

# Billings Metro VISTA Concept Paper

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Summer Associates Program 2011



*creating capacity...*

# Section One: Applicant Information

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**Name of Sponsoring Organization:**

City of Billings  
Community Development Division  
PO Box 1178  
Billings, Montana 59103

**Project Director:**

Brenda Beckett, Community Development Manager  
510 North Broadway, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Billings, Montana 59101  
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**Project Number:** 09-VSP-MT-0001

**Total Number of Summer Associates Requested:** The City of Billings is requesting seven (7) VISTA Summer Associate positions to work on educational programming for children experiencing poverty. The Billings Metro VISTA Project (MVP) targets efforts that impact homelessness and poverty as primary goals.

**Recruitment Plan:** The City of Billings has developed a multi-prong approach for recruiting qualified VISTA members. As there is no relocation funding available for this project, recruitment efforts will target local resources including posting opportunities at two local colleges and four high schools. Opportunities will be sent to several listservs the City manages, including the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness (20 member organizations) the Billings Area Resource Network (34 member organizations), the Community Housing Resource Board (20 member organizations), and Neighborhood Task Force newsletter recipients (1,635 individuals).

Continually promoting the success stories of recent local VISTAs and working to stimulate motivation for service through stories of the energy and enthusiasm of all community members involved with the movement to impact homelessness. For a broader appeal, the City is committed to national recruitment efforts including developing web pages on sites popular with college students including Facebook, MySpace, and Craigslist. Pending application approval, City staff members look forward to establishing a solid presence at the online AmeriCorps Recruitment site.

City staff is well aware that success in the VISTA project will largely depend upon finding qualified VISTA members and placing them in appropriate projects. First and foremost, a potential candidate must exhibit a passion for our mission of decreasing homelessness in Billings. He or she must be able to shift between facilitator and group collaborator as the present situation demands. Other vital attributes of a qualified VISTA member are that he or she be self-motivated, articulate, creative and respectful. City staff are very confident that we will indeed find such people to carry forward a successful VISTA project.

**Length of Summer Program:** The Summer Associates program would be in operation for ten (10) weeks, beginning on June 5 and ending on August 13, 2011.

# Section Two: Summer Education Projects

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## *Billings Public Schools:*

### *Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Enhancement Project*

#### *Location*

Education Foundation for Billings Public Schools  
Lincoln Center  
415 North 30<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 212 A  
Billings, MT 59101

#### *Site Supervisor*

Virginia Lee Mermel, PhD, CNS  
School Health Advisory Council Chair

#### *Statement of Poverty-Related Problem / Challenge*

For 5,500 low-income children in Billings, the free or reduced cost meals they eat at school provide the majority of their nutrition from late August to early June. These same children often go hungry or eat nutrient-poor diets during summer vacation.

The federally-subsidized Summer Lunch-in the-Park Program provides nutritious meals Monday through Friday, from mid-June through mid-August. For a variety of reasons, only about 36% (approximately 520) of eligible children take advantage of this valuable resource. Historically, program participation is highest on Thursdays - the one day of the week that an educational extracurricular activity is offered along with lunch.

The goal of the Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Enhancement Project is to increase participation in the Summer Lunch Program by offering a variety of educational activities to improve overall health and fitness and to assist in retention of academic skills, particularly math and reading.

#### *Narrative*

**Summer Project Activities:** Summer Associates will participate in assessing and implementing educational extracurricular activities, including reading, for Summer Lunch-in-the-Park feeding sites. Summer Associates will also track participation in the program, making changes to programming to maximize participation based on favored educational activities. This project can accommodate up to four (4) VISTA member placements and a minimum of at least two (2) members are requested.

**Background:** Approximately 5,500 children (30% of all enrolled students) in the Billings Public School system qualify for subsidized meals through the Free or Reduced Cost School Meals Program during the school year. Approximately 10% of the participating children (550 students) go hungry outside of school.

The Billings Public Schools summer lunch program must be operated in neighborhoods with 50% or more participation in subsidized school meals programs (Title 1 criterion). Last year, approximately 520 students were fed through the summer program on a weekly basis, even though about 2,200 children live in qualified

neighborhoods. Of the 520 weekly participants, 160 children were referred to service agencies for food and social services support. These referrals reduced participation in the lunch program to 375 participants.

