

Executive Summary: The Family YMCA's Española Teen Center

*New Mexico Department of Health reports show that many of Española's children live in a critical state of existence. Historical poverty, multi-generational drug abuse, familial violence, and resource challenges facing the rural community, school district and local governance have combined to essentially leave behind 15 percent of the area's children. **

But a partnership that started in 2007 between the City of Española and The Family YMCA has started to turn the tide for these youth. The plan was to create an out-of-school time resource, a teen center, for community youth. Goals of the Center are to support mastery of education, mentor teens toward higher education, and foster healthy lifestyles/positive community connections.

The overarching goal of the Espanola YMCA Teen Center (EYTC) is to keep teenagers engaged in school and away from gangs and destructive behaviors.

In 2016, EYTC was a safe haven for **601 youth throughout the year**. At an annual budget of \$200k supporting 600 youth, the cost per child per year is \$333.33.

Key evidence of EYTC being able to affect a key health indicator specifically related to education follows. Since opening in 2007 through the present (2016), staff members have tracked these results, with youth unique to each level, or unduplicated:

- 1) Assisted **41** youth to achieve their **reading-grade** level
- 2) Assisted **54** youth to achieve their **math-grade** level
- 3) Assisted **47** youth to obtain their **GED**
- 4) Assisted **54** youth to **re-engage in school that had dropped out** and/or assisted to graduate
- 5) This totals **196** individuals assisted to reach educational goals since 2007.
- 6) Youth who identified EYTC as the deciding influence to attend college (October 2007 - December 2016): **36**; 31 of these young adults are currently attending college classes, 5 of whom have finished college and now have careers.

ESPAÑOLA'S NEED:

New Mexico's Española Valley is a rural community of 9,688 that serves a county of 40,000, both of which have critical needs for services. The county and community have nearly double the national average of families and individuals below the poverty level. A total of 70% of the children are on free/reduced lunch. The school dropout rate is 7% compared with the state average of 4%. Also, a 2007 New Mexico Public Education report said 73% of Española high school graduates in college need remedial classes. The county population is 72% Hispanic and 14% American Indian.

A November 2009 NM DOH Epidemiology report, "Unintentional Illicit and Prescription Drug Overdose Death Trends, 2008," cited Rio Arriba County with the highest drug overdose death rate in our state at 52.2 per 100,000, comparable with the 7.1 in the United States (Center for Disease Control report, February 9, 2007, citing 1999-2004 statistics). A 2004 NM DOH drug abuse trends report cites the county as having severe multi-generational drug-addiction problems and fractured community services.

The State of New Mexico's Uniform Crime Report (<http://www.dps.state.nm.us/index.php>) details monthly crime statistics per reporting agency and county. In 2008, Rio Arriba County had the highest Assault and Burglary rates in the state, and was second only to the large urban center of Las Cruces in Larceny rates. In a comparison of counties in the state with similar population sizes, Rio Arriba County has double and sometimes triple the amount of total crimes. This summary reveals that this county has the highest rate of crime

of those reporting, which was 11,578.9 per 100,000. Local law enforcement officials attribute crime rates to illegal drug use; and the community being located along a known drug trafficking route.

Additionally, city and county governments face economic and personnel shortages that affect their ability to adequately meet public safety and community service needs.

CHANGING A SYSTEM

A 2010-12 Department of Education grant to the EYTC demonstrated through measurements tracked that the key connection between amount of youth tutored, amount of tutoring sessions offered, and amount of educational programs offered--thus impact to youth, is directly tied to funding support.

The most unexpected outcomes, upon final review of the numbers served during this grant period, was the amount of pure mathematical data that showed growth in numbers served and effective outreach. The main reason attributed to this is that during the two years of the grant that funding was secured, programs could be created to meet the needs of the youth. The year prior to this (2009) due to budget constraints, staff had severely cut back on tutoring hours and programs.

Numerous evidence-based studies support that out-of-school time enriching activities can keep youth on a track to graduate.

A 2012 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article by John Heller summarized research on the cost to society for the "rescue of an at-risk" youth over time.

- One youth who drops out of high school costs taxpayers between \$268,133 and \$428,130
- One youth who becomes a "career" drug abuser deprives society of between \$408,268 and \$1,070,324
- One youth who makes a career out of crime instead of a profession, in effect steals between \$1,434,455 to \$1,655,140 from other, more beneficial uses (source: The Costs and Benefits of After School Programs).

Heller's article quoted University of Illinois at Chicago professor of community health researcher David DuBois, as saying that at quality after school programs,

"The staff members play a pivotal role by helping kids feel encouraged and by giving them practical skills to cope with life in general." When asked about adults in the lives, DuBois says, the kids rank program staff above teachers: "In after-school settings where they can go every day, sometimes over many years, there's really potential for deep relationships and connection to the setting itself."

Of course the benefit to graduation is that individuals are more likely to gain access to employment with health insurance and thus less likely to rely on social service health care systems. Evidence-based research also shows that youth development programs connect youth to their community and help foster them to become leaders and connect positively to their community.

Research numbers support the thought that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Looking beyond the impact on the society, NM DOH data strongly indicates that resources are needed to help the individual.

***2008 Rio Arriba County Juvenile Justice Advisory Board study.**