

# Big Sky Youth Empowerment



## Fun, Food and Philanthropy

2011 marks the first year of a tremendous collaboration between Big Sky Youth Empowerment, the Gallatin Valley Food Bank, and the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation.

BY DAVE GRANGER AND LORI CHRISTENSON

Each week, the Gallatin Valley Food Bank donates PB&J, high-quality bread, fruit and granola bars to feed nearly 100 youth participants and adult volunteer mentors with Big Sky Youth Empowerment's 14-week winter program at Big Sky Resort. On a weekend day at lunchtime, the Mammoth Room in Big Sky's Mountain Mall is full of happy, hungry BYEP-ers feasting on scrumptious food. During the week, not all of these kids know where their next meal will come from, and some don't always have access to three meals a day.

Thanks to this collaboration with the food bank, and to continued support from the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, BYEP participants are guaranteed nourishment when they're shredding the slopes on Lone Mountain. Both BYEP and the food bank exist because of community support.

To apply for BYEP, youth must demonstrate need for the program's at-risk youth mentoring services and willingness to improve their respective situations. Applications far exceed available scholarships (valued at \$5000), and circumstances including financial challenges, single-parent families and trouble with the law are a few of the myriad risk factors associated with being accepted into the program. BYEP's top priorities are twofold: reduce problem behavior and increase positive potential.

With a primary focus on food security and universal access to nutritious

foods, the Gallatin Valley Food Bank also provides emergency food boxes to sustain individuals and families in the short term. In 2010, it distributed an average of 3,885 pounds of food per month to more than 1,128 households across three counties. By merging this immediate assistance with a 'teach a person how to fish' concept, the food bank has created an infrastructure where people can help themselves. Programs such as the Healthy KidsPack, Summer Lunch, the garden, and community health outreach contribute to long-term food security and access to healthy foods.

Also, in addition to partnering with organizations like BYEP, the food bank works with a range of agencies ranging from neighborhood church groups, to the Salvation Army, senior centers and area food pantries. More than 48 tons of food was donated to area agencies in 2010.

This holistic approach to dealing with hunger in Montana is possible because of generous community support from individuals, partner grocery stores, and community-supported groups like the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation. [gallatinvalleyfoodbank.org](http://gallatinvalleyfoodbank.org) and [byep.org](http://byep.org)

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