



# Raising the ASPIRATIONS



# of New Mexico YOUTH

## BACKGROUND REPORT

- Developed for the 2010 New Mexico First town halls
- A reference guide for participants

### Town Halls

May 5-6	Southeastern NM, hosted in Roswell
May 12-13	Southwestern NM, hosted in Las Cruces
May 19-20	Northern NM, hosted in Las Vegas
June 10-11	Central NM, hosted in Albuquerque



**NEW MEXICO FIRST**

*People. Ideas. Progress.*

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# PREFACE

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This background report is designed to help participants prepare for **New Mexico First's** 2010 town halls, *Raising the Aspirations of New Mexico Youth*, being held throughout the state in May and June.

There are few right or wrong answers to any public policy question, and the problems and opportunities around our state's young people are complex. As a result, no brief explanation of the situation – including this report – can hope to cover all the information and opinions available. The contributors have provided their knowledge and expertise, but ultimately the people and policymakers of New Mexico must decide what course the education and development of our youth will take.

## ABOUT NEW MEXICO FIRST

**New Mexico First** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that engages citizens in public policy in order to improve the state. The organization brings people together for multi-day town hall meetings. These town halls use a unique consensus-building process that enables participants to learn about a topic in depth, develop concrete policy recommendations addressing that topic, and then work with fellow New Mexicans to help implement those recommendations with policymakers.

New Mexico First was created to answer the question: “What would it take to make New Mexico *first* in national rankings, instead of near the bottom?” Historically, the state has often ranked poorly in factors like poverty, education, or health. So, regardless of the topic, we continue to focus on how to strengthen the state and improve the lives of its people.

The organization was co-founded in 1986 by U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and retired Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM). Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall now serve as honorary co-chairs.

## THE TOWN HALL PROCESS

New Mexico First town halls are not typical conferences with day after day of presentations. There will be guest speakers to help set the context, but the bulk of the event will be comprised of small group discussions among citizens who care about the topic. **This particular series of two-day town halls will ask participants to share their best ideas for ensuring that youth set high goals and are supported to achieve them.** Because citizen discussion is at the heart of this process, we ask participants to take an active part in both days of the event.

On day one of the town hall, participants are divided into small groups to discuss the issues and answer a common set of questions. On day two, participants begin combining and refining those answers. Participants from each community represented will work to identify the town hall recommendations that fit their community and discuss how to engage others in their community to implement the recommendations.

By the end of the town hall, each community will have developed the beginnings of a community action plan.

## THIS REPORT

New Mexico First's Board of Directors chose the topic of these town halls, based on input from citizens throughout the state. A number of New Mexicans contributed to the research that is the basis of this report.

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New Mexico First staff members Brittney Tatum and Krista Koppinger also supported the research effort.

## RESEARCH COMMITTEE

In addition, the report was reviewed by a statewide research committee, each member bringing different expertise. The reviewers were not paid; instead they donated their time as a demonstration of their support of the town hall process. New Mexico First thanks all the people who lent their expertise.

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# INTRODUCTION

Most of us can look back on our lives and point to special people or seminal moments that inspired us, defined our paths, or propelled us to strive for success. Perhaps it was a parent, a teacher, or even a stranger that sparked our hope and belief in ourselves. Maybe it was a story or an action we watched someone else take that lit in us a fire to overcome obstacles and reach our goals. Whatever it was, those moments were crucial toward helping us reach our dreams.

Many young people are hungry for that support and inspiration. Even in today's fast-paced, high tech world, youth need quality time with caring adults. Families remain **the** most powerful factor in the life outcomes of their children.

Most people agree that today's youth have advantages their parents and grandparents didn't enjoy, from a wealth of information available through the Internet to new types of schools. On the other hand, today's youth face incredible challenges from conflicting media messages, highly addictive new drugs, and, in some cases, inadequate attention and guidance from responsible adults. Today's youth are more likely than their parents to struggle with obesity, more likely to have encountered extreme violence through the media, and more likely to be living in single-parent homes.

How do we support today's youth to overcome these challenges and become leaders of tomorrow? We know that young people who hold a vision for their lives – a set of goals they deeply want to achieve – have every reason to finish school, make healthy choices, and avoid risky behaviors. So this report focuses on how adults can inspire youth to set and achieve high goals, whatever those goals may be.

Given this premise, New Mexico First's research committee devoted considerable time to the question of how to organize this report. The group settled on five major themes:

1. Caring Adults
2. Supportive Communities
3. Expanded Horizons
4. Multiple Pathways for Success
5. Schools for Everyone

This report is organized around these themes, each providing real-world New Mexico examples of inspiring young people, successful schools, and proven community programs.

## YOUR VOICES

Through online surveys and Facebook, New Mexico First collected input from students and adults, including the following:

*"We as adults must be proactive in guiding, directing, influencing, as well as stimulating, the lives of the youth in this world. It begins in your family and then extends to those in your neighborhood or through the local nonprofit organizations that are so desperately seeking volunteers to mentor and work with our future adults. At age 63, I can see how important it is for adults to be involved with adolescents or any age child."* – Hobbs resident

*"I've found in my own life that when someone can validate my own aspirations, I am more likely to work for them."* – Student

*"I'm convinced that money for the schools has nothing to do with the solution, but instead with societal change in families, peer groups, and expectations for all to succeed."* – Parent

*"Kids need to be shown that it is possible to climb out of a bad situation. They need people behind them every step of the way. They need to know that they will fail, but that everyone fails at one time or another."* – Juvenile probation staffer

*"I believe the biggest thing lacking in youth today is self esteem. I believe teachers, councilors and parents, and the community as a whole should look for every opportunity to support the youth with what ever is needed."* – Government employee

*"We need to make education relevant. We need to make the connection between education and professional careers more clear."* – Educator

*"The youth today are different than the youth of yesterday. We need to think about what works for us."* – Student

*"I believe that there are large differences between the goals and aspirations of low-income youth versus middle class or higher. We must work to raise the goals and esteem of all young people, regardless their income."* – Educator

# CARING ADULTS

All young people require the support of caring adults in their lives. This fact sounds obvious to many readers, and yet far too many youth lack this critical ingredient to their success. Parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, pastors, or others have the power to change lives.

