

# Welcome **HOME** · BILLINGS

*Opening doors to end homelessness.*

## City of Billings Homeless Initiatives

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*Honoring the individuals, organizations and businesses  
that have worked to further the City of Billings  
homeless initiatives over the past decade.*

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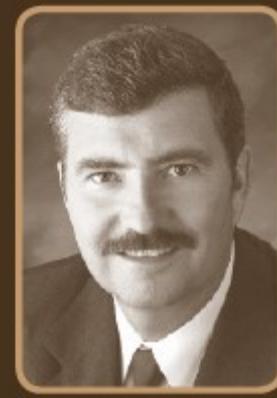


# INTRODUCTION

Together, we made a difference. Over the past ten years, Billings staff and volunteers pioneered efforts to bring about effective change in our community. Their determination resulted in an effective network of social services, community gardens, and housing opportunities for people in poverty, chronically homeless individuals and families.

The Billings homeless initiatives have garnered national recognition, awards for innovation, and calls for presentations across the country. I have immense appreciation for the local volunteers, City employees and AmeriCorps VISTA members who have worked to create a legacy for which we can all be proud.

**Thomas W. Hanel** *Mayor* City of Billings



For a decade, the volunteer members of the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness have collaborated among themselves and with the City of Billings to provide the public with information about the causes and impacts of homelessness through speaking, art and performance. They also have turned their expertise to address the underlying issues of that problem. The results have been astounding, crossing every facet, from fund-raising, to food security, to education, housing and veterans' affairs.

Much credit should go to the volunteers, the organizations that supported them, and to the City's Community Development Division, which helped coordinate activities. The relationships that have been forged among public, private and faith-based participants will carry on this important work well into the future.



**Christina F. Volek** *City Administrator* City of Billings

It has been a great honor and privilege to launch and sustain the City of Billings homeless initiatives over the past ten years. The work has etched an indelible and profound mark in my personal and professional life. For this opportunity to be of service, I am forever grateful.

Remarkable things have happened in the Billings community. Our initiatives have created new housing opportunities to end homelessness for over 100 people. Thousands have obtained life-altering services and social service providers have united in sincere collaboration.

Looking toward the future, I am confident that our amazing community will continue to rise to the challenge of serving those in need.

**Brenda Beckett** *Manager* Community Development Division, City of Billings



## *Please Note*

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This booklet illustrates a few bright stars in a tremendous constellation of projects, programs and events that have impacted homelessness in the Billings community over the past decade.

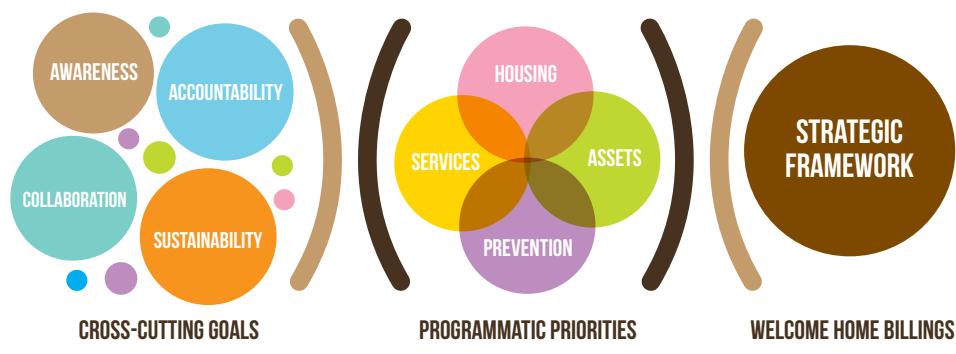
While every effort was made to review the information contained herein for accuracy and completeness, hundreds of individuals, businesses and organizations have participated in the initiatives. The accomplishments of the entire Billings community are vast and immeasurable. Please forgive any errors or omissions.

Many organizations provided services to those in need prior to the City of Billings homeless initiatives, and they will continue to do so well into the future. Please consider supporting the organizations of your choice through donation or volunteerism.

# OVERVIEW

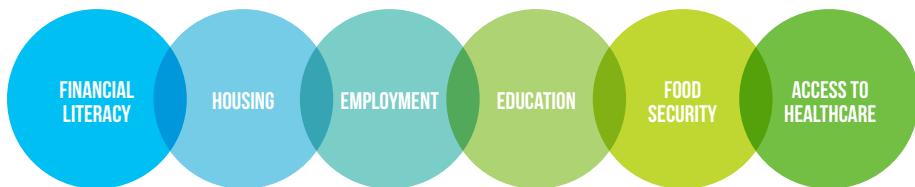
The City of Billings was chosen as a pilot project by the Montana Council on Homelessness to begin a ten-year planning process with the ultimate goal of creating a replicable plan to impact homelessness in Billings. In March 2006, the City Council adopted a resolution to create the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness. **Welcome Home Billings**, the City's ten-year plan to impact homelessness, was adopted by the City Council in October 2009.

