

LEVL: Lived Experience Voices & Leaders

Participant Information

Missoula Food Bank & Community Center (MFB&CC) envisions a community that works together in building a hunger-free Missoula where those most impacted are a leading voice in the solutions to poverty and hunger. MFB&CC currently serves 1 in 5 people in Missoula County – nearly 25,000 individuals and 7,500 households – through our choice-model store. We also serve our community through our rural satellite pantries and special programs serving children and seniors.

LEVL is a five-month program focused on providing people with lived experience in food insecurity the opportunity to explore new skills, share their stories, learn about advocacy, and build an intentional community. LEVL strives to empower people who are the true experts on the challenges Missoulians face and deeply understand the needed solutions to nourish our community. We hope that LEVL participants will feel supported in sharing their stories, using their voices and power to influence decision makers, and to build community within the group.

LEVL is open to anyone with lived experience in food and/or housing insecurity.

Expectations/Timeline:

- If selected, LEVL participants must commit to eight hours per month of program activities.
- Regular weekly meetings will take place every Wednesday (starting 9/3) from 11am-1pm. We will meet at MFB&CC (minus 11/26, 12/24, and 12/31) until January 28th.
- EmPower Place is open during all meetings at MFB&CC for free childcare.
- Free meals are provided at every meeting for LEVL participants.

Participants graduate after five months of full participation. Graduation will be on January 29th, 2026 from 4:30-6pm at MFB&CC. Graduates receive a Certificate of Completion, have a graduation party for families, and receive invitations to future LEVL group meetings and future speaking opportunities and trainings.

Reimbursement:

MFB&CC provides LEVL participants with a nominal reimbursement for time spent implementing this important program, \$100 per month for five months and \$50 as a bonus upon full participation (for a total of \$550). Incentives are provided in the form of VISA Gift Cards, and are the sole responsibility of the participant. MFB&CC is not responsible for lost or stolen cards, and cannot replace incentive reimbursements. Participants are neither employees nor contractors of MFB&CC, and therefore, MFB&CC holds no responsibility in reporting incentive compensation to the IRS or others. We understand that life happens, so LEVL participants can miss up to two meetings during the cohort. After two absences, LEVL participants will receive \$25 less in VISA gift cards for each meeting that is missed (for example: if you miss four meetings throughout the cohort, you will receive a total of \$500, not \$550, subtracting \$25 for each of the two additional absences).

Support:

The group is facilitated by Ashlee Schleicher (she/her) and Amber Stewart (she/her). Ashlee is a member of MFB&CC's leadership team and has personally experienced food insecurity and unstable housing in the last decade. Ashlee is a mom to a ten-year-old boy and is motivated by her own experiences to facilitate this group. This will be Ashlee's third year co-facilitating LEVL and brings a passion for learning, personal growth, storytelling, and community engagement.

Amber has three children who are now entering their tween/teen years. She experienced food insecurity as a child growing up with a single mom and was taught to accept help, as well as to help others whenever possible...because we need each other. She earned her degree in communication studies and nonprofit administration and has spent all her adult years working with children and families through local nonprofit organizations and schools. Amber has worked in public schools, private schools, and in the homeschool community. She is passionate about education, experiential

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learning, growth mindset, equity, and the power of story.

Ashlee and Amber both see LEVL as a radical opportunity to build strong relationships with others and within themselves to transform the state of our current world for the better.

Applications:

LEVL applications open August 1st 2025 and will be accepted until August 25th 2025.

Paper applications must be returned to MFB&CC to the attention of Ashlee Schleicher.

Applications are available online at www.missoulafoodbank.org/community-center/levl