



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>

The Silence After the Shutdown: What the End of the ACL Means for Independent Living



Let's talk about what happens when something foundational disappears. Quietly. Bureaucratically. Strategically.

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) — that almost anonymous federal body that for over a decade made independence, autonomy, and access possible for millions — has now ceased to exist as we knew it. Gone. Absorbed. Reassigned. Paper-shuffled into nonexistence.



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For some, this might sound like just another Washington restructuring. But for those of us in the disability community — for people who *live* the tension between autonomy and assistance every single day — it's much more than that. It's a signal. A dissonant note in the fragile melody of freedom.

What Was the ACL, Really?

In theory: It was a hub. A place where funding, programs, and advocacy converged. A center that understood that aging and disability weren't "problems to solve" but human conditions that deserve dignity and agency.

In practice: It was the reason Centers for Independent Living like Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow - LIFTT could do what we do. It supported our core. It didn't just write checks. It helped affirm a worldview: that disabled people should define their lives, not be defined by institutions. And now, it's gone.

What Does This Mean for LIFTT and Centers Like Ours?

Let's not sugarcoat it.

The Ground Beneath Us Just Shifted

Funding — the lifeblood of our programming — is suddenly uncertain. Sure, we're told that programs will be "reallocated" within other agencies. But anyone who's worked in systems knows that fragmentation breeds delay, dilution, and drift. Things fall through cracks. Sometimes people do too.

A Vacuum Where a Voice Used to Be



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The ACL didn't just move money. It *stood for* something. It gave the disability community a dedicated federal space. Now, that voice has no clear microphone. No seat. No badge. And that matters when laws are interpreted, when policies are drafted, when people fight for the right to *just live*.

The Risk of Reverting

Without centralized, disability-centered leadership, the independent living movement risks being recast as a social service, not a civil rights movement. We could be pushed from co-creators to passive recipients. From agency to dependency.

And we've been there before.

So, What Now?

This could be the moment to grieve. Or to rage. Or to retreat.

But maybe — just maybe — it's also a moment to adapt.

Diversify or Die (Financially Speaking)

LIFTT and CILs across the country need to think beyond traditional federal funding. Local grants, fee-for-service models, social enterprises like thrift stores — these aren't just survival strategies. They're declarations of self-determination.

Local is the New Federal

If Washington has gone silent, our voices at the city council, state capitol, and community halls must get louder. Louder and sharper. We know what inclusion looks like. We've lived it. It's time to educate those who still don't.



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Radical Visibility

Disability can no longer be the invisible thread in policy. We need to bring stories forward, disrupt assumptions, show up in every space that shapes how life is lived. We can't just react. We must lead.

A Word to Our People

To the advocates, the peer mentors, the independent living specialists, the consumers — we're not done. The system may be shifting beneath us, but we are rooted in something deeper. In community. In resistance. In the radical idea that all people, regardless of body or mind, deserve agency over their lives.

Let them erase agencies. But we will not erase ourselves.

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LIFTT is a Montana 501(c)(3) nonprofit Center for Independent Living (CIL) with offices in Billings and Glendive, providing services to aging and disabled individuals in 18 counties across South and Central Eastern Montana: Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, Golden Valley, McCone, Musselshell, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Treasure, Wibaux, and Yellowstone.

Our Vision: Empowering aging and disabled individuals to LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life.



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Our Mission: Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow – LIFTT's mission is to empower aging and disabled individuals to live independently through education, support, and opportunities.

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