

imagine **if** LIBRARIES

Columbia Falls Teen Needs Assessment 2018



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executive summary

ImagineIF Libraries values community centered service, and we constantly look for opportunities to engage with our communities in ways that take into account their unique needs. Our Strategic Goals focus on creating spaces and opportunities for everyone in Flathead County to build relationships and achieve personal transformation.

In 2016, ImagineIF began a needs assessment for teens in Columbia Falls, MT. The intent of the project was to assess the opportunities and needs for Columbia Falls area teens in order to design and deliver high-impact teen services. This report includes the results of numerous conversations with Columbia Falls stakeholders, recommendations for how to expand services for teens at the library as well as an inventory of services available to teens in Columbia Falls.



DESCRIPTION OF COMMITTEE

The needs assessment committee included Connie Behe, Martha Furman, Tony Edmundson and Sean Anderson.

Connie Behe, the Director of ImagineIF Libraries, and Sean Anderson, the Senior Librarian for Collection Development and Branch Services attended the Research Institute for Public Libraries conference in May 2016, where Denver Public Library presented the results of their assessment of teen services in the Denver metro area.

Martha Furman is a Senior Librarian for ImagineIF Libraries and oversees services provided to children and teens ages 0-18.

Tony Edmundson has been the Branch Manager at ImagineIF Columbia Falls since 2016. In that time, use of the library by teens increased significantly and required additional programming efforts.

executive summary

BACKGROUND

We chose Columbia Falls as the subject for this research because of the changes currently affecting the community. Columbia Falls has recently seen mill closures, the closure of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company and a shift toward a service-based economy. Columbia Falls has higher than average poverty rates,¹ a high rate of students receiving free or reduced lunch² and higher than average teen birth rate.³

At the same time, community leaders have established Columbia Falls as a gateway to Glacier National Park, with impressive hospitality services, restaurants, microbreweries and cultural events such as the Community Market. These efforts have revitalized the community and created momentum for further progress.

In 2015, ImaginE! Libraries extensively remodeled the Columbia Falls location, improving the space and creating a designated area for teens. The remodel incorporated ImaginE! Libraries' culture of exploration and our commitment to building deeper relationships in the communities we serve. Since implementing these changes, the public response has been astounding: **building traffic increased by nearly 23%** and program attendance for all age groups more than doubled. Furthermore, the Library has become the after school destination for approximately 30-40 teens and tweens daily.

The Library conducted this assessment to gather information to serve teens even better and contribute to their lifelong success as engaged learners.



¹ In 2016, MT Dept. of Labor recorded a poverty rate of 19.8%. Compare to the statewide average of 14.6% and the National rate of 13.5%.

² 46% at CFHS, compared to 30% at Flathead High in Kalispell and 19% at Whitefish High.

³ 35 births per 1,000 women age 15-19. Compare to 33 for the state of MT and 24.2 nationally.

methodology

SCOPE

The scope of this report includes teens and tweens in the immediate Columbia Falls area. This project does not assess teen services throughout Flathead County, nor do the recommendations apply in all areas.

Our report includes stakeholder interviews, a list of area assets, national trends in teen services and recommendations for expanding teen services in Columbia Falls. We hope that our project will encourage greater collaboration with local partners and serve as an advocacy tool for seeking additional resources.

CONSTITUENTS SERVED

ImagineIF's library services to teens focus on serving those in grades 6-12. This grade range allows us to serve both pre-teens and teens. Because ImagineIF Columbia Falls serves strong "tween" base, composed mostly of middle school students in grades 5-8, our Teen Focus Group members were primarily ages 11 and 12. This age group represents the regular after-school users of the Columbia Falls Teen Zone.



Area schools in Columbia Falls encompass a large geographic area, including the small communities of Hungry Horse, Martin City and Coram. This greater Columbia Falls area is adjacent to the Great Bear Wilderness area and Glacier National Park, and is increasingly isolated from public and information services as one travels away from Columbia Falls.

Additionally, in interviewing Susan Nicosia we learned that two-thirds of all of the students come from outside the city. This lends particular weight to issues most impacted by that isolation: school attendance, post-secondary opportunities, after-school activities, health services and transportation.



methodology

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teen offerings in public libraries have become increasingly important as librarians work to create lifelong learners, strengthen 21st century skills and serve all members of our communities. Services for teens in libraries focus on the unique developmental needs of teen users. Since 2004, ImagineIF Libraries has served teens with spaces, collections, events and designated Teen Services staff. Our services grow teens into successful adults by offering opportunities for them to collaborate, innovate and create in our interactive spaces.

