



FY2022

ANNUAL REPORT



Helping People Live Independent Lives



we are
AWARE

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Dear Stakeholder,

I am thrilled to present you with AWARE's newest Annual Report covering July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.

Despite continued challenges from workforce shortages, inadequate funding and an increased demand for care, there is no doubt that the entire team and organization remains fully committed to the mission of helping people live independent lives.

Year after year, AWARE is faced with different challenges, but we always find a way to keep moving forward. This organization was founded on the belief that obstacles can be overcome, and our team is nothing short of extraordinary when it comes to the task.

Guided by our Unconditional Care Principles and Strategic Plan, our team of 780 employees provides some of the highest quality care across all 56 counties in Montana. They're resilient, dedicated, and the foundation of our organization. We'd be lost without them, and we can sincerely say that our team consists of the best professional caregivers in Montana.

Highlighted throughout this year's report, you'll see that our work is made possible when people come together with thoughtful and innovative ideas. There are no limits to what we can accomplish when our mission is at the center of our work.

“There are no limits to what we can accomplish when our mission is at the center of our work.”

Flipping through these pages, it's inspirational to look back on this past year, and it's remarkable to think of how far we've come since our founding in 1976.

As we move forward into the future, AWARE's Board of Directors can't wait to see where our mission takes us in the next months, years and decades to come.

Together, we're all helping people live independent lives!

Sincerely,
Kristy McKay
Board Chair





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 support them to become meaningful and active members of their community.

Left, Jenny Krumm, AWARE Employee of the Year.