A Strategic Framework was developed to ensure all projects undertaken as part of Welcome Home Billings were designed with cross-cutting goals in mind, including collaboration, awareness, accountability and sustainability. Programmatic priorities included: increasing the supply of decent, affordable housing; increasing personal income levels and economic opportunity; providing adequate emergency homeless prevention programs; and expanding the capacity of essential services and treatments.



The City of Billings began receiving support from the AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program in 2007 with the placement of the first VISTA member tasked with supporting the homeless initiatives. In 2009, the City of Billings became an official AmeriCorps VISTA project. The majority of initiatives undertaken by the City of Billings would not have been possible without VISTA member assistance.

As of October 2016, the **Billings Metro VISTA Project** has placed 177 members with 43 Host Sites to impact poverty and homelessness. VISTA members have raised funds, generated volunteers, and created or expanded services in the following focus areas:



To date, VISTA members have generated over \$3.5 million to support social services to impact poverty, and have spent \$1.5 million locally in rent, at markets, and for services.

The AmeriCorps VISTA program is sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. For a complete list of full-year VISTA members and Summer Associates who have served with the Billings Metro VISTA Project, please refer to page 17.

# HOMELESS INITIATIVES TIMELINE

2006 » 2016 »

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

COLLABORATION

Mayor's Committee on Homelessness, Speaker's Bureau

Billings Area Resource Network

Faith Engagement & Youth Connect

Billings Community Connect, formerly known as Project Homeless Connect

Cultural Engagement & Social Enterprise Conferences

Resource Map & Notepad

Community Innovations Summit & Initiative

AWAWARENESS

Video & Media: Mayor's Committee, Spare Change for Real Change, Outta Sight - Outta Mind, Housing Conditions, Billings' Homeless Youth, etc.

Art: Bookmark Series

Portraits of the Homeless

Box Mural Calendar, View Without a Room, Canvas Project

Performing Arts: Spare Change for Real Change Flashmob, A Heart Without, Monologues, And I Know..., Days Until Homeless Calculator

HOUSING

Housing First: Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley – Transitional Housing Project

Veterans: Volunteers of America – Independence Hall

Housing First & Social Enterprise Business: Rimrock – Enterprise House

The Billings Home Center

PROGRAMS

Education: Twelve community Host Site organizations have utilized VISTA resources to further education programs for children in the Billings community.

Events & Philanthropy: The Spare Change for Real Change program, Purple 5k and Crit events have generated funds to support 16 total organizations and community initiatives to impact poverty.

School Food Pantries & Backpack Meals Program Awareness

The Salvation Army Youth Garden -----> Rimrock Therapeutic Garden Recreation Program

Whitetail Run Community Garden – Housing Authority of Billings

Pleasantview, St. Johns, and Bucket Gardens – Housing Authority of Billings

Amend Park Community Garden

Billings Area Food Policy Council

Veteran's Garden – Volunteers of America's Independence Hall

Veteran's Resource List

Billings Blue & Childcare Scholarship Fund

FOOD SECURITY

VETERANS

*Sustainable Initiatives that are still running strong today, shown with an arrow on the end.*

# COLLABORATION

**The Mayor's Committee on Homelessness** began meeting in June 2006 to develop a ten-year plan to address the needs of the chronically homeless in Billings. The Committee was comprised of twenty individuals representing nonprofit organizations, lending, housing, social service providers, code and law enforcement, economic development, work force agencies, veterans, civic and business leaders, philanthropic organizations, academia, health care, American Indian stakeholders, and those experiencing homelessness.

Members of the Mayor's Committee formed the **Speaker's Bureau** to provide the community with a list of people who could present information relative to homelessness to the public. Hundreds of presentations have been made to increase awareness and to support the City of Billings homeless initiatives. With the most up-to-date information and statistics, this group provided clear and consistent messages about local homelessness.

**Billings Area Resource Network (BARN)** was created by City of Billings staff members in response to the many social service providers who wanted to be involved in the City's homeless initiatives. From 2006 to 2011, the BARN worked to collaborate and mobilize community resources to assist in ending homelessness in Billings. The City of Billings staff also committed a full-year VISTA member to build the BARN's capacity in 2010. After 2011, BARN participants continued to organize Billings Community Connect events with members of the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness.

## Cultural Engagement

A Roundtable Discussion, **Understanding Homelessness in the American Indian Population**, was held in February 2007. Tribal, local, state and federal leaders were brought together to make presentations, share information and obtain guidance on the development of the ten-year plan to impact homelessness. This event was the first of its kind in the nation.