## PARENTS

In most cases, parents are the single best resource to ensure student success. The value of engaged parents is so clear that the federal law requires parental involvement in every public school in America. A vast majority of the public (86%, according to one poll) believes that support from parents is the single most important way to improve our schools.<sup>1</sup> From *Project Appleseed's* Parental Involvement Pledge<sup>2</sup> to curricula and programs such as *Dads Make a Difference*,<sup>3</sup> increasing numbers of communities and schools are focusing on strong, engaged mothers and fathers.

Parents do not have to be perfect, nor must they have completed school themselves, to positively affect the achievement of their children and teens. It is the parent's attitude that matters, research shows.<sup>4</sup>

## OTHER ADULTS

In addition to parents, other adults can and do make a difference in the lives of young people. Many youth take inspiration from foster parents, mentors, teachers, grandparents, and even employers. Tapping this resource of caring adults more broadly could change the face of the country. One estimate projects that if 100 million people (fewer than half of the adults in America) volunteered just 10 hours a year in a school or other youth/child serving organization, they would generate *one billion hours* of support for our nation's young people.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, if even one

fourth of New Mexico adults made it their goal to invest time in the life of a child or teen, all our state's youth would have a caring adult in their life.

Recently, Governor Bill Richardson convened a series of three summits on the achievement gaps of New Mexico students. Attended by almost 600 adults and youth, all the summits recommended increased community and adult support for students, including setting high expectations.<sup>6</sup>

*"Studies show that only a few things improve education: involved parents, well-prepared and motivated teachers, mentors, and charismatic, knowledgeable and committed administrators..."*

-- Dr. Joe L. Valles, Latino/Hispano Education Improvement Task Force

Dr. Joe L. Valles, a member of New Mexico's Latino/Hispano Education Improvement Task Force, knows what it takes to foster youth success: "Studies show that only a few things improve education: involved parents, well-prepared and motivated teachers, mentors, and charismatic, knowledgeable and committed administrators. [Together they form] a mutually respectful community working together."<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of this section focuses on successful efforts to support youth as well as inspirational examples of teens that turned their lives around with the support of caring adults.

<sup>1</sup> [www.educationcounsel.com/resources/files/It%20Takes%20a%20Parent.pdf](http://www.educationcounsel.com/resources/files/It%20Takes%20a%20Parent.pdf), p. 8, *It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of No Child Left Behind*.

<sup>2</sup> [www.projectappleseed.org/npid.html](http://www.projectappleseed.org/npid.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www.dadsmakeadifference.org/](http://www.dadsmakeadifference.org/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.projectappleseed.org/npid.html](http://www.projectappleseed.org/npid.html), Project Appleseed, *Six Slices of Parental Involvement*, PowerPoint, slide 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, slide 11.

<sup>6</sup> [www.newmexicofirst.org/townhalls/PED2009\\_Final.PDF](http://www.newmexicofirst.org/townhalls/PED2009_Final.PDF)

<sup>7</sup> Valles, Joe L. (2010 February 1). "Splitting APS Won't Bridge the Latino Achievement Gap," *Albuquerque Journal*, p. A7.

## THE BEST WAY TO SPEND RETIREMENT<sup>8</sup>

Rachel Morin is a 75-year-old grandmother who is not spending her golden years on cruise ships or basking in the Florida sun. Instead, everyday Morin goes to Mount Taylor Elementary School in Grants, New Mexico, to help 4<sup>th</sup> graders with their schoolwork. “Ms. Rachel,” as her students call her, takes part in Grandparents in the Classroom. The program runs in the Grants-Cibola County School District and St. Joseph’s Catholic Elementary School in San Fidel. A group of 14 grandparents go to the schools four hours a day to work with students. They are paid a modest stipend of \$2.65 per hour, but the return on that investment is truly priceless.

“Ms. Rachel is friendly, she helps everyone in class,” said 10-year-old Kyla Carrier. “Sometimes when I have problems outside of class I talk to her, and she helps me figure out what’s going on.”

The school district and the senior center are actively seeking more grandparents to volunteer their time to make a difference in the lives of our children. Older people have lifetime experiences and knowledge that can be invaluable to young people.

“These grandparents give a sense of security to these kids,” said Mount Taylor Principal Bennie Gallegos.

### RETIREEES ABOUND

Over 13% (or about 260,000) of New Mexicans are 65 or older. If just one in ten became school volunteers, we could place about 30 retirees at **each** of the state’s 856 public elementary, middle, and high schools.

As more baby-boomers retire, the number of potential volunteers grows.

<sup>8</sup> Gallup Independent Editorial Board. (2010 March 12). *Gallup Independent*.

## A CHURCH COMMUNITY THAT CARES<sup>9</sup>

The Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, takes great pride in its young members. Each adult in the predominately African American congregation is involved in the care and support of their youth. “We have to set high expectations for our young people, and they will respond.” said Rev. Charles Becknell.

The church’s approach is a simple one with powerful results. For the parents and youth who have stayed with the church, there is a 100% graduation rate, no substance abuse, and no teen pregnancies.

*“We have to set high expectations for our young people, and they will respond.”*

-- Rev. Charles Becknell, Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church

The church achieves these results by providing a range of supports. For example, men in the congregation mentor the boys and serve as role models.

A summer reading program encourages each student from elementary through high school to read at least eight books during the summer, which their parents verify. If a child is too young to read, parents read to them. Most read more than the required eight books. Rev. Becknell tells them, “You can go anywhere in the world by picking up a book and reading.”

The pastor also reviews each student’s report card. If a student is having difficulty, adults serve as mentors. “Don’t wait,” Rev. Becknell tells them. “If you get into trouble, talk to your teacher or come to us and we’ll help.” Through this kind of support, two special education children have gone on to regular classroom work. One made the honor roll and told his teacher, “I can’t wait to tell my pastor.” Throughout the year, the church gives students certificates of achievement and small cash awards from \$1-10 as recognition for good work.

<sup>9</sup> Becknell, Rev. Charles. (2010 March 9). Telephone interview.

At the end of each school year, all students are acknowledged for completing a successful year and are asked to introduce their parents to the rest of the church community. The pastor said, “The young people beam when they feel their parents are being recognized.”

Rev. Becknell summarizes the community’s belief: “If you expect more, you will get more.”

## HOMELESS YOUTH FINDS CARING ADULTS<sup>10</sup>

Rachel Kindell went from sleeping in her car and attempting suicide to becoming a leader at West Mesa High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. After being forced out of her home at the age of 15, Kindell said, “I didn’t want to wait to become part of the odds. I wanted to succeed, make my life better, and have others in my situation see me as a good role model.”



