



NOURISHING BODIES, MINDS AND COMMUNITY

# EMPower place



A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BY  
spectrUM Discovery Area,  
Missoula Food Bank & Community Center,  
and Missoula Public Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA  
spectrUM<sup>o</sup>.

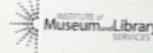


missoula food bank  
& community center  
we nourish community

# EMPower place

## NOURISHING BODIES & MINDS

POWERED BY



### Erick Green

OCCUPATION: Biology Professor, University of Montana  
FIELD: Ornithology

"My interest in music is the reason I study birds, bird songs, and communication the language of how animals talk with each other."

When I was 17, I lived for a year in the Galapagos Islands to help with research on birds called Darwin's finches. Now I teach college students about how and why animals behave and communicate. Animals come with a fantastic amount of information with their vocalizations.

I did not actually graduate from high school, but after working with the Operation Wildlife Service for five summers, I did enroll in college to study biology, music, and mathematics. I studied computer for my undergraduate career there. They're fun to watch, and I continue to study them today.

What I love about my job is that I have been able to combine my interests in music and biology by studying how animals use sounds to communicate with each other.

MISSOULA PUBLIC LIBRARY logo

### Moses Leavens

OCCUPATION: Graduate Student at the University of Montana  
FIELD: Biochemistry and Biophysics

"My culture and background influenced my decision to pursue science."

When I was in grade school, my friends and I would take our bikes up the hill during the summer and collect tadpoles from the pond. We would bring them back home, take care of them, and observe their metamorphosis into frogs. That experience got me interested in nature and how things work.

In college, I enjoyed studying math and biochemistry, so it made sense for me to combine my interests and pursue research in biochemistry, studying the molecules of the cell and using mathematics to model the data. Most of my degrees are spent doing experiments in a lab. The best part of my job is being able to spend time with my students. The hardest part is understanding a part of the universe and how it operates. This field requires a lot of understanding before and learning from my mistakes. This field requires a lot of patience and diligence, but I take breaks and spend time with my family, and I love to live.

Science is important for two reasons. It allows us to understand what is going on in the universe, and it allows us to apply that information to help us and apply the medicine, energy development, environmental protection, and education.

EMPower Place logo

MISSOULA PUBLIC LIBRARY logo



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### Contributors:

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## Dear Reader,

Missoula's EmPower Place is a vibrant learning center where children from all backgrounds learn, play, read and eat together. But long before that, it was an idea about inclusion, access, breaking the cycle of poverty, and eliminating stigma. Commitment to these ideals by three partners—the University of Montana spectrUM Discovery Area, Missoula Food Bank (now renamed Missoula Food Bank & Community Center), and Missoula Public Library—along with a history of fruitful work together, formed the core of our project.

Through collaborative planning, implementation, and fundraising, we opened the doors to EmPower Place in spring 2017. Every weekday, EmPower Place nourishes children's bodies and minds with interactive science exhibits, STEM, literacy, and arts programming, a library of children's and young adults books, an after-school club, and free meals and snacks.

We recognized early on in our project that we were in uncharted territory, and through the process of building EmPower Place and its programming, we learned a lot about what it takes to make collective impact. In bringing our three organizations under a single roof, we encountered differences not in our broad vision and goals, but rather in our organizational styles and cultures. We made many small tweaks and several large-scale recalibrations along the way. We learned that partnerships at this level of intensity are messy and require frequent, intentional communication, willing compromise, humility, and commitment. We developed five guiding principles: trust and support, high-quality collaboration, effective communication, respect, and shared ownership. These principles helped us move forward our project in ways that we could all agree upon and feel good about.

Construction of EmPower Place was funded by the Missoula Redevelopment Agency, creating a unit in the food bank facility that will be owned long-term by the City of Missoula. Funding for EmPower Place's programming, staffing, evaluation, and dissemination came in large part from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The IMLS funding was essential in bringing our vision to life, creating careful benchmarks and rigorous evaluation of our process and our impact in our community. Through this iterative process of evaluation, reflection, and implementation, we identified ways to grow and meet the community's needs, and we moved thoughtfully and deliberately.

We created this book to share why and how EmPower Place exists and how other communities might replicate the broad concept of offering fun and accessible STEM and literacy education programming in a food pantry. We hope that you benefit from reading about our experiences and lessons learned, but also, more importantly, about our enduring excitement, commitment, and joy in this work.