We serve adults, youth and their families



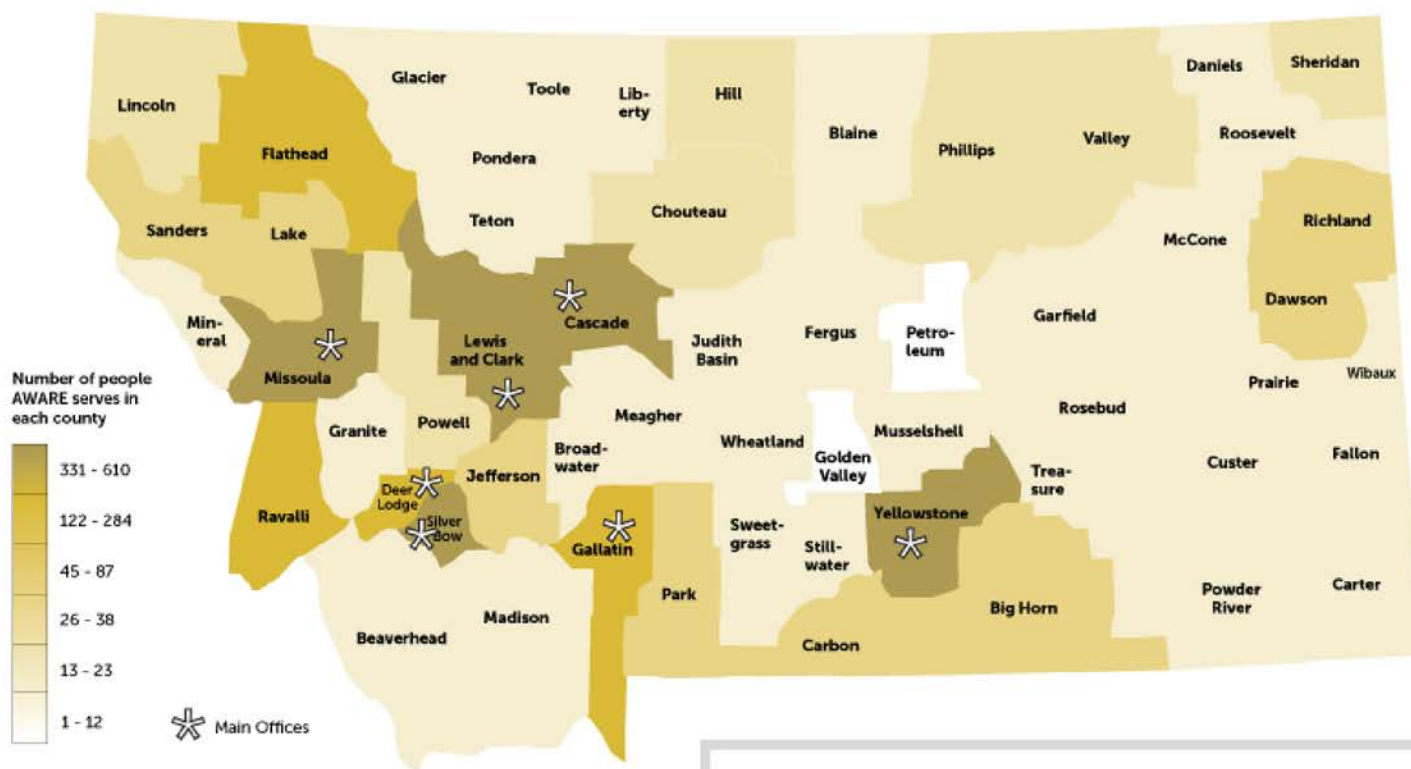
We've been doing this a long time

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.

Officially incorporated in 1976, AWARE has evolved into an organization that now provides a full spectrum of services reaching every corner of our great state.



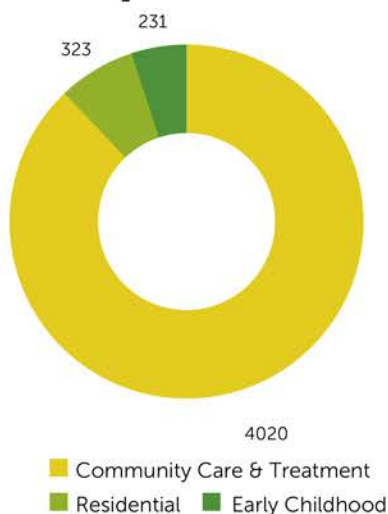
We serve all 56 counties



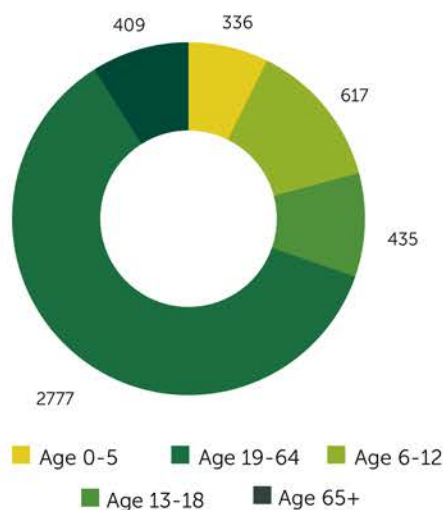
AWARE has main offices in Anaconda, Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena, Great Falls and Missoula.

AWARE provided services to 4,574 unique individuals in FY 2022

People Served



Ages of People Served



*Numbers shown are for unique individuals and do not account for clients served by multiple service lines.

AWARE'S Healthcare Heroes make a difference every single day

The past few years have been challenging, 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.



Kudakwashe Nyahumada
Early Childhood Services



Winter Maulding
DD Residential



Tyler Noland
Applied Behavior Analysis



Michaela Higashiyama
CSCT



Aundrea Edwards
Targeted Case Management



In response to feedback on the Employee Engagement Survey, AWARE partnered with William Henry for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Leadership & Communication trainings for employees throughout the organization. AWARE looks forward to continuing this partnership in the future!

30

Trainings

300

Staff Participated



AWARE launched a partnership with Healthy is Wellness as an investment in the workforce. AWARE believes that the mental and physical well-being of employees are crucial to the success of the organization and the people we serve. All AWARE employees have access to Healthy is Wellness in addition to other wellness benefits.

AWARE continues to use innovative thinking and action planning to address the workforce crisis versus sitting around and waiting for the state to invest in behavioral health. In 2022, AWARE hired an Employee Engagement Director to help facilitate engagement and retention efforts.





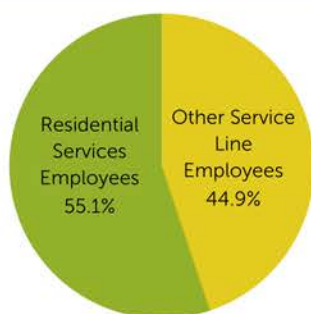
AWARE continues its efforts to proactively and creatively combat the workforce crisis through:

- Increased wages for employees
- Employee childcare scholarship assistance
- Leadership trainings including the first-ever Clinical Leadership Summit
- Connection and team building with team events/meals
- Enhanced wellness benefits and a robust employee benefit package
- Intentional and thoughtful investments in team culture & recognition



AWARE is not immune to challenges with the workforce

On average in FY22, AWARE employed **780** people and had an average of **170** positions open.



