Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
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New Mexico Voices for Children hosted “Turning Data Into Action,” a McKinley County workshop May 2 at the El Morro Events Center.

Discussions focused on the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Kids Count program, which provides child well-being rankings for the U.S.

Indicators evaluate economic, education, health, family, and community benchmarks.

In McKinley County, 39 percent of children live in poverty, compared to 27 percent in the rest of the state. In other areas, the county was equally matched with the state, such as the rate of children without health insurance at 5.1 percent.

In McKinley County, 44 percent of children live in single parent families compared to 38 percent for the state.

These are just a few of the statistics that contributed to New Mexico's ranking as 49th in the country in child well-being.

Bill Jordan, senior policy advisor and governmental relations officer, provided an overview of NMVC and said their mission is to champion public policies that improve the well-being of New Mexico's children, families, and communities.

"The Kids Count data is a resource to tell you how your kids are doing," Jordan said.

He said data filters, like looking at statistics by school districts, are easily plugged into data searches to fit various statistical needs. The goal is to get the most accurate data possible, he said.

Participants included families—many with children—community organizers, and professionals in the health care industry. Supper was served while discussions took place.

Workshop packets contained a Kids Count profile of McKinley County presented by New Mexico Voices for Children, a survey on Medicaid, information on the $6 billion general fund operating budget for FY 2019, a guide for using the Kids Count Data Center, contact information and links for useful health data, and the latest newsletter.

Group discussions focused on important issues that participants brought to the table.

Many agreed with Jacob Vigil, research and policy analyst for NMVC.

“I would say that in my community in Albuquerque, that the most important issue is early education of our kids’ preschool program,” Vigil said.

Marlene Jasper, an employee with Gallup Indian Medical Center Health Promotions said they work with schools and communities.

In her experience, childhood obesity is a concern.

“A lot of our kids are not getting out there and exercising. Just being kids and getting out there is important because their brains are ready for learning,” Jasper said.

Impromptu discussions on services and the processes involved for accessing such resources were discussed at length. These included Medicare, Medicaid and addressing needed services for children with autism and other disabilities.

For more information, visit www.nmvoices.org or www.datacenter.kidscount.org .

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