

***Project Report***

# Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

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Prepared for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
by  
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**B**USINESS GROUPS, EDUCATORS, ECONOMISTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT INCREASINGLY AGREE that early childhood education is a crucial investment. Decades of research show that putting resources into early childhood pays for itself many times over, in increased earnings, decreased use of social services and a better-educated workforce.

New Mexico has been a laboratory for a great deal of innovative work in the recent years. But while important progress has been made there is a long way to go: New Mexico's children still lag behind those in other states on a range of measures, from poverty and teen births to academic performance and drug and alcohol abuse. In a time of economic hardship and uncertainty, how can New Mexico make the best use of its scarce resources to improve outcomes for its youngest children?

For the past two and a half years Viewpoint Learning, in partnership with New Mexico Voices for Children and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, has designed and facilitated a series of structured dialogues designed to address this question. These dialogues—an effort known as “CommonGround”—have engaged hundreds of New Mexicans in working through alternatives for early childhood development in order to identify approaches that both leaders and the public will support.

Working from the perspective of both leaders and the public is essential. To be successful and sustainable, significant reform must meet two tests:

1. It must be technically feasible (this is the role of leaders, experts and decision makers)
2. It must reflect citizens' underlying values and be able to win public support.

In other words, significant reform depends on engaging both leaders and the public, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches.

# Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

## Introduction

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This report summarizes findings and lessons learned from the New Mexico CommonGround dialogues hosted by Viewpoint Learning. We explore the process and findings of these dialogues, including the implications for New Mexico and for the Viewpoint Learning dialogue process both within and outside of New Mexico: in short, what participants learned and did, and what we learned and did.

CommonGround consisted of four steps, each building on the ones before:



**Step 1: Strategic Dialogue** with high-level leaders from business, education, early childhood, government, tribal communities, faith groups and others. The group worked to develop a range of possible early childhood scenarios for New Mexico to test with the public. (December 2009)

**Step 2: Choice-Dialogues** around the state (Albuquerque, Laguna Pueblo, Las Cruces, Farmington and Española) with highly diverse representative random samples of New Mexicans. These dialogues tested the scenarios initially developed in the Strategic Dialogue. The Choice-Dialogues revealed common ground around key values and identified approaches the public would be willing to support and under what conditions. (2010)

**Step 3: Interactive Briefings** with a wide range of leaders in each of the communities where Choice-Dialogues were held. Participants reflected the full range of New Mexico's ethnic diversity. Each group reviewed Choice-Dialogue findings and New Mexico KidsCount Data, identified key opportunities and challenges facing early childhood, and the implication of those findings for future work. (Early 2011)

**Step 4: Capacity Building/Action Planning Sessions** in which groups of early childhood stakeholders, advocates, parents, teachers, and community leaders gathered to:

- Strengthen dialogue skills useful in building relationships with more than the “usual suspects” around early childhood;
- Use the Choice-Dialogue findings to develop specific dialogue-based action plans to improve outcomes for early childhood in their community. (2011–early 2012)

These sessions led to a series of follow-on activities in each community, which are currently ongoing.

In addition, we collaborated whenever possible with Everyday Democracy, whose “Strong Starts” dialogue circles on early childhood issues in local communities unfolded in parallel with CommonGround. “Strong Starts” culminated in a policy session that brought together participants from all of their dialogue circles, and which built on the findings, process and materials from the CommonGround Choice-Dialogues. We continue to consult with Everyday Democracy on ways we can work together to increase dialogue around early childhood in New Mexico.

This report explores the movement through each of these steps, reflecting on the process as it evolved and the outcomes of the process for dialogue participants, the early childhood advocacy community, New Mexico policy-makers, and for Viewpoint Learning as an organization committed to dialogue as a path towards positive community change.





### STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: PROCESS

The CommonGround Strategic Dialogue was held in December of 2009. We consulted with New Mexico Voices for Children to bring together a broad range of stakeholders, including people from early childhood, K–12 and secondary education, government, business, native communities, health, and other sectors. Participants in the Strategic Dialogue began by developing a shared understanding of the challenges New Mexico is facing around early childhood outcomes, and then worked as a group to create a set of values-based *scenarios* (approaches to improve those outcomes) that they wanted to see tested with the public. Using examples of the sorts of values that might undergird a scenario, they created three initial draft scenarios. Viewpoint Learning took those, further developed them, and vetted them with people from a range of sectors for inclusion in the workbook.

### STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: RESULTS

Leaders who participated in the Strategic Dialogue were able to find a surprising amount of common ground both about the nature of the problems and about possible ways to resolve them. For example:

- a. *Improving early childhood development requires effort from both the public sector and the private sector—neither can do it alone.* Participants recognized the importance of government leadership and public money, but they also felt that progress would not be possible without business taking a major role. The question was how to create a system of shared responsibility.
- b. *We need more and better data—both to understand where New Mexico’s kids stand today and to measure the effectiveness of programs.* The importance of data and being able to accurately measure outcomes was especially emphasized by the business leaders in the group.
- c. *New Mexico’s distinct character and cultural richness are strengths but also present challenges.* Throughout the evening, participants struggled with how to leverage the state’s unique character, diversity, and complex history. All agreed that these are some of New Mexico’s greatest strengths, but there was also

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### Step 1: Strategic Dialogues

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a sense that they occasionally become an obstacle to confronting a culture of poverty and hinder efforts to make the transformative kinds of changes required to break the cycle of poverty. (As one participant put it, “sometimes we wallow in our uniqueness.”) Some spoke of the need to develop “two-way cultural competence” so that state-level systems respect local cultures and members of local cultures can better navigate mainstream culture.

*d. “Family” means more than “nuclear family.”* Participants took as a given that parents and families have a responsibility to care for their children’s education and well-being. They also repeatedly noted that the conventional framing of “family” as a nuclear family unit is inadequate for New Mexico, where extended families and other caregivers often play critical roles in kids’ lives. The state’s early childhood policies must reflect this reality.

*e. Much has already been done; much still lies ahead.* Several people expressed concern that discussions of early childhood often focus on the ways in which the state falls short. They noted that New Mexico has made big strides in recent years, both in establishing more effective and coordinated systems and in improving specific outcomes. New Mexico should build on those accomplishments rather than try to reinvent the wheel.



Participants came up with 5 basic themes or perspectives:

- I. Focus on the extended family*—including parents, grandparents and other adult caregivers—and emphasize empowering them to do their best for the children in their care.
- II. Focus on local communities*, making use of systems and facilities available through local and county governments, school districts, chambers of commerce, cultural centers and other local organizations.
- III. Focus on employers* in both the public and private sectors, by emphasizing the importance of early childhood development to the state’s economy and employers.
- IV. Focus on public/private partnerships* and develop a shared role for the public and private sector in promoting early childhood development.
- V. Focus on children*, mobilizing everyone in the state—including families, local communities and state government—to do everything in their power to ensure that all children are equally well supported.



*These general approaches and their pros and cons were later developed into the three scenarios that the public considered in the Choice-Dialogues.*

1. **SUPPORT STRUGGLING FAMILIES.** Strong families are the most important thing in raising successful kids.
2. **LOCAL COMMUNITIES PLAY A LEADING ROLE.** Kids are raised in communities, and everyone must play a role in helping them grow up healthy and successful—including families, schools, religious organizations, charities, employers, and local government.
3. **HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR ALL.** All kids in New Mexico deserve access to high quality early learning—no matter where they live, how rich or how poor.

(The final text of the three scenarios appears on page 10.)

In drafting these scenarios we focused primarily on early childhood and the needs of children and families: we did not push people to consider early childhood within the larger picture of other state and local programs, to prioritize early childhood against other issues, or to consider the implications for providers and others directly involved in providing early childhood support and services. This was because the first essential step in CommonGround was to understand the nuances of the public's thinking about early childhood: once we had gained this information we could set the stage for broader discussions (how to balance early childhood against other issues) as well as more granular ones (how to understand the implications for providers). These scenarios will be discussed further in the section on Choice-Dialogues.

### STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: LESSONS LEARNED

- **Limited follow-up:** Continued follow-up with stakeholders following the Strategic Dialogues was not as strong as it might have been. This might be due to some confusion between Viewpoint Learning and New Mexico Voices for Children about who was responsible for follow-up. Making this part of the agreement/ understanding between Viewpoint Learning and the partner organization might have resolved this confusion—for example, creating a specific template for all follow-up and communications requirements.
- **Early childhood is different from other issues.** Very early in the process, we noted that participants in the Strategic Dialogue struggled to come up with really different scenarios (that is, scenarios that some supported but others thought were a very bad idea). This degree of difficulty was unusual in our experience. In most policy issues we deal with, different values sets suggest significantly different scenarios: for example in a discussion on health care, some people's values may lead them to support a market-based approach that treats health care as a commodity, others' values lead them to support a government-run system that treats health care as an entitlement, while still others lean towards a status quo approach.



## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 1: Strategic Dialogues

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In the case of early childhood, however, the values sets were much more closely aligned. There were no participants contending openly that raising young children is solely the purview of parents and that the government and advocacy community should not interfere. And there were no participants saying that the status quo is acceptable and that no action is needed.

We considered whether this was a problem of recruitment—were some perspectives under-represented in the room, either because the project partners did not have these contacts or because they were invited but didn't come? However, this did not seem to be the case: instead we were seeing that people of different perspectives were all in agreement about many of the core values at stake. There are certainly values-differences underlying early childhood policy, in particular around the role of government versus the responsibility of parents. Some may feel churches, community organizations and individuals should support early childhood programs rather than the government or taxpayers. But the underlying value was consistent: the community does have a stake in children's well-being. Similarly, while people had different rationales for supporting taking action to support early childhood in New Mexico (for example, some believed there is a moral imperative to care for a community's children; others were more focused on the economic benefit to New Mexico when children thrive), there was strong consensus at every stage that the current situation is not acceptable. People drew distinctions around *who* should act, not around whether action is needed at all.

The shared value around supporting families of young children that emerged in the Strategic Dialogues continued to influence how the CommonGround process unfolded, through the Choice-Dialogues to the Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building sessions. The impact on the process and results is discussed throughout this report.



## STEP 2: CHOICE-DIALOGUES

### **CHOICE-DIALOGUES: PROCESS**

In the next phase of the project (starting in summer 2010), Viewpoint Learning conducted five day-long Choice-Dialogues on early childhood development in different locations around the state (Albuquerque, Laguna Pueblo, Las Cruces, Española, and Farmington). These dialogues were designed to explore public views on early childhood in a way that goes beyond polls and focus groups—exploring public priorities and the tradeoffs people are (and are not) willing to make once they have a chance to work through the choices and their consequences.

The Choice-Dialogues were conducted with a randomly selected, representative sample of New Mexicans. The groups included people of all ages, races and walks of life: rich and poor, parents and non-parents, liberal and conservative. Throughout we strove to have each individual group accurately reflect its community while obtaining an overall sample that reflected the entire population of New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

The sessions were professionally facilitated. While the sessions were conducted in English, we also provided Spanish language materials to accommodate participants who were more comfortable in that language; in addition at least one facilitator at every session was fluent in Spanish and provided translation or commentary as needed.

In addition to the professional facilitation, in this project for the first time we made use of youth facilitators at every dialogue session. The youth facilitators made an invaluable contribution to the success of the project, and it proved beneficial for many of the youth as well. Our experience and lessons learned from working with the youth facilitators is described in detail on pages 18-19.

As a starting point for the day's dialogue, participants used a workbook constructed around three scenarios based on leaders' conclusions in the Strategic Dialogues, along with input from educators, child development experts, advocates, and business and political leaders both in and outside New Mexico. The materials provided participants with a starting point only – people were encouraged to adapt and combine them as they saw fit. (For a general outline of a Choice-Dialogue, see the sidebar on page 11. The text of the three Choice-Dialogue scenarios appears on page 10.)

1. For more detail on participant recruitment and demographics, see page 16; complete demographic information on the Choice-Dialogue sample can be found in Viewpoint Learning's report, *The First Five Years*: [http://www.viewpointlearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/First\\_Five\\_Years.pdf](http://www.viewpointlearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/First_Five_Years.pdf)

## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 2: Choice-Dialogues

#### CHOICE-DIALOGUES: FINDINGS

The Choice-Dialogues revealed clear common ground held by people of a wide range of perspectives. The findings are discussed in detail in *The First Five Years* (available at: [http://www.viewpointlearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/First\\_Five\\_Years.pdf](http://www.viewpointlearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/First_Five_Years.pdf)). What follows is a brief summary:

- **Only a little information is needed—but that information is essential.**
  - Most New Mexicans, even those with kids, have not given much thought to early childhood, and much of the information presented during the dialogue was surprising to participants. In follow-up surveys, many dialogue participants (26% of those responding to the follow-up survey) felt that learning about the key role that the early years play in future success was one of the most important things about the dialogues. Before the dialogues, 67% of participants felt that the first five years of a child's life were the most important for shaping his/her future; this increased to 86% after the dialogue, and 90% at follow-up.
  - Many participants were not aware of how poorly New Mexico children are doing on key indicators compared with other states—in the dialogues and in follow-up surveys participants expressed surprise that New Mexico is “near the bottom” in so many critical early childhood outcomes. In addition, they were surprised that this information is not more widely known.
  - Dialogue participants were also surprised to learn how the early childhood system works (or doesn't work). For many of them, the mix of programming in place for early childhood was new

### THREE SCENARIOS

#### 1. SUPPORT STRUGGLING FAMILIES

*Strong families are the most important thing in raising successful kids.*

Instead of focusing on kids alone, we will focus on supporting families—especially low-income families who face the greatest barriers to creating stable and healthy home environments for their babies and young children. This will include not just parents, but everyone in the family who is helping take care of the kids.

We will expand existing programs and make them more widely available to the families who qualify. And we will do more to help families become financially stable and earn enough to provide what their kids need.

We will invest our dollars to help New Mexico families who are struggling to give their kids a better life.

#### 2. LOCAL COMMUNITIES PLAY A LEADING ROLE

*Kids are raised in communities, and everyone must play a role in helping them grow up healthy and successful—including families, schools, religious organizations, charities, employers, and local government.*

Instead of the state deciding what new programs to put in place, each of New Mexico's unique local communities—a small town, tribal community, or a neighborhood in a larger city—will come up with their own plan to improve early childhood care and education.

Every community will get some money from the state, with poorer communities getting more per child. Each individual community will work together to decide how to spend that money and what resources they can add.

Communities will be able to emphasize their values, priorities and traditions when it comes to raising young kids.

#### 3. HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR ALL

*All kids in New Mexico deserve access to high quality early learning—no matter where they live, how rich or how poor.*

Instead of setting up a lot of different programs that vary from place to place and may or may not work, we'll invest our dollars in the early care and learning programs that research shows do the most for young kids. We will make these programs available to all kids in the state so that no one falls behind.

Kids will be able to start school at age 4 with a year of preschool before Kindergarten. For families with younger children (birth to age 3) high quality preschool and childcare will be made more available and affordable.

information; however, there was widespread dismay at the gaps in services for children and families, and participants left the dialogue with a new understanding that the current system isn't meeting the needs of the youngest New Mexicans.

- Having learned about the importance of the early childhood years, a number of participants were surprised, and many more were concerned, about how little funding is directed towards these years.

### • *What Participants Support*

After being exposed to basic information about early childhood, there was substantial agreement about the way forward. That being said, there were also differences in some key areas. These are summarized below. Taken together, the similarities and differences provide insight into how best to advocate for changes in the early childhood systems in New Mexico.

- ***Doing nothing is not an option.*** When provided some basic information (the importance of age 0–5 as a developmental window, how little New Mexico spends on early childhood, and the state's poor early childhood outcomes), people were quick to conclude that doing nothing is not an option. For many participants, this was an “aha” moment; for others it simply reinforced and strengthened their commitment to addressing this issue.
- ***Think local.*** Participants believed local communities are best suited to develop and run early childhood programs and services. In fact, participants' support for local communities taking a leading role in decisions about early childhood increased from before the dialogue to after, and increased even more at follow-up. This is in part due to serious mistrust of the state government, but it also reflects a strong sense of community strength and uniqueness.

While this was the majority opinion, there were some dissenters—people who expressed strong distrust of others when it concerns children and who didn't believe that their communities, or their local governments, had the capacity and/or goodwill to “do the right thing.” Some of these people were equally distrustful of state government, but others felt the state was in a better position to make fair and responsible

### BASIC OUTLINE OF A CHOICE-DIALOGUE

All Choice-Dialogues follow a similar sequence.<sup>2</sup>

- On entering the room, participants are given a preliminary questionnaire to assess their opinions about key issues before they are exposed to any background or other information. When appropriate these findings are compared with poll data from the general population to assess the representativeness of the sample.
- Once the dialogue begins participants hear a statement of the issue and some basic background information.
- Participants are asked to make an initial judgment of the scenarios.
- Participants briefly introduce themselves to the group, stating their name and one thing about the issue that concerns them.
- Working in small groups of 8-10, participants create a vision for the future (“What would we like early childhood in New Mexico to look like 10 years from now?”) They use the scenarios (and especially the pros and cons) as a starting point for this discussion.
- Each small group reports back its findings, and all participants meet in plenary discussion to map out a common ground vision for the future.
- Over lunch, participants return to their small groups to discuss what steps they would be willing to take to move towards the common ground vision they have just defined. How to pay for changes that need to be made is often a key component.
- After lunch, each small group again reports back, and participants work together in plenary to map out a common ground around how to get to the future we want.
- Participants fill out a longer more detailed questionnaire that includes
- Participants are asked for a final comment: what did they find surprising in the day's discussion, and what should leaders keep in mind going forward?

