

Liberty County



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Just like the sun hitting this grain, Liberty County MSU Extension looks to focus on the needs of the people of the county. Photo by Janice Hendrickson.

In 2022 community needs assessment meetings were held throughout Montana, and Liberty County was no different. Liberty County MSU Extension worked with several organizations and invited more than 100 people to conduct a successful needs assessment, with more than 80 people in attendance to learn how MSU Extension can better support the needs of the county. Top needs included having more local housing options, childcare options, retaining employees, and developing small businesses and activities locally. While MSU Extension has not traditionally worked in these areas, the goal of Liberty County MSU Extension is to work with organizations and people at the county and state level to help meet those needs in the coming year and beyond, while continuing existing programming in the fields of agriculture, family and consumer science, 4-H and community development. Liberty County MSU Extension's mission is about helping meet the needs of the people and community.

Helping Youth Learn to Manage Mental Health

Liberty County MSU Extension has been one of the few Extension programs in Montana to have an uninterrupted

partnership with their school district through the past years' health upheavals. The local MSU Extension office has a valued partnership with CJI High School and Logan Health-Chester's Director of Outpatient Service Christine Muller to help youth understand how to maintain positive mental health and help those around them do the same. Through a 5-hour curriculum, Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM), facilitators met with the CJI freshman class to showcase an interactive program for youth, promote increased discussion and knowledge about mental health, and aid in developing problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence.

In 2022, 21 youth gained an awareness of mental health and suicidal thoughts and developed problem-solving skills in relation to those issues. Students began to recognize the need to think through different stress and crisis situations and understand the importance of mental health. Students have also begun to have conversations with their peers about mental health. Students stated the following observations from the class: "It's a little harder to ask for help depending on the situation; I learned you need to ask for help; I learned it can be hard or easy to notice; I know how to 'ask people if they are okay' and that you have to reach out; Anyone can suffer from depression and stress."

As students continue to practice good mental health skills learned during their time in YAM, and practice noticing and asking questions if they need help, the youth will become better prepared to deal with their mental health challenges and overcome those instances.

Bringing Home Gardeners Together Through Master Gardener Class

The Master Gardener Level 1 class was taught in Liberty County in 2022. Six adult participants met for eight weeks to learn research-based principles of gardening. Students of the class were taught about topics including soils and nutrients, plant growth and development, annuals and perennials, pruning, lawn maintenance, small fruits, and integrated pest management. They also learned from weekly networking during class as they discussed their personal gardening experiences, successes, and failures. The course was accentuated by the collaborative efforts of several area MSU Extension agents who helped teach the course. Additionally, Abiya Saeed, MSU Extension Horticulture Specialist, presented to the class and conducted an evening pollinator course open to community members. These experiences continue to establish MSU Extension as a trusted resource for fact-based information that serves the community's needs.

Class participants gained basic gardening information and became resources of research-based information to their communities. Additionally, participants were encouraged to complete 20 hours of community service to certify as Master Gardener Level 1 gardeners. This further builds the Master Gardener program by serving communities and also develops civic engagement and pride.



Top: The Chester-Joplin-Inverness (CJI) Freshmen class learned how to manage their mental health as individuals and as a team. Photo by Jesse Fulbright; **Bottom:** The Master Gardener Level 1 class learned valuable skills through weekly meetings and networking with fellow home gardeners. Photo by Jesse Fulbright

Liberty County Staff



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