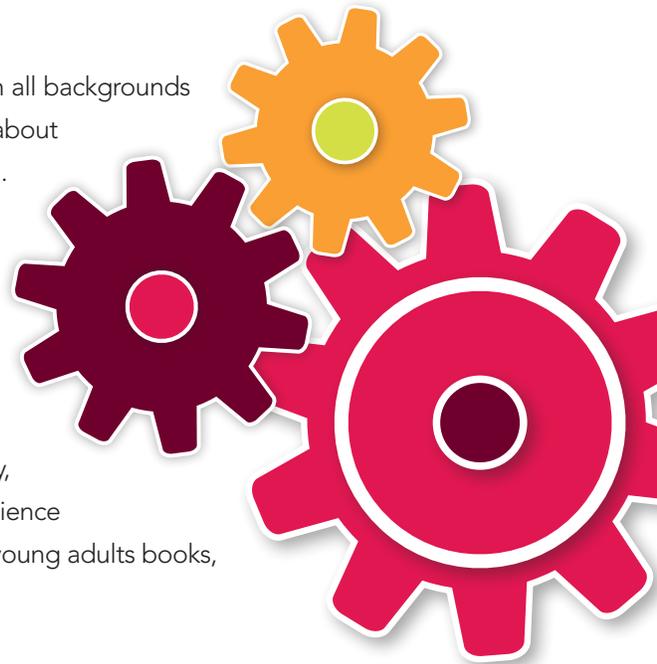
Sincerely,

**Aaron Brock**

Director, Missoula Food Bank  
& Community Center

**Jessie Herbert-Meny**

Director, spectrUM Discovery Area





2010 - 2012

spectrUM, Missoula Public Library and Missoula Food Bank pilot collaborative programming.

2015

Missoula Food Bank invites spectrUM to collaborate in imagining a family learning center to be embedded in the food bank's new location.

2016

The Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Missoula Redevelopment Agency award funding for EmPower Place.

2016-2017

Program partners listen, plan and design the space, now calling it EmPower Place.



# EMPower place

## at a GLANCE



**33.5**  
HOURS OPEN TO  
THE PUBLIC WEEKLY  
(MONDAY-FRIDAY)



**5,600**  
MEALS SERVED ANNUALLY



**13,500**  
VISITORS ANNUALLY

MAY 2017

EmPower Place opens its doors

JULY 2017-PRESENT

EmPower Place programming launches Tiny Tales (Missoula Public Library) Science Tuesdays (spectrUM) free snacks (Missoula Food Bank & Community Center) and evening role model engagement with We Are MT in the Classroom. With additional special events throughout the year.

2018

New programming partners join to host play groups and other services at EmPower Place. EmPower Place's hours expand to match Missoula Food Bank and Community Center's expanded hours.

# Missoula *A Community*

## GEOGRAPHY



5

Number of valleys that converge at Missoula



22

Miles of off-street bike trails in the City of Missoula



3

Number of rivers that converge in Missoula

29

Square mileage of the City of Missoula

7.42

Square miles of parkland and conservation lands within the City of Missoula

2,618

Square mileage of Missoula County



### FACT

Missoula is a small city located within a large, sparsely populated state. For context, the State of Montana stretches the equivalent of the distance between Chicago and Washington, D.C. but has a population of just over 1 million people.



Missoula County

Rhode Island

### FACT

Missoula County is more than twice the size of the state of Rhode Island. The entire state of Montana has about 1 million people, about the same population as Rhode Island.

# Profile

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**117,441**

Population of Missoula County<sup>1</sup>

**26,243**

Number of unique individuals served in Missoula Food Bank & Community Center's store in 2018<sup>2</sup>

**2.7%**

Percentage of Missoula County residents who identify as Native American or Alaska Native alone.<sup>3</sup>

**186**

Number of refugees resettled in the Missoula region since 2016.<sup>4</sup>

## ECONOMIC AND HEALTH-EQUITY INDICATORS

**\$61,372** U.S. MEDIAN INCOME

**\$41,968** MISSOULA MEDIAN INCOME

**\$57,661** INCOME NEEDED TO AFFORD BASIC EXPENSES IN MISSOULA<sup>5</sup>

**34th**

Missoula's inequality ranking compared to 916 metro areas nationally<sup>6</sup>

**500**

Estimated number of Missoula County Public Schools students who were homeless or in unstable housing in the 2017-2018 academic year<sup>7</sup>

**15%**

Percentage of children (ages 0-17) in Missoula County living in poverty<sup>8</sup>

**46%**

Poverty rate for Missoula families with one female adult and children<sup>9</sup>

**47%**

Percentage of Missoula parents who report that they have scaled back or left their careers because of lack of access to affordable childcare.<sup>10</sup>

**49%**

Percentage of Missoula renters who are cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.<sup>11</sup>





# PROFILES OF

## A N C H O R



missoula food bank  
& community center  
we nourish community

### Missoula Food Bank & Community Center

**Mission:** We lead the movement to end hunger through advocacy, volunteerism and healthy food for all. We nourish community.

