



VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America



Strategic Implementation Plan

Youth Count! 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, comprehensive data for homeless and at-risk of homelessness youth in Yellowstone County, Montana is lacking. Youth are incredibly resilient and smart, thus they often are invisible and go unreported. While many youth couch surf, relying on a rotation of friends, others must find shelter on the streets—a more dangerous alternative. They know when and where to hide, who to hide from, and when to seek shelter, thus making it difficult to ascertain a precise number of youth. As a result of these challenges, such data remains inconclusive regarding this vulnerable population. While planning for *Youth Count!*, VISTA members are considering these challenges, specifically regarding the various types of youth homelessness missed in the national point-in-time (PIT) survey process.

Therefore, the overall goal of the *Youth Count!* survey is intended to gather sufficient and precise data that reflects Billings' homeless youth population. In-kind support for this project has been issued directly through the City of Billings, and through the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps VISTA. VISTA members, or Volunteers In Service to America, are *“a federal resource, reporting time and outcomes to the city, on loan to the host site as a resource to build long-term capacity as a primary goal.”* Funding for the project will be developed by two Billings Metro VISTA Project members (B-MVP). In addition to fund development, the VISTA members will also be developing the survey instrument, strategic plan, and volunteer training and management plans to train community volunteers to administer the survey July 12-14, 2013. Tumbleweed's Executive Director Sheri Boelter is overseeing the VISTA members' project initiative and its subsequent implementation.

Tumbleweed is a non-profit 501(c)(3), established in 1976 and is a well-respected advocate for youth and their families for over 37 years in our community of Billings, Montana. Tumbleweed is a dynamic and time honored community model program that empowers at risk youth, families and their support systems through advocacy, education and individualized services. Tumbleweed's programs and goals are directed toward the prevention of homelessness, running away, and delinquency; addressing severe family conflict; as well as responding to other social problems among youth ages 10-21. Runaway and homeless youth tend to be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and are prone to delinquency as a mechanism for survival. Through the provision of specialized services and access to direct assistance, Tumbleweed substantially addresses the human services needs of this vulnerable population. On any given night in Billings, there are 40 to 149 homeless youth on our community's streets. Last year, Tumbleweed served over 1,600 unique youth with services including: crisis and long term counseling for youth and their families; Street Outreach Program; weekly life skills classes; support groups and parenting classes. In addition, Tumbleweed runs a drop in center where youth receive basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and can do their laundry, as well as use the shower. Youth can also participate in recreational games, watch movies, and use computers to search for jobs and housing.

PURPOSE

State wide PIT surveys have been administered throughout the nation, usually towards the end of January each year, to determine the number of homeless in urban and rural areas. As a result of the federal definitions of homelessness, per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD), point-in-time surveys do not accurately count homeless youth. Therefore, the two VISTA members in conjunction with Tumbleweed are conducting their own inclusive PIT count specific to youth in the Billings area. This youth centered PIT survey is the first of its kind to be executed in the state of Montana. In January, youth are more prone to be hiding indoors from the winter elements. The *Youth Count!* survey will be administered July 12-14, 2013 since in fact, the weather is much warmer, youth are more visible, and thus easier to count.

For the purposes of the Youth Count! project, VISTA members used the following as a baseline for survey development: youth ages 13 to 21 who are precariously housed, who are sheltered and unsheltered or living in places unfit for human habitation. Couch-surfers will also be enumerated as their living condition is neither adequate nor fixed. The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* (42 U.S.C. 11431) definition of homelessness will be the marker for determining eligibility for the survey.¹

Homeless: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition of a homeless youth is any child or youth under the age of eighteen who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For example, youth who reside in: runaway/homeless youth shelters; transitional housing; doubled-up in housing with other families or friends; couch-surfing; hotels or motels; shelters with family members; and campgrounds. The definition also includes those living in places unfit for human habitation, including cars, abandoned buildings, lots, parks, alleyways, uninhabitable trailers, or the streets.

Precariously Housed: Youth who are unaccompanied and on their own including those: in foster care and juvenile justice custody; who have left the system without a place to live; or placed into transitional housing including group homes, treatment centers and shelters.