A training entitled **Cultural Competency: Understanding the American Indian Perspective** was held in June 2007. Nell Eby, an enrolled member of the Assiniboine Nation, Fort Peck Tribes, provided training designed to increase cultural awareness and to enhance the delivery of quality services to the community. Nearly 80 social service providers and community members attended the four-hour session.

## Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is a business created to further a social purpose in a financially sustainable way. Many nonprofit organizations have adopted social enterprise strategies to generate stable revenues.

In 2008, City of Billings staff organized a two-day **Social Enterprise Conference** featuring Pioneer Human Services (PHS), a leading national social enterprise. The PHS business model includes the provision of housing, employment, training, treatment, counseling and corrections for people living in the margins of society. Revenues are earned through the manufacture, distribution and sale of products and through fees for services, rather than grants and donations.

The 2010 **Visionary Business Conference** featured successful businesses that were utilizing a social values business model. Speakers included entrepreneurs and business leaders from around the world.

The City of Billings provided \$300,000 in financing to support a **housing / social enterprise** project in 2010. Rimrock, formerly Rimrock Foundation, was awarded these funds and has been providing housing combined with services, vocational training and employment opportunities for chronically homeless men (see page 9).

[www.CityofBillings.net/socialenterprise](http://www.CityofBillings.net/socialenterprise)

**Billings Community Connect**, formerly Project Homeless Connect, began in 2007 and was held annually until 2015. This one-day event was recognized as a national best practice in the fight against poverty and homelessness. Over 3,100 participants received assistance in obtaining housing, employment, transportation, food, clothing, legal services and healthcare. Many of those who received services volunteered during other events after achieving stability. The City of Billings dedicated several VISTA members to build community capacity for the event from 2007 through 2010.

In 2013, a Billings Metro VISTA Project member developed a **Resource Map** and **Notepad** to create user-friendly guides to quickly connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness with local community resources including food, shelter, healthcare, and other services. A total of 31,500 maps and 1,240 notepads, each containing 25 individual tear-off sheets, have been printed to date.



[www.CityofBillings.net/resourcemap](http://www.CityofBillings.net/resourcemap)  
[www.CityofBillings.net/notepad](http://www.CityofBillings.net/notepad)

In 2014, the City of Billings began the **Faith Engagement In Homelessness** initiative to mobilize the faith communities to work together to meet the needs of those experiencing poverty. To date, four full-year Billings Metro VISTA Project members have been dedicated to furthering faith collaboration.

This highly successful initiative resulted in the first Faith Engagement Panel Discussion and Resource Fair, a Billings Youth Connect event in 2015, and an Analysis of Faith Collaboration paper. This paper summarized the results of a survey involving 78 local faith communities and their views on homelessness and collaboration. In 2016, the initiative evolved as **Faith IMPACTS Billings** and a Faith UNITY Concert was held in August 2016.



[www.CityofBillings.net/faith](http://www.CityofBillings.net/faith)

The **Community Innovations Summit** was held in October 2014 following a call to action from downtown business owners, law enforcement, the Downtown Billings Alliance, and the Downtown Billings Business Improvement District. The Summit was designed to showcase projects successfully assisting vulnerable individuals through collaborative efforts involving enforcement / government, businesses and social service providers.



Leadership from San Antonio's Haven for Hope development and San Diego's Serial Inebriate Program made presentations. Panel discussions were held and community leaders were engaged in addressing legislation, enforcement and project concepts. An addiction / mental health counselor position was created to accompany downtown bicycle police officers when engaging people living outside. The program has been very successful in getting people into treatment to aid in stabilization.

[www.4realchange.org](http://www.4realchange.org)

# CREATING AWARENESS

When the homeless initiatives began in 2006, City of Billings staff became aware of vast misconceptions about people experiencing homelessness through public posts in the media. As a result, staff designed the Illuminate Poverty project to create social and public awareness about the reality of poverty and homelessness in Billings.

## Video & Media

The following videos were created by Billings Metro VISTA Project members and they have been posted on the Welcome Home Billings YouTube Channel. The videos have been shown at various public venues, including a film series at the Billings Public Library in 2010.

- The **Mayor's Committee video** featured an introduction by the late John Hines, as interviewed by Lisa Harmon. The video provided statistics on homelessness and a review of the 2009 Billings Community Connect event, formerly known as Project Homeless Connect. This video was revised and updated in 2012.
- The **Spare Change for Real Change video** summarized an innovative program designed to provide an alternative to giving to panhandlers. The video also featured Billings' first flashmob, which spontaneously occurred during the 2009 Christmas Stroll. Over 40 dancers performed to a musical montage while participants held signs promoting awareness regarding the Spare Change for Real Change initiative.
- **Outta Sight, Outta Mind** was designed to illustrate the experience of living outside as a homeless person and also provided statistics on local homelessness. This 2010 video presented a compelling and revealing glimpse of what a person experiencing homelessness needed to consider when choosing a place to sleep.
- The **Housing Conditions in Billings video** helped shed light on the lack of decent, affordable housing available in Billings in 2010. Housing conditions were also highlighted in the video.
- The **Billings' Homeless Youth video** featured an interview with two young girls who experienced homelessness with their family in 2010. The film illuminated the experiences of homelessness through a child's eye, which was the inspiration for an expanded theatrical production, *And I Know...* (see page 8).
- The **Project Homeless Connect 2010 video** documented the fourth annual one-day, one-stop event to access services, Billings Community Connect, formerly known as Project Homeless Connect.

