Finding the Way Home

Five-Year Plan to Address Homelessness (2014-2019)
by the Flathead Homelessness Interagency Resource and Education
Finding the Way Home

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To The Citizens of Flathead County:

It is with great pleasure that we present this plan to our community. For well over a year, we have been wrestling with the issue of homelessness in Flathead County and how we can tangibly address this epidemic that affects hundreds of people in our county every year. Part of our solution involves the careful and deliberate implementation of a collaborative Five Year Plan to end homelessness in our area.

This plan is more than a compilation of statistics and demographics. Ending homelessness takes perseverance. Our intent is to create solutions that will practically reduce the homeless population in Flathead County and provide them with better access to safe, decent and affordable housing. The Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness in Flathead County will accomplish this by defining core problems facing the residents of Flathead County, identifying gaps in the housing market for low-income and very low-income citizens, and assess additional needs for prevention and service provider assistance for the homeless and at-risk populations.

The effort to achieve the goals in the plan has led to the creation of The Flathead H.I.R.E. (Homelessness Interagency Resource and Education), a collection of social service providers and private citizens dedicated to work together and address homelessness in the Flathead Valley. The vision of H.I.R.E. is a coordinated community response that meets the needs of its homeless population and provides safe and viable alternatives to homelessness.

Thank you for your involvement and interest in becoming part of the solution to a social disease affecting not just the homeless, but the entire community. It is an honor to work with and rely on you for the support needed to address, remedy, and eventually end homelessness in the Flathead.

Slainte!

Flathead H.I.R.E.
Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness

Flathead H.I.R.E. Goals to Address Homelessness in Flathead County

1. **Increase shelter space and the number of beds available to accommodate all of the homeless in Flathead County.**

Homelessness encompasses all demographics and cannot be generalized in a few well-defined categories; although there are some defining characteristics unique to each group. In Flathead County, we interact with United States veterans, families, children, single adults, domestic violence victims, sexual and violent offenders, and transients who want little to no fraternization with the community. Each of these groups has unique needs.

2. **Efficient coordination and communication between social service providers and the community with an emphasis on a single point of entry.**

If homelessness is to be properly addressed in Flathead County, there must be a single point of entry for those inquiring about the services offered. Too many people fall victim to misinformation or unproductive searches when attempting to find solutions on their own.

With so many needs present, there must be one central point that can determine the needs of a person who is homeless or on the verge of homelessness. This will require proficient communication between the single point of entry, the social service providers, and the community. A further benefit of a single point of entry will be the better use of valuable resources available in the community.

3. **Increased preventive measures and affordable housing opportunities for people who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness.**

Research and data support the conclusion that when homelessness is curbed, the entire community benefits economically. Therefore, Flathead County has the potential to reduce the financial impact of homelessness on the community by working to prevent it from occurring. One important facet in doing so, is to address the availability of affordable permanent housing opportunities. Transitional housing and shelters should merely be the means to an end and this system breaks down when there is no permanent affordable housing.

4. **Public awareness and community involvement are paramount to remedying homelessness in Flathead County.**

Perception is reality; if the community is not aware of the problem of homelessness in Flathead County, then effective measures will never be taken. There needs to be relevant training and education available to help people avoid the conditions leading to homelessness.

5. **Continue to sustain and develop the annual Project Homeless Connect event.**

Project Homeless Connect is an annual event held by communities across the nation. Held annually in Kalispell, Flathead Valley Project Homeless Connect is a two-day event that provides much needed services to hundreds of individuals and families that are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.
Section 1: A Look at Homelessness in Flathead County

History

The beautiful Flathead Valley is located in Northwest Montana on the north side of Flathead Lake, just west of the Continental Divide and on the west side of Glacier National Park. Settled around the turn of the 20th century, the area is rich in natural beauty and resources enabling it to grow and flourish through a wide variety of enterprises and industries. The large increases in population throughout the 20th century did not weigh on the economy until a decline in the railroad and logging industries. Soon, the focus of the economy was tourism and the high-priced costs of appealing to that industry followed. This severely stifled the local, lower-income population’s ability to afford to live in Flathead County when the few jobs available were in the low-paying service industry.

Homelessness did not appear in the Valley overnight as some inexplicable phenomenon. The dramatic rise in Flathead County’s homeless population over the past decade is a result of a steady increase in population combined with the scarcity of low-income and very low-income housing. To worsen the matter, there continues to be a deficit of funding and support for services directed at helping the low-income and chronically homeless populations.

The lack of affordable housing opportunities for low-income individuals and families in Flathead County, and more specifically, the City of Kalispell, has forced more and more individuals to resort to measures they would have never imagined. Increasingly people find themselves seeking help from the already undersupplied emergency shelter system or doubling up with friends and family. In extreme cases, some are forced to live in places with substandard conditions (weekly motels, cars, the street, the woods, etc.).

Defining Homeless in Flathead County

When beginning to address homelessness, it is important to understand what defines someone as homeless. The basic definition is seen in Merriam-Webster’s version: “Homeless: Having no home or permanent residence.”¹ While this covers the very breakdown of the word ‘homeless’, it does not include the specific situations that define someone as homeless.

Why is defining homeless important?

Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness

The way homeless is defined determines who qualifies for specific services and programs developed to address the problem. This led to systemic issues when the working definition, over the majority of the past three decades, for U.S. federal policy and program development regarding homelessness describes a homeless individual as anyone who “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” This McKinney-Vento definition directed funds towards a treatment-over-prevention oriented system that did not begin to prioritize those at-risk of becoming homeless until recently.

Defining Homeless:

While the McKinney-Vento definition led to a service-provider network that evolved into an effective treatment system, there were still major gaps in efforts of prevention. Due to this issue, a change in the definition was necessary to allow for new policy and funding directed towards all populations that are homeless, or at-risk of becoming homeless. This change was made in 2009 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) when it issued the final regulation to implement changes to the definition of homelessness contained in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH Act).

The new definition includes four broad categories of homelessness:

1. **People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided.** The only significant change from existing practice is that people will be considered homeless if they are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days (it was previously 30 days), and were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution.

2. **People who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.** HUD had previously allowed people who were being displaced within 7 days to be considered homeless. This regulation also describes specific documentation requirements for this category.

3. **Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state.** This is a new category of homelessness, and it applies to families with children or unaccompanied youth who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment.

4. **People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.** This category is similar to the current practice regarding people who are fleeing domestic violence.

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Defining the Numbers:

The most reliable numbers for assessing homelessness are derived from a Housing Status Point-In-Time Survey (PIT), which will show a snapshot in time of the homeless situation in Kalispell and the Flathead Valley. The PIT Survey is a survey that is distributed nationally by service providers on one specific day in January of each year. The goal of the survey is to assess the numbers, needs and conditions of the homeless and at-risk population.

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2
What do these numbers mean?

The data shown in Figure 1.1 was gathered from the annual PIT survey and clearly shows, over the past 6 years, a dramatic increase in the homeless population of Kalispell and parts of Flathead County. The recorded homeless population that did not sleep in a place of their own (an apartment, house, etc. owned, or rented by the respondent) grew from 240 individuals on January 31st, 2007 to 736 individuals on January 26th, 2013.

There are two major concerns when looking at the data from Figures 1.1 and 1.2. First, it is apparent that there has been a large, steady increase in the homeless population since 2007, both in Montana and the City of Kalispell. The second area of concern comes when comparing these local numbers to the National trend of a decreasing homeless population. It seems that while the rest of the nation is making strides towards ending homelessness, Flathead County and Montana have been moving in the opposite direction towards a rampant homeless epidemic. In order to reverse course and begin to reduce homelessness, Flathead County must look to the effective practices that have been used in other United States cities and determine which interventions will best fit this community.

The data from Figure 1.1 also illustrates that the homeless population did decrease a small amount from 2011 to 2013. However, these numbers are impacted by challenges to survey every homeless individual in one day, during the middle of a Montana winter, and over the large geographical area of the Flathead Valley. These limitations suggest that the true number of homeless people in Flathead County is likely much greater than what was recorded on one, cold, January day.

While the dramatic increase in the homeless population of Kalispell and Flathead County proves that many people are affected by this issue, it is also important to know which specific demographics are most heavily affected in order to address those needs.

Which specific demographics are being affected by homelessness the hardest?
Homelessness in Flathead County is rarely an individual experience. Often times, a homeless individual is accompanied by family members such as siblings, a spouse, or children. In Figure 1.3, the PIT survey data displays a significant increase in the number of homeless individuals in a family from 143 in 2007 to 431 in 2013. This means that approximately 59 percent of the homeless population in Flathead County is made up of homeless families. To build on that statistic, the number of local homeless children went from 59 in 2007 to 218 in 2013, approximately 30 percent of the homeless population under the age of 18. These results conflict with the widely accepted stereotype of a homeless individual, but nonetheless, prove that homeless families are a major area of concern for Flathead County.

