

**Montana
DeafBlind**
—Project

**20
23**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**



What is the Montana DeafBlind Project?

The Montana DeafBlind Project is a statewide resource helping families, teachers, and providers access the information and resources needed to support the learning, growth, and development of children with deafblindness, ages birth through 21.

**PROVIDING
INFORMATION
AND RESOURCES
ON DEAFBLINDNESS
ACROSS MONTANA**

What is Deafblindness?

Deafblindness is a combination of vision and hearing loss that affects a person's ability to communicate, learn, and access information. It's also sometimes called "dual sensory loss". Most people who experience deafblindness have some usable hearing and/or vision.

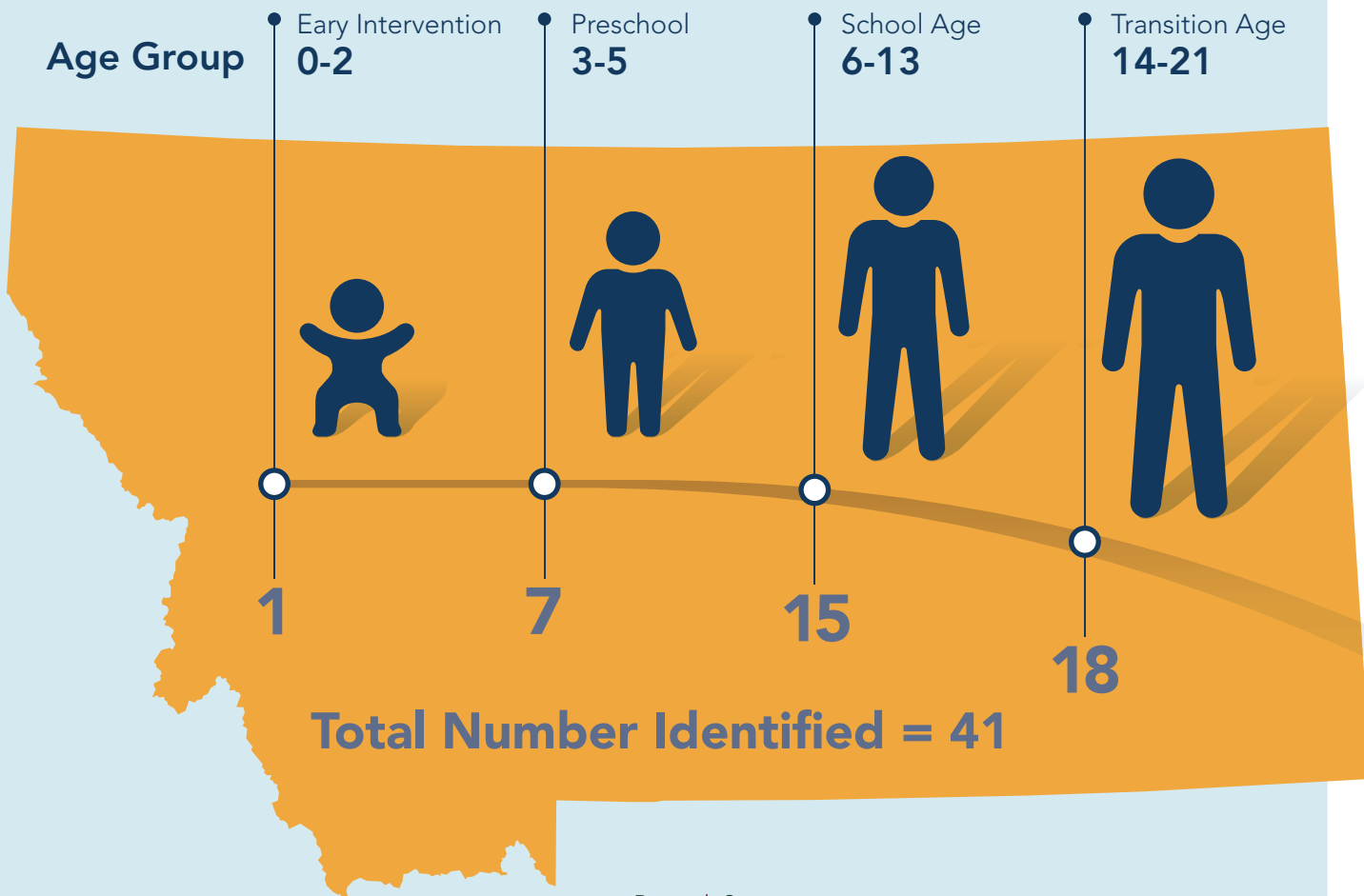
NATIONAL DEAFBLIND CHILD COUNT

Data is collected by each state deafblind project and compiled and reported by the National Center on Deafblindness (NCDB). The annual Child Count helps identify state and national technical assistance needs for children who are deafblind, their families, and the providers and systems that serve them. Learn more about the [National Child Count of Children and Youth who are Deafblind](#).

SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN WITH DEAFBLINDNESS IN MONTANA

The Child Count helps project staff see the big picture in Montana and better understand the levels of support needed across various ages and stages. This information is the foundation for the Montana DeafBlind Project's technical assistance and initiatives.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED WITH DEAFBLINDNESS IN MONTANA FOR 2022



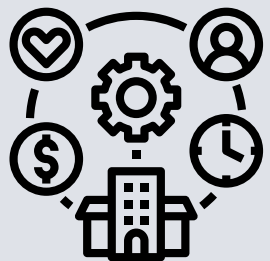
MONTANA'S 2022 CHILD COUNT SHOWED THE FOLLOWING NEEDS



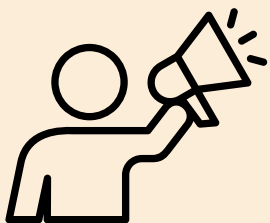
Increase the early identification of children with deafblindness.



Ensure all children who experience deafblindness are identified wherever they live in Montana.



Make sure families, schools, and agency staff serving young adults with deafblindness have resources and information about the transition to adulthood.



Continue advocating for access to interveners (only two Montana students currently receive this service).

WHAT DID THE MONTANA DEAFBLIND PROJECT DO TO ADDRESS THESE NEEDS?

COLLABORATED WITH PARTNERS TO IDENTIFY CHILDREN EARLIER

