

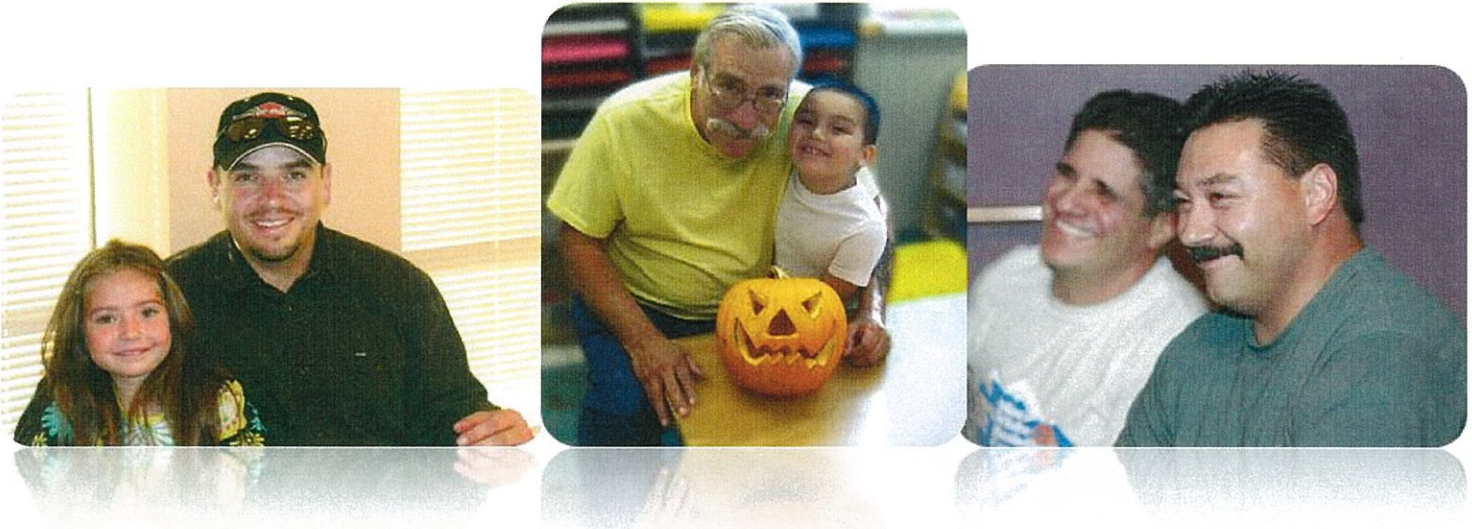
Report

**New Mexico Fatherhood Forum**

***Cultivating a Culture of Vibrant Father Engagement:  
New Perspectives from Rural America***

August 10, 2010

University of New Mexico Valencia Campus



*Co-sponsored by*

**The White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture/NM Office of Rural Development**

**New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families (NMAFF)**

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*Photo by Teri Thomson Randall for REEL FATHERS*

*Fathers matter to kids, kids matter to fathers, and families and communities are better off when fathers and children are positively engaged in each other's lives.*

### **New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families**

**A statewide coalition of organizations dedicated to creating a culture of positive father engagement by advocating for needed policy changes, promoting effective programs, and attracting new resources to New Mexico.**

## **Dedication**

**This Report is dedicated to all the fathers and families of New Mexico  
who seek a better life.**

## **Acknowledgments**

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the following organizations whose timely, generous support made possible both the  
New Mexico Fatherhood Forum and this Report:**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<b>Report Overview</b> .....	5
<b>So Far</b> .....	7
An impressionistic description of the day’s events	
<b>New Mexico Fatherhood Forum in Context</b> .....	11
Key background information on New Mexico	
<b>Welcoming Remarks by U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman</b> .....	13
<b>Remarks by U.S. Senator Tom Udall</b> .....	15
(Read by Michael Lopez, Field Representative)	
<b>Policy Roundtable: Key Findings</b>	
Education and Early Childhood.....	17
Health and Human Services.....	21
Judicial System.....	26
Workforce and Economic Development.....	31
<b>Appendix</b> .....	35
Policy Roundtable Agenda	
Public Forum Agenda	
Event Hosts, Funders, Allies and NMAFF Members	
New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families (NMAFF): Fatherhood Forum Program Team and Advisors	
<u>Valencia County News-Bulletin</u> article: <i>White House Forum Speaks to Fatherhood, Participation</i>	



## **Executive Summary**

This Report summarizes the key findings of the New Mexico Fatherhood Forum, held on August 10, 2010 at the University of New Mexico Valencia Campus and attended by some 200 individuals representing the state's public, private and voluntary sectors.

Co-hosted by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the U.S. Department of Agriculture/New Mexico Office of Rural Development, and the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families, the Forum was comprised of two sessions.

The first session was a **Policy Roundtable** of some 100 state officials, program service providers and policy makers who were invited for their expertise in one of four policy areas: Education and Early Childhood, Health and Human Services, Judicial System, and Workforce and Economic Development. Each roundtable reported their recommendations to the group at large; these recommendations are summarized in this Report.

The second session, open to the media and the public, was a **Public Forum**. It featured a panel of seven participants who spoke from their personal and professional experience about key fatherhood issues—calling attention to the support systems and policies that have been beneficial as well as those that are missing and needed.

Opening and closing both sessions, members of the faith-based community contributed their prayers, blessings, and ceremonial offerings to those assembled and to the day's dialogue in support of our state's fathers and families.

What emerged was a rich compendium of practical suggestions and impassioned testimonials by, for and about the fathers of New Mexico.

### **Policy Roundtable Summary**

The *Education and Early Childhood Roundtables* focused on how best to involve fathers in the education of their children, and how cultures, and cultural expectations about the father's role, influence the interaction between fathers and school structures. Ten general recommendations produced 14 suggested action steps, including:

- Increasing understanding among employers about the importance of father involvement in children's education, including allowing and *encouraging* time off for school conferences.
- Finding effective ways to seek and support father inclusion and involvement in school programs, in publicly funded parenting programs, and in entitlement programs such as WIC and TANF.
- Creating scholarship opportunities for male, bilingual and culturally diverse teachers who pursue elementary teacher licensure, especially to serve in rural schools.

The *Health and Human Services Roundtables* addressed how program infrastructures can better encourage and support fathers to be engaged with their children. Thirteen general recommendations and 14 suggested action steps resulted, including:

- Incorporating curricula within college degree programs for Social Work, Counseling, etc. that raise awareness of the benefits of father involvement and the ways to affirmatively include fathers in services offered and to support them in their roles.

- Funding programs that train mentors for fathers-to-be and new fathers.
- Creating programs that organize and align family service providers, including encouraging use of electronic records and interagency collaboration to better serve families.
- Providing language and measures that include positive indices of father engagement, rather than focusing on deficits.
- Creating more supports for the father’s involvement in the baby’s birth, thus increasing emotional investment in the newborn and the mother, and increasing services for expecting fathers.

The *Judicial Issues Roundtables* discussed what changes in New Mexico’s Family Court, Criminal Court, and Juvenile Court systems could help fathers in these systems stay engaged with their children. Ten general recommendations were developed, along with 14 specific action steps. Among these were:

- Strengthening efforts to encourage mediation and discourage all aspects of Family Court processes that foster adversarial interactions between parents.
- Conducting co-trainings to support team building between domestic violence prevention and fatherhood advocacy service providers.
- Increasing the prevention, diversion, family visiting, and re-entry programs for fathers involved in the criminal justice system.
- Encouraging the media to educate about the benefits for children and fathers when fathers are engaged, and the negative consequences to both when fathers are absent.

The *Workforce/Economic Development Roundtables* focused on the effect of New Mexico’s workforce issues on father engagement; especially ways to support fathers in gaining/maintaining employment, and ways to support working fathers to be positively involved with their children. Six general recommendations and four action steps were submitted, including:

- Aligning benefits and support systems; especially, creating a single set of requirements and job interviews to cover unemployment benefits, transportation assistance, etc.
- Developing a more efficient and accurate process to modify child support arrangements when a parent’s salary changes.
- Working with local media in each county to highlight examples of positive fathering, drawing on a range of “good fathering” stories from varied cultural, language, and age groups to “put a face on” the wide variety of engaged fathering activities and models.

