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UM expands childhood mental health grant work across Montana reservations

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NEWS RELEASE

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**UM EXPANDS CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH
GRANT WORK ACROSS MONTANA RESERVATIONS**

MISSOULA—

A historic mental health partnership between the Chippewa-Cree Tribe on the Rocky Boy Reservation, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and The University of Montana is now being expanded to the Blackfeet and Flathead reservations.

This expansion resulted from the project's positive, initial results at Rocky Boy and the approval of local tribal councils and schools. The project is run by the Montana Center for Childhood Trauma, which is part of UM's Division of Educational Research and Service.

Funding for the project comes from a highly competitive grant award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The collaboration also stems from research conducted through the DERS' Montana Safe Schools Project, which has received significant interest and support from U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns.

The Montana Center for Childhood Trauma provides training to school counselors who work with students with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Aaron Morsette, the center's trauma intervention specialist, said PTSD was first diagnosed in soldiers

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returning from Vietnam but is now understood to also affect about 25 percent of children exposed to violence.

“All of us are horrified by violent events, yet most of us recover with time,” Morsette said. “But about one in four students need professional help to recover.”

Some research suggests that up to 22 percent of American Indians may suffer from some form of PTSD. Morsette said there are many reasons why kids and their families hesitate to go to mental health counselors.

“We think that the best way to help is to take the services where the kids are,” he said, “and that’s why we’re working in the schools.”

One central aspect of the grant is to use school-based mental health interventions such as the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools. This program helps students work through traumatic events and memories that could come as the result of the loss of family or friends, a national catastrophe or a broad range of emotionally challenging experiences.

“Our students report they are getting healthier as they go through the CBITS training,” said Kevin Barsotti, a counselor at **Box Elder** Public Schools near Rocky Boy. “We have a wonderful facility and staff to support our efforts to help our students” he said.

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