Celebrating 40 years of service

In 1974, AWARE was formed by a small group of parents sitting around a kitchen table discussing opportunities and possibilities for their children with special needs. Their discussion led to the opening of a small furniture refinishing business where people with developmental disabilities could learn a trade and make a valuable contribution to the community. Our name AWARE Inc. – Anaconda Work and Residential Enterprises – reflects our original mission in 1976 when we became incorporated, and it continues to do so as we have evolved over time.

A history snapshot

1974  - AWARE was formed after a group of parents started talking about how they wanted more for their children with disabilities.

1976  - AWARE Inc. became incorporated to carry out its mission of serving families and people with disabilities.

1980  - AWARE opened its doors to deinstitutionalization, adding its first group home to provide services primarily to people coming out of the Montana Developmental Center.

- AWARE received its first CARF accreditation for developmental disabilities (DD) services in 1980.

1989  - AWARE added transportation services, so consumers could get to and from work. It also served as a paratransit program for people with disabilities and the elderly in Butte.

1990  - AWARE added its first intensive group homes for youth in Anaconda and Butte.

- AWARE expanded its group homes throughout Montana and operated a home in New Mexico for a short period.

1991  - AWARE added adult DD case management services in Big Horn and Carbon counties.

1997  - AWARE added community support services for youth and children including youth case management, outpatient therapy, therapeutic foster care, transitional living and CSCT services.

1998  - AWARE opened a recycling program in Anaconda to provide work opportunities for clients.

- AWARE began providing telepsychiatry services.

- AWARE opened the Child Advocacy Center in Helena.

1992  - AWARE developed an internal training program called HELP with a state-accredited manual.

- AWARE opened the Galen campus.

2001  - AWARE began accepting kids into the Galen program who would be served out of state.

- AWARE began Early Childhood Services.

- AWARE began mental health case management.
AWARE is continuously growing

From our humble beginning in the 1970s, we’ve never stopped improving and building our services. We’ve come a long way, overcoming many challenges to positively help each and every person we serve. We can’t wait to see where the next 40 years will take us.

- We form partnerships. For example, we partnered with Lewis and Clark County to open a Children’s Advocacy Center, which helps with the investigations of children who are victims of sexual abuse.
- We focus on building early childhood services because the best way to help people with disabilities is through intervention and support at the earliest stages.
- We help people find their way into the community after being institutionalized for many years. For example, we opened five group homes in Great Falls and Butte to serve some of the remaining individuals at the Montana Developmental Center.
- We continue to recruit the best qualified employees to serve more than 4,000 clients per year. We’ve grown from 7 to 1,000 employees since 1974.
- We aim to provide a full continuum of services at the highest quality for people with disabilities not because we simply wish to be the biggest.
- We are the only organization in Montana serving as a licensed mental health facility and a qualified developmental disability provider.

2002 - AWARE became a qualified provider for CDD services.
- AWARE began delivering intensive family education and support services to children and adolescents with developmental disabilities in western Montana.
- AWARE developed the Montana Home Choice Coalition.

2003 - AWARE acquired REM and opened residential, work/day and transportation services in Billings.

2004 - AWARE expanded the recycling program into Butte, which laid the groundwork for the AWARE Business Network: Bloom (2011), Growth thru Art and KANA (2012), and Cold Mountain Pottery (2013).

2006 - AWARE was awarded the contract to continue deinstitutionalization efforts with the 16AB contract.

2010 - AWARE developed the first residential autism services in Montana.

2012 - AWARE transferred the Galen program to what is now know as the Center for Excellence school and opened the doors to the group homes on Pennsylvania avenue.
- AWARE formed The Arc Montana to promote for the inclusion and advocacy of people with disabilities.

2013 - AWARE acquired Great Falls YMCA Supported Living Program and continued to build upon our supported living services across the state.

2014 - AWARE opened the newly built Center for Excellence for its first day of school.

2016 - AWARE opened five group homes in Great Falls and Butte to serve some of the remaining individuals at Montana Developmental Center.