**Impact:** Missoula Food Bank & Community Center is our community's primary resource for emergency food assistance and accessible nutrition programming. While working to address the acute instances of hunger experienced by people in our neighborhoods today, MFB&CC works to disrupt the systemic issues that create food insecurity, like inequities in access to safe housing, quality education, and civic engagement.



### Missoula Public Library

**Mission:** The purpose of the Missoula Public Library, including its branches, is to strive to provide programs, materials, and services to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, and educational needs of the Library's service area population.

**Impact:** Missoula Public Library provides quality materials ranging from books, serials, videos, audios, electronic resources, maker space activities and free Internet access to users of all ages. As a member of the Montana Shared Catalog and Partner Libraries, we share resources and materials with library systems across the state and country. A variety of programs meet the needs of the children, teens, and adults in our service area. Regular offerings in Youth Services include story times for toddlers and preschoolers, monthly craft activities, literacy activities and LEGO club. We offer writing groups and gaming for tweens and teens, as well as book groups, movie events, adult story hour, an annual writing contest, writing and foreign language workshops, computer classes and maker space activities. The Library regularly features additional events in response to current trends and local interests. The library partners in several annual community-wide events providing youth activities at Sunday Streets, Out to Lunch and Kids Fest, taking the WOW bus to the local farmers' market, giving library tours for the Missoula County Schools as part of the 5th Grade Art Experience and delivering library materials to area senior and retirement housing for the library's homebound outreach program.

# EMPower place

## ORGANIZATIONS



### UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA spectrUM Discovery Area and Broader Impacts Group



**Mission:** spectrUM Discovery Area is the University of Montana's hands-on science center dedicated to inspiring our next generation about STEM, higher education, and career pathways. spectrUM is part of the UM Broader Impacts Group, which collaborates with researchers and community partners to design, implement, and evaluate programs that respond to real needs and opportunities across Montana.

**Impact:** spectrUM's programming is designed to help close persistent opportunity and achievement gaps for Montana children. Outside of EmPower Place, our impact sites include:

- spectrUM Discovery Area, our Missoula hub
- Year-round, pop-up programming on the Flathead Reservation, including a Science Learning Tent at powwows, "Science Bytes" at free summer meal sites, and the Kwul 'l'tkin Maker Truck, a mobile, cultural makerspace funded by the National Science Foundation and collaboratively operated with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- A making and tinkering initiative embedded in schools, libraries, free meal sites, and other community gathering places throughout Montana's Bitterroot Valley.
- Pop-up science exhibits at Missoula International Airport and Missoula Public Library



# IMPACT OVERVIEW

EmPower Place offers an array of programs designed to meet the needs of children of all ages and abilities in our community.



## ANCHOR PARTNER PROGRAMMING

### Open Play:

Families can play with science exhibits, read library books, play with toys, and have a healthy snack. EmPower Place is generally a stay together, play together space where children are accompanied by an adult. On a limited basis depending on staff capacity, we offer "Shop and Play," welcoming unaccompanied, school-age children in the space while their parents or caregivers shop at the food bank. **Hours: Mon-Fri 9:30-1:30 & Mon, Tues, & Thurs 2:30-7**

### Science Tuesdays:

spectrUM Discovery Area educators guide hands-on science activities for preschoolers during the school year and all ages during the summer. **Hours: Tues 10:30-1**

### Tiny Tales:

Missoula Public Library's children's librarian leads songs, fingerplays, nursery rhymes, and stories, supporting babies and toddlers in developing language skills and vocabulary. Due to high attendance, this program is now held in Missoula Food Bank & Community Center's upstairs conference room. **Hours: Mon & Weds 10:30-11**

### Afterschool Clubhouse:

EmPower Place's free afterschool program welcome students on a drop-in basis three days per week. Afterschool Clubhouse is elective; staff will not contact parents regarding children's attendance. All children who attend receive a healthy super snack through Missoula Food Bank & Community Center's Kids Table program.

