



WORD

Family Resource Centers

A Program of WORD-Women's Opportunity and Resource Development

Newsletter

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3

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- WORD promotes and supports parent/family involvement in the schools
- WORD looks to increase literacy by sponsoring and coordinating the Western Montana Literacy Support Corps

Locations of Family Resource Centers

Missoula Area:

Bonner
Franklin
Hawthorne
Lewis and Clark
Lowell
Rattlesnake
Russell
Teen Family Resource Center

Bitterroot Area:

Daly/Grantsdale
Darby
Florence
Hamilton-Kids First
Lone Rock
Ravalli Head Start
Stevensville
Washington

Flathead Area:

Cherry Valley
Ronan

Happy Campers

"I'm happy! H-A-P-P-Y!" said Michelle Calderwood as she and her mom Carol sat around a tissue paper and log campfire in Mrs. Johnson's classroom. Calderwood and many other parents joined their children for a Literacy Lunch in their classroom, "Camp Read-a-Lot," at Washington School on November 23.

The Literacy Lunches program at Washington School is run by Tara Gallagher, the Family Resource Center Coordinator. The goal of the program is to "get parents into the school and welcome them in a way that is new," said Gallagher. The Literacy Lunch program organizes "fun activities that strengthen literacy skills."

On the 23rd, about 20 parents visited and ate lunch



with their students, and promoted literacy by creating a thumbprint animal and then authoring a story about that character.

"It's fun for the kids to show mom and dad what they do all the time," said

Tammy Riley, whose son Nick beamed when she arrived. Other parents agreed, saying that they valued the chance to make their children happy by showing interest in their school work.

"My daughter was counting down the days," said Calderwood.

"It's good to get the parents involved. Children enjoy knowing that you're interested."

Excited student were greeted with hugs from their parents, who arrived at noon. Some parents brought a lunch from home or local restaurant to share with their child, and some opted for the school's lunch.

They settled in the "campsite," a setting Mrs. Johnson's class created by turning tables on their sides and constructing outdoor scenes on them to simulate a campground. The classroom was complete with a mock-campfire, sleeping bags, and logs to sit on.

After lunch, each student

was given a clipboard with a sheet of paper and an ink pad. Using their thumbprint, students created an animal character and wrote a story with the help of their parents. Popular animals were



butterflies and mice.

The event was successful because an adult came for nearly every child, said Gallagher.

The goal for the program is to have 100% attendance.

"Parents are here for a positive reason. They are interacting with their child in the school, they are seeing the environment their child is in everyday, they are feeling welcomed," stated Gallagher.

Gallagher said that most parents make a "monumental effort to work out their schedule" to attend the event. But it's worth it. The smiling children and laughing parents are proof. "They enjoyed themselves," said Gallagher "camping out for an hour-at school."

Family Resource Centers, a program of WORD, are a collaborative program between WORD and school districts and are funded by:
-Montana Office of Community Service
-The Engelhard Foundation
-Title I
-Early Learning Opportunities

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Meet Your Family Resource Center Family

(Part three in a ten-part series on Family Resource Center Staff)

Truth be told, our Bitterroot Family Resource Center coordinators are an independent bunch. One thing they all have in common is a passion for their jobs. They love what they do. Make that two things, they all believe that what they do can make a difference in their community, one family at a time. Ok, make that three things, they all love spending time with their families. Surprise, surprise!

Maxwell and Spencer (kids), and Sassy, Edgar, and Buck (dogs) all call Christa Burns of Florence MS "Mom". Just recently transplanted from Seattle, she and her high school sweetheart husband are delighted to back in a small town. She hopes to bring the k-8 community together in pie auctions, chili-feeds, football game parties, and a Caring through Sharing program. Favorite song: "What a Wonderful World." Favorite thing to do with her kids, play games.

Things are a zoo at Elaine Copeland's house. What with her German Shepard Rosie, kitty Smoochy, Oreo the hamster, Max the bunny, two fish, Crush and Goldie, husband Russ and children Corinne and Conner, life is, shall we say, quite busy. But busier still at Florence Elementary where Elaine rejoices at seeing the joy on the kids' faces when their parents arrive at school. Her favorite food is Butte pasties and reading her favorite activity.

Missoula native Tara Gallagher always dreamed of serving in the Peace Corps. Working as an AmeriCorps volunteer at Washington Elementary goes a long way to fulfilling that dream of making a difference. Teacher, writer, journalist, and mom to Niall and Tess, she has kept her life full and busy. She loves her job working with her school families and sharing her love of reading.

Daly School's Rachel Martin's greatest joy is seeing the joy of the parents and children at her events, especially her husband Charlie and two daughters Arizona and Maddyson. This born-and-bred Montanan with a degree from the School of Technology loves to read, especially books by Francine Rivers.

