

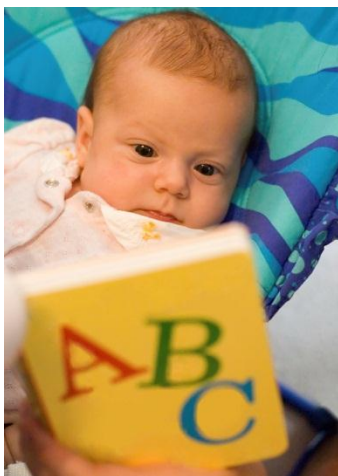
Best Beginnings of Yellowstone County Assessment Key Insights

INTRODUCTION

The Best Beginnings Council was convened in response to a grant from the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. The ultimate purpose of the grant is to develop or support a community-based infrastructure for a comprehensive system of early childhood services, including home visiting. The grant provides resources to our community to develop new or enhance existing community partnerships and collaborations and conduct assessment and planning activities.

The council formed in the spring of 2012 and conducted assessment on the status of early childhood in Yellowstone County from June – September 2012. Triple Divide Consulting, Inc. was hired to conduct the assessment. It consisted of: 1) An examination of archived data from sources such as the Census; 2) Interviews with stakeholders; 3) A survey of the organizations represented at the Best Beginnings Council.

The key insights from this assessment are presented on the next pages. The Council will use the assessment to create a strategic plan for improving the early childhood system of care in Yellowstone County.



Our mission:

To improve school readiness outcomes for children ages 0-8 in Yellowstone County.



Why Invest in Early Childhood? A Nobel Laureate's Perspective

James Heckmann is considered to be one of the top ten most influential economists in the world. In 2000, he received a Nobel Prize for his work assessing the value of investing in human capital development.

Specifically he developed “The Heckman Two-Step,” which is used by economists to remove bias selection and isolate the true causal factors of an investment or action.

After receiving the Nobel Prize for that work, he used the process to answer the question: *“How can we best invest in human capital development to increase workforce capabilities, raise productivity and social cohesion and assure America’s economic competitiveness in the global economy?”*

According to Heckman’s letter to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Reform: **“Data from economists, social scientists and medical experts conclusively shows that the answer is to invest in comprehensive early childhood development – from birth to age five – particularly in disadvantaged children and their families.”**

DEMOGRAPHICS: Yellowstone County has a large percentage of the state's population, and its population is growing faster than the state in general.

- One in six children in the state of Montana live in Yellowstone County.
- The population is increasing at a faster rate in Yellowstone County than in Montana, especially for the 0-5 age group. Between 2000 and 2010:
 - The population in Yellowstone County grew 14.4% compared to 9.5% in Montana.
 - The population under age 5 grew 18.5% compared to 13.6% in Montana.¹
- The fastest growing ethnicities under the age of 20 in Yellowstone County are Hispanic and Native American. Between 2000 and 2010:
 - The Hispanic population under the age of 20 increased by 42.1% in Yellowstone County and 51.5% in the state.
 - The American Indian population under the age of 20 increased by 35.6% and 3.3 in the state.
 - During the same period the White population under the age of 20 decreased by 1.7% in Yellowstone County and 5.4% in the state.
- The percent of children living in single parent households is higher in Yellowstone County (28%) than in Montana (27%) and much higher than in the nation (20%)².

ECONOMICS: Yellowstone County may seem better off than the state at first glance; however large pockets of the county are worse off than the state and these pockets have sizeable populations.

- 15.5% of families with children under 18 in Yellowstone County live below poverty compared to 16.6% in MT and 17.9% in the U.S.; however there are neighborhoods in Yellowstone County where the poverty rate is significantly above the State rate.
 - In the Billings Southwest neighborhood, 27.1% of the families with children under the age of 18 live below poverty.
 - In the Billings South neighborhood, 44% of the families with children under the age of 18 live below poverty.
 - In the Billings Northpark neighborhood, 94.4% of the families with children under the age 18 live below poverty.
 - The combined population of these neighborhoods (16,392) is larger than the population of forty-six of Montana's fifty-six counties. If it were it's own city, it would be the 8th largest city in Montana, right between Kalispell (pop. over 20,000) and Havre (pop. under 10,000).
- 17% of children under the age of 18 who live in Yellowstone County live below poverty, compared to 21% in the state and 13% in the United States³.
- Then number of SNAP recipients in the county has increased 94% in the past 10 years, but the number of families receiving Best Beginnings scholarships has decreased 34.4%.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau

² 2010 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, www.countyhealthrankings.com. Population Health Institute, The University of Wisconsin.

