



The Democracy Project

Fostering Teen Civic Engagement

When do you feel free?

What is something you want to change or preserve?

Humanities
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The Democracy Project

Teen-led Civic Participation

The Democracy Project is a teen-led initiative supported by local libraries, community partners, and Humanities Montana. This program gives teens the resources to effect change and know their role in an evolving democracy through direct civic participation. Students work for six months on projects they feel are vital to their community, ending with a public showcase.



The Democracy Project 2022-23 Site Map



Tribal College Libraries: Aaniiih Nakoda College Library and Fort Peck Community College Library

High School Libraries: Gallatin High School, and Columbia Falls High School

Public and Community Libraries: Billings Public Library; Missoula Public Library; George McCone County Library; Lewis and Clark Library, Lewis and Clark, East Helena Branch; Drummond School and Community Library, Seeley Lake School and Community Library, and Whitehall Community Library

Project Outcomes 2022-23

Our teen-led, collaborative process acknowledges that circumstances change and evolve and the measures of success vary from site to site.

At some sites, a robust teen audience was already in place. Some sites were developing their teen audience from scratch or rebuilding it after the pandemic.

Some sites have accomplished a lot with a small but mighty group. Other sites have needed to press pause on a project in order to focus on outreach and recruitment.

The teen-led mandate results in a wide variety of projects and approaches. Some sites accomplished more than they even dreamed possible!

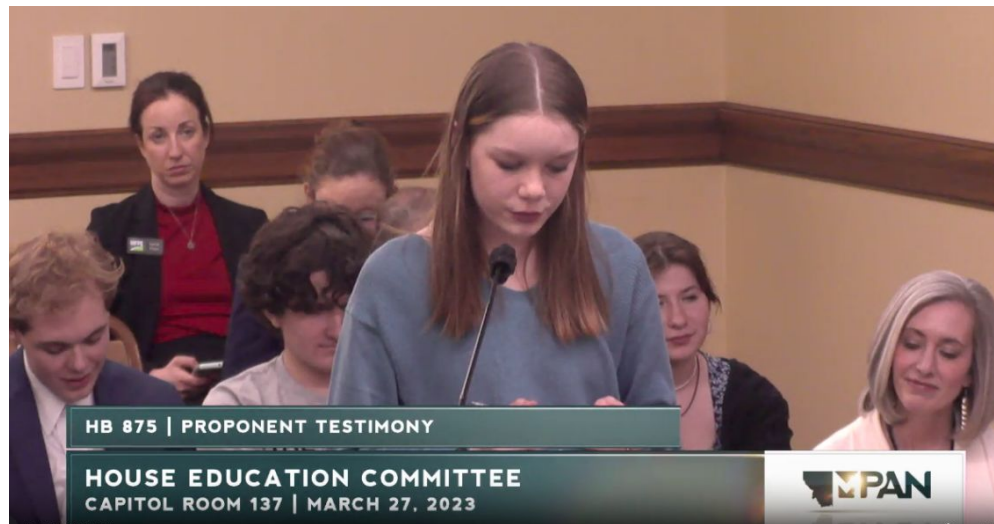
Lewis and Clark Public Library

Sherry Schlundt

Teen Services Librarian

Teens drafted House Bill 875: An Act Establishing the School Mental Health Promotion Pilot Program, which seeks to allocate public funds via the Office of Public Instruction for schools to access when addressing mental health needs with their students.

Montana State Representative Melissa Romano (D / Helena / HD 81) signed on to sponsor the bill, which was introduced to the education committee on March 27, 2023. Teens and others gave proponent testimony.



Lewis and Clark Public Library

Sherry Schlundt

Teen Services Librarian

At the end of the hearing, House Education Committee Chair, Rep. Fred Anderson (R) told the teens:

“I’d like to also add my thank you to the students that came, both for your testimony and also for being proactive rather than just sitting and feeling bad about the current system not working well. So thank you.”

The teens have also built a website of resources at MT4MH.

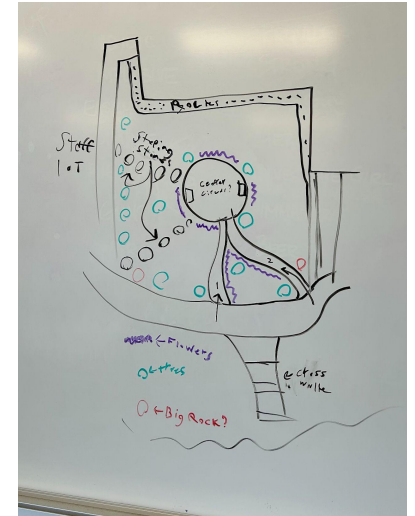


Gallatin High School Library

Kerri Cobb and Noelle Harper
Teacher Librarians

Teens are working with the school administration and the local community to develop a native plants garden that can be used for mental health and educational purposes by students and community members.

