





2024-2025

EARLY HEAD START ANNUAL REPORT

In compliance with the "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007" requiring that all Early Head Start programs make an annual report available to the public.

This report is made available to the public on our AWARE website: https://www.aware-inc.org

Hard copies are also printed and available at each Early Head Start location.







OUR CHARTER & STORY

EHS SERVICES

OUR TEAM

CHILDREN WE SERVE

FAMILIES WE SERVE

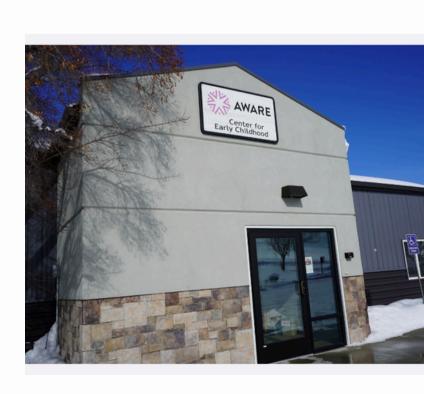
HEALTHY CHILDREN

CACFP

MENTAL HEALTH

12

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OUR CHARTER

To extend experiences to children and families that are strength based and rooted in nurturing and responsive relationships. These experiences are guided by innovative, reflective, and evidence-based practices that result in healthy attachments and positive outcomes for children and families.

OUR STORY

AWARE is a statewide, private, nonprofit corporation providing community-based services to people with challenging mental, emotional, and in some cases physical needs. Throughout Montana, AWARE offers the following services in fully licensed and nationally accredited programs: mental health services, disability services for children, disability services for adults and early childhood services.

Early Head Start (EHS) provides support to low income families with infants and toddlers, children in foster care, children with identified developmental delays and families experiencing homelessness. AWARE EHS is a federally funded comprehensive child development program providing EHS services in our classrooms and within licensed partner child care agencies. AWARE EHS focuses on school readiness of infants and toddlers, providing family engagement opportunities, age-appropriate health and developmental screenings, disability, family, nutrition, social emotional development, and education services.

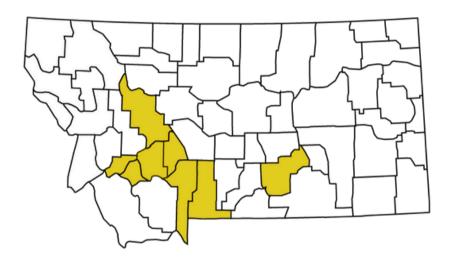


EHS SERVICES

AWARE provides EHS services to 151 children in Butte-Silver Bow, Gallatin, Lewis & Clark, Yellowstone and Jefferson counties.

AWARE has 27 classrooms at 11 sites in 5 communities including 5 childcare partners.

Our EHS program offers full-year center-based classroom services. Our EHS Child Care Partnership (CCP) program offers full-day/full-year EHS services within community child care facilities to support working families or families attending school.



AWARE SERVICE AREAS

- Broadwater
- Gallatin
- Jefferson
- Lewis & Clark
- Park
- Silver Bow
- Yellowstone

CHILDCARE PARTNERS

BUTTE

Shelly Fischer - Young Explorers Childcare Center, University on Princeton,

Kids Konnection Childcare Center

Sara George - Mini Scholars Discovery Academy

HELENA

Kari Shirley - Babies and Beyond

WHITEHALL

Kristy Wilson - Kristi's Kiddie Korner

BILLINGS

Abigail Snow-Peck - Family Tree Nurturing Center



MEET OUR TEAM

AWARE Executive Team

CEO Matt Bugni
COO Leighann Knight
CFO Francine Cooper

AWARE EHS Leadership Team

ECS Director Colleen Bosch
EHS Program Director Clark Stirgus
Fiscal Grant Manager Barb Berry
FCP Manager Jene LaCroix
Education Manager Jessie Fuzesy
Health and Disability Manager Jen Reed

AWARE EHS Policy Council

Parents and community members can help lead and make decisions about the EHS program. Policy Council members are elected by parents of children enrolled in the program.

