



## LIFTT Praises Billings Clinic Response to Hearing Impaired Patients

*The outbreak of the Coronavirus has dramatically affected peoples' lives and relationships. Along with countless tragedies, there have been many stories on unexpected positive aspects. The story below is just one example of the positive experiences fostered by Covid-19.*

Imagine being unable to communicate painful symptoms and crippling fears while you are in the throes of Covid-19 infection. That happened to Carlos Ramalho, 60, a robust and energetic executive director of the Billings nonprofit organization Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT), which serves Montanans living with disabilities in eighteen counties in the southeastern portion of the state.

Carlos lost his hearing and became deaf in 2006. Even though he uses hearing aids, Carlos relies on lip-reading and facial expressions to communicate. He is fluent at lip-reading and is so skilled at communicating with people that many are shocked to learn of his deafness.

In November 2020, what Carlos thought was just a cold exploded into a full-blown respiratory attack that showed symptoms of Covid-19. He reluctantly followed his doctor's order to get to the Billings Clinic emergency department ASAP.

To his dismay, per hospital safety precautions regarding potential Covid-19 cases, the ED staff were unable to remove their masks to communicate with Carlos. "It was impossible to describe what I was going through, he said. "It was frightening and frustrating. "Carlos added the inability to communicate was far worse than coping with Covid -19.

Eventually, one of the nurses pulled out a pen and pad and wrote out her triage questions, allowing Carlos to fully describe his symptoms. Carlos tested positive, and he spent two weeks recuperating at home. He said recovery was eased thanks to the online care via the What's App platform from Dr. Pedro M Quintana Diez, an epidemiologist he met while living in Europe.

In 2021, now fully vaccinated, Carlos was in the Emergency Department again seeking treatment for a different health issue. To his surprise, after he disclosed his deafness at check-in, all ED staff members were wearing full clear protective shields, allowing him to effortlessly communicate with hospital staff.

"I was so happy I could see their faces, read their lips, and understand what they were saying," he said, "The shields eliminated the barrier that was preventing us from communicating and helped me focus on receiving the health care I needed, instead of grappling with the frustration I felt for being deaf."



Full clear protective shields allow deaf patients to effortlessly communicate with hospital staff.

Tami Grewell, RN, is the clinical coordinator of the Billings Clinic Emergency Department.

"It's wonderful to know that Carlos is doing well," said Brad Von Bergen, Billings Clinic Emergency Department Manager.

"The Emergency Department is an incredible learning environment and communication is critical. We have had to learn new ways to do this because of this pandemic to ensure our patients continue to get the care they need. Carlos' experience provided the opportunity to gain experience how we could continue to improve communication for all of our patients."



## Invitation to join LIFTT's Adventure in 2022

2021 is almost over. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and all the challenges we faced, it has been a fantastic year of accomplishments for our agency.

We served three times more consumers than we did in 2019, meaning we helped more people living with disabilities be independent than ever before.

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 CC7TV, are publishing a bimonthly newsletter, and we 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.

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

I am proud to announce that on September 16, 2021, the board of directors approved a Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Accessibility (DIEA) Statement for LIFTT. Although DIEA have always been a priority of our team members and consumers, the events of 2020 inspired LIFTT to revisit these themes and remember why we exist. This statement symbolizes a renewal of LIFTT's commitment to advance DIEA in its service area, among its team members and consumers, according to its mission and vision.

LIFTT provides independent living services in 18 counties located in the Southeast part of Montana. Its highly diverse and equitable team is prepared to meet and relate to the diversity of the population of the service area, allowing them to have equal access to the possibilities and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Based on its new DIEA Statement, LIFTT is seeking new ways to engage and enhance the DIEA experience of its team members and consumers. LIFTT wants to create more equity and create equal opportunity in Southeast Montana around gender, generation, nationality and ethnicity, LGBTQ+, and not only disabilities.

For the time being, I will be both LIFTT's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO). Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any comments and suggestions related to LIFTT's DIEA Statement transcribed below.

*LIFTT will always endeavor to advance, build, develop, and support a diverse, inclusive, equitable, and accessible work environment, community, and society that offers equal opportunities and outcomes.*

I wish our consumers, partners and team members happy holidays.



Sincerely, Carlos Ramalho, Executive Director

## Peer Support Group

Would you like to connect with others living with disabilities? Join the weekly fun and fellowship of LIFTT's online peer support group. Whether it's laughs and games or supportive deep discussion, you're sure to enjoy the new perspectives and the positive sense of belonging. For more information contact Tanya at 690-6324.

**Join LIFTT host Tanya Thomas for our online peer support groups every Thursday at 3pm. Holiday Party: 3pm, Thursday, Dec. 16th!**

## Consumer Spotlight: Kat Gordon

Meet Kathelene "Kat" Gordon, a LIFTT consumer and Renaissance woman of the 21st century. With degrees in microcomputer operations and graphic communications, she continues learning anything that catches her interest. "I Love to learn, and I love to teach," she said, "but, I love to create even more!" Her work ranges from crystal dream catchers to jewelry, baskets, books and much more.