Figure 1.4 shows a large number of homeless individuals that are disabled and/or have a mental illness. This group is more likely to have barriers to employment and a fixed income well below the poverty line. In 2007, there were 107 homeless individuals, nearly half of the overall homeless population (45 percent), that had a disability or mental illness. While the percentage in 2013 (23 percent) for this demographic is far lower than in 2007 (45 percent), the 169 homeless individuals with a disability or mental illness in Flathead County in 2013 is still quite a substantial number.

Veterans have served this country, risking their lives and safety at great personal sacrifice. In many cases, this service results in ongoing physical and mental health challenges that face Veterans when they return to their communities. It is therefore very troubling that Veterans make up a sizeable proportion of the homeless population, both nationally and in Flathead County. Due to the fact that Flathead County historically has seen one of the largest veteran populations in Montana, the number of homeless veterans in the County is respectively high. Figure 1.4 shows the dramatic increase in homeless Veterans from 32 individuals in 2007 to 115 individuals in 2013, which today amounts to approximately 16 percent of the homeless population.
The number of **unaccompanied homeless minors** in Flathead County has grown in recent years. In mid-2013, the count of homeless youth enrolled in local schools was 268\(^4\) including the following counts in area school districts: Columbia Falls 79, Evergreen 37, Kalispell FHS, GHS 125, Olney-Bissell 3, Smith Valley 14, and Whitefish 10. As a result, homeless teens are committing suicide, prostituting themselves for a place to sleep, losing frostbitten toes during below-zero weather and “couch surfing” or sleeping in abandoned buildings every night.

The drastic rise in the overall homeless population of Flathead County is alone cause for alarm, but when analyzing the demographics most affected by homelessness, it becomes even more alarming. Families, Children, Victims of Domestic Violence, Veterans and those with a disability or mental illness are particularly vulnerable groups that should never experience the struggles of homelessness in this community, or anywhere else.

**Defining the Causes**

*Why are people homeless in Flathead County?*

Many people often relate homelessness with apathy. The misconception that every homeless person is in that situation because they do not want to work is a common belief; however, homelessness is not black and white. Its causes are often unique to each individual or family, and generally consist of a multitude of factors leading up to the point of homelessness.

The reasons for homelessness are vast, but in order to address the problem of homelessness in Flathead County, it is vital to understand what causes someone to become homeless. The following are some of the major causes of homelessness in Flathead County according to PIT Surveys.

**Causes of Homelessness:**

- **Lack of Affordable Housing**
  - The housing market in Flathead County makes it difficult for low-income individuals and families to live in a place that they can reasonably afford. This forces many to stretch themselves with housing costs that are more than they can afford, eventually leading to a desperate situation.

- **Loss of Job or Change in Income**
  - With budgets already stretched to the maximum for many residents of Flathead County, an unexpected layoff, or pay cut can be the difference between a roof over one’s head and living on the streets.

- **Domestic Violence**

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\(^4\) Heather M. Denny, Title I Specialist, Title I, Part A, State Coordinator for Homeless Education, State Coordinator for Neglected and Delinquent Education, Division of Educational Opportunity and Equity, Montana Office of Public Instruction.
Domestic Violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in America. Victims are forced to choose between homelessness and remaining in an abusive environment, often with children.

- **Mental Illness**
  - A large number of people are homeless because they lack the support for their mental illness and struggle to find stability in their lives.

- **Substance Abuse**
  - Alcohol and drug abuse in Flathead County have contributed to homelessness for many individuals and families.

- **Mental and/or Physical Disability**
  - The challenges experienced in everyday life by someone with a disability can be exhausting to overcome, but to add issues of an income well below the poverty line and the inability to supplement income without losing government benefits is simply overwhelming. This, combined with a lacking support system, forces many to walk a fine line between having a home and being homeless.

- **Family Discord and Crisis**
  - Families in crisis fail to provide teens with the physical or emotional support they require, and the teens leave or the adults push them out. Other reasons teens leave homes are foster care issues, parental substance abuse, mental or physical abuse, an unsafe home, a failed adoption, pregnancy, and sexual orientation.

- **POVERTY**
  - The underlying force behind homelessness is poverty. If an individual is not poor then becoming homeless is a much less likely scenario. Unfortunately for the working poor living in Flathead County, there is not a lot of opportunity for income growth in the seasonal and service industries. This limits the chance to overcome the poverty line threshold for the nearly 18% of the population living in poverty.\(^5\)

### The Cost of Homelessness

The costs of homelessness are alarmingly high. These are not only the financial costs of running an emergency shelter system and soup kitchens, but also include the toll of homelessness on the body, mind and will of individuals and families. Some of the costs

are obviously more difficult to measure than others, such as health issues resulting from the stressful experiences of homelessness, but it is impossible to deny the already expensive, taxing effect on the community and local resources.

Aside from a lower than average life expectancy and other poor health outcomes, homelessness presents a significant financial burden on the community’s current system. The following is an example to help to fully understand the extent of financial costs to the current system.

“Million Dollar Murray” is a homeless ex-marine, named Murray Barr, living and working in downtown Reno, Nevada. Murray battled alcoholism and would often get picked up by the local police, go through detox or to the hospital only to be released a short time later and pick up where he left off. With this treatment-over-prevention based system, it ended up costing around a million dollars over a 10-year period to “not do something” for Murray.6

While this may be an extreme example, similar scenarios play out in communities across the United States. In Missoula, Montana, Travis Mateer director of the Poverello Center’s Homeless Outreach Team and has stated, “I know a guy that we’re spending at least $60,000 a year on.” A significant annual expense when these funds could be more effectively used to provide housing for multiple homeless people.7

**Estimating the Cost of Homelessness in the Flathead**

Since there are differing costs associated with homelessness it should be no surprise that measuring these costs would be difficult. Prior to the development of this plan, there has been minimal coordination of efforts to gather and share data between agencies, organizations and the community who serve the local homeless population. For example, hospital emergency rooms, police reports, health-care payment systems, child-welfare agencies and detention centers do not record if the person they are serving is homeless. This means that it is extremely difficult to determine an accurate assessment of the actual cost of homelessness in Flathead County. However, the following data will paint a picture of what some of the costs look like in County.

**Public Safety**

Homelessness creates a sense of desperation for many who experience it. Desperation can force people into a vulnerable position, which can lead to criminal acts or living in unhealthy and hazardous conditions. From panhandling, to trespassing for shelter, to robbery, law enforcement in Flathead County has daily encounters with members of the local homeless population. Since police reports and

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detention center intakes do not keep record of those that are homeless it is difficult to estimate the cost that homeless individuals have on our local law enforcement system.8

**Medical Emergencies**

The difficulty measuring the cost of homelessness continues in the area of medical assistance. With no records identifying homeless individuals that use medical services, it is extremely difficult to sum up the costs on this system. According to personnel at Kalispell Regional Medical Center, the hospital and emergency rooms receive hundreds of visitors who are possibly homeless each year, and each visit can easily average $1,000. This projects the estimate to hundreds of thousands of dollars spent annually to provide medical services for those that are potentially homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

In addition to the estimates mentioned above, is the financial burden placed on the system currently serving the homeless population directly. A rough estimate for the total annual (2013) cost of homelessness in Flathead County is in the multi-million dollar range. While there are definite ways for funds to be used more efficiently, there is only enough to band-aid the problem.

In order to effectively end homelessness, our community must prioritize and fund services to address the causes of homelessness. For example, in Billings’ plan to end homelessness, it was estimated that it would cost between $105,000 and $135,000 to help an individual out of a state of chronic homelessness.9 These estimates may be a bit higher or lower than the true costs, but the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that it cost about $40,000 per year to assist a homeless individual with a serious mental illness.10

The fact remains that eliminating homelessness does not come without a price, but it can be done cost-effectively through coordination, planning and community-wide cooperation.

**Cost-Effective Approaches to Homelessness**

Community resources continue to decrease and due to the downturn in the economy, it can be especially devastating to those who are homeless or are on the verge of homelessness. For the past five years, Flathead County housing non-profits have worked together with local business and community members to put on Flathead Valley Project Homeless Connect.

**Project Homeless Connect**

10 ibid
Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness

Project Homeless Connect is an annual two-day event which acts as a one-stop shop to address the needs of homelessness. Since 2010, the Flathead Valley has hosted this successful event that provides the homeless or at-risk with over 50 services entirely for free, including: dental and medical assistance, Veteran Affairs Surplus, veteran services, mental health services, legal assistance, haircuts, clothes, toiletries, financial literacy resources, pet services, car seats, bike repair, vision services and many more. These services and donations amounted to over $100,000 in-kind donations for the 2013 Fourth Annual Flathead Valley Project Homeless Connect.

