

2024 IMPACT REPORT

MONTANA SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Guiding Montana Businesses to Success





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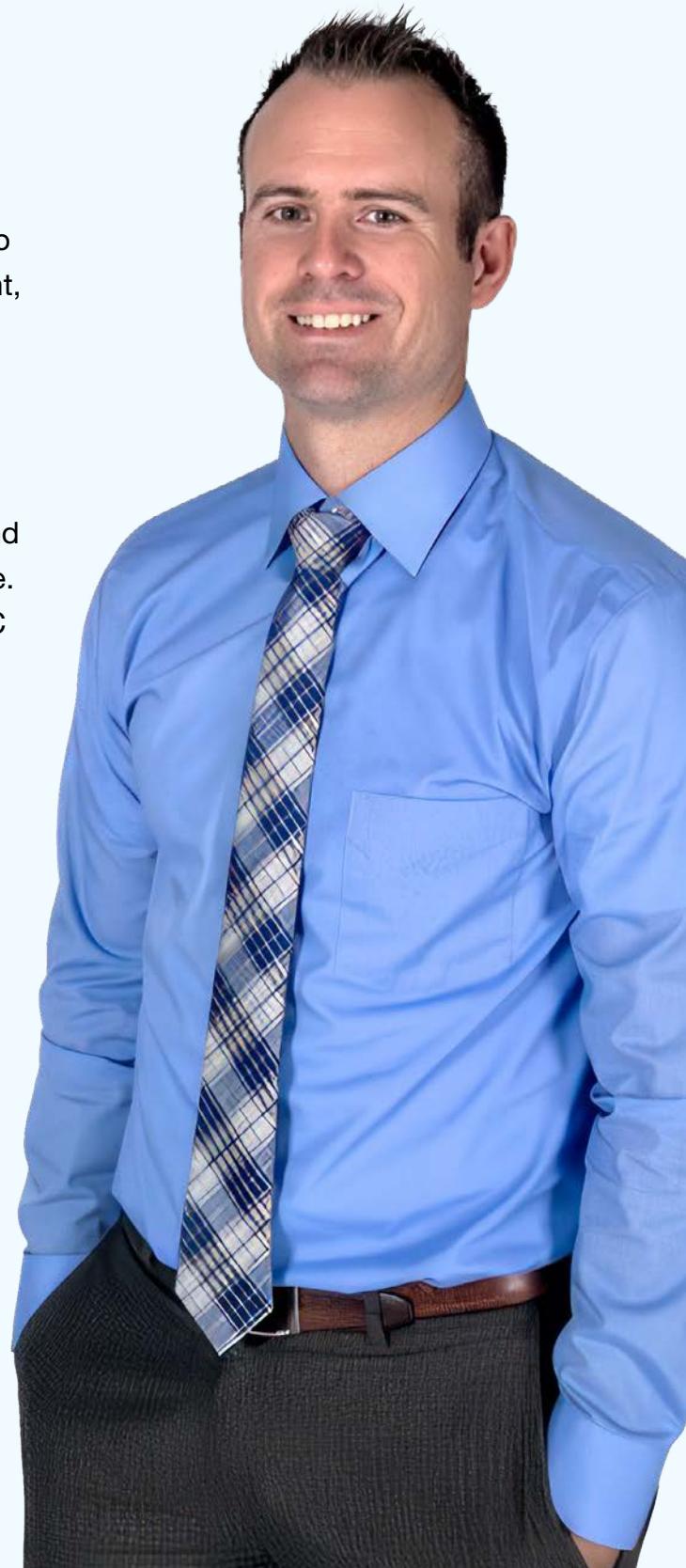
A Message from the Montana SBDC State Director

At the Montana Small Business Development Center, we have the privilege of working with partners to leverage great resources for the benefit of entrepreneurs and small business owners in our state. These partnerships enable our regional directors and business advisors to offer small business clients low-cost training and free, confidential one-on-one counseling related to business plan development, financial management, operational processes, loan application support, marketing initiatives, succession planning, cybersecurity awareness and much more.

This past year, Montana SBDC advisors have provided technical assistance to entrepreneurs and small business owners in every corner of our state. I am pleased to present the “2024 Montana SBDC Impact Report” that highlights success stories from clients, provides insight into our program and shows how we assist entrepreneurs and small business owners who support thriving local economies.

Small businesses are the engine that drives Montana’s economy. We are proud to provide services that help them thrive and thankful for the support from our funders at the Montana Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration and other host organizations across the state. Their support allows us to continue to assist in creating positive outcomes for small businesses across Montana.