During the spring semester of 2012, the City of Billings partnered with Dr. Sarah Keller's Health Communications class at Montana State University-Billings to produce a **media campaign** to address the negative stigma associated with the homeless. Three public service announcements were created for the project. An original song was written and performed, homeless individuals were photographed for portraits, and print posters were also developed.

## Art

A **bookmark series** was created by a Billings Metro VISTA Project member to allow readers to visualize the gripping reality of homelessness. Scenes from everyday homeless life were illustrated and local statistics on homelessness were exemplified.



During the 2013 Billings Community Connect event, a cardboard box mural was created by event participants. The art was later reproduced on a **Box Mural Calendar** designed by a VISTA member. The calendar was sold to generate funds for the subsequent Billings Community Connect event.

[www.CityofBillings.net/poverty](http://www.CityofBillings.net/poverty)

**A View Without a Room** was a photography project organized by a Billings Metro VISTA Project member in 2014. People with experience in poverty and / or homelessness were given cameras to document scenes from everyday life. The photographs were professionally framed and exhibited at the Del Alma Gallery.



The **Canvas Art Project** showcased writing and art created by Community Crisis Center clients to illustrate homelessness and mental illness. Organized by three Billings Metro VISTA Project members, the Canvas Art Project was a focal point for the December 2015 ArtWalk and was located downtown at the Art House Cinema & Pub. Proceeds from the art sale benefited the Community Crisis Center.

## Performing Arts

The City of Billings sponsored the following projects, which were brought into fruition by members of the Billings Metro VISTA Project and local community organizations.

In 2009, Billings' first **flashmob** was held during the 2009 Christmas Stroll to highlight Spare Change for Real Change. Over 40 dancers participated in the event.

**A Heart Without** was a theatrical production that depicted the realities of poverty and homelessness and the event raised funds for Billings Community Connect. The 2010 production showcased six monologues that were based upon interviews with local adults who were experiencing homelessness. This production also generated additional monologue performances at a local high school, the Montana Thespian Festival and at the 2012 Montana Housing Partnership Conference in Billings.



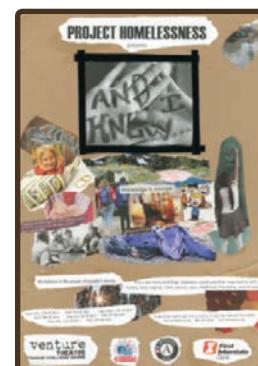
Paul Ruhter, Billings Gazette

In 2012, the City of Billings sponsored two AmeriCorps VISTA members to conduct interviews with homeless children and young adults about their challenges and triumphs. This initiative was inspired by the Billings' Homeless Youth video (see page 7).

Thirteen interviews were given to trusted local playwrights, Shad Scott and Ryan Gage, to generate a script illustrating the realities of being young and homeless in Montana. The resulting play ***And I Know...*** opened in April 2013 and ran for four weeks.

An awareness campaign, **Days Until Homelessness Calculator**, depicted how long a person could go on without becoming homeless if their income suddenly ended.

[www.CityofBillings.net/play](http://www.CityofBillings.net/play)



Written by Ryan Gage and Shad Scott  
Directed by Christie Anderson  
APRIL 19 – MAY 12, 2013  
A story of Billings' homeless youth & their experience

# HOUSING

The City of Billings has provided \$800,000 in financing to establish new housing for those experiencing homelessness in Billings. *Housing First* is a homeless assistance approach that places people in housing immediately, alleviating the stress of homelessness. Supportive services are subsequently provided as needed.

## Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley - Transitional Housing

In October 2008, the City of Billings released a Request for Proposals to develop new housing to serve those experiencing homelessness utilizing a housing first philosophy of management. A total of \$500,000 was awarded to Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley, formerly known as Interfaith Hospitality Network.

Two duplex apartment properties were acquired and rehabilitated, resulting in a total of four rental units serving homeless families. The project is located within walking distance of markets, retail stores, specialized medical services, and is situated along a public transportation bus route. Thirty-two families, equaling 97 individuals, have been assisted through this project to date.



## Rimrock - Enterprise House

In August 2010, the City of Billings released another Request for Proposals to develop a combined housing and employment project for occupancy by individuals and / or families experiencing homelessness. This type of social enterprise is considered a national best practice.