With adequate funding, AWARE could employ **950** people and immediately serve more people in need.

Behavioral health, in particular residential services, in Montana are on the brink of collapse. AWARE's residential services make up over half of AWARE's entire team.

When these services are funded adequately, quality staff can be hired, which will only save the state money by keeping people at home in Montana, out of higher levels of care.

Finding dedicated workers to serve people in AWARE's homes continues to be a challenge with nearly 60 percent of job openings coming from this service line.

AWARE supports the Guidehouse findings and recommendation to implement rate increases. AWARE believes that with enhanced (adequate) funding from the state, progress can be made in overcoming the workforce shortage.

AWARE's Corporate Congress focuses on continuous quality improvement



■ Complete ■ In Progress

Delegates started with 30 bills and passed 24. Currently, 23 bills are marked complete.

Members of AWARE's strategic planning workgroup wrapped up 23 of 24 bills passed during the June 2021 session. The bills were written and presented by peer-elected delegates who represent each of AWARE's individual service lines and communities.

Each bill becomes part of AWARE's continuous quality improvement process. The work is never fully complete but rather built upon with each subsequent year.

Not surprisingly, during a time of workforce and funding shortages, a majority of this session's bills were aimed at improving employee retention and recruitment.



In April 2022, AWARE celebrated it's first-ever AWARE Day

AWARE Day is the result of a Corporate Congress bill written by AWARE team member, Adam Pehl. Adam proposed establishing a day to celebrate the amazing people we serve, our incredible team and to help bring attention to the work we do, while also raising a few dollars to support our mission.

On AWARE Day, clients and staff had the opportunity to celebrate with pizza parties.





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 include Early Head Start (EHS) and behavioral health services. They are offered in Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena and Whitehall.

2021-22 HIGHLIGHTS

- AWARE EHS opened a new Billings full-day childcare classroom in partnership with HomeFront. EHS also partnered with the Helena Housing Authority for a full-day childcare classroom.
- Belgrade Early Head Start Center completed and opened.
- A new conference room and training center were completed at the Center for Early Childhood Services in Billings.
- AWARE continues to provide EHS services during the pandemic, including:
 - Onsite classroom services
 - Referrals to community resources
 - Mental health services for families
 - Virtual family engagement activities
 - Crisis response to family needs

AWARE Early Head Start has **28** classrooms at **10** sites in **5** communities, including **4** childcare partners and served **214** families.

23,424 Child and Adult Care Food Program meals were served.

Housing assistance was provided to **40** families.

Emergency/Crisis intervention was provided to **67** families.

Opportunities impacting EHS Families

- Homelessness/Housing and rental support
- Childcare capacity
- Food and nutrition services

The Lewis and Clark County Child Advocacy Center (CAC) of AWARE continues to assist children and families when there is a concern for child maltreatment in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater counties. The CAC is a team of compassionate professionals, who respond to child victims of abuse using forensically sound protocols and procedures to reduce the traumatization of children.

FY22 impact included:

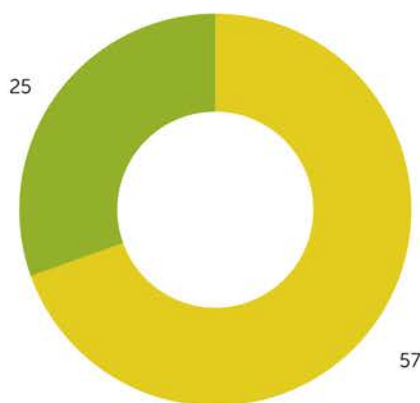
- **192** forensic interviews
- **35** referrals to specialized medical providers
- **111** therapy referrals
- **248** advocacy contacts
- Support for families through the criminal court systems **83** times

In the spring of 2022, AWARE opened eight new townhomes in Great Falls. These townhomes serve to provide greater independence for people who would otherwise be institutionalized. The increased capacity enhances AWARE's ability to serve Montanans with intense needs; however, without increased funding, staffing will remain a barrier to serving to capacity.



