

Montana Disability & Health Update



December 2011, Issue 5

Living Well with a Disability Improves Health and Saves Money

Public Health Problem

People with disabilities compose about 20% of the U.S. population but account for nearly half of all medical expenditures. A combination of medical, rehabilitation, and community advancements have increased the life expectancy of people with disabilities. A challenge for public health is to ensure these added years are quality of life years. The *Living Well with a Disability (LWD)* evidence-based health promotion program can help meet this challenge by reducing the effects of health problems and associated medical expenses for people with physical disabilities or mobility impairments.

Program

Living Well with a Disability (LWD) is an evidence-based health promotion workshop for people with physical disabilities or mobility impairments.^{1,2,3,4} *LWD* helps participants develop goals for meaningful activities that link to the management of secondary health conditions and healthy lifestyle. Previous research of the *Living Well* program resulted in a reduction of consumers' self-reported limitations from secondary health conditions, as well as significant reductions in medical care costs over a 12-month period. *Living Well* workshops provide tools and help build skills for managing health, solving problems, communicating with service providers, avoiding frustration and depression, increasing physical activity and nutrition, and maintaining healthy lifestyle practices. Workshops are conducted by trained and certified facilitators. The Montana Disability and Health Program staff provide technical assistance on *LWD* in Montana and nationwide.

Impact

Montana has made great strides in expanding the reach and adoption of the *Living Well* program in Montana and throughout the United States. The Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities partners with the Montana Disability and Health Program and Independent Living Centers to provide in-person and distance-based facilitator training, as well as technical assistance to those implementing the program. RTC:Rural tracks the organizations and individuals who participate in *Living Well* trainings, estimates the number of participants who complete workshops, and uses this information to project program effects from program development practices. As of June 2011:

- 876 *LWD* facilitators have been trained in 43 states and have served more than 7,000 adults with disabilities.
- In Montana, 119 trained *LWD* facilitators have implemented and evaluated 149 workshops, and reached over 900 *Living Well* workshop participants.
- 605 trained *LWD* facilitators come from other states with CDC Disability and Health Programs.
- Nationwide, *Living Well* participants' annual symptom-free days are estimated at having increased by 81,300 days, and the total cost savings range from \$6.4 to \$11 million. The estimated net benefit to healthcare payers is between \$2.3 and \$6.8 million.

Montanans testify about the importance of *Living Well with a Disability*

“We have been using the *Living Well with a Disability* (LWD) program for training our peer counselors for years. It shows peers how to help people define consumer-oriented goals, solve problems and develop skills that lead to better health and community participation.”

Tom Osborn, Director, North Central Independent Living, Black Eagle, Montana

“For many people with disabilities who take the *Living Well with a Disability* training, this is the first time they come to Summit Independent Living Center (ILC) because *LWD* workshop topics interest them. It might also be the first time a consumer has set a goal to maintain or improve their health or to live more successfully in their eyes in the community, alongside being accountable to a small group of people with disabilities. The camaraderie and peer support of the group is a huge welcome for people who come to our center for the *LWD* training. *Living Well with a Disability* blends with the national IL philosophy, which promotes that people with disabilities have the right to a healthy life and the responsibility to set goals to continue to live in the community of their choice. *LWD* is the first, middle and ongoing step toward changing people with disabilities’ lives!”

Jude Monson, Summit ILC, Program Director



Mike Mayer, Summit ILC Executive Director, views the landscape.

Lucy. The fellowship associated with *Living Well* workshops was the most important thing to me. Working toward my goals is hard, but I feel so much better when I do it. I am just grateful to have been in the program.

Doris was in her mid-seventies and lived alone. Partial paralysis in her left leg and pain in her knees decreased her mobility and limited her ability to leave her apartment. Most of her energy went to necessary excursions outside her home, such as trips to the grocery store or visits to the doctor's office. On a tip from a friend, Doris entered the *Living Well with a Disability* workshop. The first session encouraged her to set goals; Doris took a pain management workshop and a nutrition workshop, and she started exercising twice a week at a local fitness center. In Doris' own words, "*Living Well* is indeed a remarkable program ... when you combine quality leaders with the input of other disabled group members an improvement in lifestyle is inevitable."



