



ANNUAL REPORT

FY2021



Helping People Live Independent Lives

Our Board Chair's Statement -	3
We Are AWARE -	4
Impact -	5
Overcoming -	6
Leadership -	7
Highlight -	8
Early Childhood -	9
Residential -	10
Community Care & Treatment -	12
Looking Forward -	15
Executive Summary -	16



OUR BOARD CHAIR'S STATEMENT



AWARE

Dear Stakeholder,

On behalf of AWARE, it is my pleasure to submit this report, covering July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021.

Reflecting on the last year, the board of directors has immense pride in our team and this organization. Despite the challenges we have faced due to the pandemic and the workforce shortage crisis, we remain steadfast in the commitment to our mission – helping people live independent lives.

At AWARE, we are guided by our Unconditional Care Principles. These principles inspire the services we provide to each person who comes to us for care. It is because of these principles that we are navigating and overcoming the challenges presented to us every day. Perhaps the most relevant guiding principle at this time is 'It takes a team.'

The team we have at AWARE is nothing short of extraordinary. With nearly 800 people working across the state of Montana providing critical services, we are very proud to say we serve Montanans in all 56 counties. Indeed, we are actively working to grow our team to serve even more Montanans at a time when they need it the most. The people on our team are resilient, dedicated and the foundation of our organization. The board of directors sincerely believes we have the best professional caregiving team in Montana, and we are grateful for the care they provide.

Our organization was founded on the belief that we can overcome obstacles. In fact, another one of our guiding principles is we take on and stick with the hardest challenges. As you'll see in the enclosed report, we are not immune to challenges and difficult decisions; however, we remain grounded in our focus on how to move our organization into the future with thoughtful and innovative ideas. Our strategic plan provides us an excellent path forward to ensure we live our Mission every day.

Looking toward the future, the board of directors is confident we have the right people on our team to continue to help people live independent lives. Thank you for your support of AWARE this past year, and we look forward to our continued work together in the months and years to come.

Sincerely,
Jesse Laslovich
Board Chair

At AWARE, we are guided by our Unconditional Care Principles... Perhaps the most relevant guiding principle at this time is 'It takes a team.'





At AWARE, we believe the people we are honored to serve deserve the highest quality individualized support. Often those we care for are disadvantaged – they may be infants, children, teens, adults, or people with mental illness or developmental disabilities.

It's AWARE's goal to support them with appropriate services while fostering and advocating for the inclusion, acknowledgment and respect everyone deserves. We want them to become a meaningful part of their community.

Left, Charity Symonds, AWARE Employee of the Year.