Chad Moore
Montana SBDC State Director



The Montana SBDC



Lori Gilliland
Associate State Director
Lead Center



Kealan Connors
Communications/
Operations Specialist
Lead Center



Lorene Hintz
Regional Director
Billings SBDC



Kristi Gee
Regional Director
Bozeman SBDC



Deb McGregor
Regional Director
Great Falls SBDC



Rich Gannon
Regional Director
Great Falls SBDC



Rob Driscoll
Regional Director
Kalispell SBDC



Elizabeth Smith
Regional Director
Miles City SBDC



Jennifer Stephens
Regional Director
Missoula SBDC

The Montana SBDC (Continued)



Kayla Vokral
Business Advisor
Billings SBDC



Jay Doyle
Regional Director
Butte SBDC



Fionn Zarubica
Business Advisor
Butte SBDC



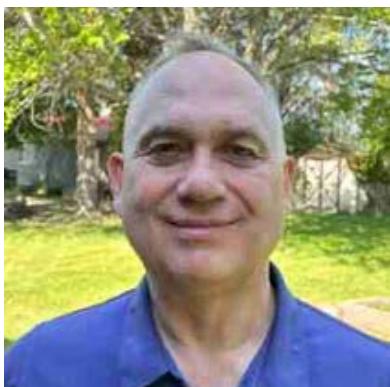
Christian Nichols
Business Advisor
Great Falls SBDC



Joe LaPlante
Regional Director
Havre SBDC



Josh Bennett
Regional Director
Helena SBDC



Steve Clairmont
Business Advisor
Missoula SBDC



Quincy Walter
Regional Director
Wolf Point SBDC



Jason Nitschke
Senior Child Care
Business Advisor
Zero to Five

Advisory Council



Paddy Fleming
Director
Montana Manufacturing Extension Center



Julie Jaksha
Market President
Ascent Bank



Reed W. Bassett
Community Banking Relationship Manager
U.S. Bank



Joe Fanguy
Vice President of Strategic Development
Blackfoot Communications



Shandy Hanks Moran
Commercial Lending Specialist
U.S. Department of Agriculture



Tracy McIntyre
Executive Director
Montana Coopertive



Ex-officio:
Brent Donnelly
District Director, Montana Office of Field Operations
U.S. Small Business Administration

2024 Economic Impact

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| New Businesses Successfully Launched | 82 |
| Total Clients C counseled | 1,285 |
| Training Events Hosted | 64 |
| Training Attendees | 566 |
| Client Loans Approved | 110 |
| Jobs Supported | 3,052 |

\$21,444,451 Financing Obtained by Clients

Data source for all statistics: Neoserra Client Database. This data reflects FFY 2024.

Training and Workshops

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| QuickBooks | Startup Roadmap |
| Profit Mastery | Cybersecurity & Your Small Business |
| Website Bootcamp | AI Tools For Small Business |



Apricot Lane is a well-known boutique franchise located in Billings since 2011. In November 2023, Katherine Howland came to the Billings Small Business Development Center with her desire to purchase the franchise from the current owner. She was unsure of what she needed to provide to the lender for financing and needed assistance with creating a business plan and understanding cash flow projections.

The SBDC provided a business plan template, spread historical financials, helped with the projections and prepared Katherine for her visit with her lender. Her experience as the manager and buyer of the business strengthened her credibility with the lender and led to financing.

Katherine bought the business and inventory for \$440,000, was awarded a \$440,000 loan from Yellowstone Bank and brought \$100,000 of her own funds for franchise fees and working capital. A grand reopening was held in March to celebrate her new ownership and the recent 13th anniversary of the Billings location.

Apricot Lane Boutique has positively impacted its local community. With high-quality outfits at an affordable price, it provides timeless and fun clothing to make women of all ages feel confident and proud.

Lorene Hintz, regional director of the Billings SBDC, stated, “Katherine was a joy to work with. She is very knowledgeable about fashion and the financials of business, as well as being coachable and smart.”



“It was great to meet with Lorene at the SBDC as a jumping-off point. She led me in the right direction and kept the process from being overwhelming.”

Katherine Howland, owner of Apricot Lane Boutique

Casual Space is not just a gathering place; it's a vibrant hub that fosters community connections and supports local entrepreneurs. Alana Sukut, the visionary behind Casual Space, is driven by her passion for bridging the gap between making friends and connecting with like-minded individuals. In 2022, Alana embarked on a journey to reach her goal, seeking guidance and assistance to navigate the path ahead.

Initially, Alana approached the Billings SBDC seeking financial support for her business venture. However, after careful analysis of her financial projections and business plan, we discovered her startup expenses were lower than expected. This allowed her to launch her business without incurring any debt. We worked with Alana to help her understand her numbers, create a budget and build her business model. With our guidance, Alana successfully bootstrapped her business, and we provided her with the tools and knowledge to succeed.

Alana's business has been operational since December 2022 and currently accommodates more than 10 vendors. Her establishment offers a diverse range of classes, workshops and game nights, effectively achieving her objective of fostering a vibrant community gathering space. Notably, Alana also obtained a gaming license to host Bingo and Bunko nights, further expanding the variety of events at her venue. Continuously attuned to client demand, she regularly introduces new events to enhance the community experience.

Kayla Vokral, business advisor at the Billings SBDC, said, "Working with Alana was a fantastic experience. Her passion and determination were truly amazing, and all she required was the right guidance and information to kickstart her business."



“I am so grateful for Kayla and the guidance and tools she and the SBDC have and still are providing me with opening and maintaining my business. Her positivity and knowledge through the process gave me the confidence I needed to continue the pursuit of my dream.”

Alana Sukut, owner of Casual Space

Thrive Cycle



Jennifer Renaud's passion for indoor cycling began in Missoula, where she immediately connected with the vibrant spinning community. She fell in love with the sense of support and the physical challenge.