ImagineIF Libraries also provides access to many of the Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets for Youth*. Teens discover access to caring adults, organized programs for youth, books to read for pleasure and opportunities to build social and emotional skills at all of our locations. Nationally, only 11% of teens in the United States experience high levels of developmental assets.⁴ Possessing these assets is crucial for teens to make positive decisions and grow into healthy, caring adults, which in turn helps build a healthy community.

Not least, ImagineIF Libraries builds crucial skills for the developing workforce. Our hands-on learning opportunities feature STEM components that enhance formal learning and help kids develop into problem solvers and innovative thinkers. As teens in Columbia Falls prepare to enter adulthood, they find the tools and experts they need at

ImagineIF Libraries.

In 2016, the ImagineIF Libraries Youth Services staff conducted an assessment of teen spaces in our facilities. In addition to making recommendations for improving the physical spaces at the libraries, the report also included a review of current trends in teen spaces in libraries.

Research found that space is indicative of an organization's priorities, as "the allotment of space in public buildings clearly illustrates which groups matter and which groups do not."⁵ Research also found that teen spaces should offer a place where teens can bring interests to explore, rather than have "sanctioned interests imposed upon them."⁶ In order to realize this goal, teens must be included in the planning process of any teen space renovation or creation.

As libraries move beyond traditional text-based literacy, digital literacy and DIY or Maker-inspired activities are included in library teen spaces. Maker and DIY programs also incorporate 21st Century skills and keep teens current as they enter the workforce.⁷

Because space and staff resources are limited, we anticipate working closely with the community to learn about other organizations working with teens. **ImagineIF values partnerships as an important way for us to offer high-impact activities and freedom of exploration.**

4 (Search Institute, 2018)

5 Velasquez, Jennifer. "A Place of Their Own: Creating Spaces Where Teens Can Thrive." *American Libraries*. 1 September 2016. Accessed online: <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/09/01/library-teen-spaces-place-of-their-own/>

6 Velasquez, 2016

7 Agosto, Denise E. "Current Trends in US Public Library Services for Teens." *Public Libraries*. September/October 2016. Vol 55 No. 5.

methodology

SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

Imagine!F Columbia Falls staff and members of the Library Management Team conducted an inventory of organizations and individuals that work with teens in the Columbia Falls area, then narrowed the list down to 18. Persons interviewed can be found in Appendix I.

INTERVIEWS

Over the course of three months, two library staff interviewed each person selected. The list of questions is in Appendix II.

We wanted to understand community issues facing teens from multiple facets, from schools and community health organizations to the religious community.

City Manager Susan Nicosia helped us gain a deeper understanding of the local tax base and the extension of City services to the greater rural area, such as Coram and Hungry Horse. We spent 1.5 days interviewing teachers at the Columbia Falls High School and spent several more days interviewing many other stakeholders including Cindy Hooker, Executive Director of the Glacier Boys and Girls Club.

After meeting with all of the stakeholders, we transcribed the interviews and coded them to conduct a qualitative analysis. We then identified themes in the responses and mapped their frequency. Using that information, we narrowed down the list to the biggest issues facing teens in Columbia Falls.

STAFF SURVEY

We also conducted a survey of Imagine!F Columbia Falls staff in order to assess their perception of internal issues, such as their comfort with interacting with teens,

their experiences providing services to teens and their estimation of the adequacy of teen spaces and collections in Columbia Falls. Respondents included staff from all levels, including the branch manager, library advisors and materials handlers. We also noted their perspective on issues external to the library, such as available teen services in Columbia Falls and challenges faced by teens in the area. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix III.

TEEN FOCUS GROUP

In order to provide a complete picture of the opportunities and challenges facing teens in Columbia Falls, we conducted in-person interviews with a group of teen library users. These interviews helped us modify or support conclusions in our research.

We conducted these interviews in the form of a focus group. Interviews took place in the Columbia Falls City Council Chambers on the afternoon of May 2nd. Our questions helped teens describe their favorite activities, challenges they face and how they communicate with each other and the community. A complete list of questions posed to the group is in Appendix IV.

findings

EMERGING ISSUES FACING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

KEY ISSUES FACING TEENS

Our interviews captured a broad swath of issues faced by teens and fell into eight common themes. The largest group of responses includes issues such as community safety, drug use, school attendance and social stigma.