**Dates & Hours: Sept-May, Mon, Tues & Thurs 2:30-5:30**

**Mondays: Games & Homework Help**

**Tuesdays: Good Eats and Cooking Club**

**Thursdays: Rockstar Science Tinkering & Making Club**





### Higher Education Events:

As part of the University of Montana, spectrUM is committed to creating on-ramps into higher education, particularly for potential first-generation and non-traditional college students. Annually, EmPower Place hosts an evening of casual conversation and Q&A with representatives from UM's admissions, financial aid, and student support offices. A free meal is provided, and children and family members are welcome. **Hours: Once annually**



### WOW Bus:

Missoula Public Library's Web on Wheels Bus visits EmPower Place every other week, providing access to computers and Internet and one-on-one, individualized technology training. **Hours: every other Tuesday 2-5**



### We Are Montana in the Classroom:

We Are Montana in the Classroom places University of Montana faculty members, graduate students, and professionals at EmPower Place with the goal of inspiring students and families about higher education and career pathways. **Hours: monthly**



### Free Meals & Snacks:

EmPower Place is always stocked with free, healthy snacks like fresh fruit, cucumbers and hummus, granola bars, milk, yogurts and applesauce. During the summer and on no-school days, EmPower Place is an open meal site, providing lunch and dinner. In summer 2018, EmPower Place served 5,606 free meals. **Hours:**

### Families First Children's Museum

brings interactive exhibits that inspire hands-on exploration and play while building empathy and kindness, social and emotional development, awareness of world cultures, and imaginative and dramatic play.

### Child Development Center (CDC)

helps children and adolescents with developmental delays reach their potential. CDC and EmPower Place teamed up to create a monthly free, inclusive playgroup for children of all abilities.

### Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)

provides healthy foods, nutrition information and referrals to health and social services in the community. WIC staff are at Missoula Food Bank and Community Center twice a week for families to set up and hold appointments. WIC staff work closely with EmPower Place to make new referrals and watch older kids while caregivers are in their appointments.

## DROP-IN PARTNER PROGRAMMING



# WHAT WE ARE LEARNING



## EmPower Place is helping reduce the stigma of using the food bank.

EmPower Place is open to everyone, not just food bank customers. Anecdotally, we're finding that this inclusive policy is helping situate the food bank as a community hub. The library has observed families that specifically came for Tiny Tales but now also shop at the food bank. Families who visit spectrUM's main location and do not typically visit the food bank are inquiring about EmPower Place as a place to take their children. Many families who do shop at the food bank are also now visiting EmPower Place on days when they're not shopping for food.

## We are reaching children and families who do not otherwise visit Missoula Public Library or spectrUM.

spectrUM regularly rotates exhibits between our main location and our satellites. We're finding that when we rotate an exhibit to EmPower Place, people often comment that this is the first time they've seen it. By offering free spectrUM memberships to every family that visits EmPower Place, we're gradually building pathways to our main location; increasingly, we do see families visiting both spaces and specifically seeking out educators whom they know also work

# ABOUT OUR IMPACT

at spectrUM's main location. Missoula Public Library has similarly reported that they are reaching unique audiences at EmPower Place that do not visit their downtown location.

## **EmPower Place builds social capital.**

EmPower Place has become the hub for parent networking, particularly for new families to the area. We often see families meet one another and make playdates outside of EmPower Place. Parents who visit EmPower Place share stories and advice and build friendships. We've even seen parents planning to meet at EmPower Place and watch one another's children in the space while they other shops at the food bank.

## **Parents use EmPower as respite.**

We play with their kids! We often hear parents say that they come every week because it means someone will hold their baby.

## **Food is powerful.**

Providing free snacks and meals allows EmPower Place to meet children's basic needs so that they can play and fully take part in STEM and literacy enrichment. We often see children and families come for the food and stay to learn and explore.

## **EmPower Place is a laboratory for Missoula's new library-museum complex.**

In 2020, Missoula Public Library will reopen in a new building that will house the library, spectrUM, a children's museum, and a media creation center. Three years prior to the opening of the new library, EmPower Place serves as a laboratory for collaboratively operating under one roof. Lessons learned at EmPower Place have influenced the development of a collective standard operating procedure for all of the new library partners, as well as a decision to hire a full-time coordinator for the library collective.

\*Documented by Dr. Beth Covitt



# STORIES OF IMPACT

“ I am a low-income single mother who battles anxiety and the heartache of being abandoned in my greatest time of need... I'm not sure the Food Bank staff noticed each I came into EmPower Place, I had reached my breaking point. My daughter would eat lunch and I'd have a cup of coffee while she played. I could not have gotten through without their support.”