**We serve adults,
youth and their
families**

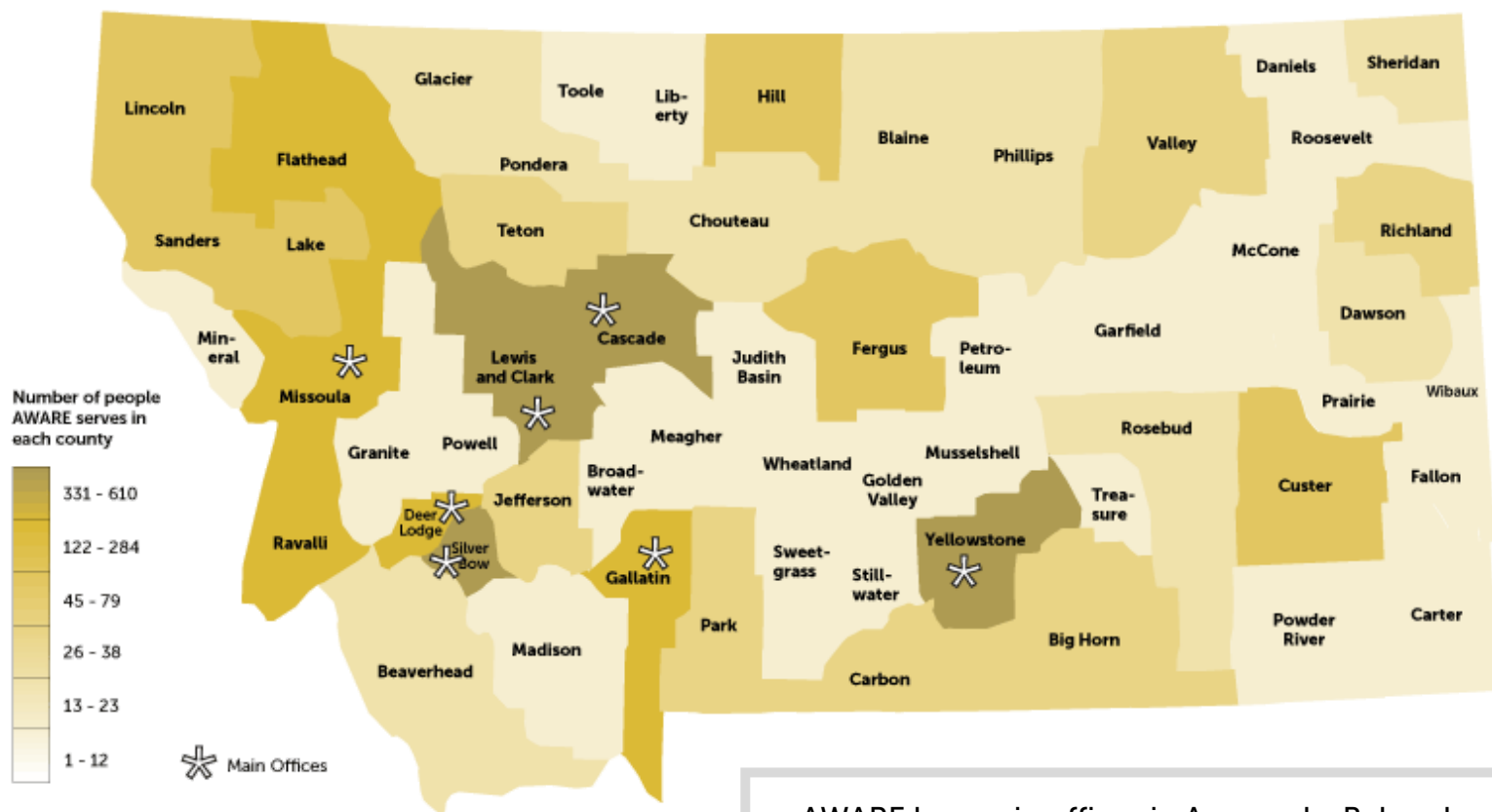


We've been doing this a long time

AWARE was founded in 1974 by a group of parents in Anaconda, Montana, who were sitting around a dining room table developing employment opportunities for their children with disabilities (right, Steve and Derrick are two people AWARE helped find meaningful employment this year). Since then, that single program has evolved into an organization, which now provides a full spectrum of services reaching every corner of our great state.



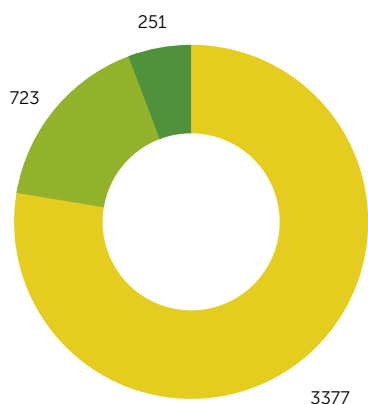
We serve people in all 56 counties



AWARE has main offices in Anaconda, Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena, Great Falls and Missoula.