2: As the dialogues progressed we made several adjustments and mid-course corrections in the process to help it work better with these very distinct communities and make best use of the added capacity provided by the youth. For more detail, see page 17 and “Evolution of the Project Design” (pages 21-22).



## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 2: Choice-Dialogues

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decisions—this was particularly true regarding funding decisions. In general, this distrust of the local community was stronger in Albuquerque than in any of the other dialogue sites, which perhaps reflects a difference between an urban community where people are less connected to their neighbors and a rural community where people tend to know each other better.

- ***The importance of universality.*** Across all five communities, it became clear that the principle of universality is key to public support for early childhood programs. People believe all children would benefit from and should have access to quality programs—especially preschool for the state’s 4 year olds—although better-off families may have to pay more for that access. Programs that are only for poor, disadvantaged children and families are not likely to gain strong public support. This sentiment grew stronger after people engaged

in the dialogues, with fewer participants supporting an approach that focused primarily on struggling families. However, at follow-up there was substantially more support for supporting struggling families than even before the dialogues.

The reasons participants gave for supporting families universally fell into two seemingly opposite camps. There were those who felt that people shouldn’t be “penalized” for not being poor—that is, they felt that providing high quality programs only to families with the highest need was unfair to the rest, because all children deserved these resources. On the other side were people who felt that providing programs focused on those with the highest needs has the potential to stigmatize such supports and undermine the effectiveness of these programs. Regardless of how it was framed, there was a clear desire for “fairness” in the system, which translated almost invariably into a demand for a universal system that served all families. What is interesting in this is that the dialogue process, plus the information provided, was able to bridge across very different perspectives and find “common ground.”

- ***Support families.*** Participants emphasized that any early childhood program must support families, not undermine them. Many did not feel this was currently the case with programs they were aware of or had experienced. Many described feeling judged, vulnerable, and sometimes condescended to or left out due to language or other barriers. This speaks to the point above about universality. The programs that people discussed as being unsupportive of families were often programs targeted at families in need, and there was a sense that such programs were often invasive and not respectful. On the other side of this, however, was a sentiment expressed by a small but vocal minority of participants—that parents were ultimately responsible for their children’s well-being and that parents were to blame for the lack of success rather than the system; these participants felt that perhaps “the system” needed to hold these parents accountable. Other participants expressed dismay that we needed early childhood programs at all, believing that the best place for young children was at home with their parents and that anything else was second-best. Once again, across very different beliefs and experiences, by the end of the dialogues the group was able to find common ground in the sentiment that parents must be better supported so that they can better support their children.



- **Ambivalence about home visiting.** New Mexicans in these dialogues were concerned that home visits could be intrusive, culturally insensitive and expose families to judgment from outsiders. While people supported parent coaching and helping parents connect to available resources, a number of conditions had to be met before they would support these activities in the context of a home visit. In particular they stressed making the program optional and available to all, employing culturally sensitive providers from the community, and having the option to meet in a neutral space. This particular issue became controversial among early childhood advocates, some of whom had difficulty accepting the fact that the general population didn't wholeheartedly embrace the positive potential of home visiting.<sup>3</sup> This is discussed more in the section on Capacity Building, below.
- **New Mexico needs to invest more in early childhood.** People do not believe the state and local communities are doing enough. After learning more about current outcomes, participants quickly come to feel a sense of urgency and a need to take action on this important issue. While it was clear that participants felt that collective action had to be taken, there was not consensus on what, exactly, should be done. After the dialogues there was a small decrease in the number of people who felt that "we" should spend more money on early childhood programs and services for children under six (and the post-dialogue decrease was mirrored at follow-up); this is in contrast to people's willingness to pay more in taxes to fund these programs and services, which was high both before and after the dialogues. At follow-up, however, the willingness to pay more in taxes decreased somewhat.

The change in thinking that more money should be spent might be connected to the importance that participants attributed to certain variables in a child's life. For example, at the end of the dialogues participants agreed that attending a good preschool is on the whole important for children: "somewhat important" for three year-olds, and closer to "very important" for four year-olds. But it was at the bottom of the list (above only having a stay-at-home parent). The perceived importance of good health care, having parents read to them, neighborhood conditions, family stability, and having other children to play with were all rated as more important than attending a good preschool and the perceived importance of all of these except having other children to play with increased at follow-up. On the other hand, the perceived importance of being in an organized preschool program did **not** increase between the dialogue and follow-up. This suggests participants increasingly valued things outside of what are typically thought of as "early childhood programs and services" and, perhaps, came to a more holistic and integrated understanding of what children need to thrive.

### CHOICE-DIALOGUES: RESULTS

- **Increased capacity of youth facilitators.** The youth facilitators described working with CommonGround and OVOC as a valuable learning experience and appreciated having the opportunity to travel around the state and learn from Viewpoint Learning staff, each other and a wide range of New Mexicans. Not only did they become better and more experienced facilitators in the process, they also got hands-on



3. We found that advocates often had difficulty hearing challenging information and using it strategically (see page 38).

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### Step 2: Choice-Dialogues

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experience with how to build a bridge between communities and leadership, and several said they planned to build on that knowledge in the future. Since the dialogues ended, some of the youth have gone on to complete college, and others are now working actively with early childhood organizations around the state. (See pages 17-18 for more on the youth and their experiences.)

- ***Changes for Choice-Dialogue participants.*** In follow-up surveys, dialogue participants almost universally described the experience very positively. One of the overwhelming responses to the question about what surprised them in the dialogue was that not only were they surprised that so many people cared enough about children in the state to commit an entire day to discussing the issue, they were also surprised that such a diverse group was able to have meaningful and productive discussion on the topic. This point was underscored by the fact that almost half of the participants (44%) did not have children living at home, and of those who did, only 14% had very young children (five or under) at home. This statistic is particularly important in interpreting the findings of the dialogues, highlighting the fact that these results reflect the views of even those who are not currently raising young children—in other words, this is likely to be a cross section of the voting population.



Choice-Dialogues are not interventions intended to mobilize participants or turn them into advocates; rather they are designed to gather information about what the public really believes, where there is common ground around an issue (that is, what the general public is likely to support), and how people respond to information about the issue. But while they weren't designed specifically to engage and mobilize the participants, follow-up data suggests that they did, in fact, lead to changes in perceptions, beliefs, and behavior in relationship to early childhood.

In follow-up surveys, months after the sessions, participants reported being more aware, more attentive and in many cases taking action to stay informed about early childhood policy. Many people took workbooks (sometimes several) home from the dialogue to share with friends or family. Immediately after the dialogues, almost all participants who responded to the follow-up survey were talking with family, friends, and co-workers about what they learned in the dialogues. Months later, the majority of respondents were continuing to talk with others. More than half of the survey respondents said that they were doing something different because of their participation in the dialogues—the majority of them discussed changes they made in their personal lives related to interactions with and decisions about young children. For example, they were reading more to their children, or thinking differently about how to choose childcare. Interestingly, almost half of the respondents who were doing something different talked about engaging in some sort of advocacy related to early childhood, particularly at the local community level, although some mentioned increased attention to state-level politics as related to early childhood. As one said, “I look at the things that the people that were elected said they would do. Where they would get their money and their positions on child care and education.” One respondent mentioned trying to apply the dialogue principles broadly to her interactions with others in order to build common ground.

While participants pointed to the new information about early childhood as one factor in the changes they experienced, they also suggested that the experience of the dialogue was transformative. Spending time having in-depth discussion about an issue with others who were often very different from them demonstrated that people could come together across their differences and work together to effect change.

- **Use of findings:** the Choice-Dialogue Findings were distributed widely in the months following the dialogues, including:
  - To legislators at the start of the 2011 legislative session.<sup>4</sup>
  - At a major conference on early childhood in Albuquerque.
  - At a large-scale action planning session run by Everyday Democracy, during which the scenarios were adapted for use by more than 100 “Strong Starts” dialogue circle participants from the Albuquerque area.
  - At each of the 5 Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building sessions (described later in this report).
  - With the New Mexico Business Partnership and New Mexico First in advance of their dialogues.
  - Online on the CommonGround and Viewpoint Learning web sites.



### CHOICE-DIALOGUES: LESSONS LEARNED

- **People are motivated to participate.** Viewpoint Learning typically over-recruits for Choice-Dialogues, because there is usually a substantial no-show rate. This wasn’t as true in New Mexico, where not only did the vast majority of confirmed participants come to the dialogue, but a number of them tried to bring additional people. To some extent this might be reflective of the high poverty rates in New Mexico, where the \$150 stipend was meaningful for many participants. However, the general appeal of the topic—early childhood—was likely an equally compelling draw.
- **Importance of local connections, especially in Native American communities:** We conducted two dialogues in communities with sizable Native American populations—Laguna Pueblo and Farmington—and the two communities showed a stark contrast. In Laguna where the population (and the dialogue participants) were 100% Native, we relied on youth facilitators from the area to broker participation with elders and the community. In Farmington, where we did not have this kind of support, we relied on a market research company, only to discover the day before the dialogue that they had been unable to reach more than a handful of Native American participants. This problem might have been averted if we had had more advance local contacts in Farmington (including local youth facilitators), who could have alerted us to the lay of the land, including where people live and how to access communities that are off the “grid” of the market research companies.<sup>5</sup> (It might even have been possible for local youth facilitators to fill the same role that the Laguna youth did so successfully in the Pueblo dialogues).

4. For a further discussion of Viewpoint Learning Vice President Heidi Gantwerk’s day at the Roundhouse, see page 22.

5. In response to the shortfall in the Farmington Choice-Dialogue, we conducted an additional capacity building session in Shiprock, in which almost all the participants were Navajo.

## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 2: Choice-Dialogues

#### DIVERSITY AND PARTICIPATION

The Choice-Dialogues were conducted with a randomly selected sample of community members in five New Mexico communities: Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Farmington, Laguna Pueblo, and Española. Dialogue participation ranged from a low of 39 in Laguna to a high of 45 in both Española and Albuquerque.

In three of these communities the random sample was relatively representative of the community demographics (with Hispanics somewhat under-represented). However, this was not the case in Farmington and Española. In Farmington, Native Americans were substantially under-represented—the 2010 Census estimates that the Native American population in Farmington is about 27%, but under five percent (4.8%) of the Farmington Choice-Dialogue participants identified as Native American. In Española, Hispanics make up 83% of the population, but only 67% of Choice-Dialogue participants identified as Hispanic. This was in part the result of the need to reflect both community demographics and as accurate a statewide picture as possible: by the time of the Española dialogue, whites were significantly under-represented in the overall sample when compared to the New Mexico population as a whole. In order to bring the overall sample in line with state demographics, we recruited several additional white participants for the Española dialogue.

- *There is public support for improving the way we support young children and their families.* The dialogues brought this point home very clearly—the public wants young children to have a better start in life. There is not broad agreement on what that should look like, but there is consensus that it is necessary. Participants continued to discuss the issues, and some mobilized for change in their personal lives and beyond, well after the dialogues had ended. It is telling that support for all three dialogue scenarios was substantially higher at follow-up than at either just before or just after the dialogue. Perhaps this reflects a growing desire to do something—anything—as people reflected on the dialogues, spoke with others, and paid more attention to the issue in the weeks that followed the dialogues.
- *Any reform effort must embrace multiple strategies, and must be supportive of families.* It is clear that there is not a silver bullet solution for improving New Mexico's substandard early childhood outcomes. Not only do approaches need to be tailored to and by communities, but within communities people need to have choices. People expressed dismay at the funding level allocated to early childhood, but they were cautious about just funding more programs—ultimately, they said, families need to be at the center of early childhood reform efforts. This meant supporting families to do a better job at parenting by providing universal and respectful support, and having a range of options from which families can choose. The message was clear: people don't want to be judged by the professionals, and they don't want to be told what to do with regards to their children.
- *People with very different ideas can have productive discussions about how to address the gaps in the early childhood system.* Participants were consistently surprised and encouraged by the effectiveness of the dialogue process for finding common ground. These lessons can be extended not only to advocacy strategy, but also to work with the early childhood advocacy community itself, which often finds itself at odds internally. The public is looking to the experts to help them understand the issues—the dialogues demonstrated that with good, consistent information, people are willing to engage and mobilize. However, if the “experts” are at odds, it will be difficult to mobilize towards a shared vision. A structured dialogue process with advocates might be an effective way to establish stable common ground.
- *Tradeoffs of a limited focus.* As discussed above in the section about the Strategic Dialogues, the focus on early childhood, while necessary at this phase of the game, limited what it was possible to learn about how the public prioritizes early childhood within a broader spectrum of issues, and how they respond to the complexities of the broader early childhood systems. This should be addressed in future work. Now that there is more understanding and momentum around the issue of early childhood, it would be useful to broaden the discussion to consider how the public and leaders view the importance and benefit of Early Childhood in a larger picture of state and local programs. While some information was included on the state budget, and people were clear that they wanted more spent on early childhood, there were few specific programs people wanted to cut. But the dialogues did not really ask people to consider what their priorities were, aside from early childhood.



Now that we have a much clearer sense of what sorts of approaches to early childhood people would support, a next round of dialogues might consider asking people if those approaches might be more important than say, health care reform, business development, or other policies that might commandeer time, attention, and funding instead. Likewise, what does the public think about which policies might do the most to improve outcomes for New Mexico in the long term? Would improving early childhood be listed at the top, or would it fall to a lower priority as the scope of what is included in the discussion broadens? Having this information would also be extremely useful to advocates, who sometimes cannot understand why people do not see the obvious benefit and imperative to investing in early childhood.

Similarly, understanding how the public understands and navigates some of the more subtle issues within the early childhood system might help to better frame the policy issues. For example, there is an underlying conflict between public education systems and private early childhood providers—the fear being that if early childhood education is brought into the public system, private providers would be put out of business. This became a divisive issue during the last legislative session, and perhaps points to an area where better understanding the values-differences at stake would help lead to more sustainable solutions.

- ***Advocates and the strategic use of information.***

Finally, the reactions of early childhood advocates in the dialogues, and then in debriefing the findings, revealed additional challenges. The purpose of the CommonGround Dialogue process is to develop an understanding of how participants' views on complex issues change as they learn about the issue, providing a basis for anticipating how the broader public will resolve issues once they have the opportunity to come to grips with them, and providing insight into how best to lead such a learning process on a larger scale. The early childhood advocacy community struggled to integrate this learning into their advocacy efforts. Some advocates approached the Choice-Dialogues as a learning opportunity for the participants rather than a learning opportunity for themselves—that is, they saw the dialogues as an opportunity to provide more information about why the public should support early childhood policy reform rather than for learning how they might change their advocacy strategies. As we saw how useful it would be for advocates to have access to a wider range of tools, we began to consider how to add that capacity building element into later phases of the project.

### ADJUSTMENTS IN THE CHOICE-DIALOGUE PROCESS

Beginning with the youth facilitator training session and continuing through the Choice-Dialogues we made some changes in the process. These were made at the suggestion of the project evaluator.

- **Tracking participation in breakout sessions.**

We asked the youth facilitators to keep track of how much each participant took part in the small group breakout sessions. In addition to providing a helpful supplement to their notes in reporting, this let the youth facilitators see quickly when an individual began to dominate the discussion and intervene appropriately.

- **Rotating the order of scenarios.**

Because of a concern that participants' response to the scenarios was affected by the order in which they discussed them, we asked each breakout group to discuss the three scenarios in a different order. Not only did this eliminate a potential source of bias, we also discovered that it helped small groups focus on their own discussion more effectively, as they were no longer distracted by hearing a neighboring group discussing the same topic at the same time. This adjustment has now become standard procedure for Choice-Dialogues.

#### YOUTH FACILITATORS

In addition to the professional facilitators that are part of every Choice-Dialogue, in this project for the first time Viewpoint Learning also enlisted the help of a group of youth facilitators—older teens and young adults from four of the five communities where Choice-Dialogues were held. (Because of an error by New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community, which recruited the young people, there were no youth facilitators from Farmington.) All of the youth facilitators were people of color, many had some facilitation experience, and all had served as leaders in their home communities.

The group of 16 youth went through a two-day training in advance of the Choice-Dialogues: In this session the youth practiced dialogue skills, learned about the Choice-Dialogue process and provided valuable feedback on the dialogue design and materials. Their comments on the materials were especially insightful: they identified pieces of background information that were especially powerful or hard to understand; they provided a reality check for how certain framings would play in their home communities (for example noting childrearing decisions where grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family members often played as big a role as parents); they suggested that we include a “thank you” page in the printed materials.

