



Linking Infants & Families to Supports

LIFTS

FOURTH ANNUAL MAGAZINE

Stories from MT Families

ALL INSIDE!

Bridging the Gap
from Knowing Better
to Doing Better

PG 7

Sofia's Arrival:
A Journey Through
Complications
and Joy

PG 14

My Journey
Through Bipolar II
and Motherhood

PG 19



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Healthy Babies
The Montana Coalition

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Table of Contents

- 2 Letter from the Executive Director
- 3 I Can Do This
- 5 Birthing Hope from Despair: Support in the Face of Addiction
- 7 Bridging the Gap from Knowing Better to Doing Better
- 9 The Power of a Plan: How a Safety Plan Changed My Postpartum Journey
- 12 Sin Familia, Sin Inglés
- 14 Sofia's Arrival: A Journey Through Complications and Joy
- 16 Creating Bright Futures
- 19 My Journey Through Bipolar II and Motherhood
- 22 Building Confidence for New Parents Through Home Visiting

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Welcome

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the fourth issue of LIFTS (Linking Infants and Families to Support) magazine. The magazine's theme, "When Help Helps," is a gentle reminder that asking for help is not only brave, but is also incredibly normal. It is something that we all do, and should feel empowered to do.



In our society, the ability to help one another and seek out resources is vital. You're not meant to navigate the parenting journey alone, nor solely with the aid of a computer screen. The wealth of people out there who are ready and eager to offer support and connection is immense, especially here in Montana.

At Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies – The Montana Coalition (HMHB), we understand the power of community and the importance of reaching out. As you read these stories, we hope you feel inspired to seek help for that thing that's been nagging you on your parenting or caregiving journey, or to offer help to someone you know who might need it. Countless individuals and organizations across our state are available to assist you, and LIFTS is here to help you find them.

Remember: asking for help is a sign of strength. Along with our statewide partners, we're here to support you and connect you with the resources you need. We hope you can use the LIFTS Online Resource Guide to connect to many of the resources mentioned in this magazine by visiting hmhb-lifts.org.

Warm regards,

Stephanie Morton
Executive Director
Healthy Mothers,
Healthy Babies –
The Montana Coalition





I Can Do This

by Kelsie Christensen

"You're an adult woman, you can do this!" my husband Bob says over the phone from 1,500 miles away.

"I'm so nervous," I reply, as I dress our four-month-old son, Emmett. "I don't know any of these people."

There are many things I didn't expect as a new mom, forced mom outings being one of them.

If only my anxiety would calm down.

The sun is setting as I load Emmett into the car, still on the phone with Bob. "Who knew free dinner would be such a driving force to get me out of the house?" I joke. "New mom life."

We arrive at the old brick school where the moms group is held, and I strap Emmett into the front pack. "I'll call you when we're heading home," I tell Bob as we hang up.

//

I ask if being a trucker's wife with kids ever gets easier. "Kind of... not really," she answers. At least she's being honest.

//

Walking down the ramp into the building's basement, I feel nauseous. "We can do this, right buddy?" I ask Emmett.

I hear kids playing and moms chatting from down the fluorescent-lit hall. I take a deep breath and walk in. Moms are on the left by a big table covered with taco fixings. Kids are to the right playing in a padded area with so many toys and activities. Emmett will LOVE this place when he gets bigger, I think to myself. *(cont.)*





With Emmett still strapped to my chest, I get some food and walk to another room, where I sit down at a plastic folding table with ten other women, a huge ball of anxiety in my stomach. What do I even talk about? My whole world revolves around this tiny person. Am I even interesting anymore?

Turns out they can relate.

I chat with a mom of two whose husband is also a truck driver. I ask if being a trucker's wife with kids ever gets easier. "Kind of...not really," she answers. At least she's being honest.

The woman sitting next to me has a baby girl strapped to her as well – a three-month old, she tells me. We exchange numbers so we can meet up for a walk, and have another adult to talk to. I feel my anxiety lessening.

After two hours, I walk outside into the dark. I can't wait to call Bob and tell him how it went. I can't believe I had the guts to go – to meet new people, and to take Emmett along to something that's actually for me. I plan to go again next month. I appreciate knowing I'm not alone and now have a community I can turn to.

I am an adult woman, I think to myself, as I strap Emmett into his carseat. And I can do this. •



Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms "Birthing and Parenting Classes" and "Support Groups".



Birthing Hope from Despair:

Support in the Face of Addiction

by Rylee McGuire, as told to Marisa Johnson, HMF RN Case Manager,
Nurse Family Partnership, Lewis & Clark Public Health Department

Like many other people struggling with addiction, my life prior to motherhood was one of darkness and despair. Addiction had only wrapped its cold, hard hands around me for about a year and half at that point, long enough to take away all that I had known. I was homeless, involved with an abusive partner, suicidal, and using substances to escape the reality of my daily nightmare.