³ 2010 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, www.countyhealthrankings.com. Population Health Institute, The University of Wisconsin.

SAFETY : There has been a significant increase in the number of children in foster care in Yellowstone County. Most cases are substance abuse related.

- In August 2012 there were 331 children in foster care in Yellowstone County, a 26% increase from the same period in August 2011 (262). 168 of these children were age 5 or under, a 37% increase compared to the same period one year ago⁴.
- Last year from July 2011 through June 2012, Yellowstone County had 499 children in foster care. Their average stay in foster care was just under 20 months⁵.
- The majority (58%) of the August 2012 cases had a drug indicator of yes. The most prevalent drug is alcohol⁶.
- Experts in the field believe drug involvement is under-reported and the actual percent of drug-involved cases is closer to 75-85% than to 58%. After alcohol, the most frequent drugs involved in child abuse and neglect cases in Yellowstone County are marijuana, and prescription drugs and meth⁷.
- Between 2007 and 2009, the domestic violence rate per 100,000 was 487 in the county and 441 in the state⁸.



HEALTH Montana ranks dead last for childhood immunizations.

- Yellowstone County has one of the worst immunization rates for young children in the whole country. As of June 30, 2012, 66% of children age 19-35 months in Yellowstone County were immunized compared to 72.7% in the United States. According to the American Health Rankings, Montana ranks the worst, 50th out of 50 states, for immunization rates for children age 19-35 months⁹.

EDUCATION Almost one quarter of the youth who started high school in the fall of 2007 did not graduate with their class in 2011.

- The largest schools in the county have 2011 Cohort Graduation Rates that are close to the national rate of 75%¹⁰ but lower than the state rate. The 2011 Cohort Graduation Rate for Billings School District 2 was 77.6%. Laurel's was 77.3%. The Montana Cohort Rate was 82.2%. The other cities in Yellowstone County have graduation rates above the state average¹¹.

⁴ Montana Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services Division

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Key Stakeholder Interview: Becky Bey, Center for Children and Families

⁸ 2010 PRC Community Health Report. Completed by Professional Research Consultants, Inc. for The Alliance (Billings Clinic, RiverStone Health, St. Vincent Healthcare).

⁹ RiverStone Health, Program Coordinator, Community Health Services

¹⁰ America's Health Rankings, <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/all/graduation> .

¹¹ Montana Office of Public Instruction

NEXT STEPS

Continued Assessment

- More work will be done to assess the infrastructure needs listed in the column to the right.
- A GIS-mapping tool is being created to show the needs on maps according to county, neighborhoods, legislative districts, school boundaries, etc.

Strategic Planning

- The data compiled through this assessment will be used by the Council to create a community plan to improve the system of early childhood care in Yellowstone County. Planning will take place in the first part of 2013.

Strengthen Capacity to Work Together

- The council is intent on finding cost-neutral ways to improve the early childhood system in the county. This is important because funding is not increasing for early childhood services.
- One way to do this is to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of existing services. A consultant is facilitating meetings with council partners and training council members. The consultant is an expert on early childhood systems, and particularly on changing systems to be more efficient and effective for families. The whole council is examining “what can we do differently that will help us to serve more families or better serve the ones we currently reach?”



Early Childhood Infrastructure

Home Visiting/Parent Support

- Nine agencies provide home visiting services (to parents who meet criteria) but the supply does not keep up with demand.

Preschool/Childcare

- An area for further study. The City of Billings identified affordable childcare as a need in their recent citizen survey. The stakeholder interviews for this assessment also identified affordable childcare as a need. Both Headstart and Early Headstart have chronic waitlists. There is a need for respite childcare.

Basic Needs (Food/Shelter)

- Area for further study. Partners report increased demand for food, rent assistance, transportation assistance.

Health

- RiverStone, Billings Clinic and St. Vincent provide excellent health care.
- Mental health and chemical dependency services need to be evaluated for parents and for children.

Employment/Job Training

- Area for assessment. Over one third of Montana’s families are “working poor.” What is available in our county to help families secure “family-sustaining” employment?