*— An EmPower Place parent visitor*

“ During our Friday art project, we were making airplanes out of toilet paper rolls and Popsicle sticks. I started playing and talking with an eight-year-old child who said that her favorite subject was math. But, she said she wasn't very good at division yet, and struggled with multiplying by 4's, 6's, 7's, 8's, and 9's. I started to decorate my airplane wings with multiplication problems for her to solve, and with a just a little help she was able to answer them all.”

*-- Kristian Stipe, AmeriCorps Leader*

“ Two young brothers were with us in Empower Place while mom and grandma were attending English classes upstairs. Their family had recently moved to the U.S. and neither of the boys could speak or understand English. They were naturally very cautious of their new surroundings and the other children in the space and were huddled in the corner of the room. I decided to show them how fun the ball wall could be by playing with it myself. After a little time had passed, I turned and saw the two boys looking between the ball in my hand and the ball wall. I offered the oldest brother the ball and watched him try it himself. I stepped back and watched as they became absorbed in discovering what every lever and wheel did. Pretty soon they were teaming up with other children to stack up the balls or to get them to shoot into the basket. When it was time for the boys to leave, they turned and waved goodbye to their new friends. Stories like this is why I love volunteering at Empower Place. The parents and children that use the space come from many different backgrounds and have shown me how diverse our community really is. It is a space where people from different walks of life can meet and bond over their shared experiences.”

*-- Haley Shepard, volunteer*



“ I never imagined the impact Empower Place would have on us. Meeting other parents and friends has been an enormous bonus. Jasper has enjoyed the variety of activities , Tiny Tales and of course the Snacks!My son went from crawling to walking and achieved many milestones hanging out at Empower Place on a regular basis. I truly feel he has gained a sense of confidence while experimenting with all the activities.. The ball wall has always been a favorite of his and with the help of Jordan and Quinn early on, he has now mastered it, among many things. Quinn, Jordan , Amanda and Sabrina are what have made the experience for us .Their patience, genuine love and all around personalities are the perfect fit for us. I feel the staff are an integral part of what has made Empower Place flow so naturally. Overall, While providing a safe space for children to be nourished through play and food, Empower Place provides an opportunity for parents to also have a support group. I feel as though it has become a sense of home for us. We are forever grateful for everyone who makes Empower Place the Gem it is!”

– Maria Garcia-Pyle Parent of Jasper Pyle-22months

# LESSONS LEARNED

## LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT WORKING AS A COLLECTIVE

Creating EmPower Place was a high-risk but ultimately high-reward endeavor. Our three unique organizations—each with our own culture and structure—came together to create a space unlike any other: a free family learning center that is one part food bank, one part science museum, and one part library.

The intent of this book is to share our experiences and lessons learned through EmPower Place as a resource for other food banks, museums, libraries, and other community organizations interested in exploring this model. Although not an exhaustive list, the following are lessons we have learned along the way:



### **To lead truly collective impact and innovation, first find your North Star.**

Our organizations share a common vision of closing the opportunity gap for children in our community. Missoula Food Bank & Community Center sees this vision through the lens of food security; Missoula Public Library through literacy; and spectrUM Discovery Area through STEM and higher education. Identifying this shared vision—and our unique perspectives on it—was one of the first tasks we undertook as a collective. When all was running smoothly, our North Star built cohesion and reminded us of our shared values; when we encountered challenges, it helped us navigate towards a resolution.

### **Prioritize relationships first, then collective programming.**

We'll admit it. Working in a collaboration is much more challenging than working as an individual organization. But once you spend time in EmPower Place, you realize that this unique place would not have been possible had just one organization taken it on. When we opened, we often felt the need to rush to do more and more for our community, yet our organizations move at different paces. Early on, our collective learned to recognize that each organization moves at its own pace, and to

manage opportunities and decision-making accordingly. The possibilities for growth and innovation are endless at EmPower Place, but we learned early on the importance of building trusts and growing and innovating as a team, rather than outpacing any one member of the collective. Identifying what was possible and within our capacity in the present—and what we should reach for later—was vital to the longevity and success of our collective.

### **Start with small experiments in collaboration, then scale up.**

EmPower Place was built on a foundation of small experiments in collaboration. For years, Missoula Food Bank & Community Center has brought free meals to Missoula Public Library during the summer months, reaching children and teens when school's out. Every child who takes home a weekend nutrition package from the food bank also receives a free membership to spectrUM. These drop-in collaborations, which are high-impact but often relatively easy to implement, rely on the premise that "We'll keep doing what we do, and you can come and do what you do alongside us." All three of our organizations pride ourselves on being good team players and based our decision to collaborate on EmPower Place in part on this strong partnership history.



