

A New Angle

MTPR Episode 40

Jill Hope, Stephanie Land, and Steph Goble on Mountain Home

Justin Angle This is A New Angle, a show about cool people doing awesome things in and around Montana. I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business.

Hey folks, welcome back and thanks for tuning in. My guests today are Stephanie Land, author of the New York Times bestselling memoir Maid, Steph Goble, executive director of Mountain Home, and Jill Hope, a young mother working her way through the challenges of creating a stable and secure environment in which to raise her son. We'll talk about the hard work and deep experiences of these women and discuss how Mountain Home and other organizations are trying to create systems of care for mothers in need. Stephanie, Steph, Jill, thanks for being here today.

Steph Goble Thank you.

Thank you.

Justin Angle So we always start with our question Where did you grow up and what did your parents do? Stephanie, why don't you take that first? Tell us where you grew up and what did your parents do?

Stephanie Land I like to tell people that I grew up in Alaska, even though I was born in Washington and most of my family was born there. You know, generations of family were born there. So we moved to Anchorage, Alaska, when I was about seven. My dad was a electrician straight out of high school. My parents had me when they were 20, so they started out pretty

young. And my mom put herself through college after that, once we got to Anchorage. And she was the first person in our whole family to put herself through college. And she became a social worker.

Justin Angle Super. Steph, how about you?

Steph Goble So I'm born and raised in Great Falls Montana, and I've gotten to live on both coasts of the United States. And then I didn't. I don't know who I was fooling. I made my way back to Montana drawn to the mountains. Both my parents are implants. They met in college and my dad thought, If I'm going to do more graduate school, I'm going to do it in the mountains and explore. So he came here for law school and my mom followed and has always worked in women and children's advocacy work. So, I think apple and tree, here, I followed suit.

Justin Angle So absolutely. Jill, tell us about you.

Jill Hope I'm from Flathead Reservation, St. Ignatius, like St. Ignatius. Like that's where I grew up was like the middle of nowhere. And I moved into St. Ignatius For middle school. For high school, I moved to Missoula.

Justin Angle So let's start out, Steph, perhaps with you. Talk us through what mountain home is. What do you all do down there?

Steph Goble I always like to start with saying that we are a communal living— I never like to use the word shelter because I think there's a lot of quick judgment that comes around when you say shelter. And what we are is a facility that provides basic needs and wraparound services for young moms and kiddos. We just recognize that that's such a vulnerable time in our lives where there's a bond that's so essential between moms and kids. And even if you're surrounded by all the support and the resources in the world, it's just it's a lot. And so

Mountain Home has a communal living space where we have seven bedrooms that moms and kids share, but they come together and cook weekly meals together. They go through evidence-based parenting classes together. And then we also have seven independent living apartments attached on campus.

All of this again, is is a one stop shop, and the idea is that we saw once we have a mom that signed up for our care, we can enroll them in mental health support through therapists and case managers, both for adults and children. We have a built in child care system. And then we also have a community center where we do financial classes. We have book club, we have peer support and then we also have volunteer platforms where we can have community centers build organic relationships with these young moms as they're kind of figuring out who they are, where they want to go and set their goals. And lastly, we have a supportive employment and education program, and this is pretty special because it is client based. It's evidence based as well out of Dartmouth University. And the idea here is that these young moms can kind of discover who they want to be set their goals, finished degrees get employment because I think the best gift you can give someone is finding self-worth and value and being able to build a sustainable structure around them.

Justin Angle Super. So Stephanie, first of all, congratulations on all your success. It's been wonderful to sort of see you succeed on so many dimensions, and it's also been wonderful to see you stay engaged in Missoula and the University of Montana community. Why did you choose to align with Mountain Home? What about that organization sort of speaks to you, and why is it important you to support it?