**N.B. During these tight budgetary times, it is important to note that many of the recommendations contained in the Policy Roundtable section of this Report require little or no additional spending. Rather, they require an investment of leadership and new sensitivities.**

**This Report has been generated by the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families. The Alliance is solely responsible for its content.**

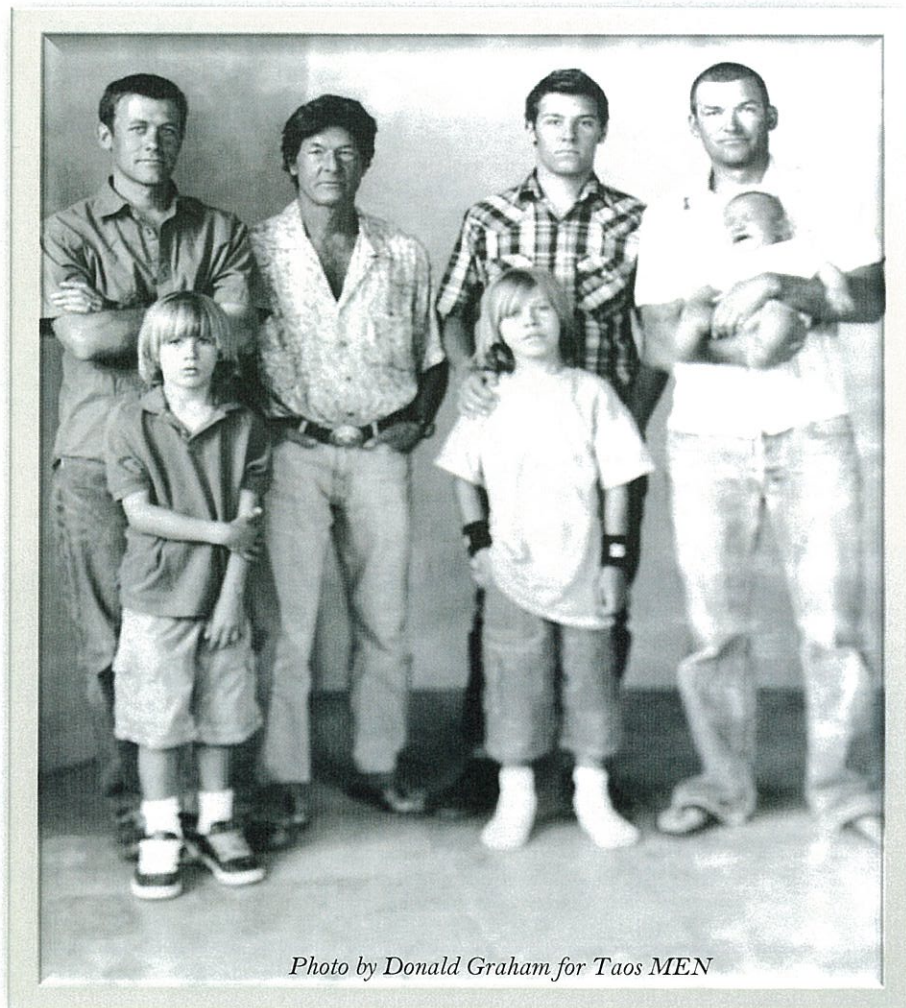


*New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families*

*Fatherhood Forum*



*Dona Ana County Head Start*



*Photo by Donald Graham for Taos MEN*



## Report Overview

On August 10, 2010 some 200 individuals – state officials, elected representatives, program service providers, policy makers, fathers, grandfathers, children and other family members attended a day-long Fatherhood Forum at the University of New Mexico Valencia Campus in Los Lunas, NM. The Forum was the sixth of a series of Fatherhood Forums sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships throughout the U.S. The federal partner for this Forum was the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/NM Office of Rural Development. The local partner was the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families.

A response to President Obama’s call for a national conversation on fatherhood and personal responsibility, the New Mexico Forum provided a transition from the “listening” format used previously to a format that fosters a statewide and national *movement* calling for new policies and programs to support positive father engagement. It was the first with a statewide focus (the others were regional in scope).

In keeping with the theme of “new perspectives from rural America,” the forum highlighted New Mexico’s agrarian-based cultures. Rooted in the traditions of rural life and the reverence for family, these cultures offer vivid, enduring models for engaged fathers and healthy, vital communities.

The Forum was comprised of two sessions:

- **Policy Roundtable**, from 12:00 to 3:30 pm, by invitation.
- **Public Forum**, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, open to the public and the media.

Terry Brunner, Director, USDA Rural Development/New Mexico Office, served as the Forum Host and Moderator. Joshua DuBois, Executive Director, White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, provided opening and closing remarks for each session.

The **Policy Roundtable** addressed key issues in four areas:

- **Education and Early Childhood**
- **Health and Human Services**
- **Judicial System**
- **Workforce/Economic Development**

Some 18 – 24 professionals and fathers were invited to participate in two groups for each policy area; some groups elected to meet as a single unit.

The opening invocation was delivered by Pastor Matthew Sellers, Paragon Church. An introduction to each policy area and instructions for each policy group were provided by: Bill Blair, Ph.D., Program Manager, School and Family Support, New Mexico Public Education Department for Education and Early Childhood; Jerry Tello, National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute for Health and Human Services; Judge Monica Zamora, Presiding Children’s Court Judge, Division III for the Judicial System, and James Rodriguez, Fathers and Families Coalition of America for Workforce/Economic Development.

Participants were asked to frame their discussion with four questions:

1. What are some current programs and policies that support meaningful father engagement in your assigned issue area?
2. What’s missing and what can we do better?

3. What policies can be put in place at the local, state, and federal levels to expand and scale up successful programs and to address the gaps that you identified?
4. What can be learned from and what considerations are needed to address New Mexico's unique cultural diversity?

After 75 minutes of facilitated discussion, each roundtable reported their key findings to the entire group. These findings are summarized in this Report.

The **Policy Roundtable** concluded with a blessing and “smudging” of the entire group by Erwin Rivera of Northern New Mexico ENLACE, and a presentation by Kathy Sanchez of Tewa Women United of the New Mexico State Flag to the guests and co-hosts from the federal government -- Joshua DuBois, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Following ceremonial singing and drumming by the Star Road Dance Company of Taos Pueblo, the **Public Forum** featured a panel of seven participants who spoke from their personal and professional experience about key fatherhood issues—calling attention to the support systems and policies that have been beneficial as well as those that are missing and needed.

The panel was moderated by host Terry Brunner/USDA and Ben O'Dell, Deputy Director, White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Participants included: Crispin Clarke, Executive Director and CEO of Men Engaged in Nonviolence (MEN); Hector Balderas, New Mexico State Auditor; Ken Howard, Healthy Families Counseling and Support; Wes Studi, New Mexico actor and father; and Andrea Moreno, Valencia County youth and daughter.

Father Frank Pretto, Pastor, San Isidro Catholic Church, provided the opening invocation for the **Public Forum**. Don McAvinchey of REEL FATHERS and Chair of the Forum Planning team provided the closing.

Bishop David C. Cooper, Senior Pastor and Regional Bishop, New Hope Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship gave the Ecumenical Benediction and Gathering of Intentions.

The Public Forum was vividly described in the August 14, 2010 issue of the *Valencia County News-Bulletin*. A hard copy of this article is provided with this report and can be accessed electronically:

<http://www.news-bulletin.com/nb/index.php/news/2730-white-house-forum-speaks-to-fatherhood-participation.html>

The driving force behind the New Mexico Fatherhood Forum was the newly formed New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families -- more than two dozen social profits, state agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and social service agencies – with key support provided by the Office of Lt. Governor Diane Denish and the New Mexico Congressional Delegation.

The purpose of the Alliance is to create a culture of vibrant father engagement by serving as an ongoing, collaborative force within New Mexico. The Alliance advocates for needed policy changes, highlights and encourages effective programs, and attracts new resources to the state for the support of fatherhood programs. The Alliance aims to build upon a number of promising programs and resources already in place, as well as the traditional wisdom of New Mexican cultures that have long valued the importance of families.

## So Far

There was a palpable energy in the hall – it was a generative energy; the kind of energy that is born when people join together across longstanding boundaries because the common purpose that brings them together is much stronger than the old habits that have kept them apart. Coming together in rural New Mexico to begin to cultivate a culture of vibrant father engagement was an exciting and intriguing prospect. And being invited by the White House, USDA/NM Office of Rural Development, and the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families indicated that this was an important event.

So, more than 200 participants came to the University of New Mexico's Valencia Campus in rural New Mexico, on August 10, 2010, for The White House's sixth Fatherhood Forum. Those gathered represented a rich mosaic of New Mexico's traditions and cultures – a source of strength at times for the state, of dissension and difficulty at other times.

People gathered under the auspices of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (WHOFNP) to generate policy suggestions to support the Obama Administration in moving its fatherhood agenda forward, offering fresh perspectives from rural America and thoughts about how to make our unique and diverse state more “father-friendly.”

From an opening invocation by an Evangelical Pastor to an ecumenical final blessing from an African American Baptist Bishop, and from a Catholic prayer of welcome in Spanish and English to Native American ceremonial blessings and drumming, the program gave voice to New Mexico's distinctive mix of cultures and traditions. Men with pony tails sat next to men with military haircuts; men in button-down shirts and ties sat next to men in T-shirts spotlighting their tattoos; women in indigenous garb sat next to women who could have stepped out of the latest fashion magazine.

But it wasn't long before all assembled realized they shared a common determination to address the challenges created when fathers are not engaged in their children's lives and the challenges imposed by traditions, family histories, systems and policies – as well as those that are self-inflicted – that keep dads and families from positively engaging with each other. And it wasn't long before all who were present also realized there was much to honor and celebrate among existing traditions, policies, and personal achievements that encourage positive fatherly relationships.

*So far* New Mexico has taken a dramatic first step by articulating a need to foster a culture of vibrant father engagement. In its February 2010 letter to Joshua DuBois, Director of The White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, requesting consideration for a Fatherhood Forum in New Mexico, the NM Alliance for Fathers and Families stated “*Fathers matter to kids, kids matter to fathers, and families and communities are better off when fathers and children are positively engaged in each other's lives.*” We acknowledged that “*our state is at or near the bottom of virtually every national indicator of the well-being of children, youth, and families and we consider that standing unacceptable.*” Furthermore we acknowledged that responsible, loving father engagement positively affects families and that father absence has a negative impact.

This report tells the story of New Mexico's determination to reverse this standing and what it has done to that end *so far*...

### Back Story

The September-October 2009 e-mail and phone exchanges between Ben O'Dell, Deputy Director WHOFNP and Allan Shedlin, Founder and President of REEL FATHERS, a social profit organization headquartered in Santa Fe, were a follow-up to Ben's invitation to Allan to discuss some of the ideas he had written about in the popular press about *daddy*ing and how to encourage “responsible fatherhood,” an idea also advanced

during the last three Presidential administrations, and one of the four key priorities of this White House office.

