For Immediate Release:

Urgent Support Needed for Pregnant and Recently Postpartum Moms and Babies on the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo

NW New Mexico First Born (NWNMFB) works with families who are being most acutely impacted by the disruptions in food and supply chains in light of Covid-19. NWNMFB participants state, “the FB curricula is top notch at supporting parents to understand themselves, their emotions, their child’s development, and how to support their growth as lifetime learners. The curriculum is fantastic at supporting fathers to be partners and parents. When parents feel supported, they are free to be their greatest selves” (Current Participant, 2020); and “the First Born Program was an absolute blessing to me during my first pregnancy and my ‘fourth trimester!’ I felt so incredibly cared for and supported. All the advice I received was based on evidence, up to date and extremely helpful” (Graduated Participant, 2019).

Executive Director, Mary Gaul, states, “we currently serve about 150 pregnant and recently postpartum moms with newborns across San Juan and McKinley counties, but primarily on the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo. You may have seen that Navajo Nation is being hit drastically by this pandemic. I am very concerned about Navajo communities and their nutritional needs. Even prior to the pandemic, Navajo Nation has one of the highest diabetes rates, and that is certainly only increasing now that people are fully dependent on commodity foods and are staying inside not exercising.”

NWNMFB staff continuously survey their families and have determined that in the month of March, nearly 50% have been laid off or lost their jobs. On average, families are spending close to $400 per week on additional food and supplies. And every week, more families report that they are missing meals as a result of food insecurity and financial instability. NWNMFB has maintained weekly contact with all families via telehealth technology, however data and cell service limitations create barriers in communication at times. These needs are not one-time needs. These are ongoing needs and well beyond the organizational budget to sustain. However, First Born is rich in relationships and is a trusted partner to families. New Mexicans can invest in the wellbeing of indigenous families during this public health crisis.

Contributions of money and supplies are needed and can be made to:

Northwest New Mexico First Born Program
122 S. Boardman Ave
Gallup, NM, 87302
Office: 505-863-8850
PayPal: admin@nwnmfirstborn.org

For more information, please contact Mary Gaul gmary@nwnmfirstborn.org, (301) 575-4033
March 3, 2020

Dear Editor,

The Navajo Nation is being inequitably hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. After centuries of forced dependency on commodity foods and land restrictions, the Shelter in Place order is unfortunately all too familiar to native communities. Even prior to this pandemic, Navajo Nation experiences some of the highest rates of chronic, nutrition-related diseases in the state. These underlying health conditions, in addition to old age, are putting Navajo people at significantly increased risk of COVID-19 associated mortality. Additionally, despite being the size of West Virginia, Navajo Nation only has 13 grocery stores, resulting in residents driving on average ~50 miles to access food. Many of these stores have been depleted since the initiation of COVID-19.

The Northwest New Mexico First Born Program utilizes the First Born™ curriculum to provide maternal health and child development education to first-time pregnant women and parents throughout San Juan and McKinley Counties, primarily on the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo. Families that have participated in our program state, “The FB curricula is top notch at supporting parents to understand themselves, their emotions, their child’s development, and how to support their growth as lifetime learners. The curriculum is fantastic at supporting fathers to be partners and parents. When parents feel supported, they are free to be their greatest selves” (2020); and “The First Born Program was an absolute blessing to me during my first pregnancy and my ‘fourth trimester!’ I felt so incredibly cared for and supported. All the advice I received was based on evidence, up to date and extremely helpful” (2019).

Families within our program have begun missing meals; this is a huge concern for pregnant women, newborns and children, who will likely experience poor health outcomes (stunting, malnutrition, etc.). It is critical that we obtain funding to continue our efforts to distribute supplies to our families for their immediate food needs and continue telehealth (HIPAA-compliant video) visits. In order to successfully maintain contact with high risk families, our program needs support for continued payroll of our staff, as well as additional phone data for families. It is also critical that we invest in local indigenous farmers. If indigenous farmers are unable to plant this month and produce sufficient crops and traditional food products, we will continue to experience significant food insecurity throughout the entire year.

Thank you for your attention on this urgent matter. If you would like to discuss these issues further, please reach out with any questions.

