

New Mexico lacks opportunities for young adult parents and their kids

Written by By Sharon Kayne New Mexico Voices for Children
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Report shows needs and barriers facing state's young parents

ALBUQUERQUE — With limited access to opportunities to advance their education and find family sustaining jobs, New Mexico's 33,000 young adult parents face hurdles to support their children and fulfill their own potential, according to [Opening Doors for Young Parents](#), the latest KIDS COUNT policy report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grantee in New Mexico, New Mexico Voices for Children, joined the call for action so these young parents can contribute to the state's communities and economy.

The fifty-state report reveals that, at 16 percent, New Mexico is above the national average (10 percent) of youth ages 18 to 24 who are also parents.

The report highlights the following statewide trends and areas of concern:

41,000 children in New Mexico have young parents (ages 18 to 24).

77 percent of children of young parents in New Mexico live in low-income families, one of the highest percentages in the country.

Only 9 percent of young parents (ages 18 to 24) have completed an associate's degree or higher.

79 percent of New Mexico's young parents are people of color, facing challenges exacerbated by discrimination and systemic inequities, with their children standing to suffer the most.

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“One of the ways that we can greatly improve outcomes for families headed by young parents is to increase proven home visiting programs,” James Jimenez, executive director of NM Voices, said. “Studies show that these parent coaching programs improve educational outcomes for kids, reduce the incidence of child abuse, and improve health outcomes for the whole family, among the many other benefits. Sadly, the state has not fully funded this program, so only a tiny fraction of New Mexico’s youngest children benefit.”

The report spotlights a national population of more than 6 million, including 2.9 million young adult parents, ages 18 to 24, and 3.4 million children nationwide living with young parents.

Opening Doors for Young Parents illuminates the most common obstacles young adult parents face, including incomplete education, lack of family-sustaining employment opportunities, lack of access to quality child care, inadequate and unstable housing, and financial insecurity.

These barriers threaten not only these young adults, but also their young children, setting off a chain of diminished opportunities for two of our nation’s future generations. But the report includes recommendations for addressing the obstacles that young parents face, most of which can be driven by policy solutions at the state level.

The Casey Foundation stresses the importance of a two-generation approach to equip young parents for success.

“If we don’t support young people when they become parents, we are cheating two generations out of having a positive future,” Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy said. “We can help young adult parents develop the skills they need to raise their children, contribute to their communities, and drive our national economy forward.”

New Mexico Voices for Children further stresses the importance of helping the state’s young parents access educational and employment opportunities. In an increasingly competitive workforce landscape, education can make a significant difference in earning power for families. However, as the data demonstrate, young adult parents here in New Mexico, like young parents nationwide, do not have the post-secondary education or specialized skills to obtain family-sustaining jobs.

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KIDS COUNT is a program of New Mexico Voices for Children and is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Opening Doors for Young Parents can be viewed at www.aecf.org/resources/opening-doors-for-young-parents ; www.nmvoices.org

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