Overall, these young people brought great value to the project. Not only did they help facilitate the small groups during the Choice-Dialogues, they also provided helpful advance insight into the economic and social landscape of the communities we visited and insight into how that played out in participants’ discussions. And they acted as ambassadors for the project before, during and after the Choice-Dialogues.

In addition to local insight and cultural competency they brought energy, humor and lively observations to every session. We also saw growth in many of the youth themselves, as they improved their skills and got a sense of how they could have a real impact on their communities. Some of the youth have gone on to complete college, others are now working actively with early childhood organizations around the state.



#### Help with recruiting:

The youth were especially helpful when it came to recruiting participants in some communities. In particular, the Choice-Dialogue session on the Laguna Pueblo could not have taken place without the work of the youth from that area. In most cases, Viewpoint Learning relies on market research companies to recruit the sample of participants who take part in Choice-Dialogues. But operating on Pueblo land presents unique challenges: not only do market research companies not operate on the Pueblo, but the nature of tribal communities makes it especially important that leaders be aware of and comfortable with the project.



The youth facilitators from Laguna took on the job of recruiting participants, talking with residents, explaining the purpose of the dialogue and getting the buy-in from local leadership that was essential to bringing participants to the table and allowing the session to go forward.

#### **Growth and development:**

The youth were bright, engaged and energetic. We were impressed throughout by their ability to juggle school, families, jobs, children (their own as well as siblings, nieces/nephews and other family members) and many other responsibilities while working with us.

The youth facilitators described working with CommonGround and OVOC as a valuable learning experience. Some had been challenged at first as facilitators to balance their own strongly held opinions and desire to make a difference with the need to understand and respect the perspectives that others brought into the room. Several told us they had learned a great deal from the opportunity to listen to new perspectives, and we were impressed with their ability to maintain their composure even when confronted with ideas that they found upsetting or simply wrong-headed.

Some have gone on to complete college, others are now working actively with early childhood organizations around the state.



#### **Working with youth:**

We learned several practical things about working with youth. For example: Don't rely on phone or email to get in touch—if you need a reply, text! Do not be surprised to receive replies at odd hours. Communication happens through third parties: the youth frequently passed messages through each other rather than closing the loop with us directly. When planning a meeting, order less coffee and more energy drinks (and more snacks are always welcome!)







## EVOLUTION OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

**T**HE END OF THE CHOICE-DIALOGUES marked the CommonGround project's shift from a research and exploration phase to broadening understanding, planning and strategy. From the very beginning of the project, we had been regularly assessing and evaluating each stage of our work to make midcourse corrections. After analysis of the Choice-Dialogues, and consultations with our local partner (New Mexico Voices for Children), independent evaluator (Marah Moore at i2i) and with support from Kellogg Foundation staff, we decided to make a number of adjustments to increase the impact of our work. Our original plan was to build on the Choice-Dialogues with two Stakeholder Dialogues with state leaders in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. A number of factors led us to revise this original design and focus more intensely on local communities and local leaders. In particular:

- **Strength of local communities.** We were powerfully struck in the Choice-Dialogues by the local pride and distinct individual character of each New Mexico community. In each dialogue, participants expressed their sense of responsibility (and capability) to improve early childhood outcomes locally, while agreeing on the need to advocate at the state level for change. It was our belief that giving local officials, advocates, community and civic leaders and others the tools to thoughtfully engage with their leaders and state representatives would be more valuable than a series of presentations to busy and distracted legislators and the usual suspects involved in lobbying for early childhood in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.
- **Part time legislature.** In addition, the fact that New Mexico has a part time legislature means that many local leaders and advocates have a great deal of contact with their state representatives, far more than in states with full-time legislatures. Building a knowledge base about challenges facing young children and families, and approaches the public and leaders would support, gave our local participants a strong basis for engagement with their state legislators, engagement that will last long beyond this project.
- **Political environment.** When the project began in 2009, New Mexico had a governor and a lieutenant governor with a strong commitment to early childhood. Our initial assumption was that the findings would provide important input for the Children's Cabinet and the Legislature to improve outcomes for early childhood. However, over the course of the project, both the governor and lieutenant governor left office, and the state's economic outlook worsened. The current governor does not have the same focus on early childhood. Given the

# Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

## Evolution of the Project Design



### LOBBYING AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

At the start of the 2011 legislative session, Viewpoint Learning VP Heidi Gantwerk and a representative from New Mexico Voices for Children went to lobby legislators at the Roundhouse. What they encountered was a case study in preaching to the choir. The pair dashed around the Roundhouse, along with scores of other advocates lobbying for their own issues. Collaring people in their offices, hallways, stairwells and elevators, they spoke with a dozen legislators and staffers in the space of a few hours.

The effectiveness of these encounters was mixed. Those who were already supporters of early childhood issues were receptive and took in the information presented. Those who were not already tuned in to early childhood were civil but showed no sign that the encounter changed their perspective. And as soon as Heidi and her colleague ended one conversation, their places were immediately taken by the next set of advocates eager for their chance to be heard. As the day went on it became clear that given the number of issues jostling for attention any one issue—especially anything new or challenging—had little hope of being heard in the tumult.

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shifts in Santa Fe, we concluded it would be more effective to focus instead directly on local communities.

- **Convening fatigue.** Leaders and advocates we spoke with in Albuquerque and Santa Fe are invited to innumerable meetings—as one person remarked, there seems to be another convening every month, with many of the same faces in the room. This sense of “here we are again” can make it difficult to build momentum or break out of established patterns. By contrast, away from the Albuquerque/Santa Fe corridor, there was a real hunger for more opportunities to meet and network.
- **Too much noise at the state level.** Viewpoint Learning Vice-President Heidi Gantwerk’s experience lobbying at the Roundhouse (see sidebar) showed the limitations of the traditional “straight to the policymakers” approach. Given the number of issues jostling for attention in a limited time, any one issue—especially anything new or challenging—had little hope of being heard.
- **Advocacy community.** As noted in the previous section the early childhood advocacy community in New Mexico had limited experience in garnering and integrating the type of nuanced information that came out of the Choice-Dialogues. Advocates’ response to concerns or lack of support is often to argue that those who disagree are wrong and pump in more information that supports the issue they are advocating for, or else to appeal for policy change on emotional grounds. Neither of these approaches recognizes and responds to the underlying fears, concerns, and experiences of the broader community.

Accordingly, we replaced the two Stakeholder Dialogues with five **Interactive Briefings**: one in each of the Choice-Dialogue communities. These 3-hour sessions brought together a range of local leaders, including early childhood providers and advocates, educators, business leaders, faith leaders, elected officials and others, as well as citizen participants from the Choice-Dialogues.

Together these participants reviewed the Choice-Dialogue findings and identified key opportunities and challenges they suggested for improving early childhood in their community and statewide.

We also added daylong **Capacity Building/Action Planning** sessions in each of the five locations. These had two major goals:

- **Strengthening skills for engaging more than the usual suspects.** These sessions provided leaders with a set of dialogue-based tools that could help build bridges to individuals and sectors with different priorities. Participants in these sessions spent several hours practicing dialogue—uncovering assumptions, listening with empathy, searching for common ground.
- **Defining concrete next steps.** To develop concrete next steps, participants were then asked to identify one or two high-leverage goals that were 1) grounded in the Choice-Dialogue findings and KidsCount research and 2) used dialogue techniques to improve outcomes for early childhood in their community and across the state. Each group designed unique projects that made sense for their community, and these projects are now being implemented.



### STEP 3: INTERACTIVE BRIEFINGS

#### **INTERACTIVE BRIEFINGS: PROCESS**

The Interactive Briefings, convened with local partners, brought together a wide range of leaders in each of the communities where Choice-Dialogues had been held.<sup>6</sup> These groups were highly diverse (with the exception of Laguna Pueblo, where participants were mostly Native American). In addition to early childhood experts and advocates, educators, and people from foundations and social service organizations, there were also a number of attendees who were not directly connected to early childhood and their participation added depth and perspective.

#### **INTERACTIVE BRIEFINGS: RESULTS**

In all five briefings participants identified a similar set of important opportunities based on the Choice-Dialogue research and their own experience:

- ***There is widespread common ground around providing support for children.*** As one participant put it, “the well-being of kids is a non-partisan issue.”
- ***Parents are a constituency that want the best for their kids and can be mobilized.*** Doing so will require targeted information to help them move from a personal to a systemic understanding of early childhood. Participants were especially struck by the speed with which people absorbed a few key pieces information and concluded that something significant had to change. They concluded that bringing people up to speed on these key points must be the starting point for any effort to broaden engagement around early childhood.
- ***Businesses can be enlisted to support early childhood efforts in their communities.*** It is important that businesses be enlisted through dialogue and engagement—the Choice-Dialogue findings made it clear that there is little public appetite for imposing mandates on businesses. But they also made clear that uncovering shared common ground about the long-term benefits of early childhood would make it easier to enlist businesses as willing partners.

6. The Albuquerque Interactive Briefing was held in conjunction with New Mexico Voices for Children's December 2010 convening on early childhood education and development: *From Birth to Success*.



## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 3: Interactive Briefings

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- ***Build on community.*** New Mexico has strong communities with rich traditions: tapping into this sense of community is the most effective way of improving early childhood outcomes.
- ***Many important early childhood resources are already in place.*** Many Interactive Briefing participants were surprised and pleased at the amount of work already going forward around early childhood in their communities—especially the number of people and organizations they did not already know. They spoke urgently of the need for networking and collaboration among these people and organizations, something that currently isn't happening effectively at the local level.
- ***We need to broaden the conversation.*** Most Interactive Briefing participants came from the sectors of early childhood, K–12 education, foundations, and social services. There were also a number of attendees who were not directly connected to early childhood—including several Choice-Dialogue participants—and their participation added depth and perspective. Many 'insiders' in these sessions recognized the need to broaden their constituency and find ways of bringing business leaders, health care leaders, civic and community leaders and residents without young children to the table.

(Lessons learned around the Interactive Briefings appear at the end of the next section.)





### STEP 4: CAPACITY BUILDING/ACTION PLANNING

#### **CAPACITY BUILDING/ACTION PLANNING: PROCESS**

In each of the five communities, and with the same local partners, we next convened daylong sessions that built on the conclusions of the Interactive Briefings and the earlier Choice-Dialogues. In these sessions, groups of early childhood development stakeholders, advocates, parents, teachers, and community leaders gathered to strengthen dialogue skills and develop specific dialogue-based action plans to improve outcomes for early childhood in their community. A small amount of seed funding was offered to each community to implement their action plan.

Participants in the Capacity Building sessions were recruited by local partners. We emphasized the importance of inviting a wide range of participants to make sure that the conversation included more than the usual early childhood players. The first part of the session emphasized the basics of dialogue: what it is (and is not), common misconceptions about it, when and how to use it, and role playing exercises to test out ways participants might put it into practice. After a brief presentation on the findings of the Choice-Dialogues, the training moved on to the practical question of how to use dialogue to better understand and navigate the different points of view and heightened emotions around the issue of early childhood. The second part of the day was devoted to action planning: what did participants feel was most needed to advance early childhood in New Mexico and their community, identifying and prioritizing dialogue based initiatives, and deciding on next steps.

#### **CAPACITY BUILDING/ACTION PLANNING: RESULTS**

##### ***Laguna Pueblo Action Plan:***

- ***Laguna Children and Families:*** Develop a community-based vision of early childhood in Laguna. Engage tribal leaders, early childhood advocates, fatherhood council members, parents and families to create a vision for early childhood that informs the development and implementation of programs for children and families on the Pueblo, and informs (and expedites) the construction of a new early childhood facility. The group has met and has begun planning and implementing a strategy of dialogues in each of Laguna's seven villages, beginning with Laguna Village. They have strong support from tribal leaders and plan to

## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 4: Capacity Building/Action Planning

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train facilitators in dialogue in order to create an “entirely new way of talking about early childhood.”

- ***New Mexico Native American Early Childhood Outreach Initiative:*** The participants from the Laguna session will initiate a cross-pueblo dialogue, mapping out all early childhood activities, sharing best practices and identifying critical issues for joint advocacy. In particular the group will focus on raising funds for early childhood programs on the Pueblos and in raising awareness among the Native population of the importance of early childhood and the benefit of high quality programs for young children and families. They have sent representatives to a number of statewide conferences since the Capacity Building/Action Planning session and are currently in talks with other Pueblos, including Akima. They report seeing an increase in the perception that early childhood is critical and is one important way to improve education outcomes in K-12, which is a significant concern.
- ***Since then...*** As mentioned earlier, after the Capacity Building session Ruth Kie pushed for a collaborative planning process around early childhood and youth, which is currently underway. She spearheaded an effort in which several different agencies (including social services, etc.) worked together to apply for a SAMHSA grant to work with children and families to prevent substance abuse and mental illness, which was funded to the tune of \$840,000. They are now developing plans for another collaborative effort to map all existing resources and services for tribal families, identify the gaps and plan for how to address those gaps.

#### ***Farmington Action Plan***

- ***Early Childhood Development Coalition for San Juan County:*** A broad coalition made up of early childhood stakeholders, educators, library staff and others in San Juan county will function through San Juan County Safe Communities Initiative “Strengthening Families.” The group will provide outreach to the community and will work to engage the business community and elected officials in identifying shared priorities and promoting legislative change to benefit early childhood. The group has already begun this work.
- ***Since then...*** The Farmington/San Juan County coalition has met several times to follow up on its plans for early childhood in the region,



and local leaders report that the lines of communication are clearer between all parties that took part in the Capacity Building. The Farmington Public Library, led by Flo Trujillo, has once again stepped forward as a community leader. Some of the seed money has been used to offer free programs using “Every Child Ready to Read” training for parents, caregivers and educators. The library has also sponsored the El Dia De Los Niños/El Dia de Los Libros: an international celebration that emphasizes the importance of advocating literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The library has also been successful in receiving a \$2,000 grant from Target and \$5,000 from ConocoPhillips for early childhood development. Flo Trujillo and the coalition are also continuing to develop relationships with the Shiprock Agency Chapter Houses to promote early childhood programs and youth mentoring.

#### *Las Cruces Action Plan*

- ***A Community Plan for Early Literacy:***

Initially the Las Cruces group agreed to form a collaborative around redefining home visiting for Doña Ana County, but in subsequent discussion they decided that a more practical first step would be to focus on early literacy. They have agreed to design and run community dialogues in several of the county’s struggling communities about how they define early literacy and what sort of supports would help them to improve outcomes. They then hope to work with providers and funders to develop early learning programs that would be embraced by these communities and to build from that to redefining home visiting.

- ***Since then...*** The Las Cruces plan for a collaborative mapping project around school readiness, particularly in less well-off communities, is in process, though implementation is still some time off. The focus has tightened to look at the impact of the implementation of Common Core standards on school readiness and kindergarten success. Viewpoint Learning has continued to work with Healthy Start to engage parents and early childhood and elementary school professionals through surveys and focus groups.



#### *Albuquerque Action Plan*

- ***Padres Dialogando Por Los Niños (Parents Engaging in Dialogues for Children):*** The parent advocates from the dialogue will spearhead a bi-lingual effort to bring in more parents of young children and engage them directly in dialogue with teachers, legislators, business leaders and elected officials. Through this ongoing dialogue the group will work towards securing increased funding/resources, educating the public about the importance of early childhood development, and increasing communication and collaboration for the improvement of early childhood outcomes.
- ***Building Cross-Cultural Respect through Early Childhood Programs:*** A diverse group of early childhood stakeholders will develop a series of “field trips” to early childhood sites, followed by structured conversations among providers, advocates and school superintendents, teachers, the local school board,



## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 4: Capacity Building/Action Planning

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legislators, parents, principals/administrators, and directors. The goal is to overcome some of the barriers parents face due to language, stereotyping, poverty and language difficulties. The group plans to bring the early childhood community and the K–12 community together to learn more about one another and work towards several shared goals identified by all participants, including increased resources for early childhood programs. These efforts will begin following the legislative session.

- *Since then...* The Partnership for Community Action has expanded a program training parent advocates (mostly Spanish-speaking) to engage legislators and decision-makers in discussions around early childhood. Many of the participants from the capacity building session participated in the advocacy training, and as a result, the program's presence in Santa Fe during the legislative session was significantly expanded this past year. (More detail can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.)



#### *Española Action Plan*

- *Early Childhood Action Network of Rio Arriba:* Create a broad network of early childhood stakeholders, including providers, inter-faith groups, educators, parents, and others. Meeting monthly, the group will focus on documenting outcomes and best practices of early childhood organizations in the county, and will create a strategic plan for improving outcomes. The network will focus on prevention rather than crisis management, and plans a kick-off event this spring.

### **INTERACTIVE BRIEFINGS AND CAPACITY BUILDING/ACTION PLANNING: LESSONS LEARNED**

- *I am not alone!* Participants in the Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building sessions were often surprised to find that the public and the other participants in the room shared their concern about early childhood. Finding so many others from different backgrounds who shared their concerns was heartening and led to a sense of hope. This was especially important for providers and advocates, who frequently expressed a sense of isolation. This may be endemic to the profession – working with very young children is challenging and isolating—and we found that it played out in people's advocacy as well. Dialogue proved extremely important as a way of combating that isolation, allowing people to connect and find common ground with others working towards the same goal.
- *Making new connections.* Both the Interactive Briefings and the Capacity Building sessions were very valuable in connecting people who had never spoken before. Several times participants were surprised to finally meet in person others whose work they had heard of for years; just as often, participants discovered that they had been working in the same community for years without ever having heard of each other.