AWARE's residential homes help people live in the communities of their choosing and out of higher levels of care – saving the State of Montana money.

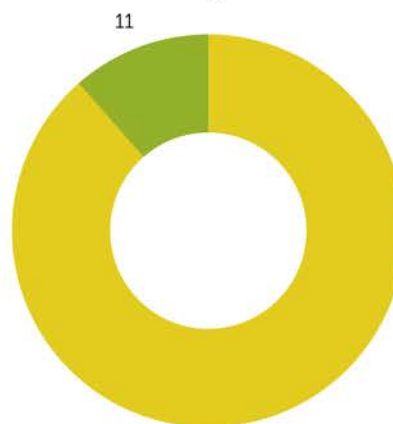
Mental Health Homes



■ People in MH Residential Care
■ Vacant Opportunities

Total Mental Health Residential Care Opportunities Available: 82

Developmental Disability Homes



■ People in DD Residential Care
■ Vacant Opportunities

Total Developmental Disability Residential Care Opportunities Available: 96

The data shown in the charts to the left is a snapshot in time as of October 5, 2022.

Vacant opportunities numbers include bed numbers from homes that have been closed due to the workforce crisis and would be available with enhanced rates.



Persistence pays Off

Success means something different to everyone. Sometimes it takes a little bit of time to get where you're going. But if you stick with it, in the long run, you're bound to achieve your goals.

Jean Lozard is one of those people who has found success during his time at AWARE.

He came on board when he was 11 years old and has been with us ever since. It's safe to say that he's made a lasting impression on everyone he works with.

In the spring of 2022, Jean graduated from high school, was discharged from his youth home and has moved into an AWARE townhome where he has the necessary supports in place to help him live as independently as possible.

In other great news for Jean, he was honored with AWARE's "Independent Spirit" award at the Unconditional Care Award Banquet and officially became a U.S. citizen after being adopted. We are so proud of Jean and honored to be a part of his journey.

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 health 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 dedicated staff stepped up to weather quarantines, health scares and staffing shortages.

In addition to the unique challenges of the pandemic, 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

In order to maintain residential services in the future, keeping Montanans out of higher levels of care, legislators are asked to **implement the recommendations** from the Guidehouse Rate Study conducted in 2021.

COMMUNITY CARE & TREATMENT

AWARE is a leader in Community Care & Treatment in Montana.

AWARE offers a comprehensive selection of wraparound supports for individuals who do not require placement in a residential setting.

AWARE provided care and positively impacted the lives of more than

4,000

adults and children in FY 22 through support at home, school and in various community settings.



Community Care & Treatment offers services in:

- Case Management
- Home Support
- Psychiatry
- Outpatient Therapy
- Education & Mental Health Support in Schools
- Behavior Analysis/Autism Treatment
- PACT/FACT: Intensive supports for kids & adults w/ mental health needs

We help people live independent lives



AWARE's PACT team served 93 people in FY22 and 93% have housing. 96% of people receiving PACT services participated in community activities.

SDMI Case Management served 454 people in FY22.

In July 2021, AWARE was awarded the contract for Severe and Disabling Mental Illness (SDMI) Waiver Case Management with the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

AWARE's top priority is the stabilization of care. We aim to ease member worries by serving as a primary point of contact, and we're helping providers with prior authorizations and other systematic processes.

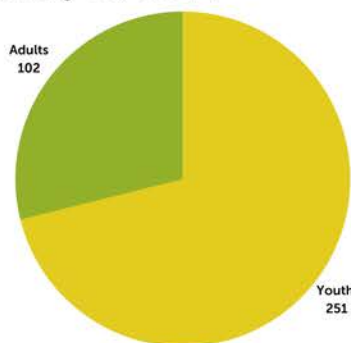




AWARE received a **\$4.5 million**, two-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand preventative and mental health services for youth and families in Montana. The focus of the project is to springboard clinical services and support back into communities that have suffered loss of behavioral health support due to the pandemic. AWARE's Family Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) services officially launched January 31, 2022.

AWARE currently has 8 teams serving 6 communities.