When I first learned I was pregnant, my initial thought was, "There is no way I can have this baby!" I contemplated ending the pregnancy, believing that I wasn't cut out to be a mother. It was then that the universe intervened, and I found myself incarcerated. Being locked up gave me the opportunity to get sober. While incarcerated, I had my first ultrasound. At that moment, I knew I couldn't end this baby's life, but I didn't know how I could be a mother, either.

After only two weeks, I was released and had to make a choice about what I was going to do to stay clean. I learned about Florence Crittenton, so I applied, hoping for what felt like my only chance of recovery as a mother.

While I was there, I was also referred to Nurse-Family Partnership, a home visiting program at Lewis & Clark Public Health, where I met my nurse, Marisa. It was these two programs

//

*They never gave up on me,
and saw things in me that I often
couldn't see myself.*

//



that completely altered the trajectory of my life. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of both. I was surrounded and supported by so many amazing women who helped me learn to trust other people, something I've struggled with my whole life. I finally had female support that was loving and safe. Between the parenting classes and the education that Nurse-Family Partnership provided, I learned valuable parenting skills. Marisa also opened my eyes to things I'd never realized about my past. Those realizations have transformed the way I see the world, as well as helped guide me on what kind of parent I want to be. If I were to list all the benefits these two programs provided for me, I would far surpass the allotted words in this article. It feels endless.

I know there's no way I could be where I am today, nor be the mother I am, if I hadn't had these two support systems in place. My gratitude is infinite. Marisa always says, "It takes a village", and it's true, they're all my village. My daughter and I are thriving today, thanks to the

love and support I received from every single person involved in my journey. They never gave up on me, and saw things in me that I often couldn't see myself. I hope someday I can give back to the world in a similar way. •

Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search term "**Substance Use Disorder Treatment Providers**". To learn about the programs available at Florence Crittenton, visit <https://www.florencecrittenton.org/>.

Read the article on page 22 of this magazine to learn more about **Nurse-Family Partnership** and other **home visiting** programs.



Look **CLOSER**

LOOK PAST MY ADDICTION.

See the mother I want to be.

Addiction is a disease requiring treatment, not judgment. Recovery requires more than grit & willpower. When moms seek care, meet them with compassion. Never underestimate the power of one kind interaction. It could change a life... maybe two.

Asking for help is brave. You don't have to do this alone. When you're ready, help is here for you.

Taking care of yourself is taking care of your baby.



To find help, visit:
www.hmhb-mt.org/lifts
or call the warmline at
(406) 430-9100
for anonymous assistance.



This project is funded in whole or in part under a contract with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. The statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.

A photograph of two children climbing a rope bridge. The child on the left is a girl with long dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and a patterned skirt. The child on the right is a boy wearing a blue t-shirt and yellow shorts. They are both focused on their task, reaching for the ropes. The background shows trees and a clear sky, suggesting an outdoor park setting.

Bridging the Gap from Knowing Better to Doing Better

by Breanna Belgarde

When planning for a family, my partner and I were on the same page about how we would discipline our kids. We agreed that the best approach included the use of corporal punishment (i.e., spanking), when appropriate. After all, we were spanked and we turned out alright, right?

After becoming pregnant, I began to wonder if there was a studied and research-backed approach to child discipline. The more I read, the more I found evidence that contradicted the fundamental beliefs I'd inherited from my upbringing. I decided I didn't want to bring corporal punishment into my parenting, despite my previous firm convictions.

Throughout the course of my pregnancy, I consumed all the materials I could find about positive discipline. My shelves were soon covered in hundreds-of-dollars worth of books and workbooks on evidence-based child discipline, and my phone filled with gentle-parenting apps.

//

I worried that I wouldn't fit in, and felt like a walking hot mess who yelled a lot more than I wanted to admit.

//

Gentle parenting was easy when my daughter was young, but became increasingly challenging as she grew into a toddler. Like the day when she'd been throwing a tantrum for what felt like an eternity – screaming, trying to bite me, hitting, kicking, you name it. We were both sick, and I was tired, achy, and at my limit. I finally screamed back at her, "Look at me! I can scream too!" She burst into tears and sobbed, "Mom, we use kind voices in this house." *(cont.)*



I knew I needed more social and emotional support. My partner worked hours that placed him outside the home more often than not, and neither of us had family nearby. Through my work with a local early childhood nonprofit, I got involved in a group for moms of children up to the age of five. Initially, I had a lot of anxiety around working with such patient and gracious women. They seemed as if they had it all together, and they were already connected socially through their faith communities. I worried that I wouldn't fit in, and felt like a walking hot mess who yelled a lot more than I wanted to admit.

I brought all of my shame and guilt to the group and had the most amazing experience: as I opened up about yelling at my daughter, they related their own moments of less-than-gracious responses to their kids' challenging behaviors. I realized that we had a lot more in common than I'd thought.