Stephanie Land I actually learned about Mountain Home through Facebook like somebody was having a birthday and they decided to support Mountain Home. I think it was like a year ago, maybe. And and I had not heard of them before. And so I just from their little caption, I looked into them and I just thought like, Oh my goodness, this is the best thing that I have ever seen and immediately donated money. And then after that had I just felt really drawn to that

organization because the thing that I relied on the most when I was in Missoula, especially as a single mom going to college, I called 2-1-1 for help so much. And that was just kind of a lifeline for me. Because it was a place that I could go, you know, even though it was calling on the phone and I could find out what resources were available for whatever I needed at the time. You know, whether it was a gas voucher, housing, I need needed help with childcare or something like that. I didn't have to go to five different organizations to find out who had what where. I could just call this person. And mountain home just seems like a an in-house kind of thing like that where you have a lot of access to people who have knowledge about what resources are available.

It's really hard to find resources when you need them. And I think any organization that not only is realistic in what things they provide for single parents and especially single parents who are trying to work and raise their kids and go to school and house and feed, you know, it's all of these basic things that a lot of people take for granted. But when you are stuck in a situation where you find yourself with nothing, there really isn't that much out there to help you unless you have, you know, a stack of paperwork or you go to five different offices or, you know, something and it is so helpful to have just one person or one building that you can go to. So you don't have to spend all day chasing around all of these things and standing in all these lines. And I also really appreciated that a lot of their focus is on mental health. I did not have that.

I never really had any meaningful connection with mental health provider. I've learned so much about post-traumatic stress disorder attachment, you know, and and trauma and triggers and all of these things that if I had known this when I was living in poverty and trying to raise my kid alone and going through all of these custody battles with their dad and and just trying to better my life and going through means testing with trying to get food stamps and just all of these things that are kind of made to make you feel like it's your fault. And it's. Really not. And nobody told me that that nobody said it wasn't my fault. And it really wasn't until I had some

success that I could see that it wasn't my fault. And so in my mind, mountain home is just kind of this like, it's not your fault. Time table place.

Justin Angle So let's let's bring you into the conversation, Jill. If you're willing. Tell us a little bit about, you know, how you found mountain home and how you found your way there.

Jill Hope Honestly, I was working at a mall and my mom was watching my son kid go to work, and I was still 19. I just turned 19. I had my son at 18 and like my mom was watching my baby while I worked. And it just did not work out, and I wasn't able. I had to quit my job and my actually my boss told me about Mountain Home and was like, Hey, like, you should check it out. And he actually let me use his computer to apply.

Justin Angle Wonderful.

Jill Hope So that's how I did. I applied on my boss's computer and then I quit my job and then Mountain Home got in touch with me and I wasn't living at home. I was me and my baby were living in my friend's aunt's house. And so just living with someone I didn't really know sucked. But yeah, and then found Mountain Home, I don't know why I'm crying. I'm sorry.

Justin Angle That's OK. Yeah, I mean, it must've taken tremendous courage to initiate that first contact. And, Steph, were you sort of around when Jill entered the organization?

Steph Goble Yeah, I think I had just started as well. So I kind of we have the same path in that way and just being new to mountain home and really what I think I just want to echo how much bravery it's when we talk to young moms about making that first phone call or contacting. You have to be so vulnerable to admit that you're in that state and to that you need that kind of support and it just the amount of courage it takes to make a transition and to get out of that, that's unhealthy living condition or an abusive relationship and to to start thinking

outside of that, it's just huge. And I just I'm proud to see those tears, Jill, because it shows how far you've come.

Justin Angle Yeah. And so you said your your your your son just turned one—.

Jill Hope In July. Yeah.

Justin Angle In July. And yeah, so what are you kind of working on at the moment? You're you're you're sort of part of the community at Mountain Home and working on being a good mom, and —

Jill Hope Yeah, and I'm trying to get my HiSET and I, it's five tests, I've passed two or three more to go, OK. And then I'm considering Missoula College and I also want to be like a lash technician. Yeah. And yeah, just the next goal is finish school, go to college and then just keep on working in the same time and be a mom. And my son's dad doesn't isn't involved in my son's life at all. He hasn't seen him since he was a few months old. So and it's been over a year and we still haven't seen or talked to him. So I'm kind of really on my own with my son.

Justin Angle And are you able to spend quality time with your son?