By the end of 2023, AWARE expects to be at 10 or more teams with statewide reach.



AWARE's FACT teams have served 353 people in Montana.

*As of 9/15/22

The FACT team's wraparound approach to care and treatment facilitates and supports:

- Stable housing
- Increased family engagement
- Increased access to psychiatric support for the most vulnerable people in our state to help minimize or prevent the need for more intensive services – saving the state money.

In November 2021, 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 is partnering with MDFT International, Inc.

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

AWARE currently has 4 clinicians certified in MDFT with an additional 8 who will be certified by year end.

COMMUNITY CARE & TREATMENT

AWARE's commitment to evidence-based practice and interventions that truly improve an individual or family's quality of life continued to grow this year with the expansion of a service line dedicated to Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services.

AWARE became the first provider of Behavior Risk Services in Montana in 2021 – a specialized service to help the highest-risk individuals remain in their community. This service requires the use of Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT) as staff and oversight of all programming by a Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA).



AWARE's ABA team serves over 80 people across the state in community-based settings and in AWARE's residential homes.



AWARE strives to help keep kids in school

AWARE has 41 CSCT teams in 29 schools in 9 communities in Montana and served 511 Montana students in FY22.

AWARE has seen a decrease in the number of students positively impacted by CSCT due to the change in funding mechanisms to the Intergovernmental Transfer model in addition to the changes caused by transferring management from DPHHS to OPI.

We provided telehealth to 708 people in FY22

AWARE provided 3,867 hours of telehealth in FY22 through our CSCT, Early Childhood, PACT, FACT, Psychiatry and Youth Case Management services.

This number shows a decrease from FY21, which demonstrates AWARE's commitment to getting back to serving people face-to-face, while still accommodating those who need telehealth.

AWARE awarded FCC Telehealth Grant

In FY22, AWARE was awarded \$457,000 under Round 2 of the COVID-19 Telehealth Program. AWARE Chief Executive Officer Matt Bugni said, "I am thankful that AWARE was recognized for our ability to assist Montanans with mental wellness and honored that AWARE is a recipient of this funding."

AWARE used this funding to equip its residential facilities and staff with the mobile equipment and connectivity necessary to securely provide telehealth services outside of a hardwired office.

This investment in telehealth equipment allows AWARE to continue meeting clients where they are at, providing the highest quality wraparound approach to care.



AWARE Center for Excellence Transitions to Private School

Evaluators were onsite this past August to perform a candidacy review of the school, which is designed to demonstrate our capacity to meet the requirements for accreditation in relation to the Cognia Performance Standards.

Cognia is a global network of educators that help strengthen schools. Their holistic approach to continuous improvement encompasses accreditation and certification, assessment, professional learning, and customized improvement services. They are recognized by the departments of education in all 50 states and the US Department of Education. Any credentials coming from schools accredited under this agency are widely accepted by colleges and universities in the US and Internationally.

AWARE's Center for Excellence is a candidate for accreditation and takes a distinguished approach, concentrating on full inclusion that honors students' cognitive strengths and gifts, rather than the perspective of student deficits.

AWARE Hosts Clinical Leadership Summit - INSPIRE MONTANA: Great Minds, Big Impact

In keeping with AWARE's principles, and in particular, to be agents of change and offer the highest quality of care, AWARE held its first Clinical Leadership Summit, INSPIRE MONTANA: Great Minds – Big Impact, on October 12 and 13, 2022, at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena, Montana.

Highlights of the summit included breakout tracks on clinical practice, advocacy and resilience.

This unique summit was open to the public and offered clinicians the opportunity to learn, earn continuing education credits, network and leave inspired. AWARE views this summit as an investment in the workforce and will continue offering the summit in future years.

CARF Accreditation



AWARE has been accredited by CARF since the 1990s. In October 2022, CARF surveyors applied over two thousand standards while reviewing AWARE's services, administration, and governance. Based on exit conference discussion, we expect that accreditation will be extended another three years to assure the continuation and delivery of the highest quality of care and services to the people of Montana.

CARF accreditation matters because it demonstrates a health or human services provider, such as AWARE, is unquestionably committed to continuous improvement in their community services and healthcare offerings, as well as in the satisfaction of their residents, clients, students, families, stakeholders, and employees.

