



Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow
1241 Crawford Drive, Billings, MT 59102 • (406) 259-5181
119 South Kendrick • P.O. Box 1387 Glendive, MT 59330 • (406) 948-8500
<http://www.liftt.org>

Equally Different, Unequally Remembered: Why Montana's Disability History Demands Your Attention



<https://www.ywhc.org/exhibit/equally-different-uncovering-the-history-of-disability-in-montana/>

Let's be honest.



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Disability is everywhere and yet — historically — it's been almost nowhere. Not in the textbooks. Not in the museum wings. Not in the official timelines of "how we got here." Until now.

From March to December 2025, the Western Heritage Center in Billings is hosting a groundbreaking exhibition: **"Equally Different: Uncovering the History of Disability in Montana."**

And no, this isn't your average stroll through sepia-toned nostalgia. This is about truth-telling. About visibility. About refusing to disappear.

Why This Exhibition Hits Different

This isn't a story about charity or pity. It's a story about power. About how people with disabilities in Montana survived, organized, and dared to demand more — even when society told them to stay quiet, stay hidden, or stay institutionalized.

It's about the State School at Boulder. It's about forced silence. It's about resistance.

It's about how disability, though always part of our collective story, was edited out — until now.

And if you think this is just "history," think again.

This is now.

DEI Isn't Complete Without the "D" That Everyone Forgets

You want to talk about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? Let's talk about how disability is almost always the last guest invited to the table — if invited at all.



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“Equally Different” forces the conversation wide open. It doesn’t just *fit* into DEI — it expands it.

It disrupts the idea that DEI is about marketing slogans and training modules. It says:

1. Where were disabled voices in your civil rights curriculum?
2. Why do your hiring policies celebrate diversity but exclude accessibility?
3. What happens when inclusion doesn’t include everyone?

This exhibition isn’t polite. It’s necessary.

And it gives us all a choice: keep doing surface-level work — or go deeper.

LIFTT’s Role: We’re Not Observers, We’re Participants

At LIFTT, we don’t see history as a spectator sport.

We’re part of this ongoing narrative.

We honor this exhibition because it *names what was hidden*.

It tells the stories of people who fought for ramps, rights, respect — and who are still fighting. It also reminds us that independent living was never handed out like a gift. It was won.

So no, we’re not just encouraging you to visit the exhibition. We’re asking you to let it change you.

The Invitation



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Go.

Walk through it. Sit with it.

Let it make you uncomfortable. Let it open something up.

At LIFTT, we're not just watching from the sidelines.

Our staff will be attending this exhibition — not as experts, but as learners. We believe in reflecting on the history that shaped the fight for independent living. We believe in listening to the voices that were once silenced. And we believe that the past has something urgent to say about how we move forward.

We'll also be recommending this experience to the individuals and families we serve. Why? Because reclaiming our history isn't optional — it's empowering. It's personal. It's a reminder that we belong in every room, every archive, and every future plan.

And when you leave, don't say, "Wow, I didn't know."

Say, "Now that I do — what will I do next?"

Because history is only powerful when it moves us.

And the fight for equity is only real when disability is not an afterthought, but a starting point.

For details, visit: [Western Heritage Center – Equally Different](#)

Let's stop rewriting history to exclude. Let's start living it — equally different, and unapologetically whole.

With commitment,



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The LIFTT Team