At Risk: Youth who are in danger of becoming precariously housed or homeless due to inadequate financial stability, lack of a sustainable family or support structure, etc.

Using this wide ranging definition for the survey will provide precise details and data regarding Billings' homeless youth population. This will allow service providers in the community to gain a better understanding of the number of the various types of homeless youth, and further, their needs to be met in order to bring them out of homelessness. Once these needs are understood, services and programs can be restructured accurately and proficiently to meet the specific needs that the youth have identified within the survey.

KNOWLEDGE & BACKGROUND

In order to gain a universal understanding of survey development, best practices, and administration, VISTA members have extensively researched national past and present PIT protocol and data. After a thorough review of the wide swath of 2003-2012 nationwide PIT survey instruments and data, VISTA members narrowed their focus to a few states. Therefore, VISTA members have adopted the best practices and procedures from the following state counts: Clark County, Nevada. 2005; Minnesota. 2009; Baltimore, Maryland. 2011; Southern Nevada, Las Vegas. 2011; Washington D.C. 2011. Furthermore, the VISTA members have researched

¹ 42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a; Sec. 11434a (2)(A)-(B) per Sec. 11302 (a) (1)-(6)

various national agencies that are advocates for children, youth, and poverty. The *Institute for Children and Poverty* (ICP), *National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth* (NAEHCY), *National Network for Youth* (NN4Y), *National Alliance to End Homelessness* (NAEH), and the *National Center for Homeless Education* (NCHE), to name a few, have been resourceful insofar as these youth-centered organizations offer a wealth of knowledge and a plethora of data that has strengthened the overall survey strategy.

The VISTA members have contacted the Executive Director of *DC Alliance of Youth Advocates* (DCAYA). The VISTAs spoke with the executive director about the implementation of the 2011 youth count in Washington D.C. She graciously provided the VISTA members with helpful feedback, including some problems that her team faced during construction of the survey instrument and implementation of the survey. Some of the problems the team faced during the survey execution and post administration were with survey jargon; a lack of feedback sessions and focus groups; and the significance of practice sessions with youth prior to survey implementation. Other factors mentioned were the lack of specifics in the questions, and the youth losing focus and interest due to its length. Nevertheless, DCAYA's youth count was extremely successful and received high praise for its execution and post survey reporting. As a result of these findings, the VISTA members have carefully studied and outlined areas that will need improvement within their planned survey. As a result of the importance for focus groups and feedback sessions, the VISTA members have outlined a *Youth Count!* Advisory Board (YCAB) to help guide their progress in survey development and initiation.

In addition to the national PIT procedures, the VISTA members have researched The City of Billings' two year action plans, Fiscal Year 2009-2013 actions plans, *Welcome Home Billings* ten year plan, and the findings from the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness. The aforementioned programs and documents thereof have provided the VISTA members with an understanding of the successess of these invaluable programs and services. Therefore, the VISTA members can fully grasp the methods in which these programs operate, their sustainability of services for the homeless community, and further, their benefit to the overall strategic goal for *Youth Count!* and future youth services.

ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS

The VISTA members have connected with community stakeholders and social service providers interested in and supportive of their project, such as: the Center for Children and Families; Child & Family Services; RiverStone Health's Healthcare for the Homeless; officers from the Billings Police Department; Rimrock Foundation addiction and crisis counselor serving at West High; and the Homeless Education Liaison for Billings Public Schools. The VISTA members have also presented their project initiative to the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness and the local Montana Continuum of Care (CoC) in order to update the committees on their progress. Moreover, the VISTA members have utilized these committees to receive feedback regarding the survey and its subsequent implementation. Tumbleweed's Street Outreach Program (SOP) has been extremely beneficial to the *Youth Count!* project. The staff's expertise and experience working with homeless and at risk youth has helped the VISTAs, for example, locate certain areas to implement the survey. In addition to the SOP, Tumbleweed's Individual and Family Counselor (IFC) and Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) counselors have reviewed

the survey instrument and have provided valuable feedback regarding the questions and survey process.

