



TO: Headwaters Board and Staff

FROM: FSG Team (Abigail Ridgway, Miya Cain, Njideka Ofoleta, and Alex Caldwell)

DATE: May 5, 2023

RE: Phase 2 Community Wellbeing Focus Groups Synthesis

Thank you for the opportunity to support the Headwaters Foundation with your strategy refresh. As part of that work, FSG worked in close partnership with the foundation staff and their community partners to convene five focus groups with members of the communities the foundation most seeks to reach:

1. Rural, low-income families (4/11/23)
2. Single parents (4/18/23)
3. Indigenous women (4/19/23)
4. Non-binary and LGBTQ+ individuals (4/20/23)
5. Spanish-speaking individuals and families (4/24/23)

The goals of the focus groups were to better understand:

- Participation in civic engagement
- Concerns and opportunities related to parenting young children
- Community visions for building power and strengthening the region's early childhood system
- Equity considerations and barriers that each of these communities experience

This document summarizes key themes from those discussions and highlights potential solutions for the Headwaters Foundation to consider.

Several key themes emerged across the five focus groups:

- The biggest barriers to health and wellbeing included **challenges in meeting basic needs** (including accessing things like healthy food and child care), and **challenges to accessing public services** due to stigma, lack of awareness, poor customer service, and racism.
- When it comes to advancing fair and just opportunities for health in the region, focus group participants recommended **increasing access to services** by streamlining enrollment processes, investing in navigators, reducing stigma in using social support services, and training service-providing workers to be aware of the needs of Montana's marginalized populations (e.g., trainings on gender-inclusivity or poverty awareness, trauma-informed service provision).
- Focus group participants shared that the biggest barriers to getting involved in community engagement were **limited time and challenges in getting basic needs met** – as well as a sense of **disillusionment, or a concern of being not fully aware/educated on policy issues**.
- Participants recommended increasing civic engagement and community power by 1) **leveraging a variety of tools (e.g., voter guides, mailers) and communities (e.g., young and older adults)**, 2) by **making it easy** for community members to get involved (e.g., compensation, building on past

involvement), and 3) through **authentic engagement with specific populations** to ensure they feel involvement is safe and meaningful.

- To strengthen the region’s early childhood systems, focus group members recommended **reducing cost barriers for families to get child care**, investing in **evidence-based programs for parents and families**, and investing in **community centers for families** – and especially for youth.

These themes are detailed below with quotes from the focus group participants about the barriers and opportunities in three areas:

1. Health Equity in Western Montana
2. Civic Engagement and Building Community Power
3. Strengthening Early Childhood Systems and Youth Supports

1. Health Equity in Western Montana

Barriers to Achieving Health Equity in Western Montana

The biggest barriers to health and wellbeing included challenges in meeting basic needs and challenges to accessing public services due to stigma, lack of awareness, poor customer service, and racism.

Focus group attendees detailed the following barriers that Western Montana’s marginalized communities face in their efforts to achieve their best health and wellness:

- **In Montana, there is a strong stigma against accessing public services stemming from the “bootstrap mentality.” There is judgment from others who believe those using public services are not trying to work.**
 - *“In Montana ... there’s a lot of stigma against accessing services. We have this ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ mindset. If you reach out for too much help, you’re bastardized for it. It’s very unfortunate. Low-income, younger folks are in that stigmatized group. There’s a lot of shame from the older people that are more well-off... Older adults that have jobs look down on younger people that seem to not have their act together yet.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“I’ve been homeless for 4 years, always getting lectured for not having a house, not having a job.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“We need to normalize getting help. We all need help sometimes, sometimes more than others. We shouldn’t be looked down on just because we’re trying to survive and thrive.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **People are unaware of their service eligibility, often because of changing rules during and after COVID.**
 - *“It might be because the government switched the rules - and people who were not able to get the services *are* now able to get services (this happened October 2022). People think they’re still not able to get services. Here in Missoula, we have an effort to get people to reapply for EBT, free-and-reduced lunch, and other services.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“For example, everyone thought we had to go to the tribal WIC office, but in fact, Tribal and nontribal folks can go to any WIC office. So people need to know what’s even available to them.”* – Rural, low-income participant