Rachel Kindell

During her darkest days, Kindell found a community program that helps homeless students receive the help they need to stay in school, including food and school supplies. She also benefited from after-school support that helps low-income students prepare for college.

“I wasn’t on the right path,” said Kindell. “The people I met through these programs made me believe I can make it, and I can make a difference for others. I was always a good student, but I needed someone to believe in me.”

Kindell’s goal was a college education. Thanks to her determination, good grades, and hard work to earn scholarships, she will reach that goal. Now a student at the University of New Mexico, Kindell is working on a plan to start a program that helps others find a place to live during college breaks, as well as summer jobs and volunteer opportunities.

Kindell’s advice to others: “Take it one day at a time. Pull something out of each experience. Hard work pays off in life no matter what your situation.” Kindell is well on her way to being one of those caring adults that all young people need.

<sup>10</sup> Kindell, Rachel. (2010 March 2). Telephone interview.

## TEEN SUICIDE

One in five New Mexican high school students report they have considered suicide in the past year. Almost 30% of New Mexican high school students reported feeling depressed for at least a two-week period within the last year.

Source: NM Department of Health.

## THE MORE ADVOCATES, THE BETTER<sup>11</sup>

Many specialists in youth development speak about the importance of adult advocates to the success of youth. Ryann Bierer, who graduated from Jemez Valley High School in Sandoval County, New Mexico, benefited from adult advocates at home, school, and work. Bierer’s mother always expected her children to do well in school and go to college. She was Bierer’s advocate at home. She bought extra books and workbooks at a local teacher’s store to help her children develop the study skills they needed to be successful.

In high school, her high school biology teacher became one of her biggest advocates. “He was very inspirational,” she said.

*“Don’t underestimate the value of having good advocates show up in your life,” she said. “It is an amazing gift when someone genuinely looks out for your best interests and believes in you.”*

-- Ryann Bierer, Alumni, Jemez Valley High

“He knew I was interested in science and told me whatever special projects I wanted to do, he would support me.”

Bierer went on to college and considered a range of careers. After Bierer graduated, she returned to Albuquerque to work, first at a health clinic for the homeless and then for Planned Parenthood. A co-worker, who became yet another of

<sup>11</sup> Bierer, Ryann. (2010 March 17). Telephone interview.

Bierer's advocates, encouraged her to apply to med school. She completed her medical education in pediatrics at UNM and went on to a fellowship in neonatology.

"Don't underestimate the value of having good advocates show up in your life," she said. "It is an amazing gift when someone genuinely looks out for your best interests and believes in you."

## SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PARENTS<sup>12</sup>

Youth Development, Inc., provides services to children and families in Bernalillo, Rio Arriba, and Taos counties. One of its programs, Caring Couples, Healthy Children, works with unmarried couples aged 17-25 who have a newborn baby or are expecting. Both the mother and father must commit to the program. The program teaches the couples how to define their partnership, honor their partner's dreams, handle conflict, manage their finances, and stay involved as caring parents.

Sometimes, a couple makes the decision to marry and the class celebrates the commitment.

Jonetta Martinez-Pacias, the program's Associate Director, said, "All of these couples want to love their child and do what is best for them. They just need to know how to achieve this. We provide them with the options and pathways to meet their responsibilities."

Supporting young parents helps ensure that they will become the next generation of caring adults all our youth need.

<sup>12</sup> Baca, Debra and Martinez-Pacias, Jonetta. (2010 March 9). Telephone interview.

## TEEN AND SINGLE PARENTS

In 2007, 52% of New Mexico births were to single mothers (compared to 39% nationally). Among Native Americans, 75% of births were to single mothers. More than half of African American births (60%) were to single moms, and Hispanics came in a close third with 58%. Among Whites, 32% of births are to single mothers. All these figures mean New Mexico has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation.

A recent survey found that close to half (45%) of New Mexican high school students report *not* using a condom during their last sexual intercourse.

Sources:

- NM Selected Health Statistics Annual Report Volume 1 (2009).
- Wind, Rebecca. (2010) Guttmacher Institute.

## DISCUSSION IDEAS

The stories in this section illustrate the incredibly important role adults can play in keeping youth safe, boosting their self-esteem, helping them set high goals, and setting the expectation that they can achieve them.

How can communities strengthen the culture of parenting? What can we as parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors do to help young people fulfill their dreams?

## SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

After-school programs. Structured activities. Youth-driven initiatives. One-on-one mentoring. Those are among the methods some New Mexico communities are utilizing to give youth on-going support with successful results. Many communities could do more, as attorney and lifelong South Valley resident Frank Baca noted in a February interview with the *Albuquerque Journal*. “We, as a community, need to do a better job of placing a value on education. It’s one thing to say the institutions need to change, but if we, those of us in the community, are not doing a better job, it makes the institutional change less effective.”

The following communities have put their focus on youth in innovative ways.

### SAFE ENVIRONMENT, HEALTHY CHOICES<sup>13</sup>

The community of Artesia, New Mexico, has a tradition of supporting young people. Community members from the schools, churches, and businesses have come together to create an environment that helps youth overcome the challenges of everyday life and go on to reach their college and career aspirations.

Recognizing the need for prevention and early intervention, the Artesia Junior High sponsors programs before school and during lunch that include college planning, coping skills, anger management, and substance abuse recovery.

Community churches also do their part. “No school organizations schedule activities on Wednesday nights

*“Young people need an environment that is safe,” Nuanes said. “They need to feel they are connected to the people and the life of the community.”*

--Michael Nuanes, Artesia Junior High

<sup>13</sup> Nuanes, Michael. (2010 March 3). Telephone interview.

because the churches offer a variety of fun activities for our young people,” said Michael Nuanes, principal of Artesia Junior High School and co-chair for the New Mexico Commission for Community Volunteerism. “The church youth directors also visit the schools during the lunch hour to provide support for our students.”



**Kids, Cows, and More teaches healthy lifestyles**

Other programs, supported by business leaders, the school, and community members include:

- Quarterback Club, through which former football players serve as mentors to local students
- Teens Talk, helps students build positive relationships with parents by inviting parents to talk with students about what it is like to be a teenager today.
- Take the Challenge, which incorporates youth entertainment into discussions about healthy choices
- Jump Start, which steers youth away from substance abuse
- Kids, Cows, and More, a partnership with local dairy farmers to teach healthy lifestyles
- Farm Safety Week, during which farmers bring their equipment to school to help students explore a career in farming and learn about safety procedures and water conservation
- The Drug and Crime Coalition, which conducts a youth survey each year and shares the data through town meetings

“Young people need an environment that is safe,” Nuanes said. “They need to feel they are connected to the people and the life of the community.”