In recent years, two approaches have been adopted by many communities nationwide to effectively utilize resources and provide an appropriate response to homelessness. These two approaches are Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing and they are defined by the National Alliance to End Homelessness as follows:

**Housing First**

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing as quickly as possible – and then providing services as needed. This approach has the benefit of being consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and seek help to achieve.

Housing First programs share critical elements:

- A focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing as quickly as possible without time limits;
- A variety of services delivered to promote housing stability and individual well-being on an as-needed basis; and
- A standard lease agreement to housing – as opposed to mandated therapy or services compliance.  

Housing First is simply: providing the homeless with housing immediately, and the necessary services to sustain a stable living situation. This idea came from evidence that housing those that are chronically homeless, rather than treating their issues while they remain homeless, would be more cost effective in the long-term.

**Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing**

Rapid re-housing is a strategy that has been successfully used by communities nationwide to reduce homelessness. Today, most households become homeless as a result of a financial crisis that prevents them from paying rent, or a domestic conflict resulting in one member being ejected or leaving with no resources or plan for housing. Most households who become homeless today have already lived in independent permanent housing, and they can generally return and remain stably housed with limited short-term assistance. Homelessness itself is

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associated with a host of negative outcomes that can be minimized by limiting the period of time people experience it. By helping homeless households return to permanent housing as soon as possible, communities have been able to reduce the length of time people remain in homeless shelters. This opens beds for others who need them, and reduces the public and personal costs of homelessness.

Prevention can help communities reduce the size of their homeless population. Prevention assistance can aid households in preserving their current housing situation and can reduce the number of people entering the homeless assistance system and the demand for shelter and other programmatic housing beds.  

While both of these approaches are well established and proven, they do not necessarily translate into perfect models for every community, however, they could easily be adapted to all communities. This plan does not make specific recommendations for either approach, but the objective of this plan is to put Flathead County in a position to draw from each approach in planning to address homelessness.

**Defining the Need**

In a general sense, defining the need for a plan to address homelessness in Flathead County begins with a simple discussion of supply and demand. In Flathead County the supply of services and affordable, appropriate housing falls short of meeting the demand.

**Estimating the Gap in Lack of Income and Affordable Housing**

The two most evident variables that effect homelessness are income and availability of affordable housing. To understand the complexity of these issues, it is crucial to look at a wide variety of data. *Figure 1.5* will show the gap in the local Fair Market Rent and an affordable housing expense (30 percent of income) for a sample of local jobs and other income sources in Flathead County.  

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14 Ibid.
As illustrated in Figure 1.5, there is a definite gap between many of the listed sources of income and the Fair Market Rent estimates for Flathead County. In 2011 Kalispell’s Median Household Income was only $39,205 compared to Montana’s $45,324 and the Nation’s $52,762. While these numbers still appear well above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) of $23,550 for a family of four, it is important to understand what determines the FPL. The FPL is determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Humans Services as “the minimum income that a family needs to pay for food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other necessities.”

This means that a family of four is expected to find affordable, appropriate housing for under $588.75 per month. In fact, this low of an income makes it difficult for a household to afford a single bedroom rental. In the Kalispell Area 17.2 percent of the...
The current rental situation presents a serious financial burden on these households and forces them to consider sacrificing other basic needs or potential savings in the attempt to make it month to month. Stretching a financial plan, or budget, does not work when you are living a paycheck away from homelessness.

It is difficult to ask employers to pay their employees more so that they can succeed in financial stability, but it is nearly just as difficult to ask the real estate market to lower their prices. However, there are ways to make up some of the difference, such as low-income housing subsidies and Section 8 Rental Vouchers. Flathead County is not new to the idea of low-income housing, but it has been unable to keep up with the need. There are over 10,000 residents of Flathead County living below the poverty level, and a severe lack of affordable, permanent and transitional housing opportunities.

HUD’s guidelines for low-income, subsidized or public housing, generally refers to rental housing that does not exceed 30 percent of the monthly income of all qualifying households. As of 2013, the capacity of low-income housing in Flathead County can be found in about a dozen apartment properties, amounting to approximately 430 units. The majority of these subsidized housing units are single-bedroom and senior housing. While the community has made significant strides over the past decade to meet the need for low-income senior housing, there is still nowhere near the amount of subsidized housing units necessary for the rest of the low-income population.

Another form of low-income housing assistance is Section 8 Rental Vouchers. "The Section 8 Rental Voucher Program increases affordable housing choices for very low-income households by allowing families to choose privately owned rental housing. The Montana Public Housing Authority (PHA) generally pays the difference between 30 percent of household income and the PHA-determined payment standard—about 80 to 100 percent of the FMR." A benefit of the vouchers are the financial opportunities they provide for very low-income households with the ability to afford a wider range of housing on the rental market, but with only 340 vouchers in 2013, the supply is a small fraction of the demand. The lack of Section 8 vouchers in Flathead County has led to a waiting period for qualifying households of approximately 2 years.

As of 2013, in Flathead County, there are nearly 800 permanent housing units that are made affordable for low and very low-income households because of the Section 8 Rental Voucher Program and other subsidized housing programs. Since a large number of these units are single-bedroom and senior housing, the total number of people living in affordable permanent housing is a small fraction of the over 10,000 people living below the poverty level in Flathead County. Doubling the number of affordable permanent

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20 Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana (CAPNM) [http://www.capnm.net/section-8-rental-assistance-programs/](http://www.capnm.net/section-8-rental-assistance-programs/)
21 Information provided by CAPNM Section 8 Staff
housing units to approximately 1,600 would be a step in the right direction, but with
an average household size of 2.3, Flathead County will eventually need to quadruple the
total number of units to 3,200 to begin adequately addressing the need. 22

An additional housing issue that affects the homeless and at-risk population is the lack of
transitional housing. HUD has established that the term ‘Transitional Housing’ means “a
project that is designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to
homeless persons to facilitate movement to independent living within 24 months, or a
longer period approved by HUD.” 23 This type of temporary, subsidized housing is crucial
in helping those utilizing the emergency shelter system to transition into independent
housing with supportive services and eventually into a stable, permanent housing
situation. With only 35 transitional housing units as of 2013, Flathead County is not
meeting the demand of the hundreds of homeless individuals and families that are
in and out of the emergency shelter system every year. An exponential increase in the
amount of transitional housing units would be necessary for Flathead County to provide
transitional housing to the entire homeless population in the area.

The disparity between wages and household income with the supply of affordable
permanent and transitional housing is alarming. To remedy the situation, at least one of
two things must happen: either an increase in wages and/or an increase in the supply of
affordable, appropriate housing.

Shelter System

Currently in Flathead County the demand for emergency shelter far exceeds the supply.
With at least 736 homeless individuals according to the 2013 PIT survey, Flathead
County’s current shelter system, of less than one hundred beds, is grossly undersupplied. Additionally, the current shelter system is limited in regards to which demographics can be served. Looking at the current capacity of the shelter system will illustrate the need to shelter all demographics experiencing homelessness.

Emergency Shelter

Starting with the most demographically inclusive shelters, Samaritan House and A
Ray of Hope provide the majority of the emergency shelter beds for homeless
individuals and families in the Flathead Valley.

Samaritan House is the largest of the local homeless shelters, sheltering over
750 individuals in 2011, with approximately 45 beds and the capabilities in
times of emergency for up to 65 beds. While the Samaritan House also has a
veteran program, family program, transitional housing and low-income,
permanent housing, for safety and legal purposes it does not serve:

23 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) ‘Transitional Housing’
https://www.onecpd.info/resource/944/characteristics-of-transitional-housing-for-homeless-families/
Flathead County

- Violent Offenders
- Sex Offenders
- Individuals under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol

**A Ray of Hope** is another emergency shelter in Kalispell funded by mostly churches and by the local community. A Ray of Hope can help individuals without having to follow the strict restrictions and requirements that federal, state and grant funding can impose. Over the years, A Ray of Hope has helped many out of the hardships of homelessness.

There lies the problem. The current emergency shelter system of these two shelters does not come close to meeting the need of their targeted demographics. Additionally, there is almost no emergency shelter for those that are turned away by these two shelters due to a troubled past, or addiction. The previously listed demographics are some of the most vulnerable and desperate groups when put in a situation of homelessness with nearly no option of shelter. Neither Samaritan House nor A Ray of Hope is able to provide shelter to homeless youth under the age of 18. Safety issues arise for the community and homeless individuals when the system has no help and nowhere to go for these socially unaccepted demographics. It is important to note that both the Samaritan House and A Ray of Hope do provide housing and support for those attempting to overcome addiction, but do not tolerate any drug or alcohol use while staying in the shelter. Following the example set by nearby Missoula, providing emergency shelter for all demographics is vital to the reduction of homelessness.