- [Translated] *“Facebook group for Latinos in Montana is really good. Most people are in Bozeman but some things are in Dillon too. I spoke with someone who works at the Chamber of Commerce who was trying to do outreach to the Latino community, and I am going to help with that. I want to make it easier for the Latino community to use public resources.”* – Spanish participant
- **Transit (gas for cars, usually) is expensive and any public options (e.g., buses) are inconvenient or nonexistent. There are also not enough rural-based offices for enrolling people. Web-based enrollment is not sufficient for older adults.**
 - *“We live 20 miles outside of town. We have an old truck - it is a gas guzzler. We are working with CFS [Child and Family Services] so we’re doing visitation with the kids. They asked us, ‘do you want to see the kids more?’ I can’t afford the fuel to go see the kids. I think there needs to be a resource that helps parents see their kids – especially after work hours. Cash assistance would help so much. We just need that extra \$20 so we can get back to work. That needs to be addressed for homeless folks. Town pump showers - they used to be \$10, now they’re \$14. We spent \$40 on laundry for a week’s worth of clothes. That’s a visit to the kids. So there’s a real tradeoff here. As a result, I’m wearing clothes that I should have washed last week.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“Transportation and gas to commute from rural areas to towns is a huge barrier for me! The closest grocery store is 15 miles away, which is closer than a lot of other folks are to theirs. And my car isn’t exactly new or four wheel drive, so if the roads are not good, then I am not going that day.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **Even if you’re eligible for services, customer service is very poor. For example:**
 - Long, time-intensive, confusing and cumbersome process to access services.
 - *“I have a close friend who is homeless. And she doesn’t have an active phone. She has to take the bus, she doesn’t have phone service, she doesn’t have ID. Where do people start? It’s all phone numbers. Even to call SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] is so time consuming.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“One of the big hurdles is going in to get services. It takes two hours to talk with someone. You have to call directly at 7:30am to get through. If you call after that, you have to wait for 3+ hours to get through. A lot of people who have to be on assistance - they will take that time because that’s the only way they will survive.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“The application was very long. Do you want this or this kind of housing? They don’t tell you the difference. You have to do mountains of googling.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
 - Staff are often rude and offer minimal customer service.
 - *“I’ve worked with people [at the government] to get SNAP, Medicaid, etc - and they don’t want to help...Medicaid has different programs - like paying for a hotel and gas to get their child eye services. But when I tried to ask for services, they just rattled off the main set of services. I can’t imagine what it’s like for people who have no time, no computer, no phone - I mean they’re mean to me. I’ve heard of people who go down to the office and they get yelled at but they can’t get through on the phone.”* – Rural, low-income participant

- Public services are too narrowly focused, so families are not able to use funds for the things they really need. (e.g., a grocery stipend for a family that eats meat they secure through hunting might be better spent on gas or child care)
 - *“We don’t have a lot of cash assistance programs. We have TANF, but mostly the grant programs I oversee are not cash assistance. But there’s a lot of evidence that shows that when you give people cash assistance, people are able to identify what they need and make their budget themselves. I would like to see more cash assistance pilot programs, especially in rural communities. And people don’t always need \$600 per month per grocery - since they’re hunting so they have lots of meat. But if I could roll over \$300 from that budget into gas or something else, that would be really helpful.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **In addition, people who do enroll in public services (e.g., WIC, SNAP) can fall off a financial cliff if their income surpasses the benefits cutoff. That benefits cliff keeps people perpetually in poverty.**
 - *“We have case manager positions open all the time, posted around \$40k. As soon as you hit \$38k, you don’t get food stamps and other assistance to get from the lower class to the lower-middle class. When you’re starting out, you might be making \$23k. If we could offer those case manager positions at \$50-60k, that could cover the difference. But my kids would lose their schooling at a nice private school where I get Best Beginnings scholarships – it costs \$10-12k to send my kids to daycare – so I won’t take that case manager position because there’s too big of a difference between the amount I would lose in benefits versus the monetary – benefit of the higher position. If people don’t get paid enough to live, they’re not going to take the higher-paid position.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“I’ve been on food stamps and section 8 vouchers; I’ve gotten all the help. You had to really be pitiful, you have to act pitiful. It doesn’t feel good as a person, but you do it because you have to get your and your kids’ needs met. I make good money now but still living paycheck to paycheck. I’m not ‘pitiful’ enough to get services. People say ‘I can’t make more than that or I will lose my housing.’ We’re in a perpetual cycle. If you make \$2 more you lose \$500 in food stamps, but you then you only have \$2 for food.”* – Indigenous women participant