After relocating to Great Falls in May 2023, Jennifer recognized an opportunity to bring her beloved spinning experience to the local community. She saw a void in the market for a boutique indoor cycling studio that could foster the same camaraderie and motivation she had discovered.

Jennifer knew that she needed a solid foundation for her dream to take root. Navigating the complexities of business formation, financial planning and securing funding proved daunting. The SBDC's expertise offered the perfect solution.

With the SBDC's help, Jennifer was guided through essential practices for launching a business. This included crafting a robust business plan, complete with realistic financial projections that would be instrumental in securing funding. Recognizing the importance of a strong online presence, the SBDC also supported Jennifer in developing a user-friendly website with e-commerce functionality.

The impact of the SBDC's support has been undeniable. Jennifer successfully obtained funding, allowing her to transform her vision into a reality. Thrive Cycle's classes are consistently full, with waitlists forming for highly sought-after spots.

Rich Gannon, business advisor for the Great Falls SBDC, stated, "Jennifer's determination and passion for indoor cycling has been inspiring. I know that Thrive Cycle will be a success."

Deb McGregor
Regional Director

Rich Gannon
Business Advisor

Christian Nichols
Business Advisor



Ride and Thrive



“Rich Gannon and his team have been a tremendous factor in the success of Thrive Cycle, from its initial business plan, to streamlining its methods, to final implementation. Rich has been my biggest supporter, mentor and sounding board throughout this wild adventure. I’m beyond grateful for his business expertise and look forward to future endeavors with Rich and his team.”

Jennifer Renaud, owner of Thrive Cycle

Divide Mountain BBQ



Virgil Madplume was born and raised in Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, he established a small backyard BBQ restaurant from scratch. Unfortunately, the pandemic-related restrictions forced him to shut down this initial venture. Undeterred, Virgil pursued a degree in business management information systems from the University of Montana. Upon returning to Browning, he made the bold decision to revive his culinary passion. This time, he reimagined his BBQ business as a food truck, combining his love for slow-cooked BBQ with a more flexible and mobile business.

With more experience and knowledge under his belt, Virgil decided he needed help achieving his vision. The Native American Community Finance Development in Browning urged him to talk with the SBDC for help with receiving a business startup loan. Working together with small business advisor Rich Gannon of the Great Falls SBDC, Virgil created a detailed business plan and financial projections that outlined the vision, market analysis and operational strategy for Divide Mountain BBQ.

With a solid business plan and financial projections, Rich guided Virgil through the process of securing funding for his startup. Thanks to Rich Gannon and the SBDC, Virgil was able to obtain a \$55,000 startup loan from Native American Community Finance Development.

By launching his business, Virgil can provide his delicious pulled pork BBQ to both residents of the reservation and hungry tourists. Soon, he hopes to relocate the food truck to Missoula during the slower winter season.

Rich Gannon stated, "It has been my pleasure working with Virgil to achieve his goal. Virgil's dedication and perseverance was the catalyst to making the business take off."



Deb McGregor
Regional Director

Rich Gannon
Business Advisor

Christian Nichols
Business Advisor



“Rich and the SBDC helped me write a business plan that led to funding to buy my food trailer. He helped me gather market research and craft a well thought out plan and projections.”

Virgil Madplume, owner of Divide Mountain BBQ

The Cage



Juli Seaman is a lifelong resident of Great Falls whose professional journey has been defined by a drive to learn and grow. Throughout her career, she accumulated a wealth of business skills working in various roles, from accounting to marketing. While these positions provided valuable experience, Juli always had a desire to create a business that would not only showcase her professional capabilities, but also make a meaningful impact on her community.

The Cage stemmed from Juli's experience as a softball player in her early twenties. Frustrated by the lack of practice facilities, Juli was determined to provide a much-needed facility to nurture enthusiasm for baseball and softball, welcoming players of all skill levels.

Juli reached out to Great Falls Development Alliance for advice with her business plan and was connected with the Montana SBDC for specialized assistance. Thanks to the SBDC, Juli was given extensive guidance and feedback on her business plan. In addition, she was directed to the appropriate financial institutions to secure funding for a down payment to purchase equipment and open the business.

Thanks to SBDC advisors, The Cage has provided a much-needed practice space for local athletes and contributes to the development of baseball and softball in Great Falls. Thanks to The Cage, athletes can practice five days a week.