Furthermore, to connect with community stakeholders, the VISTA members have presented the *Youth Count!* project to Harvest Church's homeless outreach program volunteers. As a result, the VISTA members have established a partnership with Harvest Church, which has benefited *Youth Count!* with volunteer support. In addition, VISTA members have presented their project to a Sociology class at Montana State University-Billings, and posted flyers around the campus to spread awareness about volunteer opportunities. The VISTAs have also partnered with the University's Office for Community Involvement and Student Leadership, as well as the Career Services Student Advocates. As a result of the partnership with Montana State University-Billings, interested students have joined the *Youth Count!* volunteer forces to help administer the survey in July. The VISTA members have recruited roughly 40 volunteers to help administer the survey. The VISTAs, moreover, have recruited many of the volunteers through local colleges, engaged community members, agency representatives, local events, the press, and news outlets.

VISTA members have completed a 'dry run' of the survey with some homeless and at-risk youth at Tumbleweed in order to gauge their perspective on the survey and the questions therein. Feedback sessions and focus groups are extremely important for the project's progress and success. Therefore, the purpose of an advisory board is to oversee and guide VISTA members' efforts by reviewing survey samples and giving feedback on their progress. However, the *Youth Count!* Advisory Board's (Y CAB) final stage of development is pending. Nevertheless, the advisory board will have five members; three community stakeholders and two at-risk youth from Tumbleweed.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

VISTA members' resource development for *Youth Count!* was exceptionally successful. They have written two letters of inquiry, as well as two grants to local and national foundations to secure funding for *Youth Count!*. VISTA members have submitted grant proposals to the Billings Community Foundation and the Downtown Exchange Club of Billings. In addition to the latter two foundations, two letters of inquiry were sent to the Mary Alice Fortin Foundation and the Cobb Foundation. As a result of the VISTAs' efforts, they were awarded a grant from the Billings Community Foundation for \$1,000, and received \$625 in donations for *Youth Count!*. These invaluable resources doubled the prospective budget goal of \$500 to \$1,375. In-kind support from Starbucks totaled \$212.70. Starbucks generously donated coffee, creamer, sugar, cups, and six travel tumblers for the volunteer training sessions.

The *Youth Count!* budget, for example, contains the estimated costs of the project, from advertising to supplies. Furthermore, VISTA members developed a banner, posters, and flyers that advertised volunteer opportunities for *Youth Count!*. The banner, for example, is currently hanging on the Skybridge North. The flyers were displayed in local businesses around the downtown area and on both MSU-B campuses. These advertising efforts helped to raise awareness in the community regarding Billings' homeless youth population, the Tumbleweed program, the need for volunteer support, and the dates of the survey. The VISTA members distributed media releases to the Billings Gazette, Q2-KTVQ News, and KULR8 News in order to spread further community awareness about the importance of the survey. The media releases

contained information about *Youth Count!* volunteer opportunities, and the VISTAs' grant awarded from the Billings Community Foundation. Furthermore, the VISTA members have attended area events, such as Wellafalooza, the Montana Active Lifestyle Fest, and the Rock & Rolling event for Tumbleweed. As a result, the VISTA members were able to inform the community about *Youth Count!* and successfully gathered interested volunteers.

