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Missoula County

Media Release

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Missoula Forum for Children and Youth Celebrates Twentieth Anniversary

The Missoula Forum for Children and Youth is celebrating two decades of community collaboration by hosting an anniversary appreciation event on Friday, Feb. 26 from 3 to 5:30 p.m. at the Big Sky Room at the Garlington, Lohn, and Robinson Building. Current and past Missoula Forum for Children and Youth programs will be highlighted and community partners and collaborators will be honored.

The Missoula Forum for Children and Youth is a program within the City-County Department of Grants and Community Programs that works to prevent underage substance abuse in Missoula County through the coordination of coalitions that organize and implement community-wide projects to provide early childhood support, promote positive youth development, and carry out environmental strategies to prevent underage substance abuse.

Twenty years ago, a group of community leaders and lawmakers came together to discuss the growing problem of substance abuse among youth in Missoula County. At that time, more than half of Missoula tenth graders were using alcohol on a regular basis. In addition, more than half of all students started drinking at or before the age of 14, which put them at much higher risk of addiction and other health problems later in life. Seeking momentum to change these alarming trends on a community level, the Missoula Forum for Children and Youth was created. The Forum brought together community leaders, prevention specialists, parents, youth and youth service providers to begin building capacity for a unified vision for prevention planning and implementation in Missoula.

Today the Missoula Forum for Children and Youth continues to provide a framework for prevention in Missoula. The Forum does this by supporting comprehensive programs and strategies that address underage substance abuse as well as a variety of other behavioral health issues. It is the Forum's basic belief that collaboration is the key to changing community norms and promoting protective factors for young people. These collaborative efforts have helped reduce the underage alcohol use in Missoula to 38 percent and the number of students age 14 or younger reported having tried alcohol down to 30 percent.

During the event on Friday, Feb. 26, there will be a short program from 3:15 to 3:45 p.m. featuring a welcome from Mayor John Engen, words from Commissioner Jean Curtiss, a brief speech by Jori Quinlan, a past Coordinator of the Missoula Forum for Children and Youth, and an update from our current Outreach Coordinator, Leah Fitch.

**The
Forum**
Celebrating **20 Years** of Collaboration

The Missoula Forum for Children and Youth is an alliance of prevention workgroups united by a common mission:

To build and maintain a supportive environment for collaborative and proactive work to help Missoula prevent substance abuse and other problem behaviors as well as grow healthy and resilient children and youth.