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Montana State Library Announces Development Of High Quality Play Areas in Libraries Statewide

(HELENA) --- The Montana State Library (MSL) is pleased to announce that it has awarded materials to develop high-quality play areas to 21 libraries across Montana. The materials were purchased with a grant awarded to the State Library by the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation to support the Montana State Library's early literacy initiative, Ready 2 Read.

Launched in 2009, the Ready 2 Read program is an effort to help parents and caregivers understand the value of sharing language and literacy with their children. The program has provided collections of high-quality children's books to libraries, early childhood training to librarians, and extensive information and training to parents and caregivers from throughout Montana on the importance of sharing books with children from birth forward.

"Research suggests there is no greater investment than in early childhood education," said Jennie Stapp, Montana State Librarian. "Montana libraries have evolved to meet the challenge of providing programs, services, and materials for our youngest library patrons – children from birth to three years old. By adding high-quality play areas to libraries, we are continuing to provide support at the community level that will enhance the development of our state's greatest resource – our children."

The Ready 2 Read PlaySpaces will offer high-quality toys and hands-on interactive tools with the goal of expanding the traditional role of children's library services and increasing the capacity of libraries to recognize and realize their full potential as community hubs for healthy child and family development, parent and community involvement and lifelong learning beginning at birth.

"It really does take a village to raise a child and libraries are at the heart of the communities they serve," said Stapp. "Parents need to know that their local library has everything they need to help their child get ready for school and ready for life. Additionally, our collections and knowledge of community resources can serve as a fountain of accurate and reliable information for parents and caregivers as they undertake the most important job of raising a child."

The libraries that received materials for Ready 2 Read PlaySpaces are:

- Belgrade Community Library, Belgrade
- Bicentennial Library of Colstrip, Colstrip
- Bitterroot Public Library, Hamilton
- Daniels County Library, Scobey
- Darby Community Library, Darby
- Dillon Public Library, Dillon

- Dorothy Asbjornson Community Library, Winifred
- Glacier County Library, Cut Bank
- Glendive Public Library, Glendive
- Harlem Public Library, Harlem
- Havre-Hill County Library, Havre
- Jefferson County Library, Boulder
- Livingston-Park County Library, Livingston
- Meagher County/City Library, White Sulphur Springs
- Miles City Public Library, Miles City
- North Valley Public Library, Stevensville
- Rosebud County Library, Forsyth
- Stone Child College Library, Box Elder
- West Yellowstone Public Library, West Yellowstone
- Whitehall Community Library, Whitehall
- William K. Kohrs Memorial Library, Deer Lodge

“The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation is proud to help the Montana State Library create a learning environment in libraries throughout the state that focuses on the unique and creative needs of children,” said Mike Halligan, executive director of the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation. “Turning local libraries into community hubs for healthy child and family development affords all parents of young children access to age appropriate reading materials and a 21st Century learning environment that will reap rewards for society far into the future.”

The Ready 2 Read early learning initiative builds on the knowledge that good health, early learning, parental involvement, and supportive communities play a critical role in young children’s growth and development.

“In many of Montana’s communities, the public library is the go-to place for both entertainment and learning,” said Stapp. “As such, we have a responsibility to our citizens to continually evolve to provide more and better services as research continues to demonstrate the importance of the earliest years in a person’s development and how critical this period is individually but also on a societal level.”

For more information on the Ready 2 Read early literacy initiative, visit <http://ready2readmontana.org> or contact Sara Groves at (406) 444-5357 or at sgroves@mt.gov.

About the Montana State Library

Through its statewide programs, the Montana State Library empowers Montanans; enhances learning in families and communities; builds 21st Century skills; and provides opportunities for civic participation. For more information, visit <http://msl.mt.gov>.

About The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation

The major philanthropic organization for The Washington Companies and the Washington family, The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation is actively involved in the communities where its employees live and work. The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation strives to better the human condition by supporting programs and services that give people the tools to enhance the quality of their lives and to benefit society as a whole. Since its inception, Foundation giving and the Washington Family’s personal contributions to charitable causes total more than \$120 million.

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