Kat is a native Montanan and publishes novels for her father, an old west enthusiast. She 'also discovered a "low content" market allowing her to slam out 110 journals of various sizes and themes in a matter of weeks. Some of these journals showcase her original artwork and are currently available on Amazon.com by typing in her full name, **Kathelene Gordon**



In addition to design and publishing, Kat also developed skills in alchemy. She brews colloidal silver and makes soap from scratch. Kat plans to open her own apothecary with her product line and labels. "I can design just about anything," she said. Kat also designs her life on her own terms. She inherited a genetic disorder in which her kneecaps violently dislocate. As a child, she had experimental surgeries, but the procedures failed. She said she could function, but throughout the years it became more difficult. In addition, Kat has metal in her back, a torn shoulder, advanced arthritis, COPD and more. A few years ago, she was hospitalized and upon release was granted home care. "It sucked the life out of me to keep up with everything, but thanks to LIFTT and a caring doctor, I am getting the help I need so I can finally enjoy being alive and staying productive in my own ways."

Her goals to stay productive currently include tackling Middle Eastern cooking, distilling and moccasin design. "At the beginning of every year," she said, "I torture myself with a new list of things to learn and hopefully master."

Kat has a charming self-deprecating manner with a no-nonsense outlook and a lust for learning. "My ambitions are always bigger than my pocketbook, but learning is FREE!" she

said, "I am grateful for my education, but I also appreciate technology and the many ways it has changed the world." "Being disabled 100 years ago would have been horrible and I often think about how lucky I am to be in this century!"

Kat's positive outlook is due in part to The Secret, a philosophy that taught her how to focus on what she wants and the enormous power of gratitude. "It gave me the tools I needed even though it's a slow process," she said.

Despite challenges, Kat seeks inspiration through a need to be greater than her disabilities, a desire to never stop learning, and a hunger for success. Her advice to others living with disabilities is just as candid:

"Don't fake being ok because you're trying to be 'normal.' If you leave the walker at home; you'll only wear it on your face! People can see your pain and they interpret it as anger. Giving in to the embarrassment of using walking aids in public isn't easy, but you'll be treated better than with an angry face. Plus, you will be more comfortable and safer. Use your aids even if you feel the need to shop in the next town over. I get that and it's ok!"

**"Whatever it takes to make you comfortable in every way, with everything you do! Just be you!"**

LIFTT is a not-for-profit agency governed by a consumer-controlled Board of Directors whose lives have been personally impacted by a disability. It is funded in part by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 1992 (Title VII - Independent Living Services), and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (Disability Employment Transitions Division (DETD)).



1201 Grand Avenue, Suite #1,  
Billings, MT 59102  
(406) 259-5181

**LIFTT**  
Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow

We are on the web @  
[www.LIFTT.org](http://www.LIFTT.org)

Non profit  
US Postage  
PAID  
Billings, MT  
Permit No. 88

**LIFTT's Mission**— Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow, Inc. is a Montana non-profit organization committed to empowering persons with disabilities to live freely and equally in Southeastern Montana through the provision of independent living services which reduce societal barriers.



**People with disabilities should have the freedom to work, learn and engage actively with their families and in their communities.**

**Your gift helps LIFTT make the impossible possible.**

**You can make a difference, donate at:  
<http://www.liftt.org>**

LIFTT Main Number/Messaging: 259-5181 Fax Number: 259-5259  
LIFTT Contact Us email form: <http://www.liftt.org/contact/>

**SELF DIRECT PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT PROGRAM**

Freda Mook, PCA Program Supervisor, 294-5182, [fredam@liftt.org](mailto:fredam@liftt.org)  
Lanette Brown, PCA Program Facilitator, 294-5184, [lanetteb@liftt.org](mailto:lanetteb@liftt.org)  
Valerie Rowilson, PCA Program Facilitator, 294-5208, [valerier@liftt.org](mailto:valerier@liftt.org)  
Kasey Mook, PCA Program assistant, 406-606-1762, [kaseym@liftt.org](mailto:kaseym@liftt.org)

**INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM**

Jed Barton, Outreach & Government Affairs, 294-5186, [jedb@liftt.org](mailto:jedb@liftt.org)  
Steve Woodard, Data and Quality Control, 294-5185, [steveuw@liftt.org](mailto:steveuw@liftt.org)  
Larry Ketchem, I&R Specialist, [larryk@liftt.org](mailto:larryk@liftt.org) 294-5189  
Lee Hoblitzell, IL Specialist & Project Manager, 294-5188, [leeh@liftt.org](mailto:leeh@liftt.org)  
Glendive main office: 948-8500 Glendive reception: 948-8501  
Jen Hawkinson, IL Specialist, Glendive office, 948-8503, [jenh@liftt.org](mailto:jenh@liftt.org)  
Lionia Ornelas, IL Specialist, Glendive office, 948-8502, [lioniao@liftt.org](mailto:lioniao@liftt.org)  
Tonnette Jensen, IL Specialist, Glendive office, 948-8505, [tonneteb@liftt.org](mailto:tonneteb@liftt.org)  
Jordan Larson, IL Specialist, Glendive office, 948-8504, [jordanl@liftt.org](mailto:jordanl@liftt.org)

**PEER PROGRAM**

Tanya Thomas, Peer Coordinator, 690-6324, [tanyat@liftt.org](mailto:tanyat@liftt.org)