**Outputs / Outcomes:** Increase program participation by 15% to 20% (430 to 625 students).

**Community Partnerships:** Books have been donated by the Billings Public Library for children to take home after lunch. The Billings Public Schools Health Advisory Council membership is as follows:

- Virginia L Mermel, PhD, CNS, CLC, Board Certified Human Nutritionist/Health Management Consultant and Educator; SHAC Chair and Backpack Meals Program Coordinator
- Bette Hunt, Director Billings Public Schools Food Service
- Elisabeth Clemens, PhD, Research Director, Billings Clinic Center for Clinical Translation
- Karen Dawson, Retired Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher, Billings Public Schools & Co-coordinator Billings Backpack Program
- Marvin Forquer, Instructor Billings Public Schools Career Center
- Dan Gall, MD, Internal Medicine Physician, Billings Clinic
- Bernie Mason, Yellowstone County Extension Agent
- Beverly McHugh, RD Dietitian St. Vincent's Hospital, Billings, MT
- Bruce McIntyre, Legislative Liaison, Billings Chamber of Commerce
- Anne Nichols, RN School Nurse, Billings Catholic Schools
- Robert Roe, PhD, Physical Therapist, US Public Health Service, Crow Agency
- Kay Schwartz, Health Careers Teacher, Billings Public Schools Career Center
- Laura Homlund, Grassroots Coordinator, RiverStone Health
- Travis Kemp, Billings Public Schools Board Member

**Tentative Pre-Service / In-Service Training Plan:**

- **June 5:** First Day of Service
- **June 3:** Pre-Service Orientation Webinar
- **June 5:** Sponsor Orientation
- **June 6:** On-Site Orientation at the Host Site
- **August 12:** End of Service Celebration
- **August 13:** Last day of Service

**Supervision / Service-Related Travel:** Supervision and service-related travel will be provided by the Host Site.

**Summer Assessment / Recognition:** Assessment will be conducted by program staff through evaluation of reports and measurement of outcomes against expected program achievements. The Billings Metro VISTA Project typically hosts a "fire circle" at the end of service to provide acknowledgement for the work completed. Fire circles are attended by VISTA members in various stages of service, including alumni, supervisors and community members.

## *Montana Rescue Mission:*

### *Women & Family Shelter - Summer Education Project REACH-OUT*

#### *Location*

Women & Family Shelter  
2520 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North  
Billings, MT 59101

#### *Site Supervisor*

Lana Janssen  
Women and Family Shelter Manager

#### *Statement of Poverty-Related Problem / Challenge*

The Women and Family Shelter (WFS) is located on a very busy downtown street; the Greyhound Bus Depot is next door and there is no outdoor play area nearby. Several hundred children residing at the WFS during the course of the year are clearly challenged. A program designed to help children get out of the shelter for physical, recreational, educational and emotional health has been developed. This program is called **REACH-OUT** which stands for "Recreation, Education, Art, Culture and Health-Outside" the walls of the shelter. The program will involve school-aged children staying at the Women and Family Shelter.

#### *Narrative*

**Summer Project Activities:** Summer Associates will design an educational program that includes education, exposure to art, and recreational opportunities outside of the shelter. The Summer Associates will design and implement permission slips and waivers for out-of-shelter activities, and will document activities, participation and overall outcomes. This project can accommodate up to three (3) VISTA member placements, and a minimum of two (2) placements are requested.

**Background:** Almost 80 families are currently experiencing homelessness locally (over 250 adults and children), and 42% of these families are American Indian. The majority of the individuals representing families who completed the survey were females (almost 70%) and over half of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 59.

There are more homeless American Indian people in family situations in Billings than any other race / ethnicity; American Indian families comprise 42% of Billings' homeless family population. This is statistically significant, as the American Indian population comprises almost 30% of the overall homeless population in Billings. Members of families self-identifying as Caucasian make up 40% of the homeless family population. An average of eight percent, or 13 people, self-identified as "pregnant" on the date of the survey over the past four years.

Mental health issues, substance abuse and lifestyle choice make up the top causes of homelessness for families in Billings. Domestic abuse is listed as the fourth cause of homelessness, affecting 12% of the family cohort. In the overall homeless population, domestic abuse is the sixth leading cause of homelessness in Billings.

Families are more likely to stay with others than live in a shelter, although 28 family members, on average over the past four years, stayed the night outside during the point-in-time survey. Many families stay in motels with or without vouchers. The number of families staying in a motel with a voucher dropped from a three-year average of nine to only one in 2008. An average of 26 families stayed in motels without vouchers during the date of the survey.

Families are more likely to be in immediate jeopardy of losing their current living situation, as 16% of local homeless families are being asked to leave their current living situation within one week compared to 13% in the overall homeless population in Billings. Homeless families are slightly more likely to be lifetime residents of Billings at 24% compared to 21% of the overall homeless population.

