



Department of Public Health and Human Services

Early Childhood Services Bureau ♦ P.O. Box 202925 ♦ Helena, MT 59620-2925 ♦ fax: 406-444-2547

Steve Bullock, Governor

Sheila Hogan, Director

To: Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R), early care and education providers
CC: Early Childhood Services Bureau staff
From: Patty Butler, Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief
Date: December 13, 2019
Re: Early Childhood Services Bureau Updates

Greetings!

You will find information in this memo meant to inform you on some activities in the Early Childhood Services Bureau, updates on our partners in the state, and information for the work we all do. It's a busy time, but I'm convinced there has never been a 'not busy' time in the work of early childhood! Retirements to announce, new staff and positions to support your work, and changes in policy and programs are included in this letter.

Please be sure to visit our website often to view the [Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project](#) needs assessment and strategic plan that will guide our work for years to come. Also, the announcement for policy change and the opportunity to make comment and/or attend the public hearing will be added soon to the [ECSB website](#).

I hope that this season finds you warm and content, filled with holiday cheer and gratefulness. What a magical time of year to share in the lives of children and families!

My best to you and yours,

Patty

Staff Updates

Division Updates

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) is forming a new division, the Early Childhood and Family Support Division. This new division will consolidate several bureaus and programs, including ECSB. This consolidation provides an opportunity to analyze and improve how the state supports early care and education providers from the moment they express interest in becoming a provider and throughout their journey to high quality. The new division is still undergoing formation, and more information will be shared as updates are available.

CACFP Program Specialists

Welcome to our new CACFP Program Specialists, Kelly Aughney and Janene Shepherd.

*A message from Janene: "I have worked for DPHHS/HCSB for 4+ years. My work experience includes coordinating for SNAP Nutrition and SNAP Employment & Training, working along with our USDA Federal Partners similar to the CACFP program. I also have Early Childhood experience through my work as a Preschool Teacher which I enjoyed, and also assisting Montanans across the State with eligibility for SNAP & Medicaid!
I'm looking forward to assisting Montanans through our great Child & Adult Care Food Program."
Welcome, Janene!*

*A Message from Kelly: "I'm a woman of few words. I'm excited to be a new member of the CACFP Team. I have previous experience as a Health Education Specialist for the state WIC program and most recently a program officer in MT Medicaid."
Welcome, Kelly!*

ECSB Contract Specialist

Renne't Sarbu retired on December 5th. We thank her for her many years of dedicated service with the State of Montana. Until her position is filled, please contact the ECSB Budget Analyst, [Rebecca Phillips](#), with your contract and payment questions.

Licensure Bureau Chief

Leigh Ann Holmes resigned on December 6th from the Quality Assurance Division. She has worked 29 years for the State of Montana, and has accepted the position of Director of Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Health Department. Please visit the [Child Care Licensing website](#) for a current list of staff.

For a current list of ECSB staff, please visit the [ECSB website](#).

STARS to Quality

The Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program (STARS) is about continuous quality improvement, not only at the program level, but at the state level for the STARS program as a whole. STARS will be seeing changes to the framework in the coming months due to input gathered from stakeholders in a variety of ways. A STARS evaluation was conducted with the QRIS National Learning Network with the BUILD Initiative in September of 2019. The evaluation provided Montana with valuable information, including identified areas of strength, challenges, QRIS strategies from other states, goals for Montana, and next steps. In October, many STARS providers attended the STARS Institute. During the Institute, time was dedicated to receiving feedback from STARS programs and partners. Additional information will be sent to STARS providers directly.

For more information on upcoming STARS changes, visit the [STARS to Quality website](#) for updates.

CCR&R Structure

CCR&R Network Director

The Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MCCR RN) is excited to introduce Meghan Hollifield Ballenger as the Network Director. Meghan has been in her new position since May 2019. Meghan, along with her husband and their dog, Moose, moved to Montana in July 2018. With a decade of non-profit experience, Meghan was previously at CASA of Missoula and prior to that has worked in family visitation and therapeutic foster care. MCCR RN is expanding its focus to support regional Child Care Resource and Referral organizations. Since Meghan's arrival, MCCR RN has initiated and supported regional learning communities across the state and hosted a Home-base Child Care conference. Next steps for the Network include launching a statewide consumer education campaign and coordinating shared services for providers. The mission of the Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network is to unite Montana's Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and coordinate their efforts so that they may leverage their resources to their fullest capacity and make quality child care accessible to all of Montana's families.

CCR&R New Positions

ECSB is funding two new positions within CCR&R agencies: a Family Engagement Coordinator and an Outreach and Communications Specialist.

Family Engagement Coordinator will support both Family Services Staff and Provider Services Staff to meet the unique needs of families served by regional CCR&R Agencies.

The Family Engagement position will be responsible for services, such as but not limited to, the following:

- Parent Education
- Special Needs
- Services for the Homeless
- Vulnerable populations
- Referrals
- Transition and advocacy
- Collaboration with the Early Childhood Community Coalitions
- Collaboration with Child and Family Services

The Outreach and Communications Specialist has a focus on services that support promotion or collaboration of services for Early Care and Education providers. The Outreach Specialist position will be responsible for services, such as but not limited to, the following:

- Consumer education
- Media/marketing

- Community support and engagement
- Emergency Planning

For more information about these positions, please contact your CCR&R agency.

Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services launched the Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project in 2019 through a Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) grant from the Administration for Children and Families. The Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project is focused on developing the state's comprehensive early childhood system to enhance early learning and development, family support and engagement, and health to move the state toward its vision of all children having the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential in life.

Montana submitted an application for the Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant in November 2019. The Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System project renewal grant will help the state further achieve early childhood system goals based on achievements and lessons learned from the 2019 planning grant year. Work within the renewal grant is aligned with the early childhood needs assessment findings and strategic plan goals. We expect to achieve the following outcomes, aligned with the state's early childhood strategic plan, through the PDG B-5 renewal grant project:

1. Montana's families with young children have increased access to, and participation in high quality early care and education across a mixed delivery system.
2. Montana's early childhood workforce is confident and effective, due to enhanced ECE professional development.
3. The early childhood system is coordinated to support effective family assessment, system navigation, care coordination, and use of data.
4. Montana's families are engaged and valued as partners in the early childhood system.
5. Montana's communities make early childhood a priority, and act to support children's health, learning, and well-being.
6. Montana's early childhood system is structured to support policy alignment, strategic financing, continuous improvement, and accountability.

For more information, please visit the [Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project website](#).

Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Program

Policy Updates

ECSB will be updating several policies in the next six months. These updates include policy changes to align the scholarship program policies with provider business practices.

There will be opportunities to provide feedback during the policy change process. ECSB will have a public comment period and a public hearing to gather input from interested parties. Dates and additional information will be posted on the [Child Care Policy Manual website](#).

For more information on upcoming changes to the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Program, visit the [ECSB website](#) for updates.

Training for CCR&R Family Services Staff

To support the changes in policy and the CCUBS database, ECSB will be providing training to CCR&R Family Services Staff. Training will be scheduled for Spring of 2020.