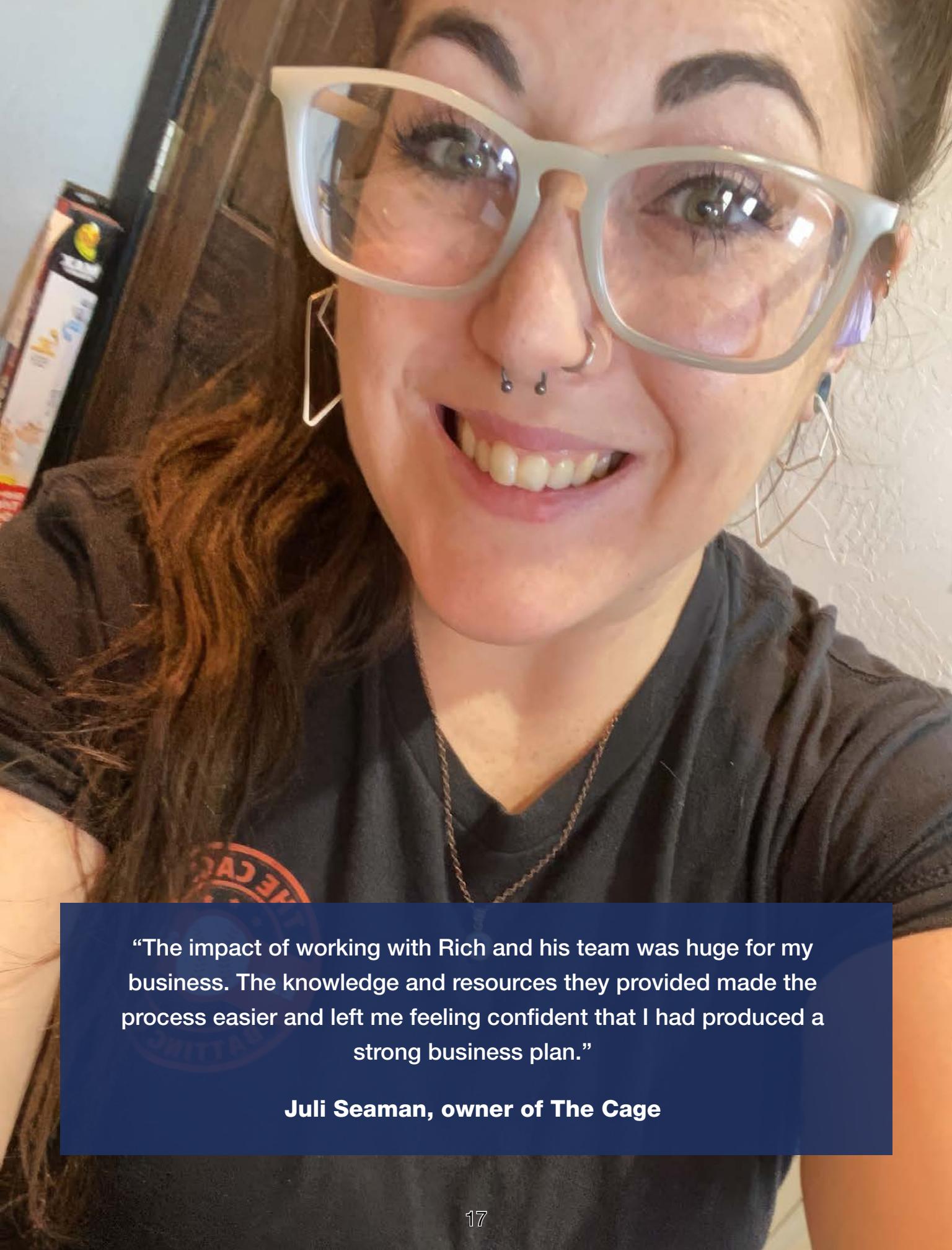
Rich Gannon, business advisor with the Great Falls SBDC, said, "Working with Juli to achieve her goal has been a pleasure. Her determination will make The Cage a home run."



Deb McGregor
Regional Director

Rich Gannon
Business Advisor

Christian Nichols
Business Advisor



“The impact of working with Rich and his team was huge for my business. The knowledge and resources they provided made the process easier and left me feeling confident that I had produced a strong business plan.”

Juli Seaman, owner of The Cage

Kaylynn Sheldon is a licensed denturist who graduated from the American Denturist College at the top of her class. She values patient education, as well as being authentic and creative with each dental design. Her desire to create a business came from the realization that patients' needs were not being met. Whether it be that dental prosthetics were rushed, or that the Bozeman area had very few specialists, she knew she had to fill that gap.

To start the business off on the right foot, she turned to the SBDC to guide her through making a business plan and understanding cash flow projections. When it became clear that traditional financing was not going to be an option, the SBDC pursued a loan through Prospera and Kaylynn secured a loan to start the business in Bozeman.

Due to the hard work of Kaylynn and the SBDC, the Gallatin Valley now has another licensed denturist to bring smiles to the community. For patients, wait time has been cut in half; patient care is personalized and judgment-free. With Kaylynn's eye for achieving natural characteristics for each person, patients get top-notch care.

Kristi Gee, regional director of the Bozeman SBDC, commented, "It has been my pleasure working with Kaylynn to achieve her goal. Through every hurdle, she's shown up and embraced every bit of knowledge given to her. Her passion and determination were the catalyst to making the business get off the ground. Kaylynn's vision of caring for patients through compassion and attention to detail will entice them to keep coming back."



“When I decided to move my business to Bozeman, I had only been in business for just under a year. To make sure my business flourished, I reached out to the Bozeman SBDC for counselling in hopes of being able to qualify for a loan with a traditional lender. Kristi helped with making a business plan and provided guidance for cash flow projections.”

Kaylynn Sheldon, owner of Smile Prosthetics

Two Kays Flower Farm



Crystal Allison and Marlene Horsfall started their flower farm business out of a deep-seated passion for preserving their family's agricultural heritage and a desire to innovate within the industry. Their motivation to steward the land for future generations and contribute to the local community's well-being has been a driving force behind their entrepreneurial journey.