## FUTURE HEALTHCARE WORKERS <sup>14</sup>

The Wellness Coalition in Silver City, New Mexico, reaches out to young people in the four southwestern counties of Catron, Grants, Hidalgo, and Luna. The coalition of healthcare and community groups serves a rural region covering 17,000 square miles. They provide programs in health, education, and conservation.

The coalition works with AmeriCorps members to place youth ages 18-25 in health clinics where they assist with everything from patient intake to diabetes screening, prescription assistance, and family support services. Many of these young people lack job readiness skills and have few job prospects. Through the on-the-job training they receive, many of them go on to college programs and healthcare careers. Some continue to work for the clinics where they served.

Sam Castello, Executive Director of the Wellness Coalition, said the program gives young people a chance to prove themselves and makes them feel valued. “Even if a young person does not have the educational or training skills needed in the beginning, they have the capability to learn and show they can be a valuable contributor to the community,” Castello said. “All they need is someone to give them an opportunity.”

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS <sup>15</sup>

Young people from the geographically close communities of Pojoaque, Espanola, and Los Alamos are finding ways to bridge the decades-long communication and social gaps between them through JUNTOS (Joining & Understanding Now, Teens Overcome Separation). JUNTOS, which means “together” in Spanish, is a youth leadership effort that promotes authentic dialogue among the three communities.<sup>16</sup>

Lori Heimdahl Gibson, one of the founders, said, “This is about building relationships and finding common ground. Young people need to know how to deal with racial differences and racism and find strategies to cope.”

<sup>14</sup> Castello, Sam. (2010 March 3). Telephone interview.

<sup>15</sup> Bartram, Jenn, Heimdahl Gibson, Lori, and Page, Cedric. (2010 February 24). Telephone interview.

<sup>16</sup> JUNTOS brochure

## HEALTHCARE, POVERTY, AND JOBS

New Mexico maintains its unenviable position as one of the states with the highest percentages of uninsured children (18%) and children in poverty (26%). New Mexico’s Native Americans fare worst, with 39% of children living in poverty. Hispanic children rank second with 29%.

The state also suffers from a shortage in healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, lab technicians, etc.) The shortage is particularly critical in rural areas and is projected to worsen as more baby-boomers retire. A wide array of recruitment efforts are underway statewide, encouraging young people to consider careers in the health fields.

Sources: NM Dept of Health and 2009 Kids Count Databook.

Participating youth set the goals of the group, using authentic dialogue to address issues of stereotypes, income gaps, and educational disparities. They strive to improve



JUNTOS youth engaged in dialogue

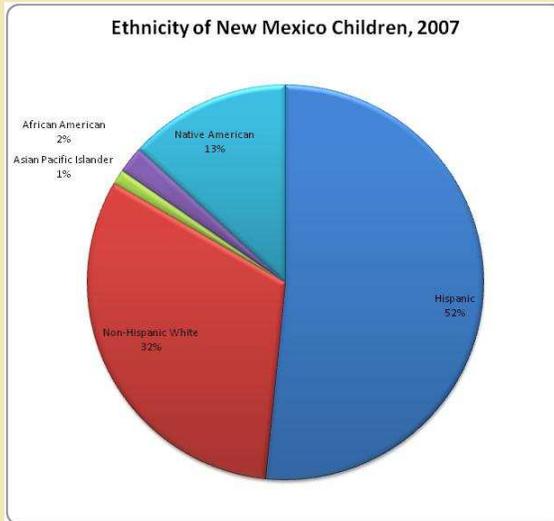
communication skills and have fun together. The adults find funding sources and provide coaching. The effort seems to have made a difference. “I used to be afraid to go to Los Alamos; now I’m not,” said a youth from

Espanola. “We are really just one and the same,” added a peer from Los Alamos.

JUNTOS activities include everything from team-building workshops and learning about cultural art, music, and dance, to potluck dinners, swimming parties, and picnics. Parents and families are always welcome and many have managed to forge lasting bonds across the three communities.

## A DIVERSE POPULATION

New Mexico remains one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the nation.



Source: 2010 Report Card and Budget Report, NM Children's Cabinet

housekeeping, painting, catering, photography, web design, landscaping, and others.

Students in the tiny town of Mosquero started a newspaper, *The Harding County Roundup*, which has become “the voice” of the community, with a circulation greater than the number of community residents. Des Moines students even started a health clinic, which is a primary provider for their community.

Some participating communities include Dora, Des Moines, Dexter, Loving, Mosquero, and Ft. Sumner.

## STUDENTS TEACHING STUDENTS<sup>18</sup>

Breakthrough Santa Fe, on the campus of Santa Fe Prep is part of the national Breakthrough Collaborative. The program serves high-potential, yet under-supported, middle school students from the city's public schools. Nearly 90% of the middle school students are of color, and English is a second language for a substantial number. Many are the first in their families with the opportunity to pursue college.

## “HOLLOWING OUT” RURAL AMERICA

The out-migration of young people from rural areas is an issue of economic and social concern nationally and in New Mexico.

Research shows that parents, educators, and other influential adults tend to encourage “achievers” to leave their community while devoting less attention or resources to students more likely to stay.

“What is happening in many small towns – the devastating loss of educated and talented young people, the aging of the population, and the erosion of the local economy – has repercussions far beyond their boundaries.”

Source-Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America.

<sup>18</sup> Multari, Michael. (2010 March 18). Telephone interview.

## RURAL REVITALIZATION<sup>17</sup>

As young people move out of rural areas to cities seeking better opportunities, shrinking rural communities suffer. The state's Rural Education Bureau is working with 23 school districts to create unique educational experiences aimed at revitalizing the local economies. Students are gaining real-world experience with agriculture, entrepreneurship, business, and community development. Some programs partner with universities to offer college credits.

“We stress the interdependence of school and community,” said Dr. James Holloway, Assistant Secretary for the Rural Education Bureau.

Various programs include: planting 150-year-old seeds provided by Zuni Pueblo elders, studying plant anatomy, and a wide range of youth entrepreneurship programs, including

<sup>17</sup> Holloway, James. (2010 February). Telephone interview.

