



# Family Resource Centers

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

## Newsletter

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For more information go to:  
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## Families Involved in Teaching is Just That

There's a lot of good things going on these days at Bonner School: kids are reading with parents, math exercises are becoming a breeze, bulletin boards are going up and down, and Swish Swash is dispensed quickly and efficiently all because of a community of volunteers at the school.

Families Involved in Teaching, FIT, is an innovative and impressive volunteer program at the school. It is run entirely by parents and brings the time and talents of over 45 volunteers to the school, an impressive percentage of the school population of just over 375. These volunteers are grandparents, aunts, uncles, moms or dads or community members. What's important is that they are involved.

"We begin each year by sending out a survey to all our parents," says grandparent and FIT Coordinator, Carolyn Smith. "We ask them what they can do for the school and when they can do it. We are the go-between between the parents and the teachers." They pass that information on to the teachers who know who, what, and when is available in volunteer opportunities.

Brian Bessette, Bonner Principal and the mover and shaker behind the program, says the FIT program gives parents the opportunity to get into the classroom, to work with their kids. It also gives the teachers a list of volunteers they can rely on.



That volunteer reliability is one of the reasons the program is so successful, says longtime parent volunteer Doreen Turk. "It works so much better than in the past," she says,

"because it is more organized." And the volunteers are more reliable. "When we train the volunteers the most important thing we say is that you've got to show up. If you say you are going to be there, you be there. That helps the teachers a lot."

The program is in its second year, begun last year by Bessette and a group of interested parents. He patterned it after a very successful program he organized as a teacher at Hellgate Elementary. "It really was an issue of safety and security," says Turk. "We want to know who is in our school, so that it's not just some Joe Blow coming in off the street. All the volunteers must sign in and wear a badge so we know that that person belongs here."

"It's fun," says fourth grader, Katie. "I get to see my mom more because most of the time she works. She helps in my sister's classroom, too." (Cont. on Page 4)

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
- Washington Foundation

# Early Education is Key – to Economic Growth?

Recent research conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank (FRB) of Minneapolis shows that community investment in early childhood education is the best use of economic development dollars.

A November 25th article in the Missoulian reported that Art Rolnick, Vice President and head of research at FRB encourages communities that want to develop and grow the local economy to invest in early childhood education, pre-schools, and daycare facilities.

"We're quite certain that investing in early childhood education is more likely to create a vibrant economy than using public funds to lure a sports team by building a new stadium or to attract an automaker by providing tax breaks," Rolnick noted.

He cites a study by the Perry Pre-School Program which found that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, \$17 is earned. Other studies have corroborated this finding.

"We're not talking about scholarships for 18-year-olds, but scholarships for 3-year-olds," he said.

He suggests that local governments use economic development dollars to establish an endowment with the interest earned to provide scholarships for all at-risk children. He says to start there because these are the kids that are most in need but with the fewest resources.

Minnesota is considering such an investment, Seattle may follow suit. To realize an annual program of \$90 million, Minnesota would have to fund an endowment with an initial investment of \$1.5 billion. The endowment would pay for needy students to attend quality, qualified pre-schools and day cares. It would also cover the cost of mentoring parents and home visits.

Montana Commerce Department Director Tony Priete was quoted in the article saying that he hasn't heard of these studies, but that for years Montana has invested in education, but mainly on work force training.

"It's one of those studies that confirms what we know intuitively," said Rosalie Cates, Executive Director of Montana Community Development Corporation. "We know that education is one of the legs of the stool of economic development. But what we've seen is a focus on k-up, not earlier."

"It's what we've known all along intuitively," noted, Cheryl Wilson, Vice-Superintendent of Missoula Public Schools, "but we get \$0 dollars from the state to help us with our two, (hopefully next year three) pre-school programs, Co-Teach. We don't even receive state monies for these children as part of the school's ANB, even though we

## Director's Notes



One of the advantages working within the school calendar is you get two "fresh starts" each year, one on the first day of the school year, and another on the first day of the calendar year. September and January provide opportunities

to plan *what* our work will be, and *how* we will accomplish it. The urgent tasks that propelled many of us into the holiday season are past. I've heard more than one person describe the enormous amounts of energy it took to "get things done". And while accomplishments thus far are admirable, let's remind ourselves that this is a marathon, not a sprint. Sprinters throw everything they have into 10 seconds; marathon runners carefully pace their energy for the later miles.

