

Success Stories from the Montana Disability and Health Program

Promoting Inclusive Healthy Communities in Montana

Public Health Issue

People with disabilities compose about 20% of the U.S. population but often are left out of community planning efforts. As communities organize to ‘...build active community initiatives’, persons with disabilities have significant roles in realizing a healthy community for all its members regardless of ability.

Program Overview

The Montana Disability and Health (MTDH) Program recruits, trains and supports Disability Advisors who provide technical assistance and infuse disability inclusion and wellness goals in public health planning at state and local levels. The Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity (NAPA) Program’s *Building Active Communities Initiative* (BACI) is a project of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services in cooperation with Montana State University’s Office of Rural Health. With in-depth, interactive training, mentoring and ongoing technical assistance, NAPA’s Building Active Communities Initiative supports community-led approaches to develop active and healthy communities. MTDH Disability Advisors are involved in BACI planning and implementation in communities across Montana and are supported with data and resources (e.g., Montana BACI *Disabilities Resources & Information*, available at:

<http://www.umt.edu/sell/cps/baci/Disabilities%20Resources%20.php>).

Making a Difference

Active community policy resolutions have been adopted in eleven Montana cities, towns and counties to date. Examples of inclusive planning language in those policies include “accessible streets”, “safe and accessible routes”, “meet the needs of all users and abilities”, and “universal access to transit systems”. Community BACI Teams reported that a Disability Advisor testimony directed them to be more thoughtful about the inclusion of community members with disabilities in active communities work.

Dawson County is a rural county with a growing population that has nearly doubled the state rate in the past few years due to the oil boom in eastern Montana and North Dakota. In 2013, Dawson County sent a multi-sector leadership team representing the county and the city of Glendive to the first Montana BACI Action Institute. Soon after attending the Action Institute the Building Active Glendive (BAG) coalition was formed and currently has close to a dozen community leaders including the Mayor of Glendive, a county commissioner, the health department, Rotarians, planners and engineers as well as active community volunteers. Dawson County adopted a Complete Streets Policy in October 2014 that received national recognition, a third ranking among all complete streets policies passed nationwide in 2014. The City unanimously passed the “*Safe and Accessible Streets*” Policy for the City of Glendive in April 2015.

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“In older American towns, like Glendive, it’s important to realize that accessibility is needed and can continually be improved for a whole and healthy community.”

~ Kathie Bach, Glendive resident & MTDH Disability Advisor since 2003.

