



Hays, Montana

JVs have been serving in Hays for 50 years. The Mission Grade School is one of two elementary schools that serve the community of Hays. North Central Montana is the traditional home of the Gros Ventre people. In the 1880s, the Catholic Church established a church and a corresponding school. Early on, it was a residential boarding school. It is now a neighborhood school that is run by a combination of lay people and nuns with assistance from Jesuit volunteers each year.

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation is home to Ass GV and Metis people. Hays is one of the largest towns on the reservation with a population of about 850. Nestled in the heart of Big Sky country between the Little Rocky and Bear Paw Mountains, the scenery is spectacular. Just a short walk from the JV community, is the Mission Canyon known for its caves, rock formations, streams and fire towers. It is a favorite recreational area for JVs and locals and is the location for the annual Hays Community Pow Wow which is always scheduled for the second week of August and is attended by the new JVs when they arrive for the first time. As new JVs arrive each fall, they are met by strangers who welcome them and tell them which nieces or grandchildren they have attending the school that year. Without JVs, critical support necessary for the operation of the school that supports the next generation of Assiniboine and Gros Ventre would be lost. Historically a marginalized population, many local people live close to or below the national poverty line. For community members who work, commutes are often long and employment opportunities are limited. Access to education has always been a challenge for indigenous people on any reservation. This placement has historically been incredibly important to the community of Hays. Over half the town of Hays went to school at the Mission and many member of the community was taught by a JV and has known and befriended JVs over the years.

Joys of being a JV in Hays

Living in Hays offers a unique and cross cultural experience known to few JVs outside of Montana. JVs are immersed in Native American culture and history and often participate in, and come to know, local traditions and celebrations enjoyed by the local peoples. JVs have the opportunity to live very closely with the land hiking in the incredibly beautiful canyon. Just looking out the classroom window, it is not uncommon to see wild horses and deer and coyote grazing on the 800 acres of land the mission sits upon. In addition to spectacular sunsets and sunrises, it is sometimes possible to see a few northern lights. Sixty miles south of the Canadian border and a seven hour drive to Glacier National Park; there are many vistas and adventures nearby awaiting exploration. WiFi at the Mission makes it possible to stay connected to loved ones.