A total of \$300,000 was awarded to Rimrock, formerly Rimrock Foundation, to acquire and rehabilitate a single-family home to house up to six men who have experienced chronic homelessness.



Equipment was purchased to support overall business concepts through a composting production facility, and later a landscaping business. Twenty-five individuals have been supported through this social enterprise business and housing program.



[www.CityofBillings.net/housingfirst](http://www.CityofBillings.net/housingfirst)

The **Housing Authority of Billings** is a public non-profit organization dedicated to providing safe, decent, and affordable housing to individuals and families. Currently, the Housing Authority owns 481 housing units and manages a total of 1,164 housing vouchers, 85 of which are reserved for veterans who are experiencing homelessness. Case management services are also provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Housing Authority's Shelter Plus Care program provides housing assistance payments for up to 22 individuals or families who are homeless and disabled, primarily with serious mental illness, addiction, or other conditions. Case management is provided by the South Central Montana Regional Mental Health Center.

*Over the past decade, the Housing Authority of Billings has provided housing to an estimated 1,650 households who were experiencing homelessness.*

**Volunteers of America's Independence Hall** is a 20-bed men's facility that has been providing transitional housing and services for honorably discharged veterans since 2009. It operates 24 hours a day and includes a full kitchen, a laundry room, dining and living space, television area, computer and resource room, a conference room, and an outside area equipped with a barbecue grill and picnic table.

While residing at Independence Hall, veterans are able to continue receiving treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs and are given opportunities to participate in activities designed to help them reconnect with the community and get back to independent living.

*Independence Hall has served approximately 400 veterans since it opened in 2009.*



In 2013, the City of Billings sponsored a full-year VISTA member to assist NeighborWorks Montana to research the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive housing center to serve low income renters and homeowners. The VISTA member facilitated a working group comprised of the Billings affordable housing organizations to bring the **Home Center** into fruition.

After 18 months of planning, the Home Center opened in July 2015 and it is located in downtown Billings, central to the City's low income neighborhoods. The City provided a second, full-year VISTA member from July 2015 to 2016 to help create the Home Center's housing and education programs.

The Home Center has been providing comprehensive housing services including information on available units, fair housing information, housing education and counseling. Housing services have been coordinated under one roof, which created the opportunity for potential homebuyers and renters seeking safe, affordable homes and access all housing services in a one-stop-shop.



# EDUCATION

**The Salvation Army:** Education initiatives involving art, music and gardening programs have been fostered by VISTA members to support youth learning. One full-year VISTA member and five Summer Associates served from 2009 through 2013 at The Salvation Army; one Summer Associate served twice! Today, the instruments garnered for the music program are being utilized by Friendship House of Christian Service. Collectively, over \$84,000 was generated through VISTA efforts and 73 volunteers were recruited.

**Billings Head Start:** Five full-year VISTA members and one Summer Associate member served at Billings Head Start to enhance educational services, further develop a children's garden, and to raise funds. Over \$130,000 was raised to support education initiatives. VISTA resources were dedicated to this organization from 2010 through 2014 (see page 13 for more information).



**Billings Public Schools:** In 2011, three Summer Associate VISTA members helped over 400 disadvantaged children with their reading skills during the Summer Lunch in the Park program. That same year, a full-year VISTA member also assisted in furthering the Backpack Meals program and created a network of school-based food pantries that still exist today.



In 2015, another full-year VISTA member assisted in expanding Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education through the creation of STEM Billings events. The member raised nearly \$14,000 for the program and 89 low-income children attended STEM Billings events during the first year.

**Montana Rescue Mission:** In 2011 and 2012, five Summer Associate VISTA members provided education and enrichment services to 76 children experiencing homelessness. Over \$5,700 was generated by the VISTA members for youth services and they recruited 40 volunteers.

**Boys & Girls Club of Yellowstone County:** In 2012 and 2013, five Summer Associate VISTA members assisted in the development and facilitation of STEM learning programs. The members recruited 21 volunteers, generated over \$1,500 and facilitated learning opportunities for 161 youth.

**Venture Theatre - Youth Conservatory:** Four Summer Associate members developed and facilitated experiential summer learning programs summer reading program in 2012 and 2013. Sixteen volunteers were recruited and 264 youth received educational services to prevent summer learning loss.



**Friendship House of Christian Service:** Education, nutrition and gardening programs have been furthered through VISTA support from 2013 through 2014. Two full-year and four Summer Associate members garnered nearly \$280,000 in funds for kitchen improvements and other educational services to benefit 240 low-income children.

**Girl Scouts of Montana and Wyoming:** Six Summer Associate VISTA members provided educational programming to young women in 2013 and 2014. The members recruited and trained 16 new volunteers to promote sustainability and 342 children participated.