Chair Bradie Weasel Chair
Vice-Chair Mickayla Yochim
Secretary Kristeen Bakker
Treasurer Vacant
Board Liaison Barb Sherrill

Members

Chris Armstrong
Daniel Bakker
Whittni Cabrera
Julianna Dominick
Jordan Garrison

Shayna Grooms Misty Johnston Carla McEntire Helen Ritari Cindy Ruffner



ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED

5%
GALLATIN

32%
JEFFERSON

22% LEWIS & CLARK 30% SILVER BOW 12%
YELLOWSTONE



ENROLLMENT

FUNDED ENROLLMENT

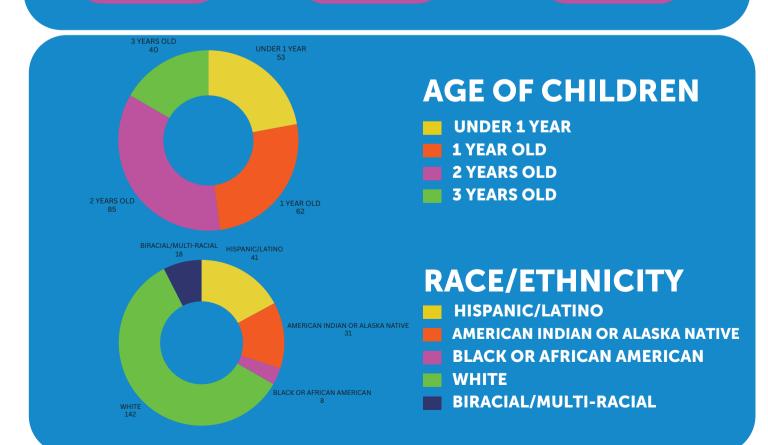
151

CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT

240

AVG. MONTHLY ENROLLMENT

95%

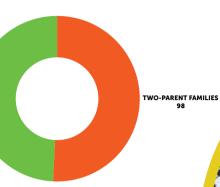


Early Head Start has served 1993 families

PARENT/GUARDIAN

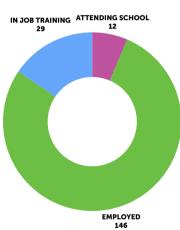
- SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES
- TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES 95



EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT

- **EMPLOYED**
- IN JOB TRAINING
- ATTENDING SCHOOL







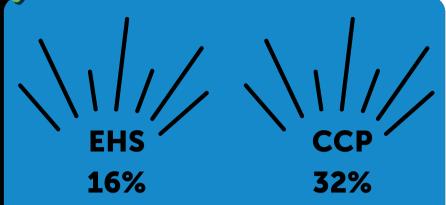






Best Beginnings

The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBS) program helps Montana families afford quality child care, allowing parents to participate more fully in the workforce and focus on their children(s) well-being.





families receiving services under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

families receiving benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



SERVICES DELIVERED TO FAMILIES

Family Advocates provide opportunities for families to identify their strengths, goals and services needed through a Family Partnership Agreement. They assist families with recognizing and achieving family engagement outcomes in seven areas: Family Well-Being, Positive Parent Child Relationships, Families as Life-Long Educators, Families as Learners, Family Engagement in Transitions, Family Connections to Peers, and Community Families as Advocates and Leaders. Family Advocates offer home visits, resource referral, parent education, and crisis assistance.

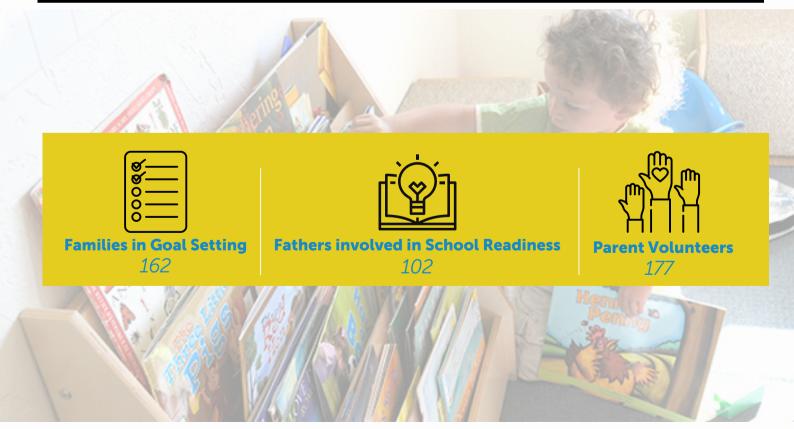
| 45 | Emergency/Crisis Intervention |
|-----|--|
| 18 | Housing Assistance |
| 23 | Asset Building Services |
| 17 | Mental Health Services |
| 0 | Substance Misuse Prevention |
| 1 | Substance Misuse Treatment |
| 2 | English as a Second Language (ESL)Training |
| 5 | Assistance Enrolling into Education/Training |
| 118 | Research-Based Parenting Curriculum |
| 144 | Involvement in Discussing Child's Progress |
| 66 | Supporting Transitions Between Programs |
| 148 | Education on Preventive Medical and Oral Health |
| 4 | Education on Tobacco Produce Use |
| 123 | Education on Nutrition |
| 3 | Education on Postpartum Care |
| 0 | Education on Relationship/Marriage |
| 1 | Assistance to Families of Incarcerated Individuals |
| 158 | Number That Received at Least One of the Services Listed Above |