Each summer, 55 middle school students attend a six-week, tuition-free program where high school and college students teach them the skills they will need to succeed in a competitive, college prep high school. The high school student teachers are former participants in the Breakthrough program. The college student teachers are from colleges all

*“It is important to invest in our young people, one student at a time. The individualized approach is sometimes the first time that they know someone believes in them and their families.”*

-- Michael Multari, Breakthrough Santa Fe

over the country. A secondary goal of the program is to interest the student teachers in pursuing a career in education. So far, 65% of these student teachers do just that.

“Our teachers are exceptional high school and college students—only a little older than many of our students,” said Michael Multari, the program director. “They know what it takes to succeed, and are committed to sharing their love of learning to help their students succeed.”



**Breakthrough Santa Fe mentor and middle school student**

Breakthrough Santa Fe also helps these students and their families explore school options including public, charter, private, and parochial high schools in the city.

“It is important to invest in our young people, one student at a time. The individualized approach is sometimes the first time that they know someone believes in them and their families,” said Multari.

## DISCUSSION IDEAS

The case studies in this section pointed various ways community organizations, churches, and other groups can support youth well. If you live in a rural area, what efforts might you consider to reduce “brain drain?”

Many of these programs described in this section are replicable or may inspire related efforts. What opportunities may exist in your area?

# EXPANDED HORIZONS

Helping youth succeed means helping them understand there is a world of opportunity available to them, limited only by their own imagination and commitment. Expanded horizons might include a foreign-exchange program enabling students to visit another country. Or it might be a cultural awareness program in their home town.

New Mexico has a variety of programs that help expand the horizons of youth through mentors, inquiry-based learning, outdoor experiences, and supportive environments. When young people have someone to show them the way, open doors to new ideas, and encourage them, they can succeed beyond expectations.

## STEM: IT'S NOT A PLANT...

In the increasingly knowledge-based economy of the modern world, it is vital that young people have access to training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Increasingly, practically all fields require these skills, from farming and ranching, to computer programming, to energy development.

Importantly, STEM skills are transferable, thus enabling young professionals to adapt to the rapidly changing workplace. The “top-10 in-demand jobs” today did not exist in 2004, and they all require STEM skills.

In 2008, 81% of New Mexican 3rd-graders were proficient in science, compared to 31% of 6th-graders and 38% of 9th-graders.<sup>1</sup>

**Sources:** Innovate-Educate New Mexico and the NM Public Education Dept.

## THE POWER OF CURIOSITY... AND PIZZA<sup>19</sup>

For youth in rural New Mexico, the world can look very small. Marisol Gamboa, who grew up in the tiny village of Salem, New Mexico, credits her sense of curiosity for helping her expand her horizons. “I was always asking, why? What’s that? How can that happen?” she said. Gamboa is now a senior computer scientist and technical lead for a group that works in counter-proliferation and operational intelligence support at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California.

Gamboa is the daughter of immigrant parents and the oldest of six children. “My family did not have much,” she said, “but we had everything we needed.” When Gamboa was very young, her aunt earned a scholarship to attend Highlands University in Las Vegas,



**Tiny Marisol Gamboa, flanked by huge cactuses, in the desert of southern New Mexico**

New Mexico. Her family took trips to visit, and Gamboa decided she

wanted to be like her aunt. “I wanted to go to college and eat pizza like she did,” she said.

Her father, a dairy farm worker, and her mother, a housewife, fully supported her dream, drive, and ambition, as they did for each of their children. All have gone on to higher education, each selecting a different and rewarding career.

There was no computer or Internet access in Gamboa’s home when she was growing up. Her first exposure to her eventual career choice came in her 10<sup>th</sup> grade year when she was chosen to participate in the New Mexico Super Computing Challenge. With the support of her mentor, a graduate student at New Mexico State University, she learned about a new industry and her potential as a computer programmer.

After Gamboa graduated from high school in 1994, she received a scholarship to UNM. She became part of a

<sup>19</sup> Gamboa, Marisol. (2010 March 9). Telephone interview.

minority study group in the engineering department where students came to do homework, study for exams, visit with tutors, and, yes, eat pizza. She completed an internship with Intel before searching for a career position with a technology-related company.

The next step was a big one. It meant leaving her family and village and moving to California. She said, “If I didn’t take the opportunity, I would always wonder what could have been.”

## OLD WAYS, NEW WORLDS<sup>20</sup>

Expanding youths’ horizons doesn’t have to pull them far from home, however. The National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP) empowers the lives of Native American youth, fosters youth leaders who are culturally sensitive, and promotes healthy lifestyles as an example for future generations. This organization – located in Gallup, New Mexico – expands the horizons of youth by connecting them to cultural understanding and nature.

“I’ve talked to many young people who, now as adults, come back and tell me the program was an empowering experience for them that gave them control over their lives and instilled a purpose for their future,” said McClellan (Mac) Hall, the founder and executive director of the organization.

The flagship program, Project Venture, provides 200 hours of year-round service that incorporate cultural and family values



Having fun at Project Venture

<sup>20</sup> Hall, McClellan. (2010 March 1). Telephone interview.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

In 2007, 43.2% of New Mexican youth reported using alcohol. 24.2% reported cigarette smoking. 12.5% reported driving while drinking and 31.2% reported riding in the car with a driver who was drinking.

SOURCE: 2009 Kids Count Databook

and reconnect youth to the natural world, along with rafting, biking, hiking, and other outdoor activities.

“Our whole model is based on what is important to our native elders, an experiential process which includes learning by doing, watching, listening, and experimenting under the caring mentorship of elders and extended family members,” Hall said.

The program has been given the highest level of recognition by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention as a model for resilience to alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse.

## LEARNING THROUGH INQUIRY<sup>21</sup>

Mackenzie Bishop believes “Business or school is not about the ends, but about the means. It is doing something the right way, ways that can be replicated for the service of many.”

Bishop is a 20-something entrepreneur with a twist. During college, he interned with a residential construction company and learned the ins’ and outs’ of marketing. But, Bishop soon went way beyond the confines of traditional construction and marketing wisdom. He wanted to create a company as a social venture, a business whose leaders aspire to build a just economy on a sustainable planet. Bishop’s company, Por Fin Nuestra Casa (PFNC), which translated in English means, “Finally, a home of our own,” is dedicated to providing housing to those who most desperately need it around the globe. The housing is created from surplus shipping containers resulting in a low-cost home with first world amenities. The company begins operations in Mexico shortly and hopes to aid in the reconstruction of Haiti.