They have also engaged with the facilities crew and government and history classes and various clubs at the school to support the project.



Drummond School and Community Library

Jodi Oberweiser
Teacher Librarian

Teens worked to fill a community need by creating a grocery delivery service. The closest grocery store is 30 miles away in Clinton.

By partnering with this business the teens have create a service that allows folks to place an order and have their groceries brought to them.



Drummond High School Library Democracy Project
124 1st Street, Drummond, MT 59812
Jodi Oberweiser, Librarian and sponsor

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Lewistown Public Library

Brittney Uecker

Youth Services Librarian



Teens worked with a local volunteer group called ROWL (Recycle Our Waste Lewistown) to expand the program both by setting up more recycling bins and recruiting more volunteers to handle the increased volume of recyclables collected. Teens are extending the Democracy Project to revive the Environmental Club at their school.

They presented to city commissioners on the project.

Lewis and Clark Public Library - East Helena Branch

Andrea Eckerson
Librarian

Teens held a clothing drive for veterans, gathering donations from the community and purchasing new sweatshirts, t-shirts, socks, underwear, hats, and gloves to make to-go bags for the unsheltered during the colder months.

Teens were pleased with how many items were donated and they received many positive comments about the good work they were doing.



James E. Shanley Tribal Library

Olivia Headdress

Academic Dean at Fort Peck Community College

Teens have created a resource closet in their school counselor's office that is open to any student in grades K-12. It is stocked with travel size hygiene items, laundry soap, clothing, and snack foods as well as canned goods for any student who misses breakfast or requests to take some home to have a snack or meal that night.

The group hopes that students will have better days if they know that they have a place to go that is open to all and get some of the supplies that they need for their everyday life.



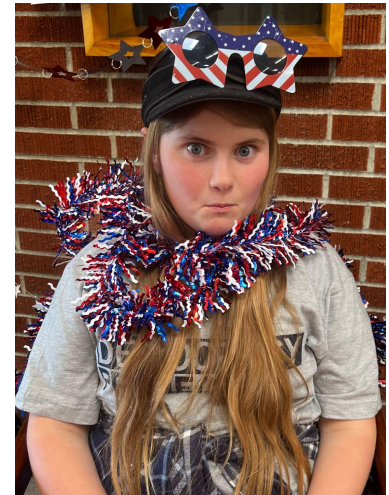
Columbia Falls High School Library

Alia Hanson
Teacher Librarian

Teens partnered with the Forward Montana Foundation to run a voter registration drive during lunch for Democracy Days. They registered 25 teens on the first day.

Teens are also working on a civic action toolkit for Montana students.

Finally, teens continued to track outcomes from the legislative session through The Session podcast. The teens felt strongly that registering people to vote was a great culmination of their work in understanding the legislative process.



Whitehall Community Library

Jeannie Ferris
Library Director

The Holocaust Book Club teens hosted a Survivor and Rescuer Fair. They educated 40 attendees about individuals impacted by the Holocaust by sharing these stories.

They also traveled by invitation to visit the Holocaust Museum LA and met with three children of survivors. The books the club has purchased will go into circulation statewide.



McCone County Library

Mary James

Library Director

Teens in Circle, MT wanted to learn the history of the generations that came before them and prevent those stories from being lost. They were given lots of advice and the stories they learned were interesting. Several of the people interviewed had profound memory loss and it would have been more successful to have talked to them several years earlier. Teens are currently working with city officials and investigating where to archive their interviews.



Works in progress - lessons from year 2

Sites at Billings Public Library and Aaniiih Nakoda Community College have paused due to staffing challenges and hope to resume in the fall.

Seeley Lake School and Community Library and Missoula Public Library have faced challenges but are navigating these obstacles with support and expect to accomplish steps towards their goals. Teens expect to complete three projects: a playground cleanup, a snowmobile ramp, and a new city park sign.

All sites have spent time and energy on outreach. We look forward to supporting these sites again in 2023-24 as they move towards a fully realized project.

We are inspired

" In my many years of being a librarian, working with the Democracy Project and its group of dedicated, caring, teens who have been meeting all year long and using their time to write a House Bill and developing a website dedicated to Teen Mental Health has been the highlight of my career. It has been an honor to work with this group of forward thinking young people. They give me hope."

~ Sherry R. Schlundt
Teen Services Librarian
Lewis & Clark Library, Helena

"I think my biggest success in The Democracy Project was making stronger connections with people and learning how to have deeper conversations about topics that aren't easy to talk about."

- Missoula teen



Thank You!

John Knight, Programs Manager

Email: john.knight@humanitiesmontana.org

Jenny Bevill, Democracy Project Coordinator

Email: jennifer.bevill@humanitiesmontana.org

WWW.HUMANITIESMONTANA.ORG

311 Brantly, Missoula, MT 59812

(406) 243-6022

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