

## **Community Organizations Collaborate to Provide Relief and Assistance to Gallatin, Madison and Park Counties**

**April 6, 2020 - Bozeman, MT** – In response to the growing COVID-19 humanitarian crisis, a diverse coalition of service providers throughout Southwest Montana has come together to mobilize resources and expertise to respond rapidly to community needs.

Southwest Montana Community Organizations Active in Disaster (SWMT COAD) is comprised of over 35 community organizations, businesses, nonprofits and individuals that have committed to merge their shared skills and abilities to provide a coordinated response and relief support in the face of natural and other disasters effecting our region.

“We recognize that there is only so much Government can do, [and] the non-profit sector of our community plays an important role in emergency response. Often their coordination is what makes a community resilient and contributes to the community's ability to bounce back from crisis,” explained by Patrick Lonergan, Gallatin County Chief of Emergency Management and Fire, during a press conference held March 23, 2020 to announce the launch of the [Southwest Montana COVID-19 Response Fund](#) by the Bozeman Area Community Foundation and the Greater Gallatin United Way, two members of SWMT COAD.

Lonergan and Kevin Larsen, Operations Manager for Gallatin County Emergency Management, provide leadership and direction for SWMT COAD, ensuring that the coalition's efforts complement and expand on essential government services. Emergency Management officials from Park and Madison counties are also integrated with SWMT COAD.

Susan Spanjol, the Co-Chair of the SWMT COAD, notes, “while this is the first time the Southwest Montana COAD has been activated, this network has spent years educating, planning and preparing for an event like the COVID-19 pandemic and provides an ongoing forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle—preparation, response and recovery—to help disaster survivors and their communities.”

While the COVID-19 pandemic is unique, SWMT COAD has infrastructure in place to respond to disasters, in coordination with the Gallatin City/County Emergency Management Plan. This includes pre-established subcommittee structure to quickly assemble and begin coordinating efforts. This allows organizations to avoid duplicating efforts and coordinating.

Many of SWMT COAD members have already begun to address the social service and economic impacts arising from the coronavirus pandemic. Coordinated COVID-19 response efforts by COAD members include:

- Launching the Southwest Montana COVID-19 Response Fund which, as of April 1, 2020 has raised nearly \$200,000 for relief and recovery efforts throughout the region.
- Eight organizations have coordinated and collaborated to facilitate safe child care options for first responders, medical and other personnel who are serving vital roles in the community.
- All members of the SWMT COAD have been asked to encourage the public to utilize the 2-1-1 hotline for their resource needs as well as emotional and mental health support. Individuals can also visit [Montana 211.org](#) for local resources.
- Volunteers from all COAD organizations are being directed to the Greater Gallatin United Way's virtual volunteer connections platform [www.VolunteerMT.org](http://www.VolunteerMT.org).
- Collaborating on a community-wide response to mental and spiritual health.

- Communicating across agencies to identify needs as they arise in the community, then establishing how to leverage existing programs or resources to meet those needs.
- The Gallatin County Emergency Management Joint Information Center (JIC) works cooperatively with the COAD to ensure the public receives accurate and timely information and that communication efforts are consistent across COAD members/partners and city/county government agencies.

For updated information on COVID-19 related response efforts throughout Southwest Montana, please contact the Help Center at 2-1-1, or for more specific or health-related inquiries contact the Health Department Call Center, at 406-548-0123 or [callcenter@readygallatin.com](mailto:callcenter@readygallatin.com).

The most accurate local source of information remains the Gallatin City-County Health Department website at <https://www.healthygallatin.org/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

###

Officially founded in June 2018, the Southwest Montana COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disasters) is an association of local organizations assisting our communities to be mobilized and prepared for disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic through coordination, preparation, education, and implementation serving Gallatin, Madison, and Park Counties.

Find us online on Facebook (Southwest Montana COAD), Instagram (@SWMTCOAD), and Twitter (@SWMTCOAD).

For media inquiries, please contact Rachel Allen at [SWMTCOAD@gmail.com](mailto:SWMTCOAD@gmail.com).