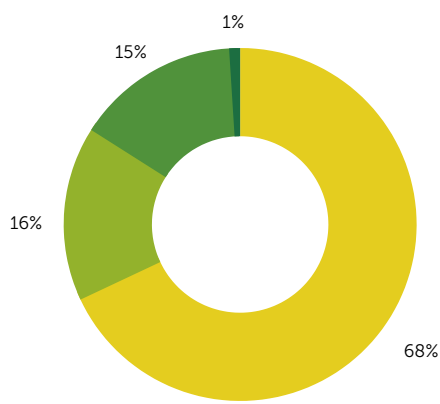
AWARE provided services to 4,351 people in FY 2021

People Served



Community Care & Treatment
Residential
Early Childhood

Age



Age 0-12
Age 13-18
Age 19-64
Age 65+

AWARE served **596** youth with severe emotional disturbances in **31** schools, **8** communities and **47** different teams.

AWARE served **235** families in **31** classrooms at **10** sites in **7** Early Head Start communities.

PACT served **78** people in FY21, and **96%** have housing.

94% people receiving PACT participated in community activities.



AWARE'S Healthcare Heroes making a difference every single day

During the last year, we've faced difficult circumstances and have been pushed into the unknown. Every day our organization leans into challenges that we never knew existed, and every day we find success. We're doing great things – we're helping people live independent lives – and it's remarkable to see the Healthcare Heroes of this era awaken and find their potential.

Inspired by the AWARE team, we began highlighting employees each month who have gone above and beyond in their duties. They have risen to the challenge, and they continue to serve our mission despite everything this past year has thrown at us.



Marie Kidd
PACT Clinician



Adam Pehl
Program Manager



Mindy Hayes
Clinical Program Director



Jessica Klapan
Nurse Coordinator



Selena Hallfrisch
Case Manager

AWARE has not been immune to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic

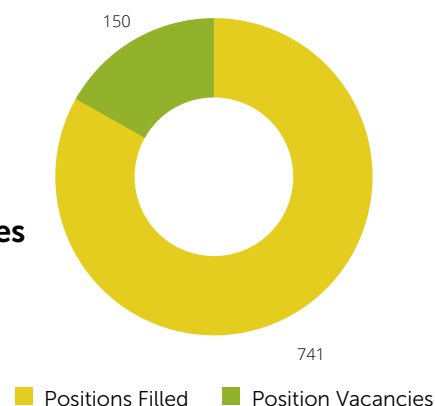
The pandemic has forced closures and quarantines, and limited face-to-face interaction. It has caused increased mental health conditions and needs in our communities.



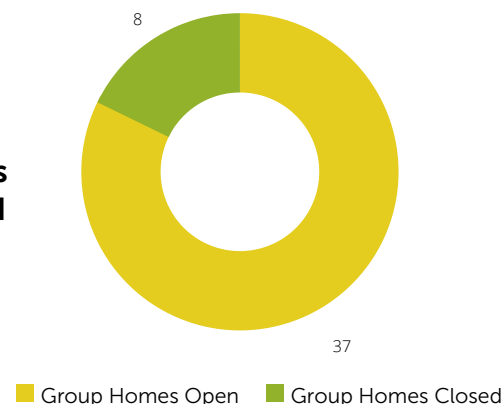
The effects of the pandemic in Montana have been magnified by the influx of people to our state, driving up housing and other costs of living. Combined with the "Great Resignation," also known as an immense workforce shortage, a domino effect has occurred.

AWARE has been forced to make difficult decisions due to the workforce crisis. In 2021, AWARE closed 8 residential homes. AWARE is prepared to re-open homes as staffing allows.

Average Position Vacancies



Group Homes Closed





Pictured above, during Corporate Congress in June, members of our leadership team also met in Helena, Montana, for training and to review AWARE's strategic plan for the upcoming years.

In **2021**, we welcomed **9** new people to the leadership team as part of the strategic plan.

AWARE brings Corporate Congress back

After a brief hiatus, Corporate Congress returned in full fashion in June 2021 at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena, Montana. Delegates arrived with more than 30 bills geared toward improving AWARE's services.

AWARE's Corporate Congress is a unique and integral part of AWARE's strategic planning process. It's designed to solicit and use input from stakeholders, staff, management and the people we serve. The process helps with overall management of the organization and enlists the help of delegates representing each of AWARE's services and communities.

