

SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) – Albuquerque, NM (Bernalillo County)

SNAPSHOT

Overview

We seek to redefine power relationships by bringing together the collective action, talents, and resources of the people within our communities. We work primarily in low-income communities of color to gain community control of our land and resources.

Mission

“The SouthWest Organizing Project was founded in 1980 by young activists of color to empower communities in the Southwest to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice.” –SWOP website



Constituency

- Low-income
- Communities of Color

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Bernalillo County

Lack of access to early childhood education

Including school readiness for kindergarten. 60% of children ages 3-4 did not attend some form of preschool or school program.¹

Childhood hunger

Environmental health issues

Including childhood asthma and cancer due to poor air quality.

Lack of access to healthy foods

Children in poverty

25% of children live in high-poverty areas with rates highest among Native Americans and Latinos.¹

School-to-prison pipeline

Juvenile criminal justice system involvement due to school discipline policies.

“I mean teachers are seeing kids showing up in pretty bad shape when they get to kindergarten... it’s just really hard to make a lot of progress when they’re showing up to school with so many issues and not having had any preparation.”
– Javier Benavidez, Co-Director

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Bernalillo County & New Mexico



40% of **asthma**

hospitalizations in Bernalillo County were for children ages 1-14.³ Between 2006 and 2010, there were 46 hospitalizations for infants less than a year old, and 516 for children ages 1-4 years old.³

27.2%

of children in the state are at risk of **hunger**; making it second among all states for childhood hunger.²



Statewide, American Indian kindergartners (32.4%) have the highest prevalence of **overweight/obesity**, followed by Latinos (27.4%), and White kindergartners (20.6%).³



Babies born to mothers in Bernalillo County have the highest number of **infant deaths** in the state.¹

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

Public education and civic engagement related to:

- Improving healthy school meals (including breakfast before the bell)
- Pollution and air quality
- Hunger and child hunger
- Access to early childhood education programs and resources

SWOP Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Environmental Justice** — advocated for the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the local air quality control board and the air quality permits in low-income communities of color
- **School Discipline** — tracking of key data elements, such as school suspensions by racial demographics
- **Civic Engagement (voter education) and Media Advocacy** — (e.g., federal work requirements tied to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); protecting healthy school meals)



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

- **Media advocacy and education** to change the public discourse and garner support for the issues that are of most importance to the community
- **Encouraging civic engagement by residents in their communities**, including having their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the lives of others at both the local and state level, including offering solutions

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- Organizers in the Land of Enchantment – Albuquerque, NM <http://olenm.org/>
- Center for Civic Policy – Albuquerque, NM <http://civicpolicy.com/>
- The Partnership for Community Action – Albuquerque, NM <http://forcommunityaction.org/>



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1. New Mexico Voices for Children. (n.d.). Kids Count in New Mexico, 2016 Data Book. Retrieved from <http://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/NMVC-DataBook2016-Web.pdf>
2. Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico. (2017). Map the Meal Gap. Retrieved from <http://www.rrfb.org/hungry-people-in-nm/mapthegap/>
3. New Mexico Department of Health. (2016, March). Healthy Kids New Mexico. New Mexico Childhood Obesity Update: 2015. Retrieved from <https://nmhealth.org/data/view/chronic/1861/>