Over the last seven years of being a parent, I've discovered again and again that knowledge isn't enough, and that all of the self-education in the world – and all of the books on my shelves, and apps on my phone – can't replace the support of other people. We need to learn together in order to do better for the next generation. •

Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms **"Birthing and Parenting Classes"** and **"Support Groups"**. LIFTS also has information about **"Child Development Information and Support"** and **"Family Support and Education"**.



THE POWER OF A PLAN:

How a Safety Plan Changed My Postpartum Journey

by Chelsea Bellon

During the early summer days of 2018, I welcomed my second baby, and found myself acquainted with an old familiarity. I felt it when I nursed my newborn, when I was getting my toddler dressed and situated in the morning, and especially at night, when nobody was around to fill my mind with busyness or conversation. It was postpartum depression, and what I would learn later was postpartum anxiety.

The anxiety manifested itself in paranoia and worry about hypothetical scenarios. How would I feed my family if I lost my job? What happens if my baby and I don't bond? Is her acid reflux actually a deeper issue that isn't being diagnosed? What happens if I'm asleep and can't hear an emergency? My body found itself in a constant state of worry when it should have been a sacred healing space of connection and love. This postpartum journey was harder than the first.

//

The nurse explained the importance of a postpartum safety plan when depression or anxiety is experienced before or after birth.

//

During an emotionally charged road trip to visit my husband's family, I found myself feeling helpless and disconnected from all of the people and support surrounding me. At one o'clock in the morning, in a small Wyoming hotel room, with a nursing three-month old baby and a sleeping toddler next to me, I left a voicemail for my family physician in Montana asking if I could be seen within the next couple of days of returning home. I remember saying, "I've had this before, but it's not going away. It's harder this time. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do."

Twenty-eight hours later, I was in a doctor's office learning about postpartum anxiety. The nurse explained the importance of a postpartum safety plan when depression or anxiety is experienced before or after birth. She printed off a safety plan form, brought me juice and crackers, and held my sleeping baby while I filled out the form.

The safety plan helped me identify triggers or scenarios where feelings became overwhelming. I was prompted to identify trusted people I could contact when I needed help caring for myself (including simple things like showering, eating, and engaging in activities outside of the house). The safety plan also identified who I could share this phase of healing with, in order to ensure that I had people checking on me. *(cont.)*



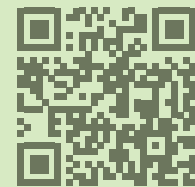
In the early months of COVID-19, I welcomed my third baby. Months of isolation and worldwide dread weighed on my postpartum bubble. The familiarity of anxiety was present, but this time it showed itself in a constant reactivity and inability to regulate extreme emotions. I'd been sure that my final experience of bringing a baby into the world would be better, less intense, but at three weeks postpartum I found myself printing off the same safety plan form, and yet again assessing my emotions, needs, and resources.

There was a difference this time, though, a new level of confidence and hope that I felt when I completed the form, then took a photo of it to send to my support network, which included my husband, best friend, and a coworker. My final postpartum experience was indeed less intense, due to my new skills of self-advocacy, and the safety plan helping me to identify and reach out to a community that wrapped me in protection and support. •

// *The safety plan also identified who I could share this phase of healing with, in order to ensure that I had people checking on me.* //

Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms **"Mental Health Providers"** and **"Psychiatric Services"**. Like Chelsea, you may also be able to reach out to your primary care physician or OBGYN for help with a plan.

To view a recommended safety plan from Postpartum International, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/PSISafetyPlan>



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Butte 406-494-1242
Helena 406-443-7370
www.familyoutreach.org



The Meadowlark Initiative®

HEALTHY PREGNANCIES
& SECURE FAMILIES

Our vision is for expecting moms, their partners, and families **to have the support they need to have the healthiest pregnancies possible** and the ability to parent their babies in a safe, healthy, happy home.

The Meadowlark Initiative® integrates behavioral health screening and services, care coordination, and navigation to community resources into prenatal and postpartum care **to keep moms and babies healthy and families together.**



Use the QR code to learn more about the initiative and find a list of hospitals that provide Meadowlark care.





SIN FAMILIA, SIN INGLÉS

by Jacqueline Rivera Salazar

Es difícil estar aquí viviendo sin tu familia, el trabajo de rancho es muy pesado y duro. Se llevan muchas horas, y más cuando es temporada alta aquí en Montana. Lo más duro es estar sola sin tu familia y el idioma es el mayor temor – esa sensación de salir de la casa y saber que alguien pueda decirte algo y no poder entender.

El embarazo es algo maravilloso, pero a la misma vez muy duro porque no está tu familia contigo para que pueda aconsejarte. En el tiempo que llegué no había comunicación para hablar con ellos. Las tarjetas para poder llamar a larga distancia eran tan difíciles de conseguir si bien me iba, hablaba con ellos cada mes y por unos 20 minutos si tenía suerte porque salían muy malas. Llegó el momento de las noticias buenas que quede embarazada. Fue la noticia más linda que pude recibir cuando aprendí la palabra embarazo en inglés. Todo era nuevo cada mes como iba el embarazo. Gracias a Dios todo salió bien sin ningún problema. Nos sorprendimos cuando nos dijeron que teníamos el Medicaid.

