

Fiscal Year **2026**

IMPACT REPORT

Investing in Montanans • Expanding Opportunities • Strengthening Communities and Systems

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Investing in Montanans. Expanding Opportunities. Strengthening Communities and Systems.

At the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development, we believe that the people closest to a challenge are often closest to the solution. By **investing in Montanans, expanding opportunities** and **strengthening communities and systems** we help create the conditions for lasting change.

Across Montana, we are privileged to work alongside youth, families, educators, healthcare professionals, behavioral health providers, Tribal partners, community organizations, state agencies and philanthropic foundations. Together, we are building stronger futures for children, families and communities.

Over the past year, our partnerships have reinforced a simple truth: **investing in Montanans strengthens Montana**. When we listen to community voices and invest in people's knowledge, skills and leadership, we create opportunities for meaningful and sustainable impact. As individuals grow and opportunities expand, so does our collective ability to address challenges, strengthen systems, and build resilient communities.

This report highlights the power of collaboration in action. The stories and accomplishments that follow reflect the innovation, commitment and dedication of our partners and demonstrate what is possible when we work together to create positive change.

Thank you for your partnership, trust and commitment. We are proud of what we have achieved together and excited about the opportunities ahead as we continue building a stronger Montana for generations to come.



Kate

Kate Chapin, Executive Director



Investing in Montanans.

We listen, convene and partner to build the knowledge, skills, leadership and capacity that empower individuals and communities to create lasting change.

Expanding Opportunities.

We create pathways for learning, employment, leadership and civic engagement that help Montanans reach their potential and contribute to their communities.

Strengthening Communities and Systems.

We strengthen the systems that support children and families by developing the workforce, advancing effective practices, fostering collaboration and helping communities thrive.

How We Create Impact

Amplify Children, Family and Community Experiences

The Center prioritizes, values and meaningfully incorporates lived experience to inform our workforce training, policy, research and evaluation, and communication efforts.

Train and Coach the Workforce

The Center develops and facilitates workforce trainings that are relevant to Montana, informed by subject matter experts and research-based practices, and deployed in tandem with coaching and capacity-building.

Build Organizational and Community Capacity

The Center strengthens existing skills and develops new expertise within organizations and communities to lead, grow and thrive.

Promote Policies that Enhance Well-being

The Center educates and engages families, youth and communities to influence policies that impact the health and well-being of Montana's children and families.

Measure Impact and Continually Improve

The Center conducts research and evaluation to demonstrate intervention impacts, provide recommendations for quality improvement, support new funding opportunities and inform the Center's strategic directions.

Facilitate Cross-sector Collaborations

The Center convenes and collaborates with diverse stakeholders to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes, increase scale, sustain work, improve effectiveness and promote systems change.

Who We Are: Montanans Supporting Montanans

A team of Montanans dedicated to supporting children, families and communities so they can thrive.

Cruz Ambrose

Tribal Education Specialist

Brooke Hathaway Angst, M.Ed

Training Innovation Manager

Kate Chapin, LCSW

Executive Director

Leslie Clachrie, BA

Digital Media/IT Support Specialist

Mary Collins, MSW

Project Director

Cat LeMay Dodge, MPA

Project Manager

Wendy Ekegren, M.Ed

Director of School-Based Behavioral Health

Roe Erin, BA

Project Manager

Lisa Firehammer, M.Ed

Project Manager

Jeffrey Folsom, LCSW, JD

Director of Policy and Special Projects

Kerrie Ghenie, MSW

Director of Child Welfare Training Partnership

Niki Graham, MPH

Project Manager

Maria Hamm, MPH, CHES

Project Manager

Lynsey Heiken, BA

Implementation Coach and MTSS Lead

Bethany Hinricher, BA

Project Manager

Brandon Ihde, M.Ed

State Implementation Coach

Andrea Lewis, BS

Project Manager

Jori Liva, M.Ed

State Implementation Coach

PJ Myllymaki, CMT

Operations and Projects Manager

Charlotte Moores, MPH

Project Director

Robin Nielson-Cerquone, MJ

Project Manager

Stacie Pannell, BS, RN

Project Manager

Mackenzie Petersen, MSW, MPH

Director of Community Based Public Health Programs

Desiree Restad, MPH

Project Manager

Carrie Jo Riordian, MPH

Epidemiologist/Evaluator

Jenny Scheuch, BA

Director of Communications

Kim Spurzem, MSW

Director of Workforce Training

Laurie Sun Child

Lead Adolescent Health Tribal Liaison

Matt Sorenson, BA

Project Manager

Karlee Tchida, M.Ed

Project Manager

FACULTY AFFILIATES

Jen Molloy, PhD, MSW, Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Allison Wilson, PhD, MEd, Associate Professor, College of Education

Jessica Liddell, PhD, MPH, MSW, Associate Professor, School of Social Work

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Total Schools Reached

104

MONTANA EARLY IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM



34 Schools



571 Educators Supported



9,461 Screenings Completed



6,134 Student Perspectives Gathered



8,085 Students Reached

SUSTAINED PAX GOOD BEHAVIOR GAME

Schools who receive sustained technical assistance to implement the program.

