

MISSOULA FAMILY YMCA

# KINDERCAMPS KICK OFF



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Kaitlin Hanson, the YMCA's new associate director of Family Services, will lead this year's KinderCamps 10-week summer camp.

## New associate director of Family Services leading program for little ones

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The Missoula Family YMCA kicked off a camp specifically designed for the nonprofit's youngest participants on Monday as part of their slate of summer offerings.

KinderCamps, for children going into kindergarten or first grade, is a 10-week summer camp that includes outdoor activities, field trips, story time, crafts and group games. The camp costs \$266 a week and still has spots available.

This year's KinderCamps will be overseen by the YMCA's new Associate Director of Family Services, Kaitlin Hanson. She began working at the YMCA in March but has a background as a previous camper and four years of experience as a

part-time employee at the Aberdeen YMCA in South Dakota. She has a master's degree in exercise physiology from Baylor University.

"I just loved the community impact the YMCA had in ways I didn't even know was possible," Hanson told the Missoulian last week. "That impact is on a larger scale now that I am working full time."

The KinderCamps are designed for exploration, creativity, curiosity and learning through hands-on experience, according to Hanson. She said attending YMCA summer camps growing up, along with her background in youth sports, helped her learn important life skills such as time management, processing, planning, organizing and understanding goals and

expectations.

Each camp week has a different theme, with June 15 through 19 focusing on "Be a Hero." The KinderCamps field trip each week will be centered around that week's theme and for the first week the campers will visit a local fire station.

There are two KinderCamps groups that will meet at different locations. The "KinderHawks" will meet at Hellgate Elementary from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the "KinderKubs" will meet at Russell Elementary from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Week 10 will operate from the YMCA.

Other YMCA full- and half-day summer camps also have sign-up availability for youth, ages 4 and up.

# Providers decry Medicaid cuts

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Gov. Greg Gianforte quietly approved a state health department proposal last month to halt planned increases to Medicaid rates, a decision providers warn puts them in a precarious financial position that threatens staffing and patient care.

Lawmakers last year put into the state budget an across-the-board reimbursement bump of 3% to roll out each year of the two-year budget cycle. The next round of increases was set to go into effect July 1, but those will no longer be implemented because of budget pressures.

Advocates during the 2025 Legislature fought hard for that increase, calling it a lifeline that would help shrink the ever-growing gap between the cost of care and revenues earned for treating patients on Medicaid, the health insurance paid for with a combination of federal and state dollars. They responded to the Gianforte administration's decision with a mix of consternation and concern.

"We need to trust that when a policy or funding is approved by our elected leaders and signed into law, we can depend on it," said Matt Bugni, the executive director of AWARE, one of the largest behavioral healthcare providers in Montana. "Stripping away funding at the last minute, especially from nonprofit groups that care for the elderly, kids in crisis, people with developmental disabilities and those with mental illness, is irresponsible."

The Department of Public Health and Human Services in March started telegraphing that the fiscal year 2027 increases might be on the chopping block in order to resolve a budget imbalance that officials blame on the Legislature.

Specifically, DPHHS said a last-minute slash to Montana State Hospital funding and allocating dollars based on overly conservative estimates put the state's largest executive agency in a budget crunch that it now must remedy.

The best way to do that? Nix the upcoming fiscal year's Medicaid rate boost, officials said.

A bipartisan group of legislators last month formally asked the Gianforte administration to overrule the proposal, and a long line of representatives from behavioral health groups, nursing homes and other community-based care organizations showed up to testify at the Legislative Finance Committee meeting to voice their concerns.

Despite the pushback, Gianforte's budget office greenlit the plan, a spokesperson for the governor confirmed this week, giving the health department permission to forgo the increases.

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# City eyes new security cameras in parks

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Advanced security cameras could soon monitor several popular parks after the Missoula City Council unanimously approved a contract for the new system on Wednesday afternoon.

The security camera system costs \$366,391 and would install several dozen new and replacement cameras at Fort Missoula Regional Park, Mobash Skate Park, Currents Aquatic Center and Splash Montana.

The city previously operated security cameras at some of the locations, but the image quality and angles the cameras provided were limited, according to Lincoln Lake, the city associate director of Developed Parks and Trails.

"Some of these (areas) have zero coverage right now, but these highly advanced cameras will provide us the ability to have coverage throughout our parking lots, throughout all of our green spaces and where we have incidents," Lake said, adding the upgrade is necessary to deal

with potential crimes at the parks, like vandalism.

In March someone drove onto the field at Fort Missoula Regional Park, damaging three of the soccer fields. Lake told council fixing the damage alone cost \$36,000, and the loss of revenue from closing the field ranged from \$30,000 to \$40,000.

"It is time for an upgrade and be able to provide surveillance in these areas," Lake said.

The cameras will have better image quality and scope of coverage, but do not have the ability to read license plates, nor have facial recognition technology, the Parks and Recreation Department confirmed to the Missoulian.

The proposed contract with Verkanda Inc. is for a total of 89 cameras and associated equipment, according to a project quote attached to the council's agenda.

The city already had \$249,391 budgeted for the upgrade in its fiscal year 2026 budget. Parks and Recreation officials



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Three soccer fields at Fort Missoula Regional Park, seen on Wednesday, March 25, were damaged after a vehicle drove through them.

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