It's difficult to be here living without your family. Ranch work is very heavy and hard. It takes many hours, especially during the peak season here in Montana. The hardest part is being alone without your family, and the language is the biggest fear – that feeling of leaving the house and knowing someone might say something to you and you can't understand it.

Pregnancy is a wonderful thing, but at the same time, very hard when your family is not with you to give you advice. When I arrived, there was no way to communicate with them. The long-distance calling cards were so difficult to get, and if I was lucky, I would talk to them once a month for about 20 minutes because the connection was so bad. Then the good news came that I was pregnant. It was the most beautiful news I could receive when I learned the word for "pregnancy" in English. Everything was new each month of the pregnancy, and thank God everything went well without any problems. We were surprised when they told us we had Medicaid.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We're delighted to present these companion stories of parenting in Montana. Jaqueline's motherhood journey begins in 1998; her daughter Jazmine's, in 2021. Presented here in a bilingual format, we hope the intergenerational narrative resonates with readers across the state, and beyond.

// _____
*En el tiempo que
llegué no había
comunicación para
hablar con ellos.*
_____ //



Seguimos en el mismo rancho por muchos años más hasta que de nuevo salí embarazada. Me vine a Dillon a aliviarme de Jazmin ya con más experiencia, pero no menos difícil. Seguí sin mi familia sin hablar inglés y tenía que ir a mis citas con el papá de mis hijos, pero él solo se limitaba a decirme que todo estaba bien que no había nada de qué preocuparme.

En la actualidad sigo sin poder expresar mucho el inglés, pero ya me puedo mover para hacer mis cosas necesarias de la vida. Me divorcié y saqué adelante a mis hijos. Tengo un trabajo que me da la oportunidad de seguir aprendiendo cada día más y más inglés. Veo a mis hijos realizados y Jazmin ahora en su etapa de mamá. Ella tuvo a mi nieta en el mismo pueblo que ella nació. Cada día aprendiendo las dos pero siempre juntas contando una con la otra.

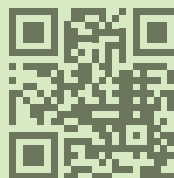
A través de mi trabajo ayudo a gente nueva que va llegando sin saber lo dura que es la vida aquí. Hay mucha ayuda disponible. Puedo aconsejar a las nuevas generaciones que sigan adelante, siempre con la frente en alto, luchando por lo que quieren y no dejando que nadie les haga sentir lo contrario. La verdad es que estoy muy orgulloso de lo que he logrado en cada etapa de mi vida.

We stayed at the same ranch for many more years until I got pregnant again. I went to Dillon to give birth to Jazmin, now with more experience, but not any less difficulty. I was still without my family, not speaking English, and had to go to my appointments with the father of my children, but he would just tell me that everything was fine and there was nothing to worry about.

Currently, I still can't express much in English, but I can get around to do the necessary things in life. I divorced and raised my children on my own, and I have a job that gives me the opportunity to keep learning more and more English every day. I see my children succeeding, and now Jazmin is in the stage of being a mother. She had my granddaughter in the same town where she was born. We learn every day together, always sharing with each other.

Through my work, I help new people who arrive without knowing how hard life is here. But there is so much help available. I advise the next generation to move forward, always with your head held high, fighting for what you want and not letting anyone make you feel otherwise. The truth is, I am very proud of what I have achieved at every stage of my life. ■

To learn about various medical, dental and behavioral health services available to agricultural workers in Montana, visit **Ag Worker Health and Services** at <https://www.agworker.org/>.



SOFIA'S ARRIVAL:

A Journey Through Complications and Joy

by Jazmin Rivera Girard

Lying in a hospital bed with my husband, Isaiah, holding one leg, and a nurse holding the other, I'd been pushing for what felt like an eternity. My mom should've been there with us, but the pandemic took this opportunity away from me, limiting the number of people I could have in the room to one. Instead of holding my hand and wiping my brow, my mom was sitting in the hospital parking lot, nervous and helpless. It was up to Isaiah and me to navigate this on our own. His phone lit up every couple of minutes with a new text from my mom. With no luxury to think about her now, I continued to push, hoping I would hear my baby's cry at any moment.

The only birthing facility in a vast rural county, our local hospital limits the number of hours that a woman can be in active labor, for both her safety and the baby's. After several hours of pushing, the doctor said we'd need to be taken down for an emergency c-section. I was exhausted, and just wanted my baby girl in my arms.

In the OR, Isaiah sat by my head, while doctors jostled and pulled at my abdomen, only a curtain separating us from the scene of our baby finally being earthside. Eventually we heard her cry, and I looked at Isaiah with tears running down my face, overwhelmed with relief. Sofia had arrived.

Isaiah was the one to hold her first, and brought her over to me. Pride and love burst through me as I looked at her perfect little face. Our new family was healthy and safe, and my mom saw her grandchild for the first time through a phone screen.

