

## Executive Summary: The Family YMCA's Española Teen Center

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*New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) reports reveal that Española and Rio Arriba County (RAC) suffer with poor educational outcomes, multi-generational substance abuse, domestic violence, poverty and high crime rates. An August 2022 DOH Epidemiology report says RAC has the highest drug overdose rate in the state at 86.9/100,000 vs. the state average of 29.2; and the RAC alcohol-related death rate is 83.3/100,000, double the state average of 39.8. A 2020-5-year cohort NM Public Education Department report shows Española's graduation rate was 65.5 percent versus the state average of 81.7. The need for funding is vital to creating positive outcomes for youth.*

*A partnership that started in 2007 between the City of Española and The Family YMCA continues to turn the tide for these 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 2023, EYTC was a safe haven for **317 youth throughout the year**. At an annual budget of \$200k supporting 317 youth, the cost per child per year is \$630.91.

Key evidence of EYTC being able to affect a key health indicator specifically related to education follows. Since opening in 2007 through the present (2023), staff members have tracked these results, with youth unique to each level, or unduplicated:

- 1) Assisted **48** youth to achieve their **reading-grade** level
- 2) Assisted **67** youth to achieve their **math-grade** level
- 3) Assisted **62** youth to obtain their **GED**
- 4) Assisted **59** youth to **re-engage in school that had dropped out** and/or assisted to graduate
- 5) This totals **236** individuals assisted to reach educational goals since 2007.
- 6) Youth who identified EYTC as the deciding influence to attend college (October 2007 - December 2023): **54**; 9 of these young adults are currently attending college classes, 29 of whom have finished college and now have careers.

### **ESPAÑOLA'S NEED:**

New Mexico's Española Valley is a rural community of **10,526** that serves a county of 40,000, both of which have critical needs for services. The county (21.8 percent) and community (18.9 percent) have nearly double the national average (**11.6 percent**) of people below the poverty level. All children in the Española School District are eligible for free/reduced lunch. The school graduation rate is equal with the state average of 76 percent. The City's median household income is \$44,427 (versus state average of \$56,420; US average is \$53,463); the employment rate is 52.2 percent; and the percentage of those with a bachelor's degree or higher is 17 percent. The City's population is 83% Hispanic; the County's population is 67 percent Hispanic, and 17 percent American Indian.

According to the Neighborhood Scout security rate, Española has a violent crime comparison rate per 1,000 residents of 30.54 vs. the state's 7.8 rate, and the national median rate of 4.

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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.