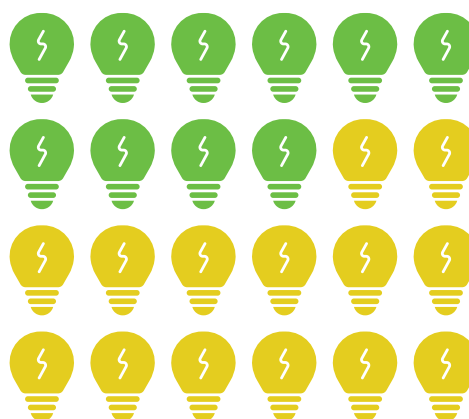


2021 Corporate Congress Delegates

Best Day Ever...

The "Best Day Ever" was passed as a Corporate Congress bill in June. Our direct care employees recognized that the people in our care deserve the same amazing experiences as others during the holidays, birthdays and other special times of the year. So, the Best Day Ever campaign was created to honor those special moments.

Progress continues on Corporate Congress bills



Delegates started with **30** bills and passed **24**. Currently, **10** bills are marked complete while **14** bills are in progress.

■ Complete ■ In Progress

AWARE awarded grant to start new Early Head Start classroom in Billings

In January, it was announced that AWARE received an Innovation Grant through the Center for Children, Families, and Workforce Development at the University of Montana, in partnership with the Montana Children's Mental Health Bureau. The \$111,000 in grant funding supports enhancing family engagement through Early Childhood Services.

The AWARE Early Childhood Services team will put this grant to work with a goal of developing a support system for families that increases their engagement through parenting skills and resilience training. The program focuses on preventing maltreatment and neglect and increasing success for reunification and long-term family well-being.



In the first half of 2021, AWARE launched efforts to help the workforce crisis:

AWARE increased its sign-on bonus from **\$250** to **\$1,000** in an effort to recruit and fill open positions across the state.

AWARE implemented a **\$1,000** referral bonus. Current employees may earn up to **\$10,000** per calendar year in referral bonuses.

AWARE clients experience equine therapy



Despite the pandemic and thanks to dedicated team members, AWARE was able to pilot a new opportunity for some youth in its care. Summertime in Montana opens up many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. This summer, the kids we serve got out to enjoy activities like bike riding, swimming, fishing, hiking, playing in the park, and gardening.

Special horseback riding lessons were also part of the summer schedule – a therapy the kids did not realize they were receiving.

AWARE Therapist Lisa Pesanti (pictured left) was instrumental in scheduling riding lessons for the kids. As an equine therapist for the last eight years (she has been a therapist for 15 years), she can attest to the positive outcomes. AWARE looks forward to implementing more opportunities like this in the future.



We give kids the best start to a great life!

AWARE offers early childhood services to families and prenatal children through age five. Our early childhood services are available to families of all socio-economic status. Children of all abilities are welcome. Our programs includes Early Head Start (EHS) and behavioral health services. They are offered in Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena and Whitehall.

2020-2021 HIGHLIGHTS

- AWARE continued services during the pandemic, including classroom activities, support group opportunities, community resources and crisis response.
- Families received virtual telehealth education opportunities to increase their knowledge while empowering them to make appropriate family decisions.
- AWARE partnered with Home Front in Billings and the Helena Housing Authority to provide EHS services on-site in the housing complexes.

Opportunities impacting EHS Families

- Services to children in foster care
- Access to childcare
- Food security
- Access to community resources
- Substance use prevention & treatment

AWARE Early Head Start provides services in **5** communities, including **4** childcare partners.

28,652 Child and Adult Care Food Program meals were served.

Parents and children received **328** hours of telehealth through early childhood services.

Mental health services were provided to **68** families.