During the initial meeting on November 4, 2009, in Ben's Washington, DC office, Allan suggested that the White House consider New Mexico as a setting for one of its 2010 Fatherhood Forums. A few weeks later, this idea was shared with Claire Dudley, Policy Advisor to Lt. Governor Diane Denish. With Claire's active support on behalf of the Lt. Governor, a January 8, 2010 meeting was scheduled to generate interest in advocating for a White House fatherhood forum in New Mexico.

Expecting a maximum yield of 25% to invitations sent out during the holiday season for a January 8 meeting, invitations were delivered to some 40 individuals representing a broad cross section of state and community-based organizations.

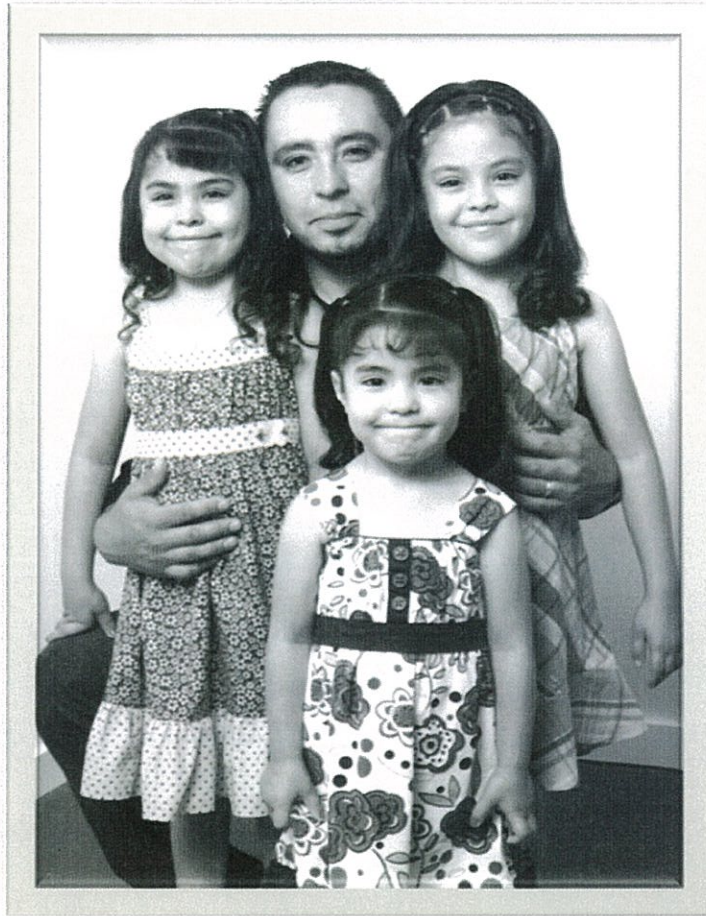
The initial meeting, convened by the Center for Philanthropic Partnerships, the New Mexico Children's Cabinet, and REEL FATHERS (RF), and coordinated by RF, was attended by almost 30 participants at the Albuquerque Community Foundation. This invitation yield of approximately 75% was the first indication of the depth of enthusiasm in the State for working on fatherhood issues.

The enthusiasm generated at the meeting led to a subsequent meeting one week later hosted at the Albuquerque office of Senator Jeff Bingaman. During that January 15<sup>th</sup> meeting the participants formed the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families (NMAFF) to create a culture of positive father engagement in New Mexico. To that end, its initial goal was to formally invite the White House to co-host a Fatherhood Forum in New Mexico.

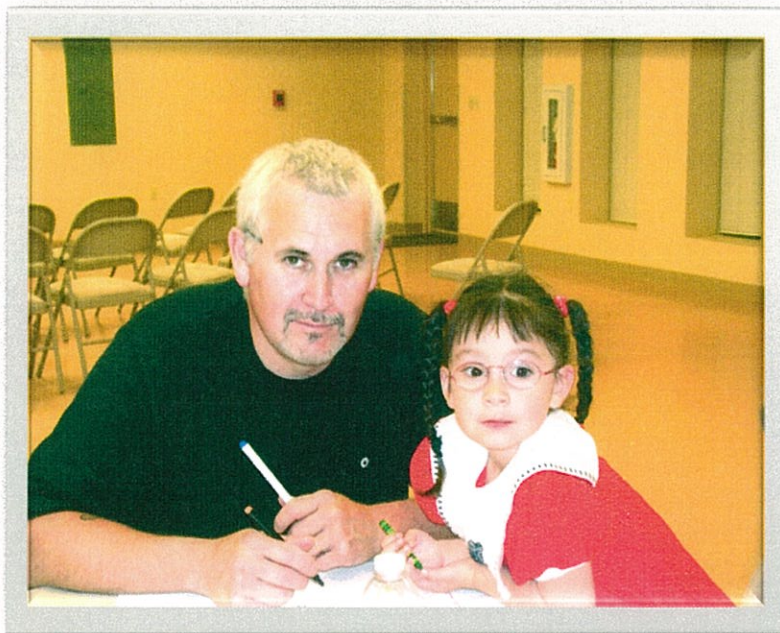
On March 2, 2010, on behalf of NMAFF, Allan hand-delivered a packet of letters to Ben O'Dell. This packet, together with a New Mexico *ristra* and a package of extra hot New Mexico chile, followed two weeks after a similar letter was sent to President Obama, co-signed by the New Mexico Congressional delegation. During the meeting with Allan, Ben shared his excitement about the efforts in New Mexico because it fit so well with the Administration's proposal to Congress for the Fatherhood and Marriage Innovation Fund. Because the Fund, as proposed, would enable states to expand programs supporting fatherhood and families, New Mexico would be prepared to support nonprofits and service providers with existing partnerships with the State.

By embracing the vibrant traditions and diversity of its population and by crossing traditional boundaries between state and local organizations, those who gathered at the New Mexico Fatherhood Forum demonstrated a powerful commitment to have New Mexico become a national model for being an authentically father- and family-friendly state for all its citizens. *So far* we have demonstrated an understanding that the need to do this is greater than the temptation to adhere to old patterns that discourage genuine collaboration. We have come a long way in a short period of time...and we are as aware as we are determined to go *so far* to make the changes that are needed.

***Our children are waiting, we can do no less!***



*Photo by Donald Graham for Taos MEN*



*REEL FATHERS YDI-Taos Head Start*





## **New Mexico Fatherhood Forum in Context**

New Mexico may have been the perfect location for a White House Fatherhood Forum entitled *Cultivating a Culture of Vibrant Father Engagement: New Perspectives from Rural America* – for many good reasons and sadly, for some not so good.

**New Mexico is a rural state.** Of our 33 counties, only three have population centers of more than 100,000 people. Our smaller communities are as diverse as our population: Pueblo Indian villages that have been continuously occupied for thousands of years; small agrarian villages settled by Hispanic colonists after conquest; larger towns and small cities with economies based on a single or a few prime industries – mining, tourism, military, government; Indian reservations where the population is scattered over vast areas or where chapters are in widespread and isolated locales. Even some of our more urban centers see themselves as being part of a frontier-minded state. And because New Mexico is a large state, our communities are spread out. Many people must travel great distances to access resources, health care, education, and employment opportunities.

**New Mexico's population is diverse and reflects many growing national trends.** We are truly a melting pot. Our residents represent incredibly varied heritages, speak ancient and sometimes disappearing languages, and come to New Mexico from all over the world. Our people celebrate fathers and families with ancient and new traditions. People who self-identify as Hispanic make up over half of our population and the state ranks high in the number of undocumented people living here. Over ten percent of our residents are Native American, thirty percent are White, while other racial and ethnic groups are well represented in the state. And our diversity is seen in communities all over the state. While our cultural diversity is a hallmark and a strength, it can also lead to divisions, to institutional racism, and to barriers in providing supports and services for families.

**New Mexico is a poor state.** More than 25% of our state's children are born into families living in poverty, ranking us 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation. We have few industries that provide high-paying jobs, so although many families may appear to be living above federal poverty levels, the cost of living in New Mexico makes their reality different. High tech and so-called "green" jobs show potential for increasing New Mexico's wage base. While tourism provides many jobs, these are usually low paying while costs of living in tourist-attractive communities are high. Unfortunately, high poverty statistics include high rates of child abuse and neglect, and high rates of substance abuse in families.

**New Mexico ranks near the bottom among states in national statistics on the well-being of children, youth and families.** Over half of the births in New Mexico are to single mothers. Our teen pregnancy rate is the second highest in the nation. Our high school graduation rate is second from the bottom nationally – on average 77 students drop out of school each day in New Mexico. On average, more than 13 children per day are victims of a substantiated report of child abuse as a result of a Child Protective Services investigation. Father absence and insufficient father involvement factor significantly in every social problem experienced by our children and our families.





## **Welcoming Remarks by U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman**

Thank you very much, Terry [Brunner], for the kind introduction. It's great to be here to encourage all of you who are participating in this forum.

Let me join all of us in thanking the White House for taking the initiative to come here. As Joshua [Dubois] mentioned, this is the sixth of these conferences or forums the White House has held around the country. We are honored that they chose New Mexico as the location for today's forum, and the Valencia Campus of UNM is a great host. We thank the UNM Valencia Campus Executive Director Alice Letteney – our hostess here. Alice heads up this campus – it's a beautiful facility, her staff has done a great job, and we're very fortunate to be here.