Having the opportunity to make and develop these connections was so important that several communities (in particular Farmington and Española) took steps to make it permanent and ongoing.

- **Getting to a systemic view of problem.** Another benefit of these sessions was the way they helped participants get beyond their individual perspective. Walking into the room, many people had a relatively narrow view of the issue, the main concerns, and what could be done about them. After only a few minutes of dialogue, however, they began to connect the dots among their various individual perspectives and build a more systemic view. This was especially the case for parents, businesspeople, local elected officials and others with less direct experience with early childhood issues and advocacy.
- **Getting beyond the usual suspects.** We saw that these sessions were much more effective and meaningful when there was a wide range of backgrounds and world views in the room. In Albuquerque, for instance, about half of participants were “usual suspects”: early childhood advocates, providers, teachers and people from the non-profit and social service communities. However, the other half was mostly young low-income Spanish-speaking parents, eager to find ways to help their children and their community improve. The result was a powerful merging of perspectives, as participants learned from each other’s experience and viewpoints with an immediacy few had ever experienced before. The resulting action plans were innovative and concrete, and participants left the dialogue energized and eager to continue the work. By contrast, in Española, almost everyone in the room was either a provider or an advocate. As a result the dialogue training was less successful—there was more of a sense that “we know how to do this already” because people did not have to move far beyond their comfort zone and engage with new, different or threatening perspectives. While a viable action plan did emerge, it was not as innovative, and the session was not as positive an experience for participants.
- **Power of dialogue in tribal communities.** We were surprised at how strongly the dialogue training resonated in the tribal communities. In Laguna Pueblo (and later in Shiprock), most of the participants were new to the dialogue process. Coming from highly hierarchical societies, participants saw the ability to bring in a range of voices both liberating and exciting, and they were quick to see potential applications in many arenas beyond early childhood. In Laguna in particular Ruth Kie has embraced dialogue as a key tool in bridging the many silos that exist in the tribal community; and she has worked successfully to bring the agencies into closer collaboration so that they can better get families the help they need. (This effort is described in more detail on page 31.) The later Capacity Building session in Shiprock was similarly positive and well-received.
- **Value of local facilitators.** Our two New Mexico-based professional facilitators added a great deal to these later phases of the project. One had extensive experience in early childhood circles and was already well known by local conveners and others—at every session he was greeted with hugs and animated conversation. This helped smooth our entry into communities and made us more welcome. The other brought deep knowledge of tribal structure and experience in tribal areas and helped us adapt our materials and processes to best mesh with local cultural practices and assumptions. Working with these two greatly enhanced our



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### Step 4: Capacity Building/Action Planning

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credibility with local leaders when we returned to the Choice-Dialogue communities for the Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building sessions—they helped provide a bridge between the local groups and us “outsiders.” In addition, having bilingual capacity was very valuable even when all participants in the room were fluent in English—there were times when a quick translation did a great deal to help Spanish speakers feel more confident in their understanding/make a point more culturally relevant. It did a lot to help people feel welcomed and comfortable in the discussions.

- **Importance of reporting/recording.** In order to reduce budgets, we did not record these meetings, and we did not bring extra Viewpoint Learning staff to take notes, etc. This made sense at the time, since we did not plan to draft reports out of these sessions and assumed the convening organizations (who would be receiving seed money for their projects) would take ownership of the results. However these organizations did not necessarily have the capacity to do so, and there was less back and forth than we would have liked. In retrospect we would have done better to write up the results, or at least create a template that the convening organizations could use to write up their own. We plan to budget for reporting and recording at every session of this kind in the future.
- **Time lag.** Finally, the time lag for the final phase of the proposal, although not of our choosing, made things difficult in terms of follow-up. We lost momentum with the 6+ month gap after the capacity building sessions, and it has proven difficult to get things up and running with the local conveners.







### STEP 5: WHAT COMES NEXT?

**A**T THE REQUEST OF THE KELLOGG FOUNDATION, Viewpoint Learning worked closely with our local conveners in Laguna, Las Cruces, Farmington and Española to develop community follow-up support Viewpoint Learning could provide that would further strengthen local capacity to engage a broader range of people in structured dialogue around improving outcomes for early childhood. The proposal was originally developed in April of 2012, but was not funded until the fall of that year. Over the course of that time, the needs, priorities and resources of the local communities shifted. Because our goal was to provide capacity building that fit with the needs of the conveners and their communities, our activities in several of the locations shifted as well. All are described below.

- **Laguna Pueblo:** Originally the Laguna Pueblo and the Laguna Division of Early Childhood were interested in engaging residents in a community conversation about the development of a new Early Childhood Center. However, the Laguna Dearly childhood was successful in bringing key stakeholders together to apply for a sizeable SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant. This grant is based on thoughtfully increasing the collaboration of social service agencies and departments on the Pueblo. Viewpoint Learning participated in the initial launch meeting for SAMSHA (called Project LAUNCH) to provide counsel and help determine how dialogue-based capacity building might build on the work they are doing.

Out of that discussion emerged a clear need for an overarching community mapping process. Many different organizations, agencies, departments and individuals provide a vast array of services throughout Laguna's Villages, but the work is often isolated and there is no central resource guide, no system for referrals and only limited knowledge of what others are doing. Along with Ruth Kie at the Laguna Division of Early Childhood and Ramona Dillard at the County Health and Welfare Department we designed and facilitated a "Laguna Provider's Forum" for more than 60 service providers covering a range of services. This was a first step towards developing ongoing collaborative efforts and a more robust referral process designed to meet the full range of needs of all clients, no matter what service they are presenting for. The meeting was lively and participants were highly engaged. Next steps are the development of a resource guide, dialogue around

## Dialogues on Early Childhood in New Mexico: Lessons Learned

### Step 5: What Comes Next?

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an improved referral process and the creation of a “Laguna Providers Association”, as well as a follow-up meeting in October. (More detail on the results of this meeting is included in an appendix to the report)

- **Farmington:** In our original discussions with Flo Trujillo and the Farmington Library, it emerged that dialogue-based capacity building around early childhood would be of great value in Shiprock for members of the Navajo Nation. Working with our conveners in Farmington, we adapted our process and conducted a day-long Capacity Building and Action Planning session at the library on the reservation. Much like in our Farmington and Laguna Capacity Building sessions prior, the group quickly gelled together and viewed dialogue as a new and important tool to ensure better outcomes for their young children and families. Their planning focused on collaboration and outreach, in particular to the Chapter Houses (the tribal government parallel to county government). The group considered best practices and looked at expanding existing models.

Since the meeting in October, the group has continued to get together regularly and has had some notable successes, both in planning events and expanding their communications and outreach. They have presented at Chapter House meetings, and created a blog about early childhood issues for the Shiprock Tribal Project. Since the meeting, they have added new partners to the mix, including Restoring and Celebrating

Family Wellness and School Health Education personnel and the Navajo Career Prep organization. They have a Vista Volunteer whose time is partially devoted to communicating information about early childhood programs. As of this writing, the group just played a role in a two-day literacy workshop. This is a group of individuals that will continue to develop programming and collaborative activities to benefit families in Shiprock long beyond Viewpoint Learning’s direct involvement. (More detail on the results of this session and the ongoing activities in Shiprock can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.)



- **Las Cruces:** The initial proposal from Las Cruces focused on early literacy as a lever to engage people around early childhood, and included community dialogues in underserved communities to develop strategies to promote early childhood literacy that are unique and meets the needs of their respective communities. However, in the period between submission of the proposal and funding, Healthy Start of Doña Ana received a grant to conduct research around the implementation of the Common Core curriculum, and to identify ways to increase academic success for children in the county. Viewpoint Learning has been providing design, survey and facilitation support to help Healthy Start Achieve their objectives on this project. Thus far these activities have included several planning and design meetings, design and facilitation of several focus groups with parents and the design and ongoing analysis of an online survey of teachers and early childhood educators. Future activities will likely include an additional dialogue with parents, teachers and administrators and possibly one or two additional focus groups.



- **Española:** Initially in Española, Viewpoint Learning and LANL proposed a strategic dialogue with the LANL Board and other key stakeholders designed to set an agenda for expanding the Firstborn program and other home visiting programs. Unlike in the other locations, however, the capacity building session in Española was populated primarily by a fairly homogenous group of foundation personnel and high-level stakeholders, which changed the dynamic considerably in comparison to the other sessions. This group was less invested in the practice of dialogue, and came in with more of a pre-set agenda. As a result, there was less ownership of the result, and more of a sense that they knew the answer going in. Discussions of next steps went through the Foundation Executive director, and did not emerge from the group's efforts. As the executive director's thinking shifted, we considered other possible applications of dialogue. However, given the lack of organic and community-wide support for the process, and the fact that the suggested activities (helping the New Mexico Association of Grantmakers develop a strategic plan) were not on topic, Viewpoint Learning, in consultation with W.K.K.F., made the decision to shift the funds allocated to Española to the more promising activities in the other identified locations.







## REFLECTIONS

**A**T ITS ESSENCE, DIALOGUE IS about developing mutual understanding and building trust. People engaged in dialogue with others who have different worldviews build relationships, better understand each other's points of view, and begin to trust one another. They develop a shared language around issues that matter to everyone involved. This is not to say they end up agreeing; to the contrary, dialogue is especially good at revealing the distinction between misunderstanding and true, fundamental differences in beliefs, values or worldviews. Dialogue reveals common ground that might not be otherwise obvious, particularly in our ideologically divided era. And while dialogue is distinct from decision-making, the ability to engage with others and find common ground creates hope that action can be taken, that people of good faith can find ways to work together to find solutions to some of our most vexing problems.

### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Our work in New Mexico has yielded some clear and tangible accomplishments up to this point:

- *Greater insight into public priorities for early childhood.*
- *Expanded local networks of early childhood advocates, public, stakeholders.* People are now talking who didn't talk before, and people are now connected who previously only knew each other by reputation.
- *More awareness in local communities of what other regions are doing; potential for coordinated action.*
- *Stronger capacity in communities to engage a wider range of stakeholders, leaders and policy makers.*
- *The data obtained on early childhood in general and public priorities in particular has been used more widely.* Many people have asked for extra copies of our workbooks, charts, and other materials to help spread that information more widely.
- *The dialogue process has taken root in several communities in a vigorous and exciting way:* in several locations people have asked to use our materials on dialogue to run their meetings, as well as using our approach to tackle other issues facing their communities.



#### LESSONS LEARNED

##### A. About the process, especially as it applies to the issue of early childhood:

- **Tradeoffs involved in a tighter focus.** Of necessity, the CommonGround project had a somewhat circumscribed focus on early childhood and the needs of children and families. This limited the discussions in two important ways.

First, early childhood was not considered within a larger picture of other state and local programs, and the scenarios that came out of the Strategic Dialogues did not ask people to prioritize early childhood against other issues. (And indeed the public is only very occasionally asked to weigh in on this kind of question.) How to set budgetary priorities is a key issue—when resources are scarce, adding additional responsibilities, no matter how worthwhile, is very difficult.

Second, the focus on the needs of children and families related to early childhood did not address the implications of potential changes for others directly involved in the early childhood system in New Mexico—for example, childcare providers. While beginning considerations of early childhood in a more focused way was necessary to understand the nuances of people’s thinking about the issue, the debate on the ground during the two most recent legislative sessions was largely centered on these areas.



In future discussions, it will be necessary to turn to the broader issue of how to prioritize early childhood against other issues, as well as the more granular question of specific impacts and policy details.

- **Early childhood is qualitatively different as an issue.** As we saw throughout the project, very few ideas came up that sparked serious disagreement. Many core values center around issues of agency and responsibility, but children are a special case: they are almost always seen as blameless for their circumstances (even if their parents aren’t). It is very hard for anyone to argue that they do not want children to succeed. And people feel a much more immediate sense of responsibility for children—even children from a widely different background than their own—than they do for adults. On a very basic level, children are always “ours.” No matter what, children are held harmless.
- **Leaders and public share the same stated goal, different practical priorities.** In both the Strategic Dialogue and the Choice-Dialogues, the question of universality was at the forefront. For leaders and the public alike, universal access was taken as the ideal: given full funding, all parents/children should have access to every program if the family wanted it. (There was not a lot of support anywhere for mandatory participation.) The public, as a rule, tended to stop there: the ideal of fairness for all was an essential value. But leaders struggled with the practical considerations of funding and access. Given the fact that poverty is so determinative of outcomes and resources are so limited, decisions have to be made in implementing programs. But when leaders are focused on how to determine access, it creates a huge disconnect between advocates and the public and makes it harder to create a dialogue.

**B. About the role of advocates:**

- **Advocates as the “bridge” between leaders and the public:** It has long been a goal of Viewpoint Learning to develop bridges between the public and elected officials. In general we have looked to civic leaders rather than advocates to fill that role, as advocates have so much invested in a particular worldview. However in the work in New Mexico, we worked more closely with advocates than we have previously. At first this was for the simple but practical reason that advocates were willing to show up at meetings about early childhood (an area widely viewed as a “niche” issue, and not a central concern for business and other power players the way K–12 education is).



Showing up was only half of the picture, though. As we shifted our focus to advocates and other people engaged on a day-to-day basis with early childhood, education, and social services, it became clear that they—and not policy

makers—were in fact the end users of the insight provided by Choice-Dialogues. As Heidi Gantwerk’s experience lobbying in Santa Fe made clear, elected officials in New Mexico have very limited time to pay attention to any one issue, particularly given a part-time legislature. The kind of nuance offered in Choice-Dialogue reports cannot be conveyed in 30-second sound bites while walking the halls of the Roundhouse. Real change will require legislators who are involved and engaged over the long term. It is not realistic for Viewpoint Learning to do that long-term relationship building, as we are not in the state and cannot build the relationships with legislators. But advocates can—and they can be on the scene during those long stretches when the legislature is not in session and legislators go back to their jobs/regular lives in their districts. Overall, it became clear that the best approach is for Viewpoint Learning to work in a capacity building mode and allow local leaders to maintain the relationship with legislators—the difference between focusing on 10 minutes with a lobbyist and having constituents regularly engaging with the issue during off-session, writing letters, organizing, and bringing busloads of people to the Roundhouse when appropriate.

If advocates are to successfully take on this role of bridging between leaders and the public, then they need specific skills, among them:

- **Not negotiating over crumbs.** If the advocate/policy-maker relationship is based on negotiating a list of demands in a time of scarcity, their interaction is not likely to be very productive. If, however, an advocate can come to a legislator with a good understanding of where their constituency falls on issues related to early childhood, can provide some special understanding and a range of possibilities that would be broadly supported, and provide assistance for legislators in how to lead people along the learning curve on these issues, that could be more useful.
- **Building networks.** As noted earlier, working with very young children is frequently isolating, and this may well carry over into early childhood advocacy. The hunger we saw for opportunities to connect with others doing the same work spoke to the need to combat isolation and find ways of building and cultivating relationships among all those working on early childhood issues in various capacities.

- *Hearing unusual/different points of view.* On issues like home visiting, funding and the role of the state, the public has strong views that can differ from the views of leaders and advocates (sometimes significantly). Understanding where those views differ is essential to finding common ground and moving forward with approaches everyone is likely to support. We found that advocates often had difficulty hearing challenging information and using it strategically. On a few occasions, advocates observing Choice-Dialogues had to be prevented from intervening and trying to convince participants that their views were misguided (at which point a few advocates then turned their focus on the materials, suggesting that they were presented in a way that prevented participants from coming up with the “right” answer). Dialogue training offered many of these advocates a new set of tools for taking in different points of view and working to discover common ground, even where it seemed unlikely.
- *Dialogue.* Overall, the tools and skills of dialogue came as a revelation to many of the advocates and local leaders we worked with. As described earlier, many local leaders (especially in tribal communities) saw the ability to bring in a range of voices both liberating and exciting, and they were quick to see potential applications in many arenas beyond early childhood. A particular challenge is building local capacity for dialogue, which is complex and requires some skill. This skill is to some extent present in Albuquerque, but less so in smaller communities like Farmington and Las Cruces, where conveners are already working very hard for little money, with limited staff capacity. Building capacity in these communities requires ongoing financial and support commitment—the relatively sporadic sessions that were part of this project are a start, but long-term support is needed.
- *Who is at the table?* One key element of establishing strong relationships among advocates is broadening the definition of who IS an advocate. Getting non-standard players to the table on early childhood issues is a huge challenge in New Mexico. The “usual suspects” conduct most work on early childhood: in other words, early childhood experts and advocates, along with people from K–12 education,

### HOME VISITING

Most experts strongly support home visiting programs and would like to see more families participate. However the Choice-Dialogues indicated widespread public reservations and suggested that it would be difficult to build broad public support for home visiting without a serious reconsideration of how programs are designed and how people talk about them.