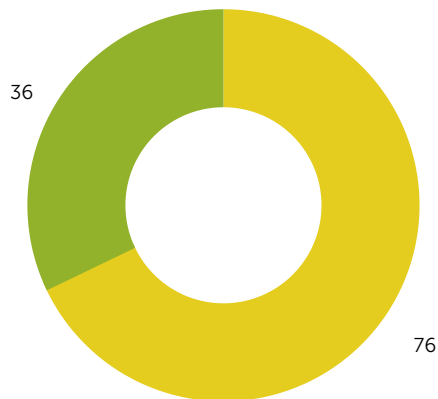
Research-based parenting curriculum was provided to **100** families.

100% of EHS children are up-to-date on immunizations.



AWARE welcomed 167 people to live in our homes in FY 2021

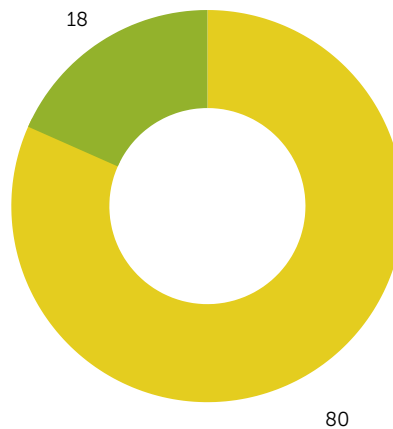
Mental Health Homes



Total Beds Available: 112

- Beds Filled
- Vacant Beds

DD Homes



Total Beds Available: 98

- Beds Filled
- Vacant Beds

Pictured above, people who live in our homes often enjoy fun activities like Pi Day, on March 4.

The data shown in the charts to the left is accurate as of December 15, 2021.

Vacant bed numbers include bed numbers from homes that have been closed due to the workforce crisis.



My life on a farm

By Troy M.

Mallard Court is on 10 acres out in the country near Missoula. We have five hens and one rooster. We got the chickens when they were babies. When chickens are little, they need to be fed twice a day. Once they get bigger, you only need to feed them once a day. I clean out the chicken coop once a week.

We also have a garden that I and the staff, George, built. We have corn, sunflowers, tomatoes, cucumbers, mint, sage and strawberries. I have already picked over a dozen small tomatoes. I pull the weeds in the garden three times a week. I water the garden and the field every day. We found some free ceramic chickens and put them in the garden to help keep the gophers out!

We promise to provide the best care possible

AWARE offers residential services for adults and youth. We provide care in more than 40 homes across Montana. Homes are located in Anaconda, Billings, Butte, Great Falls and Missoula. Each home offers a specialized service to support people with autism, developmental and mental disabilities, and special medical needs.

STANDING STRONG

We believed we were strong before the pandemic and now we know our roots are well planted. Care for our residents took on new meaning as staff stepped up to weather quarantines and health scares.

In addition to the unique challenges of the year, state rule changes brought new requirements to both adult and youth mental health residences. AWARE was prepared before the changes took effect to transition and support best practices, implementing additional evidence-based practices, trauma-informed agency policies, and after-care services for foster youth.

0% | Residential clients referred out-of-state by AWARE

91% | Clients/stakeholders are happy with their care

According to satisfaction surveys, the stakeholders and clients we serve under our developmental disabilities services are happy with the services they receive. This is good news because of the huge adjustments both staff and clients had to make during pandemic times.



Family finds support and success by using ABA

Six-year-old, turning seven soon, Marky (pictured left) began working with AWARE BCBA's and RBTs in early 2021.

Mom Brittany Lindgrin said she learned about AWARE's ABA program through the special education department.

Since that time, an AWARE BCBA has performed the appropriate assessments to help the family come up with a plan to support Marky learn and grow. Marky and his mom meet with a BCBA or RBT one to two times per week.

"ABA is definitely something someone should follow through with," Brittany said. "It's a great service."

We help people live independent lives

AWARE is a leader in Community Care & Treatment in Montana. AWARE's services include statewide targeted case management for people with mental health and developmental disabilities, PACT team services, school-based care and psychiatry. AWARE provided care for more than 3,800 adults and children in FY21 through support at home, school and in various community settings.