Many of the responses from our adult interviewees focused on a general need for direction for teens, primarily due to the changing economic conditions in Columbia Falls. Respondents reported that Columbia Falls teens may not have adequate knowledge of post-secondary opportunities.

Many responses referenced a general need for adult support in the community, which is an issue broached in the Developmental Assets developed by the Search Institute. The Developmental Assets state that among other things, teens need support from non-parent adults, strong community relationships, boundaries and creative opportunities.⁸ Our respondents also mentioned that Columbia Falls' teens need help building basic life skills, and we learned that a number of teens do not have regular access to food, shelter, healthcare, family stability or a combination of these factors. Demographic data listed in our executive summary supports this perception.

Finally, several respondents reported that Columbia Falls teens have an excessive focus on the virtual world, including social media. Interviewees mentioned related issues of safety, bullying and a distraction from school and creative pursuits. As the use of smartphones and social media becomes part of the modern landscape, determining the social effect of the use of these tools is beyond the scope of this project.

With regard to internal issues, respondents identified funding as a primary concern. Respondents from both non-profit organizations and schools reported that while the community supports their goals and missions, financial help is difficult to sustain. Organizations rely on local funders and grants to maintain a presence in the community, but they report an inability to meet their goals.

Respondents also identified challenges in building relationships between organizations. While respondents agree about the issues facing teens, organizations would still like more opportunities to coordinate complete services and support. Each organization might experience a different facet of struggle in a teen's life, but the public schools emerge as the best place to offer services. In spite of this, some organizations feel as though they may not have adequate access to teachers and administrators to provide these services.

Identifying overlap of teen services between organizations could result in greater efficiency for each of the organizations.



findings

GAPS IN TEEN SERVICES

Based on the responses from the interviewees, teens in Columbia Falls are in need of space and activities. Nearly 70% of the responses to this question focused on the need for affordable, accessible activities and common spaces to gather and hang out.

High school sports are popular and successful in Columbia Falls, and respondents consistently mentioned a need for opportunities for non-athletes. Specifically, activities like gaming, coding and the arts are popular activities that may not have an organizing force to attract teens.

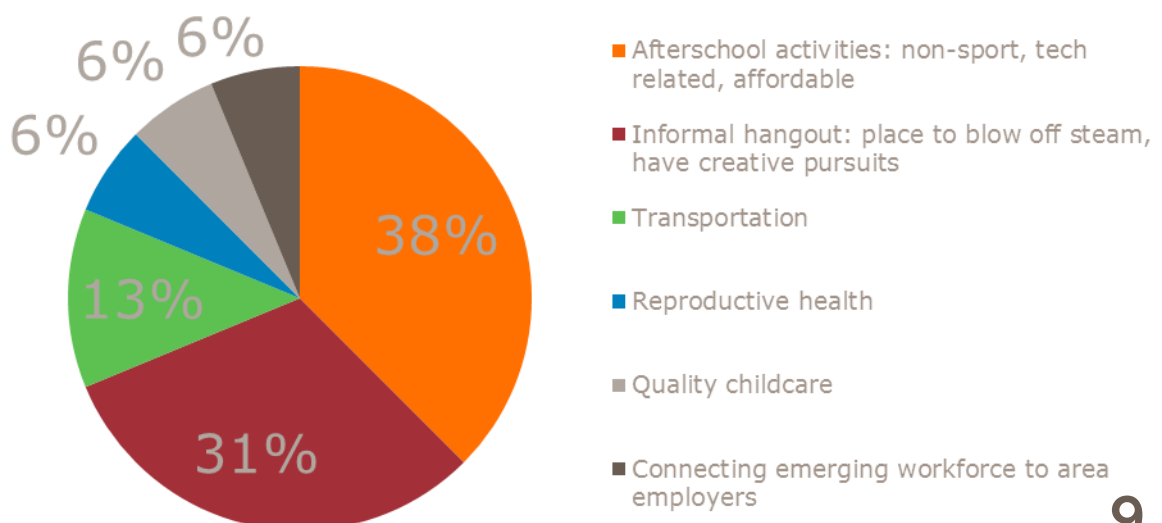
In the same vein, several respondents mentioned that high school students often work after school. Many activities have associated costs for equipment and training, which are additional barriers to entry for many. Thus, while most respondents could assist with overcoming these barriers, teens remain in need due to a lack of awareness of this assistance.

Our interviewees told us that Columbia Falls teens do not have adequate space to gather, and the places that do exist have caveats that are either deterrents to teens or excluding factors. The library partially fills this need for space, but many respondents recognize the capacity limitations within the library and conflicts that can arise as teens outgrow existing spaces.