Kelly Morris of Darby Elementary loves her job, especially reading with the kids in the classroom. Married to her high-school sweetheart, Kelly has three children, Tori, Brianna, and Tyler and manages to coach the high school cheerleading squad and read in her spare time. Favorite family things to do:

hunt, fish, and hike, anything outdoors. Favorite book: *The First Snow* by David Christiana set outdoors, of course!

Nancy Preston of Lone Rock School, like many of Family Resource Center Coordinators, was a familiar face around school before becoming the Family Resource Center Coordinator. She loved to volunteer in her children's (Alex and MacKenzie) classrooms. Her greatest joy is seeing parents in the school, "The kids are so excited and happy." Her favorite thing to do is spend time with her family, doing anything, and horseback riding.

Kids First's Vicki Rivera is a native Bitterroot-ian, born and raised, and a Darby High School graduate. She runs, coaches basketball, plays the piano, loves to read spiritual and non-fiction books and spend time with her husband and three children. She loves working with the families in Hamilton and building a stronger community.

Buying a motorbike is one of the many things that Wanda Stordahl has done

recently. She also has been seen downhill skiing, camping, golfing and generally just hanging out with her girls, Jade and Brooke. This Butte native loves being at school getting to know the kids and their families, so much so that she has thoughts of returning to school to become a teacher.

Hamilton MS FRC coordinator Vickie Williams wanted a little more out of her job as a mortgage banker than a paycheck. She wanted to make a difference. Her work coordinating and corralling middle school parents is a perfect fit. Having teenagers Raychel and Angela at home helps her understand that it is very important that parents at this age talk to one another. So she has created a parent network to help parents get to know one another and to help families set common ground rules on issues such as curfews.

Paula Wood is an old-hand at working with kids, she has five children of her own (Caleb, Josh, Lindsey, Michaela, and Evan) plus she used to own her own day care center. But working with the community in a different way was important to her and so she relishes her job working with Head Start parents. Originally from Minnesota, Paula married her childhood sweetheart who is now with the Montana National Guard in Iraq. She loves baking and cooking and roller skating; loves the song "1989" by Prince and would love to become a home economics teacher when she has the time.



Back Row: Kelly Morris, Wanda Stordahl, Rachel Martin, Vicki Rivera, Victoria Williams, Julie Overholt
Middle Row: Nancy Preston, Paula Wood
Back Row: Tara Gallagher, Elaine Copeland, Christa Burns

Partnership with Kids First

Up and down the Bitterroot, children are bringing their parents to school. They are inviting them for story times and book fairs, for spaghetti feeds and scarecrow-making, for football parties and family pictures, and to “do” lunch. They are even bringing them to school to volunteer.

Why? It’s quite simple, actually, says Pat Murphy, training leader for Kids First. “Research has shown that when parents are involved in their children’s schools, students are more likely to earn higher grades, attend school regularly, have better social skills, and tend to go on to higher education.” To that end, Kids First in Hamilton has helped Bitterroot Valley schools establish Family Resource Centers in their communities. The goal of the Family Resource Centers, of course, is to bring parents into their schools.

“The Family Resource Center is fitting together a lot of things that we have already done,” says Lone Rock School superintendent Michael Williams, “but schools don’t have the time to do it all. They can do so much more.” Thanks to the help of Kids First.



Kids First, housed in Hamilton’s old Westview School, is a community-based non-profit organization which has a bold, yet simple mission, it seeks to build community among families in rural communities and to help strengthen those families.

Kids First started six years ago with a Getting Things Done Grant which focused on local community development. Today the center is funded by a number of sources,

primarily the Drug Free Communities Grant which asks that Kids First build a coalition of local communities that would work to increase protective factors in the community and would decrease the decrease the risk factors.”

. Through a series of community meetings, the community participants decided that one of the most important ways to meet these goals was to help schools establish Family Resource Centers in their schools.

Which they did. The goal was to have three centers the first year, they had seven. Today they have ten Family Resource Centers, including an important parent-community link at Head Start and one at Kids First. Because these centers are located in schools many miles from each other, Kids First provides the glue that holds these centers together by providing training, sharing resources, and building community by holding twice monthly brainstorming, problem-solving, collaboration-building meetings. Team Leader Julie Overholt visits the centers regularly helping with events, sharing information and offering Kids First support.

As part of the Tobacco Free Ravalli initiative, Kids First offers many other services to the community: Leadership High offers a team of Ravalli County high-school students an opportunity to work on a project to benefit the community; Kids First Early Childhood Program sponsors a kindergarten-readiness camp in the summer, weekly play groups and an indoor gym at their Westview site, parenting classes as a way for families to get to know one another. They also offer their facility to the community for basketball and skate nights and community meetings. The Kids First computer lab hosts computer classes taught by high school students.