ABA HIGHLIGHT

This year, ABA needs its own highlight. AWARE's commitment to evidence-based practice and interventions that truly improve an individual or family's quality of life grew even further this year with the development of a service line dedicated to ABA services.

AWARE currently employs five Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA), three Registered Behavior Therapists (RBT) and has five in training to test to become RBTs, providing ABA in homes, schools, and communities.

In addition, AWARE became the first provider of Behavior Risk Services. A specialized service to help the highest-risk individuals remain in their community. This service requires the use of RBTs as staff and oversight of all programming by a BCBA.

AWARE provides ABA services to **28** clients in Billings, Bozeman and surrounding areas.

AWARE ABA provides services to **42** people living in group homes in Anaconda, Billings, Butte, Great Falls and Missoula.

AWARE employs **5** BCBA's, **3** certified RBTs and **5** staff are currently in training to become an RBT.

COMMUNITY CARE & TREATMENT, CONTINUED



Montana man finds success and support in AWARE's PACT program

Myron (left) has worked with AWARE since 2002 receiving case management services. But for the last few years, he's taken part in the PACT program in Helena to receive community-living support.

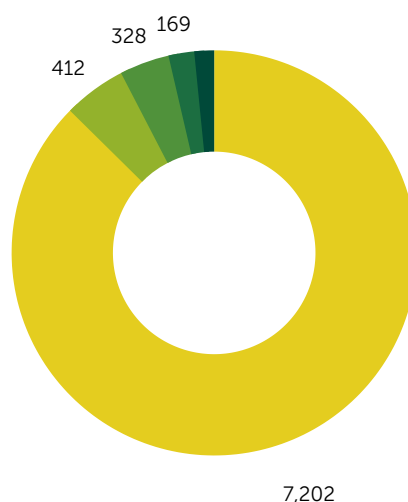
Once a week, a PACT team member goes to Myron's house to assist him with things like reading mail, writing checks, paying bills, and organizing his medications.

"I don't know where I'd be without AWARE's help," Myron said.

We provided telehealth to 829 people in FY21

AWARE provided **8,251** hours of telehealth in FY21 through our CSCT, Early Childhood, PACT, Psychiatry and Youth Case Management services.

AWARE used Skype, Zoom and other approved telehealth services **9,779** times during FY21.



AWARE was an early technology adopter in 1995, which successfully supported the telehealth trend during the pandemic, positioning AWARE ahead of the curve.

Telehealth hours per service

- CSCT - 7,202
- Psychiatry - 412
- Early Childhood Services - 328
- Youth Case Management - 169
- PACT - 130

88% | Clients/stakeholders report that staff are dependable and reliable

According to satisfaction surveys, the people we serve under our Community Care & Treatment services responded that they trust AWARE staff because they are dependable and reliable. We have to admit, we are grateful for our staff and think they are the best around.

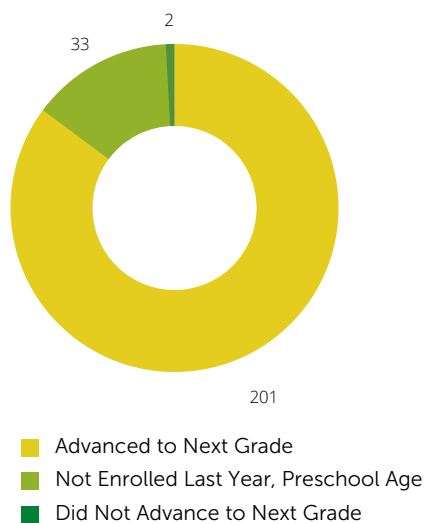
84% | Families/stakeholders are happy with school services

According to satisfaction surveys, families/stakeholders of our CSCT program are happy with the services they receive in their schools. We think that speaks volumes during a time when CSCT was revamped across the state. We're huge supporters of keeping kids in school and out of trouble.

