

**Greater Gallatin
United Way**



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For immediate release.

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To learn more about Greater Gallatin United Way’s kidsLINK Afterschool Program, watch this short film [here](#).

Gallatin County Provides \$309,000 in COVID-19 Relief Funds for Greater Gallatin United Way kidsLINK Afterschool Program to Support Working Families

November 23, 2021 – The Gallatin County Commission voted today to provide a \$309,000 subgrant award from the county’s COVID-19 relief funds to Greater Gallatin United Way (GGUW) to stabilize and staff the afterschool childcare program known as kidsLINK. Out-of-school-time programming will assist families, businesses and school districts in Gallatin County by rebuilding the local economy and social services that have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This is a real, practical way we can help make this program viable,” said Gallatin County Commissioner Joe Skinner. “This program helps hardworking families remain employed, helps businesses keep their employees. It’s a big behind-the-scenes benefit for all of us. We are privileged to be able to help fund this.”

“During the pandemic, when afterschool programming started going away, we started understanding how fundamental it is to our families and our economy. It’s just a foundation, mission-critical item,” said Commissioner Scott MacFarlane.

“This is a great use of our American Rescue Act Plan funds. It will impact a lot of families in our county,” said Commissioner Zach Brown.

For more than 20 years, GGUW’s kidsLINK Program has partnered with school districts, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and private businesses to support working families with out-of-school-time care for their children in Gallatin County. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, GGUW supported 32 afterschool programs in a four-county area. Almost every community in Gallatin County was involved in the kidsLINK Program network. But when the pandemic hit, most of those programs closed when the schools closed. Parents everywhere were scrambling for childcare solutions.

Greater Gallatin United Way CEO, Danica Jamison says, “Afterschool, before-school, summer, and other out-of-school-time programming for youth is essential for working families and for a strong economy. Many families who participate in kidsLINK programs struggle to make ends meet each month and are unable to pay a program fee for their children to participate, especially during this pandemic. GGUW kidsLINK aims to ensure all kidsLINK programs are accessible to these and all families and relies on community and government support to make this possible.”

kidsLINK Program Director, Karen DeCotis says, “One current challenge is securing enough staffing to reopen kidsLINK program sites and keep them open. Recently we experimented with new staff positions and incentivized hiring practices, which is showing some success. We are hopeful that with COVID relief funds we will be able to hire and retain adequate numbers of quality, enthusiastic staff members.”

Public schools receive zero funding to operate afterschool programs and only eight sites in Gallatin County receive federal funding support from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant: Belgrade Saddle Peak, Bozeman Hyalite, Irving, and Whittier, Three Forks elementary, middle, and high school, and West Yellowstone. 21st CCLC funding only covers a portion of the costs of those programs.

DeCotis shared that a kidsLINK Program goal for our communities is that no child has to be home alone afterschool. “While providing a safe place for children to be during the out-of-school-time hours is our number one priority, we also care about making the programs engaging, affordable, emotionally and physically safe, academically supportive, and fun. We try to help each young person find their ‘spark’ through a variety of enrichment activities and positive mentorship.”

“An economic impact report in 2019 brought to light that more than 5,852 jobs benefited from kidsLINK,” says Jamison. “Employers gained more than 397,000 hours of workforce time, and working parents pocketed more than \$9.8 million of additional payroll because their children were in kidsLINK programs while they finished their workday. The pandemic brought kidsLINK programs to ground zero. County funding will help us rebuild the kidsLINK network and return these essential services to our community.”

Gallatin County is receiving \$22 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Gallatin County Commission is in the process of deciding on what to do with these critical dollars.

Portions of the \$22 million have been allocated to help pay for the county's pandemic response. The allocation to Greater Gallatin United Way is the second commitment to an outside agency to date. The commission has also provided \$2 million to Gallatin College Montana State University to help grow the local and regional workforce in high-demand industries.

Commissioners continue to work with nonprofits, local governments, and businesses across Gallatin County to allocate other funds to help with four program areas they have prioritized: housing, mental health, economic recovery, and water and sewer projects.

Visit gallatin.mt.gov for more information.

About Greater Gallatin United Way

Greater Gallatin United Way's mission is to mobilize the caring power of our communities. We empower donors, volunteers, businesses, governments, non-profits and community groups to invest in neighbors and improve the quality of life for everyone in Gallatin, Madison, Meagher and Park counties. Working together, we identify our community's most critical needs and implement collaborative and innovative solutions. Learn more at www.greatergallatinunitedway.org.