Let me also thank the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families for their work in organizing this event. I know a lot goes into producing one of these events, and I very much appreciate that.

Let me also introduce Angelo Gonzales who works in my office in Albuquerque. And then, of course, I want to thank Terry Brunner. Terry does a great job as the State Director for the Rural Development Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Let's welcome his boss, too -- Undersecretary Dallas Tonsager, who is going to speak right after me. And let's extend a little more formal thank you and recognition of Joshua Dubois, who is here from the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships that is co-hosting this forum.

We have President Obama to thank for the focus on fatherhood and the national conversation that is going on around this subject. He is a great role model for what it takes to be a good father.

I remember shortly after he became president, he invited a group of us from the Congress – the committee chairs and ranking members from both the House and the Senate -- to come to the White House for a big dinner. This was a first. No president had done that before, at least that we could remember. We were all dressed for the occasion and we had a wonderful sit-down dinner with all these waiters hustling around serving the elegant meal.

The president got up after everyone had eaten and gave a nice little talk. Then he said, "Let me just say, so there's no confusion about it, tonight is a school night. Michelle and I have the habit of visiting with our daughters before they go to bed every school night, and encouraging them to share how the previous day was and how the next day's going to be. And so Michelle and I are going to excuse ourselves. You folks have a great party."

That was the first time, I think, at least in my experience around the White House, that we had a president be that up front about, "My first priority is my kids, and my first priority is my responsibility as a father to my daughters." I admired that, and I think everyone in the room admired it. And that, I think, is the attitude that has led to a conference like this one.

So I'm honored that we are having such a conference here. There are a lot of reasons that you folks know, as well as I do, about why fathers are absent too often – why they are often not meaningfully engaged in

raising their children. Those factors are all exacerbated and made worse because of the economic circumstances we find ourselves in. I don't think there's anyone who questions that economic difficulties cause stress within the family.

But there are things government can do to make things better, and we need to explore what these are. There are barriers, and there are gaps that exist within our current programming that we should try to fix. There are many community-based organizations represented here that are doing important things with regard to this whole issue of fatherhood. We need to understand the impact of their work better and find ways to support them.

I know that the President is planning to request that Congress establish a new fund. This is the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund, which will be a resource for community organizations that are engaged in fatherhood work. I hope we can support this fund in the Congress; I certainly will. Hopefully we'll succeed in establishing this program, and it will provide funding for community organizations in New Mexico that are working on this important set of issues regarding fathers and families.

Again, thank you for allowing me to be here.



## **Remarks by U.S. Senator Tom Udall**

(Read by Michael Lopez, Field Representative)

Thank you for inviting me to share a few thoughts today as we kick off this critically important dialogue on fatherhood engagement in New Mexico.

Earlier this year, I teamed up with the other members of the Congressional Delegation and invited the White House to host a Fatherhood Forum here in New Mexico.

I want to thank President Obama and the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships for elevating the issue of responsible fatherhood not only in New Mexico, but across the nation. I also want to thank UNM/Valencia for their hospitality, as well as USDA/Rural Development and the New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families for the many months of planning and coordination leading up to today.

This room is filled with some of New Mexico's finest citizens—teachers, counselors, mentors, coaches, community leaders, philanthropists, and members of the clergy. I commend the work you do every day to improve the lives of New Mexico's families, and to create a culture in which fathers can fully engage with their children. The perspectives you bring to this dialogue are of great value because of the unique communities you represent. Your collective voice will help to shape national policy and promote father-friendly programs and strategies that will most certainly have an impact close to home.

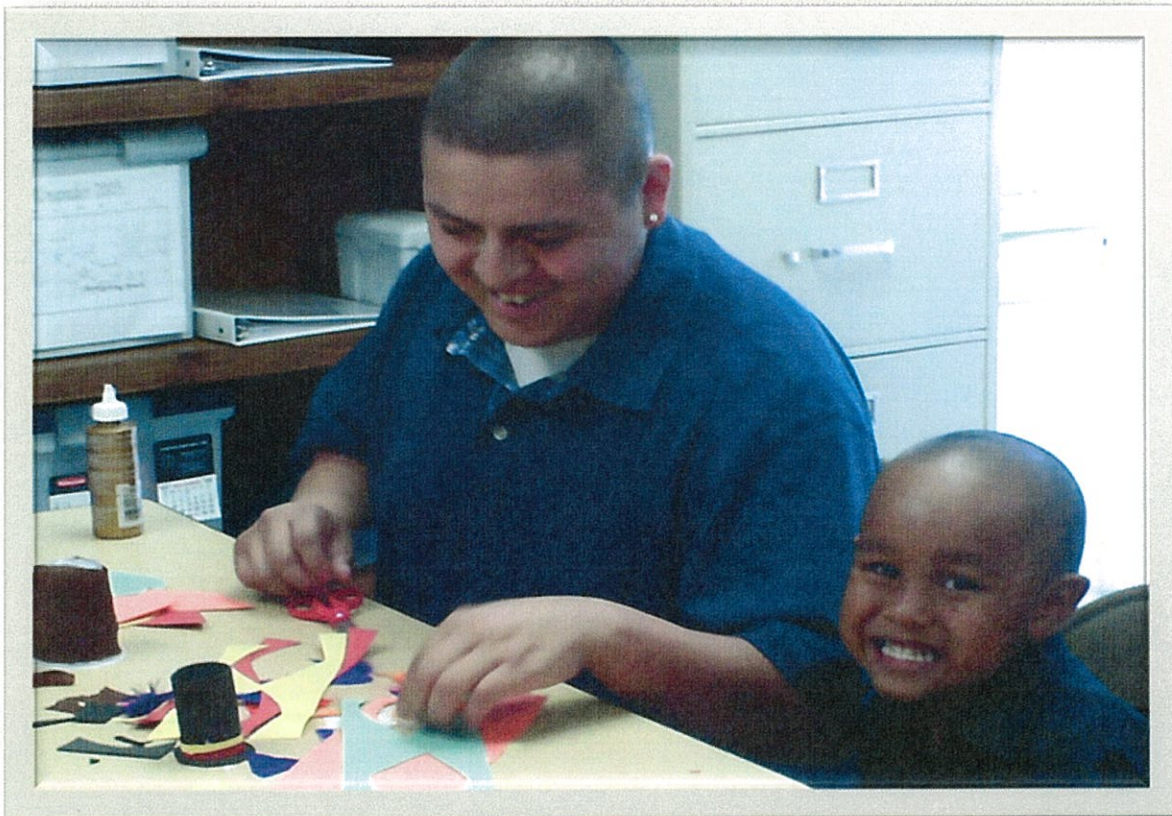
Earlier this year, I lost my father, who was one of the most important people in my life. I am grateful every day for his strength, his wisdom, and his love. Through his example, I, in turn, have tried to be the best father I can be to my own daughter.

The importance of fatherhood cannot be overstated, and New Mexico fathers deserve the necessary resources to succeed in what is arguably the most important job in the world. When fathers are denied this network of support, their families suffer, their children suffer and their communities suffer.

Thank you again for your participation and advocacy on behalf of New Mexico's fathers. Please accept my best wishes for a successful and productive gathering. I look forward to supporting your efforts in the days to come.



*Las Cruces Public Schools Men's group*



*Mid West New Mexico CAP*

## Education and Early Childhood Roundtable

This Roundtable focused on how best to involve fathers in the education of their children and what can be done within various educational settings and systems to make them more father-friendly. Much of the discussion at the two tables involved ways that schools could become sites for parent education programs. There was also conversation about how fathers and their roles are defined in various cultures, and how this influences the interaction between fathers and school structures. Finally, thoughts were shared on the role schools could take in growing great future fathers.

Members of the two panels included representatives from the New Mexico Department of Education, the Albuquerque Public Schools, Brindle Foundation, the Office of Philanthropic Outreach (now the Center for Philanthropic Partnerships), Southwest Association of Indian Arts (SWAIA), the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the Director of the Santa Fe Children and Youth Commission, a seventeen year old from this rural area, a Program Manager of Early Childhood Services for CYFD, a Laguna Pueblo father, and a member of the New Mexico Youth Alliance.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Boys have different learning styles and needs than girls; educators need to recognize this if we want to encourage boys to become great fathers.	Increase awareness about the difference in learning styles between boys and girls during teacher training.	Consider adding a requirement in teacher licensure curricula for learning and incorporating the different learning styles of boys and girls.  Include information about differences in learning styles in schools' pre-service days at the start of the school year.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers often experience schools as not being father-friendly and welcoming.	Examine attitudes toward fathers on a school-by-school and district-wide basis.  Provide incentives, such as food, to encourage father involvement at school events.  Create fathers' circles or groups. Provide opportunities for fathers to introduce wisdom/cultural legacies in schools. These could include storytelling times, sharing work experiences and skills, school/ community garden projects and other ways of working, including working with the land.	Encourage every public school and school district to foster cultures of active father engagement.  Fund PTA initiatives to support programs that engage dads in schools.  Develop policies that encourage volunteer involvement of parents/fathers during the school day.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers sometimes experience cultural and gender barriers to father involvement.	School districts need to hire more male teachers, especially at the elementary level, and then need to encourage those teachers to reach out to dads in their schools. Capacity for bi-lingual outreach especially needs to be greater.	Create scholarship opportunities for males and bi-lingual and culturally diverse teachers who pursue elementary teacher licensure, especially for rural schools.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Grandfathers, uncles and other close family friends or relatives are often the prominent male in the family, becoming a father figure if the dad is not present.	Conduct outreach to, and include in programs, grandfathers, uncles and other males playing a fatherly role to sanction and strengthen their presence in students' lives and school programs.	Provide awareness programs for school officials and teachers about the importance of having fathers, grandfathers, and other males involved in the lives and education of children.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Many fathers are unaware of the importance of being involved with their children's education ("That's the mom's job").	Find multiple ways for school and community parenting programs to call attention to the importance of dads being just as involved as moms and other caregivers.	Promote family-to-family mentoring programs to provide much-needed support and tools for supporting active father engagement (Parents Reaching Out, ENLACE provide model programs).  Schools and districts could rework forms so that when feasible, they require two parent signatures on documents – health forms, progress reports, etc.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers are sometimes discouraged from involvement due to societal and cultural norms, or other barriers.	Increase the awareness of all family members about the importance of father involvement in all aspects of a child's life.	Encourage all publicly funded parenting programs to provide support for father inclusion, involvement and engagement.  Advocate that all federal, state and local entitlement programs – WIC, TANF, etc. – provide parenting education programs that include father involvement for their enrolled recipients.