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Northwest New Mexico First Born

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San Juan County Office: 114 N. Behrend Dr, Farmington, NM, 87301  (O): (505) 325-9187

2019 Summary Report & 2020 Vision
Our Staff:
NWNMFB Staff have a wealth of both academic and practical experience in the field of early childhood development. Out of our 16 staff, 2 have Associates, 9 have Bachelors and 2 have Masters degrees. 2 staff are currently pursuing Masters degrees and 1 is pursuing a PhD. 3 Staff are fluent in Navajo, 1 is fluent in Zuni, 1 is fluent in Spanish, and 1 is fluent in Japanese.

Race/Ethnicity of Families Served

With a large Native American population residing in our counties (McKinley-75%, San Juan- 36%), we predominantly serve members of the Zuni Pueblo and Navajo Nation, constituting nearly 67% of our program participants. Our staff’s racial/ethnic backgrounds, cultural identity and language preferences match those of the families that we serve.
The Northwest region of New Mexico has the highest amount of tribal lands compared to other counties (McKinley- 75%, San Juan- 63%), with poor roads and infrastructure. Residents of the Navajo Nation drive, on average, over 50 miles to access fruits and vegetables and healthcare.

McKinley and San Juan counties contain the most tribal land in the state of New Mexico, and the majority of the county is considered to be rural. In order to adequately provide services across the entirety of the two counties, home visiting staff have to drive upwards of 70 miles in each direction to meet families in their homes. Home visitors travel on long dirt roads, in inclement weather and across areas with limited cell service in order to serve their families.
Northwest New Mexico First Born was established through an initial financial partnership with the LANL Foundation, St. Joseph’s and the Navajo Nation. Since our founding, NWNMFB has increased and diversified our financial portfolio by increasing our annual operating budget from $152,000 to $834,000, while simultaneously maintaining support from key actors including the Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo and the Kellogg Foundation.

NWNMFB provides direct services through face-to-face home visits with families in the most rural, tribal communities within the state of New Mexico. Therefore, the vast majority of our funds support staff salaries, mileage for home visits, and resources for families (i.e. car seats, safe sleep materials, clothing, diapers, food, etc.).

The highest paid employee, the Executive Director, sets their salary comparable to the communities served, capping their income at $55,000 per year, compared to the average $76,000 for nonprofit Executive Director positions within New Mexico.
Northwest New Mexico First Born

Service Model: Working with First Time Families

**Prenatal**
Home visitors meet with the family 3-4 45-min visits per month, discussing prenatal and postpartum topics and supporting access to prenatal care.

**Infant to 1 year**
Home visitors continue to meet with the family 3-4 45-min visits per month, encouraging breastfeeding, ensuring immunization and screening, and discussing health & wellbeing of mom and baby.

**1 year to 2 years**
Home visitors meet with the family 2 45-min visits per month, discussing developmental stages, health & wellbeing of mom and child, and conducting screenings.

**2 years to 3 years**
Home visitors meet with the family 1-2 45-min visits per month, discussing developmental stages, health & wellbeing of mom and child, family planning, and preparing for pre-K.
Northwest New Mexico First Born

2019 Outcomes

286 Families Enrolled Throughout the Entire Year

6,652 Home Visits Conducted

11,875 Services Provided, Including Developmental & Health Screenings, Counseling & Goal Setting, and Maternal/Child Health Education

Of pregnant women were screened for postpartum depression (PPD) and offered breastfeeding information/support

Overall increase in immunizations, well child check-ups, car seat usage and school readiness

Overall decrease in developmental delays and violence within the home
Growing Need and Impact

According to the 2014 RAND Corporation randomized control trial, children who participated in First Born were

- 41% Less likely to have visited a primary care provider 9 or more times
- 33% Less likely to visit the ER

The 2019 First Born Annual Report data notes significant improvement in maternal and child health outcomes, including:

- 69.8% Of infants primarily breastfed for at least 6 months, compared to 34.1% statewide
- 98% Of children had current immunizations, compared to 71.9% statewide
- 89% Of teen caregivers completed high school compared to 67.9% statewide
Family Feedback

The First Born Program was an absolute blessing to me during my first pregnancy and my “fourth trimester!” I felt so incredibly cared for and supported; all the advice I received was based on evidence, up to date and extremely helpful.
-Graduated First Born Participant, 2019

