocky Mountain Theater in Hamilton. SILC Board member Hannah Thompson is working with our staff on the Garden of a Thousand Buddas in Arlee. The Living Well staff being trained in the living well classes and things like that. Summit staff is now trained to do the Money Follows the Person program.

Construction continues on the Summit office in Kalispell as well.

- Carlos Ramalho, LIFTT

LIFTT has been partnering with Disability Rights Montana to protest the cuts and

reductions in funding for all the programs aimed at helping people with disabilities and aging live a meaningful life. Unfortunately, the Montana Fair Housing non-profit organization closed due to funding resources that were canceled by the Federal administration. LIFTT is working diligently to learn about and fill that service gap.

LIFTT also participated in the ADA Resource Fairs in Sidney, Miles City and Hardin. LIFTT received several references from individuals seeking to receive a diversity of independent living services from LIFTT.

LIFTT received a small grant to start the Diabetes Prevention Program. LIFTT is planting a community garden and plans to share resources with Food Banks and other nonprofit organizations in the community. The garden is linked to the Diabetes Prevention Program and highlight the use of food as education for health improvement and prevention. Many consumers have already participated in the planting process.

LIFTT is working with the Western Heritage Center. They are hosting an exhibit called Equally Different and covering the history of disability in Montana. LIFTT completed the 511 CCIR counseling services at the Special K. Ranch.

LIFTT is experiencing astronomical growth. For example, LIFTT in May 2024 had 519 consumers with information and referral and in May 2025 there are 556 consumers. Advocacy and legal services experienced a growth of 365%. This year LIFTT served 315 individuals in Yellowstone County, Dawson County 155, Custer County 45, and Richland County 31. This is very significant because as you know Custer and Richland Counties are extremely rural. Traditionally zero individuals had received services in those areas considered underserved or unserved.

LIFTT continues to plan for an ADA accessible rural transportation program and expect to have the two vehicles from Montana Department of Transportation before the spring of 2026.

- Margaret Keener, NCILS

Margaret Keener indicated that NCILS has provided 168 people (153 carried over) with services using Part B and General Fund money this quarter and many more in the SDS program. NCILS is strengthening its use of CIL Suite so more accurate numbers for our quarterly reports can be generated. The majority of folks served live in Cascade County which is right around Great Falls and Black Eagle. But NCILS has served 57 people in Roosevelt County, 10 in Valley, 3 in Toole, 2 in Teton, 2 in Sheridan, and 2 in Pondera. Additionally, there are about 40 individuals in Glacier and 8 in Hill. NCILS also serves

Daniels and Blaine County as well.

NCILS continues to do advocacy and legal services work with people in the process of applying for Social Security disability benefits or resolving issues. Additionally, NCILS aided those who needed accessible housing, independent living skills, and skills training. NCILS continues to work on developing their peer counseling program. This quarter NCILS had 15 people participating in Legislative Day, including 8 consumers. NCILS also participated in Rally Day with several of our youth who attended the Montana Youth Leadership Forum participate and speak. NCILS participated in two High School Resource Fairs this quarter. NCILS was busy in the state legislature, providing testimony or comments 26 different times on bills that would impact people with disabilities. The peer program is working with the city on accessibility and making the community here in Great Falls better suited for people with disabilities. During a Growth Policy meeting in March, 15 people provided feedback specifically regarding people with disabilities on the layout of the city and features that could be utilized in city planning.

NCILS has been very active with the Task Forces, every NCILS staff member participates in at least one task force. NCILS staff also encourage those on their caseloads to be a part of a Task Force. Additionally, NCILS also participates in a project with the Department of Health and Human Services and Mackenzie Jones. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the collaboration of Local Health Departments with community services provider. Next quarter NCILS hosts the My Life Step 2 Summer Camp. Planning for the MyTransitions Conference is underway. In June NCILS is facilitating a training focusing on safety for people with disabilities. Statistics show that people with disabilities are fifty percent higher to be victims of violent crime. Planning is starting for an ADA picnic and celebration for consumers and community partners on July 22<sup>nd</sup> in Great Falls.

- Scott Berkenbuel, Ability Montana

Scott Birkenbuel updated the SILC the many happenings at Ability. He shared that the recreation team delivered 93 adaptive ski lessons, 54 individual lessons, and 39 school group lessons. This was possible due to 20 volunteers. Camp Bull Wheel was donated to Ability. The property, equipment, and funds to operate the program have been acquired over the past several months. Camp Bull Wheel is already full for the year with people wanting to take advantage of the opportunities that the camp has to offer.

In the Independent Living program, the major highlights have been the successful

implementation and growth of various support and interest-based groups. These groups have increased participation engagement and helped build stronger community connections. Staffing capacities have improved, allowing for broader reach and more effective service delivery. A more comprehensive onboarding training plan was developed to support new IL staff ensuring they're well equipped from the start. Each office completed an annual strategic plan and established quarterly goals creating greater alignment and focus across the organization.

Community engagement efforts were increased through the planning and coordination of Let's Talk events in Butte and Helena. The Ability team played a key role in a successful Legislative Day and Rally Day. These events amplified consumer voices at the state level. The IL team celebrated a major communications win with the organization's podcast which saw an impressive almost 300% increase in listening over the previous quarter. Internal communication has improved through regular meetings and team building activities, strengthening collaboration across offices. Staff development continued with the roll out of targeted training courses including Medicare and Medicaid education, and improved outreach planning has Ability better able to serve remote communities.

For the self-direct team there are now 41 veterans' administration clients. Ability started this program approximately two years ago and six years to implement. The EVV continues to be a challenge. Ability staff have reviewed a few different alternative products that will better serve consumers and staff. The self-direct team attended a training session on Money Follows the Person and Ability is recruiting a staff member to allow for this anticipated increase in the consumer base. Ability is looking at going to a pay com system for our payroll that will have a learning management system that will streamline the PCA application process and ensure alignment with the program requirements. This has been a really long process however. The system currently being used isn't adequate.

## Public Comment

- None

3:59pm Meeting adjourned, next meeting to be held in conjunction with the SRC. Date and time to be announced.