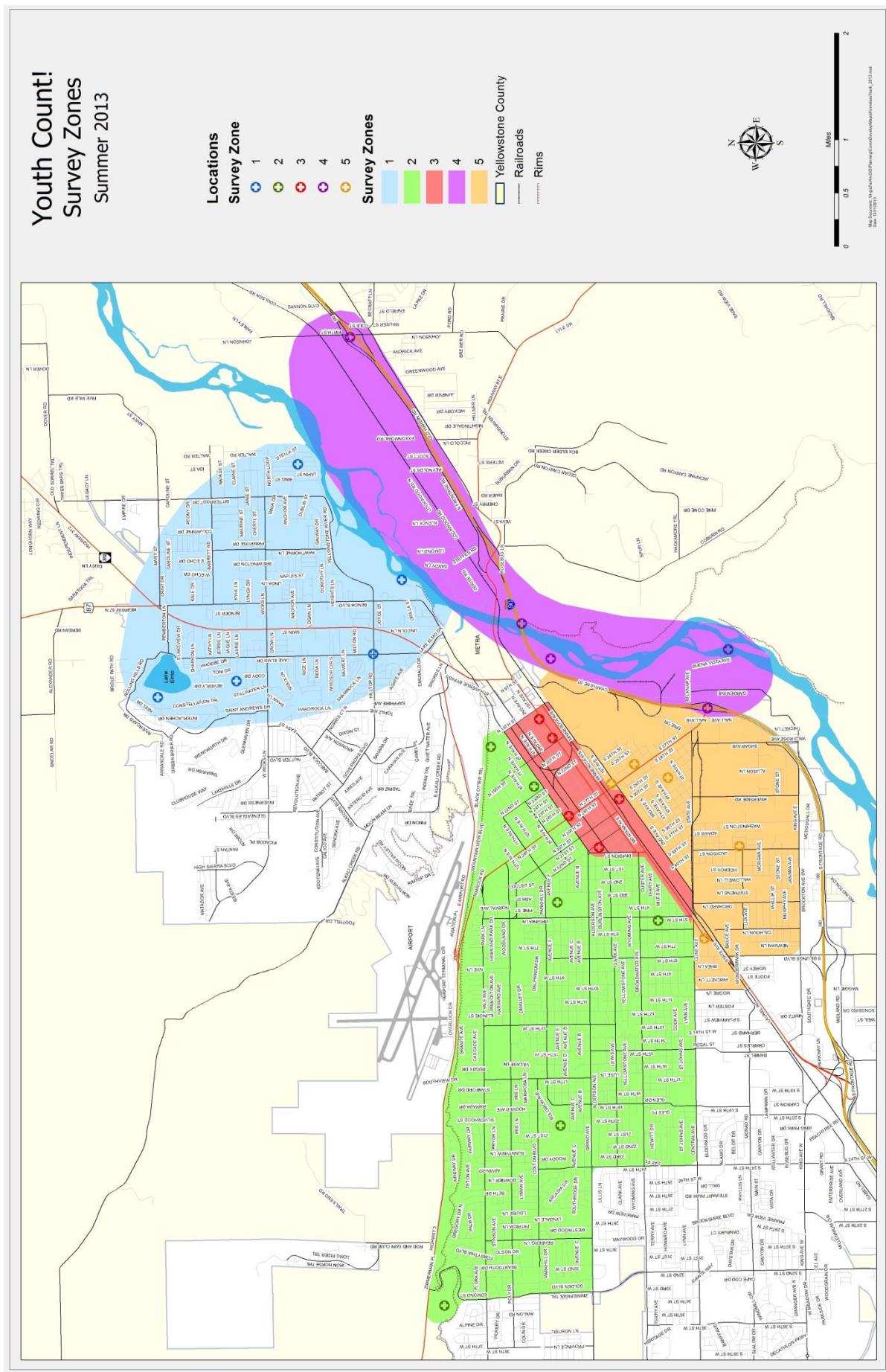
Fundraising was also a fundamental part of resource development for *Youth Count!* A VISTA member developed a plan and has successfully sold Giving Bean coffee, complete with a customized designed label promoting Tumbleweed and *Youth Count!*. The whole bean and ground pound bags of coffee were sold at various events to benefit Tumbleweed and the *Youth Count!* project. In addition to the VISTAs' grant, the funds raised from the coffee paid for the production and printing of the strategic volunteer training and management plans, strategic implementation plan, survey instrument, and flyers. These funds, moreover, covered the cost of the goodie bags—complete with snacks, water, and chapstick—to be handed out to the surveyed youth, as well as 30 *Youth Count!* t-shirts for the volunteers to wear during survey implementation.