Teens also need reliable transportation, especially as a way to connect them with existing activities and resources. Movie theaters, shopping centers and gyms are popular destinations, but all require a drive of 20-30 minutes each way.

Teens need transportation in order to access affordable health care, including reproductive health care since satellite services for Columbia Falls do not exist in proportion to the need.

Gaps in Services for Teens in Columbia Falls



findings

STAFF SURVEY

Staff overwhelmingly reported feeling comfortable working with teens and said that teens feel welcome inside of the library. When asked for details about teens feeling welcome and comfortable, staff reported the teens feel welcome because we provide dedicated space for this group, and that the space is not separate or hidden away. Similarly, staff pointed to a general lack of places for teens to simply 'hang out' in Columbia Falls that does not have associated costs and that teens want a safe, welcoming place to socialize freely with their friends that is outside of a school setting. Several staff reported teens' desire to "be themselves," and that there can be the

perception that teens are too loud or disruptive.

In response to teens' engagement with library services, staff responses were varied. Library materials are not necessarily the draw for this group, with one staff person reporting that the collections could be updated and expanded, especially graphic novels and manga.

ImagineIF Staff in Columbia Falls report that teens need reliability, freedom and trust from adults. Space is truly our limiting factor, as teen programs often extend into the children's space. Staff feels that the library is at capacity for the programs that we offer and the volume of teens that we can serve.



findings

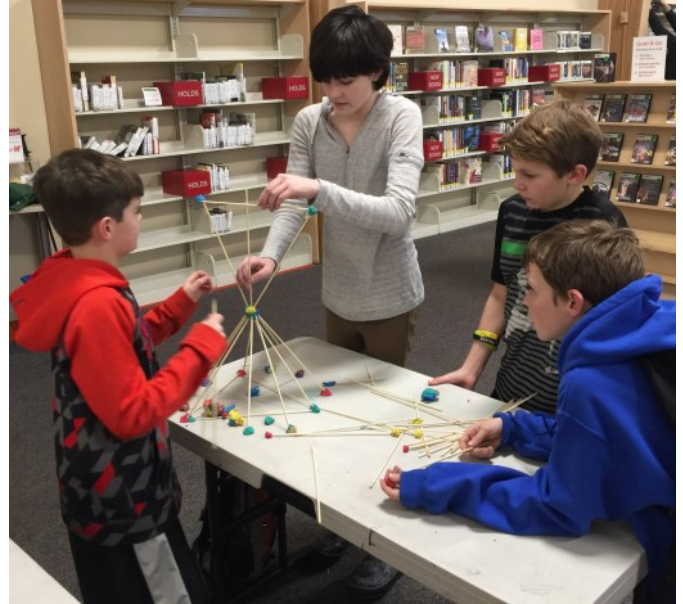
TEEN FOCUS GROUP

We wanted to more fully understand the experience of teens in Columbia Falls – their social habits, needs and motivation for visiting the library.

The teens that we interviewed as part of this focus group are like teens elsewhere in the Flathead Valley – they are highly social, and tend to prefer outdoor activities, such as camping, hiking, and playing outside. They are also highly connected, with most reporting that they find out about things that are going on via social media, digital advertising, and through personal connections with family and friends.

Transportation is complicated for this group. Most reported that transportation both before and after school is either non-motorized – biking, skateboarding, or riding a scooter – or reliant on another individual for a ride. Only one reported riding the bus before and after school. This confirms responses from the other segments of our research, specifically that teens generally do not have access to services outside of Columbia Falls, or that they are left to their own devices between school release and parents arriving home after work.

Teens overwhelmingly identified publicly available spaces such as parks, shops, and fast food restaurants as places that feel safe to them. While teens do feel safe in Columbia Falls public spaces, there are a limited number of all-season public spaces without a financial barrier to entry. This fact, combined with the fact that the winter months are too cold for prolonged outdoor activities, lends support to the City of Columbia Falls' interest in developing more public spaces.⁹



Columbia Falls teens identified several gaps in their community's offerings for teens, including teen-targeted shops, indoor activities and informal places to gather and socialize. They suggested that Columbia Falls needs malls, museums, amusement parks and places to swim year round. While many of these spaces and activities require payments for teen participants, the teens' discussion of them supports the need for more places in Columbia Falls to gather and socialize that is outside school or home.