**Domestic Violence**

Here in the Flathead Valley, victims of domestic violence have the option for housing at The **Abbie Shelter**, a partnering nonprofit organization that provides emergency and temporary shelter for women and their children who are in immediate danger from a violent partner. As a confidential, secure location, The Abbie Shelter provides safety for victims. When the threat of a violent partner is alleviated (either by relocation, jail, or the passing of time), the victim may no longer qualify for Abbie Shelter services, and is once again faced with homelessness as a result of domestic violence. Additional temporary housing is needed to address homelessness caused by domestic violence.²⁴

**Mental Health**

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²⁴ Information provided by Hilary Shaw, Executive Director Abbie Shelter and Violence Free Crisis Line
Many individuals who are homeless struggle with mental health conditions. In the Flathead Valley and surrounding areas, mental health services are limited. Many of the services are centered in Kalispell and few have inpatient living meaning consumers must maintain their own housing or be referred out to housing in the area. If the program does include inpatient stay, it is usually only a short-term service intended to help the consumer stabilize during crisis. Individuals whose behavior can be violent due to their mental illness have further trouble finding housing with landlords who are worried about the safety of their other tenants. All of these problems are exacerbated for mental health patients in the Flathead Valley’s outlying areas where housing resources and facilities are even scarcer.25

Veterans

Northwest Montana is not only home to one of the largest veteran populations in the entire state, but also to one of the largest homeless veteran populations in the state. An emergency shelter program for veterans currently exists through a coordinated effort between the Department of Veteran Affairs and the Samaritan House. This provides 14 beds specifically for veterans at the Samaritan House. Additionally, there are 34 HUD-VASH Vouchers given out by Veteran Affairs to support veterans’ long-term housing needs. While this does provide some relief to the local homeless veteran population, it still falls short of addressing the larger need for more veteran-specific emergency shelter and housing assistance.

Youth

There is a growing awareness in the Flathead Valley about homeless unaccompanied minors, with about 30 percent of the homeless population being made up of children according to the PIT surveys. The Flathead Youth Home (FYH) is licensed by the state of Montana to provide shelter care for up to eight youth between the ages of 10 to 18. FYH primarily provides care for at-risk youth who are in services with Child Protective Services or Youth Court. However, FYH receives a Basic Centers Grant from the Federal Administration for Children and Families to provide shelter care for runaway and homeless youth. Several grassroots organizations also seek to serve this population, but Montana has a Custodial Interference Law making housing a youth under the age of 18 without permission from their legal guardian a possible felony.26

Recently, a teen (18+) shelter named Amber’s Home has taken the initiative to address this enormous need. Still in the early phases, Amber’s Home needs more support from the community to adequately address this unacceptable issue.

As all the high schools in the Flathead Valley work toward meeting the objectives they have established for Graduation Matters, Montana, one important aspect of graduation rates keeps resurfacing. There is a percentage

25 Information provided by Maya Negron, Sunburst Community Service Foundation
26 Information provided by Lance Isaak, Program Director Flathead Youth Home
of youth that are at serious risk of dropping out. The reasons are many and include chronic truancy, pregnancy, addictions, and homelessness. This at-risk group should be a part of the GMM program, and it is these students that we must enlist to commit to graduating. But how can we expect this population to succeed when their basic needs are not met? Schools may provide our homeless students with food, clothing, hygiene products, and even blankets. The one thing schools cannot provide them is a safe, warm place to sleep. These students are the largest and most vastly neglected group within our state. Montana is behind in dealing with this issue because many adults think it’s the teens’ fault, and we have neglected to ask the youth, “What trauma have you been through that you are trying to live on your own with no living skills?”

In mid-2013 an informal committee of community members formed in Kalispell to address the issue of homelessness in unaccompanied youth. This group has recruited a 7 member board and has held numerous community meetings to increase awareness about the alarming number of Flathead County teens who are homeless. Together with the community they are working to develop a both a teen homeless outreach program and shelter.

**Prevention**

Homelessness is not an issue unique to Montana or to Flathead County. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 610,042 people experience homelessness in the United States each day. Recognizing that this is a large scale problem, communities across the U.S. have developed innovative plans to address homelessness and help people find housing. Many of these plans focus on prevention or early intervention before families are faced with not having a place to live.

The Denver Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness states it best:

”Assisting a family or individual with rent, utility, or mortgage payments before they become homeless is much less expensive than providing emergency services and does not disrupt lives as does an episode of homelessness. Other households get stuck living in temporary situations such as motels because they cannot save enough to secure a rental unit.”

Like Denver, these are major concerns for Flathead County. Preventive measures will be more cost-effective than relying on an emergency service system to fix homelessness on its own. Focusing more financial efforts on programs, such as Neighbors in Need and the Emergency Solutions Grant, that assist households before they become homeless will help reduce or even stop the upward trend in the homeless population.

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28 Denver Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, ‘Prevention’ pg. I-18
Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness

Services

Service providers help homeless individuals and families, and those at risk of becoming homeless, to reach and sustain a stable life in permanent housing. Flathead County has a large service provider community, with services ranging from: Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) to Habitat for Humanity and Mutual Self-Help Housing, to food pantries and child welfare providers. Unfortunately, a vast majority of the local services have experienced funding cuts over recent years and are difficult to access for many individuals and families living in the large geographical area of Flathead County.

While the PIT surveys show that services are a major need for the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless, it is also equally important to focus on the lack of wraparound services and discharge planning for those exiting institutions or other service provider programs. If there is no due diligence and no follow up plan for those exiting services then it is likely for these individuals and families to fall back into an episode of homelessness.

For real success to be achieved, these services need to be integrated into a system that focuses on a community coordinated single-point of entry and emphasizes discharge planning and long-term affordable housing.

Community Awareness, Response and Outreach

Increasing community awareness and understanding regarding homelessness in Flathead County is crucial to 5-Year Plan efforts. Education and public awareness campaigns will help reduce misconceptions and stigma related to the public’s view of homeless people. By educating the community about the current services and resources in Flathead County, these campaigns will expose the need to expand housing and service opportunities. Raising the overall awareness of homelessness in the community will also help redirect individual contributions away from panhandling and towards local organizations that effectively address the needs of homeless individuals and families.

The second part of raising community awareness is coordinating a response to the issues directly. While it is paramount to educate the community about the services and issues of homelessness, it is equally important to provide education to the homeless community. Other communities across the country and in Montana have been successful in creating a coordinated outreach team that works with the community and local police. Missoula has an outreach team made up of volunteers that has seen great success in getting people off the streets and set up with local service providers. Bringing help to people, rather than expecting them to find it themselves, is an effective, pro-active response from making a ‘real’ effort to address homelessness directly.

For the dual purpose of raising funds for Missoula’s Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), Missoula started the Real Change Not Spare Change campaign. This campaign educates the public with old parking meters that act as a donation center for HOT and display information about homelessness and panhandling. This system would be a great addition to the community with a minimal amount of effort.
Section 2: Goals and Action Steps

Accountability

Another main function of this Plan is to hold Flathead H.I.R.E. accountable for addressing the issues of homelessness in Flathead County. Upon approval of the 5 Year Plan to Address Homelessness, Flathead H.I.R.E. will:

- Elect members to an Executive Committee consisting of no less than one chairperson and a representative to head each of the subcommittees.

- To create structure and sustainability, the Executive Committee will also develop guidelines, which reflects the Flathead H.I.R.E.'s mission and vision statements, to regulate and assess its efforts.

- The Executive Committee will establish subcommittees to address each goal set forth in The Plan.
  - Additional sub-committees may be created to address issues and tasks not directly addressed in this plan.
  - Each sub-committee will develop assessment tools to review the progress of each specific goal or task of that sub-committee.

- The Executive Committee will meet at a minimum semi-annually to review and assess the progress of The Plan and sub-committees.