70 schools • **37** districts
170 new teachers trained

2,309

Workforce professionals trained and supported to better serve Montana's children, families and communities.



20

Nonprofit organizations and coalitions supported through capacity building and technical assistance.



MONTANANS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE INFORMED OUR EFFORTS

9

Family Ambassador Board Members

Family leaders who guided children's mental health policy, programs and workforce development.

15

Youth Advisory Coalition Members

Youth leaders who co-designed behavioral health career pathways, policies and practices across Montana.

112

Subject Matter Experts and Knowledge Keepers

Montanans with lived experiences whose knowledge, perspectives and expertise shaped training resources.



Family Ambassador Board members at the Montana Capitol.

"As the mother of a teen with mental and behavioral health challenges, I have a deep understanding of how necessary FAB's work is for Montana's families and children. FAB does more than advocate and bring awareness to problems in the system — FAB helps to create meaningful solutions to the issues."

— Keri Cardinal, Family Ambassador Board Member

Strengthening Communities and Systems Across Montana

Together with our partners across Montana, we engaged in projects that spanned multiple sectors, addressed complex challenges and expanded opportunities for children, families and communities.

18
Contracts
Awarded
14 renewed
4 new

**FY 26 Award
Volume**
\$5.7
million

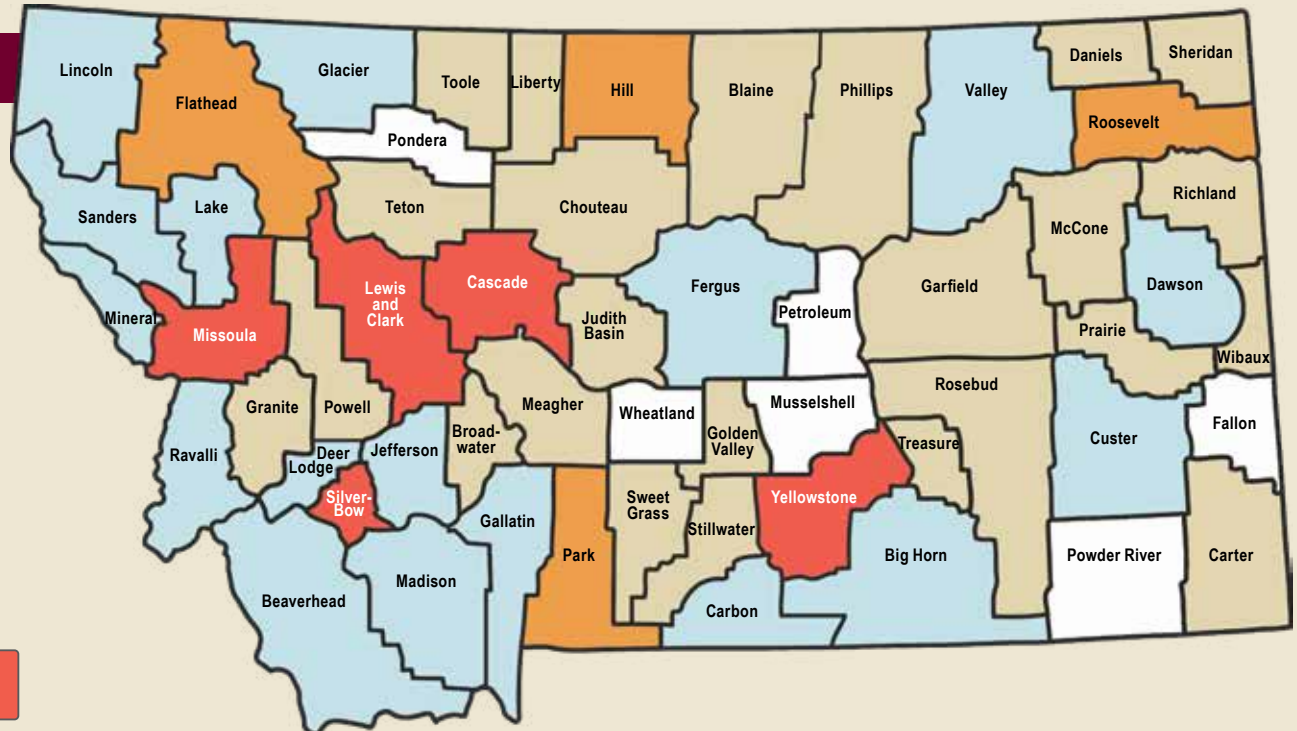
OUR FY 26 PROJECTS

- Capacity Building Support for Headwaters Foundation grantees
- Children's Mental Health Learning Series
- Community Health Worker and Community Integrated Health Supervisor Trainings
- Community Health Worker Training and Association Support
- Court Improvement Program
- Crisis Response Workforce Training
- Headwaters Foundation Health Equity Briefs
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Training
- Montana Child Welfare Training Partnership
- Mountain Home Montana Evaluation Support
- MT OPI Implementation Science Training
- National Center for Rural School Mental Health Research Study
- Native Youth POWER Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program
- Project ECHO UM
- School-Based Behavioral Health Initiatives
- State and Local Fiscal Recovery Affordable Housing Gap Financing Evaluation
- Targeted Case Management Training and Workforce Support
- Youth Behavioral Health Career Pathways

OUR STATEWIDE REACH

Montanans in
50 of the 56
counties were impacted by
Center projects, trainings
and partnerships
in FY 2026

Number of Center Projects Per County



Youth Behavioral Health Pathways Program: Building Montana's Behavioral Health Workforce From the Ground Up

The Youth Behavioral Health Pathways Program invests in the strengths, talents and aspirations of Montana's young people. Through hands-on learning, mentorship, and real community experiences, students discover their own ability to lead, support others, and make a difference in their communities. Along the way, they build confidence, resilience and practical skills for navigating life's challenges and forming healthy relationships, while exploring rewarding career paths in behavioral and community health. The program will launch in Flathead, Park, Lewis and Clark and Silver Bow counties in fall 2026.

Project Snapshot

- **College Credit:** Earn dual-enrollment college credit while in high school.