Acostada en una cama de hospital con mi esposo, Isaiah, sosteniendo una pierna y una enfermera sosteniendo la otra, había estado empujando durante lo que me parecía una eternidad. Mi mamá debería haber estado allí con nosotros, pero la pandemia me lo quitó, limitando el número de personas que podía tener en la sala a una sola. En lugar de tomarme la mano y secarme la frente, mi mamá estaba sentada en el estacionamiento del hospital, nerviosa e impotente. Dependía de Isaiah y de mí navegar esto por nuestra cuenta. Su teléfono se iluminaba cada pocos minutos con un nuevo mensaje de texto de mi mamá. Sin el lujo de pensar en ella ahora, continué empujando, esperando escuchar el llanto de mi bebé en cualquier momento.

La única instalación de parto en un vasto condado rural, nuestro hospital local limita el número de horas que una mujer puede estar en parto activo, tanto por su seguridad como por la del bebé. Después de varias horas empujando, el doctor dijo que necesitaríamos una cesárea de emergencia. Estaba exhausta y solo quería tener a mi niña en mis brazos.

En el quirófano, Isaiah se sentó junto a mi cabeza, mientras los doctores se movían y tiraban de mi abdomen, con solo una cortina separándonos de la escena en la que nuestro bebé finalmente llegaba al mundo. Finalmente escuchamos su llanto, y miré a Isaiah con lágrimas corriendo por mi rostro, abrumada de alivio. Sofia había llegado.

Isaiah fue el primero en sostenerla y me la trajo. El orgullo y el amor estallaron en mí mientras miraba su pequeño rostro perfecto. Nuestra nueva familia estaba sana y segura, y mi mamá vio a su nieta por primera vez a través de una pantalla de teléfono.



In the hospital room, where we would spend the next four days, the nurses explained that I'd lost a significant amount of blood. As for our new baby girl, she was jaundiced, and spent her first days of life in a plastic crib, padded with blankets, under a special light. When she cried, Isaiah and I took turns sleeping with her while keeping her under the light. Heat radiated on us, we wore goggles to protect our eyes, we were uncomfortable but in complete bliss.

The complications eased, but I was still bound to a hospital bed from fatigue, while Isaiah tended to our baby's needs. The nurses were the navigators of every first experience that couldn't happen in the comfort of our home, but instead in the unfamiliar environment of a hospital room. Isaiah had never before changed a diaper, or swaddled a baby, and nervously asked the nurses for help. They stood by him and offered step-by-step instructions as he changed his first diaper.

Finally, it was time to go home. Isaiah carried Sofia out of the hospital, and she looked so little strapped into her new car seat. Opening the door to the parking lot, we felt the sun on our faces, breathing in fresh air for the first time in days. We got into the car and drove directly to my mom's house. It was time for Sofia to meet her abuela.

En la habitación del hospital, donde pasaríamos los siguientes cuatro días, las enfermeras nos explicaron que había perdido una cantidad significativa de sangre. En cuanto a nuestra nueva bebé, estaba con ictericia y pasó sus primeros días de vida en una cuna de plástico, acolchada con mantas, con una luz especial. Cuando lloraba, Isaiah y yo nos turnábamos para dormir con ella, mientras la manteníamos bajo las luces. El calor nos rodeaba, llevábamos gafas para proteger nuestros ojos, estábamos incómodos pero en completa felicidad.

Las complicaciones disminuyeron, pero yo todavía estaba atada a una cama de hospital por el cansancio, mientras Isaiah atendía a las necesidades de nuestra bebé. Las enfermeras eran las guías de cada primera experiencia que no podía suceder en la comodidad de nuestro hogar, sino en el espacio desconocido de una habitación de hospital. Isaiah nunca había cambiado un pañal o arropado a un bebé antes, y preguntó nerviosamente a las enfermeras por ayuda. Ellas se quedaron a su lado y le ofrecieron instrucciones de paso a paso mientras cambiaba su primer pañal.

Finalmente, se llegó la hora de ir a casa. Isaiah sacó a Sofía del hospital y ella se veía tan pequeña, sujeta en su nuevo asiento de auto. Al abrir la puerta del estacionamiento, sentimos el sol en nuestras caras, respirando aire fresco por primera vez en días. Nos subimos al coche y fuimos directamente a la casa de mi mamá. Era el momento de que Sofía conociera a su abuela. •

Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms **"Family Practice"** and **"Obstetricians and Gynecologists"**.



6 Señales de un Bebé con Sueño

¿No estás seguro si el bebé está listo para dormir?

Busca estas señales:

- Está irritable
- Se frota las orejas
- Tiene los ojos rojos
- Está llorando
- Arquea la espalda
- Tiene la mirada perdida

Si el bebé muestra señales de que tiene sueño, puede ser que sea hora de dormirlo.

Sueño Seguro: Aprende • Planea • Provee

Aprende como dormirlo con seguridad en hmhb-mt.org.