In order for Flathead H.I.R.E. to run efficiently and effectively, there will have to be a balance between a grand collective effort and individual autonomy for the respective services. To maintain order, establish a cohesive feel, and ensure multiple opinions are heard and considered, an Executive Committee shall be formed to supervise various duties. This committee will have the benefit of different voices and ideas as it addresses internal issues concerning vision and mission statements as well as drafting ideas aimed toward addressing the various issues facing the different subcommittees formed and enveloped into the Plan.
Flathead H.I.R.E. Goals and Actions Steps to Address Homelessness

**Goal 1:**
Increase shelter space and the number of beds available to accommodate all of the homeless in Flathead County

Increasing shelter space and the number of available beds will be a critical part of the Plan. Even though it seems convenient and easy to paint all homeless people with a wide brush, there are many categories of homelessness and each one requires the same basic needs to live. This sub-Committee will be tasked to work with local homeless service providers and government officials to: increase shelter space for all demographics of the homeless population, and update zoning codes to accommodate the demand for shelter space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Committee Action Steps</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elect representatives to work with Samaritan House and A Ray of Hope on expansion Projects.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and develop projects with local organizations to address all needs for emergency shelter by creating new space and thus expanding the demographics served by the shelter system.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with local government to change zoning and urban planning to accommodate more and diversified shelter space.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create collaboration between homeless service providers to reduce duplication of services and promote coordination.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an assessment tool and meet at a minimum semi-annually to assess data, progress and future development.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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Goal 2:
Efficient coordination and communication between social service providers and the community with an emphasis on a single point of entry

Having a single point of entry will be necessary to end homelessness. Many people are unintentionally left out of the process of finding housing or services because there is so much information available, but it is not in a streamlined or centralized location. In addition to further developing a ‘No Wrong Door’ system with all local service providers, an official contact person or agency dedicated to assessing the needs and then offering the proper channels for the homeless or people at risk of becoming homeless will enable people to find adequate help.

A single point of entry will help the community to avoid wasting time, finances, and resources. This sub-committee will coordinate with local service providers to establish a single point of entry and a proper discharge plan. To effectively assist as many individuals and families as possible, the sub-committee will also coordinate efforts with the outreach program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Committee Action Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach established agencies and organizations to discuss and assess a single point of entry and further develop the ‘No Wrong Door’ program.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a sustainable single point of entry approved by the Executive Committee.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordinate with local organizations to establish an integrated effort between the community and service providers for proper discharge planning.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate efforts with outreach program.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an assessment tool and meet at a minimum semi-annually to assess data, progress and future development.</td>
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## Goal 3:
**Increased preventive measures and affordable housing opportunities for people who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness**

The most cost-effective approach to ending homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. This sub-committee will research funding opportunities and work with already established programs and organizations that provide assistance in efforts to keep individuals and families housed.

Ending homelessness will be an intentional but gradual process. Providing affordable transitional and permanent housing will take a coordinated and multidimensional effort within the community. This will work best when the local, state, and federal governments commit to prevention funding. Affordable housing is the cheapest way to save the entire community money and our research supports this idea. The sub-committee will be tasked with fostering relationships with local, private business owners, landlords, government and developers that will enable the prospect of affordable housing to become a reality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Committee Action Steps</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruit members of local government, developers, landlords, and existing affordable housing properties to the Sub-Committee in an effort to explore options for increased opportunities of affordable and transitional housing.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue alternative funding sources from local, state, and federal government to support and sustain affordable housing options.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research possibilities for lobbying the Montana State Legislature to allocate funds to transitional and affordable housing.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join local effort (Neighbors in Need, etc.) and research fundraising options to increase preventive measures to homelessness.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an assessment tool and meet at a minimum semi-annually to assess data, progress and future development.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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Goal 4:
Public awareness and community involvement are paramount to remedying homelessness in Flathead County

Information and education will play a crucial role in ending homelessness. Knowing the causes and indicators of homelessness will allow us to launch a preemptive strike against it. This sub-committee will utilize its resources and facilities to host forums on homelessness and town meetings if necessary. A vocal and public face will be applied to the stereotypical and anonymous picture of homelessness that currently resides in our community.

The sub-committee will also be intentional about reaching and helping people before they become homeless. To accomplish this, the sub-committee will create an outreach program that will act as a response team to situations of homelessness. The outreach program will be proactive and operate as an immediate response to assist those that are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. To supplement the cost of the outreach program, the sub-committee will start an awareness and fundraising campaign, similar to Real Change Not Spare Change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Committee Action Steps</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement an awareness campaign about homelessness that will be distributed throughout the community and schools of Flathead County.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a volunteer-based outreach program that will educate the community and homeless population, and act as a response team to directly assist the homeless in the community by coordinating efforts with the single point(s) of entry.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement a fundraising and awareness program similar to Missoula’s Real Change Not Spare Change program, educating the community about homelessness while raising funds for the outreach program.</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an assessment tool and meet at a minimum semi-annually to assess data, progress and future development.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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Goal 5:

Continue to sustain and develop the annual Project Homeless Connect event.

Project Homeless Connect (PHC) is an annual event that is crucial in the fight against homelessness that is made possible through a collaborative effort to organize and sponsor the event. PHC raises community awareness and assists as many people as possible in a short period of time. This event has had great success in the Flathead Valley and will benefit more people each and every year.

Sustaining Project Homeless Connect will only strengthen the local movement to end homelessness and Flathead H.I.R.E. will take responsibility for ensuring the future successes of this event. This sub-committee will need a large number of members every year to support the many logistics involved in running Project Homeless Connect.
The Mission of Samaritan House is to provide shelter and the basic needs for homeless people. While fostering self-respect and human dignity, Samaritan House will encourage the residents’ efforts to find employment and housing.

Programs

Emergency Shelter: With 45-65 beds, Samaritan House served 1900 people between 2011 and 2013. In addition to providing basic needs to clients, case management works with clients to get them employed and back into housing within a 30 day length of stay, or longer if necessary for special situations.

Transitional Housing: Samaritan House has 19 transitional housing units that are subsidized, low-income temporary housing to help individuals and families transition back into permanent housing. Annually, Samaritan House has an average of approximately 90 people living in their transitional housing units with an average length of stay of 3.75 months.

Homeless Veterans Program: Special program for homeless veterans made possible through a coordinated effort between the Samaritan House and Veteran’s Affairs. Allows veterans to utilize the shelter for as long as they need to become stable and find permanent housing. With approximately 30% of the shelter being veterans, this program provides them with transportation, medical assistance, retraining and educational opportunities.

Contact Info: Address: 124 9th Ave West Kalispell, MT 59901
Phone: (406) 257-5801
Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana (CAPNM) has been helping people, improving lives and strengthening communities since 1976. CAPNM is a private, non-profit Community Action Agency with the overall mission to provide services and advocacy to improve lives and strengthen our communities. CAPNM is the largest private human-services agency in the four-county area, providing a wide variety of services to promote self-sufficiency and independence.

Housing Programs

The Emergency Solutions Grant Program provides funding that helps keep families from being evicted from rentals and becoming homeless as well as assisting shelters with maintenance and operating costs in our four county service area.

The Courtyard Apartments consists of 32 units, 16 are available to low-income individuals and families, while the other 16 units are available transitional housing for those qualifying as homeless. If accepted into a transitional housing unit, the individual or family will work closely with a case manager on self-sufficiency goals. Supportive services are available through case management depending on the individual and family needs.

The Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers allow very low-income individuals and families to choose and lease safe, decent and affordable privately-owned rental housing.

Mutual Self-Help Housing (MSH) helps low income families construct their own homes. The program is targeted to eligible families who are unable to buy clean, safe housing through conventional methods. Families perform 65% of the construction labor on each other’s homes under qualified supervision. The savings from the reduction in labor costs means that eligible families can own their own homes without a cash down payment.

Employment & Training

State Displaced Homemakers Program assists individuals who have been providing unpaid service in the home and have been dependent either on the income of another family member or public assistance. Individually designed programs stress career guidance, occupational skills training, on-the-job training and job search assistance in helping individuals to find employment and achieve economic security.

Work Readiness Component (WoRC) Program provides intensive case management focused on financial freedom and eventual independence from Public Assistance Programs through job readiness training, work experience and classes designed to address employment barriers.
Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana (continued)

Energy Programs

Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) assists eligible low income individuals and families pay a portion of their household winter energy bills. Customers may also be eligible for discounts from local utility companies based upon LIEAP eligibility.

Energy Share of Montana helps with emergency heating needs caused by situations beyond the household’s control and is used as a last resort for those ineligible for other programs through a partnership of citizens, organizations and utility companies.

Energy Conservation provides materials including window plastic, weather-strip, water heater blankets, roof patch, caulking and energy conservation informational packets to LIEAP eligible households to assist in lowering energy consumption and heating costs.

Weatherization Program helps LIEAP eligible participants to improve the overall efficiency of their homes and thus reduce household energy consumption. Homes are prioritized by annual income and energy consumption. Special consideration is given to emergencies, elderly and disabled individuals.