Jill Hope All the time, I'm with him, yeah, he's like literally with me all the time.

Justin Angle And now that you sort of feel like you have some stability and a plan, how does motherhood feel different or does it feel different?

Jill Hope Honestly, I was only like a mom, like a few months before my own home. OK, so like I just it was my life was really chaotic. I was literally just 18, and then I turned 19. So I was like, literally, just from high school normal and now I'm a full time parent. And it was a really weird transition because I was like, wasn't really, like, prepared to grasp how much responsibility I

was really taking. Because I was like, Oh, I'm like, I'm having a baby. Like, I was going to be so cute. I'm excited to meet him. And then all the, Oh, ****. This is huge. Like, I'm like a mom forever. Like, This is never going to stop and I have to, like, be stable for my son forever. And that's like, really scary. You know, I always have to be like, stable for him. Always had to have a job. You know, I mean, so it's like the weird transition.

Justin Angle We'll be back to my conversation with Stephanie Land, Steph Goble and Jill Hope after this short break.

Welcome back to New Angle. I'm speaking with Stephanie Land, Steph Goebel and Jill Hope about the amazing work of Mountain Home Montana.

So Stephanie, when you hear Jill's story, I mean, what does that evoke in you? What do you what do you think of her feel?

Stephanie Land You know, I think becoming a mother is extremely isolating, especially when it's unexpected, and it's not really part of what your social group is doing. You know, I became a mom at twenty eight and it was ten years older than what Jill went through. But at the same time, like my social group, we were baristas and waitresses and working all these odd jobs and drinking at bars at night and just kind of like hanging out and then suddenly you are pregnant and you can't be a part of that anymore. And it's incredibly isolating. And I think there's a lot of loneliness that happens just in the other half of the equation, who made this baby like not wanting to be any part of that. And kind of, in my case, was very angry that I even chose to continue on with the pregnancy.

It was so incredibly lonely and and I went through this time period. I mean, not only through pregnancy, but then, you know, the first year of my child's life just feeling not only very much alone and very much on my own with everything but like also like what am I going to do with this human being that is like so vulnerable and relies on me for everything I think, you know,

after a while, I relished in this schedule and the responsibility and and all of that, because without it, I don't think I would have been able to do the things that I was supposed to do, like get up at seven o'clock in the morning. It helped sometimes that I had a three year old banging on my face at six o'clock in the morning and like, Oh yeah, I got to get up and make sure that you're OK. And and I still think about those years of just setting them up for the best possible path that they could take and and I know that it was hard and it was at times it was horrible. But we got through it and I wouldn't want to put like so much on my kid that I'm telling them, you are the person that made me survive all of this. But like, in a sense, they kind of were. I do see just that primal need to take care of your kid was so strong and I'm glad that it was for me. I am thrilled that my kid has grown up into that person that they are. And I don't think that there is any difference between a parent who doesn't have the means, and a parent who does I mean, we're all trying to parent. And we're all trying to do the best that we can. And I just wish that there was more equality in that assumption.

Justin Angle Jill, as you as you hear Stephanie's reflections. Yeah, maybe 10 years or, you know, a few more years down the road from you. How is that? Is that inspiring to you?

Jill Hope Stephanie, that I really connected with? Stephanie said, like the primal need to take care of a kid was strong. Which is really true. That's with me, like soon as I became a mom, like my whole life changed. I'm like, I'm like, I'm a good mom, and I'm going to have to be good mom forever because I just love my baby that much.

Justin Angle So, Steph, I'd love to get your thoughts on this next idea. As our hearing, Stephanie and Jill, reflect on their experiences. I mean, to kind of themes emerged to me. One is the kind of emotional support for dealing with a lot of the ambiguity around all of these challenges coming at Young Moms so fast. But also like, it sounds like you need an administrative staff to just navigate, like you said, all the different forms of government support and systems and forms and just it's so daunting and it occurs to me like, yeah, wealthy folks have eased because they don't have to navigate all these different systems or they can farm

that out or like that's part of the tailwind that wealth creates in many ways. So talk about like how your organization maybe tries to manage both of those and probably other dimensions that are not even considering.