Despite their rich history as a generational farming family, they needed the SBDC's help. Neither Crystal nor Marlene had prior experience in business ownership. Recognizing the importance of starting their venture on solid ground, they sought guidance from the SBDC's experienced staff.

Through the SBDC's guidance, Two Kays Flower Farm got the assistance it needed to succeed. SBDC regional director Rob Driscoll facilitated appointments with key stakeholders, allowing Crystal and Marlene to gain insights from experts and regulatory authorities. Most importantly, his personalized consultations walked them through critical decisions about their business, offering clarity and confidence as they navigated the complexities of entrepreneurship.

With everyone's help, the business's success has come to fruition. Furthermore, with SBDC assistance, Crystal and Marlene navigated the application process and obtained grants for high tunnels from Natural Resources Conservation Services, extending their growing season and increasing crop yield.

Rob Driscoll, regional director of the Kalispell SBDC, said, "Their farm serves as a living testament to the region's agricultural history, providing a space for residents and visitors alike to connect with nature and learn about farming practices passed down through generations."



“SBDC assistance was essential to our business because it provided invaluable guidance and support at critical junctures. Through Rob’s expertise, we navigated complex financial decisions with confidence.”

**Marlene Horsfall and Crystal Allison, owners of
Two Kays Flower Farm**

Anaconda Yoga



Marquis Matson has practiced yoga for over 15 years and has spent the last 10 years as a digital marketing consultant in the yoga industry. After returning home to Anaconda, she noticed a need for a dedicated yoga space. With her years of yoga experience, her vision to create her own studio could finally come to fruition.

Even though Marquis had a clear vision for her business, she needed financing to make it a reality. Following a recommendation, she sought assistance from the SBDC for expert guidance. Thanks to SBDC staff, she developed a business plan, financial projections, a loan application packet and received general business advice to support her entrepreneurial goals. This guidance was pivotal in laying a solid foundation for the business and securing financing.

With the Butte SBDC's help, Marquis secured \$21,000 of financing. As of 2024, the studio has 27 members, with additional drop-ins from both residents and out-of-state visitors. Members, especially those recovering from injuries or hip replacements, report health improvements from regular gentle exercise. Many individuals in the community have found Anaconda Yoga to be a supportive and healing space.

"Anaconda Yoga is a business that revolves around the community. With local partnerships like Discover Anaconda and Smelter City Brewing, they can put on free community sessions. With Marquis's industry knowledge, she can tailor her classes to meet the needs of the local community, which sets Anaconda Yoga apart from many other studios," stated Fionn Zarubica, business advisor at the Butte SBDC.



Jay Doyle
Regional Director

Fionn Zarubica
Business Advisor



“SBDC’s assistance was essential to my business. I gained valuable knowledge, like how to assess fair rent deals and effectively engage with the local community. Without the SBDC’s guidance, I would not have been able to open Anaconda Yoga in such a short time.”

Marquis Matson, owner of Anaconda Yoga

Baker Childcare and Early Learning Center



Fallon County families had been without a licensed childcare provider since 2019. Vaughn Zenko, the executive director of the Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team and the Eastern Montana Economic Development Authority, knew he had to fill this gap.

To begin the process of creating a licensed childcare facility, Vaughn turned to the Zero to Five Montana Program and the SBDC for guidance. He needed help with strategic planning, business planning and financial projections. Through its partnership with the regional SBDC, Zero to Five provided 30 hours of technical assistance in market research, startup assistance and more.

Vaughn and the EMEDA Board found it difficult to access the capital necessary to start the program. Thanks to the community, land was donated, and private funds were found. With these funds, they were able to acquire two modular buildings to house a Head Start facility and a licensed childcare program.

Unfortunately, once the capital access problem appeared solved, a weather disaster struck: In the summer of 2024, severe storms hit the area, knocking over one of the buildings, causing delays and increasing budget costs. Fortunately, with donations from across the state, they were able to offset the cost of the building. By October 2024, over \$7,000 worth of furniture, fixtures, equipment, toys and books were donated to the program.

Baker Childcare and Early Learning Center opened in the winter of 2024, creating 11 jobs in the Head Start program and licensed childcare facilities, and providing early care and education for 38 children. This also allowed dozens of other under-employed residents to re-enter the workforce.



Elizabeth Smith
Regional Director

Jason Nitschke
Senior Child Care
Business Advisor



“Finding a licensed childcare facility in Fallon County has been hard for parents and care takers. With Jason’s help, we learned how to start the business and establish goals. Without the donations of our community and every else, we would not be here today.”

**Carrie Schwartz and Vaughn Zenko,
directors of Baker Childcare and Early Learning Center**

North Post, a sporting goods and lifestyle store in Plentywood, was re-established in late 2023 by Cheryl Bjorgen of MBS Adventures, LLC. The store offers a broad range of products and services, including apparel, athletic gear, customization, engraving, firearms, fishing equipment and even Tropical Sno and hard ice cream.

