

The Community Action Pages



2017 Newsletter, vol. 2

4th Annual Play Date at the Zoo



HRDC's 4th Annual Play Date at the Zoo was a great success, thanks to community sponsors, in-kind donors, volunteers, and HRDC staff. This event provides a venue for families to spend quality time together and also receive information regarding services available through numerous community resources. Nearly 4,500 attended this community event, with 28 organizations on hand to provide information to the parents regarding their services. Mayor Tom Hanel spoke at the event, proclaiming June 15, 2017, **Supporting and Strengthening Families Day**.

Sponsorship from area businesses helped make this whole event possible. We couldn't have pulled it off without the financial support of: MDU, PayneWest, ProBuild, Rimrock Pediatric Dentistry,

Sam's Club, and Yellowstone Bank.

Volunteers came from schools, 4H groups, Optimist Clubs, local businesses, and other individuals. Volunteers helped with greeting families, various games and activities, local talent and animal performances at the amphitheater, face painting, and dispersing snacks and water to families. Members of the United States Department of Public Health Services volunteered, taking charge of traffic control, while safely escorting families across busy Shiloh Road. Over 100 HRDC staff were on hand to help with the event and to provide information to families regarding the various services that HRDC provides.

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Child Care

STARS Preschool Grant Helps Montana 4-5 year olds

“More Montana kids will now have even greater opportunities growing up here than the generations before them. This investment helps our families, it helps our kids get off to a bright start, and it helps our economy. We’re finally making this long-awaited investment, and by doing so, building a stronger future for Montana”, Governor Steve Bullock announced, after securing the six million dollar investment over the next two years in publicly funded preschool. This is the first time that the state has made such an investment in early childhood education for pre-kindergarten children.

HRDC’s Child Care Department is looking forward to supporting the grantees in our region. Recipients include: Billings Head Start, Lockwood School District, Beartooth Children’s Center in Red Lodge, and Kountry Kare in Shepherd. Forty-seven programs applied for the grant and 17 were chosen based on the quality of the application,

readiness of the program, geographic diversity, and diversity of program type. Programs will serve a total of 285 four- and five-year old children around the state.

Research shows that children with high-quality early learning opportunities from ages 0-5 are more likely to read at grade level, graduate from high school, and earn even more money; and that every \$1 spent on high-quality pre-school programs creates \$7 in future savings to the communities and states that invest in them. Current costs and limited access to high-quality programs prevent many families from enrolling their children in early learning programs. The typical cost of child care consumes around 13% of the average family’s income. This grant will provide support for more high quality preschool availability without increasing the cost to families.

Alternative Education Success Story

Michael joined HRDC’s Alternative Education program in August 2016. Michael set a goal of obtaining his HiSET and completed this task within six months. Michael spent over 100 hours studying for his goal and admits there were some challenges, like showing up every single day, reading the materials in all of the books, and needing frequent breaks from studying.

With his HiSET in hand, Michael now has set a goal of becoming a diesel mechanic. He states, “This class taught me to strive for success and never give up. I appreciate all the help the teacher gave me in studying



HRDC instructor, Penny Hudson, and student Michael

for the test. I feel a lot more confident with going further in my education and learning a new trade. I hope that this program helps a lot more people like it helped me.” Congratulations and best of luck in your exciting, new future Michael!

VITA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

Positive feedback from VITA volunteers this tax season

“This past semester has been the most rewarding experience for me. Not only was I able to help others, but I learned so much throughout this semester. This was the most hands on experience I have had through my entire college career. I was constantly learning and asking questions throughout the semester.

“I have absolutely loved helping all of these people. It was so humbling being able to help people with their taxes. Although this was not my first time volunteering, it was my first time voluntarily doing this caliber of work and I loved being able to help. I think that was my favorite part of the entire semester. The appreciation that they expressed genuinely humbled me and made me appreciate the work that I could provide.”

-Lauren, MSU-B student

“Overall, this experience was rewarding. Along with the opportunity to prepare taxes and broaden my understanding, the smiles and thank you’s were endless and the most rewarding.”

-Alyssa

“The knowledge learned through (volunteering in) the VITA program becomes more concreted by applying it in real situations as a VITA volunteer. The VITA program gives the volunteers valuable skills and knowledge to take away. The VITA program also allowed a great opportunity to build a resource network with many different people. All the volunteers constantly made the environment a fun place to learn and to be for everyone. The program facilitators were fantastic at making the volunteers feel appreciated for their services.”

-Derek

Generous donation for HRDC’s Hardin office



Hardin resident, Ashley Rowe, recently donated hundreds of children's book to HRDC's Hardin office. Ashley raised \$600 in funds to purchase books for the donation. Her employer, Usborne Books, then donated an additional 50% of that amount in books. The Hardin staff now have a nice library in the office. Some of the books will be given to clients and their families. Others will stay in the library for children to use while their parents meet with staff. These books will benefit many families serviced throughout Big Horn County. THANK YOU for your generosity!