During the 2008-2009 school year, the Billings Public School system identified 413 students as meeting the definition of homeless, and there are surely other children who have not yet been identified as such. Other children experiencing homelessness may not attend school, although state law requires children aged 7 to 16 years to be enrolled. Data on homeless students has been gathered by the public school system annually beginning in the 2003-2004 school year, and numbers have increased steadily.

The majority of homeless children identified in Billings in 2006-2007 were in elementary school, with 42% enrolled in Kindergarten through third grade and 21% in fourth through sixth grade. Fifteen percent were enrolled in seventh through eighth grade, and 22% in ninth through twelfth grade. Forty-four percent of identified homeless youth were identified as American Indian, 42% as Caucasian, eight percent Hispanic, three percent Black, and one percent Hawaiian.

Homelessness in children and youth has, unsurprisingly, a negative effect on a child's academic performance and likelihood of graduation. Nationally, approximately 1.35 million children experience homelessness annually. These children are much more likely to be exposed to violence, experience chronic health problems, and suffer from behavioral and emotional difficulties. Additionally, unstable family situations, frequent changes in schools and a lack of adequate nighttime residence all contribute to the difficulties a homeless child faces in school.

**Outputs / Outcomes:** Increase program participation to 30 families / 45 children. Since a child's scope of reference is that which they directly experience, staff hopes that the children will see life from a different perspective than what 'being homeless' affords them. Because so many of these kids have lived in a family car moving from place to place, they are behind in school, they have not acquired social skills to make friends and have been exposed to 'survival living' rather than a childhood.

When afforded opportunity to dream big, children will often pursue some aspect of those dreams as adults. Through REACHOUT efforts, children will be given the opportunity to view life through a different lens and embrace a future full of potential rather than despair.

**Community Partnerships:** Establishing partnerships for program augmentation / enhancement and support for activities will be sought with organizations such as:

- ZooMontana
- City of Billings Parks and Recreation Department
- Rodeo Association.
- Western Heritage Center
- Moss Mansion Museum
- Yellowstone County Museum
- Carmike Theaters
- Venture Theatre
- Billings Studio Theater
- Yellowstone Art Museum
- Billings Public Library
- Billings Symphony



**Tentative Pre-Service / In-Service Training Plan:**

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**Summer Assessment / Recognition:** Assessment will be conducted by program staff through evaluation of reports and measurement of outcomes against expected program achievements. The Billings Metro VISTA Project typically hosts a “fire circle” at the end of service to provide acknowledgement for the work completed by the member. Fire circles are attended by VISTA members in various stages of service, including alumni, supervisors and community members.

# Section Three: Position Descriptions

 <b>SUMMER ASSOCIATE POSITION DESCRIPTION</b> 	
Organization Name:	Billings Public Schools Health Advisory Council (SHAC) and School Food Service
Summer Associate Project Name:	Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Enhancement Project
Site Supervisor of Summer Associate:	Virginia Lee Mermel, PhD, CNS, School Health Advisory Council Chair Bette Hunt, Director of School Food Services Steve Harris, Food Service Manger, Summer Lunch-in-the Park
Describe the organization:	
<p>The SHAC and the School Food Service have worked closely for the past 4.5 years to make sure the nutritional content of school meals meets current USDA standards of excellence and that as many Free and Reduced Meal eligible children as possible participate in the Summer Lunch in-the-Park Program.</p>	
State the specific poverty-related problem and project goal designed to overcome that problem:	
<p>For many low-income children, the free or reduced cost meals they eat at school provide the majority of their nutrition from late August to early June. These same children often go hungry or eat nutrient-poor diets during summer vacation.</p> <p>The federally subsidized Summer Lunch-in the-Park Program provides nutritious meals Monday through Friday, from mid-June through mid-August. For a variety of reasons, only about 36% of the eligible children take advantage of this valuable resource. Historically, program participation is highest on Thursdays - the one day of the week that an educational extracurricular activity is offered along with lunch.</p> <p>The goal of the Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Enhancement Project is to improve both the nutritional status and academic retention of low-income children by attracting more of them to summer lunch sites with educational extracurricular activities including physically active games, reading programs, math games, etc.</p>	
List required qualifications & eligibility criteria:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed to this National Service program for 10 week period beginning June 5, 2011.</li> <li>• Must be at least 18 years of age at time of placement.</li> <li>• Must serve on a full-time basis and may not have outside employment during the project period.</li> <li>• Indicate a growing passion for the mission of decreasing homelessness in Billings.</li> <li>• Possess basic understanding of strategic planning, community organization and community development/empowerment.</li> <li>• Ability to communicate effectively (both written and orally).</li> <li>• Ability to work both independently and as part of a team.</li> <li>• Computer skills and knowledge of some software (WORD, Excel, Power Point, etc.).</li> <li>• Ability to work with diverse generations, incomes and cultures.</li> </ul>	