“When our family decided to pursue the opportunity to purchase North Post, we were elated, though unsure of the process,” said owner Cheryl Bjorgen. “This is when we decided to reach out to the SBDC for guidance. The staff’s invaluable support helped us through buying the business. They helped us craft a solid business plan and were available to answer questions and offer advice.”

Cheryl added, “Even after the purchase was complete, the SBDC has continued to support us. They inform us about training opportunities and grants that could benefit our business, such as QuickBooks training sessions. Their ongoing support has been invaluable as we navigate the challenges of owning and operating North Post.”

Since reopening, the business has been a staple in the community. With its focus on being a one-stop shop, North Post has become known as “more than a sports store.”

“The North Post success story is one we wish for all our small businesses in the region,” said Quincy Walter, regional director of the Wolf Point SBDC. “They were terrific to work with and their passion for their business was present every day. Their willingness to ask questions and listen makes me know that North Post will be a success.”



Quincy Walter
Regional Director



“Thanks to Quincy and the support of the SBDC, we’ve realized our dream of owning a successful business. North Post continues to thrive, and we are grateful for the guidance and support we’ve received along the way.”

Cheryl Bjorgen, owner of North Post

Bitterroot Early Learning Network



Bitterroot Early Learning Network's journey began in 1980 as Bitterroot Preschool, founded by a group of dedicated parents seeking quality early childhood education in Hamilton. By 1984, Evergreen Kids Corner was born; by 1989, they purchased the schoolhouse where the school operates today.

However, like many early childhood education programs across Montana, the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges, like labor shortages, rising inflation and impacts on affordability for parents. Due to these factors, Ariella Wells approached the SBDC in November 2022 for help.

With SBDC assistance, Evergreen Kids Corner rebranded itself as the Bitterroot Early Learning Network. This rebranding helped the school evolve into a community development organization committed to providing high quality early childhood education throughout the Bitterroot area. Over the last two years, BELN has received 46 hours of one-on-one technical assistance and trainings in marketing, managing a business, workshop development and government contracting assistance.

When BELN initially engaged with the Missoula SBDC for technical assistance, the program employed three staff members, had less than \$5,000 in the bank, was obligated to \$55,000 of debt and had a monthly gross revenue of \$7,700. As of November 2024, staff size doubled to six employees, the program is debt-free, monthly gross revenue doubled to an average of \$14,000 and cash on-hand is more than \$100,000.

"Ariella's dedication to early childhood education, creativity and willingness to innovate led me to believe BELN would be successful," stated Jason Nitschke, senior child care business advisor for Zero to Five Montana.

"Ariella's dedication to early childhood education, creativity and willingness to innovate led me to believe BELN would be successful," stated Jason Nitschke, senior child care business advisor for Zero to Five Montana.

Jennifer Stephens
Regional Director

Steve Clairmont
Business Advisor

Jason Nitschke
Senior Child Care
Business Advisor



“Collaborating with Jason Nitschke and the Montana Small Business Development Center has been instrumental in advancing our mission at BELN. Jason’s insights and support has enhanced our strategic planning and operational efficiency, enabling us to more effectively serve our community and advocate for early childhood education.”

**Ariella Wells, executive director of
Bitterroot Early Learning Network**



Big Sky Hammer Guys



After working in the aviation maintenance industry for over 20 years, Nick Jakob was looking for a change. With skills in construction, he decided to pivot to the home remodeling industry. Thanks to previous experience, he already had most of the tools needed to start work. Together with his mother, Myrna Jakob, they formed Big Sky Hammer Guys LLC. They also chose to make Myrna the majority owner to qualify for the Indian Preference List on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

To improve their chances of success, they reached out the Missoula SBDC for help with registering the business. They also needed assistance crafting a business plan to submit to the Montana Department of Commerce for the Indian Equity Fund. With help from the Montana SBDC, they worked to register the business and spent many hours on business plan development and financial projections. Nick was also able to complete and submit the business plan and application materials needed to receive the Indian Equity Fund.

Thanks to the Montana SBDC, Big Sky Hammer Guys is now up and running. The company's application for the Indian Equity Fund will allow Nick and Myrna to buy more power tools and a job trailer to store and organize equipment and materials.

Big Sky Hammer Guys has been bidding on Confederated Salish and Kootenai Elder Program Renovations, which will be conducting work to make bathrooms and living areas more accessible and safer for tribal member elders. Nick and Myrna feel their work is very rewarding and necessary. Nick stated, "I wish I could do even more for our elders."

"Nick and Myrna have shown the principles needed to make any business successful. I know for certain that Big Sky Hammer Guys will be a success," commented Steve Clairmont, business advisor at the Missoula SBDC.

Jennifer Stephens
Regional Director

Steve Clairmont
Business Advisor





“To my business advisor, Steve Clairmont, and business partner, June Rae McDonald, a sincere thanks. I couldn’t have done it without them. I would also like to thank my parents, Dick and Myrna Jakob, for their support.”

Nick Jakob, owner of Big Sky Hammer Guys

Connor Moore and Nolan Gilbert both moved to Helena to be wildland firefighters in 2019. During this time, they bonded over their shared interest in baseball. With Nolan's 10 years of coaching baseball and Connor's business background, they decided to join forces and start Granite Peak Athletics LLC. However, neither had started a business before, so they needed guidance to get the business off the ground.