“Collaboration is the key,” says Murphy. We are doing these wonderful things only because we have these wonderful partnerships. AmeriCorps which provides our wonderful volunteer coordinators, WORD which provides vital support, the schools, the community and our funding sources. We couldn’t have done it alone, the schools couldn’t, nor could the community. It is essential that we partner and work together. That is why we are able to do what we do for our kids and our families for our communities.”

A Note from the Director- A Season of Giving and Receiving

WORD/Family Resource Centers program began the Literacy Support Corps, an AmeriCorps program, in response to a desire within schools to build stronger partnerships with families and community resources for the benefit of students. We recognized this AmeriCorps program as a pathway for Literacy Support Corps members (often parents from within a school community) to become active participants in their schools and larger community. All of WORD’s programs have a commitment to empowering people. So, it was very encouraging to see the results of "Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps," that has been underway since 1998, and is the largest rigorous study ever conducted of AmeriCorps. The recent release of this major study on the impact of AmeriCorps service on the attitudes and behaviors of members highlights the important and beneficial impacts AmeriCorps service has on members, communities, and our nation. Among the highlights:

National Service Increases Civic Engagement - As a result of AmeriCorps, members have a stronger connection to their communities, are more aware of local problems, and are more active in their communities.

National Service is a Pipeline to Public Service - AmeriCorps members are more likely to choose careers in public service such as teaching, social work, public safety, and the military services than those in the comparison group. AmeriCorps is helping create the next generation of leaders in the public and nonprofit sector.

National Service Leads to Sustained Volunteering - AmeriCorps participation had a significant effect even on members who did not volunteer prior to their service, reflecting the capacity of AmeriCorps to awaken and strengthen civic attitudes and behaviors. AmeriCorps not only benefits school communities, it strengthens leadership abilities within each member, empowering them to affect their environment. News of this nature affirms our belief that giving and receiving are indeed circular and helps to make us merry and bright in this holiday season!

-Jeanne Moon, Program Director

Locations of the Family Resource Centers:

Missoula Area:

Bonner School
PO Box 1004
Bonner, MT 59823
Sara Boyett
406-258-6151
family@bonner.k12.mt.us

Franklin Elementary
1901 S. 10th West
Missoula, MT 59802
Vickie Rectenwald
406-327-0483

Hawthorne Elementary
2835 S. 3rd West
Missoula, MT 59804
Mandy Hansen
406-327-6945

Lewis and Clark Elementary
2901 Park St.
Missoula, MT 59801
Karin Schalm
406-327-6946
frclewis@mcps.k12.mt.us

Lowell Elementary
1200 Sherwood
Missoula, MT 59802
Kasey Savage
406-327-0390
lowellfrc@mcps.k12.mt.us

Rattlesnake Elementary
1220 Pineview
Missoula, MT
Jane Olson
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Russell Elementary
3216 Russell St.
Missoula, MT 59801
Melissa Parrott
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Teen Family Resource Center
1861 S. 12th St
Missoula, MT 59802
Essie Etchingham
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Bitterroot Area:

Daly/Grantsdale Elementary
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Hamilton, MT 59840
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Florence Elementary
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Elaine Copeland
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Florence Middle School
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Hamilton Middle School
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Hamilton, MT 59840
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Nancy Preston
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Ravalli Head Start
81 Kurtz Lane
Hamilton, MT 59840
Paula Wood
406-363-1217 ext 20

Kids First
Westview Center
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Vicki Rivera
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Flathead Area:

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Edna Lemm
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Ronan Middle School
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WORD-Family Resource Centers

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Editorial

Family Resource Centers have taken Ravalli County by storm! For the last three years local school districts, Kids First and W.O.R.D. of Missoula have teamed up to provide AmeriCorps members in local schools to staff Family Resource Centers. Schools are the hub of small rural communities, and Family Resource Centers have become the heart of the school by providing family-oriented activities to reinforce academic achievement and the importance of family support. This year, eleven members are serving schools from Florence to Darby. The Bitterroot AmeriCorps Team is unique in that each is a local community member and mother with their own children in the school. This definitely has been an advantage to the school as the member comes to the position with knowledge of the community and its' needs.

Research is beginning to show the importance of parental involvement in their children's education. By providing family-oriented literacy events in the schools we are promoting school success, better attendance, and reducing crime and delinquency. We hope you will join us in celebrating the importance of families by visiting a family resource center activity at your school soon.

-Pat Murphy