<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Many employers do not have policies that allow fathers to be involved with their children's education, especially during the school day – and even fewer encourage it.	Increase the awareness among employers of the importance to society of father/parent involvement in a child's education.	Encourage employers to allow, even support employees in taking time off for parent-teacher conferences with no negative consequences. Treat school conferences as a duty, like voting and jury duty.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Students have few ways to learn and be inspired about what is involved in being a great parent.	Develop student curricula to teach about early childhood development and the critical role parents have in giving babies a great start in life. Current school parents could team up with community providers to do presentations that supplement course work.	Provide information for adolescent males about the impact and severity of child support payments and consequences for non-compliance before they father a child.  Include early childhood development in late elementary, middle and/or high school level curricula, with an approach that is culturally inclusive and emphasizes both the serious responsibility and the joy of parenthood – for both parents.



## Health and Human Services Roundtable

This Roundtable addressed how the Health and Human Services infrastructure serves fathers in New Mexico and how it can better support them to be fully engaged with their children.

The Roundtable identified the need to increase education and support programs as the primary means to better engage and prepare fathers to support mothers and their children. There was a consensus that more evaluation and research is needed to create a broader knowledge base in this emerging field of targeted services for fathers. Clinical research on the individual learning styles of fathers was discussed, as well as attachment histories and other individual factors.

The Roundtable suggested that the exploratory and qualitative nature of many of these new approaches requires a committed funding stream free of the typical quantitative, evidence-based focus of traditional grant requirements. Otherwise, these much-needed programs may never be able to mature past their incubation stages.

Members of the Health and Human Services Roundtable included representation from Senator Tom Udall’s Office, the New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs, Tewa Women United, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, the New Mexico Office of African American Affairs, the New Mexico Child Advocacy Network, U.S Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families (ACF, Dallas, TX), the New Mexico Child Support Enforcement Division and the National Latino Fatherhood Institute.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
When the father is absent from or disconnected from the birthing experience, there is less emotional investment with the newborn and the mother – a contributing factor to future conflict with or detachment from the mother and/or child.	Create more supports for the father’s involvement in birthing. If necessary, allow court mediation services to occur before birth to allow father’s involvement with newborn.	Recommend that funders consider creating incentives for pre-natal agencies/ programs to provide an equal amount of programming for fathers-to-be.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
There are fewer father-specific resources in social service/public health agencies that serve expecting parents than there are for mothers.	Develop high quality father-specific materials about child development and utilize them in services for expecting parents.	Recommend the development of new standards and procedures at the state level for licensure as a social service provider (or to win a detention facility contract) that require father-specific resources to be provided to fathers.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
There is a need for more counseling/therapy for fathers and families after a baby is born. Mental health resources for low-income families, including psychological assessments, are disproportionately directed to mothers.	Increase the number of sensitivity, anger management/conflict resolution, emotional self-regulation, and social development classes offered by service agencies that contract with the state. Offer increased psychological assessments. Advocate for programs to move toward serving fathers proportionately.	Review state contracts and funding levels and find ways to adequately fund this increase in classes and mental health services.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Service providers who work with expecting families need training on engaging the father and instructing him about his responsibilities.	Increase education for these service providers on how to convey information and encouragement to fathers about child development and their opportunities for involvement.	Work with the Public and Higher Education Departments in New Mexico to incorporate changes, especially at the practicum level, in college programs that offer degrees or certifications in Social Work or Counseling. Make “fatherhood awareness and issues” part of standard curricula, including special “fatherhood studies”

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers, like mothers, need mentors with whom they can check in and ask questions along the way, especially at the very beginning and at key developmental junctures/stages.	Increase home visitation programs for families, couples, and separated individuals with curricula that include working with fathers.	Support increased funding for programs with curricula that serve fathers-to-be and new fathers.
Fathers with low self-esteem or social problems particularly need mature fathers acting as mentors.	Incorporate experienced male mentors into home visiting programs. Have these mentors available even before a child’s birth to facilitate fathers’ engagement in care of newborns.	Provide funding to establish programs that train mentors for fathers-to-be and new fathers. This could include creating “male doula” programs for expecting fathers.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Research has shown that a father's presence at early sonograms activates a paternal feeling that has proven to increase involvement.	Promote and incentivize father attendance at sonograms to create an early bonding opportunity.	To encourage inviting fathers to attend sonograms, include a process such as signature verification to insure that the father is invited, barring any legal obstruction.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers/parents often do not have the time off from work they need to identify and register with each agency or service that can support them or benefit their child.	Align services for parents to help fathers gain access to multiple programs across disciplines.	Support a policy allowing the reorganization and centralization of parenting service centers and agencies (like CYFD) that incorporates community providers as well. (A parenting clinic would mimic the structure of community health clinics/partnerships.)

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
IT barriers between government departments limit communication and collaboration in serving different members of the same family unit.	Create a policy that organizes and aligns family service providers, making electronic record keeping the new standard.	Encourage the use of electronic records and inter-agency collaboration to better serve families.  As part of this reorganization, consider creating names for social service programs that make reference to fathers/men as well as mothers/women.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Funding for father involvement programs is either based on the <i>numbers</i> of fathers served or on structures that are not appropriate to some communities or best to insure the quality and longitudinal progress of the specific fathers served.	Fund local organizations to assist local communities in supporting father involvement. Allow program structure that is not "evidence based" as defined outside the community, but that creates progress as perceived by the involved community, tribe, etc.	Create policy that sets aside monies for more quality-oriented services to fathers and families, with community input into feasibility and desired means and outcomes.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Family service/social service providers often refer to fathers primarily in a negative context (where and when they are not present, what they are not doing, etc.)	Re-tool our thinking and our language away from a deficit model.	Provide language and measures that include positive indices of father engagement.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
To qualify for greater supplemental funding from the government, custodial parents or guardians sometimes still have to create a façade of a father's lack of involvement, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and decreases the morale and motivation of the excluded father.	A review of existing funding guidelines is needed to see where policies still dis-incentivize father involvement.	Review existing funding guidelines and amend funding support policy to encourage the connection of fathers to families.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Non-custodial fathers sometimes do not seek mental health / behavioral health services that would help them become better fathers because they fear that having this on their record will hurt their chances of seeing their child.	Incentivize rather than punish fathers who obtain education and support for whatever challenges they may be contending with.	Encourage social services and judicial programs to be clear that therapy, support groups, parenting education classes, etc. are positive factors for a parent's outcome.



*Silver City First Born Fatherhood group*



*Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility Family Day*

## Judicial System Roundtable

The Judicial Issues Roundtable split into two groups, both focusing on changes needed in New Mexico’s Family Court, Criminal Court, and Juvenile Court systems with the aim of helping fathers involved with any of these Courts stay engaged with their children.

Discussions included a review of existing programs that are part of, or work with, the judicial system and that encourage – or have the potential to encourage – greater father engagement during incarceration and following release. New or improved programs and policies and other areas of need were identified and discussed.

Members of the two panels included two District Court Judges, an Under Secretary of USDA, a field representative for Senator Bingaman, a young father currently receiving family support services, a representative of the Aspen Partnership, the President of the Native American Fathers and Families Association, the Executive Director of Men Engaged in Nonviolence (MEN), the President of REEL FATHERS, a representative from PB&J Family Services, the Valencia County Sheriff, a senior supervisor with the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)/Youth and Family Services, the Fatherhood Program Director from Las Cumbres Community Services, the Fatherhood Program Director from Laguna Pueblo, a representative from Youth Development Inc. (YDI), a rural senior Pastor, the Deputy Director of the New Mexico Office of African American Affairs, a State Senator, the Regional Director for the U.S. Health and Human Services Department/Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and a representative from Think New Mexico.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
<p>In order for our justice system to support fathers engaging and remaining engaged with their children, many more alternative and supportive programs are needed, especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More prevention and diversion programs</li> <li>• More alternatives to incarceration</li> <li>• Improved systems for family, especially child, visits with incarcerated fathers</li> <li>• Re-entry programs that educate returning fathers in life skills --</li> </ul>	<p>Persons engaged with the justice system at every level – leaders at the federal, state, and local levels, the court system, social service providers, educators, the business community, and the community at large –deliver a shared, urgent message about the changes needed to support positive father engagement.</p>	<p>Prioritize advocacy for improved systems and funding of services.</p> <p>Encourage the media to educate the public about the benefits to fathers and children when men are positively engaged with their children, and conversely, the negative consequences when fathers are absent.</p>