Steph Goble I think we're in a really special window with this pandemic, to be honest with you. I think we're feeling a shift, hopefully feeling a shift in our society of going from, you know, I or you to we. And recognizing that the way we have it set up, whether that's bigger systems and governmental systems, state or organizations like Mountain Home, we need to change the model. And that's why I do believe, you know, obviously I'm pretty biased, but Mountain Home is unique in the sense that we're thinking of long term. We're thinking continuity of care. Like all of these impact that. And so when a mom and her, you know, baby or kiddo or, you know, fetus enroll with us, we really are focused on meeting them wherever they are on that path and making sure their voice is part of sculpting that plan. And so having someone navigate that with them and ensuring that prenatal health doesn't fall through the cracks, that we're ensuring that a mom who has to work, shift work and gets off at 9:30 at night can still get a pediatrician online. Those kinds of things that, yeah, someone with a financial background isn't as concerned about because they have the accessibility to that. But as human beings, we all deserve that right? And Stephanie's right. If it's a one stop shop, it's less likely that people fall through the cracks.

Justin Angle Yeah. And what you said there really struck me that this moment of, you know, in the life of young mom and a young child like it is, that's an intergenerational moment, right? So if you're going to try to break up cycles of intergenerational poverty or struggle or trauma? Yeah, it would occur to me that that moment is particularly salient.

Steph Goble Yeah. So interesting stat from Mountain Home is like 40, 43 percent of our moms have been involved in some part of the foster care system themselves.

Justin Angle OK.

Steph Goble And so we're showing that if we can keep the family together and we can work on helping them grow healthy together, there's less likely that that foster system that we're falling back into it. That the next generation is having that trauma of separation, that trauma of unhealthy living conditions and addressing things like mental health in that process so that moving forward, there's good coping. And Jill and I've had honest conversations about that and sobriety and what she wants for Charlie, which is pretty amazing.

Jill Hope So I had a problem in high school with alcohol. It was really bad. It took my whole life. It literally did. I almost killed me. And I'm worried about my son, and I'm worrying because he's Native American and the and the generational curse went to me. obviously. It went to my sister, went to all my family whenever and then my son. I'm just really hope he chooses the right path, and I hope he stays away from alcohol. And I just really, I'm going to help him. I'm going to support him any way I can. Because I know my parents, when I fell into that, they kind of gave up on me. All right. She's a bad kid like you, just like the rest of them.

Justin Angle You have the courage to to speak out. You know, I've seen you quoted in the press, you're you're doing this interview, you've decided to tell your story publicly. What's the motivation behind that? What are you hoping to achieve? Are you? Yeah. Tell us about that motivation.

Jill Hope Pretty much is awareness, because I know I am not the only one. I know there's tons of moms, tons of young moms, and I think we all just go through the exact same thing. And I know it's hard, like I really do. So I just want to let you know like you can pull yourself out of that and you can live a life without alcohol. Like, I didn't think it was possible, but it really is possible.

Justin Angle Super. So are the last. Threat of questions, and I'll theme it a little bit differently for each of you, and I'll start with you, Jill. Like, fast forward, you know, 10 years from now. What are some other things that you envision in your future or aspire to?

Jill Hope I want to live somewhere in a bigger city where it's sunny. I want to have like a really nice house, and I just want to have like a walk in closet. I think that'd be cool. Yeah. And just have a really nice car and have my son in a nice school. I hope he's a basketball player, so I, you know. Yeah, and that's what I want to do. I just want to be happy and just do good things in my lifetime.

Justin Angle So, Stephanie, talk about kind of the future for you. I mean, tremendous success with your debut book. What sorts of questions and issues are you looking to investigate and stories? Are you still interested in telling in your in your next act?

