



Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow

## The LIFTT Connection!

DECEMBER 2020

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

### LIFTT opens office in Glendive to better serve Eastern Montana



**Independent Living Specialist,  
Jen Hawkinson**

Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow (LIFTT) is pleased to announce that it has opened a new office in Glendive, in order to accommodate the growing need for independent living services in the eastern portion of the agency's 18 county service area.

The office will be staffed by Jen Hawkinson who will act as LIFTT's front line presence in eastern Montana communities providing the region's disability community with programs and services in several core areas including: Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Skills Training, Youth Transition, and Institutional Transitions.

Jen Hawkinson has many years of experience in the human services field and has long been a part of the Glendive community.

LIFTT hopes to further expand its staffing and professional capabilities as well as to establish partnerships with schools, human service agencies and other community institutions that will allow us to further increase our ability to provide services to consumers in the counties we serve.

*The decision to reestablish an office presence in Glendive is a logical step in our growth strategy. Eastern Montana has a diverse population in need of independent living services that recognize and celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of the region.*

**Carlos Ramalho,  
LIFTT Executive Director**

**The Glendive office is located at  
100 ½ South Merrill St. Unit 12.  
(406) 606-1766 or via email at  
jenh@liftt.org**



Join your peers and LIFTT staff for a Holiday ZOOM! 3:30 p.m. Thurs., Dec. 17

Come enjoy the fun! Hope to see you there, merry and bright!

Zoom Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/93017341646>  
Meeting ID: 930 1734 1646

If you need technical support please call Tricia at 406-647-0126

### LIFTT Elects New Officers

The board of directors of LIFTT recently elected new officers.



**LIFTT Board Chair Andy Fox**

The officers elected by their fellow directors are:

Chair: **Andy Fox**

Vice-Chair: **Sandra Meehan**

Treasurer: **Paula McMahon**

Secretary: **Lee Hoblitzell**

The elected officers serve a five-year term from 2020 through October 2025.

Also serving on the board as directors are: **Chad Hooker, Dan MacDonald, Lavonne Miller-Kautzmann, Ian Elliot** and **Bob Maffit**.

*We appreciate the efforts of these committed volunteers and look forward to working with our board of directors to do great things for people with disabilities and the independent living movement in southeastern Montana.*

**Carlos Ramalho**

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

This is a time like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to produce uncertainty, stress, and trauma in our communities. We have all been impacted by this virus, which has been devastating for so many. Despite the challenges we are all facing, this is also a time that is bringing out the best in many people such as healthcare workers, first responders and essential workers - all risking their lives.

With respect to social distancing, LIFTT offices remain closed. However, we are still working for our consumers, peers, and colleagues through a variety of communication tools, including social media, frequent phone calls, and weekly Zoom sessions. We want to stay connected with you!

Instead of the traditional meeting around a conference table, the LIFTT staff and board adapted their communication needs by holding virtual meetings on Zoom. Our wonderful staff, including those running the Self Direct Personal Care Assistant

Program and the Peer Support Program, stay in touch with clients throughout southeastern Montana, and are there for them (virtually) whenever necessary.

LIFTT is hopeful that in the coming months, we will look at this difficult time in the rearview mirror. When we do, it will be with immense pride in how our consumers, peers, staff, and board responded. Together, we can get through the pandemic and emerge stronger by appreciating the healing power of communication – no matter the device.

In the meantime, please continue to stay-at-home, wear a mask, and observe physical distancing.

Wishing you a joyous holiday and peace in the coming year.

**Carlos Ramalho,**  
Executive Director



## MEET ALEXA'S FRIEND

## CHANDRA REUM —

## A LIFTT CONSUMER



### Talking Back

When LIFTT offered Billings resident Chandra Reum a free Echo Dot, she was worried the A.I. device Alexa, would not understand her voice commands. Chandra has Cerebral Palsy, which causes her to stutter. But when LIFTT Executive Director Carlos Ramalho set up the device and Chandra introduced herself, she was stunned when Alexa responded accurately and clearly.

Chandra now relies on Alexa to be her personal assistant, providing her with online shopping, appointment reminders, entertainment such as music and audio books, and much more.

"When I first got started with Echo Dot, I stuttered, "she said, "but now, my speech is getting better and better."