- **Credential:** Earn a community health worker credential that demonstrates foundational behavioral health and community support skills.
- **Career Experience:** Complete work-based learning for high school credit and gain real-world experience in community and behavioral health settings.
- **Skills for Life:** Build durable skills that drive success across careers and

"This project empowers young people to build skills, explore careers, and enhance their purpose and well-being while helping their peers. We are proud to support this important effort."

— Gabe Rowley, Work-based Learning Collaborative Director, Reach Higher Montana

life, including leadership, empathy, communication, teamwork, and resilience.

- **Connections:** Meet behavioral health professionals, explore career pathways and learn about opportunities in education, training and employment in Montana.

Investing in Montanans

Montana's future behavioral health workforce begins when young people discover their ability to lead, serve, and make a difference

in their communities. Whether they pursue behavioral health, education, healthcare, business, or other fields, students gain skills that prepare them for success in school, work and life.

Expanding Opportunities

Youth voice is the heart of the program. Through the **Montana Opportunity Youth Advisory Council** — a partnership with Empower MT, Reach Higher Montana and the Human Resource Development Council of Bozeman — young Montanans play an active role in shaping the curriculum, activities and the future direction of the program. Their



Participant stickers featuring the program tagline, "Be Someone Others Count On."



perspectives ensure the program remains relevant, responsive and grounded in the experiences of Montana youth.

Strengthening Communities and Systems

Montana's growing healthcare and behavioral health workforce needs make early talent development critical. By investing in future generations, the program strengthens workforce pipelines and builds lasting benefits for children, families and communities across Montana.

Looking Ahead

With support from the Blank Family Foundation, the Youth Behavioral Health Pathways Program will expand to additional rural Montana counties in the coming year, connecting more youth to opportunities while strengthening the workforce and communities that depend on them. By leveraging existing initiatives such as pre-apprenticeships and the STARS Act, we aim to expand program participation while strengthening long-term sustainability.

"Montana youth are incredibly important and should be heard. This program can help youth advocate for the things they love, especially behavioral health."

— Montana Youth Advisory Council Member

School-Based Behavioral Health Initiatives: Strengthening Student Well-Being and Educator Success

Children thrive in schools where they feel connected, supported, and ready to learn. Through our Montana school-based behavioral health initiatives, educators gain the tools, knowledge and coaching needed to identify student needs early, strengthen school climates, and create lasting systems of support that help students succeed.

Project Snapshot

- **Early identification:** Use local universal screening data to identify behavioral and social needs before challenges escalate.
- **Coaching partnerships:** Provide three years of tiered coaching and technical assistance to build school capacity.