In-Home Services

Personal Touch Home Care is available through Medicaid or Private Pay to people who need assistance with activities of daily living. Attendants are provided for the care and homemaking needs of individuals at risk of nursing home placement. Each friendly Personal Care Attendant is educated, trained, supervised by a professional nurse and have passed a background check. Services may include transportation, exercise, meal preparation, bathing, grooming and dressing assistance, laundry, light housekeeping, etc.

Asset Development

Homebuyer Education courses are offered to give homebuyers the information they need to find, purchase and maintain a home, covering topics such as ID theft, credit, budgeting, and working with realtors, mortgage lenders, home inspectors, and title companies.

Free to Choo$e, a financial education course, offers an opportunity to learn about budgeting, banking, saving, credit cards and loans. Individuals and families who complete the class can work through a mentor program for up to a year of support and have an opportunity to access a small line of credit to assist in building or re-building credit.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) provides low-to-moderate income community residents with free tax preparation and assistance from IRS-certified volunteers from January through April 15th.

New Economy Project (NEP) provides a comprehensive, individualized planning and training program consisting of financial literacy courses, mentoring and advocacy designed to break down economic barriers.
Five Year Plan to Address Homelessness

*Flathead School Districts Responsibilities*

- Free Breakfast and Lunch
- Transportation: To and from the school of origin
- Availability to students: Clothing, hygiene products, bedding, school supplies
- Link to community resources based on situation/need
- Educational needs/referrals: tutoring, counseling, required tools, emergency/transitional living guidance, mentor/mentoring opportunities
- All School District services to be provided through the Homeless Education Liaison

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**HEART PROGRAM**

*Goal:* To provide tangible resources to families/students in crisis and or transition through confidential advocacy, and nonjudgmental support.

To serve our community through community education and outreach events, advancing the prevention and awareness/statistics of homeless students/unaccompanied youth.

**Heart Locker.** Facility to receive “donated” clothing, (shoes and boots etc), hygiene products, blankets, and school supplies that is available to the students in need at NO COST.

**Heart Fund.** Emergency funds donated for availability to address immediate needs of the students/families. (Accounting reports of this fund are available upon request.)

*All donations mailed to:*

*Heart Fund*
*School District 5*
*233 1st Ave East*
*Kalispell, Mt  59901*

*Contact: Ronda Stevens - Liaison office: 406-751-3630*

*Email: stevensr@sd5.k12.mt.us*
Mission:

The mission of VFCL is to promote safety, independence and empowerment for victims & survivors of domestic & sexual violence.

Philosophy:

VFCL believes all victims and survivors need access to information and resources and have the right to make decision in their own lives. VFCL believes our community must willingly assume a significant role in preventing and responding to domestic and sexual violence.

Goals:

To serve victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence through confidential advocacy, crisis intervention, emergency shelter, education, and nonjudgmental support.

To serve our community through community education and outreach events, advancing the prevention and awareness of domestic and sexual violence.

Contact Information:

Office: 752-4735  
Crisis Hotline: 752-7273

www.abbieshelter.org  
www.violencefreecrisisline.org

www.facebook.com/abbieshelter  
PO Box 1401, Kalispell MT 59903-1401

Our Services:

- 24-hour Crisis Hotline: The Violence Free Crisis Line
- Emergency Shelter: The Abbie Shelter
- Court Advocacy in the municipal courts of Kalispell, Whitefish, and Columbia Falls
- Safety Planning and Case Management services
- Support Groups for victims & survivors of domestic & sexual violence
- Children's Program for children who have witnessed domestic violence in their homes
- Free and subsidized counseling for victims & survivors of domestic & sexual violence
- Teen dating violence prevention education in all local schools
- Community Education and Awareness
- Information and Referrals
The Flathead Youth Home creates a safe place for boys and girls whose lives have crashed into a crisis. We provide short-term shelter care for youth in need of a safe place to stabilize a crisis, and long-term group care for youth requiring a longer stay before transitioning to an appropriate long-term placement. We are licensed to care for boys and girls between the ages of 10-18. Since 1997, FYH has been assisting children in finding security, a sense of belonging, and a place to call home.

FYH receives referrals from area youth courts, mental health facilities, and the Department of Child and Family Services. We are also able to work with unaccompanied minors who have runaway or been pushed out of their homes and need assistance in finding a safe long term home. Whether the crisis begins at home, culminates in an altercation with the law, or revolves around mental health issues, we are passionate about keeping kids in their community. We work with families, court systems, counselors and case managers to facilitate best placement options for each child.

Lance Isaak  
Program Director  
Flathead Youth Home  
825 E Oregon St.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 755.4622  
Lisaak@youthhomesmt.org

Hannah Plumb  
Development Coordinator  
Flathead Youth Home  
825 E Oregon St.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 755.4622  
Hplumb@youthhomesmt.org

Email us at:  
http://www.youthhomesmt.org
There are two great homeless shelters in the Flathead Valley, one is the Samaritan House and the other is A Ray of Hope. We have worked with the Samaritan House for years working to keep people from living on the streets. In working together we have helped many individuals regain hope for a better life.

A Ray of Hope does not take any State or Federal funding. We believe the good old Montana motto of helping others when they are out in the cold with a hand up not a hand out; all we ask of them is that they pay it forward by helping others and they work toward recovery from the things that brought them to homelessness. We know we cannot change a broken heart by unkind actions. Changing broken hearts starts with following the great command to love others. We apply this commandment within a program that helps our guests make better choices. We begin the day with a Bible study, this is the ‘happy hour’ of the day. Although the bible study is optional, we have always had a positive attendance rate. The purpose of the bible study is to share the word of God, to help individuals strive for a better life, to instill good moral values, and to cover the 12 Steps. We let people in to A Ray of Hope when they have lost their I.D.’s. Our staff uses the internet to search through each States administration to retrieve birth certificates and other information needed to get a new I.D. We get them to the SS office to get a new card, this allows the individual to get a job and earn money to rent their own place.

Often someone who wishes to stay with us will be full of body lice. A Ray of hope provides all the medicines needed to take care of destroying the lice. We give guests new clean clothes and a clean bed helping restore the individual’s self-esteem.

We work with people who have failed in other homes, even those who have been ask to leave because of drinking or using drugs. We give them more than a few chances. As an example, if a person has been drinking for twenty years, and has decided to clean up their life and if and they stay sober for a month for the first time in years, and then then drink – A Ray of Hope will give them a second chance. Often the second time they may stay sober for at least six months but eventually drink again. After all this if they come back to us, and do not lie about their drinking, they will be offered a third chance. This time we give them the choice to go to our Helmville Retreat for a year (no charge) to help them stay sober. Of the individuals who have stayed in our Helmville retreat for a year, thus far 40% are staying clean & sober and doing well. Some of these individuals have been in and out of A Ray of Hope over a five year period. But we have found it takes more than thirty days to lead an individual with a wrecked life, full of poor choices, to be set free from their bondages.

We have taken in felons, people that no one else will give chances to. We have helped them make a new life on the outside. We have given them a new start, and many of these individuals are now giving back to society, instead of being a draw on the tax base. We also work with veterans to get them help with their medical or mental health issues, (some of these wonderful servants of our country have been with us up to three years). Our goal is to get them back into the life they enjoyed, before they served to keep us living in a free land.

A Ray of Hope gives bus tickets to those individuals who have family members in other cities and states which allows them to have a safe place to stay. We pray for and with them, encouraging them to attend a Church of their choice. We have a cuss cow, which requires individuals to put a quarter in for swearing. From our experience we know that all angry outbreaks start with swearing which leads to hurting others emotionally or physically. A Ray of Hope refers individuals to many other wonderful programs in the community to help them in a hand up.

We operate Hope Thrift which provides clothes to individuals who are in need when they show up on our door step with nothing. Hope Thrift also works as the training ground for our guests. The guests who are able are required to work in thrift store a few hours a day to fulfill our mission as “A Hand Up, Not A Hand Out.” As they work for Hope Thrift we teach them job skills, which allow them to become productive, contributing members of our community once again.
Sparrows Nest Northwest Montana (formerly Flathead Valley Homeless Youth Committee) is in the early stages of organizing. Since 2013 we have:

- Formed a seven member board
- Written and prioritized goals
- Solicited and accepted donations through Flathead Youth Home
- Sought community education and input
- Explored several programs/options to provide safe shelter for homeless teens

Without a safe, warm place to sleep, their safety and health is compromised. They are at an extremely high risk of dropping out of high school and failing to reach their potential as productive, contributing community members. They fall through the cracks of Child Protective Services and other organizations providing services for the homeless. These are our modern day orphans.