Potential Solutions to Advancing Health Equity in Western Montana

Participants recommended increasing enrollment in public services by streamlining them, investing in navigators, reducing stigma, and training service-providing workers to be aware of the needs of Montana’s marginalized populations (e.g., gender-inclusive trainings, poverty awareness trainings, trauma-informed service provision for tribal populations).

To advance health equity and better get community members connected with the services they need, focus group participants offered the following solutions:

- **The group asked that enrollment in services be more streamlined, ideally a “one stop shop” for eligibility for all types of services.**
 - *“During COVID, it seems like people learned how to get the services they need online. People are used to using apps. So waiting on a phone call, leaving a message, some of those old school methods of getting information don’t work for them. So there’s been some efforts to create*

more apps. Maybe a menu could pop up: “do you need support with child care? With food?” We definitely don’t have that in place in our community - there are certain pieces - but it’s not consolidated.” – Rural, low-income participant

- **Navigators are essential to making it easier for people to learn about services for which they are eligible, fill out paperwork, and move through the process.**
 - *“The only reason I was able to survive was I had a case manager. She was advocating for me, she knows her way around, she knows the services. A lot of people would benefit from that.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - [Translated] *“I have found it really hard to find somewhere to rent. There are a lot of scams. It would be helpful to have a resource that helps with housing, even just orienting you.”* – Spanish-speaking participant
 - The group focusing on LGBTQ+ and nonbinary issues highlighted that **peer navigators** have been a powerful support for some of this group. For example, the “Mosaic” group works with neurodivergent individuals at the University of Montana to connect volunteer students with people in the community trying to get enrolled in public housing.
- **They recommended changing the narrative of who is getting these services.**
 - *“Providing a community space for that conversation - even if it’s a media piece, or a part of your newsletter - is the most impactful way to address stigma. It’s about sharing the voices of people who are willing to be vulnerable. Like I don’t look like a homeless person, but it’s something I’ve had to deal with in my life. And if I’m not willing to talk about that, then that plays into the stigma that homeless people are ‘dirty vagrants.’”* – Rural, low-income participant

The group focused on Spanish-language speakers raised several needs specific to the Spanish-speaking and/or migrant community, including English classes and free legal help:

- [Translated] *“The community needs English classes. None are available. Many Latinos in the area are seasonal workers and have not been able to learn English.”* – Spanish-speaking participant
- [Translated] *“Lawyers would be really helpful. Immigration is really challenging, and legal help is expensive. More workforce resources would also be helpful, especially for immigrants.”* – Spanish-speaking participant
- [Translated] *“We couldn’t find a place to rent without a sponsor because we don’t have SSN or ID.”* – Spanish-speaking participant

The group focused on Indigenous women suggested that customer service with public programs can be **traumatizing** and highlighted the need for training for public employees on topics like understanding poverty and checking biases.

- *“[Public service employees] have stereotypes of who Native people are [and there is] blatant racism in your face...You have to choose between getting treated poorly with racism and micro-aggressions or your kids aren’t going to get fed.”* – Indigenous women focus group participant
- *“I think [we need] people that understand - whether natives or just minorities - someone who is able to help you navigate and know what is available. You can go on a website but it’s overwhelming. It’s a 4-5 hour wait to get to someone on the phone, and then it feels like an interrogation...It’s often traumatizing for people. It’s hard to get a people who have been systematically abused to cooperate*

with the system. We are very disillusioned, if anything it's gotten worse." – Indigenous women focus group participant

For the group discussing LGBTQ+ and nonbinary issues, participants highlighted the need for increasing the general public's awareness and knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community – and that even basic awareness could increase access to services, increase community safety, improve parenting and child/youth outcomes, and other positive outcomes. For example, the group members recommended:

- **Gender-inclusive service access and training.** For example, health care providers need to be equipped to make referrals to programs/services – and physicians, nurses, social workers, educators, public servants must be trained on gender-inclusive engagement (e.g., gender transition issues, learning about when it's safe to tell families about a kid's identity). They should also communicate inclusive practices to potential clients using pride flags and inclusion statements.
 - *"I was taken back when I was talking to my doctor about using PREP for prevention. He had no idea what I was talking about. There are gaps in healthcare for LGBTQ and that is something that needs to improve."* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
 - *"My brother is gay and didn't know there was any kind of treatment or prevention for HIV/AIDS. When there's that lack of information it's not just for others it's for ourselves as well."* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
- **Parenting training.** Parents need to be more aware of trans issues, gender issues, disability issues – anything to work against the messages we're hearing from legislators. The [Gender Spectrum](#) conference was highlighted as a success.
 - *"[As a younger person,] I wish I had more knowledge about queer people and knew they exist. Having that knowledge and those experiences is important. How are you supposed to figure out who you are if you aren't exposed to the options of who you might be."* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
- **Educated mentors and/or ambassadors in the community to highlight the needs and presence of LGBTQ youth.**
 - *"What this community needs is embracing and not just acceptance."* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant

2. Civic Engagement and Building Community Power

Barriers to Civic Engagement and Building Community Power

Focus group participants shared that the biggest barriers to getting involved in community engagement came down to limited time and challenges in getting basic needs met – as well as a sense of disillusionment, or a concern of being not fully aware/educated on policy issues.

When it comes to building community power, focus group participants highlighted the following barriers that Western Montanans face when they try to get involved:

- **Limited time and long working hours (due to low wages) means people have little time and capacity to be involved.**

- *“I volunteer on a group that helps people learn to ski and waterski. The majority of people who volunteer are retiree-aged folks. I ask them, why are you involved now, and in this community? More often than not, in their early 30s, they just didn’t have time. They were trying to build careers and lives. I think a lot of people run into this when you’re trying to have a life and go to your kids’ sporting events that start at 4:30pm and go until 7pm and you might do that four nights a week and you might have four kids.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- *“I’m not involved in elections within my community. I don’t look into it. I don’t pay attention to the news. There’s not enough time. I’m just focused on the kids and what’s going on here.”* – Single parent participant
- **People who don’t have their basic needs met aren’t prioritizing civic engagement** and don’t easily see the connection between their engagement and getting those needs met. This may be especially true for the most impoverished populations, including Native populations.
 - *“It’s so hard when your lights are getting shut off or you don’t have food to think about bigger things. All the policies in Montana have made it harder and harder to vote, especially for people on reservations.”* – Indigenous women focus group participant
- Some people shared that they were **not involved either because of disillusionment with government and politics**, or a **concern that they are not up to speed on the issues to vote on** – especially when it comes to local or child-focused issues.
 - *“I do not feel involved [in local elections or politics]. I don’t feel educated about things at the local level. My family - my parents - are very involved. They tell me to just focus on voting for everything Republican.”* – Single parent participant
- In the discussion focusing on Indigenous women, the group offered that members of Montana’s tribes can feel **apathetic that voting makes a difference**, and are under-involved in local, non-tribal elections. They requested more easily available information about what these positions do and how it impacts them.
 - *“People are feeling sad because they vote in big things, and they don’t see change happen...You really have to think beyond tribal council and president - it’s school board and fire chief positions. Those are the places you can see change happening more. Local politics aren’t set up to be a system that is accessible to people.”* – Indigenous women focus group participant
- **Lots of events are alcohol or substance-centric** (e.g., sponsored by a brewery) and may turn off people who have experienced substance use disorders.

Potential Solutions to Increase Civic Engagement Among Western Montanans

Focus group participants recommended increasing civic engagement by:

- Building and/or leveraging a variety of tools (e.g., voter guides, mailers) and communities (e.g., youth and older adults),
- Making it easy for community members to get involved (e.g., compensation, building on past involvement), and
- Authentically engaging with to ensure various populations feel involvement is safe and meaningful.