Finally, the teens reported having strong relationships with Imagine!F Columbia Falls staff. Teens stated that the library is a fun place to hang out, a place to "do something." Notably, only two teens stated that they come to the library to get books, which is consistent with the overall trend in library usage. Events and after-school activities are well-attended, which demonstrates that the library is a place where they feel comfortable exploring and learning new skills.

recommendations for library services

A NEED FOR PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES

Our interviews with community leaders, teens, and library staff highlighted the need for public gathering spaces in Columbia Falls, especially spaces that are open and welcoming to teens. In the context of this research, the definition of teenager ranges from 11-year-old 6th graders through 18-year-old high school seniors. Columbia Falls teen gathering spaces will need to offer spaces, services and activities that appeal to young people across this age range.

Removing barriers such as fines and program fees has been very successful for

ImaginELF, and we are interested in collaborating with service providers to help eliminate similar barriers, both real and perceived.

Efforts to expand services should extend beyond the Columbia Falls city limits. Because transportation is a key barrier to teens' participation in activities located in other parts of the valley, coordinating access will be a critical component of holistic teen services.

JOB RECRUITMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR TEENS

21st Century skills-building is a priority service at ImaginELF. We help people develop themselves through innovation, experimentation, collaboration and creativity. We have the unique opportunity to teach these skills within the context of Columbia Falls' emerging economy. Partnerships with local business would be a key component, and we look forward to connecting businesses and the emerging workforce in new ways.

Columbia Falls teens need access to paths for success. We should provide opportunities for targeted job recruitment and soft-skills development. A network of engaged adults in teens' lives will have a tangible impact on their success. One way that we will continue this work is to expand upon our Wired Wednesday program, which offers Maker-inspired activities that teach teens about current technologies while helping them collaborate and build social skills.



recommendations for library services

ESTABLISH TEEN SERVICES COUNCIL IN COLUMBIA FALLS

We learned that there is a need for more connection between service providers and teens in Columbia Falls. Public school students, for example, have access to activities and events that may not be accessible to youth not enrolled in the public schools. Similarly, some organizations do not have the ability to extend their services to the public school system, and must serve a more dispersed population during off-hours. Many organizations would like improved communication with each other and with the teen.

ImagineIF is a member of the Best Beginnings Council for Flathead County, a coalition of local organizations that meets monthly in order to ensure coordinated

services for young children. We recommend forming a similar coalition focused on teens in Columbia Falls to increase coordination between teen service organizations so that efforts are not duplicated and teens have an easy way to access the resources that they need. Such increased collaboration between service providers could also address other challenges, such as the difficulty of communicating with teens and managing behaviors. We envision that local leaders, educators, service organizations and several youth members would be part of this coalition to ensure that its work remains focused on teens' needs and to obtain young people's expertise about their cohort.



conclusion and library summary

Imagine! Libraries will pursue avenues for addressing several of the needs listed in this report. In particular, we feel poised to address job skills, low cost programs for tech and creative pursuits, and the initial steps for building a community coalition. We will investigate possibilities for partnerships with Job Service and work to be more involved with upcoming teen job fairs. Similarly, our Wired Wednesday program could grow into a more fully developed Makerspace, with technology tools to help teens stay current.

Conducting this research and writing this report helped us better understand

Columbia Falls and further appreciate the individuals who make the community successful. We look forward to working together to help teens achieve their dreams through improved access to the right ingredients, as well as the caring adults who already surround them.

We extend thanks to all of the local organizations working with teens and the individuals who graciously gave their time to offer valuable insights and advice. A full list of these generous community members appears in Appendix I.



appendix I

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- Susan Nicosia; City Manager, City of Columbia Falls
- Jenny Lovering; City Councilor, City of Columbia Falls
- Scott Gaiser; Principal, Columbia Falls High School
- John Thompson; Assistant Principal, Columbia Falls High School
- Troy Bowman; Activities Director, Columbia Falls High School
- Betsy Funk; Teacher, Columbia Falls High School
- Soozi Crosby; Librarian, Columbia Falls High School
- Kathy Dragonfly; Nurse, Columbia Falls High School
- Wakefield Troy; Social Worker, Columbia Falls High School
- Jenny Stone; Art Club, Columbia Falls High School
- Eric Morgan; Teacher, Columbia Falls Junior High School
- Don Bennett; President, Freedom Bank
- O'Brien Byrd; Coach, Flathead Rapids Soccer Club
- Peter Erickson; Pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church
- Jacey Barnaby, Weyerhaeuser
- Ben Frentsos; 4H Extension Office
- Ashley Peters; Flathead County Health Department



appendix II

COMMUNITY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Who are your primary constituents?
- What are the key issues facing your constituents?
- What are your key priorities for your organization over the next 3-5 years?
- How do you define success with your program?
- How do you get information about how best to serve teens?
- How do you find teens to participate in your program?
- What are any emerging issues for your organization in serving teens?
- From your perspective, what gaps exist in service to teens in Columbia Falls?
- With whom else should we talk, including any of your partners?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Would you like a copy of our report?