Describe key duties & roles of the Summer Associate:

- Work with SHAC, the School Food Service Director, the County Extension agent, and the Reading Rocks Program personnel to augment and enhance the current extracurricular activities plan to be offered at each Summer Lunch-in-the-Park feeding site.
- Evaluate the current extracurricular activities plan to determine resource availability and determine how often the activities can be offered.
- Learn how each activity is taught/offered.
- Implement approved activities.
- Track participation and outcomes.

State the specific expected outputs and outcomes to be met through the fulfillment of the key duties and roles:

- Increase participation in Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Program by 15-20%.
- Improve satisfaction of children and parents with the Summer Lunch program.
- Contribute to the children's fitness and academic skill retention.

Describe any partnerships in the community that will contribute to this project's success:

The County Extension Agent, Bernie Mason, has a wealth of multidisciplinary curriculum that teaches nutrition along with math, science, reading and even physical activity. Bernie will be an excellent resource for VISTAs to consult when developing activities for the Summer Lunch-in-the-Park Program. VISTA members will also be able to consult with the Reading Rocks Director to learn some best practices. First Interstate Bank Foundation can help provide volunteers to implement activities at the various lunch sites.



## SUMMER ASSOCIATE POSITION DESCRIPTION



Organization Name:	Montana Rescue Mission: Women and Family Shelter
Summer Associate Project Name:	REACH-OUT
Site Supervisor of Summer Associate:	Lana Janssen (WFS) Women and Family Shelter Manager

### Describe the organization:

The Montana Rescue Mission is a non-profit organization which provides temporary emergency care and rehabilitative services, shelters, food and pathways to ending homelessness one person at a time.

### State the specific poverty-related problem and project goal designed to overcome that problem:

The Women and Family Shelter (WFS) is located on a very busy downtown street surrounded by commercial buildings. With no outdoor play area nearby, several hundred children residing at the WFS during the course of the year are clearly face challenges to play and interact with each other. A program designed to help children get out of the shelter for physical, recreational, educational and emotional health is in the process of being developed. This program is called **REACH-OUT** which stands for *Recreation, Education, Art, Culture and Health-Outside* the walls of the shelter. The program will involve school-aged children staying at the Women and Family Shelter.

### List required qualifications & eligibility criteria:

- Committed to this National Service program for 10 week period beginning June 5, 2011.
- Must be at least 18 years of age at time of placement.
- Must serve on a full-time basis and may not have outside employment during the project period.
- Indicate a growing passion for the mission of decreasing homelessness in Billings.
- Possess basic understanding of strategic planning, community organization and community development/empowerment.
- Ability to communicate effectively (both written and orally).
- Ability to work both independently and as part of a team.
- Computer skills and knowledge of some software (WORD, Excel, Power Point, etc.).
- Ability to work with diverse generations, incomes and cultures.

### Describe key duties & roles of the Summer Associate:

- Review the REACH-OUT program and augment / enhance the program to ensure inclusion of a sufficient recreation, creative, and educational activities outside of the shelter.
- Ensure exposure to the arts, including, learning and playing musical instruments, painting and sketching on canvas, nutrition and exercise education.
- Implement permission slips and waivers for out of shelter activities.
- Document activities, participants and overall outcome of activities.
- Partner with key staff to recruit businesses and individuals to partner with the Montana Rescue Mission for these projects.

State the specific expected outputs and outcomes to be met through the fulfillment of the key duties and roles:

Increase program participation to 30 families / 45 children. A child's scope of reference is that which they directly experience, staff hopes that the children will see life from a different perspective than what 'being homeless' affords them. Because so many of these kids have lived in a family car moving from place to place, they are behind in school, they have not acquired social skills to make friends and have been exposed to 'survival living' rather than a childhood.

When afforded opportunity to dream big, children will often pursue some aspect of those dreams as adults. Through REACH-OUT efforts, children will be given the opportunity to view life through a different lens and embrace a future full of potential rather than despair.

Describe any partnerships in the community that will contribute to this project's success:

Program activities include things like trips to the Zoo, local parks, rodeo, movies, theatre, museums, library and special events. All activities which engage a child either physically, mentally or emotionally. Staff hopes VISTA members can assist in obtaining access to activities on a donation basis/partnership with local businesses.