“Simply sitting down with our UM coach and going over the data as a group was insightful and productive.”

— Montana Educator

- **Evidence-based support:** Expand access to practical support through the Early Identification System Intervention Hub.
- **Data-informed decision making:** Use student and teacher data to guide meaningful decisions and improve outcomes.
- **System building:** Strengthen school-wide processes that support prevention, intervention and continual improvement.
- **Rural school impact:** Increase access to mental health support and resources in rural Montana communities.
- **Student success:** Foster environments where students thrive academically, socially and behaviorally.

Investing in Montanans

Strong schools are built by the people who show up for Montana’s students every day. Through long-term partnerships with educators and school leaders, the Center helps schools develop the confidence and skills to use behavioral health data, strengthen classroom practices, and create supportive learning communities where students feel a sense of belonging.

During the 2026-2027 school year, **34 participating EIS schools** completed **9,461 universal screeners**, including **6,134 student self-reports**, helping school teams make informed decisions about services and supports that promote student well-being, engagement, and success.



“One of the biggest successes our district experienced while participating in the project was the ability to identify students needing additional academic, behavioral or social-emotional support much earlier than we had in the past.”

— Montana Educator

By combining coaching, training and collaborative problem-solving, we empower local teams to lead lasting change that reflects the unique strengths and needs of their students and communities.

Expanding Opportunities

When schools can identify and respond to student needs early, more students have the opportunity to succeed. The Montana Early Identification System (EIS) helps educators shift from reactive responses to proactive support, using student and teacher perspectives to better understand school experiences and inform decisions. Coupled with coaching and access to practical, evidence-based strategies, schools can

align supports to their unique context and ensure students receive the right help at the right time.

Strengthening Communities and Systems

Lasting change happens when schools build systems that can grow and adapt over time. Through coaching, collaborative planning, and continuous improvement practices, schools develop the capacity to address changing student needs while strengthening connections among educators, families, and community partners. By embedding sustainable processes into everyday practice, schools create supportive learning environments that benefit students today and strengthen communities for the future.

Looking Ahead

As the initiative expands across Montana, the Early Identification System is helping educators use data more effectively, identify student needs sooner, and strengthen sustainable systems of support. In fall of 2026, the Teacher Learning Hub will introduce the course Implementation Science Introduction for Montana’s Educational Leaders. This was designed at the Center, in partnership the Office of Public Instruction, to enhance schools’ capacity to implement initiatives and improve outcomes for students.



Top: Montana educators participate in a strengths-based engagement activity led by the Center’s School Behavioral Health team at the Montana Summer Institute.

Bottom: Brooke Hathaway Angst, the Center’s Training Innovation Specialist, discusses Positive Childhood Experiences and the Early Identification System’s role in early intervention.

Montana Crisis Response Training: Building a Stronger, More Connected Crisis Response System in Montana

The Montana Crisis Response Training equips crisis responders and system partners to deliver timely, person-centered behavioral health crisis services across Montana. Developed in partnership with the DPHHS and crisis response leaders across the state, this program combines online learning and virtual coaching to strengthen crisis system coordination, support implementation of the Crisis Now framework and improve outcomes for Montanans experiencing a crisis.

Project Snapshot

- **First-of-Its-Kind Training:** Montana's first comprehensive crisis response training program.

"The Montana Crisis Response Training will provide a tremendous benefit by helping providers educate their staff and create consistency across crisis services in the state."

— James Pyke, Flathead County Behavioral Health Supervisor

- **Expert-Led learning:** Combines self-paced online learning with live tele-coaching from experienced practitioners across the state.
- **Strengthening Crisis Response Systems:** Supports implementation of the nationally recognized Crisis Now framework across Montana.
- **No-Cost Credential:** Offers a University of Montana Certificate of Completion at no cost to participants.

Investing in Montanans

The Crisis training strengthens the skills, confidence and resilience of crisis responders, care coordinators, staff of the Montana 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, emergency medical technicians, community health workers and other professionals. Participants gain practical tools for trauma-informed, person-centered crisis response while building strategies to sustain their own well-being in demanding roles.

Expanding Opportunities

By offering no-cost training and connecting professionals across communities, the program increases access to high-quality crisis response knowledge. The training

creates opportunities for shared learning, professional growth and stronger local crisis support networks throughout Montana. Live virtual learning sessions give participants direct access to experienced responders and practitioners and space to work through real scenarios from Montana communities.