Family Engagement

AWARE Early Head Start provides so much more than education for young children. We believe the parent is the child's first and more important teacher. We also believe the whole family plays a vital role in a child's development and school readiness. Parent and family engagement are evident in all areas of our EHS program. Parents participate in activities aimed at building healthy families through a strength-based approach, including the following:

- Parent committee meetings to provide parent leadership opportunities and program input.
- EHS parent representation on Policy Council.
- Family partnership agreement, including identification of family goals
- Collaborative partnership with EHS staff.
- Individual parent-teacher conferences.
- Child find opportunities to ensure children are typically developing.
- Promoting resiliency through the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment.
- Transition planning with local school districts, Head Start, and Part C agencies to ensure child success beyond EHS.
- Family Advocates provide emotional support, resource connection, and crisis intervention to empower families to overcome crises and build resilience for the future.
- Family engagement opportunities to foster a love of education.



Healthy children are ready to learn!

EHS provides support for children and families with obtaining health and dental services, referring children for treatment, assisting families with finding a medical and dental home, and acquiring insurance coverage. EHS health specialists provide health education and training for parents and staff, including hand washing and preventive oral health care.

100%

80%

60%

40%

20%

PREVENTATIVE DENTAL **SCREENING**

13%

UP-TO-DATE ON WELL CHILD EXAMS



Children with **Medical Insurance**



Children with Up-to-**Date Immunizations**





have an ongoing source of continuous, accessible health care provided by a health care professional



of children served have continuous, accessible oral care provided by an oral health care professional

HMHSAC

The statewide Health and Mental Health Services Advisory Council (HMHSAC) meets twice a year to bring together staff, parents, healthcare providers, and other community health partners to discuss the planning and operations of AWARE Early Head Start health services. The committee's mission is to support the health and wellness of each and every Early Head Start child and family.

MEMBERS

Jennifer Reed - AWARE EHS Health Manager

Jessica Tiry - AWARE EHS Health Specialist

Traci Shinabarger - AWARE Clinical Director

Haley Knight - AWARE EHS Data Specialist

Quinn Curry - Young Families Early Head Start

Jane Gillette - Sprout Oral Health Program

Cassie Drynan - Rocky Head Start

Morgan Gates - Family Outreach

Callie Parr - 4C's Butte

Kate Monger - Riverstone Health Billings

Rebecca Lopez - Southwest Montana Community Health

Carlyne Johnson - 4C's

Erica Schuppe - Wild Roots Therapy - Billings

Megan Little - Billings Clinic

Genea Fields - Mental Health America of Montana

EARLY HEAD START HEALTH SERVICES

- On-site hearing and vision screens
- On-site oral health education and screens
- Classroom health education activities
- Parent health education opportunities
- Classroom nutrition education activities