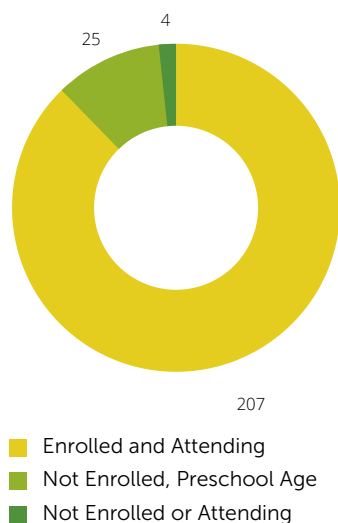


AWARE strives to help keep kids in school

Advancement to 2021

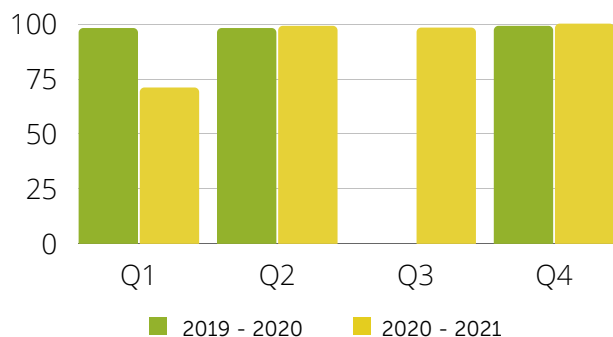


Enrollment in 2021



AWARE followed 236 kids throughout the school year to ensure enrollment and advancement.

Percent of Youth Not Referred to a Higher Level of Care



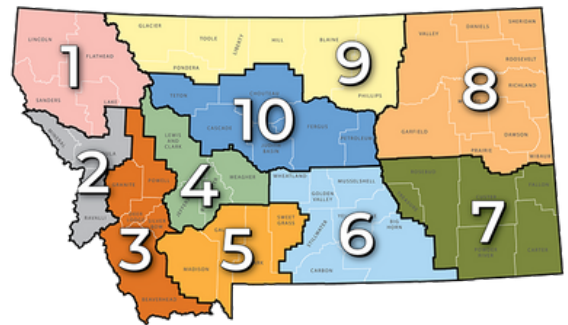
Third-quarter data, Feb. 1 - April 30, 2020, not collected due to school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have a lot to look forward to next year. Below find some exciting announcements that occurred since the close of FY21:

AWARE awarded contract for SDMI Waiver Program in all 10 regions

AWARE is expanding case management services after being awarded a contract for the Severe Disabling Mental Illness (SDMI) Home and Community Based (HCBS) Waiver Program in 10 Regions across Montana. Through the program, AWARE will be able to serve an additional 400-750 people.

This program will primarily serve people age 18 or older who have been involuntarily committed to the Montana State Hospital or the Montana Mental Health Nursing Care Center.



Case managers assess, coordinate and assure delivery of services and supports. They work in partnership with the people in their care, service staff and significant others (i.e., family members) to create a Person-Centered Recovery Plan (PCRP) that enables people to remain at home, in the community, rather than an institution. AWARE started offering SDMI case management in July 2021.

AWARE awarded \$4.5 million grant

AWARE received a \$4.5 million, two-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand preventative and mental health services for youth and families in Montana.

In December 2021, 6 teams in 5 communities have been hired, surpassing expectations and allowing for services to reach more families sooner than projected. By the end of the two-year grant period, 10 teams will be in place.

The focus of the project is to springboard clinical services and support back into communities that have suffered loss of behavioral health support due to the pandemic.

The FACT model will use in-home therapeutic and family support services for youth and their families, whether biological, adoptive or kinship families. AWARE's FACT teams will be equipped to serve youth and families across Montana. The FACT team's wraparound approach to care and treatment will facilitate and support stable housing, increased family engagement and increased access to psychiatric support for the most vulnerable people in our state to help minimize or prevent the need for more intensive services.

