

SPRING UPDATE

APRIL 2023



Young People's Leadership Guides the Passage of SB 31 and HB 389

Twelve young people engaged at the 2023 Legislative Session, attending committee hearings, calling and emailing legislators, and sharing their experiences. Thank you to Alyssa, Catelynn, Christian, Krystal, Jayson, Joanna, Mia, Micaela, Pamela, Q, Shaniah, and Tichelle for their leadership! Thank you to Senators Katy Duhigg, Linda Lopez, and Siah Correa Hemphill and Representative Raymundo Lara for their sponsorship of SB 31 and HB 389, respectively.

SB 31, Kinship Guardianship Changes, allows for a close family member or other qualifying person to care for a child when the parents are unable to care for them. In these situations, where a parent voluntarily gives custody of their child to CYFD, parents deserve access to legal counsel prior to signing and throughout the life of voluntary placement agreements to ensure that the agreements are not coercive.

HB 389, No ID Card Fee for Homeless Individuals, will remove barriers to getting an ID, improving access to housing and services that support their stability.



Message from Co-Executive Directors Ezra Spitzer and Lorilynn Violanta

In February, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued an executive order to transform and reorganize the “fundamentally broken” Children, Youth and Families Department. All branches of government and both parties agree—CYFD is not meeting the needs of New Mexicans. Yet, let’s be clear. CYFD’s struggles are not new. They are not exclusive to this administration, Republicans, or Democrats. No singular Secretary is to blame. Bills proposed at legislative sessions are band-aid solutions that oversimplify a vast and complex system that a volunteer legislature is ill-prepared to understand. Increased budgets and filling staff vacancies will not fix the problem. We must start fresh and create a new way to engage and support young people and their families.

Child welfare departments across the U.S. do not meet the needs of families, and in New Mexico, many families live in extreme poverty, struggling to get by. CYFD “services” are insufficient and rooted in the misguided notion that family separation is the solution. Government raising children is not the answer. Foster care is not the solution for cases related to poverty, and attacking families and taking more children into custody will only make it more difficult to identify, prevent, and address cases of severe abuse. New Mexico must learn from our failures and build a system that truly and profoundly lifts families out of poverty. Transformation must be rooted in this, or proposed solutions will never work.

We need to have the courage to think beyond the current system, and we must center young people and families. Later this year, NMCAN will share more information about how we are working toward creating a system that is guided by the voices of young people and families—those who have lived through the unnecessary trauma of family separation—and gives them the tools and resources to succeed.



Creating Opportunities to Build Confidence & Skills

Responding to young parents' desire to gather with peers, NMCAN's Parent Group is a valuable space to engage families and strengthen relationships. Meetings offer parents the opportunity to gain confidence in learning and talking about parenting and supporting their children. For example, one young parent shared that their child was being bullied in preschool because of their shoes. The parent shared they advocated for their child at the school and was proud of themselves for having the skills to speak up in a constructive way. Wins like this show the impact of building young people's social capital and life skills because they deserve to have their opinions heard.

Through our Youth Leader program, a young person was appointed to the Office of Family Representation and Advocacy Oversight Commission by the NM Supreme Court. Their advocacy journey began when they attended NMCAN's leadership development trainings, learning how to effectively share their experiences to drive positive systems change. Over time, they have spoken to legislators, judges, and lawyers about the importance of quality legal representation. Now, in their appointed role on this Commission, they are developing new skills and lifting up the experiences of families impacted by systems.

Image captions and credits, front page left to right: NMCAN staff celebrate our new building at the Open House in February (Gabby O'Keefe Photography). Staff, partners, and young people connect with legislators at the 2023 Legislation Session (New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty). Back page: A family celebrates our new building at the Open House in February (Gabby O'Keefe Photography).

50 for \$5

Community and relationships are everything. Will you help create healthy, happy, and strong communities for New Mexico's young people and families by joining our 50 for \$5 Campaign? Join our incredible group of donors who give \$5 or more each month. Donate at [NMCAN.org](https://nmcán.org).

Our New Home Centers Community

Thanks again to all who joined us at NMCAN's Open House! Young people will always have a safe place to hang out, grow their networks, learn new skills, and lead change in their lives and communities.

Thank you to our partner:



Office Will Be Closed in June

NMCAN will be closed for the month of June to allow our team to rest, rejuvenate, and reflect. Please contact us before then if we can assist you with anything. Looking forward to seeing you in July!

Connect with us!

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