CARF accreditation represents the highest level of accreditation that an organization can receive.



“

I am optimistic about the future and proud of the work our organization has done to “re-evaluate.” We continue to adapt and grow despite the challenges we have faced in recent years. AWARE is currently 780 strong. Just imagine the even greater impact we will have when we are more adequately funded and can employ 950 people, enabling us to run at full capacity with the services we offer.

”

Dear Friends,

If I was asked to choose one word to describe AWARE as an organization, it would be resilient. Resilient is defined as “being able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions.” I am humbled and honored to lead a team of resilient and passionate caregivers. Our team takes on and sticks with the hardest challenges, and this annual report is a small sampling of the inspiring work our team does every day.



While we are all tired of talking about the pandemic, the reality is that we are still navigating through it and the impact on our lives. The need for mental health care is at an all-time high. Inflation is skyrocketing, and record numbers of people continue moving to Montana. The cost of living and childcare is going nowhere but up, exacerbating the workforce shortage. Recently, the keynote speaker at our Clinical Leadership Summit in October provided great perspective. Instead of calling it the “Great Resignation,” perhaps we should be viewing our current workforce struggles as a “Great Re-Evaluation.”

As the workforce is evaluating what is important to them, AWARE is doing the same as an organization. Each year, our annual report allows us the opportunity to review, assess and evaluate the work we are doing and establish a plan forward. As demonstrated in AWARE’s FY22 Annual Report, AWARE has taken proactive steps to recruit and retain our dedicated workforce. We have increased wages and expanded health and wellness benefits for staff. We have invested a significant amount in trainings, including diversity, equity and inclusion and leadership and communications with William Henry. We also hosted our first-ever Clinical Leadership Summit. AWARE’s leadership team seeks to bring training opportunities to our staff to address and build the skills to support well-trained, empathetic caregivers that support positive outcomes for the people we serve.

AWARE consistently seeks to learn and adapt to our changing environment. We are actively working to foster a workplace culture that is attractive to job seekers. But more importantly, we are providing a workplace that is fulfilling and a place where employees want to stay and grow professionally while bringing our mission to life — helping people live independent lives.

I am optimistic about the future and proud of the work our organization has done to “re-evaluate.” We continue to adapt and grow despite the challenges we have faced in recent years. AWARE is currently 780 strong. Just imagine the even greater impact we will have when we are more adequately funded and can employ 950 people, enabling us to run at full capacity with the services we offer.

As demonstrated in this report, it takes a team, and the AWARE team is doing incredible work across the state. Part of what makes our organization so unique is that we are not center based. We meet people where they are and provide a true wraparound approach to care. Our psychiatrists, therapists, behavioral health specialists and case managers provide care in collaboration with AWARE's Early Head Start and residential programs, in addition to providing in-person and telehealth outpatient services. This wraparound approach allows our team to provide the highest quality of care.

AWARE is not immune to the challenges caused by the lack of adequate funding for behavioral health. As this report shows, AWARE is currently unable to serve at full capacity in our residential homes, and this inability is directly correlated to funding. For the health of the organization, we have made some hard decisions to leave residential opportunities open, which ultimately costs the state more with potential clients being served in hospitals, institutions or placed in correctional or out-of-state facilities.

In 2021, a rate study was requested by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and funded by the 2021 Legislature. The study found what we all have known to be true for many years—behavioral health in Montana is on the brink of collapse. For the last 16 years, Montana's legislature has authorized a 1-2 percent rate increase per year for behavioral health services; however, the increase is not enough to operate sustainable programs as inflation has greatly outpaced our funding. The most recent rate study recommends significant rate increases. I am hopeful that Montana's executive and legislative branches will implement the recommendations of this study. AWARE stands ready to run at full capacity as soon as this happens.

The services AWARE provides to Montanans are important and needed. AWARE's unique approach to community-based wraparound care and meeting people where they are at is critical to reaching and assisting the people who need it most.

We hope you, the reader, are compelled to act and assist us by advocating for our mission, our services and most importantly our clients. Please consider contacting your representatives and senators across the state asking them to fully support and implement the recommended rate increases as part of the governor's budget this biennium.

I am proud to be the leader of AWARE. We are humbled to serve the people of this great state of Montana and appreciate your support.

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.





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AWARE

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