Este proyecto está financiado total o parcialmente bajo contrato con el Departamento de Salud Pública y Servicios Humanos de Montana. Las declaraciones que aparecen aquí no reflejan necesariamente la opinión del Departamento.





Look High and Low for Creatures of All Shapes and Sizes

It can be a lot of fun for kids to spend time with an adult finding and learning about different plants and creatures. Whether it's spotting ladybugs, counting birds, or feeling the textures of plants and animals (like a slimy worm or a scratchy leaf), exploring the world of plants and animals together helps kids connect with nature and with the adults around them.



Attend and Enjoy a Community Event

Taking kids to community events, like pow wows, community dinners or other free activities in the park, helps them feel like they belong. Being part of these traditions, hearing familiar songs, and smelling the food can make kids feel connected to their community and the adults around them.



Share a Reading Adventure

Reading to kids is a wonderful way to bond. Using funny voices and sounds, exploring letters and colors, and talking about the characters in the story make reading together lots of fun. It's a great way for parents and caregivers to connect with kids.

If you need ideas on how to read aloud to kids, attend a local library story time to learn from the pros!



Make a Rainbow with Items in Your Environment

Helping kids explore their surroundings can make them feel safe and comfortable. A fun game is to have them find different-colored objects around them, which can be arranged to create their very own rainbow! Whether indoors or outdoors, this simple activity can make kids feel happy and secure, and is also a great way to explore and become acquainted with safe new places.

CREATING BRIGHT FUTURES

by HMHB Staff

What's one positive memory that you have from your childhood? Where were you? What were you doing? What were you feeling? What did you smell? Who were you with?

If it's hard to answer this question, you're not alone. Often our strongest memories are about stressful or even traumatic experiences. We often see and hear stories about some of the worst days of someone's life, focusing mostly on the negative. But this is only part of the story. What are the things that help us as adults to manage the inevitable adversity we will face? Research is showing that positive childhood experiences may be part of the answer to how we grow healthy kids and families and stronger, more resilient communities.

What Are Positive Childhood Experiences?

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are moments that make children feel safe, valued, and like they're part of a community. PCEs are the building blocks of a healthy, happy childhood and contribute significantly to emotional and psychological development

7 POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

- 1) *The ability to talk with family about feelings.*
- 2) *The sense that family is supportive during difficult times.*
- 3) *The enjoyment of participation in community traditions.*
- 4) *Feeling a sense of belonging in high school.*
- 5) *Feeling supported by friends.*
- 6) *Having at least two non-parent adults who genuinely care.*
- 7) *Feeling safe and protected by an adult in the home.*

*Bethell C, et al. (2019) JAMA Peds

// Positive childhood experiences don't have to cost a thing, and can have lasting impacts on a child's development, confidence and well-being.

// over time. They don't have to cost a thing, and can have lasting impacts on a child's development, confidence and well-being. And we can all play a part in creating PCEs for our kids and the kids in our communities.

It is crucial to balance the understanding of PCEs with the harmful experiences that children may encounter. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are instances of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction that can negatively impact a child's future mental and physical health. While ACEs pose significant risks, the presence of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can play a crucial role in mitigating these potential harms. Studies have shown that PCEs can offset some of the impact of ACEs. *(cont.)*



How Can I Help Kids Experience PCE's?

On page 16, we've shared examples of some simple and mostly free activities you can share with your own little one or another child you care about.

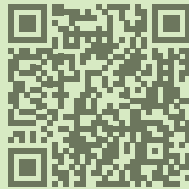
- **Look High and Low for Creatures of All Shapes and Sizes**
- **Attend and Enjoy a Community Event**
- **Share a Reading Adventure**
- **Make a Rainbow with Items in Your Environment**

Can you think of an experience or opportunity you've provided for a child that you hope will influence their life?

By creating positive childhood experiences, we can help shape the future for our children and our communities. Simple moments of connection, belonging, and support can leave a lasting impact, helping kids grow into confident and resilient adults. Let's make every opportunity count! •



Please visit <https://hmhb-mt.org/for-partners/aces-hope/> to learn more about how we can grow resilience in our communities.



Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms "Family Support & Education," "Play Spaces," and "Public Libraries".



Come grow with Head Start careers.



Head Start programs have positions and career pathways in early learning, family and community engagement, working with children with special needs, mental health, finance, HS, administrative support, health, nutrition, and support and transportation services.



START YOUR
HEAD START
CAREER



mtheadstart.org



Mother Love

THE HMHB-MT PODCAST

A safe space where moms and caregivers share their stories and experiences.

FRESH STORIES
ON THE WAY!

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My Journey Through Bipolar II and Motherhood

By Shayla Horner

After my first pregnancy, I was prescribed an antidepressant for postpartum depression. Within 24 hours of starting the medication, I'd cut my hair, started a YouTube channel, and deep-cleaned and redecorated my house. I discovered a new ability to run off of three hours of sleep, and felt like I was thriving. So relieved to be out of my previous state of zombie-like living, I wasn't willing to admit I was equally unwell, and experiencing what I would later recognize as having been a manic episode.

