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Independent Living and Community Participation

Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities

11-14-2022

Montana Voices Amplified: A Microphone so People with Disabilities and their Families are Heard

Shawna Hanson

Stacey Bliss

Wisam Raheem

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Montana Agitate, Advocate, Help Each Other Navigate

A MICROPHONE SO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE HEARD

History

In the summer of 2020, a parent advocate wrote an essay about increasing her autistic* son's tolerance for wearing a face mask. She described the process and why it was important. It was evident to the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities (RIIC) and the Montana Family to Family Health Information Center (MT F2F) staff that this message needed to be shared, especially during a pandemic.

In September 2020, Montana Voices Amplified (MVA) was launched to share the voices of selfadvocates. MVA is a platform for people to speak for themselves. We edit, publish, and promote articles and videos focused on lived experience.

* We respect the autistic community's rejection of person-first language.

Details

Contributors submit a five-minute video or a 600-700-word essay on any topic related to their lived experience as a person with a disability or caring for someone with a disability. Once a submission has been accepted, authors are paid \$100.

Submissions are edited, resources are researched and added, and the essay is returned to the author for review. After the submission is approved by the author, the graphic designer creates print and electronic files.

Essays are posted on the website, shared on social media, and printed in a professionally designed publication to distribute to the author, families, schools, agencies, legislators, etc.

Captioned videos are posted on the MT F2F website and shared on social media.

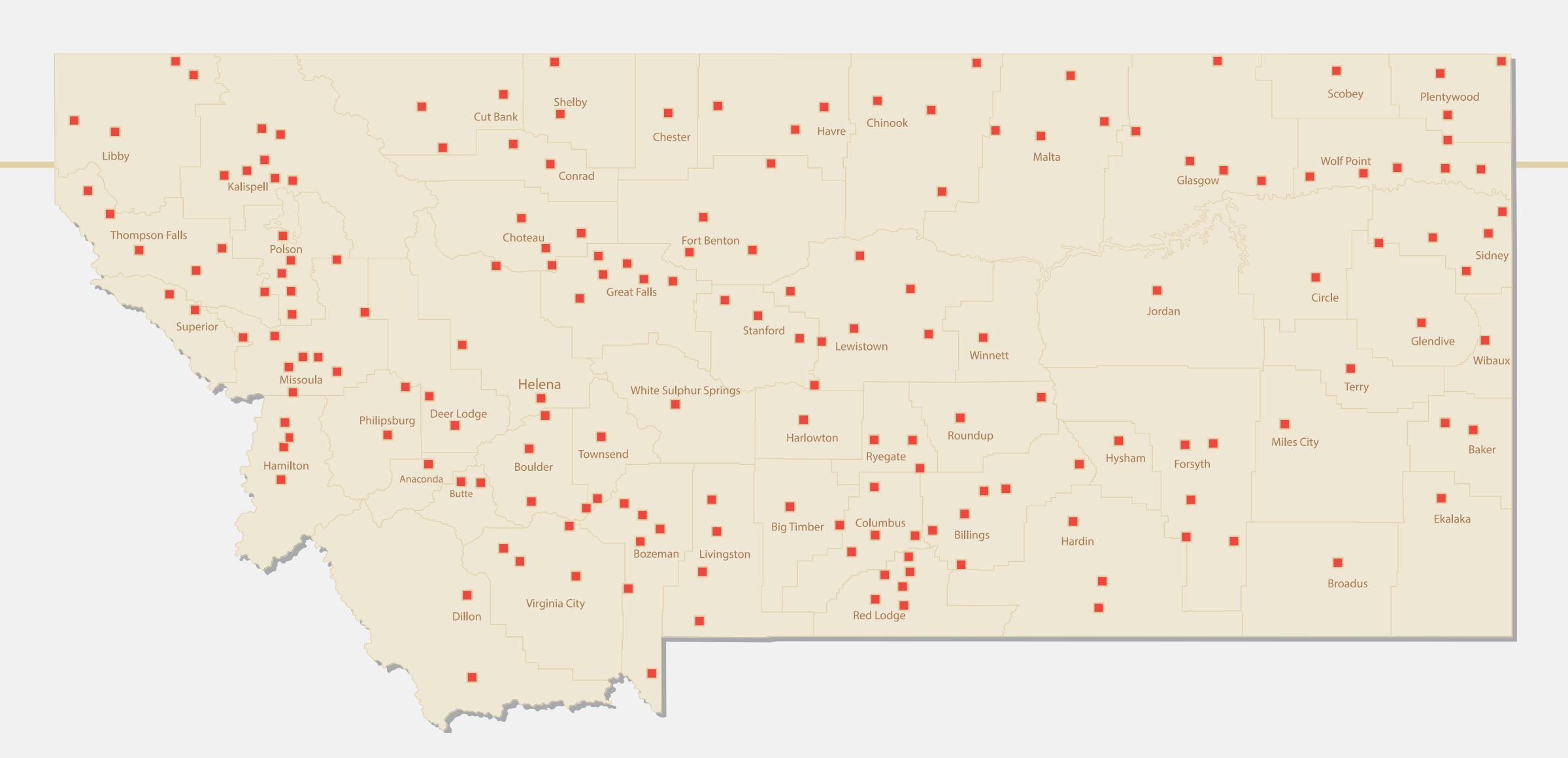
Accessible formats (accessible PDF and ePub) are available via University of Montana ScholarWorks.