The FB curricula is top notch at supporting parents to understand themselves, their emotions, their child’s development, and how to support their growth as lifetime learners. The curricula is fantastic at supporting fathers to be partners and parents. When parents feel supported, they are free to be their greatest selves.
-Current First Born Participant, 2020
The northwest region of New Mexico has experienced historical trauma ranging from forced assimilation through boarding schools, loss of land, cultural practices and language, to high rates of missing and murdered indigenous women. It was only a few decades ago that the Indian Child Welfare Act was established to prevent Native American children from being taken from their own homes and put into adoption/foster services. Due to this trauma, families within our region of the state are distrustful of ‘support’ systems, including home visiting. NWNMFB aims to use a (historical) trauma informed approach to breaking down some of these barriers. This means using more culturally tailored and sensitive approaches when working directly with families. Additionally, NWNMFB aims to utilize technology in order to more equitably serve most at-risk and difficult to reach families in the most rural and tribal lands in the state.
2020 Goals

Annually, the University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability (CCD) provides technical assistance in the development of program goals to NWNMFB and 32 other home visiting programs across the state of New Mexico. For 2020, all staff at each county office identified their own program goals, based off of recent county needs assessments and rooted in improving equity and access of services.

**McKinley County**

- Work more collaboratively with local Home Visiting Programs and create MOUs.
- Conduct a community mapping activity to identify inequities in alcohol marketing and its impact on parent-child interactions
- Engage local healthcare providers to increase understanding of services and initiate warm hand-offs

**San Juan County**

- Increase warm hand-offs to ensure more equitably access to healthcare and social services
- Increase recruitment and retention of Spanish-speaking, immigrant and LGBTQ families
- Utilize the Harm Reduction Model and Navajo Wellness Model to increase parent-child bonding and attachment
Northwest New Mexico First Born

Virtual Visits Pilot Project

Rationale

The northwest region of New Mexico has the highest amount of tribal lands with a majority of Native American residents. Both counties are very rural, with poor quality roads and limited infrastructure. With the long distances that residents of McKinley and San Juan counties travel to access healthcare, nutrition and other services, there is a huge economic burden on families. This also limits the ability of Home Visiting programs to see families face-to-face frequently.

Phone applications and mobile health has been shown to help increase access to medical and social services that families have limited access to in rural and tribal communities like ours. Piloting virtual visitings in this setting will provide outcomes data to support the expansion of telehealth across the state of New Mexico.
Northwest New Mexico First Born

Innovation in Home Visiting

New Mexico’s first home visiting app pilot project

Features

➔ About Us/Contact Info
➔ Direct Scheduling with HVs
➔ Virtual Referral Process
➔ Virtual Visits
➔ M/C Health Education
  ◆ Audio in Zuni, Navajo, Spanish and English
  ◆ Local, traditional knowledge From Native Medicine Practitioners
➔ Survey to track Feedback
➔ Direct Links to Resources

Anticipated Outcomes:

● More equitable access to health education and home visiting services
● Improved cultural competency of programming
● Increased dosage of home visiting and weekly/bi-weekly communication
Northwest New Mexico First Born

Phone Application and Pilot Project Road Map

Phase 1: January–March 2020
Develop Northwest New Mexico First Born App, capable of scheduling face-to-face and virtual visits, and inclusive of locally developed health education materials available in Zuni, Navajo and Spanish.

Phase 2: April–June 2020
Pilot the app in semi-urban settings, including Gallup, Farmington, Bloomfield and Shiprock. Collect preliminary data on virtual visits and health outcomes of mother and child.

Phase 3: July–December 2020
Pilot the app in rural and tribal communities across McKinley and San Juan counties, utilizing phones/tablets with prepaid data plans that cover these areas. Collect additional data on virtual visits and health outcomes of mother and child.
Conclusion

The First Born program expanded to the northwest region (McKinley and San Juan counties) in response to a request to serve the Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo, and some of the most rural families within the state of New Mexico. Since our establishment in 2014, we have been consistently increasing the number of families that we serve. Over the last two years alone we have doubled the amount of Level 2 (families with significant stressors/trauma); the demand to serve these families is constantly growing. Additionally, given the vast geography, poor roads and limited infrastructure, the families that we serve face additional barriers to accessing services. By utilizing technology to provide innovations in home visiting, we will be able to utilize a more equitable approach to home visiting service delivery. NWNMFB will be the first home visiting program in the state of New Mexico to pilot virtual home visits. Data will be collected on the quality of virtual services provided; this data will be used to advocate for the availability of funds to support these services statewide in order to more appropriately serve rural and tribal communities. We are on the leading edge of innovative public health and early childhood development practice, and constantly strive to strengthen our approach to ensure health equity and social justice within the communities that we serve.

For more information on Northwest New Mexico First Born Programming, please contact:

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