<sup>21</sup> Bishop, Mackenzie. (2010 March 4). Telephone interview.

What motivated Bishop to aspire to be a very different kind of businessman? He attributes this outlook on life to the inquiry-based approach at East Mountain High School (EMHS) in Sandia Park, New Mexico. Students there are asked to conduct “Inquiry Projects” through which they provide evidence and factual data, and then interpret the information using history, images, and personal experience. EMHS believes that these projects connect students to the larger world.

“Learning is not memorizing information, but understanding how the world works, how to solve problems, and not being fazed by challenges,” Bishop said.

### A PLACE TO GO AND EXPLORE<sup>22</sup>

The Computer Clubhouse, sponsored by Youth Development, Inc. in Albuquerque, in partnership with Intel Corporation, provides a safe after-school environment for latchkey youth. The program provides a place for children to do their homework, explore technology, and engage in structured activities that help students develop their confidence and talents.

Concha Cordova, Associate Director for Employment and Training, said the youth love the program and have to be pushed out the door at 6 p.m. One student told her, “I don’t have a computer at home. I would not be able to bring up my grades without help to do my homework. You helped me be myself.”

*“Young people just need to feel encouraged, to be shown that they have choices in life.”*

-- Concha Cordova, the Computer Clubhouse

Through a larger network created by the Museum of Science in Boston, young people connect with students in 20 countries. Through technology, they form relationships and skills that will help them engage in high skilled, higher wage careers.

“Young people just need to feel encouraged,” said Cordova, “to be shown that they have choices in life.”



The Computer Clubhouse, a safe environment to expand imaginations

### DISCUSSION IDEAS

Technology has made the world a hyper-connected, faster-paced place. How can adults ensure that youth have the abilities to keep up with the changes? What training and skills must we provide so they are prepared for the ever-changing and global workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

And yet how can we help youth slow down enough to appreciate the worth of old cultures, the value of a well-crafted essay, or the benefits of a quiet moment?

<sup>22</sup> Cordova, Concha. (2010 March 11). Telephone interview.

# SCHOOLS FOR EVERYONE

No two children are alike, so it makes sense that one type of school may not serve the educational needs of all youth. In New Mexico we have over 850 public schools, including traditional, magnet, alternative, and charter schools. In addition, many communities have one or more private schools, often with a religious focus.

With these different approaches come different outcomes. Some charter schools outperform their traditional counterparts. Others do not. Some alternative schools open their doors to homeless and troubled teens. Others prepare the next generation of leaders through military training. Some schools ask students to spend hours outdoors conducting nature and science research; others ask students to do their research indoors on computers.

Unlike past generations where all schools were pretty much the same, many of today's youth benefit from options. Examples of those options are presented in this section.

## BRIDGING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP<sup>23</sup>

Eldorado High School in Albuquerque is generally known for doing well on standardized tests, but in 2008 Principal Martin Sandoval noticed that Hispanic and low-income students were scoring lower than their classmates in math. Among Hispanic students, 44% were proficient in math. Among students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, only 22% were proficient in math. Sandoval used grant money to pay for substitute teachers, allowing math teachers to work during the day to design a collaborative, teamwork-oriented math program that included one-on-one tutoring.

Sandoval's focus on teamwork and collaboration paid off. In 2009, Eldorado's math proficiency scores rose to 63% among Hispanics and 42% among low-income students. Eldorado's program has become a model for other Albuquerque schools, with similar methods now being employed at Highland, Manzano, and Albuquerque High.

<sup>23</sup> Heinz, Hailey. (2010 February 9). "Math Masters: Teamwork Among Eldorado Teachers is Showing Results," *Albuquerque Journal*, pp. A1,A2.

## GRADUATION RATES

Roughly 60% of NM students complete high school. The graduation rate for girls is higher than boys (65% versus 56%). Asian and White students are more likely to finish school than their Hispanic, Native American, and African American peers.

High school graduation has proved to be a key indicator of poverty and prosperity. Estimated lifetime lost earnings for just one year's worth of dropouts is nearly \$3.6 billion. This lack of income often leads to an inability to provide for basic necessities such as housing, food, and healthcare.<sup>1</sup>

In the Albuquerque metropolitan area, 6200 students dropped out from the class of 2008.

Source: NM Public Education Department.

## LEARNING ANYWHERE, ANYTIME<sup>24</sup>

The eCADEMY is an online initiative, one with promise for fast and cost-effective replication. The program will be piloted in the Evening High School in Albuquerque. This school focuses on students up to age 28 years old who have dropped out of school.

The program prepares teachers to handle blended classes (online courses supported by teachers who can be reached either electronically or face-to-face). These courses allow students who have family or job commitments the flexibility to earn their core graduation credits. Teachers are available to help students during extended hours throughout the day and early evenings.

Many of the courses at eCADEMY are provided by IDEAL-NM, which provides eLearning services to K-12 schools and higher

<sup>24</sup> Ryan, Ph.D., Thomas. (2010 March 16). Telephone Interview.

education institutions. These services increase the digital literacy skills needed to participate in a global economy. The online courses conform to all state standards.

“In the 21st Century, it is important to reach out to students where they are, whenever they are ready to learn,” said Thomas Ryan, Chief Information Officer of Albuquerque Public Schools. “This program provides high quality learning resources 24/7.”

Initially this approach to education will be implemented in an urban environment, but it can easily be adapted inexpensively to serve isolated or rural areas where there may be fewer students or qualified teachers. Homeschoolers could also benefit.

## COMMUNITY-BASED, MISSION-FOCUSED SCHOOLS<sup>25</sup>

Charter schools provide educational choices for parents and students, enabling families to select the school that best fits their needs, interests, or talents. The following examples present different schools suited to specific populations.

The Roots and Wings Community School in the mountain village of Questa, New Mexico, is a pioneer charter school in



A hands-on lesson for students at the Roots and Wings Community School

the state. The small school serves 60 sixth to eighth graders and focuses on interdisciplinary, experiential education in a wilderness setting. Students study several important questions that define the central themes of their core academic courses each year. Relevant field trips are incorporated into the curriculum.

the state. The small school serves 60 sixth to eighth graders and focuses on interdisciplinary, experiential education in a wilderness setting. Students study several important

“This school fits students who need and enjoy a very different learning environment,” said Lisa Grover, Chief Executive Officer, New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools. “Its small size and hands-on focus works well for this community with a very unique mountain setting.”