LWD graduate Mark Cash ready to launch on a fishing trip.

Brian. Ten years ago, Brian sustained a severe head injury when a drunk driver smashed into him. Although Brian lived independently when he enrolled in *Living Well*, he struggled with re-entering the social scene. He wanted to be "buff and date again," but fatigue and pain limited his activities. Brian set out to increase his stamina through fitness, address neck pain, and rekindle his love of life. He identified the need to work with a physical therapist to improve his gait and design an appropriate fitness program. Brian now exercises regularly at the YMCA, attends church, works part-time at a music store and volunteers several hours a week at a local service agency. He reports that his social life is in full swing.



Laura Bogar, *LWD* graduate, co-trains fitness trainers.

Brent. I was born with an eye disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. In the summer of 1986, I was involved in an auto accident, which left me with a TBI. I was very social and outgoing. After the auto accident I dealt with a lot of depression and had barriers to overcome. I got involved with an Independent Living (IL) center in Billings, Montana to do a job assessment through the state VR. The IL staff introduced me to the *Living Well with a Disability* class where I learned ways to deal with a lot of my problems. The *Living Well* class helped me heighten my awareness of ways and means to

better my life, set meaningful goals, keep a positive outlook, and understand the effects of depression. I have a passion for eating right and getting exercise, which has helped me both emotionally and physically. I see how much the *Living Well* class can empower people with disabilities, and I want to pay it back and let it out!

George. I have cerebral palsy and blindness. What *Living Well* did was to teach me how to become a citizen advocate for disability rights in Montana and to show compassion for all with disabilities. I testify locally and statewide on Independent Living and brain injury issues. I am also an Accessibility Ambassador. I have helped determine whether fitness centers and mammography centers throughout north central Montana are accessible. I have recently moved to my own apartment!! This is what *Living Well* has done for me!!

Darren. As a facilitator, *Living Well with a Disability* has been a great experience. The 10-week program allows individuals with disabilities to create a healthy lifestyle plan, unique to their desires and strengths, to overcome every day and ongoing challenges to reach meaningful life goals. Being a person with a disability, I have used the *Living Well* tools and techniques to improve my life. It is awesome!



Darren Larson (right) and Michael O'Neil discuss visitability policy at a Montana housing conference.



LWD graduate and facilitator Chris Clasby hunts with adaptive equipment.

Kim. I suffered a Brain Injury due to stroke and emergency brain surgery in November 2002. Before my injury I was an ACTIVE elementary school teacher. I feel the (LWD) course and subsequent workshops have given me a better quality of life and not just a quantity of life. Before the course, I merely just sat in my chair!! *Living Well* caused me to meet new people and try new experiences. I joined my local Brain Injury support group. I attend NCILS Meet Your Legislator Days. I tell our Cascade County legislators my concerns. I took my personal advocacy to a new level in early January 2009 when I testified before Montana legislature. I have the confidence to speak out thanks to *Living Well with a Disability*.

Scott. I have been a co-facilitator for the LWD program now for almost a year. I personally have learned better ways for living and coming to terms with my disability and that I can be a part of society. The class has also taught me that having a disability is not always a bad thing. Even though my disability might slow me down, it doesn't have to stop me from having fun. I have also changed my diet to eating better, which has given me more energy to do more activities.

Lynne. I have cerebral palsy. I have tried to be as active as my disability would let me. The one thing that I take pride in is my job, and there was a time when I was just feeling sluggish and did not feel as good as I could. In the *Living Well* class we talked about nutrition. I was not burning the calories that I was taking in. I am overweight and I am the only one that can change that. I try to exercise every day and no less than three times a week if I can't do it every day. I have lost 15 lbs., and I feel great!



Lynne Kelly, representative of disability issues on the MT Cancer Control Coalition, at New Directions Wellness Center.

References

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