Flathead Valley Homeless Youth Committee has applied to become associated with Tumbleweed, a successful program for homeless teens located in Billings, Montana. Whether we become part of Tumbleweed or not, we will pursue establishing the following for our homeless teens:

- Host homes in the Flathead Valley, including training to help the hosts
- Crisis counselors in every high school to guide and refer homeless students
- A teen shelter operated by professional s to work with homeless teens
- Outreach program to locate those in need
- Transitional housing to prepare them to live on their own
- Graduation from high school and continuing education with the support of FVCC

We are just beginning our journey and realize that all of the above is going to cost money. We’ve had a quote of $115,000 for transitional housing alone. We’ve discussed grant-writing and fund-raising and are determined that the money will not be an obstacle to helping our homeless teens. We have faith that with the help of this wonderful community, we can take care of our homeless teens. To quote Sheri Boelter, director of Tumbleweed, “We can pay to help the kids now, or pay much more much later.”

**Our mission:** To ensure shelter for homeless high school students enrolled in NW MT schools.

**Our vision:** We envision, for every homeless student in the Flathead Valley, safe, supportive housing that will provide a solid foundation which will enable these students to graduate from high school and become productive, contributing members of their community.
Flathead County

Flathead City-County
Health Department

**COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES**

- Immunizations
- Maternal and Child Services
  - Prenatal Support & Home Visiting
  - Developmental Screening
- WIC Nutrition Program
  - (for Women, Infants, and Children)
  - Breastfeeding Support
- **Prenatal Support & Home Visiting**
- **Developmental Screening**
- **WIC Nutrition Program**
  - (for Women, Infants, and Children)
  - Breastfeeding Support
- **(406) 751-8110**

**HEALTH PROMOTION**

- Free Cancer Screenings
  - Breast
  - Cervical
  - Colorectal
- Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation
- Car Seat Safety Education
- Reduced Cost Bike Helmets
- Impaired Driving Prevention
- **(406) 751-8101**

**ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

- Radon Test Kits
- Food Establishment Grading
- Mosquito Control
- Septic Reviews and Permitting
- **(406) 751-8130**

**COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**

- Primary and Dental Health Care
- HIV and STD Testing and Education
- Well Child Visits
- Family Planning
- Health Insurance Marketplace
- Enrollment Assistance
- **(406) 751-8113**

Find us on Facebook
www.flatheadhealth.org
1035 First Ave West, Kalispell
**(406) 751-8101**

Providing quality public health services to ensure the conditions for a healthy community.
Basic Needs

Abbie Shelter.................................................................752-7273 (crisis line)  
PO Box 1401, Kalispell MT 59903  
1-888-583-7654  
Violence Free Crisis Line - a hotline offering confidential crisis intervention in situations of domestic and/or sexual violence. Abbie Shelter- an emergency confidential homelike setting for women and their children to temporarily reside due to a violent incident. Other services: information/referrals to community resources, victim advocacy services, support groups, programs for children, & a violence prevention program for teens (PEACE project).

Citizen's Advocate Office ..............................................1-800-332-2272  
Capitol Station Room 232, Helena MT 59620  
Responds to questions or complaints related to state agencies.

Clinics - Free (see Shepherd's Hand Clinic)  
Coats For Kids............................................................752-1522  
8 First Street East, Suite #205, PO Box 427, Kalispell MT 59903  
Annual event providing winter outerwear to children.

Columbia Falls Community Kitchen (see Community Meals)  
Community Health Center(CHC).......................................751-8113  
Third Floor, 1035 First Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901  
Flathead City-County Health Department - Primary care clinic for medical & dental evaluation and treatment, preventive health exams for all ages on a sliding fee scale. Call for an appointment.

Community Kitchen (see Community Meals)  
Consumer Credit Counseling Service (see Rural Dynamics)  
Community Meals- Free meals for persons in need  
Columbia Falls Community Kitchen...........................892-4895, 892-5142  
1210 Ninth Street West, PO Box 2304,Columbia Falls 59912
St. Richard's Catholic Church-last 4 nights of the month, 6 pm.
Community Kitchen-Feeding the Flathead.................752-7337  
Free evening meals at 6 pm:
Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
603 South Main Street, Kalispell - first 3 Mondays  
Central Christian Church  
248 Second Avenue East, Kalispell - each Tues & Thurs. first 3 Saturdays & last Sunday of the month  
Faith Alliance Church  
348 Second Avenue West, Kalispell- last 7 days of the month  
Glacier Mountain Fellowship  
4043 Highway 93 So, Kalispell - every Wednesday
Salvation Army .............................................................257-HELP  
110 Bountiful Drive, Kalispell MT 59901  
Free breakfast and lunch Monday- Friday to those in need. No requirements. Breakfast: 7:40- 8:45am, Lunch: noon- 1:00pm. Bakery goods given away. Shower, facilities also available.
Shepherd's Hand Community Meals..............................260-3502  
Christ Lutheran Church, 5150 River Lakes Parkway, Whitefish - every Monday 5:30 pm
The Lord's Kitchen........................................................862-1653  
Whitefish Foursquare Church, 233 Kalispell Ave, Whitefish - every Wednesday 5:15 pm
Eagle Transit.................................................................758-5728  
Mailing:160 Kelly Road; Office: 1333 Willow Glen Drive, Kalispell  
Provides public city bus and specialized transportation in Flathead County. Includes fixed route, inter-city and dial a ride (curb to curb) services with discounts for people who are elderly or disabled.

Emergency Clothing and Household Vouchers..............257-HELP  
Salvation Army, 110 Bountiful Drive, Kalispell MT 59901  
Emergency vouchers to shop the Salvation Army Thrift Store.

Emergency Shelter at Samaritan House.......................257-5801  
124 Ninth Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901  
Shelter for individuals or families who are homeless.

Emergency Solutions Grant....................................752-6565  
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300, Kalispell MT 59904  
Community Action Partnership - Homeless prevention program with limited help for people in housing but in jeopardy of homelessness.

Energy Share of Montana...........................................758-5433, 1-800-344-5979  
PO Box 5959, Helena MT 59604  
A program of last resort using private donations to prevent heating emergencies for households who are experiencing an unforeseen crisis and are not eligible for other heating assistance programs.

Family Assistance Center........................................758-3100 Press 3  
Armed Forces Reserve Center, 2898 Highway 93 North, Kalispell  
Information and referral services to military families from all branches, whether active, Guard/Reserve, or retired.

FamilyWISE Prescription Discount Card Program.........752-7266  
Gateway Community Center, 1203 Highway 2 West, Kalispell MT  
United Way- Obtain a discount card for prescriptions for anyone- no eligibility, no registration, no income limit, any age, most pharmacies.

Feeding the Flathead (see Community Meals)  
Food Banks  
Provides short-term emergency food assistance to people in need.  
Bigfork.................................................................837-2297  
7545 MT Highway 35 South, Bigfork MT 59911  
Columbia Falls......................................................892-0241  
82 Railroad Street, Columbia Falls, MT 59912  
Evergreen..............................................................752-3663  
Calvary Lutheran Church, 2200 Highway 2 East Kalispell, MT  
Kalispell- Flathead Food Bank.................................752-3663  
Gateway Community Center, 1203 Highway 2 West, Suite #2  
Marion...................................................................752-3663  
Fire Dept Auxiliary Building, Gopher Lane, Marion MT  
Martin City.........................................................752-3663  
Canyon Head Start Building, 755 South Fork Road,  
Martin City MT 59926  
North Valley Food Bank-Whitefish............................862-5863  
311 East First Street, Whitefish MT 59937  
Veterans Food Pantry-Kalispell...............................756-7304  
1349 Highway 2 East, Kalispell MT 59901  
West Shore Food Pantry-Lakeside....................844-2779, 261-4560  
140 Bills Road(behind Conoco), PO Box 192, Lakeside MT 59922

Food Stamps -See SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) , the current name for Food Stamps  
Food Stamps Hotline.............................................1-800-332-2272  
SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)  
Citizens' Advocate Office in Helena MT  
Call to locate an office. They also respond to questions or complaints related to Food Stamps (SNAP).

Free To Choo$e.....................................................752-6565, 1-800-344-5979  
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300. Kalispell MT 59904  
Community Action Partnership - Financial Education classes for financial independence: budgeting, banking, saving, credit cards and loans. Families or individuals completing the class can be in a mentoring program for up to a year of support and access to a small line of credit to build a credit history. Child care, dinner and a youth class is also available at each session.

Grocery Delivery Service............................................257-6230  
Volunteers deliver grocery orders from Rosauers for people with low income and who are home-bound.

Habitat For Humanity of Flathead Valley...............257-8800  
307 First Avenue East, PO Box 2836, Kalispell MT 59903  
An Ecumenical Christian partnership to build homes for people with very low income, working families living in inadequate housing. ReStore sells surplus building supplies at up to 70% discount and is open to the public at 2610 Hwy 93 South - 752-2905.