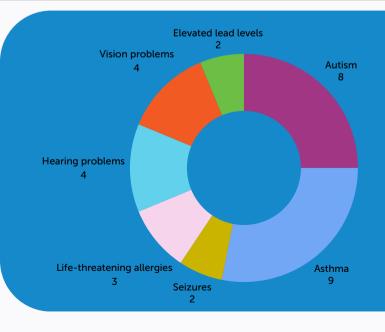
VISION SCREENING 97%



LEAD SCREENING
51%



HEARING SCREENING



Chronic Health Conditions

- AUTISM
- ASTHMA
- SEIZURES
- LIFE-THREATENINGALLERGIES
- HEARING PROBLEMS
- VISION PROBLEMS
- ELEVATED LEAD LEVELS

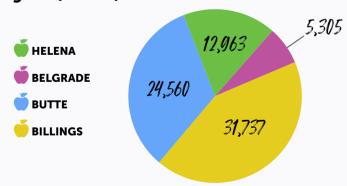
Ten percent of our enrollment is reserved for children with diagnosed disabilities. In partnership with Part C providers, children receive services to address their disabilities. Each child receiving Part C services has an individualized family plan (IFSP), which includes individualized goals. Children and their families receive transition support as they age out of EHS services to ensure continued disability services remain in place, as indicated.

AWARE Early Head Start served 32 children with an IFSP or 21% of our enrollment.



CACFP MEALS SERVED

Children eat nutritious meals "family style", which promotes positive social interactions and self-help skills. All EHS classrooms and child care facilities participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).



Beginning nutrition education in early childhood is an important part of helping to ensure that children" will achieve healthful lifestyles." ~Robert Earl



Conscious Discipline

AWARE EHS implemented Conscious Discipline, a social-emotional learning program, this year. EHS staff attended training to learn the Conscious Discipline philosophy and then began integrating practices into our classrooms and facilities. Conscious Discipline, an "adult first" technique, supports adults in learning about self-control and self-regulation, including how we respond to stress, understanding our emotions and how to regulate our responses when triggered. This self-awareness promotes positive modeling for children as they learn to manage their thoughts and feelings. Our EHS team is focused on creating a safe and supportive space for our young children to learn, grow and develop important connections with those around them.

38 group and individual classroom consultations were provided for the year.

Staff Trainings

- Emergency Debriefing Training
- Applied Behavior Competencies
- A Trauma Informed Approach
- Co-Regulation

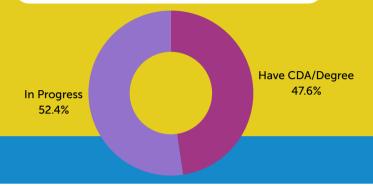
Early Head Start mental health consultation (MHC) is a preventive approach to supporting children's social and emotional development. MHC services support adults who work with and care for our EHS children. Mental health consultants provide guidance and training to all staff, assist teachers with individualized interventions, and connect families to community resources. By integrating mental health consultation into our work. Early Head Start creates a nurturing and emotionally supportive environment for children in our care.



TEACHERS

Early Head Start requires all classroom teachers to have a child development associate credential (CDA). Support and guidance are provided to all education staff to ensure they are knowledgeable of appropriate child development strategies and have professional development plans and goals in place throughout the year.

63 education staff who have received or are currently working towards their CDA.

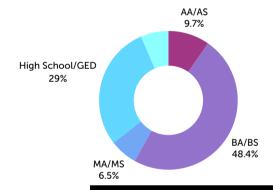




AWARE EHS staff participated in a Conscious

- ECS Director
- EHS Program Director
- Fiscal Grant Manager
- Education Manager
- Health & Disability Manager
- Family & Community Partnership Manager
- Education Coordinators
- Site Supervisors

- Family Advocates
- Mental Health Consultants
- Health Specialists
- Nutrition Specialists
- · Administrative Assistants
- Data Project Specialist
- IT Support Specialist
- Curriculum Professional Development Specialist



Discipline training to learn on-going practices directed at increasing children's social-emotional learning and classroom management.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- teaching staff have returned to school as part of the Montana Department of Labor Apprenticeship program. This program allows our EHS teachers to receive an Apprenticeship Certificate in Early Childhood.
- > 5 teachers achieved their Child Development Associate certifications this year.
- ? staff members celebrated an Associates or Bachelor's degree during the program year.