Focus group participants offered some best practices for what works in terms of power building and civic engagement:

- **Leverage intergenerational relationships and community-building opportunities.** The group suggested there is a large population of older adults and retirees that now have more time to get involved in civic issues than young families.
 - *“In high school, I loved being involved in local older folks’ community gardens. They had a lot of land but not the agility to get on their hands and knees to take care of it. I loved helping them out and learning about what this town used to be like. Your kids used to go to your elderly parents’ house but they don’t do that anymore. So this builds that bridge.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **Build on past involvement.** Individuals and families who start getting involved through their school or church or organization from whom they have previously received social support services
 - *“I got to take a couple classes through Mountain Home. And even if you take a class once, that helps get your foot in the door - it might get you involved in another class and get more involved in the community. I’m a big homebody, and I’m starting to be more involved in my community through Mountain Home. That’s one of the reasons I’m on this focus group - because Mountain Home suggested it. It also helps you guys hear my voice and our voices.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **Compensate people for their lived experience and provide transportation and child care to support engagement**
 - *“I work for a board that requires lived experience - and in our case, that’s youth homelessness. The board offers compensation to me for my time, which really helps keep me involved. Plus, the other people I’m spending time with on the board have a shared intention - the board is made up of a variety of voices that are trying to impart change. That’s inspiring for me.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- **Make it easy to get involved** (e.g., texting, reminders, etc.)
 - *“They don’t let you forget and make it easy to do stuff. For example, they text you reminders about what’s going on and give you links. They make it easy to get involved.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“I work full-time, school, kids, etc. If I could bring the kids with me, I could attend and be more of a voice in my community. Being able to take the kids would probably be the best. Snacks are always great too. If there’s other parents with their kids the parents could be more involved. Building a community within the community.”* – Single parent participant
- **Get people involved through “old ways”** – not just relying on social media but doing things like in-person events, mailings, courthouse reader boards, postcards, personal connection and invitation, etc.
 - **For instance, a voter guide helped one single parent get more involved in local elections):** *“When I lived in Washington, when it was time for local elections, they send out a pamphlet that is not just a picture of this is Republican this is a Democrat. It was a breakdown on [everything] – they don’t send anything out like that here. If I wanted to know anything I would have to research it myself. If they mailed something like that out or make it available on Facebook. If it was easy to access, I would be a lot more likely to be involved.”* – Single parent participant

The focus group participants discussing LGBTQ+ and nonbinary gender issues raised the need for two specific approaches to increase community engagement of these populations:

- **Safety.** Signs, flags, trans stickers, pronouns in email signatures, etc., can be powerful signals.
 - *“What drew me was that there was huge pride flag. It’s not something you see every day in Montana.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
 - *“If there is a pride flag on the door, like to a restaurant, I feel much safer about being there with my child because I know staff believe in equality.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
 - *“I see almost any teacher I go to, if they have a pride sticker, I assume I’m safe.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant
- **Knowledge** about what’s happening and what services are available. People don’t know about events, etc. Posters around school are public and welcome – especially since that would not feel like an approach that’s targeting any individual in particular.
 - *“Posters around the school. I like that it’s public – it’s not them coming up and saying “I think YOU would be interested. It also says they are comfortable putting that up in the school.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant

3. Strengthening Early Childhood Systems and Youth Supports

Barriers and Potential Solutions for Early Childhood Systems and Youth Supports

To strengthen the region’s early childhood systems, focus group members recommended reducing cost barriers for families to get child care, increasing access to evidence-based programs for parents and families (e.g., home visiting), and investing in community centers for families – and especially for youth.

Focus group participants offered the following recommendations for strengthening early childhood systems:

- **Reduce the cost barriers** (e.g., transportation gift cards, pay-what-you-can models) **to early childhood services and care.**
 - *“When I got my son into daycare, they gave me a gift card for gas. That was really cool.”* – Rural, low-income participant
 - *“Here in Missoula, we have Lil’ Griz Cub House, and they offer a pay-when-you-can approach – that was really helpful for paying for daycare.”* – Rural, low-income participant
- Increase access to voluntary, **evidence-based programs for parents and families** (e.g., Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers). That will require growing the **workforce** offering child care and in parenting supports (i.e., home visiting).
 - *“We got our parents taking classes on circle and security, love and logic. Where we run into a barrier is child care. Also, not having enough teachers who are there to teach the classes. We haven’t been able to do a class in months because they are not able to facilitate the group.”* – Single parent participant
 - *“We had a program in Butte called Nurse Family Partnership. That was very successful. It was a home visitor. She was a registered nurse and a home visitor. They would go to the home of a*