January is an ideal time to reflect, plan and recommit to our work. It's important that we examine how much we are trying to do. Can we manage the workload in the long run? In a culture that encourages and rewards us for saying "yes", it can be hard to say no to requests or opportunities. Yet, many times this is exactly what we need to do. Who are the people and activities that feed our sense of hope? Who do we gain strength from? Research consistently shows that when we invest in care for our body, our heart, our mind, and our spirit, not only are we happier, but it pays huge dividends in our ability to create good results in our work. Our challenge is to set priorities and invest our energy in activities that are not urgent on any given day, but essential to the long-range success of our work. In staying connected to our purpose, keeping our hearts open and minds clear, we are far more likely to actually play our part in creating strong, vibrant and healthy learning communities.

provide 3 FTEs (full time equivalents), paras and facilities for these children. They need to put their money where their mouth is."

"And really," noted Cates, "the key is to have quality jobs so that low-income issues aren't pushing these social issues. Economic stress of our families, that's the concern." Wilson agrees, "We need to focus on whatever the family need is and build models that make sense to those families. "

# Team Leaders...Nancy and Melissa

On a very busy day last week, I managed to catch up with Family Resource Center Team Leaders Nancy Preston and Melissa Parrott. I had wanted to interview them for a story about their jobs, but after listening to and taking notes on the conversation between this dynamic duo (it was really like listening to a wonderful old married couple, who finished a thought, interjected an idea, bounced off an idea by the other person, I decided just to let them speak for themselves. See for yourself!



<b>Suzette:</b>	Tell me about your jobs:		
<b>Nancy:</b>	In Missoula and Bitterroot Valley there are a total of 21 sites and 23 current members.		members know who to go to – and when. The Family Resource Center’s most important role is to increase parent involvement within their school and in their child's education.
<b>Melissa:</b>	The jobs of Team Leader have been part time positions, but the last two years have evolved into full time positions.	<b>Nancy:</b>	It’s important to know who the key players are in making the Family Resource Centers a success, the teachers, the staff, the community and even the students.
<b>Suzette:</b>	So, what is it you do?	<b>Melissa:</b>	Each area holds team meetings twice a month.
<b>Melissa:</b>	We do a lot of mentoring, leading, and facilitating...	<b>Nancy:</b>	We basically facilitate the team meetings – facilitate trainings that are essential to the member and the program itself. We also help to keep them on track and help them talk things out.
<b>Nancy:</b>	A lot of it is support and helping the team members to build on their strengths.	<b>Melissa:</b>	It's a great place for the team to problem solve with one another.
<b>Melissa:</b>	We also work on conflict resolution, problem-solving, and helping them understand the mission and goals of the Family Resource Center.	<b>Nancy:</b>	At the beginning of the year the member, team leader, program coordinator and the site supervisor, such as the principal, meet to discuss the goals for the Center and what each would like to see accomplished that year. We're there to help frame the goals and see that they are within the scope of the AmeriCorps service agreement and the member’s contract.
<b>Nancy:</b>	At the start of each year we help them get to know the families, the community and the resources they have in their areas, and help put together a work plan for the first month of school.		
<b>Melissa:</b>	That's where it really helps to have been a Coordinator in a Center prior to becoming a Team Leader. Being able to know how to work with the dynamics of each school community, helping the		

(Continued on Page 4)

# Team Leaders Continued...

- Melissa:** It's a holistic approach to setting healthy boundaries. Family Resource Center Coordinators receive requests from every angle.
- Nancy:** We try to visit the Centers as often as we can and if needed, help as a volunteer with Center events/activities.
- Melissa:** It is also important to meet one on one with team members, it can be challenging since there are so many. These meetings help us to know where they are mentally and emotionally within their service.
- Nancy:** The challenge in the Bitterroot is the fact that the Centers are spread out, they are in almost every school and community from Florence to Hamilton. So we really rely on phone and e-mail to keep in touch day to day with our teams.
- Melissa:** As hard as it is, we both recognize the importance of these meetings.
- Nancy:** We try to go to events and help out, do whatever needs doing. That way we can give some good feedback. After an event we can get together and go through a Plus Delta
- Melissa:** The Plus/Delta is a great way to talk through the event, talking about what works, what didn't work and if there are any ways to make it better.
- Nancy:** We want to make being a Family Resource Center Coordinator as easy as possible, we're here for support: this means moral and physical volunteerism, if they need it.
- Nancy:** It is important to the program and to us to help each member find their strengths...
- Melissa:** ...we're definitely about empowering – as we empower them, they empower parents,
- Nancy:** and parents empower the community. It's a cycle, a circle if you will. Once it's working, it is really hard to break and I think that is really the goal of the program.

## FIT Continued...

The volunteers are all background checked and must sign a confidentiality form. "We hold a training day," says Smith, "that gives everyone the same information, the dos and don'ts, how to use the copy machine and the die cutter, where things are, things like that."