I was 22 then, and wouldn't receive an accurate diagnosis until five years later.

At 27, I was trying to finish college, working part-time at an elementary school, and taking care of my then-5-year-old daughter. I knew that if I didn't help myself, I'd be fighting the same battle of taming my own mind for the rest of my life. I spent my nights watching my daughter sleep, knowing that I needed to

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A diagnosis does not define you. It can dictate choices you make, but it doesn't have to be your entire identity.

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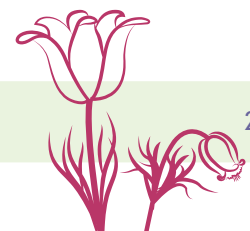
do something – anything – to be the mother she deserved. I knew in my bones that I was a nurturing and devoted mom, but I wanted to feel at peace in order to be able to provide her with peace.

I reached out to a therapist through my university, and canceled my appointment four times before finally showing up. That first session was the beginning of a healing process that was one of the most brutal experiences of my life. Forgiving people who have wronged you is hard; forgiving yourself is merciless. I received a Bipolar II diagnosis, and after dosage adjustments, have had immense luck with the right mood-stabilizing medication.

I found out I was pregnant with my second in December of 2023, and told my doctor that I wanted to taper off my medication. I'd done the research, and knew that mine was one of the most recommended mood-stabilizers for pregnancy, but in spite of advocating for the destigmatization of mental-health conditions, I knew deep down that I didn't want to admit to my new medical team that I was dependent on a medication for survival. My doctor expressed concern, but said it was ultimately my decision. I made the choice to stop.

Though I'd had an easy first pregnancy, this one hit me like a freight train. I was consumed by depression and anxiety, my mind brimming with current dilemmas, past conflicts, and personal downfalls. I had to take frequent bathroom breaks at work to steady my breathing and avoid giving in to my spiraling thoughts. I struggled to perform daily tasks at home, and knew I was losing my ability to hide my diminishing mental health from my daughter – the very reason I'd initially sought help years before. I realized that it wasn't wrong to need help, but it was wrong to jeopardize what I worked so hard to maintain over the years, just to avoid stigma.

I went to my OB's office and was met with pure grace by the resident medical assistant. I'll never forget the kindness that he showed me in such a vulnerable moment. He told me that while I'm choosing to share my body with someone else, I'm still worth loving and advocating for. He was clear and communicative about the medical basis for his reflections, sharing the scientific justifications for why it was okay to restart my medication. I walked out of the office feeling seen. *(cont.)*



Facing Addiction & Fighting Stigma
BECAUSE WE'RE STRONG.

A diagnosis does not define you. It can dictate choices you make, but it doesn't have to be your entire identity. The imbalances within my body don't determine my capabilities as a parent. I can be a great mom, a loving wife, and a functioning member of society while also needing assistance in maintaining the disequilibrium in my brain that is quite literally out of my control. What is in my control, however, is choosing to be honest with myself and my support team, so that I can not just survive, but thrive. •



Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms "Mental Health Providers" and "Psychiatric Services".

Tell Us What You Think

Please scan the QR code to share your thoughts on the fourth issue of LIFTS magazine. Your feedback is important to us — we'd love to know what you enjoyed and what you'd like to see more of. **All survey participants will be entered into quarterly drawings for a chance to win a \$25 gift certificate.** Thank you for your time and input!



ASKING FOR HELP ISN'T A WEAKNESS. IT'S BRAVE.

- As Montanans, together we can:
- Face Addiction
 - Fight Stigma
 - Support Treatment & Recovery
 - Help Save Lives

BECAUSE WE'RE STRONG.



HelpSaveLivesMT.org



TELL YOUR DOCTOR



Are things not as you expected?

Expectations

- Supported by friends and family
- Warm fuzzies while breastfeeding
- Endless love for your baby
- Sleeping when the baby sleeps

Reality

- Feeling more alone than ever
- Constant worry or scary thoughts
- Don't feel connection with baby
- Can't sleep, even when baby does

1 in 6 moms will feel this way. You deserve to be cared for.

Parenting is hard. Sharing doesn't have to be. Tell your doctor, midwife, or nurse today.



Building Confidence for New Parents Through Home Visiting

by Shelby Gustin & Chaz Gustin

SHELBY:

I learned about home visiting after my son was born. I was at my first WIC appointment, and the home visiting program was based in the same public health office. I was kind of anxious about being a new mom, and was a stay-at-home mom at the time, so I didn't really have a lot of people to talk to. I was looking for guidance and advice, but also needed some social interaction myself. The first visit was nerve wracking – I'm a new mom, I have a three-week old baby, and I don't know what I'm doing. Towards the end of the visit I felt a lot more relaxed, a lot more comfortable, and more open to the program.