EmPower Place formalized these ad hoc, drop-in partnerships and, by bringing our organizations under a single roof, added new potential for impact, but also complexity. The physical EmPower Place space was funded by Missoula Redevelopment Agency, creating a “condo” unit that will be owned long-term by the City of Missoula and is currently leased to spectrUM. Funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services supported programming and evaluation through a grant to the University of Montana (spectrUM’s parent institution) and sub-awards to Missoula Food Bank & Community Center and Missoula Public Library. A memorandum of understanding created a framework for this complex partnership and funding structure, but our organizations’ ability to work collectively relied on the trust and relationships we had built through years of lighter, lower-stakes collaboration.

### **Identify backbone organizations and define each partner’s role.**

Rather than identifying a single backbone organization, EmPower Place has a backbone team that consists of leadership and staff from each of our three anchor organizations. Monthly backbone team meetings create a space to make programming decisions, reflect on what’s working and what’s not, and plan ahead. To define each

partner’s unique role in the collective, we also created a “Roles” document that has proven especially useful for identifying who is responsible for specific tasks like marketing or on-boarding new staff.

### **Set clear roles and structure, but also be willing to evolve.**

Identifying our collective’s structure and roles provides essential clarity for our staff, but we also recognize the need to evolve and continually refine our practices and make sure we are getting the right people to the table. In addition to our backbone team (meeting monthly), our collective currently includes:

- A leadership team that meets 2-3 times annually and includes the executive directors and on-the-ground program managers from each of our anchor organizations. The leadership team sets long-term vision, development strategy, and policy.
- An annual meeting of the full collective—including all staff, volunteers, and our two evaluators—for updates and discussion on the health of the collective.

This existing structure evolved over time, particularly in EmPower Place’s first two years, but has settled in a form that balances the voices and perspectives of our leadership and on-the-ground staff.



## To move collectively and navigate conflict, communicate continuously.

Finding your collective's North Star is fundamental, but ongoing communication is also vital to success on the ground. In EmPower Place's early stages, we mistakenly assumed that because we were aligned at the 30,000 foot level, we also had a clear road map for navigating on the ground. In the drop-in partnership model, policy and decision-making are typically guided by the host organization, leaving little room for ambiguity or conflict. But in our collective, "all under one roof" model, we found that we did not always agree on answers to high-stakes questions. For example, do we sign children in and out? How do we make sure that every child gets back to the right parent or guardian every time? At what age—if ever—can children visit EmPower Place unattended by an adult? We intentionally did not set up EmPower Place as a traditional childcare facility, but we nevertheless struggled at first with the tension between security and accessibility.

Blurred lines of reporting also initially created confusion. For example, our Institute of Museum and Library Services grant included funding for a half-time EmPower Place educator employed by Missoula Food Bank & Community Center. From the start, the food bank was committed to providing funding for the other half of the position, creating a full-time job and expanding capacity. Although seemingly practical on paper, in practice, this funding structure created challenges for the new, entry-level staff person, who was on one organization's payroll but received formal and informal supervision from three organizations. There was also ambiguity about the difference between this employee's grant-funded and food bank-funded hours, goals, and responsibilities.

These ambiguities and conflicts did not resolve with any single policy change; rather, we doubled down on developing a collective communication plan and trained our staff on our collective brand and roles. Ambiguities about roles and reporting diminished as we refined our organizational roles and team structure. Most importantly, we have learned to identify and vocalize concerns early and address both challenges and opportunities preemptively rather than reactively.

## Develop a collective standard operating procedure (SOP).

Each of our organizations came to EmPower Place with its own organizational SOP, but we quickly learned that, just as EmPower Place was not solely a library, science museum, or food bank, nor could we simply replicate our existing procedures. This learning process was initially challenging for us as a collective, as it exposed some stark differences in our organizations' practices, assumptions, and decision-making processes. Midway through EmPower Place's first year of operation, we even decided to pause programming temporarily so that we could build the trust and consensus we felt we needed to operate the space safely and successfully. During this break in programming, each of our organizations researched into other models for working collectively, and we hired a third-party facilitator with expertise in child-centered design to guide us. From this "reboot," we ultimately emerged with a collective SOP that is truly co-authored and co-owned.

## LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT DOING COLLECTIVE PROGRAMMING



### Staffing is vital.

Initially, we underestimated the staff time needed to make EmPower Place operate successfully. We also initially underestimated the potential for the food bank's existing and highly effectively volunteer corps to engage as volunteer educators in EmPower Place. With the addition of AmeriCorps Team Leaders placed at both spectrUM and Missoula Food Bank and Community Center, as well as increased staffing from each of our organizations, we are now able to sustain a "two-deep" staffing model that ensures we always have at least two trained educators on the floor at all times, as well as sufficient time for prepping, cleaning, and planning. Each shift has a Lead staff who is in charge of making decisions.

### Practice child-centered design.

Placing children at the center of our design process means prioritizing safety, accessibility, and trauma-informed approaches. It also requires us to be intentional about what services we can and cannot provide.

Currently, our space is designed for family to stay-and-play. It is not the type of daycare space you might encounter at IKEA or a gym or shopping mall: with three different exits and a policy that encourages adult family members and caregivers to play with their children, we cannot function as a drop-off daycare facility. This works for us in this space and builds community by creating opportunities for parents and caregivers to connect with one another.

If we were to truly become a space where kids of all ages could be dropped off while parents shop, we would either have to increase capacity to have staff specifically dedicated to caring for those unattended children and staff

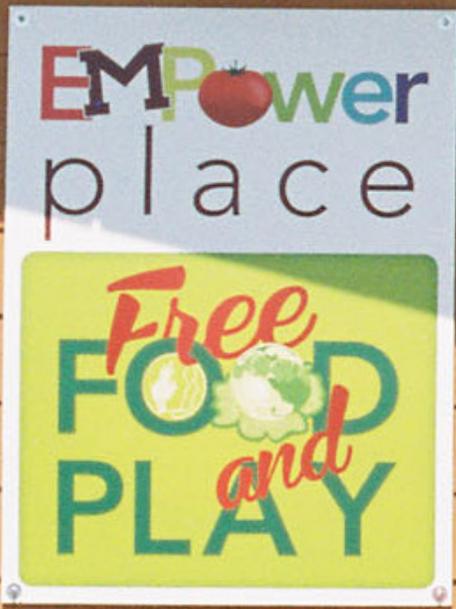
dedicated for engaging with families or the space would need to be redesigned to have areas for families to play independent from areas for unattended children to play.

We are continually in the process of updating the design of the space to be more child-centered. We originally did not plan on enough comfortable seating for adults, including a semi-private space for breastfeeding mothers. Additional changes have included adding an area for staff to sit during short breaks when the space is empty, meandering sidewalks outside the space to discourage children from running straight out to the street, non-slippery, easy-to-clean furniture, and toddler-friendly furniture with rounded corners and low surfaces.

### Conduct evaluation not only with visitors, but also with people who are not visiting.

Our program evaluation is designed to be minimally intrusive and to engage people who visit EmPower Place as well as people who use the food bank but do not visit EmPower Place. Our most recent survey was incorporated into the food bank's existing intake process and included questions designed to help us better understand if families are finding out about EmPower Place and why they do or do not choose to visit EmPower Place. These questions have helped us refine our marketing strategy and reflect on what we can do to be even more welcoming and inclusive. Additionally, by incorporating our EmPower Place survey into the food bank's existing intake process, we remove real or perceived barriers for families who might feel less welcome at EmPower Place if they are asked to check in at a front desk or fill out a form in the space.

# TOOLS FOR RE



# APPLICATION



## **We recommend considering the following questions to help you and your partners identify real needs in your community and develop a collaborative plan to meet those needs:**

- What does your community value and what are its strengths?
- What are the needs of parents and families in your community? Are there gaps in existing programs?
- What locations might work best, considering factors such as bus routes, neighborhood-level needs, and potential to serve high-need audiences?
- Who could partner with you, specifically on leadership and planning, programming, and fundraising?
- What is your sustainability plan and your community's capacity to support your efforts financially?

## **What questions should you be asking potential partners?**

- What are your organization's unique strengths that you could bring to this partnership?
- What is your history of partnering with other organizations and how do/did your missions align?
- What is your organization's capacity to partner? Can you contribute to funding or staffing?
- What is your process for answering tough questions, and how do you address conflict or disagreement?
- Are there differences between your and your potential partners' organizations—cultural, structural, or operational—that you should preemptively acknowledge and address?
- What are your and your potential partner's collective goals? What are you trying to achieve? What's your guiding light?
- What does success look like?
- How will you respond if you fall short of achieving your goals?

Our commitment to EmPower Place as a team has created a community learning center that allows us to make a much greater impact than any of our individual organizations could make on their own. Recognizing the power of this collaborative approach to break down silos, the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC) honored spectrUM with the 2019 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Award for visitor experience in the category of small institutions.