<p>empathy, reflective inquiry, emotional literacy, and communication, for example -- and provide child development information and appropriate expectations when re-entering the family.</p>		
<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
<p>In families where grandparents take care of the children of absentee parents, rifts in the family may occur when a parent returns to take on their proper role and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Family Court mediators to address issues related to family members who have acted as parents for a significant period of time.</p>	<p>Increase the services available to mediators for referral to help parenting grandparents make a smoother transition.</p>

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
<p>Many men <i>want</i> to be involved fathers, but don't know <i>how</i>. Assistance needs to be given, rather than punitive consequences, when family courts interface with fathers.</p>	<p>Increased education for Family Court judges and mediators about the effect of father absence on children's well-being, and therefore the critical need to foster positive father involvement.</p> <p>Increase the number and quality of programs in communities for teaching parenting skills to fathers.</p>	<p>Specific set-asides in funding related to family health are encouraged, to be awarded to underserved communities to reach expectant and new fathers to support their involvement with their children. Such programs need to include father-to-father mentoring, life skills such as empathy, reflective inquiry, emotional literacy, communication and self-advocacy, and to provide child development information.</p> <p>Make research on the benefits of father engagement and the consequences of father</p>

		absence on children's and fathers' well-being easily available online, with special outreach efforts to judges and mediators. Ideally this would involve outreach by groups that include judges from every level of the system.
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<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Judges many times do not have all the information needed for an informed decision, including extended family circumstances, before they must decide on cases that come before them.	Stronger efforts to change any aspects of family court processes that foster – in structure or in fact – adversarial interactions between parents.	<p>National and local leaders are urged to speak about the ongoing need to change from adversarial court processes to mediation guided by children's best interests.</p> <p>Create court systems to help parents who will be involved in Family Court proceedings become literate in legal language and processes, especially mediation.</p> <p>Also, create systems to help fathers/parents access appropriate legal advocacy when unable to pay.</p>

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Most communities lack adequate resources for supervised visitation and a safe exchange between estranged parents.	<p>Increase funding for exchange/supervised visit programs.</p> <p>Introduce therapy and parenting skills education into these programs.</p>	<p>Support increased funding and community volunteer efforts to increase resources for supervised visitation and enrich these programs with therapy and parenting skills education as possible.</p> <p>Initially, state and federal monies could fund pilot programs, and evaluate the economic benefit of</p>

		fewer cases being brought back to Family Court multiple times with unresolved conflicts, allegations of child harm, etc.
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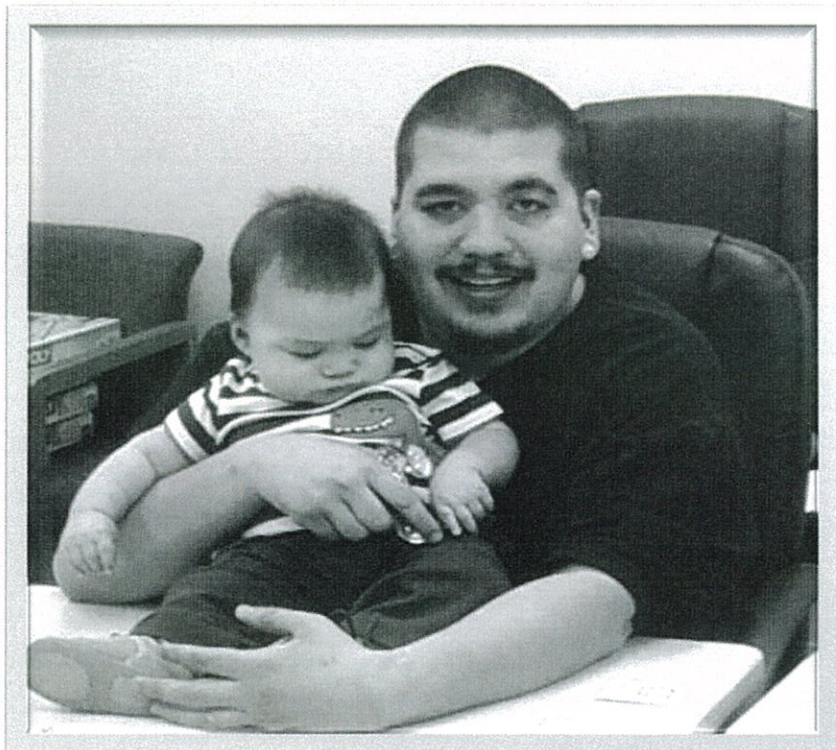
<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
It is known that there is a great need for more supports for fathering when men are involved in the Court systems; however, specific numbers and comparisons of states' programs are not available.	Information on the number of men involved in the justice system for fatherhood-related issues, and the effects and costs of current policies on their fathering, is needed.	A study initiated by the U.S. Department of Justice is encouraged, both to assess needed resources for promoting additional mediation/support services and to raise awareness and commitment to progress in this area.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Families with incarcerated fathers often slip through the cracks of the community's supportive services. There is little coordination and communication between Fatherhood programs and Domestic Violence programs	Conduct co-trainings and staff mixers in communities. DV programs can train FH programs regarding issues of lethality and manipulation. FH programs can train DV programs in the benefits of involving fathers and techniques to so. Explore development of fatherhood classes for graduates of batterer re-education programs.	Funding sources at all levels to include co-trainings in the expectations of programs receiving funding. Provide IT assistance to help different agencies serving the same families, as in mentoring programs, to keep father support a service focus, while keeping confidentiality appropriately protected.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
When a father's salary decreases, it is difficult to get child support modified accordingly. Fathers who can't pay the current amount become out of compliance. Child support enforcement systems use some punitive policies that restrict the ability of fathers to provide child support; these end up being counter-productive.	An automated, more efficient and accurate process is needed to modify child support when a father's salary changes.	This system to be used by state judicial districts to make timely and appropriate adjustments in child support requirements.  Review policies such as removal of driver's licenses for non-support as potentially counter-productive.



*REEL FATHERS YDI-Taos Head Start*



*YDI's Caring Couples Healthy Children*

## Workforce/Economic Development Roundtable

This Roundtable focused on the effect of New Mexico’s workforce issues on father engagement. Participants discussed ways to support fathers in gaining and maintaining employment, and to support working fathers to be positively involved with their children.

Discussion included a review of current programs that support fathers in gaining and maintaining employment. This was followed by fathers sharing where they feel there are service gaps, making it more difficult for them to both find/maintain employment and be an engaged father.

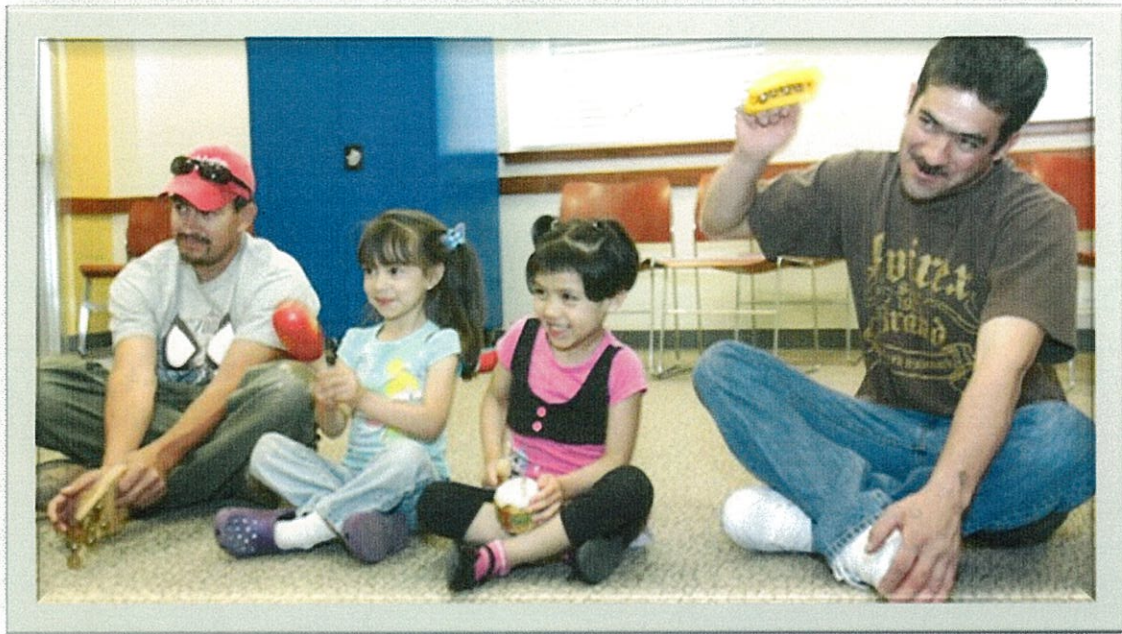
Members of the panel included the Secretary of the Department of Workforce Solutions, the Secretary of Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD), the Director of the ENLACE Program, a high school student, two University of New Mexico students, the Campus Executive Director of UNM Valencia, the Chairman of the Advisory Board for UNM Valencia, the Director of Youth Development Inc. (YDI), and two representatives of the New Mexico Department of Higher Education.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
<p>Unemployed fathers don’t know what resources are available, and they work with agencies that do not themselves have the “whole picture” of available resources.</p> <p>Fathers need different verification papers at different agencies – food stamps, unemployment benefits, non-profits, for example -- greatly complicating the task of getting support services.</p> <p>Job searches are required but unemployment does not cover childcare.</p> <p>Transportation may be difficult. The same job searches don’t fulfill multiple agencies’ requirements.</p>	<p>Create an aligned system of benefits and supports for unemployed fathers, consolidating all the information given by users and providing access to a full inventory of supportive programs and resources. A systematic, automated process could then provide comprehensive information for all available resources based on a client “portfolio” indicating their specific situation. The system would have one set of requirements to cover food stamps, unemployment benefits, transportation assistance, etc. The same job interviews would count toward all services, and the system could provide updates.</p>	<p>The Secretaries of Workforce Solutions, HHS, CYFD, and other state leaders as appropriate, working vigorously together, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align systems at state and local levels;</li> <li>• Initiate “town hall” meetings in every county/city to identify the local needs around workforce/fathering issues and identify resources available locally.</li> </ul>

<b>Problem/Need</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Fathers need continuing education to become better providers.	TANF and Workforce Solutions could review policies to further support increased education as fulfilling work requirements for benefits.	Amend TANF regulations to allow fathers to fulfill certain TANF requirements by taking online college courses.

