

Dear Community Leader,

As a mental health professional in the town of Ennis, I am reaching out to advocate for a Community Center in the Madison Valley. The Madison Valley Community Center will address the needs identified in the Madison County Health Needs Assessment (Madison Valley Medical Center & Montana Office of Rural Health, 2020) such as substance/alcohol abuse, mental health issues, obesity, heart disease, depression/anxiety, work/economic stress, social isolation/loneliness, lack of exercise, domestic violence, child abuse/neglect, hunger, and suicide. This community center will provide supportive services for all of our residents including our most vulnerable populations, children/adolescents, families, and individuals struggling with addiction, mental health, and physical health issues. The community center will provide an essential touchstone for members of the greater Ennis community to come together and continue building the important social fabric of our area.

The services provided by the Madison Valley Community Center should include the following:

- Event Space: community rental income from events (i.e. graduation parties, wedding rehearsals, Holiday parties, fundraisers...) can help offset costs of operation.
- Drop-in Daycare: also helps offset cost of operation. (Children's Relief Nursery)
- Co-Working Spaces: shared office space for community rental (community-building and economic benefits)
- Recreation/Fitness
 - Fitness equipment
 - Community fitness classes
 - Sport Court
 - Pool?
- Community resources for families
 - Child Advocacy Resource Center
 - WIC office
 - Food security support (food bank?)
 - Breastfeeding support
 - Teen Center
- Educational community programming/classes
 - Adult education courses
 - Science/Outdoor (Jack Creek Preserve)
- Mental Health Services
 - Support Groups (addictions, parenting, teens, grief/loss...)
 - Crisis Care (volunteer crisis support team)
 - Direct services (child, adolescent, family, and individual case management and mental health therapy services)
- Montana State University Extension Center
 - Human Development Clinic extension?
 - Graduate-level counseling interns and student counselor education

The Madison Valley Community Center should address the social issues and needs identified in the Madison County Health Needs Assessment from a framework of prevention and by providing easy, localized access to community services. This means implementing evidence-based practices, community programming, supportive services, and much needed community resources in a "one stop shop," improving accessibility and the utilization of services. The preventive framework requires that we address

the barriers to utilization of (physical and mental) health care and resources in our community such as accessibility, cost, and proximity.

Research supports that preventive services such as: skill building, strengthening families, access to physical fitness and mental health services, building resilience, early intervention, and reducing children's exposure to violent or harmful events will positively impact the health of our community residents (Bellis, et. al., 2017; Mohammad, et al, 2015; Srebnik, et. al., 2015; States News Service, 2020; Story, et. al., 2016; Tomlinson, et al., 2017; Trudeau, et. al., 2016; Vella, et. al., 2018). For example, "Children's Relief Nurseries" (CRNs) have many benefits for the community and are billable to Medicaid. CRNs reduce risk factors associated with child maltreatment, improve family stability/functioning, improve successful parenting, improve child literacy, decrease emergency room visits, increase family employment/income, support positive child development and wellbeing, improve health-care linkages, and decrease overall family risk (Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, 2012; Evaluation of Oregon's Relief Nursery Program, 2009).

By initiating a collaborative partnership between the Town of Ennis, Madison County, the Madison Valley Medical Center, Ennis Schools, Montana State University, and local health professionals we will be able to provide our community with the resources that may prevent domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and other poor mental and physical health outcomes identified in the Needs Assessment.

If you are receiving this letter, you are also committed to the betterment of our rural community through the creation of supportive services and resources for our geographically isolated residents. By providing an indoor recreation space for winter activities, access to community resources, and a caring supportive environment, we will be able to increase community connection, engagement, and improve the overall health of the residents in our beautiful Valley.

I am asking that you support this project through advocacy, fundraising, community programming, or by serving on our Steering Committee. Our first meeting is scheduled for **Monday January 11th at 3pm** when we will create a detailed plan outlining the steps necessary to make this vision a reality. Please respond by January 1st, 2021 if you plan to attend or would like to be involved in another capacity. Together we must address the barriers to resources and support in our community so that we can reduce domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and other health and social problems. We need to focus our efforts on prevention and accessibility through providing affordable, convenient, localized, and effective evidence-based resources to the community. A community center will strengthen the social fabric of our community, individuals, and families.

Please join me in creating something great for the Madison Valley!

Sincerely,

Lindsay DeGroot, MEd, LSC, LCPC

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