Project staff created an ongoing Deafblind Early Identification Advisory Council. Members of this interagency council share information about their systems, referral processes, and needs. They identify opportunities to work together to increase the identification of newborns and children with deafblindness. The goal is to ensure children, families, and providers get the resources and information they need as early as possible to support the communication, social skills, and adaptive learning of children who experience deafblindness. Council members include parents; Montana Milestones Part C Early Intervention service providers; Mental Health specialists; and representatives from Children's Special Health Services, Newborn Hearing Screening and Early Intervention, the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, the Family to Family Health Information Center, Office of Public Instruction, MSU Early Childhood Education, and MonTECH.

Activities:

1. The project supported a Montana Milestones Part C Early Intervention service provider to attend the Western Regional Early Intervention Conference to learn more about early identification and deafblindness strategies. After the conference, this individual provided in-service training about what they had learned to other specialists at their agency.
2. The council committed to meet on an ongoing basis to identify and address statewide needs.
3. Council members developed a five-page list of action steps and ideas to help identify children earlier and connect their families with important services. The council will review progress on the action steps during their 2024 meetings.



INCREASED OUTREACH TO IDENTIFY CHILDREN ACROSS MONTANA

Building meaningful connections from infancy forms the foundation for learning, communication, and exploration. To ensure kids are identified no matter where they live in the state, Montana DeafBlind Project staff increased outreach efforts to build awareness and identification to ensure children with deafblindness get the resources they need.

Activities:

- 1.** Project staff created rack cards, fliers, and other materials to increase awareness of deafblindness and shared these with families and agency partners.
- 2.** The Montana DeafBlind Project collaborated with other Rural Institute projects, regional organizations, state agencies, families, and medical providers to hand out the deafblindness materials and resources in locations and at events across the state.
- 3.** With help from project staff, the Rural Institute secured Office of Public Instruction funding to create a part-time Rural Schools Outreach position. This Public Education Specialist provides specialized assistance in deafblindness and post-secondary transition to rural schools.



