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MONTANA YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY TO REMAIN OPEN

DILLON, MONT. – The Montana National Guard, with input from the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), University of Montana Western and Beaverhead Co. public health officials, has confirmed that they will continue operations of the Montana Youth Challenge Academy (MYCA) for the time being. All four entities have been working cooperatively to ensure the safety and security of the MYCA cadets and staff, UMW Campus Community and the Community of Dillon.

Resident educational programs were specifically excluded from the mandate recently issued by Governor Bullock that required the closure of all public schools that was done to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. There are currently 124 Cadets and 50 staff at the MYCA.

"Public health has reviewed the measures in place to safeguard the Cadets at the Challenge campus in Dillon, and we have partnered with local health officials to develop a continuous evaluation process to ensure all possible prevention measures are in place and effective," said Dr. Greg Holzman, State Medical Officer.

"Ensuring the safety and welfare of our National Guardsmen and Challenge Cadets remains my top priority," said, Major General Matthew Quinn, Montana National Guard Adjutant General, "Keeping the Challenge Cadets contained on the campus within a shielded environment reassures me that they are safer there than any other option at this time."

"The cadets of the MYCA are managed in an enclosed environment with very little interaction from outside individuals. Keeping our program youth where they are allows us to limit exposure and mitigate the risk of its possible spread," said MYCA Director, Trent Gibson. "To maintain the safety and the security of our Cadets, we are taking even greater steps to minimize risk of the possibility of introducing the virus to the cadets, our faculty or the community."

"These young folks are in a safe environment. They are not a harm to the Dillon community and they need to stay in place and continue their personal improvement," stated HD 71 Representative, Ray Shaw, Sheridan, MT.

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Gibson said that he fully understands the concerns expressed by the Dillon and academic communities and confirmed that the program would never do anything that would violate the trust that parents and caregivers have placed in the program. "We have been assured by public health experts this course of action is the most responsible way to ensure the continued safety and security of everyone involved," said Gibson.

Prior to the concerns of COVID-19 in Montana, the Academy had already proactively increased cleaning, sanitization and personal hygiene to combat the normal illnesses that get passed around this time of year. "We will fully follow the direction and guidance of the Beaverhead County Department of Public Health as well as the State of Montana DPHHS and the Center for Disease Control," stated Gibson.

The following steps have been put in place in order to reduce risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19 and will be in effect until further notice:

- All Staff and Cadets briefed on importance of personal hygiene and CDC recommendations for handwashing and coughing/sneezing into the elbow.
- Additional hand sanitization available for all staff and Cadets.
- All common touch surfaces are sanitized twice daily.
- All staff are required to use hand sanitization station upon arriving at or leaving buildings.
- Cadets are required to wash hands upon arrival into the dormitory, after using the restroom and before eating.
- Staff with a fever or persistent cough are not authorized to be on MYCA campus.
- Cadets with persistent cough are disallowed in the dining facility.
- Cadets and staff have been limited to three buildings on campus.
- Cancellation/postponement of family day, mentor day, placement recruiting, or public service-to-community events.
- Dining facility has removed common touch condiments and replaced with single use packets; social distancing will be practiced.
- Cadet start self-service of meals in the dining facility.
- Cadets are quarantined per medical provider recommendations.
- Staff who have medical concerns are being authorized to stay home or telework IAW state policy.
- Face-to-face recruiting activity has been suspended.
- Social distancing of staff in the community has taken place.
- Implementation of tele-medicine for non-emergent medical needs is being implemented when possible.
- Work related travel is being limited to essential activities that do not violate social distancing directives.
- Staff will be held in the first-floor entrance of Clark Hall and required to have a temperature scan, and answer screening questions prior to being allowed to enter and report to work.
- UMW will serve Cadets in a separate room than UMW students.
- MYCA staff are being tested as necessary.

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MTNG Youth ChalleNGe Academy serves youth, 16-18 years of age who are at risk of not graduating high school. During an intensive 5 and 1/2 month residential program followed by a 12 month mentoring program, Youth ChalleNGe provides the tools & experiences to graduate productive, employable, law-abiding, and taxpaying citizens. The program has conducted 40 classes & graduated over 3,000 cadets since its inception in 1999.

The Academy's 80% Overall HiSet/GED success rate exceeds the national average. Over 80% of students maintain a long-term placement rate four years after graduation. Academy staff are personally involved in assisting cadets to develop their Post-Residential Action Plans to reinforce commitment to long-term success.

##MTNG##

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