Impact

- Supports self-advocates
- Promotes connections and communication
- Provides an opportunity to build partnerships with people, groups, organizations, etc.
- Reaches people in a very large state
- Cross-promotes Rural Institute services

Lessons Learned

- Continue to be intentional about profiling diverse voices.
- Consider distribution plan and think about the right audience for the message.
- Track where and how issues are distributed. (Conferences? Tabling? Mailing?)
- Include publication date or citation on each issue.
- Access to a fantastic graphic designer and accessibility specialist is key.



The map above illustrates the reach of Montana Voices Amplified.

Montana is a rural state, home to just over a million people scattered across 147,040 square miles. Montana is the fourth largest state in the U.S. It would take more than 10 hours to drive from Montana's Idaho border to the Dakota border. Montana's geography combined with the country's poorest internet* makes access to services and providers difficult, and outreach to hundreds of rural communities challenging.

* It's Official, Montana Has the Worst Internet Service in the Nation, Great Falls Tribune, 2021/04/23

I hope that by

sharing my experiences with some of these new ways I can now 'see' theater, movies or museums, it will encourage others to try out these services. They really are a game changer for those with sight loss.

Sara Streeter



Rediscovering Museums with Tactile Tours

Montana Voices Amplified has given me a way to share my story. This is empowering and allows us to help build awareness and understanding in others. These are powerful tools and meaningful gifts. When our stories resonate with readers, lives are impacted and partnership grows.

Elizabeth Cummings

Health Information Center

I love the MT

Voices project as it gives a voice to the crowd that is most often not heard. It allows us to tell our stories in our own way, which makes it such a unique format and it's all made possible by the talented and dedicated staff. Without your hard work, we can't get our stories or information out to the world.



You Are Putting Down



A Parent's Perspective:

Navigating Face Coverings

Presented by:

In a state as rural

as Montana, you often feel

isolated in raising a medically

complex child. Voices Amplified

succeeds at connecting parents--their

experiences, wisdom, and insight--and

allowing them to share and receive as if

they were in the same room. Hearing

(my writing has) been helpful gives my

experiences meaning and my life

more purpose.

Elizabeth Hill

Shawna Hanson, Outreach Coordinator for the Montana Family to Family Health Information Center Stacey Bliss, Communication, Education, and Data Manager for the Rural Institute

Old TV Static - Finding 'My
Way' Through Medical Trauma

Wisam Raheem, Accessible Technology & Media Design Specialist for the Rural Institute

A Parent's Perspective:

It's helpful

to know how chronic

illness/disabilities shape us

and how sharing our stories

can help non-disabled people

understand us. Understanding

is the first step you take

toward kindness!

Bee Croyle

How to Advocate Without

Alienating Team Members