A different example is Roswell’s Sidney Gutierrez Middle School, one of the highest performing schools in the state for math and science. The school emphasizes the use of technology and service learning to help students master skills needed in a modern workplace.

Cesar Chavez Community Charter School takes a different approach. Serving the border community of Deming, New Mexico, the school supports students who are at risk of failing, dropping out or falling through the cracks of the traditional school system. The high school offers many students a second or even third chance to earn a diploma or GED. The school provides extended hours and a self-paced curriculum to allow students the flexibility to continue their education while managing real-life responsibilities such as parenting, sibling childcare, and jobs.

## NM’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 460 elementary schools
- 128 middle schools
- 22 junior high schools
- 128 high schools
- 40 alternative schools
- 78 charter schools

Source: NM Public Education Department

“Successful charter schools have to be accountable, first and foremost, to the students and their parents by demonstrating excellent academic results,” said Grover. “They also have to demonstrate fiscal accountability to the taxpayers and be compliant with state educational regulations. These schools are market-driven. If they are not successful, they will not be sustained by the communities they serve.”

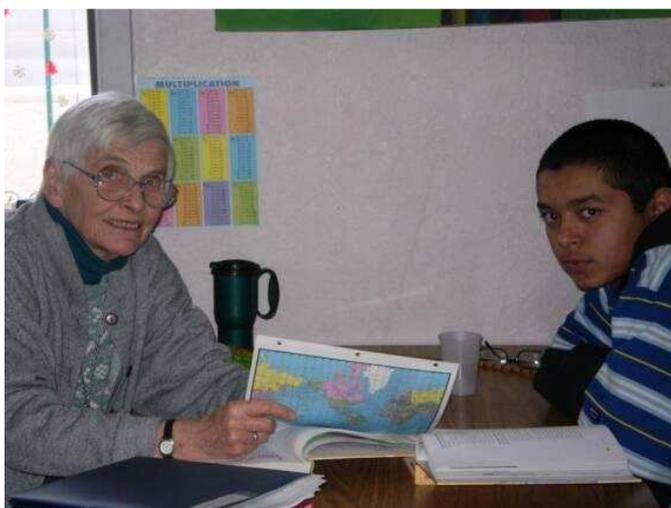
<sup>25</sup> Grover, Lisa. (2010 March 16). Telephone interview.

## TROUBLE WITH THE LAW<sup>26</sup>

Rivers Academy in Las Cruces, New Mexico, started as a private school and evolved into a treatment center that helps young people who have run into trouble with the law successfully re-enter the public school system.

The academy designed an accredited academic program and intense “wraparound support” for students. A team of teachers, therapists, social workers, and mentors work with small groups of students who attend four-hour blocks of treatment and instruction everyday. Students are typically from single-parent homes, and often have histories with substance abuse or gang activity. The academy reports that 99% have learning disabilities.

“We help these students recapture their childhood, give them a sense of belonging, and help them build a turnaround plan for getting back into the public school system to be successful there,” said Nema LeCuyer, Executive Director of Rivers Academy.



Building a turnaround plan for getting back into public school

After one year of operation, 43 students have successfully returned to public school without loss of graduation credits. The academy continues to support the students until they graduate from high school or receive their GED.

“These young people need consistent, strong relationships they can trust and count on. This support is what can bring them back into society and success,” said LeCuyer.

<sup>26</sup> LeCuyer, Nema. (2010 March 18). Telephone interview.

## INCARCERATION

In 2008, over 24,500 New Mexico youth were referred to the juvenile justice system. Roughly 4,000 were put on probation and just over 300 were incarcerated.

Many come from single-family homes, have experienced domestic violence, and have mental illness.

Source: NM Juvenile Justice Services Annual Report, (January 2009), p. 4.

## EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS<sup>27</sup>

Early College High Schools (ECHS) are springing up all over the nation. Boasting a dropout rate of just 2%, these schools offer students the chance to earn up to two years’ of college credits and an associate’s degree by the time they graduate high school. ECHS programs are challenging yet supportive, with small classes and a student-focused approach to learning. The chance to save both time and money has proved to be a powerful motivator with students.

Las Cruces Public Schools is slated to soon open an ECHS in partnership with NMSU and Dona Ana Community College. The school will offer dual credit classes in both liberal arts and technical/vocational fields. Most of the students at the Las Cruces ECHS will come from the Las Cruces Public School district, but some will also come from Gadsden Independent School district and Hatch Valley Public School district.

“Our target is first-generation students and students not necessarily college-bound, but with potential,” said Michael Morehead, a researcher with the project.

The ECHS aims to improve the education, retention, and workforce development of young people in the region.

<sup>27</sup> Morehead, Michael. (2010 February). Telephone interview.

## STAYING IN COLLEGE<sup>28</sup>

CAMP, the College Assistance Migrant Program, helps migrant or seasonal farm workers and their children attend college at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Over 200 young people from farming and ranching regions of the state have been recruited into the program since 2002.

They receive a scholarship for the first year that allows them to pay for housing, the college meal plan, and textbooks. Social events help the students make new friends. In addition, workshops help them learn about managing finances, healthy nutrition, and other skills that lead to being self-sufficient in an unfamiliar environment. They also receive one-on-one academic counseling, tutoring, and career mentoring.

*“Being able to talk with someone who is successful and comes from a similar background is a very important motivator for these students,”*

--Michelle Montano, CAMP

Program Director Michelle Montano said, “These students are used to working hard. They just need help in how to fit into a different community and cope with life on a university campus.”

About 30-35 students enter the freshman class each year. In the first five years of operation, the program boasts a 90% retention rate with 36 graduates, four of whom have gone on to graduate schools.

“Being able to talk with someone who is successful and comes from a similar background is a very important motivator for these students,” Montano said.

## DISCUSSION IDEAS

These stories demonstrate the variety of educational program models available to help students from all kinds of backgrounds reach their education goals. These models can be adapted to fit any community or youth group. What are some special educational needs in your community that aren't being met by public or private schools? Can you think of an educational model that would work to meet those needs?

<sup>28</sup> Montano, Michelle, (2010 March 11). Telephone interview.

# MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

Communities around New Mexico support youth by offering venues to be creative, entrepreneurial, self-directed, and engaged leaders. From storytelling to environmental stewardship, these programs offer youth ways to spread their wings and find their voices, helped and inspired by their peers and the adults around them. The evidence-based AVID college-awareness program offered in the Albuquerque Public Schools is an example.

Everyone learns differently, and not all students will be student body presidents. However, most young people can excel in something – be it the arts, 4-H, or building projects – and they gain major life skills in the process.

Data point to at least seven district learning styles, with most people drawing on more than one.

1. **Visual (spatial)** learners prefer pictures, images, and spatial understanding.
2. **Aural (auditory-musical)** learners prefer sound and music.
3. **Verbal (linguistic)** learners prefer words, both in speech and writing.
4. **Physical (kinesthetic)** learners prefer using their bodies, hands, and sense of touch.
5. **Logical (mathematical)** learners prefer logic, reasoning, and systems.
6. **Social (interpersonal)** learners prefer to learn in groups or with other people.
7. **Solitary (intrapersonal)** learners prefer to work alone and use self-study.

The following case studies illustrate programs that develop future leaders, tapping their unique learning styles and interests.

## LITERACY THROUGH STORYTELLING<sup>29</sup>

By the time she was six years old, Samantha Keller-Deweese was a storyteller at the Farmington Public Library. A few years later, she was telling her favorite Robert Munsch stories. Munsch was so impressed with her dedication to the storytelling tradition that he sent her an autographed book.

The Farmington Public Library supports youth storytellers



Young storyteller at the Four Corners Storytelling Festival

such as Keller-Deweese because the staff knows telling stories is one way to build literacy.

The Youth Storytellers project engages young people up to age 18 in a traditional cultural practice of New Mexico that instills in them the joy of reading folk tales, fairy tales, tall tales, myths, legends, ghost

stories, cowboy poetry, and writing their own personal stories.

Flo Trujillo, the Director of Youth Services at the library, said, “The program helps young people develop a sense of personal responsibility and connects them to their family and culture”

*Blended Zine* is another project of the library. It is a literary and arts magazine published by teens to showcase their work while teaching valuable publishing, marketing, and technical skills.

Through the Youth Storytellers and *Blended Zine* projects, the library engages the creativity of youth in building important career skills.

<sup>29</sup> Florez, David and Trujillo, Flo. (2010 February 22). Telephone interview.

## BUILDING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT<sup>30</sup>

The North Central New Mexico Youth Entrepreneurship Project is directed by Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE). The primary activities are youth entrepreneur camps, summer internships, educator workshops, the annual youth entrepreneur conference, and the annual statewide youth business plan competition.

Each summer, students attend camps in Española, Las Vegas, and Taos. Upon completion, they are ready to work with their teachers or other adult mentors to start a school-based enterprise or an individual business. Young entrepreneurs also serve internships in a variety of businesses such as art operations, marketing, journalism, and agriculture.

Ron Martinez, Executive Director of ENLACE, says, “It is our strategy to expose young people to a wide variety of career options, entrepreneurial possibilities, and cultural activities that contribute to the sustainability of New Mexico.”

ENLACE partners with the Regional Development Corporation and 40 other organizations to sponsor the annual Statewide Youth Business Plan Competition.

Kathy Roberts, Rural Programs Manager for Regional Development Corporation, explains, “We have seen successful plans for a skateboarder clothing line, doggie cookie treats, and greenhouse produce that is sold to local restaurants.”

## TRAINING IN THE ARTS<sup>31</sup>

Youth-produced plays, band performances, radio shows, and poetry readings are just a few events held year-round at Warehouse 21 in Santa Fe. Warehouse 21’s stated mission is “to be a hub for youth-directed development in the arts through mentorship and entrepreneurial opportunities.”

<sup>30</sup> Martinez, Ron and Roberts, Kathy. (2010 February 22). Telephone interview.

<sup>31</sup> Gallegos y Reinhardt, Ana Marie. (2010 February). E-mail Correspondence.



Learning by doing at Warehouse 21

“The staff of W21 recognizes the need for community involvement among young people,” said Ana Marie Gallegos y Reinhardt, Executive Director. “Schools and families are struggling to compete with peer and mass media pressures and the hazards of promiscuity, substance abuse, and crime.”

W21 seeks to address these issues for young people ages 12-30 through evidence-based support structures, mentoring, engagement in creative pursuits, and development of vocational skills. W21 offers workshops and classes in theater, media, and visual arts. W21 employs the artists they help develop. For-profit ventures include everything from media production to an Internet café and retail storefront.

## YOUTH CORPS... PLUS!<sup>32</sup>

Youth whose lives are marked by poverty, substance abuse and violence find positive alternatives and role models at The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RMYC) in Taos County. The program has been in operation since 1995 and is modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. RMYC prepares young people for responsible and productive lives and builds their community spirit through service.

*“All young people want to succeed at something,”*

--Carl Colonius, RMYC

The Field Program provides real work experience and skills development in natural resource management, environmental preservation, watershed and fire safety corridor restoration, and community beautification for youth members ages 16-25.

<sup>32</sup> Colonius, Carl. (2010 March 5). Interview.



#### Building community spirit through service

RMYC differs from other youth conservation corps in their focus on continued education. Corp members who do not have a high school diploma are required to enroll in a GED program. Many receive college credit for their coursework from the University of New Mexico-Taos. When they complete their commitment, they receive AmeriCorps awards to continue their education. Eighty percent of RMYC's graduates go on to either a job or education opportunity.

"All young people want to succeed at something," said Carl Colonius, Executive Director of the RMYC. "They just need options and an environment that supports them while still holding them accountable for their actions."

#### DISCUSSION IDEAS

All of the communities in this section have found innovative ways to engage youth and support their aspirations. Some of their methods require time and commitment, but not a lot of money. What can your community do differently to support youth?

## CONCLUSION

Youth learn to be community leaders the same way adults do – by taking on tasks and completing them, gaining a sense of responsibility, and taking ownership of their work. Youth invariably rise to the expectations of others. If adults have high expectations and provide moral support, a helping hand, and understanding, youth can achieve amazing goals. What can your community do to foster a sense of accomplishment among youth?

If we choose to, we can make New Mexico a state where every child is nurtured by caring adults, where every young person completes an education with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, where every young adult sets life goals and achieves them.