BUILT CAPACITY AROUND SECONDARY TRANSITION

The Montana DeafBlind Project is committed to helping students succeed after high school. The project's Secondary Transition initiative promotes person-centered planning, involves families, and provides team support to set the stage for a bright future for young adults who experience deafblindness.

Activities – Project staff:

1. Joined the Montana Capacity Building Institute Team, which focuses on improving transition outcomes for students with disabilities. The team includes parents, students and representatives from agencies and organizations such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind and Low Vision Services (VRBS), Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities, Office of Public Instruction, the Montana Empowerment Center (Montana's Parent Training and Information Center), North Central Independent Living, Montana Center at MSU-Billings, and Workforce Services.
2. Continued to provide technical assistance to families, schools, and Montana agencies on decision-making supports as individuals become adults.
3. Launched the Montana Transitions Pilot in collaboration with the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, VRBS, and Marc Gold and Associates. This pilot concentrated on planning for the future and using customized employment strategies, including Discovery, for students with deafblindness.

“Discovery allows us to look at a skill and find a job that fits them accordingly instead of the other way around. Which I believe really gives us a different perspective and allows us to provide some additional hope for families. I believe that when we implement this and parents see it, they change their perspective from 'they can't' to 'he/she is really good at...,' which is more impactful.



DISSEMINATED INFORMATION ON INTERVENERS

According to the National Center on Deafblindness, “An intervener is a person who works consistently one-to-one with an individual who is deafblind to help them gather information, develop and use communication skills, and establish relationships.” The Montana DeafBlind Project promotes Interveners’ importance in schools, informing partners and families about their significance and guiding those seeking support. This advocacy is particularly vital in rural Montana, where grassroots efforts are shaping support for students with deafblindness. (Learn more about [Intervener services in educational settings.](#))

Activities – Project staff:

1. Continued to share vital information and strategies with state partners, families, and school staff on why Interveners are crucial for students with deafblindness.
2. Continued to connect future Interveners with available courses and certification programs.



SUPPORTED FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Families are at the heart of the Montana DeafBlind Project's mission. Staff's commitment to family engagement is unwavering and braided throughout all project initiatives. The DeafBlind Project supports families to be strong voices for their children.

Activities:

1. Six parents serve on the Deafblind Early Identification Advisory Council.
2. One Montana parent serves as the USH Ambassador for Montana, where they help others in the state understand Usher syndrome.
3. Three members of a family represented Montana at the biannual CHARGE conference.
4. Another parent joined the Rural Institute Consumer Advisory Council.

“The Montana DeafBlind Project has been a huge resource for us. It has given us lots of resources for our son: educational, evaluations, financial, support groups, Intervener education, and more. I know that if I have a question about anything concerning deafblindness, I can ask them, and they will either know the answer or find the answer.”
(Parent of a child who experiences deafblindness)



PROVIDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

The Montana DeafBlind Project provides technical assistance and training to ensure everyone has the information and tools they need to interact with, teach, and provide services to individuals with deafblindness.

Activities:

1. Facilitated the Early Identification of Deafblindness webinar series, accessible on the DeafBlind Project's [Events/Training page](#).
2. Customized a DeafBlind 101 virtual training series for a school team.
3. The Project Coordinator serves as a member of the Special Education Advisory Panel for OPI to ensure the needs of students with deafblindness are always included.



Story Share: The school team shared that they felt better prepared to start this school year due to participating in last year's DeafBlind 101 webinar series. This preparedness impacted the school year positively, and the student now has access to education in new ways.

Giving Gratitude to Project Partners

The Montana DeafBlind Project's reach would not be possible across this vast state without the collaboration of numerous partners including families; the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind; Montana Milestones Part C Early Intervention; Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind and Low Vision Services; Title V Children's Special Health Services; Hands and Voices; Office of Public Instruction; the Montana Empowerment Center; Newborn Hearing Screening and Early Intervention; and other projects located at the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities.



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