**Billings Public Library:** From 2014 through 2015, three full-year and six Summer Associate VISTA members worked to develop Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) learning opportunities through the Teen Education and Creation Hub (TECH) Lab and with Children's Services. A total of \$22,000 was generated by the VISTA members to support learning programs.

**Pompeys Pillar:** Historic education programs benefiting 453 low-income students have been facilitated by two full-year VISTA members and one Summer Associate member from 2014 through 2016. Over \$10,000 has been raised to date for learning programs.

**Housing Authority of Billings:** Learning and literacy initiatives have been facilitated by three full-year VISTA members and two Summer Associates from 2014 through 2016. Garden learning programs were initiated and a new program, Wild Words, was designed to foster a love of reading for students living in low-income housing. Over \$16,000 has been raised for the program and 275 youth have participated in the education curriculum to date.

**Eagle Mount:** In 2015, one Summer Associate assisted in a summer learning loss prevention program that benefited 40 children with disabilities. Nearly \$1,400 was generated to support the education program.

## Events & Philanthropy

**Spare Change for Real Change** was created in 2005 to raise awareness to the issues of poverty, panhandling, and homelessness, while offering the public an alternative when giving to at-risk individuals. The program has granted over \$50,000 to area social service providers caring for at-risk and vulnerable populations in Billings.



VISTA support was committed to the project in 2009 and by 2010, two new fundraising events were launched. The **Purple 5k** and downtown **Crit**, a closed-circuit bicycle race, have been held annually to generate grant funds for social service organizations to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

These grants have addressed gaps identified in Welcome Home Billings, the City's ten-year plan to impact homelessness, including laundry machines, accessible bathrooms, housing deposit assistance, computers to assist in finding employment, etc. The following organizations and initiatives have been awarded grants through a competitive process:

- Community Innovations
- Volunteers of America - Independence Hall
- St. Vincent de Paul Charity Office
- Montana Rescue Mission
- District 7 HRDC
- The Center for Children and Families
- Mental Health Center - The HUB
- Tumbleweed Program
- Motivated Addiction Alternative Program
- Billings Community Connect
- Housing Authority of Billings
- Friendship House of Christian Service
- Rimrock
- Community Crisis Center
- South Park Senior Citizens Center
- The Canvas Project

# FOOD SECURITY

In 2010, the City of Billings hosted two VISTA members to create a system of community gardens to alleviate food insecurity for those experiencing poverty and / or homelessness in the Billings area, particularly where food deserts exist. Several sustainable community gardens began through these efforts. Additional full-year and Summer Associate VISTA members have been dedicated to various Host Sites to further food security and community gardens to date.



A Billings Metro VISTA Project member organized the creation of six school-based **food pantries** in 2011 to provide food to young children and teenagers in need. This program has become fully self-sustaining and several additional schools have also opened pantries! The VISTA member also worked to increase awareness of the **BackPack Meals** program.

From 2011 through 2013, Rimrock sponsored a **Youth Garden** in partnership with The Salvation Army. Six Summer Associate VISTA members worked in the garden for three summers to provide educational opportunities for children. The garden has been greatly expanded to include raised beds and it currently serves as a therapeutic recreation program for people in recovery.

The Housing Authority of Billings built the **Whitetail Run Community Garden** in 2012. This 7,000 square foot garden offers 50 plots for individuals, families, children, the disabled, and community members. The **Pleasantview Garden** features 20 standing, raised beds and three ground-level gardening beds to accommodate elderly and disabled residents. The **St. Johns Garden** contains four garden beds and other housing complexes have a total of six garden boxes. Others served by the Housing Authority may also participate in a **Bucket Garden** program. The Housing Authority has hosted nine full-year and two Summer Associate VISTA members to assist in expanding food security and utilizing the garden to offer youth educational opportunities to prevent summer learning loss.



The **Amend Park Community Garden** was the first community garden in the Southwest Corridor neighborhood to be completely open to the public, regardless of gardening experience. Developed by the City of Billings - Parks & Recreation Department, this garden gives residents a chance to grow their own fresh, affordable food utilizing public land. A total of five full-year and two Summer Associate VISTA members have worked on this project from 2014 through 2016 to bring it into fruition.

Billings Head Start's **Discovery Garden** provided a fun and interesting way for students to learn about plants, nature, the environment and science. The garden was incorporated into the curriculum throughout the school year as an experiential learning program. The garden also supported a social enterprise initiative to sell produce at affordable prices through the Healthy by Design Gardener's Market. Today, produce is being sent home to families dealing with food insecurity and children are often found outside picking and eating produce on-site! A total of five full-year VISTA members served at Head Start for education programs, and one Summer Associate supported the gardening program.



The **Billings Area Food Policy Council** (BAFPC) worked from 2010 to 2015 to address issues relating to food security in Billings and neighboring communities with VISTA support. The BAFPC created a network resulting in greater communication and coordination between stakeholders to increase access to food in the community while promoting local food production.