- pregnant mom... and teach them everything they would need to know about the pregnancy.” – Single parent participant*
- **Build trust** between families and service-providers – especially in the case of home visiting.
 - **(On home visitation):** *“So many people are afraid to be judged - if your house isn’t kept a certain way. They don’t really understand what a home visitor is here to do. If there’s nothing that’s concerning, there’s nothing to be reported. Parents are just not comfortable having a stranger in their home.” – Single parent participant*
 - **(On home visitation):** *“[We need to] build a relationship first [between parents and home visitors]. Start meeting at the office first, educating them more on what you will be doing in the home.” – Single parent participant*
 - Invest in **community centers** as well as **respite care** services for families with special needs – health care, domestic violence, etc.
 - *“I was a single mom with my first kid, and I had to do a lot of medical travel to Spokane. But I couldn’t bring my older son to appointments. So, I used a service there - an emergency crisis center – to care for my older son during appointments. I would call them a day before and let them know I would be in town with my older son and younger son and I would check in my son. It was completely confidential, we had a safe word to pick him up. If they didn’t have that service, I don’t know how my younger son could have had his medical needs met. I was not allowed to bring my older son. What if this was available to Montana? It was for a lot of people who were experiencing domestic violence, for example, and they needed a place for their kids to stay for a couple hours.” – Rural, low-income participant*
 - Make resources available for **single dads**.
 - *“In Missoula, we have single moms assistance, but there’s no services for single dads out there. When we were married, we couldn’t get any assistance. So, we separated. And we immediately got housing. My husband was sleeping outside in the truck, and we were inside where it was warm and multiple beds. That was traumatizing for the kids especially.” – Rural, low-income participant*
 - Invest in **programs for youth** – especially afterschool programs, community centers, and mentorship programs (especially male mentors for single mom families).
 - *“I personally went to a community center after school and made many friends that way. My vision for him would be for him to be social and have that kind of interaction. That would be my dream. He’s pretty lonely. To have that kind of rec room where I could drop him off or he could take the bus – that would be great.” – Rural, low-income participant*
 - *“My son’s dad is from a tiny town and all the kids just do what the older kids do- drinking, smoking, etc. So having a community center especially in rural areas could be really beneficial.” – Rural, low-income participant*
 - *“In an ideal world, there’d be more early childhood programs. More for the kids to do, more for parents to do – even if there was another sports team parents can’t cough up the money. It would be easier if there was something set up for kids to be able to go do something. My kid’s dad is in prison – nowhere in the picture. It would be nice if there was a big brother, big sister program. I would like to get him actively involved with an older male role model.” – Single parent participant*

- *“Having more afterschool programs that aren’t so expensive. Having transportation where you know your child is safe and they are going to be transported to an afterschool program.”* – Single parent participant
- [Translated] *“In the winter it is hard to connect to the community and find resources, especially for children.”* – Spanish-speaking participant
- The group focusing on LGBTQ+ and nonbinary issues highlighted the need for **safe spaces for engagement** – especially for youth. For example, the Boys and Girls Club was a success story for some of this group. Opportunities that are free, accessible (e.g., everyone walks there after school together) can be helpful.
 - *“We were kind of isolated, but we have the Boys and Girls Club - it’s such a rich and robust program in Montana. You could send your child every day after school ‘til 6 and all weekend. We have a very high number of queer kids in this community, and they are so loved and so accepted. There is such connection between kids and families.”* – LGBTQ+ and nonbinary group participant

The group focused on Indigenous women offered several culturally specific solutions to improve early childhood systems, including:

- **Parenting Leadership Training institute.** Expand this outside of Missoula.
- Find ways to **support cultural connection for kids and tribes, mentorship, and places of belonging** (e.g., circle of elders or mentors)
- **Mutual aid on reservation** was important during the pandemic and could potentially be a solution to continue
 - *“Many Native babies have lactose allergies so having breast milk is important. We survived the pandemic by helping one another feed our babies.”* – Indigenous women focus group participant