FALL 2025

The MONTANA MINUTE

Highlights from the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development

Center Awarded $1.2 Million HRSA Grant to Launch Youth Behavioral Health Career Pathways in Rural Communities

The University of Montana's Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development has been awarded a three-year, $1.2 million grant from the Health Resources & Services Administration through its RCORP–Pathways initiative. The funding will support youth behavioral health programs and career pathways in rural Montana, addressing urgent needs in both youth behavioral health and workforce development.

Montana faces a youth behavioral health crisis. Suicide rates among young people are nearly three times the national average. In 2023, one in four high school students reported seriously considering suicide, and one in seven had attempted it. Meanwhile, 46 of Montana's 56 counties are classified as frontier, and 51 are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas — meeting only 32.9% of behavioral health needs. While Montana has a strong foundation in work-based learning, there are no established pathways for youth to enter behavioral health careers. The RCORP–Pathways grant will help close this gap by creating a workforce pipeline in Livingston, Helena, and Kalispell. High school students will train as Community Health Workers (CHWs), earn a university-issued certificate, complete internships, and potentially

receive dual enrollment credit through partnerships with colleges and universities.

In addition to technical training, students will develop essential life and career skills — such as problem-solving, stress management, and resilience. A statewide network of partners — including high school work-based learning coordinators, community colleges, Reach Higher Montana, and industry leaders like the Montana Primary Care Association and Montana Urban Indian Health Consortium — will support the initiative's long-term success.

"By developing youth-led behavioral health training programs and building a statewide network of education and industry partners, we're creating a sustainable pipeline of providers rooted in their communities. This investment in Montana's future workforce will have a lasting impact."

- Matt Fete, Dean of the UM College of Health

"UM's RCORP–Pathways initiative, led by the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development, is a vital step toward solving Montana's behavioral health workforce crisis — especially in rural and frontier communities," said **Matt Fete, Dean of the UM College of Health.** "By developing youth-led behavioral health training programs and building a statewide network of education and industry partners, we're creating a sustainable pipeline of providers rooted in their communities. This investment in Montana's future workforce will have lasting impact."

"This grant represents a transformative opportunity for Montana's youth and rural communities," said **Kate Chapin**, **Executive Director of the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development**. "By equipping high school students with the skills and credentials to become Community Health Workers, we're not only addressing a critical workforce shortage — we're empowering young people to be part of the solution in their own communities. This initiative is about hope, healing, and creating meaningful career pathways that begin in high school and lead to lifelong impact."

With only 12 grants awarded nationwide, Montana is among a select group of states leading the way in youth behavioral health workforce development. By training and empowering youth to become CHWs, this initiative will strengthen behavioral health services across rural Montana while preparing students for further education and careers in specialized behavioral health fields.

"This initiative is about hope, healing, and creating meaningful career pathways that begin in high school and lead to lifelong impact."

- Kate Chapin, Executive Director of the Center

For more information about the Center's new youth behavioral health pathways grant, contact Kate Chapin at **kate.chapin@umt.edu**.

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA | CENTER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Children, Families & Workforce Development partners with the child protection, health, educational, and judicial systems to develop educational and training resources for professionals and caregivers statewide. We also conduct research that focuses on solving problems that impact children and families, and we work to help partnering agencies with capacity building and technical assistance.

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