When first hearing this result in the Interactive Briefings, many advocates blamed the wording in the materials, or assumed that the public opinion arose from ignorance and the solution was to “sell” the idea better. It took them some time to absorb the reality that this considered public opinion arose from deeply held values: the solution was not better marketing, but understanding how to tailor home visiting programs to accommodate those values. As participants took this in, they noted that the most successful home visiting programs already met many of the conditions outlined in our report (for example, an optional program, available to all, culturally sensitive providers from the community, option to meet in a neutral space). This provided a starting point for constructive action.



foundations, and social services. Broadening engagement to include businesspeople, civic and community leaders, elected officials, and residents without young children—“*unusual suspects*”—is challenging, but it is essential to breaking down barriers to increased support and funding for early childhood. There have been some inroads (for example the New Mexico Business Partnership), but this also has led to some conflict as traditional early childhood providers and advocates have to deal with players that do not necessarily see things the same way they do.

Even more difficult is simply getting people not directly involved in early childhood to attend meetings, dialogues, etc. A few have taken on early childhood as a critical issue, but in general, the groups that convene meetings (such as New Mexico Voices for Children, Decade of the Child, etc.) tend to get the same people over and over. Even if they reach out to others, it is hard to get their attention, especially when groups have a reputation or are perceived as being very left leaning, myopic, etc. The Strategic Dialogue was a good start to building some shared ownership and awareness, but it proved hard to maintain that, especially as the work spread out to local communities. And even if it is possible to get people to come to a meeting, sustaining their interest is difficult.

- ***Cross-currents among advocates and other early childhood supporters.*** The community of usual suspects is itself not a monolith. Working with the various organizations involved with early childhood in New Mexico was a mixed bag. On the plus side, relationships among partners, facilitators, and local actors was a key part of the process. But sometimes early childhood organizations ended up pitted against one another, scrambling for scarce dollars or at odds as to policy. A particular example occurred around the Permanent Fund, where not all organizations were on the same page. Some wanted to push for using Permanent Fund dollars to fund early childhood; others felt this was premature and actively opposed the measure. The result was bad feeling.
- ***A role for outsiders.*** As outsiders arriving to work in New Mexico we encountered some initial wariness. Many in the early childhood community shared the prevailing attitude that locals could and should be the ones who deal with New Mexico’s early childhood issues; others were concerned that outsiders would siphon scarce dollars away from local efforts. But as the project unfolded we saw growing recognition that well-informed outside organization can operate without being seen as having an agenda or being implicated in local in-fighting. This gives the outside group freedom and credibility in many circumstances.





#### **C: About the relationship between W.K.K.F. and grantees, and grantees with each other:**

- **Complicated relationships.** At several points in the project we encountered complex relationships between W.K.K.F. and its grantees, and the grantees with one another. In many cases limited funding leads to competition among grantees and a tendency for organizations to map out and guard their turf. Often Viewpoint Learning was perceived as being aligned with New Mexico Voices for Children, which had strained relationships with some other grantees. This posed a bit of an obstacle to Viewpoint Learning building relationships with organizations that were less aligned with New Mexico Voices for Children. In other cases, as in the case of the land grant legislation, WKKF grantees are directly at odds.
- **Confusion about roles and responsibilities:** There were several grantees involved in this work (New Mexico First, Viewpoint Learning, Everyday Democracy) and our work tended to overlap to some extent. On a couple of occasions, Viewpoint Learning and Everyday Democracy were not on the same page about who was responsible for what, although this was generally cleared up quickly. We did everything we could to connect with Everyday Democracy and to make sure that if people were going to multiple meetings, each had its own purpose and direction, but this might have been even more directly dealt with. Some sort of brief overview from W.K.K.F. that laid out key grantees and their project might have been helpful and might have provided opportunities for added collaboration.
- **Who owns the follow-up?** This was definitely an issue between Viewpoint Learning and New Mexico Voices for Children. New Mexico Voices for Children did some work in keeping Strategic Dialogue participants in the loop, but that work was incomplete and sporadic and they were not clear that this would be their responsibility. In local communities, conveners have limited capacity for this kind of followup. We generally did what was required in terms of the contract, but it was tough to do more, especially since we were not on site.



#### **HOW DIALOGUE MADE A DIFFERENCE**

Every element of this project shared the “invisible foundation” of Viewpoint Learning’s dialogue model. While the project began with research and exploration (Strategic Dialogue, Choice-Dialogues) and moved to broadening understanding, planning and strategy (Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building), every step was designed to bring together people with differing worldviews, to build trust and develop understanding and common ground around ways to improve outcomes for New Mexico’s children.

Using structured dialogue had a number of important effects for participants in all of the CommonGround Dialogues, whether they were members of the public, early childhood educators, business leaders, parent advocates or other stakeholders.



Dialogue by its nature builds bridges across different kinds of diversity; ethnic, ideological, socio-economic, age and more. This was true in the CommonGround dialogues, and in particular in the Choice-Dialogues. Participants in all of the sessions sat down with people that did not think like them, look like them, live like them. And just that experience alone was unusual for many participants, who tend to engage with people that share their perspective or are similar to them in other ways.

Given the diversity present in these dialogues, people were genuinely surprised and encouraged by their ability to sit down with people who thought differently than themselves and have a civil conversation about an issue that it turned out mattered to everyone involved. The simple realization that others, even those who might see the world very differently, cared so much about the well being of New Mexico's children was unexpected and comforting for people. This was especially true for early childhood workers and advocates, who often feel they face a Sisyphean task to improve outcomes for so many children struggling in the face of what seems to be an uncaring public and political climate. And while this realization might not seem very surprising, it was one of the most often cited responses when people were asked about the after-effects of the dialogue process. They felt less alone and felt there was potential to make progress on issues they thought few other people cared about.

For all participants, the dialogues brought about a shift in thinking from a more individual perspective to a more systemic understanding of the root causes and likely solutions to early childhood outcomes. Participants had very different starting points; some were experts in the field while some had never thought about early childhood prior to walking in the room, but across the board, participants increased their understanding and were better able to put their own experiences into a broader context of their community, their county, the state, and the decisions and policies that affect all of New Mexico's children.

Dialogue participants were able to “widen the lens” they were currently using to think about early childhood. And this allowed people to find common ground despite the clear differences in perspective. A more systemic understanding provided the space to uncover solutions and approaches that might not have been suggested otherwise.

For many participants, the experience of dialogue, and particularly the capacity building sessions, opened up the potential to find new ways to engage community members and leaders on issues beyond early childhood. The simple experience of being asked to think about and share their opinions on important issues was eye-opening and unprecedented. Many—especially the younger participants, the more economically deprived, those who had limited English skills, or who were unused to feeling “heard”—felt a growing sense of agency and competency: they matter, and their actions make a difference. Many, even months later, stated that they were engaging actively around issues of early childhood: going to meetings, contacting legislators and more. Participants from the tribal communities (Laguna Pueblo and the Navajo Nation in Shiprock) saw dialogue as a breakthrough tool for addressing a range of critical issues with tribal leadership.

Participating in the structured dialogues of the CommonGround project built confidence, created capacity for dialogue and a sense of agency and empowerment that will continue to have positive impacts for many participants and their communities well beyond the scope of this effort.



#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR VIEWPOINT LEARNING**

As described in the preceding pages, Viewpoint Learning's efforts around early childhood in New Mexico have evolved over the past few years, and that evolution will have implications for our work going forward.

One of the most interesting reflections involves the potential audience for the findings of our Choice-Dialogue research and other dialogue results. In general we have tended to target elected officials, agency heads, C.E.O.'s and other policy makers; presenting our findings to them and making every effort to engage them in some sort of two-way conversation about the implications of those findings. While we still believe that policy makers are an important audience, our work in New Mexico made clear that we need to reach out to and engage advocates and other stakeholders in more depth, and that their involvement will increase the reach of the findings and the life-span of their usefulness.

Elected officials and other policy-makers are faced with terrible scheduling challenges, and they are bombarded with information on many different issues on a daily basis. Advocates and other stakeholders, however, are in the early childhood arena for the long haul. They value the opportunity to develop tools and knowledge that will help them connect with decision-makers. And as they are the ones on the ground all year long, it is essential that they have facility with the results, are able to take in the nuance of the findings (even when they contradict their own positions), and can apply the findings and dialogue skills to their continuing efforts to improve policies and programs supporting early childhood development.



This is also why adding a capacity-building component was so important. Advocates are accustomed to negotiating in a culture of scarcity; they are conditioned to debate, convince, broadcast, and lobby. Structured dialogue (and active listening) is not one of the most common tools in the toolbox, but it is critical if early childhood advocates are to make significant gains with policy-makers and the business community. They must understand where people are coming from and incorporate that into their own thinking. And applying the tools of dialogue goes a long way towards building trust, which will also be a key piece of relationship-building.

This focus on advocates also led to a follow-up that was aimed at local communities rather than at state-level leaders, a less common direction for Viewpoint Learning. We discovered a sort of "convening fatigue" in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. While we were able to get leaders to attend our sessions, early childhood advocates were already involved in many different collaborative

efforts, and were very intentional in their lobbying and policy work. They appreciated the findings, but they were less inclined to pick them up and take action. However in our local Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building sessions, we saw just the opposite. People were able to hear and incorporate the findings and take tangible steps to improve early childhood outcomes in their own communities. And while in Albuquerque and Santa Fe people in the early childhood world all frequent the same tables, people at our dialogues in smaller communities were often meeting each other for the first time, and the energy around their newly discovered potential for collaborative action was significant.

We also believe that our work demonstrates the value of the role of “outsider.” While there was trepidation at first (why are dollars going to a group of outsiders coming into New Mexico?) as the project progressed, most of the participants in our dialogues came to see the value of having a neutral party with a unique skill set shaping the effort. Viewpoint Learning had no vested interest in the outcomes, aside from finding common ground around approaches that would improve outcomes for young children. We went in agnostic about what those outcomes ought to be. That perspective, and the lack of history in New Mexico, turned out to be a positive. Because we were not viewed as having any particular agenda, we were able to convene meetings and open up conversations in ways local organizations might not have been able to, especially once we had the help of knowledgeable local facilitators and youth from the communities themselves. We could hear all points of view, and could in turn be heard when we had results that countered an organization or individual’s dearly held position.

Ten years ago, when Viewpoint Learning was founded, it was with the goal of providing better information for decision-makers about how the public and other stakeholders viewed important and challenging issues. And in large part, our work in New Mexico was based on this goal. However, the CommonGround project, in the end, did much more than provide better public opinion data. The work shifted from public opinion research into action research, through an ongoing two-way dialogue and learning process. Local stakeholders learned valuable skills along with critical insight into public opinion, and are currently using dialogue techniques along with the findings from the research to inform their efforts across the state to improve outcomes for children. And in turn, we at Viewpoint Learning have broadened our ideas about the value of dialogue, our connections and relevance to the advocacy community, and the importance of our role as an outsider.





## APPENDIX

**This appendix provides descriptions of continuing follow-on activities around early childhood development in Farmington, Shiprock, Albuquerque, Laguna Pueblo, and Las Cruces. These activities built on the Interactive Briefings and the Capacity Building sessions.**

### FARMINGTON

***Farmington Public Library Summary: “The dialogue-based capacity building session on early childhood care and education advocacy for San Juan County, NM”***

As an education leader in the community, the Farmington Public Library recruited community leaders who attended the Interactive Briefings and Capacity Building Sessions for Early Childhood Development with Viewpoint Learning and New Mexico Voices for Children in August and November of 2011.

Engaging the leaders, some that had previously been part of a community dialogue, started conversations about how San Juan County can work through alternatives for early childhood development in our community by getting the facts and developing new partnerships. The presentations at the library were very informative, and new partners, some of which the library had not considered as supporters of early childhood development, were recognized from the business sector. Business partners agreed children will achieve higher levels of literacy achievement, readiness to learn and academic achievement. They would partner together with early childhood development organizations and make it a priority in San Juan County.

At the end of the first session, Viewpoint Learning distributed postcards to participants and had them write a response to the question: “What is one thing I can do to help improve early childhood outcomes in New Mexico and in my community?” The postcards were mailed back to the participants a few weeks later. Some of the participants received the postcards and asked when the next discussion would take place. Participants wanted to share what they had written, so some hand-delivered them back to the library. This is the first step in the community beginning to recognize the importance of developing literacy skills in children from birth to age five.

One of the success stories was the addition of daycare and Head Start center staff (not just the directors and administrators) at the dialogue-based Capacity Building session to move forward on early childhood care and education advocacy. Participants went back to the Head Start center and shared with the administrator that the meeting brought forth new ideas for early childhood education for our community.

San Juan County was lacking communication and the dialogue skills for early childhood advocacy and participants shared a model of what the community should look like that proved to be successful. It was



**FARMINGTON**

determined to develop a coalition/organization within San Juan County to meet regularly and share resources. The coalition would also develop tracks at conferences and find funding for those programs that were being cut in early childhood education. The organization would provide advocacy at the legislative level and would assist early childhood education organizations to invite legislators and speak at the events. The coalition would work to get a story and a picture from the legislators to strengthen public awareness on early childhood development.

“Doing nothing was not an option.” Now the public library is defining its role as a community leader. It is a dynamic solution at a local level, offering supplemental free programs using “Every Child Ready to Read” as training for parents, caregivers and educators, developed by the American Library Association for early childhood development. El Dia Del Los Niños/El Dia de Los Libros is an international celebration that brings a community together to recognize the importance of early childhood education. The celebration emphasizes the importance of advocating literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The Navajo and the Spanish/Immigrant cultures are important in San Juan County, and the diversity in early childhood education makes this a first opportunity to exhibit desirable behaviors of social/interpersonal skills at an early age.

Since beginning the advocacy for early childhood development, the Farmington Public Library has been successful in receiving a \$2,000 grant from Target and \$5,000 from ConocoPhillips for early childhood development. The Farmington Public Library is also a partner with Parents as Teachers that was just funded by Kellogg to implement “Every Child Ready to Read” for teen parents.

After the final dialogue, various partners met together to follow up on the projects suggested and determined what is achievable in our community for advocacy that fits with San Juan County values and needs for future investments.

1. Early Childhood Development Coalition/Organization for organizational support through San Juan County Safe Communities Initiative “Strengthening Families” for meetings and to provide a track at the yearly summit. (All participants from the NM Voices Briefings are invited to attend the meetings.) Provide support to Barbara Tedrow and Peggy Sorica who will provide updates from the Governor’s Office and CYFD. The Northwest New Mexico Arts Council will provide some of the local support in addition to the funding to develop a PSA for Early Childhood Development programs in San Juan County that will be shown on all community plasma screens and local television.
2. San Juan College “Celebrate the Child Conference” (April 28) Early Childhood Development trainings. Pay for speaker/presenter and provide Early Childhood Development Scholarships to four college students to attend the conference. (All participants from the NM Voices Briefings are invited to attend and/or present at the conference and to set up a booth.) Radio station KSJE will provide an opportunity to enhance CUEXTOS, HANE AND TALES literacy to include information about early childhood education providing an empowering environment for literacy.
3. Every Child Ready to Read @ the Farmington Public Library for early childhood educators, parents and caregivers on Saturday, December 10, 2011. Lunch is provided and everyone will receive a book of Spanish and English fingerplays published by the American Library Association. Farmington Public Library will be at the Library Legislative Day on February 2, and Flo Trujillo, Youth Services Coordinator will be introduced on the floor of Representatives. The library will be distributing information about “Every Child Ready to Read” to all the legislators along with the importance of Early Childhood Development in New Mexico. Youth Alliance from San Juan County and throughout New Mexico will visit with legislators during “Celebrating NM Children and Youth Day - January 17, 2012” and provide facts about early childhood education.

**FARMINGTON**

4. El Dia de Los Niños celebration at the Farmington Public Library with Early Childhood Development partners from San Juan County and participants from NM Voices Briefings. Every early childhood development program is encouraged to have an event in April or May and invite legislators, mayors, city council members and New Mexico leaders to speak at the events. A proclamation from the Governor will be requested that will include the terminology for early childhood education.

*\*Unfortunately we did not receive approval to take a Head Start or Early Childhood Development bus to the New Mexico State Legislature for Legislative Day.*

Prepared by Flo Trujillo, Youth Services Coordinator

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**SHIPROCK**

***Shiprock Capacity Building Session***

**October 2012**

In October of 2012, a group of Navajo Nation early childhood, education, arts, health and other Shiprock service providers and community leaders gathered at the Shiprock Library for a day of dialogue capacity building and action planning around early childhood. The group was convened through the Farmington Library and in particular through the tireless efforts of Flo Trujillo following a successful session in Farmington some months prior. After seeing the power of the dialogue process and the progress of the group in Farmington (which continues to make an impact today), Flo wanted to engage members of the Navajo Nation, a population served by the Shiprock library, in a similar process.