Strengthening Communities and Systems

The training fosters a shared language, common understanding, and coordinated approach among crisis system partners. By aligning practices across 988, mobile crisis response, healthcare and community services, it helps build a more effective and seamless behavioral health crisis system statewide.

Looking Ahead

Crisis responders helped build this training, and they are still shaping where it goes next. Crisis responders helped shape this training and continue to guide its evolution. As Montana's crisis response system grows, the program will provide accessible learning opportunities that strengthen workforce skills, foster collaboration, and support a more connected and effective statewide crisis response network.

The Family Ambassador Board: Families Driving Change in Montana's Children's Behavioral Health

Effective behavioral health services for children depend on strong partnerships among families, providers and state systems. Through the Family Ambassador Board (FAB), caregivers help shape policies, improve services and ensure family perspectives guide decision-making across Montana's children's behavioral health system.

Project Snapshot

- **Improving Systems Through Family Voice:** FAB advises the Children's Mental Health Bureau on communication, workforce development, and system improvement initiatives.
- **Strengthening Family-Centered Care:** FAB partners with providers to enhance family engagement and service quality.
- **Supporting Families:** FAB ensures caregiver perspectives inform decisions while helping families navigate complex systems of care.

Investing in Montanans

As paid consultants, FAB members partner with state agencies and service providers on projects that strengthen behavioral health services across Montana. Through this work, they build skills in advocacy, training, systems improvement and public speaking.

*Lived experience
shared by FAB isn't just
helpful feedback — it's vital
guidance for how we improve
children's mental health care
across the state.*

— Renae Novak, DPHHS Children's
Mental Health Bureau Chief

Families develop unique expertise through caring for children with mental and behavioral health challenges. FAB recognizes that expertise as a valuable resource, giving caregivers opportunities to use their knowledge and experience to help improve services and systems statewide.

Expanding Opportunities

Originally established to support Children's Mental Health Bureau improvement efforts, FAB has grown into a trusted resource for providers, state partners, and community organizations seeking family-informed solutions.

Members help identify barriers facing families, advise on system improvements, and increasingly lead projects that address emerging needs through practical, experience-based approaches.

Strengthening Communities and Systems

In FY26, FAB worked with state and community partners to improve children's behavioral health services across Montana. By increasing family involvement, improving communication and treatment planning, and identifying gaps in local services, FAB helped inform changes aimed at creating more responsive systems for children and families.

Looking Ahead

Family engagement remains central to the Children's Mental Health Bureau's improvement efforts. FAB will continue advancing state priorities while expanding its role as a statewide leader in family voice and lived-experience expertise.

By strengthening partnerships across behavioral health and youth-serving systems, FAB is helping ensure family perspectives remain at the center of service improvement and decision-making throughout Montana.

Our mission and vision

The mission of the Center is to enhance the health of Montanans by transforming the systems that serve us. We envision a Montana where everyone is served by high-quality and equitable systems of care.

THANK YOU to our FY '26 Contract Partners and Sponsors

Accelerate Montana
Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation
Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
Behavioral Health Systems for Future Generations Commission
Butte High School
Capital High School in Helena
Court Improvement Program of the Montana Judicial Branch
East Helena High School
EmpowerMT
Family Ambassador Board
Flathead High School in Kalispell
Glacier High School in Kalispell
Headwaters Foundation
Helena High School
Highlands College
Linderman Education Center in Kalispell
Missouri Prevention Science Institute
Montana Consortium for Urban Indian Health
Montana Department of Labor and Industry Career Development Team
Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services:
• Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Division:
- Children's Mental Health Bureau
- Prevention Bureau
- Treatment Bureau
- Developmental Disabilities Bureau
- Prevention Bureau
• Child and Family Services Division:
- Training, Recruitment and Retention Bureau
• Early Childhood and Family Support Division
- Early Childhood Services Bureau
- Family and Community Health Bureau
- Child Care Bureau

• Public Health and Safety Division: Communicable Disease Control and Prevention Bureau
Montana Department of Commerce
Montana Office of Public Instruction
Montana Public Health Training Center
Mountain Home Montana
Montana HOSA: Future Health Professionals
Mountain Pacific
Montana Primary Care Association
Montana Office of Rural Health and Area Health Education Center at Montana State University
Montana University System Office of Commissioner of Higher Education
Montana Youth Courts
National Center for Rural School Mental Health
Park High School in Livingston
Project for Alternative Learning in Helena
Quality Improvement Center in Engaging Youth on Finding Permanency, Team with Lived Experience Board
Reach Higher Montana and the Work-based Learning Collaborative
Phyllis J. Washington Center for the Advancement of Positive Education
U.S. Department of Education: Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
• Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
• Health Resources and Services Administration

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