Help Net (see United Ways 2-1-1)  
Updated April 2014
Literacy Volunteers of Flathead County..........................257-7323
1203 Highway 2 West Suite #30, PO Box 3234, Kalispell MT
Trained volunteer tutors provide free, confidential instruction for adults and families in basic literacy (reading, writing, math), English as a second language (ESL), Life Skills classes, and US citizenship. Services for people in adult & juvenile detention, special reading projects, and free books at all local food banks.

Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)..............758-5433
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300, Kalispell MT 59904
Community Action Partnership - Pays a portion of a household’s primary heating costs for eligible individuals or families with low incomes during the winter months; assistance to obtain discounts through utility companies; tips on ways to conserve energy.

Meals on Wheels.................................................................758-5710
Agency on Aging, 160 Kelly Road, Kalispell MT 59901
One hot nutritious meal per day Mon-Fri at congregate meal sites and home delivery for senior citizens. Special diets, frozen meals available.

Medicaid.................................................................751-5900
121 Financial Drive, Suite A, Kalispell MT 59901
Office of Public Assistance- Provides applications for Medicaid which pays medical bills for eligible people who have a low income.

Montana211.org (Internet access only)
A statewide online information directory linking people to local resources & services.

Montana Fair Housing...............(406) 542-2611, 1-800-929-2611
2522 South Third Street West, Missoula MT 59804

Montana Insurance Commission...............(406) 444-2040
840 Helena Avenue, Helena MT 59601 1-800-332-6148
Information on insurance regulations. Consumer protection.

Montana Legal Services Helpline........1-800-666-6899
Helpline times: Monday- Friday 7:30am- 5:15pm, Saturday 9:15am-12:45 pm. Federal and privately funded program providing free legal assistance in civil cases to people with low incomes living in Montana. Applications also on the web at www.mtlsa.org

Montana Woman's Clothes Closet.....................755-5753
1103 South Main Street, Kalispell MT 59901
Montana Woman Foundation - Gently worn donated clothing for sale at affordable prices to women starting a career, needing professional work attire. Closet is open two weekends per year.

Neighbors in Need......................752-8181, 1-800-332-8425
PO Box 8721, Kalispell MT 59903
Fund of last resort for one-time emergencies - temporary shelter, rent, utility bills, food, car repair and gasoline for people in need.

New Economy Project (NEP)..................752-6565
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300, Kalispell MT 59904
Community Action Partnership- Individualized planning, classes, & mentoring to learn how to navigate the “new economy” and make sound financial decisions.

Office of Public Assistance.................................751-5900
121 Financial Drive, Suite A, Kalispell MT 59901
State agency for applications for SNAP (Food Stamps), Medicaid, emergency aid for dependent children, and TANF cash payments.

Rural Dynamics Consumer Credit Counseling...1-877-275-2227
275 Corporate Drive, Suite 204, Kalispell MT 59901
Services and free counseling for financially distressed families/individuals to achieve financial independence. Programs include: budgeting, credit & debt management, work support benefits, bankruptcy, financial literacy education, housing, foreclosure prevention, tax prep, and financial information for small business.

Salvation Army (also see Community Meals)...........257-4357
110 Bountiful Drive, Kalispell MT 59901
Free hot meals (breakfast & lunch) Mon - Fri to those in need, shower facilities, emergency vouchers for clothing & household items, school supplies, summer lunch program for children, scouting programs for boys & girls, and summer camp. Worship services. Sunday School.
Samaritan House...............................................................257-5801
124 Ninth Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901
Emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing for individuals or families who are homeless with low or no income. Offers case management support to find employment and housing.

Seventh Day Adventist Community Service Center......257-6008
494 Ninth Avenue East North, Kalispell MT 59901
Provides clothing, bedding, kitchen ware and a limited supply of furniture in emergency crisis situations.

Shepherd's Hand Clinic ..................................................260-3502
Christ Lutheran Church, 5150 Riverlakes Parkway, Whitefish MT
Free walk-in clinic for people who are uninsured with no access to medical treatment. Open Monday evenings 6:00- 9:00pm.

Shepherd's Hand Community Meals (see Community Meals)
Shepherds Shelves Food Pantry.................................752-7021
Easthaven Baptist Church, 2010 Whitefish Stage Road, Kalispell
Emergency food on a last resort basis for people in need.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).751-5900
121 Financial Drive, Suite A, Kalispell MT 59901
Office of Public Assistance- Federal food assistance program to help families and individuals supplement their monthly food budget.

Social Security Administration............755-1015, 1-888-487-0150
275 Corporate Drive, Suite D, Kalispell MT 59901
Processes applications for Social Security retirement, disability, survivor and dependents benefits, Medicare, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program; Handles questions concerning benefit checks, Social Security numbers and Social Security cards.

St Matthew's Social Concerns.......................................752-6402
703 First Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901
Voucher program for persons needing emergency/ or temporary assistance (housing, utilities, food, clothing). By appointment.

The Lord's Kitchen (see Community Meals)

Thrift Stores
Calvary Lutheran Clothes Closet.................................752-4102
2200 US Highway 2 East, Kalispell MT 59901
Only open on Thursdays 4 -6 pm
Community Thrift..........................................................752-8105
203 Fifth Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901
Flathead Industries Thrift Stores:
Columbia Falls.......................................................892-4849
412 Nucleus Avenue, Columbia Falls MT 59912
Kalispell.........................................................755-3842
40 East Idaho, Kalispell MT 59901
Whitefish..............................................................862-5221
223 Baker Avenue, Whitefish MT 59937
Goodwill Store...............................................................758-0240
2137 Highway 2 East, Kalispell MT 59901
Habitat For Humanity Re-Store..................................752-2905
2610 Highway 93 South, Kalispell MT 59901
Surplus building supplies for sale to the public at a discount.
Hope Thrift..............................................................260-4184
105 Sixth Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901
Klothes Kloset..............................................................892-4534
286 Nucleus Avenue North, Columbia Falls MT 59912
Montana Woman's Clothes Closet.............................755-5753
1103 South Main Street, Kalispell MT 59901 (See listing) Only open two weekends per year.
New 2 You Thrift...........................................................212-6169
140 Second Avenue West, Kalispell MT 59901
Resurrected Blessings...............................................871-4950
905 West Center Street, Kalispell MT 59901
Salvation Army.........................................................257-5449
1500 Highway 93 South, Kalispell MT 59901
Second Helpings ....................................................752-7283
Gateway Community Center, 1203 Hwy 2 West, #1 Kalispell
Seventh Day Adventist Thrift Store..........................257-6008
494 Ninth Avenue East North, Kalispell MT 59901
Soroptimist Thrift Haus.............................................862-3330
303 First Street, PO Box 1843, Whitefish MT 59937
Veterans Clothing and More Store............................756-7304
1349 Highway 2 East, Kalispell MT (open to public

Transportation (see Eagle Transit)  Updated April 2014
Unemployment Insurance .....................................(406) 444-2545  
Biweekly Reporting .........................................1-800-207-0667
Helena Claims Center, PO Box 8200, Helena MT 59604
Short-term economic relief to eligible workers. On-line - ui4u.mt.gov

United Way's 2-1-1 ...........................................752-8181, 1-800-332-8425
PO Box 8181, Kalispell MT 59904
An information and referral line that links people to services, counselors and support groups.

Violence Free Crisis Line...........................752-7273 (crisis line)
PO Box 1401, Kalispell MT 59903  1-888-583-7654
A hotline offering: confidential crisis intervention, advocacy, and nonjudgmental support in situations of domestic and/or sexual violence as well as access to the temporary shelter for women & children (see Abbie Shelter) and information and referrals to community resources, victim advocacy services, support groups, programs for children, and a violence prevention program for teens (PEACE project),

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA).................752-6565
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300, Kalispell MT 59904
Community Action Partnership - IRS-certified volunteers provide free tax preparation services for community residents with low to moderate incomes from January- April 15th.

Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).................752-6565
214 Main Street, PO Box 8300 Kalispell MT 59904
Community Action Partnership - Helps people on Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIPEAP) improve the energy efficiency of their home with weatherization to reduce energy bills and emergency furnace repairs. Special consideration is given to emergencies, people who are elderly and/or are disabled. Materials such as window plastic, weather strip, water heater blankets, roof patch, caulking etc. is also available.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Nutrition Program
Flathead City-County Health Department - Supplemental nutrition and education program for women with infants and children up to age 5, nutrition information, breast feeding support, and health care referrals:
Kalispell, 1035 First Avenue West.............................751-8170
Columbia Falls, 501 Sixth Avenue West......................892-4811

Updated April 2014