



A Brief History of the GFWC Billings Junior Woman's Club

The Billings Junior Woman's Club (BJWC) was organized in 1933, joined the Montana Federation of Women's Club the following year, and in 1935 became a part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Dues in 1933 were 50 cents. Since its inception, BJWC's focus has been helping women and children. We have met the third Tuesday of the month, September through May since 1933. Throughout the 1930's, BJWC took public stands on the necessity of rest rooms in City Hall, public kindergartens, the Community Chest Drive, and the Red Cross Drive.

In 1940, eyeglasses were purchased by BJWC for two needy children. This evolved into our School Medical Fund.

During the 1940's, BJWC's involvement centered on the war. Donations were made to the Veteran's hospital, Red Cross, and Women's Field Army. BJWC volunteers worked on committees to support soldiers and sell war bonds. The club helped raise money for a new YWCA building. Each year a deserving project was selected by the club: Eastern Montana Normal School Kindergarten, layettes for needy mothers, public kindergarten, and many more.

In April of 1951, the BJWC decided to undertake a project in order to enter GFWC's "Build Freedom With Youth" contest. The requirements of the contest were to work to improve

your community for youth and to choose the project most needed in your community. After many meetings with welfare and community officials, the need for a Receiving Home became apparent. The Billings Receiving Home was officially opened on September 30, 1951 at 803 Lewis Avenue. This was a temporary home for abused, abandoned, and neglected children in our community.

By 1960 dues were up to \$7.00. In December 1960, ground was broken on the 1400 block of Custer Avenue for the new Receiving Home. In 1962, BJWC won the State Community Improvement Project for the Receiving Home Project.

In 1966, the mortgage on the new building to house the Receiving Home was paid off!

Starting in the 1960's we operated the concession stands at the Midland Empire Horse Races and the Fair as our major fundraising activities. We continued with these projects through the 1980's. Volunteers also helped with polio clinics, collected food for the needy and supported school bond issues, planted trees in city parks, and purchased equipment for the two hospitals.

In 1967, BJWC went out on a limb and sponsored a Delegate to Boy's State! This same year we became heavily involved in public library projects, which continue today.

The Bunny Project began in 1970. Members dressed as bunnies and visited children at the hospitals at Eastertime.

The 1970's were a mixture of fundraising, renovation of the new Receiving Home, and contributions to several local projects. Billings Receiving Home won the National GFWC Community Improvement Project contest and received \$1,500. By now, membership was nearing one hundred. Rent-a-Santa was established as a fundraiser and monthly programs ranged from writing wills, to hosting a speaker from People's Republic of China. BJWC was a busy group!

The School Medical Fund was officially established in 1979.

During the 1980's, the Receiving Home was officially named the Billings

Youth Home. A fair booth, an art auction, and a Christmas Craft Auction became the major fundraisers for many years. Contributions continued throughout the 1980's to many local programs. During this time, the State of Montana officially became the provider of service for youth in crisis (Foster Care), and the Billings Youth Home was permanently closed. Our building was leased to a local daycare center, with the proceeds being used by BJWC for all of our philanthropic projects, including a Zoo Bus to Zoo Montana.

By the 1990's BJWC had established a yearly \$1,000 scholarship to a Montana female resident attending one of the local colleges.

We continued to support the Ted Lechner Youth Services Center by providing materials and labor for a new fence. We also redecorated two bedrooms at the Ronald McDonald House. By 1992 we became a much smaller club of approximately 25 members. Members worked hard to continue the School Medical Fund, philanthropic endeavors, community involvement, state project involvement, and continued support for the Ted Lechner Youth Services Center. We created a library at the Montana Rescue Mission Women's & Family Shelter, sponsored the Comfort Pillow Project for breast cancer patients, helped in raising funds to restore stained glass windows in the Rotunda of the State Capitol in Helena, and donated time and books to school libraries.

By the turn of the century, we were small in number but not in spirit. We continued our commitment to Ronald McDonald House, helping them with an expansion project by providing the appliances and furnishings for a new kitchen. The newly formed Rimrock Opera was able to provide a Children's Outreach Program to the elementary schools due to a generous donation by BJWC. BJWC helped to fund the expansion of the children's facilities at the YMCA.

In addition to the college scholarship, a high school scholarship award was initiated whereby \$500 was granted to a graduating senior from each of the three public schools displaying both academic and civic dedication. We renewed our commitment to Zoo Montana by pledging funds and time in expanding the children's playground and adopted several needy families through the Family Support Network.

One of our major projects was donating an electric powered, 12 passenger, covered "Zoo Mobile" for Zoo Montana. It is equipped with a speaker system, air conditioning, and it is wrapped in wild animal prints! The Zoo Mobile is used for guided tours of the zoo for guests with disabilities and any other groups that would like to reserve it.

More recently, BJWC has been busy collecting plastic that can be recycled into benches (keeping thousands of pounds of plastic out of the landfill). Books for Babies, which provides a new board book for every baby born at Billings hospitals was started in 2008.

We make a difference in the lives of children by being their advocates through programs like CASA, the Family Tree Nurturing Center, and the Ted Lechner Youth Service Center. We provide services for victims of domestic violence by supporting Angela's Piazza, Tumbleweed Runaway Program, Family Promise, Community Crisis Center, Alzheimer's

Association, Heifer International, and Shot@Life. Our Arts and Culture committee donates to music and theater programs so that school children can participate in the Arts. We continue to make comfort pillows and began to make rice bags for hospital patients. The School Medical Program still provides needed medication, and medical and hygiene supplies to schools. The Scholarship Program is still providing scholarships and started a Community Scholarship Program in 2024. The Health and Wellness Committee has also started a Medical Supply Closet housed in the club garage.

BJWC members pride ourselves on continuing to meet the needs of children and women in our community for over 90 years.