

**Subject:** Thanks for a Fantastic Phase III

Thank you for all of your great work, Occupant Protection Team! I'm back in Maryland, reflecting on a week of efforts to help Montana families become safer. And what a week it was!

Through the hard work of HMHB Montana, Childcare Resource & Referral Agencies, Head Start leaders, coalition leaders, and Early Childhood Conference organizers, we really made a difference. We reached childcare center personnel, home and family childcare providers, family services representatives, Head Start transporters, law enforcement officers, child passenger safety technicians, parents, children, and others. Participants received functional awareness, specific to their professional roles, and we provided them with training credits, CEUs, and frame-able certificates of attendance. Even with the minor setback of needing to reschedule the Miles City training, the week was full of opportunities to teach, learn and share.

One highlight of the week, for me, was our participation in the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Early Childhood Conference, in Poplar. Professionals from at least three Montana tribes came to our two sessions, and will bring the information gained to their communities. And all of the signs of early success were present. We were asked a lot of questions – many participants took copious notes – we were personally thanked by attendees – we received fantastic written and verbal comments – AND we were told about some immediate improvements that would be made in transportation practices. Since the communities represented have low restraint usage rates with few local resources, and Native Americans are twice as likely as everyone else to die in motor vehicle crashes, the classes provided a wonderful starting point.

We were also reminded of how valuable facilitated continuing education and networking is to technicians, and of how valuable technicians are to their communities. While some of the techs were primarily present to gain CEUs, or to have remaining child seat checks verified by certified instructors, all were able to share their knowledge and experience during the hands-on portions of the classes. The bonus was that techs learned new or clarified information, in the process. They saw child seat and vehicle combinations that were new to them, explored new solutions that they had never been exposed to, learned the correct way to deal with commonly misunderstood situations, and reinforced concepts that they were previously not as certain of. All of this was done, in the company of two certified instructors, so they got what they most immediately needed.

Although there are many other successes to highlight, there is one more area that really needs to be shared. One of the biggest benefits, I recognized in our shared work, was the desire to use this training program as a catalyst for further improvement. We heard talk of early childhood professionals obtaining additional training and CPS certification. Head Start providers identified areas where they are not meeting policy minimums, and now understand where they need to focus attention. Larger scale transportation providers recognized vehicle issues that they may already have some solutions to. Childcare providers recognized and began correcting their own practices, and also how they can help educate the families they serve. Technicians determined some areas where improvement and updating is needed, and some of them will prioritize attending the upcoming Technical Update. Community leader networking led to discussions of further cooperation, coalition building, and legislative support.

Special thanks, for this week's successes, are due to Steven Bailey, Christy Nelson, Denise Herman, Early Childhood Conference organizers, and, of course, Patty Carrell and the HMHB team of leaders and partners. Montana DOT sponsored the trainings in March!

The rest of the story is in the attached photo essay. If anyone needs higher resolution versions of photos, for web, newsprint, internal/external promotion, or recruiting, please let me know.

**THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU ARE DOING TO PROTECT MONTANA FAMILIES!**

Joe

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