[www.CityofBillings.net/gardens](http://www.CityofBillings.net/gardens)

The **Veteran's Garden** project started in the summer of 2011 as a collaborative effort between the Volunteers of America, the City of Billings - Community Development Division, and Billings Metro VISTA Project volunteers. In its first year, the garden generated over 800 pounds of produce and provided healthy food for veterans living at Independence Hall. Produce was also donated to economically disadvantaged seniors.

Two full-year VISTA members initiated the project and two Summer Associates expanded the garden. On September 11, 2012, substantial improvements were made to the garden as a VISTA community service project. Several other local businesses have contributed to the garden project.



## City of Billings - Veterans & Military Services

In 2013, the City of Billings began an initiative to address the needs of low-income veterans, active military members and their families. Five full-year VISTA members have been dedicated to this initiative from 2013 to 2016.

The **Veterans Resource List** was created to connect veterans to local services, including shelter, housing, food, transportation, health care, education and treatment. To date, 1,350 of the lists have been distributed to people in need.



**Billings Blue** was designed to increase services and resources for veterans, active military members and their families. Businesses and merchants have committed to offering military discounts on food, entertainment, auto repair, apparel, gym memberships, and other retail services. A list of participating merchants is available on the City of Billings website.

Billings Blue also resulted in the creation of a **Childcare Scholarship Fund** in partnership with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1634. Military families needing assistance in paying for childcare can apply directly to the VFW. Over \$1,200 was raised to help families in need.

A **Military Commissary** sale was held in April 2014 at the Billings Armed Force Guard and Reserve Center. According to the Malmstrom Air Force Base Store Director, VISTA support resulted in a 33.5% increase in sales and a 56% increase in transactions.

[www.CityofBillings.net/veterans](http://www.CityofBillings.net/veterans)

# HOMELESS INITIATIVE PARTICIPANTS

# Mayor's Committee on Homelessness

Mary Lou Affleck  
Nick Angeloff\*  
John Armstrong  
Edward H. Arnold, Jr.  
Jeanne Astle  
Adela Awner\*  
Carol Blank  
Sheri Boelter\*  
Stephan Bradley  
Lucy Brown\*  
Joseph Chalupa\*  
Patrick Chapel\*  
Ken Chase  
Paul Chinberg\*  
Don Christman  
Bill Cochran  
Claire Coleman\*  
Gene Culver  
Laura Dimmler  
Lisa Donnot  
Gary Drake\*  
Nell Eby\*  
Larry Gaalswyk\*  
Lisa Harmon\*  
Constance Heidenreich  
Dave Herbert  
John Hines  
Gary Huffmaster  
Stephanie Iron Shooter  
Steve Janich  
Gary Knopp  
Luke Kobold  
Nick Little  
Kristin Lundgren\*  
Dustin Machler  
Bruce MacIntyre  
Myrna Martinson  
Joseph McClure

\*Also participated in the Billings Area Resource Network

# Billings Area Resource Network

Dylan Adair  
Stefanie Amarson  
Sue Bailey  
Susan Barton  
Warren Beck  
Jennifer Belcher  
Becky Bey  
Janet Brierton  
Ramona Bruckner  
Dick Buckley  
Victoria Cech  
Lyla Dyer  
Marina Edgerton  
Jeremy Emerling  
Michael Erickson  
DP Ewald  
Amber Field  
Connie Fink  
Katherine Fjelstad  
Ellen Gartner  
Carmen Gonzales  
Connie Halvorsen  
Kathleen Hanley  
DeeAnn Hartman  
Randy Heinz  
Jennifer Henman  
Mary Hernandez  
Dee Holley  
Donna Huston  
Major Kevin Jackson  
Theresa Kauffmann  
Tess Keck  
John Keebler  
Lori Kelim  
Tiffany Kelker  
Kathy Kramer  
Tasha LeClair  
Jack Leuchtmann  
Coleen Lind  
Mark Maher  
Pam Makara  
Stefanie Marson  
Harry Merchant  
Cindy Millard  
Patti Miller-Webster  
Kelly Mortensen  
MarCee Neary  
Kim Nussbaum  
Wes Nussbaum  
Cheryl Nystrom  
Gayle Ottman  
Marian Pappan  
Gwynn Pederson  
Melissa Reams

Johnnie McClusky  
Sandra McKee  
Tracy McLuskie  
Billie Parrott  
Barb Perzinski  
Jim Peters  
Linda Price  
Perry Roberts\*  
Sue Runkle\*  
Richard Schilf  
Denise Smith  
Leonard Smith  
Timothy Smith  
Judy Stewart\*  
Mona Sumner  
Randall Swenson  
Jacquelyn Wagner  
Kathryn Waitman  
Danielle Wang