The frequency of visits depended on how comfortable I felt with my son, and where he was at, developmentally – they base it on your child's needs, as well as your own. At first, I was really worried that I wasn't interactive enough, that I wasn't helping my son reach his milestones, especially at a younger age. The home visitor came and was very reassuring. She told me: "He's ahead of where he should be, and he's doing great, and you're doing great."

This program is not just for the babies, they have a lot of resources for the mothers and fathers. If you need to see a therapist, they can bring you a list of providers; if you just need to vent, they can sit there and listen. They're very supportive. There was a visit where the house was a mess, and I was hurrying up and cleaning, and we were able to do the home visit while she helped me pick up.

I think that all new moms would benefit from home visiting. I'm pregnant with my second now, and I still want to keep doing the program. I definitely think it's for everyone if they're interested in it. It's awesome. One of the best decisions that I made as a new mom was getting into this program.

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There was a visit where the house was a mess, and I was hurrying up and cleaning, and we were able to do the home visit while she helped me pick up.

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CHAZ:

We had Greyson when I was a student in high school. There were times when I didn't want to go to school, but with the help of Shelby, and my aunt, I was able to fully go to my classes and stay knowledgeable and do my homework. Greyson was there at my graduation, as a little man, just a couple months old. It was so awesome. Eventually, I want to go to college.

We had a lady from WIC who talked to us about the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program, and it felt like a great opportunity. I was grateful to have somebody that cared. We had this nice lady come in and teach us all about our child and his development. There were times where I was at work, and Shelby would let me know how the home visit time was spent. But when I'm able to be there, I try to be present, and get all the information I can, because it really is beneficial to our son's growth.

I have a friend who just had a baby, and I was talking to him about home visiting. His girlfriend was really interested, because he's busy with work. Next time I see him, I'm going to bring it up and just let him know how important it is for kids and for the parents, as well.

My advice to new dads is to be patient, and don't be too hard on yourself. You're still new to being a parent. You've just got to try your best and keep doing things day by day. It all comes together in the end if you work for it. •

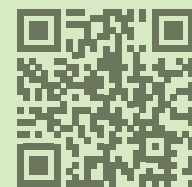
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Visit hmhb-lifts.org for local resources using the search terms **"Family Support & Education," "Food and Nutrition Supports,"** and **"Public Benefits Enrollment"**. You can also visit hmhb-mt.org/homevisiting to learn more.



HOME VISITING:

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a home visiting program and how can it benefit my family?

Home visiting is a voluntary, proven support and coaching service that strengthens families through pregnancy and early childhood. Trained home visitors, such as nurses and early childhood specialists, work with expecting parents and caregivers of young children, to build parenting skills and connect families with needed services to support optimal physical, social, and emotional child development.

Who can participate in a home visiting program?

Eligibility for home visiting programs varies by program, but some are available regardless of income or background. Currently, not all areas in Montana have the same access to home visiting programs, but statewide work is being done to change this!

What happens during a home visit?

During a home visit, the visitor will provide personalized support based on your family's needs to increase your competence and confidence in parenting. This may include discussing your child's development, answering parenting questions, providing lactation support, offering health and safety tips, and connecting you with community resources.

What if I'm not able to have someone visit my home or I don't have a home?

Home visiting programs are designed to be supportive and non-intrusive. If you have concerns, you can discuss them with the program coordinator to find a solution that works for you, such as virtual visits or meetings in community spaces like a library or coffee shop!

Is there a cost to participate in a home visiting program?

Most home visiting programs are offered at no cost to families. They are often funded by state or federal programs, non-profits, or community organizations.

How do I sign up for a home visiting program?

The best way to sign up for home visiting is to reach out to a local program near you. You can use the LIFTS Online Resource Guide (hmhb-lifts.org) to find home visiting sites across Montana by typing in "home visiting" in the Search feature. If you have trouble locating one, please call the LIFTS Warmline (406) 430-9100 for assistance. •

Head Start cares about your whole family.



Serving children 0-5 and pregnant women in Montana. Our program supports your family through quality early learning, healthy foods, and comprehensive medical, dental, mental health and developmental service coordination.

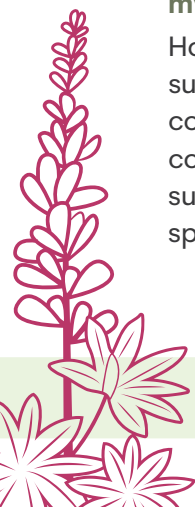
We partner with you to ensure your child has the Head Start advantage.



LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS



mtheadstart.org



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Montana WIC is proud to serve Montana families with food and nutrition benefits. WIC serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding parents as well as infants and children up to their fifth birthday.



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An **online resource guide** for families expecting and raising young children in Montana.



- **Easily searchable** by location & service type
- **Over 3,000 resources statewide** listed including birthing & parenting classes, car seat installers, native cultural connections and more

 www.hmhb-lifts.org

 **(406) 430-9100**
Anonymous warmline
answered by HMHB staff



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The Montana Coalition