The goals of the session were to:

- Strengthen and practice dialogue skills that build two-way communication, trust and understanding with colleagues and stakeholders
- Better understand and use research findings, even when they conflict with personal preferences—applying Choice-Dialogue and other research findings in this community and in New Mexico to advance Early Childhood Development (ECD).
- Identify 1-3 priority initiatives to improve ECD in this community and in New Mexico, drawing on the research findings and dialogue skills

Much like our experience in Laguna, we found in Shiprock that formal, structured dialogue is not a tool with which many of the Native American participants in our sessions were familiar. However, we found that in both locations that it was an extremely appealing tool, and the group quickly identified many applications of dialogue that they believed could improve outcomes for children in Shiprock.

They envisioned creating ongoing dialogue-based programs to help create supportive networks for people struggling with a range of issues (bullying, substance abuse, etc.) They believed schools would benefit from the application of dialogue to improve relationships with parents and families, and that community workshops might be more productive if the sort of structured dialogue they practiced in our session could be applied. And in particular, the group wanted to introduce dialogue around early childhood issues into the Chapter House (akin to county government) meetings throughout the Navajo Nation. These meetings, they believed, were quite hierarchical and closed, and they wanted to see a different kind of conversation take place with tribal leaders.

***What's working?***

As they considered what existing strengths they had to build, they identified a number of factors or programs that were helping families in Shiprock and that they wanted to see continue or expand. This included strong involvement and engagement between the community and schools and the library, both of whom offered well-regarded programs for young children. Some mentioned a mentoring program known as FACE, and various initiatives centered around getting young people involved in art as a way to express themselves and deal with some of the emotional challenges they face on the reservation. Parents as Teachers (also cited as an effective program in Laguna) was raised as something to expand. And as in Laguna, they spoke highly of the local Head Start program, which was very successful but not big enough to meet the needs of all families.

And overall, people cited the strong tradition and culture of the Navajo nation and the caring parental involvement in many families as a firm foundation on which to build.

**SHIPROCK*****What's Not Working?***

In a thoughtful discussion about the overarching factors that were getting in the way of taking steps to improve outcomes for children and families, the group named some significant systemic challenges they faced, including negative stereotypes (both among Shiprock residents and from outsiders) and cultural stigma about the need for help and support. They expressed a great deal of frustration with outsiders (funders and agencies) perceived as “making decisions” for Navajo residents, and felt there was a lot of time and effort spent dealing with red tape and bureaucracy to address fundraising requirements that did not improve or expand program delivery.

Many suggested that strict income guidelines for services made it difficult for people and families to access much needed services, when many might fall just above the strict cut-off, but still not be able to afford to pay. And competition among groups and programs for funds, status and “turf” was viewed as intense. At the same time, they believed there was ongoing and unnecessary duplication of services and that better coordination and collaboration could improve the use of available funds.

***What do we need to create?***

As the group considered what was needed to improve outcomes for young children and families, they generated a list of programs, relationships and supports that they believed would have potential to make a real difference on the reservation.

- **Relationships:**

In general, participants saw an urgent need for stronger partnerships among all of those who dealt with young children and families. Participants singled out the role of state government, but even more tribal government and the Chapter Houses, and they focused a great deal of attention on these as vehicles for change. Part of this energy came from a strong belief that the Chapter Houses and most tribal officials were currently not connected to early childhood issues, and in many cases, only barely aware of the challenges and resources available.

They all agreed that schools play a huge role in the lives of families, and need to be more involved in early childhood. And the courts came up several times as well, as they have such an important role to play at critical times for families.

Overall the group agreed that strengthening relationships among systems and programs serving families and young children, programs, parents, Chapter Houses, Head Start, and others was a key step to building collective impact among the stakeholders.

- **Programs**

The group suggested a number of programmatic additions or improvements they believed would make an impact. Building on their desire to improve relationships among stakeholders, they saw an urgent need for a robust system of cross-referrals across a range of programs serving parents and families. They also wanted to see better supports in place for individuals and families who were facing a range of challenges; for example LGBT teens, who face a particularly difficult time on the reservation, teen parents, children and families struggling with health issues, etc. Information and training around prenatal care and development were seen as lacking, and all agreed that classes and support groups to help young parents develop parenting skills would be extremely valuable.

Family literacy programs, art programs and playgrounds and physical fitness programs were viewed as

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effective but insufficient and the group wanted to see them expanded. And they believed that systems change should include ECD-themed curricula for high school and college students, with some sort of support for students studying ECD. They clearly understood that all of this effort takes significant funding and that a concerted effort to raise funds earmarked for ECD and related programs was essential.

- **Communications**

Underlying all of the group's discussions was a strong sense that communications around ECD are haphazard and ineffective. Key agencies and organizations are unaware of what services others provide; parents are unaware of the resources available to them and tribal officials are unaware of the challenges faced by young families, the efforts in place to address them and the need to expand those resources.

**Action Planning: What can we do together to improve outcomes for young families?**

Building on its assessment of what was working, what wasn't and what was needed, participants then worked in groups to develop two initiatives that built on dialogue to improve outcomes for young children and families.

- **ECD Township**

The first, known as the "Early Childhood Development Township" initiative, focused on overcoming the barriers presented by lack of communication and knowledge about the needs of young families and the services available. At the heart of this initiative was a collective effort on the part of ECD stakeholders to create easy to access information about ECD needs and programs on the reservation and share those with Chapter Houses and tribal officials. This included the creation of an inventory of resources and presentations and discussions at Chapter House meetings throughout the reservation.

In designing this initiative, the group wanted to ensure efficient delivery of services and build awareness throughout the Navajo nation about resources and needs. The group wanted to see a shift towards programs designed and provided by Navajo organizations rather than continue to have outsiders bringing programs to (and "making decisions for") the Navajo Nation.

In their initial brainstorming around this initiative, several goals surfaced, including:

- Present at Chapter House meetings, and provide childcare through one of the existing programs, most likely Head Start.
- Create a much broader awareness about what programs like PAT (Parents as Teachers), FACE (a mentoring program for elementary school students), Head Start and block grants provide, and ultimately to increase participation by families and schools in these programs.
- Develop grant writing programs to support ECD efforts, in particular prenatal support and family literacy programs.

As they got into more specific action planning, they identified a primary and more specific objective:

**Objective: Identify ECD programs and establish collaborations and partnerships with Chapter Houses**

**Action Steps:**

- Conduct/create an inventory of ECD programs/needs.
- Prepare a fact sheet, an FAQ sheet and a Powerpoint presentation for delivery at Chapter House meetings.



## SHIPROCK

- Conduct/create an inventory of Shiprock regional (Four Directions\*) program and service/needs (community needs).
- Convene dialogues in each of the Shiprock area regions (the Four Directions).
- Contact Chapter officials with information on meeting dates, activities, etc. \*\*

## \* Communities of Shiprock's "Four Directions"

1. North: Hogback, Shiprock, Nenahnezad
2. East: DZ, Upper Fruitland, Counselor, Huerfano
3. South: Newcomb, Sanostee, Two Grey Hills
4. West: Teec Nos Pos, Cudeii, Beclabito

\*\* Note: IHS spring season services dedicated to "New Beginnings" (children and youth).

#### • Bridging Family and Community-Mentorship Programs

**Objective: Develop direct relationship in our community between mentorship and Chapter Houses in order to expand mentoring opportunities for young people.**

The second group focused on the effectiveness of mentorships for young children and adolescents, and identified expanding existing mentoring programs and adding new ones to reach many more children as a key priority. In particular, they wanted to involve Chapter Houses in this effort, and saw the potential for major benefit to the Shiprock community.

In order to succeed the group saw a need to overcome a fear of change and a culture of excuses, as well as negative community emotions around social services and the stigma associated with them. They also wanted to consolidate services to make sure mentoring programs were streamlined and targeted. Members of the group introduced a successful program known as Futures for Children (FFC) that connected community members with elementary school children, and the group agreed that expanding this model and providing training for mentors was an important step. They also suggested exploring implementing the CASA model (Court Appointed Special Advocate) for the Navajo nation, but this was seen as a more complex and therefore more long-term objective. And finally, grant writing and securing funding to support these efforts was critical to success.

The project agreed to promote and expand the availability of mentorship programs throughout the Navajo Nation by working directly with Chapter Houses and tribal council delegates. Participants suggested starting by working together to introduce every Chapter House to "Futures for Children," an existing program that has developed and implemented training and curriculum in Shiprock and can be made available more broadly at very little cost very quickly.

This program has had demonstrated effects in some Navajo communities, and because it is low cost, the group thought resistance and inertia would be easier to overcome. They believed that a future step could involve starting a CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) program or a similarly-focused program for the Navajo Nation might make sense as a future step. Eventually, the group wanted to establish strong connections between Chapter Houses and a wide range of mentoring programs to ensure that as many children as possible have access to the support, resources and encouragement of mentors from the community.

**SHIPROCK**

The group planned to work together to prepare materials and presentations for the Chapter Houses about mentorship and in particular FFC, train all committee members in the FFC curriculum, and then go out to meet with Chapter House officials as well as Council delegates. They planned to develop materials that laid out the benefits of FFC and other mentorship programs and then work directly with Chapter officials to put programs in place.

The group identified key players who would take on all of these activities, and to date, they have met with several Chapter Houses around ECD and mentoring programs and have participated in a number of community events to promote early childhood programs and services. The group has expanded its list of partners to include RCFW (Restoring & Celebrating Family Wellness) and School Health Education Specialist Regina Morgan from Northern Navajo Medical Center Division of Community Health Services as well as Navajo Career Prep, which has been one of their strongest allies in early childhood development. The group meets monthly and has established a blog, <http://shiprocknavajotownship.blogspot.com/>. They continue to work together to communicate broadly and to tribal officials about ECD programs, services and needs.

A Vista Volunteer (who participated in the capacity building session) is handling all communications for the Shiprock Tribal Project. As for the communication, Winifrey Redhouse was hired as a Vista Cadre for the Shiprock Tribal Project.

## ALBUQUERQUE

In Albuquerque the Capacity Building session and the grant directly affected the scope of and participation in the Partnership for Community Action. Parents who had been involved in the Capacity Building session took part in the PCA training and became active advocates in Santa Fe, where they forged connections with state leaders around issues of early childhood, with the extra benefit of the dialogue training they had received. Without the support provided by the Capacity Building and the grant, these parents would not have participated in this program: but with that support PCA was able to expand and become far more active in its efforts reaching out to state legislators throughout the year.

**PARTNERSHIP FOR  
COMMUNITY  
ACTION** WORKING FOR A STRONGER  
AND HEALTHIER NEW MEXICO

Partnership for Community Action (PCA) is an education and advocacy organization that works at two levels for maximum impact. In communities, we help people develop as leaders to create change for their families and their neighborhoods. At the state level, we advocate for systemic change that improves access to quality education, health and economic opportunity for all New Mexicans.

Photos of the children at our Community Coalition meeting

The Partnership for Community Action has the opportunity to collaborate with many spectacular families! We have worked with 109 families from the fall of 2011 to present.

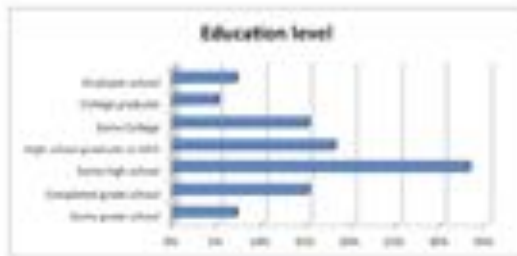
**Where the Partnership for Community Action community members come from:**

Ninety percent of the participants are from Mexico including Cuernavaca, Chihuahua, Michoacan, Ciudad Juarez, Durango, Toluca, Santa Barbara, Mexico City y Nuevo Casas Grandes. Also, there have been families in our program who are also from the United States, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, Cuba and China.

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Of these participants, the majority have at least some high school as shown in the diagram below.



Seventy percent of the families have either 2 or 3 children per family as shown below. With all families combined, 61% of the children are between the ages of 0-6 years old.



**What the Partnership for Community Action community members are involved in:**

The Partnership for Community Action oversees the Communities for Education and Action (CEA) initiative. CEA creates a space where professional development can take place with parents in the southwest quadrant of Albuquerque. We conduct a series of parent leadership courses during which parents become well versed on the science behind early childhood development through the *Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors* class. What makes the CEA model different is that parent graduates are facilitators of the class. They are not only experts on the subject of early childhood, as they are loving parents themselves, but they can easily put themselves in the shoes of other parents. The facilitators also develop great leadership skills as they prepare and present these classes.

What this seed grant has enabled the CEA members to do is participate in information sessions during which they gather tools needed to advocate for not just their children, but all children throughout the state. Through a series of legislative information meetings, parents gained important knowledge on how being civically involved helps improve the community for their children's future. The members of the CEA initiative and PCA staff built on current curriculum in order to provide additional tools on how to use dialogue to advocate for early childhood education.



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This new training helped parents realize their collective power as constituents to articulate the local need for early childhood system improvements.

Ten facilitators collaborated to co-create a presentation and then conduct a series of house meetings during which families learned about the legislative process and how to get involved! During our 2013 session we a substantial increase in our legislative advocacy work then the year before! During the month of January we were able to host 10 house meetings at elementary schools throughout the southwest quadrant of Albuquerque.



During the legislative session we had a 100% increase in facilitator participation! During the 2012 legislative session none of the facilitators went to the New Mexico legislature to advocate for early childhood education. In the 2013 legislative session we had facilitators testify for almost every hearing for the Invest in Kids Now Initiative. This is because they were able to discuss its importance with other community members in preparation for the 2013 legislative session. Below is a photo of Josefina Ramirez and her daughter Abigail and on the next page is Perla Montoya sharing her testimony with one of the committee.



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ALBUQUERQUE



*"Soy Perla Montoya. Soy mamá de 3 hijos. El más chico está en kínder. En pre-k mi hijo pequeño aprendió a distinguir los colores, escribir, comportarse, compartir, y usar tijeras, y el desarrollo un gran interés por los libros. Lo más importante es que me ayudaron a identificar que él necesitaba terapia en su habla. No le entendaron los maestros ni los compañeros. Hoy en día que él está en kínder él está batallando para poder leer. Él solo dice las sílabas, no puede juntarlas para leer la palabra completa. Si mi hijo no hubiera ido a las terapias de lenguaje antes él estaría más atrasado en todo hoy en día.*

*Me dio gusto que mi hijo alcanzara lugar en el pre-kínder. La que en donde vivo hay varias primarias, pero solo 2 de ellas tienen pre-kínder. Son de cupo limitado. Solo aceptan 30 niños, ya que registrarse con mucho tiempo de anticipación.*

*La razón por la que estamos abogando es para que todos los niños tengan acceso a una educación temprana de alta calidad. Es muy lamentable que por no asistir a un pre-kínder ellos entre al kínder atrasados o la mayoría sin saber nada. Yo que hoy en día las expectativas son más altas que cuando mi niña la mayor estaba en el kínder.*

*Hoy en día es urgente que expandamos más oportunidades para los niños en mi comunidad y todo el estado. Si no hacemos eso vamos a seguir más y más atrasados."*

While the Invest in Kids Now initiative did not pass, there were many successes. The process that the parents went through has given them confidence in advocating for their children in school and at the local level. CEA members are in the process of preparing a presentation for school board members of the Albuquerque Public Schools.



[www.herecommunityaction.org](http://www.herecommunityaction.org)



**LAGUNA PUEBLO*****Laguna Service Providers Forum  
April, 2013***

In the latter part of 2012, Viewpoint Learning engaged in a series of exploratory meetings and discussions with Ruth Kie of the Laguna Division of Early Childhood and Ramona Dillard, Director, Pueblo of Laguna Community Health and Wellness Department (CHWD) to consider ways dialogue might be useful in Laguna. Earlier in 2013, Viewpoint Learning participated as a consultant at an initial meeting for SAMHSA Project LAUNCH (Linking Access to Unmet Needs for Children's Health), a Pueblo-wide effort to improve and better coordinate substance abuse and mental health services (as well as more general social and other services) for families with young children. At this meeting it became clear that a larger Pueblo-wide effort to improving coordination of social services could go a long way towards improving outcomes and conditions for many residents, including young families.

Upon conclusion of the Project LAUNCH meeting, and in consultation with the Project LAUNCH team along with Division of Early Childhood and the Pueblo of Laguna CHWD, Viewpoint Learning agreed to design and facilitate a large-scale meeting of a wide range of social service providers from Laguna. This dialogue was designed to

- Build connections among providers, many of whom have limited knowledge of what other agencies provide or who to contact if the need for a referral arises;
- Identify unmet needs and strategize collaborative efforts to meet them;
- Form the basis for a community-wide resource guide to help improve referrals and increase understanding among clients and service providers about available services.

***The LSP Forum***

The group was made up of more than 50 service providers from a wide range of agencies and areas of focus, including health care, early childhood, K-12, seniors, substance abuse, mental health, financial assistance, veterans affairs, utilities and community planning, and more. Every one of the participants reported having met at least one person (and in most cases several people) they had not met before. After introductions at their tables, participants worked in small groups to gather information about the populations served by the people and organizations at their table, the services they provided and the unmet needs their clients presented with. After all the groups collected this information on several wall charts (included below), the entire conference did a gallery walk to review what had been posted. Whenever one of the conference participants knew of a resource that addressed an unmet need, they indicated that on the chart.