Voice assistants such as Amazon Alexa pose tremendous advantages to people with disabilities. The LIFTT Echo Dot Project is funded by the Cares Act and the Billings Community Foundation. For more information call LIFTT (406) 259-5181

### We still have some Echo Dots free to LIFTT consumers!

Echo Dots can help you make calls, control smart home devices, listen to music, news, jokes, weather forecasts and much more. Supply is limited, first-come-first-served, so call LIFTT today, 259-5181

## MEET THE LIFTT STAFF!



Freda Mook,  
PCA Program  
Supervisor

### ACTION ALERTS

When the 2021 Montana legislature begins on January 4, Montana's Centers for Independent Living have updated our Action Alert service which notifies and provides links to action steps for advocates when legislation of importance to the independence of Montanans with Disabilities comes up.

To sign up to receive Montana IL Action Alerts in your email, go to <http://www.mtcil.org/become-an-advocate/>

## What do Raid Leader, Crocheting and the Atlanta Braves have in common?

*Diagnosed with ADD at eight, LIFTT PCA supervisor, Freda Mook has a gift for detail.*

ADD symptoms include difficulty following instructions, completing tasks, and socially interacting. Freda Mook teaches disabled people and caregivers how to live independently. Her job is demanding and requires planning, attention to detail and interacting with people. In the 17 years Freda has worked for LIFTT, she has combined traditional ADD medication with unconventional life skills to keep her on track.

### Montana Tough:

Born and raised in Big Sky Country, Freda is a third generation Montanan whose ancestors homesteaded in the now abandoned community of Springtime. Freda's family experienced several devastating setbacks over the years, including her brother's suicide, her parents' divorce, her father's dementia, and her mother receiving a Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis. To distract her young daughter, Freda's mother

taught her to crochet and introduced her to baseball and the Atlanta Braves. Life went on. Freda graduated from Skyview High in Billings, met her husband, and had four children and two grandchildren. She continued to cultivate her hobbies and added a new one by becoming a crackerjack World of Warcraft (WOW) gamer, combining her skills with those of 31,000 other real-time strategists to defeat world bosses and dungeons.

"Gaming relaxes me," she said, "and I meet people from all over the world." Recently, Freda traded WOW fantasy for the rowdy camaraderie of American Truck Simulator - driving a virtual 18-wheel rig across America. Minecraft and The Sims are also part of her gaming repertoire.

### Choices:

Watching both parents die in nursing homes compelled Freda to work to keep people out of nursing facilities through personal care assistance. "Self-Directed Services allow people to make their own choices instead of having someone else make them."

Freda made her choices, and although her job is challenging, Freda can handle it. After all, she is a mother, has been chased by dinosaurs in the misty fantasy land of WOW, cheers her throat raw for the Atlanta Braves, and gifts loved ones with hand crocheted bedspreads. Keep on Truckin' Good Buddy.

## Peer Support Group

Would you like to connect with your peers over the holidays?  
LIFTT hosts online peer support groups every Thursday at 3pm.

Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/93017341646>

Meeting ID: 930 1734 1646 One tap mobile +1 346 248 7799,  
93017341646# US





## Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow

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(406) 259-5181

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**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."

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

Please welcome new employees  
to LIFTT!

Larry Ketchem has joined LIFTT as an  
Information and Referral Specialist.  
Larry can be reached by at 294-5189.

Valerie Rowlison has joined the LIFTT  
Self Direct PCA Program and will assist  
consumers with Medicaid Self Direct  
Services.  
Valerie's direct line is 294-5208.

*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 Services Division).*

### Give a call (406) or email us!

LIFTT Main Number/Messaging: 259-5181

LIFTT Contact Us email form: <http://www.liftt.org/contact/>

LIFTT Fax Number: 259-5259

#### 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 Rowlison, PCA Program Facilitator, 294-5208,  
[valerier@liftt.org](mailto:valerier@liftt.org)

#### INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Brooke Brandt IL Specialist, 294-5191, [Brookeb@liftt.org](mailto:Brookeb@liftt.org)

Larry Ketchem, I&R Specialist, 294-5189, [larryk@liftt.org](mailto:larryk@liftt.org)

Gary Parkins, IL Specialist, 294-5188, [Gparkins@liftt.org](mailto:Gparkins@liftt.org)

Jen Hawkinson, IL Specialist, 606-1766, [jenh@liftt.org](mailto:jenh@liftt.org)

Jed Barton, Outreach & Government Affairs, 294-5186, [jedb@liftt.org](mailto:jedb@liftt.org)

#### PEER PROGRAM

Tanya Thomas, Peer Coordinator, 690-6234, [tanyat@liftt.org](mailto:tanyat@liftt.org)