

Best Beginnings Council of Yellowstone County

Needs Assessment

Key Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to analyzing community data and risk indicators reflecting the status of families in Yellowstone County with infants and young children, the needs assessment process also included an extensive effort to interview members of the Best Beginnings Council and parents of children age 0-5 who have experience working with service providers in the community. Three basic questions were asked during these interviews: (1) What is working well in the community; (2) What is not working well; and (3) What specific suggestions do you have regarding actions to address deficiencies in the community’s support system for families and children?

The perspectives of those interviewed are summarized in the strengths and weaknesses chart below. These initial findings were presented to the Best Beginnings Council for further discussion.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
The community has many strong organizations providing services to families with infants and young children.	Many non-profits serving families in the community often apply for the same funding sources.
The Best Beginnings Council has the support of most of the organizations and programs working with families in the community.	How can the “community” apply for a need?
Billings has many strong day care programs several of which are “flexible,” and there are many options for pre-school.	Many working parents cannot afford licensed day care. There is a need for more accreditation, but this can be difficult in Montana.
Existing home visiting programs have been well received by parents.	Many families are receiving services from several agencies—can this be better coordinated?
The Nurse Family Partnership will enhance existing home visiting programs.	71% of children with disabilities do not get into special education (statewide statistic).
“Simply Family” magazine provides a monthly calendar of activities for families.	Many parents, especially those new to the community, have difficulty finding out what’s available.
Billings Community Playgroup is greatly appreciated by many parents. It is a place where parents can learn what’s available.	More opportunity for play groups is needed, especially for children with disabilities and special needs.
Local school district has small class sizes and has a strong early childhood intervention program.	School funding in Montana is a problem and is a constraint to early assessment.
“Parents Ask Line” is a good place to get	Many parents want to use the Internet as a place

information.	to get information on what's available.
The Library's story time programs provide important opportunities for parents.	More free activities with "substance" are needed.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Ten agencies are "geo-centric" to the Billings South and Southwest neighborhoods, where poverty and low income rate are high.	Other neighborhoods, such as North Park and Downtown, also have higher risk indicators than the County as a whole.
A local program is working to establish a center to help families in crisis and has established important partnerships, such as with law enforcement.	Establishing relationships with families in need of help is critical.
Awareness of the need to breaking down "silos" is growing in the community.	Applying for assistance from an "agency" can be intimidating to low income parents.
With regard to the Best Beginnings Council, "the right people are at the table."	The Council needs a clear mission statement and an action plan with initiatives that can be implemented on a collaborative basis.
City parks are important places for activities for young children and many of these opportunities are free.	Low income parents struggle to find affordable activities for their kids in the winter and existing parks need playground equipment that is appropriate for younger children.
The City of Billings operates a transit system that is important to many low-income parents.	Many families with infants and young children have limited transportation options, especially for getting to work in the evening and on weekends.
Several programs in the community provide assistance with nutrition education.	Childhood obesity is a growing concern and many parents need help learning how to prepare healthy meals.
Billings is home to a strong medical and health care community, including many pediatric specialists.	Many pediatricians do not know what's available to help parents after their child is born. "You get your car seat and off you go."
The City of Billings has a "Safe Streets" program.	Many parents will not let their children walk or ride their bike to school due to heavy traffic volumes.
Many parenting and other classes are available in the community to help families with infants and young children.	Participation in these programs is often disappointing. "How can we communicate better with parents?"

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