Early Head Start defines school readiness as...



a child possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and later learning in life.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

How children learn, considers temperament, past knowledge and experiences

- Imitation: copying actions and behaviors of adults and peers
- Attention: focusing on tasks for increasing periods of time.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social skills

- Self-awareness: developing a sense of independence and self-confidence
- Social skills: learning to share, take turns, and play cooperatively with peers
- Emotional regulation: beginning to manage emotions and understand the feelings of others

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY COMMUNICATION

Listening, speaking and understanding

- Vocabulary: expanding their vocabulary and using simple sentences.
- Listening skills: following simple instructions and responding to questions.
- Communication: expressing needs and wants verbally.

COGNITION

Thinking, applying knowledge

- Problem-solving: engaging in simple puzzles and sorting activities
- Memory: recognizing and recalling familiar objects and people.
- Concepts: understanding basic concepts like colors, shapes, and sizes.

PERCEPTUAL MOTOR AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Movement, coordination health practices

- Gross motor skills: walking, running, jumping, and climbing
- Fine motor skills: using utensils, drawing with crayons, and manipulating small objects.
- Visual skills: recognizing and identifying different colors, shapes, and sizes.
- Auditory skills: responding to various sounds, following verbal instructions, and enjoying music.
- Tactile skills: exploring different textures through touch and engaging in sensory play (e.g., sand, water, playdough).
- Taste and smell: developing preferences for idfferent foods and recognizing various scents.



Children are assessed \mathcal{J} times per year using My Teaching Strategies assessment, measuring growth on Widely Held Expectations by age

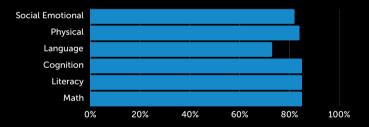
Children's social-emotional growth is assessed $\mathcal J$ times per year using the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment.

Families complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire screening at enrollment, parents and teachers complete follow-up ASQ screeners at twice yearly home visits to encourage a team approach to the child's development across environments.

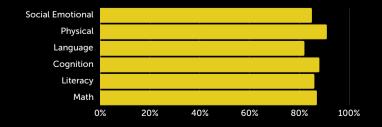
Child level data is collected and reviewed $\mathcal G$ times a year for planning and individual goal setting and to screen for potential referral needs.



Period 1 - Children Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (July 2024 - October 2024)



Period 2 - Children Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (November 2024 - February 2025)



A community-wide strategic planning and needs assessment was completed in January 2025 as required by Head Start Performance Standards to help with understanding community strengths and identifying programs in our services. The assessment in conjunction with other program date informs AWARE Early Head Start program planning.

Opportunities and Areas Potentially Impacting Early Head Start Families:

- Homelessness
- Housing and Rental Support
- Child Care Facilities



Homelessness continues to impact all communities

Housing Cost

The median cost of houses increased in all the EHS communities

Rentals

The price of rentals increased in all the EHS communities

Child Care

Child care capacity is low in all communities for infants care





VOLUNTEERS

5 Foster Grandparents are volunteering in our EHS classrooms. Foster grandparents provide a loving presence reading to toddlers, holding babies, and playing games with the children.

Community volunteers offer their time throughout the year assisting EHS by providing quality services including time spent in our EHS classrooms, working on the playground and providing gifts for children.

MUSIC IN THE CLASSROOMS

EHS children in Billings were fortunate to participate in a project with Musikgarten this year.

Musikgarten is a music curriculum designed for early childhood. Staff trained under Musikgarten professionals to learn to present music in the classrooms while nurturing children's natural inclination toward music, movement, and learning. The Musikgarten Foundation generously donated staff time, training, and materials to ensure fidelity to the curricula.





NEW CHILD CARE PARTNER

Sara George, Mini Scholars Discovery Academy has joined our team of child care partners. Mini Scholars Discovery Academy is located in Butte and will provide EHS services in her child care center for up to 4 children.



FINANCIAL INFORMATION & AUDIT RESULTS

FEDERAL SHARE

Early Head Start funding comes from the Office of Head Start and is awarded after the grant application has been approved.

NON-FEDERAL SHARE (IN-KIND)

Each Head Start program is required to match each dollar of federal funds with 20% non-federal share or in-kind.