After reaching out to the Montana SBDC in Helena, regional director Josh Bennett offered valuable insight for Connor and Nolan to secure funding for their start-up. Thanks to this guidance, they received the financing needed to start their business. With one-on-one counseling, Connor and Nolan opened the business knowing they were registered with the correct agencies and no boxes had gone unchecked.

Granite Peak Athletics can now foster an atmosphere of growth and development for young Helena-area athletes for years to come. As part of GPA's mission, training camps are held to give children the opportunity to become better baseball players. It also offers performance programs for strength and conditioning, nutrition and overall athletic performance. These programs will allow athletes to reach their full potential and give them the tools they need to stay healthy on and off the diamond.

"Connor and Nolan have demonstrated the principles needed to make any business successful. In light of their determination and knowledge, I'm certain that Granite Peak Athletics will not only be a success, but will also impact local baseball and softball players for a long time," stated Josh Bennett, SBDC regional director.



"This was the first business we started. It was challenging to know all the things that needed to be done and how to get them completed. Josh was very helpful in providing this information and giving us resources to get them done."

Connor Moore and Nolan Gilbert, owners of Granite Peak Athletics

With extensive experience in the sound industry, Willie Madril recognized an opportunity to take his expertise to the next level and pursue his dream of entrepreneurship. In April 2021, he founded 406 Custom Auto & Sound. After successfully operating the business for three years, Willie and his wife, Valerie, identified a growing demand within the state for portable production, sound and stage equipment. To meet the demand, they expanded their services to include equipment rentals and support for musical performances, festivals, weddings, proms and other events.

To ensure their success, Willie and Valerie sought help from the SBDC to develop a business plan and financial projections. Additionally, they needed assistance with financial management, creating a solid plan for budgeting, funding and cost analysis to ensure stability during the expansion. By partnering with the SBDC, Willie and Valerie gained access to professional advice, resources and a robust support network, enabling them to grow their business while minimizing risks.

Thanks to the Montana SBDC, 406 Custom Auto & Sound created four full-time jobs and obtained financing through Bear Paw Development's revolving loan fund. By expanding, 406 Custom Auto & Sound is now one of only six portable sound and stage companies in Montana. Willie and Valerie like to give back to the community by sponsoring events and soccer teams.

"Thanks to Willie and Valerie, Havre has a new industry to be proud of. From repurposing an old building downtown, to creating new jobs in the community, I know that 406 Custom Auto & Sound will reach success," said Joe LaPlante, regional director of the Havre SBDC.



Joe LaPlante
Regional Director



“Working with Joe and the SBDC was a smooth, easy process. The SBDC made sure we had everything we needed for our financing package.”

Willie and Valerie Madril, owners of 406 Custom Auto & Sound



Montana SBDC Regional Director Wins National Award For Excellence



In July 2024, the Montana Small Business Development Center Network announced SBDC regional director Quincy Walter of Wolf Point was the 2024 Montana “State Star,” a national honor that recognizes outstanding performers from SBDCs around the country.

Quincy was honored in September 2024 at the national America’s SBDC conference in Atlanta. Award nomination criteria names exemplary performance, significant contributions to the program and a strong commitment to small businesses as top qualifiers for the award.

“Quincy’s experience and perspective bring great value to her clients,” said Chad Moore, SBDC state director. “She’s an asset to the entrepreneurs and small business owners in Northeast Montana. We’re thrilled to have her on our team.”

“I’m honored to receive the Montana State Star Award from the SBDC network. Thank you to my colleagues who submitted my name for this honor. To find a career where I get to continually help individuals start or grow their small businesses in northeastern Montana is a dream come true for me,” SBDC regional director Quincy Walter said. “This recognition reflects not only my dedication, but also the collective efforts of our incredible team at Great Northern Development Corporation to make success possible for all small businesses in our region.”

Walter joined the SBDC in 2021, hosted by Great Northern Development Corporation, providing confidential one-on-one consulting and training for entrepreneurs and small business owners across the seven-county Wolf Point region. She set a record in loan closings, using innovative strategies to help small regional businesses grow under her guidance, and has hosted countless training sessions, covering a wide range of topics.

Walter has also helped other SBDC centers across the state by reaching out and collaborating, which has increased communication and efficiency, as well as prompted more SBDC clients to get the help they need to succeed. Additionally, due to her dedication to a local “Minnow Tank” competition, \$5,000 was awarded to each local start-up and existing small business which proved they had the best business idea.

In 2023, Walter counseled 103 clients, supported over 313 jobs and helped clients secure over \$6 million in funding.

Quincy Walter of Wolf Point
National Award for Excellence



Montana Businesses Receive Awards During the National Small Business Week in Billings

 BILLINGS

In 2024, Billings had the honor of hosting administrator Isabel Casillas Guzman from the Small Business Administration for National Small Business Week, which ran from April 29-May 3, 2024. On May 3, four clients from the Montana SBDC were recognized for their significant achievements and contributions to the community.

Canvas Creek Team Building received the Small Business Champion Award. Owner Karen Grosz of Billings said, “By creating art together as a team, it serves as a lasting reminder of what you can achieve together.”