Stephanie Land Well, I'm working on a book called Class and I'm researching it right now and just learning as much as I can. The premise of the book is I was a moment in my senior year of college, I was pregnant with my second child and I was kicked off of food stamps as a full time student and I was so angry at that. And it was it was such a defining moment for me, I think, because I had worked so hard to get to that point of my senior year of college. I was about to graduate with the bachelor's. It was still just this moment of just, I am working so hard and now you're punishing me because I'm working 16 hours a week and not 20, and it just it didn't make any sense to me. And so, I wanted to write about that and just how inaccessible higher education, especially U of M, is inaccessible to low income students. And how many barriers there are in place.

I think we expect people in poverty, people on the edge of poverty, people who are working class, you know, we we hammer this world resilience onto them. I don't think that we should just default to like, Oh, well, children are very resilient. They'll get through it. When, really, we need better systems to support them so they don't have to learn how to be resilient. I shouldn't

have learned how to be resilient as a single mom. Jill shouldn't learn how to be resilient, and her son shouldn't learn how to be resilient. We should be fighting for programs to support them so that they don't have to learn that skill.

Justin Angle Yeah, that's well put, Stephanie. Thank you. Steph, what are kind of the, you know, your ten year, five year objectives for your term at Mountain Home?

Steph Goble Mountain home. I think Stephanie kind of voiced my first challenge, which is people don't know, Mountain Home offers as much as it does. I mean, we don't discharge from our services. We have people enrolled in our mental health center that are have been are in their thirties and forties because it's not a quick fix, right? Like, we all deserve that kind of support. You know, unfortunately, there are so many young families in our region that need support. Our referral list is 10 to 20 moms deep at all times. There is a need for more housing. There needs to be client led voices at the table, at city council and at state functions. Just talking about like, how do we make good low income housing available? How do we make wraparound services part of our greater societal process? Where it's not just mental health as in one component and then child care is a different component and basic needs is in a whole different realm and know that all needs to be talked about. And the voices that matter are Stephanie's and Jill's and understanding where they can easily fall through the cracks and how we can make this easier for those that have way too much stacked up against them and how everyone should be involved in making that better for the next generation.

Stephanie Land And I would just like to say I I think Jill's voice is way more important than mine. Honestly, every time that I speak, I I tell people that they need to listen to people in their communities who are actually going through this right now. I mean, I've been I've been out of it for six or seven years. I don't really know what's going on with programs right now. I don't know what it's like and it changes a lot.

Thank you, Jill, for speaking out and talking. I know it's hard and I'm getting emotional. I just like, I really appreciate you bringing Jill into this conversation, and that means a lot to me because a lot of the times I come into a conversation as a white person who owns a home in the South Hills now, and it's just like, I'm so far out of it that I don't really feel connected to to what people are experiencing right now. As much as I try to remind myself what it's like and I try to marvel at there being so much toilet paper in my cabinet, you know, like all of these moments are just like, Wow, I've come so far. But like, we really need to talk to people who are are still struggling to just survive right now. And and I think the people in our community should be the loudest voices in that. Definitely.

Justin Angle Well, I can't thank the three of you enough for engaging in this conversation. Stephanie, you just mentioned like feeling a little disconnected to where Jill is. I hope this conversation help more people, more listeners feel connected to each other to these challenges. And if a listener wants to go out and do something about this? Steph, where would you direct folks online to to help get involved in some of these challenges?

Steph Goble Yeah, just mountain home, empty beacon or dot org. I'm sorry, or I'm happy to always meet with people individually to talk about it. And I provide tours so they can kind of see. I think it's always nice to have a visual. And the only other thing I would say is the biggest and the strongest message is if there's someone out there that needs that help. So we just want to make sure we're not just speaking to the the supporters, but the moms and partners out there that are really struggling to see where that next door is and how to open it. We're here and we want to help.

Justin Angle Thank you.

Steph Goble Thank you.

Justin Angle Thanks for listening to a new angle. We really appreciate it. And we're coming to you from Studio 49, a generous gift from University of Montana alums Michelle and Loren Hansen. A New Angle is presented by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business, with additional support from consolidated electrical distributors, Drum Coffee and Montana Public Radio.

Aj Williams is our producer. VTO, Jeff Amment, and John Wicks made our music. Editing by Nick Mott and Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. Thanks a lot. See you next time.