Some unmet needs rose to the surface repeatedly. In particular, housing, employment and education opportunities, adequate transportation, childcare and the need for more counseling and mental health services surfaced in multiple groups. These are clearly serious and pervasive concerns that limit the potential of families and young children in Laguna to thrive. A number of groups also mentioned that they had difficulty collecting good data that could inform their program design and delivery of services, primarily because of a lack of staff and technology. Office space and consistent funding were raised as major obstacles as well. Providers also identified many more specific needs in their client populations, including legal and forensic services in court cases, sufficient spots in Head Start, consistent wound care, specialized clinical services (e.g. for autism), foster care placements and supervision, elder day care and many others.

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### ***Supports and challenges for collaboration***

Participants then turned their attention to identifying the factors in Laguna that either support or discourage collaboration, and again, there was a great deal of common ground among providers working in very different areas.

The factors that the group saw as discouraging collaboration fell into 4 overarching categories:

- Insufficient resources
- Problems with communication, information and perception of providers
- Client challenges
- Systems issues

#### **Insufficient resources**

- Large caseloads and small staffs (e.g. one Public Health Nurse for the Pueblo of Laguna) so people feel overwhelmed and out of time
- Employee turnover
- Lack/inconsistency of funding, competition for limited dollars
- Schedules – limited time to collaborate, inflexibility in schedules, overlapping evening meetings/events, disconnect between provider hours and client needs
- Outdated resource guides, lack of a resource hotline
- Poor data:
  - » Lack of resources to analyze and manage data
  - » No way to share data (within Laguna or outside, with Acoma, other agencies that serve tribal communities)
- Lack of emergency services (childcare, housing)

#### **Problems with communication, information and perception of providers**

- Lack of communication/networking among providers on the Pueblo, poor education among providers and Pueblo residents about services available, incorrect assumptions among providers (e.g. about what services others provide and how, about quality, etc.), limited knowledge of tribal leadership about services available
- Lack of outreach to communicate range of services available, eligibility requirements for services, to counter misperceptions of agencies, etc.
- Public misunderstanding: people don't know what different agencies do, may have had prior bad experience
- Referral system chaotic and unclear, lack of referrals in which outside agencies submit information to early childhood programs, limited coordination of case management among service providers

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**Client challenges**

- Family commitment: families unclear on what agencies do; unwilling to follow through, afraid to speak up
- Motivation: many clients show up because they have to for some reason or another; they may want to address one issue but do not want to take the steps needed to make significant changes in their lives
- Denial: “I don’t need this service—I’m fine!”
- Stigma and stereotyping: people are uncomfortable asking for help, feel it reflects poorly on them and their family
- Location: no centralization of services, creates huge transportation and coordination challenges
- Transportation: many Pueblo residents have no means of transportation to access services, and the transportation available, while decent, is highly inadequate to meet current needs
- Housing: safe, adequate, affordable housing is essential and in short supply
- Child care: families cannot take the time to access services or take classes, participate in counseling, etc. if they have childcare responsibilities, and there is limited childcare available on the Pueblo

**Systems issues**

- Insufficient administrative support, lack of support from management AND tribal leadership
- Procedural barriers, excessive paperwork/process, restrictive regulations/policies (and the ability to hide behind them; to use bureaucracy as an excuse for inaction or poor outcomes)
- Lack of program follow-through from partners
- Lack of advertising coordination: events compete with each other rather than collaborating or building on each other
- Customer service: providers and front office have poor or limited job skills, lack of professionalism, clients presenting beyond scope of work
- Clients have limited confidence in the confidentiality, trust, respect, accountability of provider
- Clients have unrealistic expectations
- So many needs for so many clients makes prioritizing difficult, and there is no good process to help providers do so
- Need for more MOU/MOA – lack of formal interagency/intergovernmental agreements to collaborate
- Common vision
- Program isolation/working in silos/territorialism
- Not having all team players on the same page/at meetings together
- Partners not voicing their perspective/solutions
- Cultural sensitivity (especially among non-natives)

**Supports for collaboration:**

At the same time, participants saw a number of factors in Laguna that either currently support collaboration or could help to do so, and on which they could build to improve outcomes for all residents:



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Some factors for success are already in place:

- Laguna is a small, tight-knit community, and the cultural norm is to work together
- Employees have commitment and compassion; they are committed people, working hard
- MOUs/MOAs among Pueblo agencies and organizations
- Some providers have a broad knowledge of services available

Others are more aspirational; while there are examples of many of these factors, they are not the norm in Laguna:

- Strategic planning among providers
- Collaborative partnerships, joining forces for events/activities, sharing providers
- Smooth coordinated referrals, referral forms offered to clients who present for all services
- Improved communication and networking, sharing of information, regular community forum (like today); conferences, benefits fair, word of mouth, program flyers and brochures would go a long way towards improving outcomes
- Family support/commitment and motivation
- Personal connections/networks (especially through clients)
- Common goal/Common vision among Laguna providers
- All-inclusive program goal/events that involve multiple agencies or divisions team work
- Increased funding, resources (a factor that would support increased collaboration if increased funding could be secured)
- Better follow-through on collaborative efforts
- Getting behind a common cause: building the community, community awareness, bringing people to the table

After discussing the factors that either support or discourage collaboration, the conference worked in small groups to identify some tangible steps that might help them better serve their clients, and improve outcomes for Laguna families. They considered what actions they might take, who would need to be involved, what resources are needed and on what timeline?

**Objective: Have a centralized data base system**

Who needs to be involved?

- Systems administrator, service providers, central IT staff, data entry staff

What steps and when?

- Quarterly meetings to update information
- Identifying different systems
- Prioritize family needs
- Creating and disseminating universal forms for all providers to use with client

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What resources are needed?

- Funding (for staff and technology), Database (software and hardware)
- MOU's/MOA's
- Statewide service providers

**Objective: Create a formal provider association**Who needs to be involved?

- All direct service providers

What steps and when?

- Increase and sustain communication among providers
- Create shared vision, common language, strategic planning
- Identify stakeholders
- Obtain data and prioritize
- Consistent quarterly meetings
- Re-evaluate and assess administrative duties; re-assign as appropriate

**Objective: Create shared drive/website as resource for referrals**Who needs to be involved?

- All direct service providers

What steps and when?

- Increase and sustain communication
- Remain updated on changing information
- Identify web developer
- Obtain service brochures and detailed information

**Objective: To improve collaboration and outcomes through a comprehensive resource directory for service providers (this has been incorporated into the ongoing efforts to create a resource guide, with facilitated meetings planned)**Who needs to be involved?

- ALL OF US!!

What steps and when?

- Create a "web tree" in which providers reach out to and communicate with other providers (especially those not present) via e-mail
- Each of us to contact 3 other providers that we work with and get their information
- Involve the tribal IT department for creation and maintenance of the web tree

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- **Deadline:**
  - » Web tree to be completed in 2 weeks
  - » Submit other providers information within 1 week
  - » Develop an MOU with the tribal IT dept. in 3 months
  - » Present to tribe (by select volunteers)
  - » Find a funding source within 3 months such as Project LAUNCH

**Objective: Create a contact list from this provider forum**

Who needs to be involved?

- Every participant
- Community providers who are not here

What steps and when?

- Type up contact list from meeting
- Submit information sheet
- Compile contact info, review and edit
- Distribute
- Share with others in department

What resources are needed?

- Person to compile
- Providers updated info funding
- Social networking ("It's the future!")

**Objective: Establish Effective referral process**

- 1. From school(s) to Laguna Behavioral Health Services for mental health concerns**
- 2. From Laguna Police Dept. or LBHS to early childhood about incidents regarding kids/families**

Who needs to be involved?

- LDOE and EC-8 grade
- Cibola County Schools (K-12)
- Parents, family, community
- Laguna Behavioral Health Services

What steps and when?

- Gathering referral forms from departments
- Developing flow charts of services
- Educating each other about process and points of contact

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What resources are needed?

- Time for each program to collaborate
- Project LAUNCH

**Objective: Better communication among service providers**Who needs to be involved?

- All service providers
- Tribal administrative officials
- Program directors/leaders

What steps and when?

- Communication skills building
- Motivational training: Touchpoints/WE Initiative
- Biannual follow-up

What resources are needed?

- Trainers
- Centralized location
- Reminder/incentives/advertising
- Support from administration down

**Objective: Resource Guide**Who needs to be involved?

- Representatives from all programs

What steps and when?

- Monthly/regularly scheduled meetings to follow up on initial meeting
- Completion goal: end of May, 2013

What resources are needed?

- Existing resource guides combined into one
- Manpower
- Materials: computers, paper
- Committee

As participants talked through these specific steps, they were excited about the prospect of doing something significant. At the same time they knew that it would be up to them to make sure those steps happened and that ensuring the follow-through needed to get results would be no easy task. Participants were willing to do their part: almost all of the participants showed their commitment by signing up to participate on at least one of the action

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steps identified by the group (and often more than one). The first step being addressed by the Laguna Division of Early Childhood and CHWD is the creation of a resource guide, and meetings are being planned to move towards creating a guide for distribution.

At the meeting's conclusion, participants were asked to envision coming back in 5 years to celebrate the success of this group's efforts to improve outcomes and service delivery for all residents of Laguna Pueblo. They painted a picture that was exciting and ambitious—and that every participant felt was truly within reach. Five years from now, when the Laguna Service Providers gather to celebrate their successes, they will do so in a community where:

- There is excellent Collaboration, Communication and Coordination of resources and programs
- People know where to go for services and where to send others for services because of the increased Collaboration, Communication and Coordination
- Providers and residents are better informed about upcoming events and services
- There is a Laguna Pueblo Service Providers Association that has increased the number of referrals and decreased the bureaucracy and red tape that prevents people from getting access to services they need
- The Laguna Pueblo Service Providers Association meets regularly
- More sophisticated data tracking informs the delivery of services
- An electronic resource guide is easily accessible and regularly updated
- A TV channel (WPOL-TV: On the West Side) features programs and services and keeps the population informed

In five years, if all goes well, the Pueblo of Laguna will be a model for Native communities in terms of services provided to Pueblo residents and the results for all of Laguna's families.

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The following pages contain transcribed wall charts from the Laguna Service Providers Forum



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Chart 1

Org/Agency	Who is served	Services provided	Unmet needs	POBT/OTB addressing unmet needs
Laguna Department of Education Partners for Success & Laguna Assets Connection	Youth 14-24 Adults with disabilities	Employment & training GED, college associates School supplies Higher ed. scholarship & financial aid, college counseling Education training	Affordable housing Employment for individuals with disabilities Supplemental funding Office space for GED classes, distance learning, ADA-compliant building	LA Connections LUNMS LCCP LA Connections ODS benefits coordinator LCCP Laguna Middle School Laguna family resource center (RCR) Tribal planning application for funding for infrastructure (CIP)
POLI BHHS Shoshone	Children 4- 18/19 youth Adults, families, youth, couples Social services, courts	Individual, family, group, couples counseling Parent guidance Clinical assessments/screenings Behavior therapy Play therapy Program development for Shoshone ED in school counseling Trained in MFT	Learning disorders Pervasive developmental disorders Respite care for foster parents Child-care for children, participants during program hours Housing Data collection MFT/BAIS in-house	MHS Social Services Housing priority team (ask planning about this) GEO Project LAGUNA (asked) Planning office Dr. Gorman at LBHS for data MCH Program New Service Treatment Center

## APPENDIX

### LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 2

Org/Agency	Who is served	Services provided	Unmet needs	PCDT/CTF leading to unmet needs
Laguna Head Start	Children and families birth to 5 years	Home visits with teacher, development specialists, home visitor, family advocate Referrals, provide resources Door sitting-child first Obtain documents Health screening medical followed by Risk self program HR screening- case management	Housing Transportation Mental health services Employment Education - lack of funding resources Clothing/food bank	Laguna housing authority LDOC mental health consultation - WIC/eth program LCDFP ADL, GHS - WBI PRISUEP - Higher Ed resources Benefits coordinator M. San- JIT St. Vincent services in grants Headrunner food bank USA Gift program
Childs Laguna Veterans Program	Veterans, family Survivors Veterans health benefits National Cemetery benefits Veterans housing Veterans benefits		Medicare Medicaid	
PO, Behavioral Health	People of Laguna & surrounding areas - adults, couples, families, children DUI - counseling, courts, social services	Counseling Training, mental health services Supervision Substance issues	Medicare Medicaid Child care Co-parenting services	ADL, Teen Services & enrollment people ADL Benefits coordinator
		San Jose Family couples Play free	Data collecting Behavioral coaching	Mary Scott Gift program QEC Project/LAUCO - Data (Data) - Dr. Guzman at UHS
PO, Planning Program	Community members pueblo-wide, village council PO, programs and services	Opportunities for input into vision, goals, actions Document input Data about the community (same) Occasionally input information on land infrastructure	Can't provide forms for everything Can't implement most plans	PRGF Laguna Community Foundation & VISTA program Village official support LDOC - needs data to apply for grants
HOI ELITE - Laguna Men's School Counseling Resource Center	Middle school students & families through full service community school model	Provide on- and off-school based health services Engage families: help students learn Behavioral health counseling Athletic programs Mentor society - after school programs	Tutoring Health services not offered prior school Integrated family support services	Talk to Early Childhood to see if LMC services also have children in Head Start. May already have family advocates. LCDFP

LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 3

Org/Agency	Who is served	Services provided	Unmet needs	POST-ITS relating to unmet needs
QOH	0-60 year old individuals & families schools	Home visiting Medical monitoring Transportation Referral followups OPR certification Chronic disease self-management Health education Medication pick up	No wound care No medication dispensing	ADL, Resocialization CHP program management ADL, PT/OT ADL, PT/OT
ACL, Waiver	Children, adolescents, adults & elderly from Azusa, Camella, Laguna & surrounding areas	Counseling Evaluations Psychiatric medication evaluations Case evaluations/placements Referrals to OPR and RTC Referrals for neuro-psych assessments Important medical risk consultations Carecase management	Forensic evaluations for custody, adoption, and competency trials	WCH program PCL, SHS WCH program LJHS Anthony (Anthony) Italy - MFLAC
LDOL Division of Early Childhood	0-5 year children & toddlers parents of enrolled children Part C early intervention Early Childhood Training	EC Education & development services (center or home based) Health screenings Individual and family service plans for OI, PT and SLP Professional development	There is a waiting list for 0-5 year old clients Parent counseling CHC counseling for 0-5 year old clients Concurrent college education opportunities	LJHS WCH Program

## APPENDIX

### LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 4

Org/Agency	Primary service	Services provided	Unmet needs	POB/TOT relating to unmet needs
Laguna Dept of ECE (Division of early childhood)	Children & families in head start program	Home visits Child care Goal setting Public assistance Group/fatherhood meetings	Limited transportation Education Housing/clothing	UCSP Shuttle/ride transportation Anthony Rios: ITFS/LAB Some clothing and emergency items at Laguna Family Services Maribel T. Visit officer
LA Correction	American Indian Adults	Employment support services	Available employment opportunities Bulky capacity enterprises	
POL, Utility Authority	Community & other entities	Utility operations & management OCG repair LNUAP Payment assistance Minor home maintenance Emergency response for homes, water leaks etc Homeowner services – oil cleaning, rodents etc.	Home plumbing repairs Home inspections Remodel & improvements Limits on services due to funding	New file Collaboration with other groups AGL, PHN, R2 CHS Assistance
POL, CHRC - sports - watershed - fisheries management	Community members recreation		Special clinical services (example: learning disabilities, autism)	LBRS: some providers have this expertise AGL, PHN for clinical mental health services
POL, CHRS				

LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 5

Org/Agency	Who is served	Services provided	General results	PCBT/ITS addressing unmet needs
Social Services	Child, adult, elderly If not adults Laguna tribal members ICW/rep, when IDH	Child, adult & elderly protective services General assistance Family services CM/attachment	Foster care placements Foster care training Supervised visitation program Children's crisis center	WIC program Early integration (birth to 3 years) "all net"
Drift program/Gen	Most tribal members of Laguna Cancer patients in Laguna	Medical transport (cancer patients) Home visits Medical referrals Home health services Screenings/health fairs Cancer support group meeting Cancer awareness	Referrals from providers Much needed elder day care Senior completion program	Remove senior center (Laguna) Marvyn T.: not office Kae Thomas
Family services	Victims of domestic violence & sexual assault Offenders & families	Dr. crisis calls, advocacy, court, medical counseling Transport and education Shelter victims of DV/family	Visitation, center for family Communication/education on consequences of DV Housing for male victims Transportation for program Another resource	Neutral center in ASQ WIC program Referrals to early childhood if child 3-5 years in household with DV LCSP
HSU/LB/Higher ed	Enrolled tribal members (TU)	Scholarship assistance Higher education	Funding for part time students Internships leading to work	
Drift program/gen	General population with chronic disease Women/children Men work in mines	All ages HL prevention, health services OBI, well-child, Medicaid WICSP, nutrition Subsidy for continuing care	Elder day care Handicap/disability housing improvement program Legal representation (intake program)	Maxwell Montemorel: Early Head Start Disabilities Planning/housing priority even has community input on housing disability improvements Planning has community
				<p>trial of elder day care</p> <p>LA Connections: Anita Woola SSJ-ORDD</p> <p>Inter-Wasage</p> <p>Claudia Powell OSC-61</p> <p>Marvyn T.: not office</p> <p>Benefits coordinator Moore</p> <p>RM/CA</p> <p>Anthony Riley LAC</p>
			<p>OHIO PROGRAM</p> <p>Expanded transportation services off reservation</p> <p>Office based/CH center</p> <p>Community based nurses and medical staff</p>	<p>Laguna/Roma connections</p> <p>Jack Ship: ACL</p>