Yarn Bar, based in Billings, was recognized as the Woman-Owned Business of the Year. Owners Linda Heins and Sue Baker commented, “We encourage all levels to start from the beginning, enhance and expand current skills and spark a general fiber creativity.”

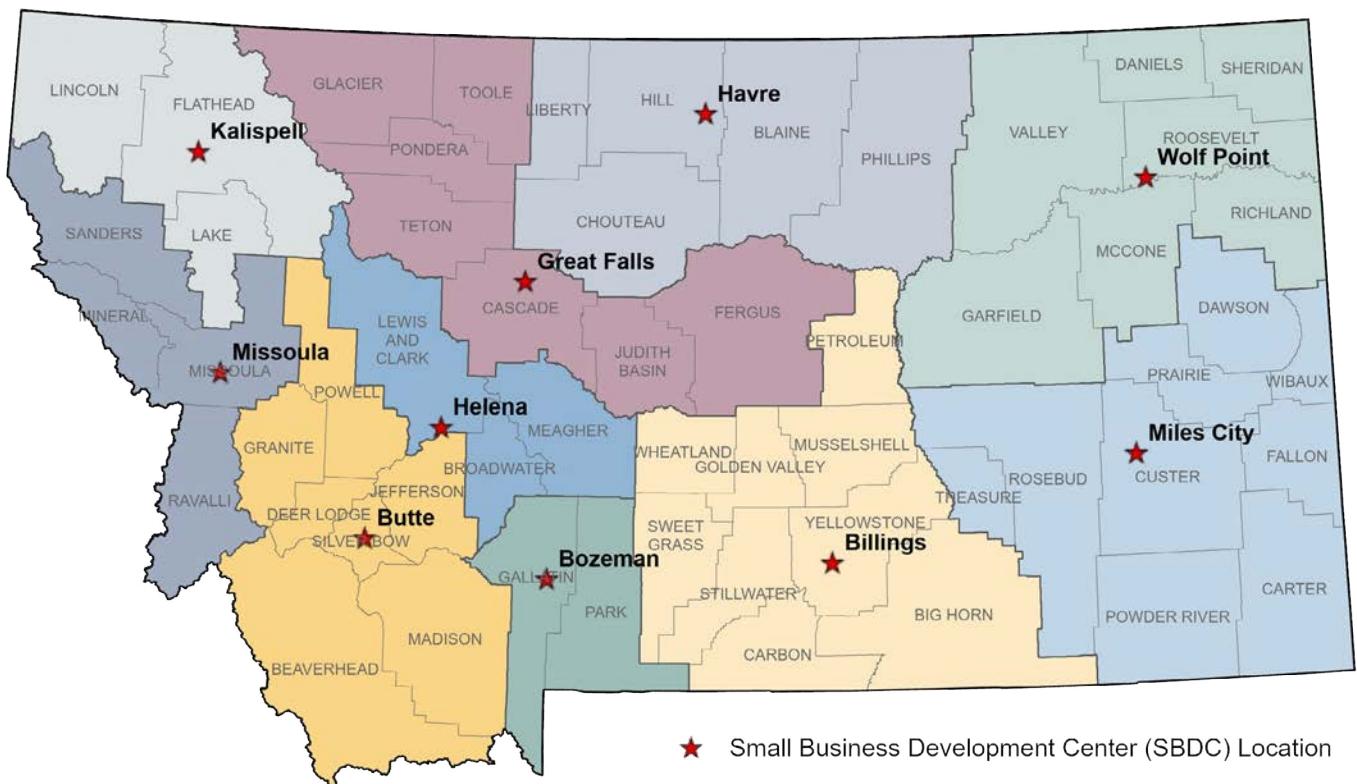
Graphic Finesse, also in Billings, won the Young Entrepreneur Award. Owners Aaron Waller and Genia Castro stated, “Our goal is to develop authentic brands, websites and logos so that any company, big or small, can effectively deliver their message.”

Loretta L. Bolyard of Mountain West Psychological Resources in Butte was named Small Business Person of the Year. She emphasized, “Our team’s commitment revolves around ensuring that our community continues to have access to mental health services close to home.”

Awards like these not only celebrate the hard work of entrepreneurs, but also inspire those wanting to start their own ventures. Initiatives that promote small business development are essential for fostering vibrant economies and the next generation of entrepreneurs.



Montana Small Business Development Center Regions



Map Produced on 8/5/2024 | Montana Department of Commerce | commerce.mt.gov

Great Falls Development Authority
Great Falls - 406-836-2078

Bear Paw Development Corporation
Havre - 406-399-1557

Flathead Valley Community College
Kalispell - 406-609-9496

Great Northern Development Corporation
Wolf Point - 406-650-2524

University of Montana
Missoula - 406-243-4770

Miles Community College
Miles City - 406-874-6168

Helena College
Helena - 406-447-6944

Big Sky Economic Development Authority
Billings - 406-254-6014

Headwaters RC&D
Butte - 406-533-6780

Prospera Business Network
Bozeman - 406-587-3113

Visit sbdc.mt.gov to learn more and make an appointment with an advisor in your area.



 **FISHTAIL**



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

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Check out sbdc.mt.gov for more information on our programs, trainings, events, success stories, and our Online Classroom.

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