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
It is difficult to both start new fatherhood programs and maintain ongoing programs. This difficulty is compounded when turnover at the state level leads to changes in funding priorities, instead of priorities being solidly based on the needs of the end users.	<p>Develop programs and policies in a way that considers and protects the end users from the beginning.</p> <p>Design evaluations to be data-driven and to include real-time feedback to the programs and to the state.</p> <p>Program data to include challenges encountered by programs' users.</p>	<p>Develop a state level collaborative of fatherhood advocates, service providers, and government representatives – with strong state and federal support. This collaborative would use a solid knowledge base of program development and evaluation to help beginning programs. This entity would also advocate for conditions leading to program stability.</p>

<b>Problem / Need</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Step</b>
Social norms about fathers – fathers don't need time off to care for their children or don't need to attend school meetings, for example - work against vibrant father engagement.	Publicize, "put a face on" good fathering. There will be many different kinds of "good fathering" but all will have some consistent elements. Stories and photos in local papers, parenting profiles in media, etc., can reinforce the basics while showing different faces of good fathering.	Create a state-funded campaign to work with local media in each county, highlighting positive fathering in a variety of ways, including community awards, and radio, television, and newspaper coverage.



*REEL FATHERS PMS-Head Start Santa Fe*



*New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition Young Fathers Project*





## **Appendix**

Policy Roundtable Agenda

Public Forum Agenda

Event Hosts, Funders, Allies and NMAFF Members

New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families:  
Fatherhood Forum Program Team and Advisors

Valencia County News-Bulletin article:

*White House Forum Speaks to Fatherhood, Participation*



## ROUND TABLE POLICY DISCUSSION



- 11:30 **Registration and Box Lunch**  
Traditional *Norteño* Hispanic musical entertainment
- 12:10 **Welcome**
- 12:15 **Invocation:** Native American Ceremonial Prayer and Blessing  
Governor Benavidez, Isleta Pueblo  
(\*Please wait to eat box lunch until blessing is complete – thank you.)
- 12:20 **Welcoming Remarks by Government Representatives**
- Senator Jeff Bingaman
  - Dallas Tonsager, USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development
- 12:50 **Introduction of Roundtable Discussion Topics**
- Education and Early Childhood by Bill Blair, Ph.D., Program Manager, School and Family Support, New Mexico Public Education Department
  - Health and Human Services by Jerry Tello, National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute
  - Workforce and Economic Development by James Rodriguez, Fathers & Families Coalition of America
  - Judicial, by Judge Monica Zamora, Presiding Children’s Court Judge, Division III
- 1:05 **Round Table Instructions and Assignments**  
Thinking about your experiences in rural communities, small towns and cities in New Mexico, to whatever degree possible:
1. What are some current programs and policies that support meaningful father engagement in your assigned issue area?
  2. What’s missing and what can we do better?
  3. What policies can be put in place at the local, state, and federal levels to expand and scale up successful programs and to address the gaps that you identified?
  4. What can be learned from and what considerations are needed to address New Mexico’s unique cultural diversity?
- 1:10 **Round Table Discussions**  
*Tables 1-2: Education and Early Childhood*  
*Tables 3-4: Health and Human Services*  
*Tables 5-6: Workforce and Economic Development*  
*Tables 7-8: Judicial*
- 2:15 **Reconvene and Report Out**
- 3:15 **Closing Remarks and Thank You**
- Joshua DuBois, Executive Director, White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
  - Don McAvinchey, Chair, NM Alliance for Fathers and Families
- 3:25 **Gift of Seeds and NM State flag/Zia Sun**  
Kathy Sanchez, TEWA Women United
- 3:30 **Adjourn Roundtable Policy Session**



## **5:00-7:00PM PUBLIC FORUM AND TESTIMONIALS**

*Registration and Light Refreshments*

*Entertainment by Star Road Dance Company*

5:00

### **Welcome**

Terry Brunner, Director, USDA Rural Development, New Mexico Office –  
Event Host and Moderator

Joshua DuBois, Executive Director, White House Office of Faith-Based and  
Neighborhood Partnerships

5:05

### **Opening Invocation**

Father Frank Pretto, Pastor, San Isidro Catholic Church

5:10

### **Welcoming Remarks by Government Representatives**

5:30

### **White House Fatherhood Video**

5:35

### **Panel Introductions and Presentations**

- Wes Studi, Actor
- Hector Balderas, New Mexico State Auditor
- Crispin Clarke, Executive Director, Men Engaged in Nonviolence
- Andrea Moreno, Participant in YDI-Valencia Division
- Ken Howard, Healthy Families Counseling and Support

6:05

### **Q&A**

6:50

### **Closing Remarks and Thank You**

- Don McAvinchey, Chair, NM Alliance for Fathers and Families
- Joshua DuBois, Executive Director, White House Office of Faith-Based and  
Neighborhood Partnerships

6:55

### **Ecumenical Benediction and Gathering of Intentions**

Bishop David C. Cooper, Senior Pastor and Regional Bishop,  
New Hope Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship

7:00

### **Adjourn**



## **White House Fatherhood Forum** **Cultivating a Culture of Vibrant Father Engagement** ***New Perspectives from Rural America***

### **Event Hosts:**

White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships  
U.S. Department of Agriculture – New Mexico Office of Rural Development  
University of New Mexico – Valencia  
New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families

### **The White House Fatherhood Forum/New Mexico is generously supported by:**

Brindle Foundation  
Con Alma Health Foundation  
Las Cumbres Community Services with support from the  
National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity-Building Initiative (made possible by the  
Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)  
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Paso a Paso Network

### **Program Support provided by:**

Office of U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman  
Office of U.S. Senator Tom Udall  
Office of Lt. Governor Diane Denish  
New Mexico Department of Health – New Mexico Project LAUNCH  
New Mexico Office of Philanthropic Outreach

### **New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families**

Brindle Foundation  
New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (NMCYFD)  
Dolores Gonzales Elementary School PTA  
ENLACE NEW MEXICO  
Las Cumbres Community Services  
Men Engaged in Nonviolence, Inc. (MEN)  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse  
New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC)  
New Mexico Department of Health, Family Health Bureau  
New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community  
New Mexico Legal Aid  
New Mexico Office of Philanthropic Outreach  
Peacekeepers Domestic Violence Program  
New Hope Full Gospel Baptist Church of Albuquerque  
State of New Mexico Second Judicial District Court  
New Mexico Office of African American Affairs  
New Mexico Parent Teacher Association  
New Mexico State University  
New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition  
Northern New Mexico Birth Center  
Parents Reaching Out  
REEL FATHERS  
City of Santa Fe Children and Youth Commission  
University of New Mexico – Valencia  
Youth Development Inc.  
Youth Development Inc. – Valencia Division



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## White House forum speaks to fatherhood, participation

Written by Dana Bowley/News-Bulletin

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"There's a heavy weight on a child when there's no dad."

— President Barack Obama

Obama knows. He grew up in a home with a strong mother and grandparents, but without the influence only a dad can provide.

"This is an important issue for President Obama. He felt the weight of an absent father," said Joshua DuBois in opening the White House Forum on Fatherhood on Aug. 10 at the University of New Mexico-Valencia Campus. "That's why he started this national conversation on fatherhood and personal responsibility last year."

DuBois is executive director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, a co-sponsor of the local forum with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development division.

The UNM-VC forum was the seventh and last in a national series of forums this year to address what the president has called a national family crisis because of absent fathers. The findings from the local forum and the other six will form the basis of recommendations for programs and policies to assist community action.

"We're trying to define what it means for men to be engaged in their families," said Ben O'Dell, assistant director of DuBois' agency. "We're trying to answer the question, how do we bring government around to help your community in helping fathers to be engaged."

### **President's message**

Obama set the tone for the forum in a recorded message shown at the beginning.

"We need fathers to step up," the president said. "Fatherhood doesn't end at conception.

"It's not about being perfect, but it is about always trying ... We need to remember, the smallest moment can have the biggest impact."

Why was New Mexico, and specifically Valencia County, chosen to be one of the seven national sites for these forums?

Unlike the other six forums, which were largely regional or urban in nature, there was a need to address another area.

"The White House wanted one of the forums to focus on the problem in rural communities," said Don McAvinchey, an official with ReelFathers in Santa Fe, and the chief organizer of the local forum. "We suggested New Mexico because it is not only mostly rural, but because of the diversity of the rural population, We wanted to hold the forum in a rural area, but close enough for people to make flights, and UNM-VC had the facilities to host this."