Ashley Rowe (left) and Hardin supervisor, Susan Old Elk

SNAP E & T Success Story

Joshua enrolled into the SNAP Employment and Training Program when he was 28-years-old. He was living with his mother, who offered little or no support in helping Joshua to succeed. His father has been in prison since Joshua was 6-years-old, serving a 25-year-to-life sentence. Joshua is a well mannered, shy, young man with little life experiences or work history. He had only had two jobs in his life, one babysitting his nephew for a time, and the other working for a cleaning service through a temporary agency for six months. As for his education, he dropped out of school in the 9th grade and was never encouraged to go back to school or obtain a GED/HiSET.

After talking with his HRDC case manager, who stressed the importance of education, Joshua agreed the best place to start his journey to self-sufficiency was to enroll into the adult education program.

Joshua never had applied for a driver's license and relied on his mother for transportation. As a part of the SNAP E&T program and the adult education program, bus passes were provided for Joshua's transportation needs.

Joshua took the TABE test and started working towards his future. He met with his case manager every week and talked about his progress. There were conversations about what careers or education opportunities he was interested in. At the beginning he didn't really have any ideas. Joshua never thought it was possible for him to attend college. He stated that this whole experience has opened his eyes to bigger ideas. Joshua remained focused and positive about obtaining his HiSET. In August 2016, Joshua was ready to take his test, and, after working diligently for 16 months, Joshua passed and earned his certificate.

Periodically Joshua's case manager mentioned college and suggested he visit with an academic advisor at MSU-Billings or City College. She also suggested he look into the Montana Apprenticeship Program. The



MT Apprenticeship Program sparked an interest. He stated that being an electrician or a welder would be good career choices.

Joshua was informed about the Work Experience Program (WEX) at HRDC. Since he had only ever had two jobs, the WEX Program was a good opportunity for him. In the program he would be placed in a non-profit agency where he would volunteer, working 12-20 hours per week. It would give him some current job skills, a good reference letter, and the possibility to be hired if a position there opens up. Joshua agreed to give WEX a try.

Joshua was placed at Habitat for Humanity and worked 20 hours per week. He was there 5 months. During that time his WEX case manager remarked how much Joshua had matured and wasn't as shy as he was when he first started. Although his activity hours were filled with working his WEX placement, Joshua did contact the representative with the MT Apprenticeship Program and was working towards his goal of becoming a licensed electrician.

Joshua soon realized in order to be successful in the MT Apprenticeship Program, or at any job, he needed his driver's license. He studied for a few weeks and the SNAP E&T Program paid for him to take his driving test.

Joshua left the SNAP E&T Program in February 2017, finding employment at a local printing company. He called to report how happy he was at his new job and to thank HRDC for the assistance while he was in the SNAP E&T Program. The program gave him real world experiences and introduced him to people who cared and encouraged him to be successful.

Pathways Success Story

H O P E
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C H A N G E

Of the many people who achieve success while partnering with HRDC, Shayla, stands out due to her efforts and educational achievement. Shayla was awarded the Parents as Scholars slot in May 2016 and met her education goal in December 2016 when she earned her baccalaureate degree in English from Montana State University Billings.

She noted that her education was very important to her, and was grateful for the opportunity to utilize Parents as Scholars until she completed her degree in December. Shayla gained employment

within weeks of earning her degree with a local business in Billings, and recently moved back home to Northern Montana in pursuit of a position as a librarian.

In addition to the benefits made available through Pathways including case management, supportive services for her vehicle, and job readiness training, Shayla received a Best Beginnings' scholarship—to help with child care costs—that she utilized throughout her time at the university. Shayla states that she is beyond grateful for the services offered through HRDC, and that without them, success would have been difficult, if not impossible.



Heidi, a successful business owner, came to The Home Center in 2016. She wanted to educate herself about homeownership and what steps she would need to take in order to obtain the home of her dreams.

Heidi attended the First Time Home Buyer Class and received one-on-one pre-purchase counseling with Carrie. Carrie worked with Heidi individually to develop an action plan, which addressed what would help Heidi move into home-ownership. Heidi was given access to all of the resources available to help her achieve her goal.

Heidi learned so much from the class, and it helped outline the steps to expect in the journey.

When asked why Heidi would recommend The Home Center to others, she said: “The Home Center is important because it provided a roadmap for what to expect. I was able to ask questions and determine what would work for me personally. I received ongoing support and gained confidence while doing something which was really scary for me!”

