NMCEH Leads Team of Agencies to End Youth Homelessness

by Hank Hughes, Executive Director

The New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness has been coordinating the development of a plan to end youth homelessness in Northern New Mexico and we are about to put that plan into practice this summer. Northern New Mexico was one of 11 communities selected nationwide to be part of round two of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, a federal grant program designed to help communities end youth homelessness.

Addressing youth homelessness is critical to our overall strategy to end homelessness because for most people homelessness starts when they are young. If we can help youth get quickly out of homelessness while they are still young, we can prevent years of suffering and instead help people reach their goals and become productive members of our communities.

Five nonprofit agencies and two county governments will team up to provide new housing and services in the 14 northernmost counties of New Mexico. In addition to NMCEH, Youth Shelters of Santa Fe, DreamTree of Taos, Samaritan House of Las Vegas, Kewa House of Santo Domingo Pueblo, Rio Arriba County and San Juan County will all provide rental assistance for housing along with supportive services.

These agencies have been selected by an impartial committee to receive the $3.37 million in federal funds along with $523,000 in state matching funds for the new project. These groups will provide housing for 115 homeless youth along with support services to help them reach goals that they set for their futures. Kewa House will provide outreach to Native American youth in the region to make sure they are not overlooked and NMCEH will coordinate the placement of youth into housing using a prioritization system that ensures those in most need are served first.

While this project starts in Northern New Mexico, our plan is to expand to the whole state in the next three years.

NMCEH and a group of agencies in Albuquerque have already applied this year for funding through round 3 of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program to expand the project to Albuquerque, and we then plan to apply for Southern New Mexico in the 2020 round of funding.

A drawing made by Susan Kelly, a former NMCEH Advisory Board Member, depicting youth homelessness.
This past State legislative session saw much more progress on the issue of homelessness than any other in recent memory. The fact that the state has an influx of oil and gas revenue helped, but so did having a number of Senators and Representatives who really care about the issue. Some of the Key highlights were:

- $523,000 was appropriated to match the $3.37 million federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program grant. This will ensure that this project gets off the ground this summer. $225,000 was appropriated to start a new homeless shelter in Española, a community that has needed its own homeless assistance program for a long time, thanks to Rep. Joseph Sanchez.
- $100,000 was appropriated to address homelessness in Gallup and another $100,000 to address homelessness in Hobbs.
- $985,000 was appropriated for a new shelter in Albuquerque to replace the one where people have to be bussed to.
- $2 million was added to the New Mexico Housing Trust Fund.
- Studies of how best to address housing and homelessness were commissioned for Albuquerque and Gallup.

Many legislators contributed to these successes and we don’t know everyone who helped because much happens behind the scenes. We do especially want to thank the following Representatives: Patty Lundstrom, Wonda Johnson, Tomás Salazar, Bobby Gonzales, Matthew McQueen, Joseph Sanchez and Melanie Stansbury. We also want to thank the following Senators: Nancy Rodriguez, Pete Campos, Carolos Cisneros, George Munoz and Liz Stephanics.

"SOAR"ing through NM - Getting Benefits to those Experiencing Homelessness, by Fred Hernandez, VISTA Volunteer

SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) is a best practice designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI (Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance) for adults and children who are currently experiencing, or at risk of homelessness and who have serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorders.

It can be a challenge for anyone to gain access to SSI/SSDI benefits and for those individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness the challenge can be even greater! NMCEH is the State Team Lead for this initiative. Due to the nature of this initiative, a lack of funding and a high need, many organizations throughout NM have found alternative means to providing this valuable service. Sustaining a volunteer program can be challenging without being proactive in finding and maintaining a solid foundation.

Monthly steering committees, online training opportunities, live technical support, and strong community collaboration are some of the approaches used to strengthen this initiative in NM. This past year, New Mexico became recognized as one of the top 10 states for having an approval rate for SOAR applications to SSA being approved at above 82%. The National TA Center also conducted a week-long visit to support expanding and launching SOAR throughout some key NM communities, there have been numerous organization groups trained in SOAR and the NMCEH is working to launch SOAR within the first tribal community in the nation!

If you are interested in learning more about SOAR, please contact Fred Hernandez at fred-h@nmceh.org or Hana Gossett at hana-g@nmceh.org, or check out the SOAR website at www.soarworks.prainc.com.
Our Sincere Gratitude Goes Out to these Individuals & Organizations
Thank You to Our Individual and Business Supporters (since previous newsletter)

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Anatoly Zlotnik

And, Special Thanks to:
Chainbreaker for hosting a forum on housing and homelessness and their ongoing advocacy for affordable housing.
Departing staff members Ben Ofoma and Lisa Maury for their years of service to the cause of ending homelessness.
The McCune Charitable Foundation and The Frost Foundation for their ongoing and faithful support.
Marisol Atkins, Zoe LeBeau, Katie Symons, Jenn Lopez and Linda Siegle who are providing the expertise we need to expand housing options for homeless people in New Mexico.
The State Legislators, listed on page two who helped obtain new state funding for several initiatives to house people experiencing homelessness.

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Member Organizations: For a list of our 80 members, please go to www.nmceh.org

An inspirational quote from Richard Quinn in Las Cruces: “As a resident of the Gospel Rescue Mission and long-term client of the Community of Hope, it was a great pleasure to welcome our new friends from Central America. They are not immigrants or migrants, they are refugees. I’ve seen no compromise in the excellent services these agencies provide to the needy in Las Cruces. Yes, myself and my friends have had to increase our work hours, but these refugees are so polite and so grateful it was a joy to do so. My family goes back to the Revolutionary War, which was born in pain and defended by blood. My dad fought in World War II and Korea. My uncle was a POW in a Nazi concentration camp. I am a true American and I say give us your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”
DreamTree Project Buys Ziggy’s to Expand Youth Opportunities
by Stéphanie Lefebvre, Office Manager

Earlier this year, DreamTree Project, an emergency youth shelter and transitional living program located in Taos and serving northern New Mexico, purchased Ziggy’s Frozen Yogurt. When Ziggy’s original owners put up their Taos successful business for sale, the DreamTree Project leadership seized the opportunity. Catherine Hummel, Executive Director at DreamTree, envisions that the Yogurt shop will provide a source of revenue for their nonprofit. Additionally, starting this fall, qualifying youth receiving services at DreamTree Project will be able to work at Ziggy’s, learn working skills and receive a paycheck.

The New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness bimonthly membership meeting took place in Taos on May 10th. Following the meeting, some members of the Coalition made their way to Ziggy’s Frozen Yogurt to learn about the new DreamTree Project business model and enjoy some delicious yogurts!