

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GFWC BILLINGS JUNIOR WOMAN'S CLUB 1933-2017**

The Billings Junior Woman's Club (BJWC) was organized in 1933, joined the Montana Federation of Women's Clubs 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 main concern has been children.

Throughout the 30's, BJWC took public stands on the necessity of rest rooms in City Hall and public kindergartens (which were not begun until 1975). In 1940 eyeglasses were purchased for two children, thus establishing a School Medical Fund, helping needy families with medications, glasses, dental work and hearing aids.

During the 40's, BJWC involvement centered on World War II. "Keep America out of the War" petitions were circulated. Donations were made to the Veterans' hospital, Red Cross and the Women's Field Army. Volunteers entertained soldiers and sold war bonds. We also helped raise money for a new YWCA.

In 1951, 160 members took on the incredible task of raising money for a Yellowstone County Emergency Receiving Home for Children. This was to be a temporary residence for abused, abandoned and neglected children in our community. The Home was dedicated September 30 of the same year, at 803 Lewis Avenue. The BJWC Club took on almost all the tasks associated with maintaining the Home, including shifts to play with the children. By 1958, a new facility was needed and \$85,000 was raised. Ground was broken December, 1960, at the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and Custer.

In the 1960's, BJWC Club volunteers helped with polio clinics, collected food for the needy, supported school bond issues, planted trees in city parks, and purchased equipment for the two hospitals. In 1964 a food booth at the fair was begun and was a major fundraiser until the 80's. In 1966, we became heavily involved in public library projects, which continue today.

In 1980 the Receiving Home became the Billings Youth Home, focusing on troubled youth aged 12 through 18. The State officially became the provider of service for youth in crisis in 1986, and the Billings Youth Home was closed. This allowed us to rent the building to a daycare center, using the proceeds for our many philanthropic projects.

Today, the six Departments and seven Special Projects cover many community needs, from domestic violence prevention to education on the importance of reading to infants and young children. We pride ourselves on continuing to meet the needs of children and women in our community.