AWARE EHS receives the majority of it's in-kind from parent and

community volunteers, parent-child activities, and community donations.



| | 2025 | 2024 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| US Dept. of Health & Human Services | \$4,415,586 | \$4,316,138 |
| Non-Federal Share | \$1,079,035 | \$440,292 |
| Total | \$5,494,621 | \$4,756,430 |

| | Proposed 2025 | Actual 2024 |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Wages & Benefits | \$3,368,844 | \$3,069,551 |
| Program Related | \$749,416 | \$854,727 |
| Office Supplies | \$7,700 | \$12,414 |
| Occupancy Expense | \$151,258 | \$192,896 |
| Building Repair & Maintenance | \$38,920 | \$186,550 |
| Total Expenses | \$4,316,138 | \$4,316,138 |

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

Early Head Start programs are required to track administrative expenses. The maximum allowable cost for administration is 15% of the total expenditures and in-kind.

In 2023-2024, administrative costs were 10.3% of the total.



AWARE EARLY HEAD START INCOME STATEMENT For July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

| Income | YTD | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Base Federal EHS Grant | \$4,231,818 | 86% |
| Training & Techical Assistance | \$84,320 | 2% |
| Child & Adult Care Food Program | \$136,343 | 3% |
| In-Kind Revenue | \$440,292 | 9% |
| Total Income | \$4,892,773 | 100% |

| Expenses | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------|
| Wages & Benefits | \$3,069,551 | 63% |
| Childcare partners | \$558,590 | 11% |
| Contributed nonfinancial assests | \$240,113 | 5% |
| Program Related | \$544,606 | 11% |
| Professional fees | \$88,053 | 2% |
| Office Supplies | \$12,414 | 0% |
| Occupancy Expense | \$192,896 | 4% |
| Building Repair & Maintenance | \$186,550 | 4% |
| Total Expenses | \$4,892,773 | 100% |

AUDITOR'S OPINION:

Auditor's Opinion: We have audited Aware, Inc.'s compliance with the types of compliance requirements identified as subject to audit in the OMB Compliance Supplement that could have a direct and material effect on its major federal program for the year ended June 30, 2024. Aware, Inc.'s major federal program is identified in the summary of auditor's results section of the accompanying schedule of findings and questioned costs.

"In our opinion, Aware, Inc. complied, in all material respects, with the types of compliance requirements referred to above that could have a direct and material effect on its major federal program for the year ended June 30, 2024."

The Head Start Act requires a periodic federal review of Early Head Start programs to ensure consistent quality and accountability. The review also allows our program the opportunity for continuous improvement of our services and practices.

SERVICE AREA

Designing quality education and child development program services

GRANT NUMBERS 08CH011642

COMPLIANCE LEVEL
Area of concern

APPLICABLE STANDARDS*1302.91(e)(1)

TIMEFRAME FOR CORRECTION

Follow up with Regional Office for support



* 1302.91 STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

- (e) Child and family service staff
- (1) Early Head Start center-based teacher qualification requirements. As prescribed in section 645(h) of the Act, a program must ensure center-based teachers that provide direct services to infants and toddlers in Early Head Start centers to have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or comparable credential, and have been trained or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANT

EHS successfully completed a quality improvement plan to address a federal review finding.

THANK YOU

AWARE EHS would like to thank our supporters who have generously given their time, financial assistance, and consultation to ensure that children and families in our communities receive the support needed to realize their goals.

OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Action Fire Extinguisher Service

Allegra Printing

AMR Safe Kids of Yellowstone County

BDC Orthodontics and Pediatrics

Butte 4C's

Butte Job Service

Butte Health Lead Program

Butte Pediatric Center

Butte Rescue Mission

Bozeman Job Service

CASA of Yellowstone County

Danielle Eldridge, LCSW

Dolly Parton Imagination Library

ECI - Billings

Family Outreach

First Interstate Bank

Health Department

HRDC - Billings

Kid Counseling of Montana

Lead Pediatric Clinic

Lewis and Clark County Health

Mariah VanAken Gipson

Met Transit

Musikgarten Foundation

Options Clinic

Phillips 66 Women's Network

Prickly Pear Dentistry

Rimrock Pediatric Dentistry

Riverstone Health - Billings

Rockinghorse Tree Farm

Rocky Mountain Development Council Inc.