AWARE selected for the Community Health Excellence grant program



In November, AWARE was selected to be part of the PacificSource Health Plans Community Health Excellence grants program. AWARE's proposal, titled Enhancing Family Health and Well-Being Through Provider Development and Training, received funding in the amount of \$78,300.

The goal of this proposal is to increase the provision of evidence-supported family engagement and trauma-informed family treatment interventions, resulting in an increase in family protective factors and family satisfaction with services. AWARE will partner with MDFT International, Inc.

AWARE will launch the MDFT training and implementation schedule in early 2022, and in doing so, it will be the first agency in Montana to offer this therapy to the families who need it the most.

We have focused our attention on opportunities, and with some creativity, optimism and thoughtful planning, we have accomplished remarkable things.

Dear Friends,

An appropriate word to summarize this past year is “challenging.”

We are still in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for mental health care is rapidly increasing, record numbers of people are moving to Montana – pushing up the cost of living, and we are experiencing a workforce shortage (termed the Great Resignation) unlike anything we have seen.



How else do you describe a time such as this?

We are doing all we can to attract and retain employees. Despite our efforts, we have a substantial number of open positions. The workforce shortage has led to excessive overtime and stress on current employees and has forced some tough decisions. During the past year, AWARE has closed eight group homes, thus reducing our residential capacity by over 30. It is an unfortunate reality we face. Because of the workforce shortage and inadequate governmental funding, AWARE, and other organizations like us, are forced to serve fewer people in our group homes. Service reductions like this result in less access to appropriate care and our potential clients being sent to more costly and less therapeutic placements.

We are humbled and inspired by our clients and our team of caregivers; we find solace in the humanity of serving people and our communities. We are surrounded by a team that gives definition to the term “resiliency.” We have focused our attention on opportunities, and with some creativity, optimism and thoughtful planning, we have accomplished remarkable things.

It is important to acknowledge the team we have in place. We would not be here today without the dedication and commitment of the more than 700 people who help us achieve our mission. We continue to focus our resources on supporting our teams. Through operational efficiencies and investment in services with margin, we have been able to raise employee wages; this is despite adequate governmental funding. We have also received donations for a childcare scholarship fund that will help employees secure quality, affordable childcare, so they can remain part of our workforce.

Additionally, we are redesigning programs to meet the constantly growing demand for services. We have expanded case management services to include almost 500 people through the SDMI (Severe and Disabling



Mental Illness) Waiver, we have held the line with our CSCT (Comprehensive School and Community Treatment) teams as new rules and funding mechanisms are put into place, and we are implementing a FACT (Family Assertive Care & Treatment) program to meet the needs of youth and their families across Montana.

Lastly, we ask for your help to support our mission and our clients. The Montana Legislature authorized a 1-2% rate increase for behavioral health services for 2022-2023. This is not enough to operate sustainable programs. The state of Montana and the congressional CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act provided relief in 2020-2021 to help us keep our doors open. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) from March 2021 provides the ability for additional relief; however, AWARE has yet to experience assistance from these available funds.

It was announced in mid-November that behavioral health employees who meet low-income eligibility requirements may apply for childcare assistance funds made available with the \$2.7 billion that was sent to Montana through ARPA legislation. We have and will continue to communicate regularly with our staff and advocate on their behalf to get access to ARPA funds, with the goal of maintaining a viable workforce.

We remain hopeful that Montana's Executive and Legislative Branches will utilize CARES Act, ARPA and state funds to adequately support behavioral health and developmental disability services now and in the future. We also hope that you, the reader, are compelled to action and assist us to advocate for our mission, our services, and most importantly our clients.

Although we find ourselves in challenging times, we know our efforts are worthwhile. The programs AWARE offers are crucial to the thousands of individuals and families we serve. We help people live independent lives. Our positive outlook and willingness to find a solution overcome even the most challenging of times.

Sincerely,
Matt Bugni
CEO

For more information and to learn more about the work we do and to read more success stories, please visit www.Aware-inc.org.





www.Aware-inc.org