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## LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 7

Org/Agency	Who is served	Services provided	Unmet needs	PCST/CTB addressing unmet needs
PCJ, B-HSD	Primarily individuals residing within the Laguna community  Individuals in the surrounding communities who chose to receive services with L&HSD	Individual, family, group counseling services for substance abuse, mental health Alcohol education classes Anger management classes Detox services Geriatric addiction counseling, education & awareness Domestic violence support services Adult youth prevention services	Halfway house services Detox services	Housing priority for homeless Planning about the Lack of education to youth/elderly
PCJ, CHH program	Laguna community members, pre-conception to EOL	Assessment/ensure plans for needed health/medical related services  Home visiting, transport, health education, disease prevention, disease health screenings, specific coordinated community-based health programs Prenatal/postnatal care Newborn care, women's health	After hours care, respite care, hospice care, wound care, medication dispensing/administering	Wound care, ACL, Anthony Riley L&HSD, L&HSD
UMHACL, West centers, L&HSD & L&HSD	6 <sup>th</sup> -12 grade students/families L&HSD & L&HSD	Individual & family counseling Crisis intervention Basic health care, minor injuries & illness TOP (Teen Outreach Program)	This year we have not been able to provide primary care & sports physicians	L&HSD (UMHACL, TO & H&H should have contact to deliver the service - all of it)
HOPE/CHC	HOPE/CHC provides educational and school based health services. But enhance the well-being of students to ensure their academic success by addressing barriers to education achievement  Engage families in education journey of 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> graders	After school programs Athletic programs Help ensure safe & positive learning environment	Tutoring Health care services not offered year round	HOPE/CHC HOPE/CHC
BEC/Project LAUNCH	Children age birth to 5 and their families Teenage parents Adults Grandparents raising grandchildren Foster guardians Children prenatal to age 5 & their families	Early Intervention Part C Early Head Start (home based and center based) Preschool Head Start	Legal issues, follow-up documents Direct service provision of therapy/counseling Wanted of 30 infants & toddlers Unmet children's dental needs	Child Welfare/Prosecutors New Mexico Legal Aid Court/Behavioral Health ACL, Dental Courts Behavioral Health Laguna community foundation VISTA program L&HSD ACL, CHH for therapy/counseling

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LAGUNA PUEBLO

Chart 8

Org/Agency	Eligible served	Services provided	General needs	PCSET (CSE) leading to similar results	Challenges	PCSET (CSE) leading to challenges
Laguna Utility authority	Community (Hispanic, Pueblo American, non-native)	Services (heating, water, waste)	In-home plumbing services	Utility authority Private plumber LACNHS	Leading culture and conflicts	
Laguna Community Health & Wellness (Barrios con Poder program)	Low income All income Age (birth to adult)	Counseling Self-sufficiency Paternal activities	Income, employment, housing, lack of health insurance Criminal background	LA Connections	Language	
Partners for Economic		Preventive maintenance	Transportation	Skanska (rental) Vet office - M Tupelo CAB UNIT	Personal responsibility	
Early Head Start - home based program		Case management Advocacy	Transportation of children, chronic, mental health, homelessness	LACNHS	Misinformation	
Laguna early intervention		Child development and education/therapy	Child mental health, homelessness, child care	Skanska (Skanska only, 12 years & up) LACNHS	Homelessness	
Laguna Housing Development and Management Enterprise			Emergency housing income restrictions Criminal background	Laguna Housing - better communication with general public Firearm due	Multi-family overcrowding Overcrowding	
				10-domestic violence, then Laguna Family Services CPI housing CAB for info on connecting to other resources		
					Traditional vs. Western values	Self Program
					Acculturation of ethnicity	Family services Domestic violence CAB Insurance
					Substance abuse	LACNHS Behavioral Health LACNHS BCH program LACNHS - Addressing Risky LACNHS

**LAS CRUCES****Las Cruces, New Mexico****April 2013****Analysis of online survey**

Our biggest caution with this information is that the majority of respondents were childcare workers rather than K-3 teachers, of whom we had only a handful. Many claimed to be implementing the Common Core standards in their classrooms, which is in fact not possible as they do not apply to Pre-K. One possible explanation is that respondents were confusing the Common Core standards with New Mexico's Early Learning Guidelines. This is concerning because it indicates that knowledge of the Common Core and the changes that will be coming to classrooms in Las Cruces is minimal, and misunderstanding widespread. And given the level of academic achievement expected of these students when they enter kindergarten, it seems critical to ensure that the early childhood community is informed about what to expect and how best to prepare students. Some of the key questions that are evidence of this confusion (again, most of the answers coming from early childhood workers):

- 48% say they have introduced Common Core in their classrooms while 37% are not sure if they have
- Of those who say they have introduced the Common Core the large majority (70%) say that it occupies 50% or more of their classroom time. Most (75%) say this is the right amount of time. And nine out of ten of the users (91%) believe that it helps children learn, even those from diverse backgrounds. (Again this makes much more sense if the teachers are talking about the ELG's rather than the Common Core standards.)

Another key finding, and one echoed in the focus groups, is that a primary area of focus and concern for parents and early childhood teachers alike is social and behavioral far more than academic skills. EC teachers in particular see huge gaps in communication and language skills, and worry that students will fall farther and farther behind due to these deficits. They see kids as shy, lacking interpersonal skills and deficient in oral language. And when kids are coming in with such challenges, it is far more difficult to focus on teaching the ABC's or basic math skills.

When asked, respondents named what they thought children should know upon entering kindergarten in each of a number of key areas:

- **Social skills:** Respondents most often stressed the importance of sharing, taking turns, following rules and directions.
- **Language skills:** Most often mentioned were knowledge of ABCs, the ability to write their name; to communicate and speak in complete sentences in order to express themselves. A few mentioned the ability to understand stories or knowledge of how to read a book, and a few specifically stated that this could be in their native language.
- **Math:** Most mentioned were the ability to count at least from one to ten and to recognize numbers. Less common but also mentioned were the expectation that children will understand the concept of adding and subtracting, or know something about shapes.
- **Motor skills:** The expectations were that children will know how to hold a crayon or pencil; use scissors; be able to sit, jump.
- **Creative arts:** Know colors, able to move to music and participate in classroom songs and dances

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As to what are the highest priority skills students should have in general coming into kindergarten, teachers focused primarily on the social skills, language and classroom behavior. They felt children need to be able to listen and communicate and work with others. Some spoke of respect for the teacher or other adults. Basically what teachers regarded as most important to teach in early childhood was classroom behavior—they want children who are responsive and well mannered and can cooperate with other children. A few mentioned specific types of knowledge, such as the ABCs, but that was not the primary focus of teachers working with young children.

Similarly, when asked what children lack going into kindergarten, social skills were most often mentioned. Teachers repeatedly expressed concern about children who are shy and can't or don't ask for the help they need, children with very limited vocabularies, and those who show a lack of respect for teachers and others. Teachers focused more on language capabilities and "manners" rather than specific skills, though a few mentioned the ABCs or the ability to hold a pencil. A number mentioned parents' lack of engagement in their children's education as being particularly concerning.

About half of the respondents felt that 50% or more of the children in their classes are prepared for kindergarten. This response is shaded by the fact that many respondents were early childhood educators who may have felt they were rating themselves, as opposed to what was intended: kindergarten teachers rating the readiness of the students entering their classes. Lower rating on this question would indicate EC teachers were not doing a good job preparing their students. Also, given that many of these teachers are not familiar with the kindergarten curriculum, their ratings are somewhat suspect.

However, teachers believed that children who have had preschool training are much more likely to be prepared. About three out of four teachers felt that 80–100% of children who have been to preschool are prepared for kindergarten. As one teacher put it: 50% of most kids are prepared; but 80% of those who have been to preschool are prepared. Again, this question becomes a reflection on the perceived skills of the respondent when those answering are pre-K teachers rather than elementary school teachers and principals.

Some information about the respondents:

- 65% are childcare workers Including Pre-K and Head Start
- 7.6% are kindergarten teachers
- The remainder is a mix of parents, retired teachers, administrators, foster care parents
- About two-thirds (63%) of those who participated in the survey have been teaching for 10 years or less
- They teach throughout the region:
  - 32% Las Cruces
  - 23% Hatch
  - 14% Chaparral
  - 14% Sunland Park
  - 7% Anthony
  - 10% Mesquite
- Seven out of ten have 50% or more English language learners in their classes
- 83% identify as Hispanic/Latino and 13% as white/Caucasian



**LAS CRUCES****Analysis of focus groups**

In a series of focus groups conducted with parents of young children in Doña Ana County, New Mexico, facilitators explored parents' experiences with early childhood education, their beliefs about what children should know before entering kindergarten and their expectations for what students should learn in their first year of school. The discussions also touched on their understanding of and expectations for the Common Core, and how to better inform parents about their child's education before they enter school.

Three focus groups contributed to this report: one conducted in both English and Spanish in Las Cruces, and Spanish-only groups in Hatch and Rincon. The groups were fairly small, so these findings should be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive; however the findings were quite consistent across groups. In addition, the results of these focus groups strongly echo results on some of the questions in a survey of educators (primarily early childhood educators) conducted as part of the same project.

***Before kindergarten***

Parents began by sharing what they had tried to teach their children before starting school: what they thought was important for children to master before entering kindergarten. As in the survey, parents seem to focus most strongly on behavioral, social and moral traits: respect for adults, manners, self-care, learning the difference between right and wrong. Parents tended to stress behaviors (whereas early childhood educators focused just as much on communication skills) as parents saw this as a major differentiating factor in the success of students entering kindergarten. They saw themselves as having an important role to play in teaching these behavioral, social and moral skills, but somewhat less so in regard to academics, in part because many did not know what to teach or struggled with English themselves.

Related to this issue was a theme that surfaced throughout the focus groups: the major roadblocks for English Language Learners. Parents who were monolingual Spanish and whose children went into school without knowing any English reported their children having a much harder time, being at a significant disadvantage at the start and losing ground quickly. Parents reported their Spanish-speaking children feeling anxiety, being made fun of, thought of as less bright, being viewed and treated differently by teachers, and generally running up against roadblocks to success that will only be exacerbated by the implementation of the Common Core standards.

For these children, access to quality early childcare education seems to be of the utmost importance if they are to remain on par with their English-speaking classmates; however parents report great difficulty in accessing programs (described in more detail below).

When pressed about academic skills they thought children should have before entering kindergarten, parents talked about knowing some numbers and letters, shapes and colors. Several agreed that Sesame Street was a good guide for the sort of things kids should know, and that Sesame Street and PBS were helpful to them in teaching. But overall they focused, even when pressed, on the softer skills they felt were critical to their students' success.

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***During kindergarten:***

Parents were asked what sort of skills they thought their children would be expected to master in kindergarten. Their responses were similar across the board (and similar to the responses from many of the early childhood educators in the survey): counting from 1–10 or maybe 1–20, with some very basic knowledge of how to add 1+2, etc. They wanted children to know how to write their name, letters, etc. Most did not think they should be able to write a simple sentence or read a simple book. In general the skills they listed were very basic, and well below the sorts of skills outlined in the Common Core for kindergarteners.

Parents of Spanish-speaking children, especially those who did not have access to early childhood programs, reported their children coming into kindergarten with much lower skills and feeling very badly about it. Comments from an English speaker who was extremely involved in her children's education represented some of the negative perceptions they face; she suggested that kids whose parents "spend time with them" succeed, while parents who "cannot spend time with their kids" have major challenges.

Parents of kids who have already gone through kindergarten reported that classes demonstrated a huge range of skill levels at the end of the year, with some kids fairly advanced and some well behind. Again, lower income Spanish speaking participants, particularly those who lived at some distance from the city of Las Cruces, saw their children falling farther and farther behind and struggled to know how to help them. This also raised a discussion about how much work teachers send home in kindergarten; some parents (notably those who speak English) thought it was very helpful, while others found it overwhelming.

Several parents reported direct involvement with their children's teachers as being extremely helpful, but not always easy or comfortable. Many parents are hesitant to contact their children's teachers and do not know how to get better involved. They do not get communications home from teachers: many do not have access to or know how to use e-mail, and feel very disconnected to their children's schools. This problem was exacerbated in families where parents moved frequently and students have to change schools. Papers in backpacks get lost, e-mails don't go through. Some suggested that snail mail might be the best method of communication, another suggested monthly meetings (with food) or perhaps e-mail with some education for parents about how to use it. They liked the idea of e-mail, but the realities of limited Internet access and limited technical skills made it less practical.

***Access to early childhood programs***

Parents who had the opportunity to put their children in a Head Start program felt that their kids had an advantage entering kindergarten, but many parents did not or could not access Head Start for a number of reasons. The farm workers in the Las Cruces session could not arrange for their children to get to the program; transportation was a huge obstacle. Others faced waiting lists or did not make the income cutoff, although they could not afford private programs. Several of the parents didn't even know about Head Start and almost no one could name any other early childhood program or where they would even learn about one. The only other programs mentioned by name were Aprendamos and Healthy Start, which serve different purposes. Parents who had access to Head Start said they had to be very proactive to get into the program, and that the quality of different Head Start programs varied widely.

***Information about what to expect in kindergarten***

Almost to a person, parents reported having no idea what was expected of their children before entering

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kindergarten; even those whose children participated in Head Start programs. There is a glaring disconnect between early childhood and K–12 systems, and no one is perceived as helping to bridge that gap for parents. Their contact with their neighborhood schools begins only when they register for kindergarten, and even then they do not get much information about what kids need to know coming in at the end of kindergarten. They thought neighborhood schools should be doing more outreach to the community to help provide parents of young children with information about what was expected and what sorts of services were available.

When asked where they thought information should come from they named several nodal points in their communities:

- Neighborhood schools should reach out to families with young children, hold community fairs, etc. Most had no contact with schools until kids were enrolled
- W.I.C. program. Almost everyone involved had interacted with W.I.C., and this could be a great point of connection for families with young children.
- The health care system: clinics, pediatricians and promotores

Many reported having received some information from one of these sources about early childhood, particularly from the medical system, but said it was almost entirely behavioral, not academic, and had nothing about what kids ought to know to be prepared to be successful in school, just information about behavioral and developmental milestones.

This gap in information about expectations is a chasm; parents have no information and have no idea where to get it or to get resources to help get their kids better prepared, and the points of connection that exist are thus far not engaged in the issue at all. The key systems serving these families are disconnected and better communication and collaborative efforts among K–12, early childhood programs, health care, W.I.C. and other social service agencies could really make a difference in helping families get their children prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

**Common Core**

Only one parent (an English speaker who was deeply involved in her children's education) had any basically accurate idea of what was involved in the Common Core Standards. One other participant said she thought she had heard of them but didn't know anything about them. The rest heard about it for the first time in the focus groups.

They thought in theory it sounded like a good idea; that in the long term it could raise student achievement and make it much easier to switch schools or move to other states, something that was a common occurrence for many of these families (and that often caused their children to lose ground academically). But they expressed deep worry about the implications for testing (would it get more frequent, harder? It's already perceived as pretty tough). Participants talked about the increased stress on their children in regard to academic achievement and said that teachers were talking to their 3rd graders about how they would not go college if they didn't do well on standardized tests. And again, the issue of English language proficiency loomed large for parents of Spanish speakers, who felt it was unfair to give their students the same tests at such a young age when they were at such a large disadvantage compared to English-speaking students.

Basically, people have no idea what is coming or even that anything is coming at all. They have no concept of

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what will change, what they are supposed to do to prepare for these new standards, or how to find out anything more. There may be a very difficult transition when these standards are implemented, especially with English language learners, as people do not see the change coming at all.

Again, these findings seem to reflect the same lack of knowledge demonstrated in the survey, in which many pre-K and Head Start educators said they were already using the Common Core in their classrooms. This is not possible, and it indicates that they are really not aware of what the Common Core is or what it means for their students as they enter kindergarten.

***What could help families***

Parents had a range of suggestions for things that might help families, including:

- Summer school programs for young children to help them prepare academically
- A DVD for all families with information on what will be expected of elementary school students vis-à-vis the Common Core.
- A community program for evaluating children's readiness before they enter school
- Summer reading programs

There was some back and forth about home-based programs, with some participants suggesting that they would like to have someone in their home teaching them to help their children prepare and others saying they only wanted to participate in programs outside of the home. This is reflective of broader research conducted by Viewpoint Learning that shows a deep ambivalence on the part of the public about home-based programs. Everyone agreed that programs should be available to those ages 3 and up, and they agreed unanimously that cost and physical accessibility and transportation were critical issues that are currently preventing many children from getting the support they need.

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