

Park County



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Yellowstone River near Gardiner, by Mary Anne Keyes.

Park County, located just north of Yellowstone National Park, provides the only year-round gateway entrance. The county itself encompasses over 1.7 million acres, including 57% public lands and the highest peak in Montana – Granite Peak. Just over 16,000 residents enjoy the beautiful expanse of scenic mountains and river valleys the landscape offers. Tourism and hospitality, healthcare and social services, government, and agriculture are major economic drivers in Park County. Nine communities are spread throughout the county beginning with Wilsall in the north and ending with Cooke City in the far southeast. The Park County MSU Extension office has four staff members who provide research-based, non-biased information to county clientele.

Loan Program Assists Businesses Affected by the Pandemic

In 2019, Park County MSU Extension took over management of a nearly \$1 million small business revolving loan fund (RLF) on behalf of the City of Livingston and Park County. Shortly thereafter, Park Local Development Corporation was formed as a 501(c)(3) to oversee the RLF and enable the expansion of business assistance resources in Park County. Park County

Economic & Community Development Extension Agent Katie Weaver serves as the organization’s executive director.

Shortly after the Governor’s stay-at-home order was issued in March 2020, Park County MSU Extension and Park Local Development Corporation mobilized a group of community business and financial leaders to explore ways the RLF could be used to help the county’s struggling small businesses. An emergency microloan program was proposed and quickly approved by the city and county. In May 2020, the Emergency Microloan Program online application went live for businesses adversely impacted by COVID-19. Over 20 small businesses applied for the \$10,000 loans and by July, nine loans totaling \$85,000 were approved and funds dispersed to businesses in Cooke City, Emigrant, Gardiner, and Livingston.

Developed to fill a gap in existing grant and loan programs for small businesses, the emergency microloan program was able to assist businesses that were unable to access other financing. There was a great deal of confusion in the early days of the rollout of CARES Act funding and this local program was key in assisting many businesses as they navigated a multitude of different programs.

Over the summer, to support businesses in adapting to current conditions and planning for the future, nearly \$70,000

was raised in charitable donations and grants. In December 2020, this new grant program, designed to meet the ever-evolving needs of Park County's small business community, will implement business training and technical assistance to ensure the viability of our small businesses and their future resilience.

Youth Aware of Mental Health Reaches All High Schools in the County

"I learned about drugs from my mom. There were some drugs she used that she would be okay with; still my mom. Other drugs made her crazy. She finally just left. That was six years ago. I think you all need to know that about me."