# EMPower place

## COLLECTIVE STRUCTURE AND ROLES

### IMLS Project Evaluators

**Glenn Page,**  
Sustainamatrix

**Beth Covitt,**  
spectrUM & the Broader  
Impacts Group  
(University of Montana)

### Leadership

**Aaron Brock,**  
Director, Missoula Food Bank  
& Community Center

**Jessie Herbert-Meny,**  
Director, spectrUM Discovery  
Area (University of Montana)

**Nathalie Wolfram,**  
Director, Broader  
Impacts Group (UM)

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**Pam Carlton,**  
Youth Services Librarian,  
Missoula Public Library

**Kristi Havlik,**  
Education Coordinator,  
Missoula Food Bank  
& Community Center

### Operations

#### AmeriCorps team leaders

Kristian Stipe,  
Dec 2017-Aug 2018  
Jordan Fernandez,  
Sept 2018-Aug 2019

#### 8 spectrUM Educators

#### 10 MFB&CC volunteers

**Grace Decker**  
Child-Centered  
Approach Expert

### Former Project Team Members

**Holly Truitt,**  
spectrUM & Broader Impacts Group

**Quinn Mawhinney,**  
Missoula Food Bank & Community Center

**Hannah Still,**  
Missoula Food Bank & Community Center

**Hannah Gimpel**  
spectrUM & Broader  
Impacts Group



## ROY L. SHAFER LEADING EDGE AWARDS

spectrUM Discovery Area is a proud recipient of the 2019 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Award in the category of visitor experience (small institution). Awarded by the Association of Science and Technology Centers, the “Edgie” recognizes spectrUM’s role in co-developing and co-anchoring EmPower Place as an inclusive hub for science learning.



Jessie Herbert-Meny, Director, spectrUM Discovery Area, accepts the award at the ASTC Annual Conference 2019.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#).

Saul, N. & Curtis, A. (2013). The stop: how the fight for good food transformed a community and inspired a movement. Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing.

Truitt, H. (2017). Learning to move collectively. Dimensions, 19 (5). Retrieved from [www.astc.org/astc-dimensions/dimensions-septemberoctober-2017-codesign-for-transformation/](http://www.astc.org/astc-dimensions/dimensions-septemberoctober-2017-codesign-for-transformation/).

Truitt, H., Swaney, R., Swaney, W., Wethington, N. & Wolfram, N. (2018). Cocreating transformative change: making collective impact with the Flathead Nation. Connected Science Learning 7 (10). Retrieved from <http://csl.nsta.org/2018/09/cocreating-transformative-change/>.

Herbert-Meny J., Duley A., Brock A., Allred J., and Wolfram N. (in press) Breaking Down Silos...And Moving in Together. Dimensions.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> City of Missoula, Bicycle & Pedestrian Office
- <sup>2</sup> Missoula Food Bank & Community Center, 2018 Stats at a Glance. Available at [www.missoulafoodbank.org](http://www.missoulafoodbank.org).
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Census
- <sup>4</sup> New American Economy (2018). New Americans in Missoula. Available at [www.newamericaneconomy.org](http://www.newamericaneconomy.org).
- <sup>5</sup> Missoula Chamber of Commerce (2019). Child Care in Missoula. Available at [www.missoulachamber.com/page/childcare](http://www.missoulachamber.com/page/childcare).
- <sup>6</sup> Economic Policy Institute (2016). Inequality in the U.S. by state, metropolitan area, and county. Available at [www.epi.org/publications/income-inequality-in-the-us/](http://www.epi.org/publications/income-inequality-in-the-us/).
- <sup>7</sup> Missoula Organization of Realtors, 2019 Missoula Housing Report. Available at <https://www.missoularealestate.com/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Bureau of Business & Economic Research (University of Montana), Montana Kids Count 2018 Data Book. Available at <http://www.montanakidscount.org/>.
- <sup>9</sup> Missoula Invest Health (2017). A Tale of Three Neighborhoods: A Study of Health Equity. Available at [www.ci.missoula.mt.us/2036/Missoula-Invest-Health](http://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/2036/Missoula-Invest-Health).
- <sup>10</sup> Missoula Chamber of Commerce (2019).

# Hours

**Monday-Friday:** 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

**Monday, Tuesday, Thursday:** 2:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

# Programming

**Monday:** Tiny Tales with Missoula Public Library

**Tuesday:** Try-It Science with spectrUM

**Wednesday:** Tiny Tales with Missoula Public Library

**Thursday:** Afternoon Science with spectrUM

**Friday:** Open Play with EmPower Place

# EMPower place



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