

FAMILY PROMISE OF GREATER HELENA EXPANDS TO TOWNSEND, BROADWATER COUNTY

HELENA, MT—Family Promise of Greater Helena is expanding its services to Townsend and Broadwater County to address challenges faced by at-risk families and children. The expansion is being funded through a grant from the Gianforte Family Foundation and the national Family Promise organization.

Family Promise helps homeless families through temporary shelter, food, and essential services. Its Homelessness Prevention and Diversion program, initiated in Helena in 2021, identifies and stabilizes at-risk families before they become homeless, thus mitigating problems at the outset, according to Executive Director Renee Bauer.

A lack of affordable homes has forced more people to seek housing outside of Helena and Bozeman, creating strain on Broadwater County, Bauer says. “Townsend doesn’t currently have a problem with homelessness, but it does have a vulnerable population.” Low wages, rising costs, and few employment opportunities in Broadwater County create challenges for residents, she says.

The new Family Promise program in Townsend, led by Leslie Heisey, will focus on prevention. Heisey, from Radersburg, is meeting with area schools, social service organizations, churches, and others to assess needs of at-risk families. She also works with the Broadwater County Development Corporation, serving on the Housing and Planning focus group for the BCDC Community Review.

“Our goal,” says Heisey, “is to keep Broadwater County families in Broadwater County and give children stability at home and school.”

According to Bauer, Helena’s homeless population doubled from January 2020 to January 2021, and, “We have seen a frightening increase in people with substance abuse and mental health issues the past 12 months.”

The population of Broadwater County grew more than 20 percent from 2010 to 2020, according to the U.S. Decennial Census. “However, you do not see homeless people in Townsend,” Bauer says, because they must seek help through agencies, such as unemployment offices and social service organizations, in larger towns.

Heisey works with Broadwater County residents from an office at the Townsend United Methodist Church at 200 N. Cedar Street. Screenings and additional services are provided through Family Promise’s Helena office.

Bauer says, “We have the ability to design programming that’s community driven. Prior to this expansion, families needing emergency shelter had to travel 50 miles to Helena or 80 miles to Bozeman. We are now able to keep them in the community, thus providing stability from schools and friends and family nearby.”

Family Promise welcomes community volunteers, donors, and supporters. For more information or to donate, call 406-465-9467 or visit <https://www.familypromisehelena.org>.

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