# Billings Metro VISTA Project - Host Sites

Big Brothers / Big Sisters of Yellowstone County  
Billings Area Resource Network  
Billings Head Start  
Billings Public Schools - District 2  
• Summer Lunch & Backpack Meals  
• Summer Reading in the Parks  
Boys & Girls Club of Yellowstone County  
CASA of Yellowstone County  
The Center for Children & Families  
Community Housing Resource Board  
Crow Tribe Veteran Affairs  
District 7 HRDC  
Downtown Billings Alliance  
Dress for Success  
Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley  
Family Service, Inc.  
Family Support Network  
Friendship House of Christian Service  
Friends of Pompey's Pillar  
Girl Scouts of Montana & Wyoming  
Habitat for Humanity Mid-Yellowstone Valley  
HAVEN

Housing Authority of Billings  
Mental Health Center - The HUB  
Montana Health Care Foundation  
Montana Rescue Mission  
• Women & Family Shelter  
NAMI Billings  
NeighborWorks Montana - Home Center  
Rebuilding Together - Yellowstone County  
Red Lodge Area Community Foundation  
Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council  
Second Chance Homes  
Self Help Law Center  
State of Montana - Youth Court Services  
The Salvation Army  
Tumbleweed Program, Inc.  
United Way of Yellowstone County  
Volunteers of America - Independence Hall  
Venture Theatre - Youth Conservatory  
Veterans Treatment Court  
Wise Wonders Children's Museum  
YWCA Billings

# City of Billings Initiatives

- Food Security & Community Gardens
- Illuminate Poverty
- Faith Engagement in Homelessness
- Services for Veterans, Active Military Members & Families
- Parks and Recreation - Community Gardens
- Planning Division - Access to Education via Trails
- Police Department - Volunteers



# BILLINGS METRO VISTA PROJECT MEMBERS

\*Summer Associate VISTA Members are italicized.

★ Members who worked exclusively with Veterans / Military Service members.



# RESOURCES

## *Data & Reports*

The following reports and data were authored by City of Billings staff and Billings Metro VISTA Project members. Access reports online at [www.CityofBillings.net/homeless](http://www.CityofBillings.net/homeless).

**Data Workbook:** Statistical information on the demographics of those experiencing homelessness in Billings from 2005 through 2008. An addendum survey was also conducted in 2007, which included key cost estimates and housing choice. This data was utilized in the assessments featured in Welcome Home Billings, the City's ten-year plan to impact homelessness.

**The State of Homelessness in Billings - 2012:** A review of the conditions and risk factors for those experiencing homelessness. The study identified over 600 people experiencing homelessness and nearly 125 individuals who were at-risk of homelessness.

**Billings Housing Status Survey Results - 2013:** A report on the annual point-in-time count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals living in Billings. This study identified historical trends in chronic homelessness in Billings in addition to other demographic data.

**Youth Count! 2013:** The City of Billings sponsored this effort to prepare and facilitate a survey process to assess the number and demographics of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in the area. Two full-year VISTA members and one Summer Associate were hosted by the Tumbleweed Program to prepare and facilitate one of the first Youth Count! surveys in the nation. Youth Count! was the impetus behind the Youth Mechanics Education Employment Training (MEET) event held in June 2014, which connected youth to employers and educational opportunities. Youth MEET was the first event of its kind in the region, followed by Billings Youth Connect, which was held in June 2015. [www.CityofBillings.net/youthcount](http://www.CityofBillings.net/youthcount)

**Analysis of Faith Collaboration - 2014:** A study conducted to determine the willingness of faith leaders to collaborate with one another to serve those in need. Nearly 80 faith communities participated in the survey.

**Study of Perceptions in Homelessness - 2014:** This study was conducted to garner insights on the misconceptions and beliefs relative to the homeless in Billings.

## *In Memoriam*

**John Hines** served on the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness from 2007 to 2012. While he experienced homelessness for many years, John later secured housing, reconnected with his family, traveled the world, and found love. He was a fantastic advisor, honored colleague, and a trusted friend.

John said, "A homeless person needs self-confidence, a feeling of being respected as an individual, a great deal of encouragement and...the basic, simple things in life; food, shelter, clothing, medicine." He also had these words for others experiencing homelessness,

*"Find something that you really want to do, and go for it. STAND on it."*

**Jeffrey Knudson** was a local eighth grade student who volunteered for the homeless survey and Project Homeless Connect in January 2009. Shortly after, Jeffrey unexpectedly passed away. As Jeffrey was greatly influenced by his volunteer service, memorial donations were directed to a local nonprofit organization serving the homeless. Jeffrey's immediate and extended family members have continued to support nonprofit organizations to further this amazing young man's legacy and impact on homelessness.

## *Contact*

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# Welcome HOME BILLINGS

*Opening doors to end homelessness.*

*for more information contact*

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