ADMINISTERING POINT-IN-TIME SURVEY

The *Youth Count!* survey will be administered July 12-14, 2013. The VISTA members' goal is to survey 50 eligible youth, ages 13-21, during this three day point-in-time. Survey participation is voluntary, completely anonymous, and confidential; therefore the youth do not have to answer any question they deem invasive; no personal information will be used to link the participant to the survey. A unique identifier was created for each respondent to avoid counting a youth more than once. Structure of the unique identifier included the following:

<i>Initials: First and Last Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Day of Birth</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Unique Identifier</i>
BR	21	23	M	BR2123M

After the surveys are completed by the administrator, they will be sealed in an envelope and given to the appointed volunteer count leaders or count organizers. The count leaders and organizers will turn each sealed survey packet into the *Youth Count!* Headquarters at Tumbleweed. Five zones were created to ensure adequate geographic coverage of known areas where youth congregate or live. Volunteers will be divided into teams consisting of two to three people assigned to a specific zone during any of the following shifts: 9:00am to 12:00pm; 4:00pm to 7:00pm; and 7:00pm to 10:00pm.



Furthermore, a VISTA member has developed a strategic volunteer training and management plan for volunteer training sessions for survey administrators. The *Youth Count!* volunteers have attended one of the two mandatory volunteer training sessions. These training sessions, moreover, were directed by the VISTA members and constructed to prepare the volunteers with the knowledge and experience to administer the survey with the utmost efficiency. The VISTA members reviewed the extensive training manuals, the survey instrument, and discussed protocol. During the training session, the volunteers provided feedback and guidance, and reviewed the pre-planned areas where they will canvass. After successful completion of the mandatory training sessions, the volunteers received a certificate of completion.

FINAL PRODUCT

After all surveys have been received and evaluated, VISTA members will compile the data into a comprehensive report. Since the survey consists of 42 questions and survey participants may deviate from the truth or further, provide misinformation, VISTA members will ensure that the data report is free of any repeated responses or apparent false statements. Furthermore, the VISTA members' report will be formulated on the basis of the survey questions, including demographic data, the number of homeless and at-risk youth, and personal experiences of those surveyed. A descriptive narrative will follow data tables and charts explaining, for example, the percentage of surveyed youth who were couch surfing or who do not have access to a shower. This, in fact, provides an overall clear and concise report that can be utilized and disseminated by local and state governments, those of various academic and professional fields, and social service providers focusing on youth and poverty.

The VISTA members will then present the results of *Youth Count!* via the comprehensive data report to Tumbleweed, the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness, and the City of Billings. In addition to the aforementioned stakeholders, the finalized comprehensive data report will be presented to local service providers in Billings. Therefore, local organizations will gain a personal insight and an understanding of the youths' needs. They will then be able to secure more federal funding to develop and further expand the indispensable services that these youth rely on, such as educational training, health care, and housing services.

The results of this point-in-time will undoubtedly aid in efforts to break the cycle of chronic poverty in the Billings community. Furthermore, the reported results and restructured services will help fulfill the needs of youth who are homeless and at risk of homelessness, and hopefully, eliminate homelessness for future youth. By making these services available to Billings' youth, it is not only an investment in the youth and their future, but in the community's future as well.

Youth Count! 2013 Budget

Category	Cost	Description
Advertising:		
<i>Banner</i>	\$81.65	
<i>Banner Installation</i>	\$90.00	The VISTA members developed a 3' x 20' banner to raise awareness about the dates of the <i>Youth Count!</i> survey and volunteer opportunities. The banner is being displayed on the Skybridge North, from July 5th to 14th. The banner installation was done by Billings Sign Service.
Supplies:		
<i>Printing/materials/supplies</i>	\$300.00	Produced/printed roughly 100 flyers and 30 training manuals for volunteer training sessions, as well as roughly 300 surveys. Pens, envelopes, and clipboards for survey administration.
<i>Refreshments for training sessions/focus groups</i>	\$212.70; In-kind donations	Refreshments were provided for volunteer training sessions; such as water, coffee, fruit, cookies, etc.
<i>Youth Count! Volunteer T-shirts</i>	\$180.00	30 t-shirts were made for volunteers assisting VISTA members with the survey; including design and production fees. This will aid in identifying who is a volunteer, which will assist with overall coordination efforts.
<i>Goodie bags for surveyed youth</i>	≈ \$200.00	4 bags of candy, 5 boxes of snack bars, four cases of water bottles, 1 pack of 100 bags, 50 3-pack chap sticks.
Total:	≈ \$1,064.35	Total cost for all products/services (in-kind donations)