Safe Kids Yellowstone Count

Sprout Oral Health - Bozeman

The Valley Hub - Helena

Town Pump

United Way of Yellowstone County

Wild Roots Therapy

YWCA



OUR INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS

Altizer, Katherine

Audet, Allan

Audet, Simarae

Axtell, Nancy

Bailey, Tracy

Bloom, Koren

Boe, Karen

Bosch, Morgan

Boshart, PT, PPT, Haley

Bright, Valerie

Brunell, Debbie

Burnaugh, Alicea

Casey, Megan

Chadek, Diana

Clement DDM, Christina

Cotnoir, Mary

Cutshall-Bailey, Patty

Ryan, Daphine

DeBock, David

DeBock, Judy

Dominick, Julianna

Dupea, Brittany

Ellis, Sheena

Engler, Judith

Filipovich, Karen

Fischer, Shelly

F, Kietun

Foster, Mike

Fox, Emmie

Garman, Kelby

Gates, Morgan

Gavin, Mary

Graves, Juanita

Greeno, Bryce

Hart, Rachael

Hoffman, Katelyn

Honey, Gentry

Honey, John

Hunking, Kourtney

Isaak, Tami

Johnson, Rodney

Kallin, Mya

Kallin, Nickolas

Kallin, Vaughn

Kelleher, Kasey

Kennedy, Bill

Kline, Jena

Laib, Tammy

Lanz, Ellie

Leprowse, Debbie

Mariah VanAken Gipson

Martin, Carla

Martin, Sasha

McElroy, Katie

McGrath, Ashlynn

McGrath, Kelly

McKnire, Abby

Metropoulos, Theresa

Mitchell, Allissia

Mitchell, Casey

Mitman, McCaela

Montgomery, Sarah

Murphy, Erin

Nicholson, Bernice

Ochoa, Ryder

O'Connell, Sue

Peck, Abby

Perce, Keri

Persepeno, Christina

Pina-Orozco, Olivia

Porter, Carrie

Powers, Connie

Prchel, Curt

Pritchard, Joanne

Rector, Jennifer

Red Willow Horse Capture

Russette, Janel

Schilling, Megan

Sexton, Michelle

Sherman, Mikel

Sherrill, Barb

Cl.:... 1/-...

Shirley, Kari

Siggard, Denise

Silva, Sara

Smenaglid, Anna

Snow-Peck, Abby

Sorensen, Heidi

Spearson, Miriam

Staber, Layne

Stahl, Samantha

Stenssie, Kaylie

Struder, Kelly

Talbut, James

Tiry, Jessica

Toth, David

Vetsch, Avalyn

•

Vetsch, Mackenzie

Vigil, Teason

Ward, Jonna

Welch, Melinda

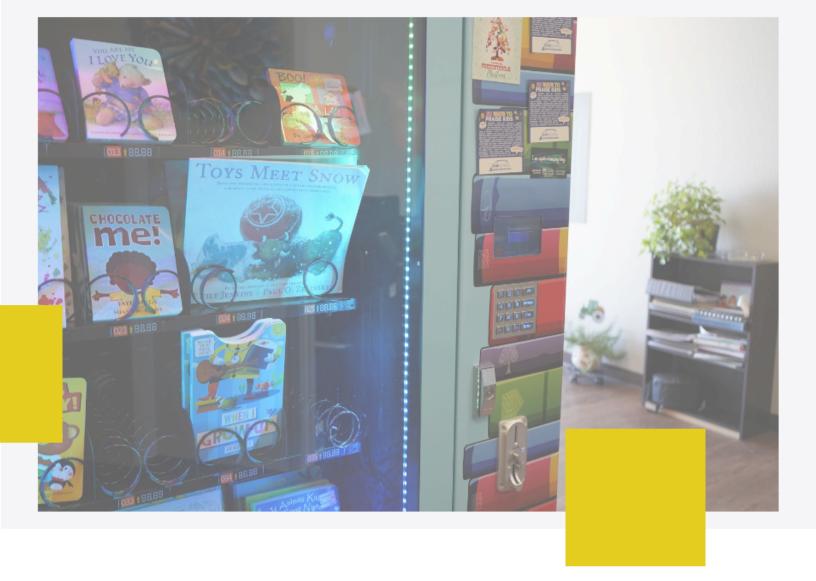
Williams, Joy

Williamson, Lucas

Williamson, Mikayla

Wilson, Kristi

Zimmerman, Jean



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