appendix III & IV

STAFF SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you comfortable working with teens?
 - a. Why or why not?
2. Do teens feel welcome at ImagineIF Columbia Falls?
 - a. Why or why not?
3. Do you perceive Columbia Falls at a teen-friendly location?
 - a. Why or why not?
4. When do you feel most successful working with teens in the library?
5. When do you feel most challenged working with teens in the library?
6. What do you think teens want to do at the library?
7. Do you feel that the Columbia Falls Young Adult collection is adequate to meet the needs of Columbia Falls teens?
8. Do you feel that the Columbia Falls teen space is adequate to meet the needs of Columbia Falls teens?
9. What kinds of services would you like ImagineIF Columbia Falls to provide for teens?
10. What kinds of services would you like all of ImagineIF to provide for teens?
11. What are the challenges you face in serving teens?
12. How do you use the website with teens?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

TEEN FOCUS GROUP

1. What kinds of things do you like to do in Columbia Falls?
2. How do you find out about things to do in Columbia Falls?
3. How do you get around town?
 - a. Before school
 - b. After school
 - c. Weekends, summers?
4. What places feel safe to you?
5. What is missing from Columbia Falls?
6. What are you passionate about?
 - a. What are you inspired by?
7. Why do you come into the library?



appendix V

INVENTORY OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH TEENS

School (Non-sports)

Art Club	Jennifer Stone
Dance Club	Betsy Funk
Key Club	Kate Daniels
Student Council	Mary Behrendt
Close Up	Mr. Fairbank
Graduation Matters	Betsy Funk
Running Start	Elizabeth Romain
Band	Josh Forke
Cheerleaders	Marissa Church
Choir	Bethany Benton
Drama	Brynn Cadigan
Columbians	Josh Forke
Foreign Language	DJ Weatherly
NHS	Jake Hall
Peer Allies	Scott Gaiser, Scott Thompson
Special Olympics	Kate Daniels
Speech & Debate	Barry Conger
Student Council	Mary Behrendt
FCCLA	Lynne Thuesen
Freshman Advisor	Pam Hughes, Julia Whitman
Soph. Advisor	Jennifer Stone
Senior Advisor	Jenny Lovering, Erin Quitia
Library	Soozi Crosby

Sports (Independent)

Whitefish Mtn. Resort	Bill Cubbage
Whitefish Race League	
Flathead Rapids	O'Brien Byrd
CF Baseball Association	

Faith-based

First Baptist Church	Pastor Marc Dobson
Methodist Church	
Our Savior's Lutheran	Pete Erickson

Volunteerism

MCC	
WMR (Ridge Academy)	Bill Cubbage
Community Garden	Jenny Lovering

Community Groups

Glacier Institute	
BMWf	
Alpine Theatre Project	
Boys & Girls Club	
Boy Scouts	
4H (Extension Office)	Ben Frentsos
CF Chamber of Comm.	Stacey Schnebel
CF City Council	Jenny Lovering Darrin Fisher Mike Shepherd
County Commissioners	
County Health Clinic	

School (Sports)

Activities Director	Troy Bowman
Football	Jaxon Schweikert
Basketball	Chris, Cary Finberg
Wrestling	Jessie Schaeffer
Swimming	Mike Nelson
Cheerleading	Marissa Church
Jr. High Boys Basketball	Only Jr. High sport listed
Golf	Gene Marcille
Soccer	O'Brien Byrd
Softball	Dave Kehr
Tennis	Gene Marcille
Track	Jamie Heinz
Volleyball	Jessy Matthews

appendix V

INVENTORY OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH TEENS

Employers

A&W
Super 1
Smith's
Weyerhaeuser
F.H. Stoltze
Flathead Job Service

Businesses/Community Leaders

Freedom Bank	Don Bennett
State Farm	Lyle Mitchell
Nomad	

Employers (Seasonal)

City of Columbia Falls	Susan Nicosia
City Pool	Jeff Steiner

Recreation

Big Sky Water Park
Glacier National Park
Pinewood Aquatic Center

