

Event aimed at promoting better parenting skills attracts small crowd

Written by Story and photos by Andy Gibbons III Sun Correspondent
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Governor backs out from attending

On Sept. 7, New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Department held a "Pull Together" rally at Gallup High School's Kenneth Holloway Auditorium. The event was spearheaded by CYFD Cabinet Secretary Monique Jacobson, the main speaker at the event.

Gov. Susana Martinez, who originally planned on attending the event, did not make it to Gallup. Her absence may have contributed to the low attendance during the afternoon event.

But with news of the event being released to the public one day before the event, the attendance was dismal – 48 in all.

GMCS Public Relations Director Teri Frazier said a CYFD spokesperson told her to release information to the public one day before event, but she didn't consider the directive out of the scope of her daily requests to disseminate information to the public.

Meanwhile, Jacobson apologized on the governor's behalf, saying Martinez had to stay in Santa Fe to work with politicians on the state's budget. The current budget allots about \$470 million to CYFD per year.

The lack of Martinez, though, did not prevent Jacobson from giving a speech outlining the new program that will help CYFD partner with other organizations and make New Mexico the best place to be a kid.

CYFD has 2,000 employees, 30 offices, and four divisions that cover the children in New Mexico. With such a large staff, and among the various roles CYFD plays in the state, Jacobson said she envisions a unified mission.

"The mission is improving the quality of life for our children," she said. "Every single day, all of our staff can do at least one thing to improve the life of a child, no matter how big or small."

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CYFD's aim is to ensure the safety of the child, prevent fatalities or injuries, empower kids with a feeling of safety, and provide legitimate human connections to broaden their social horizons.

One arm of CYFD is the juvenile justice department, which aids children whose behavior has gotten them into trouble.

"We have a real shot of changing the trajectory of a lot of these kids, of breaking the cycles of violence we too often see," Jacobson said.

The public typically associates CYFD with the displacement of children from their biological families into foster care, according to Jacobson, who said that aspect of the department is necessary for ensuring a child's safety.

"If it can't happen with the family God gave them, then we will find a family that can fulfill that role," she said.

Much of Jacobson's speech was an appeal to the public to report possible child abuse by dialing #SAFE on a phone. But she also had something to say about this process and the stigma behind it.

"Every time I hear people saying CYFD needs to take those kids away from those bad parents, I wonder if people know the implications," she said. "Before we or law enforcement can take those kids, we need to have a safe place to put them, so we need even more foster parents."

This past year, CYFD was able to recruit 100 additional foster parents. While not everyone is in the best situation to help by becoming a foster parent, there are other ways to help, too. It's the legal duty of every New Mexico resident to report child abuse.

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“So often, people tell me that it’s not my business,” Jacobson said about reporting possible child abuse. “But I tell you, child abuse has to be everyone’s business because those kids won’t have a voice otherwise.”

Jacobson asks the public to change their perspectives and embrace the notion that New Mexico really can be the best place to grow up as a child.

“Try to see Gallup, New Mexico, as the best place to be a kid, not in 15 or 20 years after we’ve addressed all the family issues, but tomorrow,” Jacobson said.

After Jacobson’s speech, the audience was encouraged to meet at least two new people and to network for the sake of helping kids.

“The event was amazing and excellent,” Mayor Jackie McKinney told the Sun. “[Jacobson] was great as the Secretary of Tourism when she came up with the ‘New Mexico True’ campaign, and now she is great at this position.”

McKinney concluded with: “This really pulls on your heart when you’re talking about kids. People really should take the time to check this organization out. Nobody wants to see kids hurting — let’s take care of our kids.”

To become involved or to learn more, visit pulltogether.org. The public may also participate in a ‘Community Hub,’ wherein local organizations and citizens help families navigate the resources available to their own unique situations.

***Story and photos by Andy Gibbons III
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