"So many families are working families, they are extremely busy, and they just don't have the time," says Family Resource Center Coordinator, Anya Miles. "The FIT program really helps parents volunteer when they can, around their busy lives, whether it is working in the classroom or helping with something that they can do at home. It works very well, that way, everyone has an opportunity to help however they can."

For busy teachers like fourth-grade teacher Debbie Thrailkill, "The ladies are wonderful. They do so many things for me and that allows me more time to focus on the kids. But it takes a real go-getter like Carolyn to organize all this wonderful help."



# Locations of the Family Resource Centers:

## Missoula Area:

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

Franklin Elementary  
1901 S. 10th West  
Missoula, MT 59802  
Alicia Crandell  
406-327-0483  
franklinfr@mcps.k12.mt.us

Hawthorne Elementary  
2835 S. 3rd West  
Missoula, MT 59804  
Carrie Strike  
406-327-6945  
hawthornefr@mcps.k12.mt.us

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

Lowell Elementary  
1200 Sherwood  
Missoula, MT 59802  
Josh Archey  
406-327-0390  
lowellfr@mcps.k12.mt.us

Paxson Elementary  
101 Evans  
Missoula, MT 59801  
Liz Stotts  
406-542-4055  
frcpaxson@mcps.k12.mt.us

Rattlesnake Elementary  
1220 Pineview  
Missoula, MT  
Jane Yungmeyer-Olson  
406-542-4914  
resfr@mcps.k12.mt.us

Russell Elementary  
3216 Russell St.  
Missoula, MT 59801  
Jillian Foster  
406-728-2400 ext 4846  
frcrussell@mcps.k12.mt.us

Teen Family Resource Center  
1861 S. 12th St  
Missoula, MT 59802  
Cheryl Matt  
406-542-4900  
cmatt@wordinc.org

Northside Women's Center  
127 N. Higgins Suite 307  
Missoula, MT 59801  
Meg Heart  
mheart@wordinc.org

## Bitterroot Area:

Daly/Grantsdale Elementary  
778 Grantsdale St.  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Rachel Martin  
406-363-2122 ext 190  
406-363-1889  
martinr@hsd3.org

Florence Elementary  
5602 Old Hwy 93  
Florence, MT 59833  
Vanessa Ward  
406-273-6741 ext 203  
elemfr@florence.k12.mt.us

Florence Middle School  
5602 Old Hwy 93  
Florence, MT 59833  
Christa Burns  
406-273-6741 ext 203  
burnsc@florence.k12.mt.us

Hamilton Middle School  
209 S. 5th St  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Cathy Orr  
406-363-2121 ext 5004  
orrc@hsd3.org

Hamilton High School  
327 Fairgrounds Rd  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Ellen Ryter  
406-375-6060 ext 6222  
rytere@hsd3.org

Lone Rock Elementary  
1112 Three Mile Creek Rd  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
Erica Amt  
406-777-3314 ext 219  
ericaamt@lonerockschool.org

Ravalli Head Start  
81 Kurtz Lane  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Cami Ewalt  
Susan Matthews  
406-363-1217 ext 20  
camrae@ravalliheadstart.org  
susanm@ravalliheadstart.org

Kids First  
Westview Center  
103 S. 9th St. #105  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Jodi Waliser  
406-375-9588  
jwaliser@bitterrootkids.org

Stevensville Elementary  
300 Park Ave  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
Debbie Bauer-Johnson  
406-777-5613 ext 351  
johnsond@stevensville.k12.mt.us

Stevensville Junior High  
300 Park Street  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
Debbie Bauer-Johnson  
406-777-5533  
johnsond@stevensville.k12.mt.us

Washington Primary  
225 N. 5th St.  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
Michelle Wilson  
wilsonm@hsd3.org  
406-363-2144

Victor School  
425 4th Avenue  
Victor, MT 59875  
Brandy Boak  
boak@victor.k12.mt.us  
406-642-3221 ext 255

## Flathead Area:

Cherry Valley Elementary  
111 4th Ave  
Polson, MT 59860  
Tara Bowman  
Liana Zimmerman  
406-883-6333 ext 525  
lzimmerman@polson.k12.mt.us

Linderman Elementary  
111 4th Ave  
Polson, MT 59860  
Cassie Anderson  
406-883-6229

Two Eagle River School  
PO Box 160  
Pablo, MT 59855  
Dacia Whitworth  
406-675-0292

## WORD-Family Resource Centers

127 N. Higgins Ave  
Suite 307  
Missoula, MT 59802  
406-543-3550