The importance of the rural perspective was emphasized by Ed Avilos, a Mesilla native who is the USDA Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

"In rural America," Avilos told the crowd of about 150, "the father sets the tenor. He sets the tenor for the family. He sets the tenor for the work ethic, he sets the tenor for patriotism, for most everything."

With no father present, he said, all of those influence are lost.

### **The Panelists**

The forum was set up in a panel format, with five panelists from diverse perspectives — including a state official, a celebrity, a community organizer, a young person and a professional in the field — followed by a question and comment period involving the

audience.

The panelists were asked to present their stories and viewpoints on fatherhood. Here is what each had to say.

### **Hector Balderas**

Balderas is the New Mexico State Auditor. He grew up in deep poverty in northern New Mexico.

"I had a strong grandfather and an active father," Balderas said, but nobody talked about fatherhood issues in their culture, and men rarely spoke of or displayed affection. Balderas said he was aloof as a youngster and not really engaged with his father.

"I had a child at a young age," he said, admitting he didn't take much interest or active participation in parenting. "I didn't know I had an issue, because it wasn't something men in our culture talked about. I didn't know until I was older."

As he got older, he said he learned that he needed to be more engaged, and has since worked to make that happen with his three children.

### **Wes Studi**

Studi is an Oklahoma native, Cherokee Indian, and an actor who has lived in New Mexico for 15 years.

"I didn't know I didn't have a father," he said. "In the Cherokee culture, you have an extended family that takes care of you. If there's no father, an uncle becomes your father, or someone else. I didn't realize until I went to school. The other kids were talking about their fathers and I suddenly realized, 'Hey, I don't have one of those.'"

In truth, Studi did have a father.

"I met him when I was 7. He came back home from the Korean War. He'd been in the military all that time, but in our culture when someone was gone like that no one talked about them. It was like they didn't exist until they came back."

Studi said he took an instant dislike to the man and resented his presence in the house. But he did come to respect him.

"He was a quiet man who did by deed. I didn't like him, but I liked the things he did. I think the thing he did I liked the most is he gave me a good work ethic."

Asked how fatherhood is different or changing on the reservation, Studi said, "I am of the first generation of Cherokee men who went into the delivery room. My father and grandfather would never have done that.

"Our view of fatherhood changed as we had to adapt to European ways. We're taking on more of a western concept of fatherhood, which is good as long as we keep our customs."

Later, Studi said he was interested in talk during the forum about how men coming out of incarceration can re-engage with their children.

"I have a son who is incarcerated," he said. "He had a child just before he went in. He's seen her during visits and has tried to be engaged, but he and others like him are going to need help as they come out, not just as fathers, but in dealing with the changes going on all the time in the world."

### **Crispin Clarke**

Clarke is executive director of Taos MEN (Men Engaged in Nonviolence), a program that evolved out of the events of 2004, which Clarke described as "a terrible year for youth violence in Taos."

He said one person came forward with an idea to address the issue, not with a youth program, but by focusing on men and fathers who would actively promote nonviolence and take on a mentorship role in the community.

Part of the program is a widespread media campaign in which men of the community agree to appear in newspaper ads taking a stand against violence. An early supporter of the program is former Valencia County News-Bulletin publisher Chris Baker, now publisher of the Taos News, which runs the mostly full-page ads at no charge.

Each ad features two or three people with the theme "We're men and we're nonviolent, join us." Each ad carries a short message, such as "It's never OK to abuse a woman or a child,"

"Step up and be a mentor to a boy in need," or "Fathers: raise your sons to be nonviolent."

The program has grown so successful and has enough sponsorship it can afford a director and can conduct outreach programs.

"We've started working with the dads," he said, "training them and supporting them. There was a flood of interest."

He described the effect in the community as a rock being plunked into a pond and the ripples spreading further and further outward.

### **Andrea Moreno**

Moreno is a local high school student who is a participant in Youth Development Inc.-Valencia Division programs.

Moreno presented the perspective of a young person in a home with a very active and engaged father. She described her father as supportive of all his children, engaged in their activities, someone she can confide in and get advice from, and someone who displays his love and affection frequently.

Moreno was asked about friends and schoolmates who don't have fathers or don't have fathers who are as engaged as her's.

She said she has a couple of friends who don't get to see their fathers much because they're off working.

"They wished they could see them more," she said. "They admire them for working so hard for their families, but they wish they could see them more."

### **Ken Howard**

Howard is the director of the Healthy Families Counseling and Support program in Kansas City, Mo..

Howard's father left the family when he was young and, as happens with many children, he felt it was his fault. His response was to bury his feelings and avoid being in a position to be hurt again.

"I became a shape-shifter," he said. "I became invisible. I became whatever someone else wanted to see."

He said his anger and guilt led to predictable responses and results, including gang membership and incarceration.

"Did you know that 90 percent of the people in prison come from a fatherless home?" he asked.

Howard said he decided that wasn't the life he wanted, and took the route of education and service to get out. Now he helps people in the situation he was in.

"When dads do what they do, it's awesome," he said. "Men and women are different. Each stimulates a child in a different way."

He noted that when you give a man a baby, he'll play with it, toss it in the air, hold it upside down, tickle it. When a woman holds a baby, generally she's cuddling or rocking it gently.

"The child needs both of those," Howard said. "If he doesn't get one of them, he doesn't develop completely. Lack of a dad can lead to an inability to make attachments later in life, like with a spouse."

He said the biggest problem is that dad's don't know what to do, and when men don't know what to do, they generally withdraw and do nothing.

Howard used some modern-life statistics to illustrate the needs and problems.

He said recent studies show that young people spend six to eight hours a day engaged with electronic media — computers, iPods, phones, texting, television.

"A father's average amount of contact with a child, I'm talking about eyeball-to-eyeball focused one-to-one contact, is about 15 minutes — a week."

Dads, he said, must make the effort to get between the child and the media and make a connection.

In answer to a later question about how to engage dads, Howard said it should start before the child is born.

"Men don't get prepared for fatherhood," he said. "My gosh, you've got nine months to

get ready. Pick up a book, get on the Internet, talk to somebody.

"There are two types of fathers, men who play defense and men who play offense.

"Those who play defense don't learn to change a diaper, so when a diaper needs to be changed they hand the baby off to mama. Those who play offense, who get prepared, are ready to change that diaper.

"Those who are prepared are more engaged. We need to prepare men for fatherhood."

### **Audience participation**

Following the panelist presentations, comments and questions were taken from the audience.

One man commented that schools need to keep better statistics on the difference between male and female performance in school.

"There is no official recognition of how badly boys do in school," which correlates to how they perform as fathers, he said.

Michael, a currently unemployed single father of three from Laguna Pueblo, discussed how difficult it is to stay engaged with the kids when he is struggling to find work or working at a couple of part-time jobs at the same time.

"It's hard to have contact with them" beyond preparing meals, taking care of the house, getting them to school and seeing them when he can, he said.

Michael said he is part of a Laguna fatherhood group that's working to get fathers interested in their kids, but he asked what he can do under his circumstances.

"You're doing it," Howard responded. "You're providing you for them."

Echoing Obama's "small moments" comment, he said kids are far more interested in dad's quality of engagement than the quantity.

Melody Bell, an education with the state Department of Corrections, addressing Wes Studi's concerns about the needs of men coming out of prison, said, "A lot of our men are ready to engage when they get out."

Those who can avoid recidivism, she said, are ready to step up as fathers.

"I would ask that the community help them to accomplish that," she said.

One speaker suggested that the answer to the involvement of young people today with technology and electronic media is for the older generation to embrace it. He said there appeared to be too much emphasis on how things used to be and that people need to adapt with the changes.

Howard agreed, noting that he has some client fathers who use e-mails, text messages and their own Facebook pages to engage with their children.

Adrian, a young divorced father from Española, talked of how his involvement in a fatherhood program has helped him in the face of an unpleasant divorce and his own failings as a parent.

"It's helped me to learn to understand my daughter's needs," he said. "It's helped me to learn to communicate with my ex, to be patient, to learn my rights.

"We're working on a parenting plan with each other, and we're learning to communicate without anger, without yelling at each other.

"I think every father should be involved in a fatherhood program."

Another young man from Lordsburg offered a story similar to Adrian's, and spoke of the value of a fatherhood program in his community.

### **Getting started**

Crispin Clarke was asked what it takes to get a fatherhood program going in a community.

"You can do a lot without any funding," he said, "with volunteerism, enthusiasm and hard work.

"You need a spark, someone in the community to take the initiative."

A program can start as simply as sponsoring discussion circles when men can talk and educate themselves. From that, he said, mentors will emerge.

"You want to build a community of mentors," he said. "You want the people who are involved to feel like they're part of a club. That's when it starts to catch on."

**Sen. Jeff Bingaman**

Earlier that day, Sen. Jeff Bingaman welcomed the participants to the forum, saying they had President Obama to thank for the nationwide conversation on fatherhood.

"Shortly after he was elected, President Obama invited the committee chairs and others to a dinner at the White House," Bingaman said. "He welcomed us, and then he told us that it was a school night. And every night, he and Michelle would visit with their daughters. He said, 'We're going to excuse ourselves and you guys have a great party.' It's the first time I can remember a president that felt his first priority was to his kids and to being a father to his daughters. That attitude has lead to conversations like this."

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Contact [Dana Bowley](#)

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## **New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families**

**A statewide coalition of organizations dedicated to creating a culture of positive father engagement  
by advocating for needed policy changes, promoting effective programs,  
and attracting new resources to New Mexico.**