Heidi closed on her beautiful new home and sent The Home Center a copy of her new favorite photo. It is our new favorite photo, too! Congratulations Heidi!





HRDC Family Forward Project

Poverty and its social impact present a real threat to stability in our community and across the state. Community Action uses strategies to move people out of poverty and along a pathway to self-sufficiency.

It can be difficult, intimidating, and overwhelming for families who need assistance from different agencies to go from place to place to find support and services to address specific needs and barriers, each time having to re-tell their story. For these families the barriers they face and the needs they have are often intertwined and must be addressed simultaneously. A supportive community culture and bundled services, along with the knowledge and guidance of providers utilizing strength-based approach and principles, will support families. People who may previously have felt overwhelmed and experienced a strong desire to just “give up” will now be empowered.

HRDC has been working to establish a supportive community culture through the development of Family Forward, a pilot project working to implement an integrated, bundled service delivery system utilizing strength-based philosophy to promote self-sufficiency.

The statistics are staggering and the hope is that the Family Forward Project will provide the medium to address the reality of these statistics and be a reliable

source of support for individuals and families willing to work towards self-sufficiency. The Family Forward Project will address multiple meaningful life domains, which if unstable, would present a barrier in reaching self-sufficiency. By addressing these life domains, in addition to bundling services, either simultaneously or sequentially, the odds increase for progress and achieving self-sufficiency.

Additionally, utilizing a strength-based approach with individuals and families allows them to take the lead, build on their strengths, and be more willing to take responsibility and “buy into” the process and services. They will be empowered to set their own goals, while capitalizing on their strengths in order to meet those identified goals.

The Family Forward Project addresses sixteen meaningful life domains: employment, housing, food/clothing, safety, child health/development, childcare/education, adult education, physical health, mental health, financial health, transportation, substance use/addiction, legal issues, life skills, healthy outlets/leisure activities, and natural supports. Experiencing difficulties in one of these life domains is significant, yet experiencing difficulties in more than one meaningful life domain can

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Family Forward Project *(continued)*

be overwhelming.

Family Forward is built on a foundation of mutual respect and partnership. No single agency can—or should—be expected to address the multiple barriers and needs faced by individuals and families served. Family Forward’s collective strength is based on partnerships and collaboration to integrate and bundle services to best address the multi-faceted needs and barriers of those served. Family Forward has developed a consortium of providers, who meet on a regular basis to staff cases and address both the barriers and needs of the family in addition to community and system barriers which also impact the provision of services.

Community partners committed to the Family Forward Consortium include: Billings Job Service, Child and Family Services Division of Yellowstone County, Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley, Family Service, Head Start, Housing Authority of Billings, Montana State University Billings-City College, Office of Public

Assistance of Yellowstone County, Rimrock Foundation, RiverStone Health, South Central Montana Regional Mental Health Center, Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services, and YWCA Billings. Other providers already working with the family are invited to the table as well. This consortium will collectively address a family’s barriers and needs and brainstorm how best to meet them.

The supportive community culture created through the Family Forward Project will provide the medium for individuals and families to receive the support required to reduce the barriers they are facing and work toward achieving self-sufficiency.



Harmony House Grant Recipient

The Grainger Foundation was established in 1949 by William Wallace Grainger, founder of W.W. Grainger, Inc. Each year Billings’ local Grainger office works with a non-profit to assist with their needs. HRDC’s Harmony House was selected by The Grainger Foundation as a recipient of a \$5,000 grant for 2017. These funds will be used to make renovations to Harmony House and maintain safety standards for the mothers and their children living in this transitional living facility. The Harmony House staff, and HRDC, is grateful for organizations like this, who recognize the many valuable contributions we make to the community. Thank you Grainger Foundation and Chris Marron, who worked with HRDC to facilitate this generous gift.



Grainger staff with HRDC Program Director, Amy Ensign (center)



District 7
Human Resources
Development Council
7 North 31st Street
PO Box 2016
Billings, MT 59103



Play Date at the Zoo *(continued)*

Officer Tom Keightly of the Billings Police Department spoke to children and their parents, handed out children's ID kits and word search books, gave tours of his police car, and posed for photos with children proudly wearing his

police hat! American Medical Response was on hand for medical emergencies and provided transportation within ZooMontana for attendees needing a little extra

assistance. AMR also spoke with families, distributed coloring books, and gave tours of their ambulance.

It's a tremendous feat to put together an event like this, but seeing families spending time together—viewing the animals, laughing, watching performances together—and learning about community resources makes it all worthwhile.

One young boy exclaimed, "It was awesome! I loved the scavenger hunt the best," as he held up the prize he had earned. Many parents expressed their appreciation and stated "what a great event for families in the community." We're already looking forward to our 5th Annual Play Date at the Zoo in 2018!