-YAM participant to their classmates

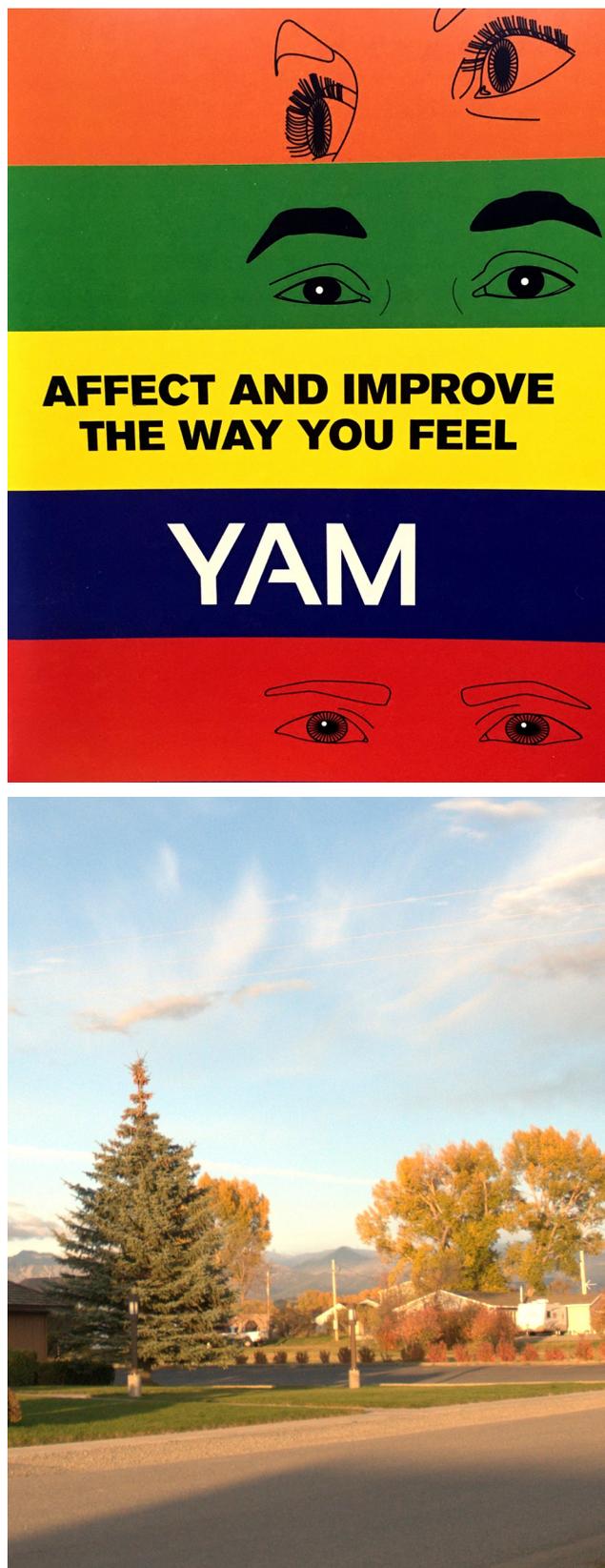
Park County ranks fourth highest for the rate of suicides within the state when adjusted per capita, according to ChildTrends data from 2007-2016. "There's a culture of stigma surrounding mental health here," said YAM facilitator and MSU Extension agent Mary Anne Keyes. "The YAM program breaks through the stigma. We talk about how physical and mental health are equally important for the whole body to be healthy."

Through the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program, 128 Park County freshman were able to have candid discussions with classmates about issues they face and to brainstorm solutions. YAM is a five-session program covering the basics of mental health and offering youth the opportunity to role play tough situations. Keyes noted "This class covers uncomfortable topics like drug use, parents fighting, depression, and relationship breakups. Participants think about the hypothetical situations before experiencing them. For example, it helps students to know that everyone feels uncomfortable and yucky when parents or guardians fight. We brainstorm positive things to do to feel better." The class focuses on the importance of self-care for mental health, what you can do to feel better, what depression is, and how to know when a friend needs help.

Most importantly, community, state, and national resources are discussed and tried. "Students put the National Crisis Hotline and Text Line numbers into their cell phones," Keyes said. "Then at least one of them tests the numbers immediately. It helps to hear there is a real person at the end of the hotline and a real person on the text line. They know resources are a button away if they or a friend ever needs them."

Park County Native Hired as New Agriculture Agent

Hello, my name is Josh Bilbao and I am the new Ag/Natural Resources/Horticulture Agent for Park County MSU Extension. I am no stranger to Park County as I was born and raised in Livingston, graduating from Park High in 2001.





Previous Page: (top) Students receive a booklet as well as the opportunity to role play experiences, by Mary Anne Keyes; **(bottom)** Clyde Park, MT, by Katie Weaver; **This Page:** Sunset over a hay field in the Yellowstone Valley near Livingston, by Katie Weaver

After high school I attended college at Montana State University where I graduated with a Bachelor's in Wildlife Management (05') and a Masters in Range Management (08'). After graduate school, I took a job with Boulder County Parks and Open Space in Longmont, CO, where I worked with landowners and leasees on water resource/water rights issues, plant ecology and revegetation needs and wildlife-related issues. In 2011, I became the Agricultural Resources Manager for the City of Boulder Open Spaces and Mountain Parks in Boulder, CO. This position allowed me to work with agricultural leasees of the city's open space properties on best management practices for multi-property use, where agriculture production ranged from traditional cow-calf operations to small-scale organic vegetables. In 2015, my family was able to move back to Montana where we hope to stay for the long haul. Since October 2017, I was the agriculture agent for Gallatin County MSU Extension before moving to Park County. I greatly look forward to working with producers and landowners of Park County.

Park County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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