

# child development program

Albuquerque, NM

## Overview

The Albuquerque Department of Family and Community Services, Division of Child and Family Development, administers the city's Child Development Program. For children birth to three years old and their families, the program provides Early Head Start services at eight centers and in families' homes. For children 3 to 5 years old and their families, it provides services at 18 licensed Child Development Centers. The program aims to strengthen families, enhance knowledge of child development, promote self-sufficiency, and build stronger communities.

The Child Development Program is a collaboration among the City of Albuquerque, Albuquerque Public Schools, and other community partners. It serves low-income families of all ethnicities, particularly working parents, parents seeking employment, and/or parents going to school. Programs take place in community multi-service centers, community centers, public schools, and places where intergenerational programs are provided—all in low-income areas.

The Child Development Program started in 1989, after a community assessment indicated that voters were very interested in quality childcare, which would enable parents to work and/or go to school. The program was made possible by the convergence of this citywide movement and a successful application for federal funding of a comprehensive child development program. From the beginning, strong

## Profile

### Staffing

Direct Service: 135  
Classroom staff: 109  
Home-based service coordinators  
& home visitors: 15  
Other (specialists): 11

Managers: 5

Administrative Staff: 7

Total: 147

### Children & Families Served

0-2: 180  
3: 109  
4: 272  
5: 312

Total: 873

### Budget

\$6,475,430

### Sources

- City sales tax of 2.5%
- Federal Early Head Start

advocacy on the part of school board and city council members played a major role in the development of a comprehensive city investment in early childhood (see Founding Leaders).

The program's philosophy is that the quality of care that a child receives in the first five years of life has a significant impact on the child's development. To optimize the development of each child, the program fosters relationships based on mutual trust and respect among caregiver, child, and family. Classroom staff, home visitors (called Family Development Facilitators), community partners, and, most importantly, parents collaborate to raise socially and emotionally healthy children. All materials are translated into Spanish, and each family is matched with staff from its own culture.

### Evaluation

A longitudinal study conducted by the City of Albuquerque shows that children who have participated in the Child Development Program are much more successful than their peers who have not had the program's enriching experiences. The literacy, language, and motor skills of participating children far outstrip those of children who have not participated in the program. Participating children also are less likely to be referred to special education. Participating families are much more engaged in their children's education and in achieving their own family goals.

### How the Program Builds Protective Factors

The Child Development Program builds five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

#### Parental Resilience

- Family Mental Health Services
- Family Progress Reviews
- Home Visits

### Hours

7:00 am-5:30 pm

### Services Provided On-Site

- Early Head Start (0-3)
- Individual counseling
- Job development
- Licensed childcare (3-5)
- Parent support groups
- Parenting workshops
- Resource referral
- Teen parent programs
  - Customized school
  - School-based childcare
  - Residence

### Partners

- Albuquerque Early Childhood Collaborative
- Albuquerque Public Schools
- Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute
- Barelvas Science Learning Center
- City of Albuquerque
- Cuidando Los Niños
- Head Start
- Mexican American Legal Defense Fund
- New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families
- New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children
- New Mexico Dept. of Children, Youth, and Families
- Planned Parenthood
- Rape Crisis Center
- University of New Mexico
- Voices for Children

Through memoranda of understanding, the following organizations provide programming for developmentally delayed children and parents:

- Information Resources for Families
- Newsletters and Bulletin Boards
- Social Events
- Support Groups
- Workshops

### **Social Connections**

- Community Partnerships
- Home Visits
- Newsletters and Bulletins Board
- Parent Committees
- Radio and Television Programming
- Resource Referrals
- Social Events
- Support Groups
- Workshops

### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

- Family Mental Health Services
- Family Progress Reviews
- Home Visits
- Information Resources for Families
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Radio and Television Programming
- Support Groups
- Workshops

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Community Partnerships
- Family Mental Health Services
- Home Visits
- Programs for Homeless Families
- Resources Referrals
- Teen Parent Programs

### **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**

- Child-specific ChildCare
- Family Mental Health Services
- Family Progress Reviews

- Alta Mira
- APS Child Find
- APS Inclusive Child Development Project
- Home Education Livelihood Program
- Native American Pueblo Parent Resource Center
- Parents Reaching Out
- Peanut Butter and Jelly Family Services, Inc.
- Realizing Confidence and Independence
- University of New Mexico Mental Health Center

### **Ways of Identifying When Families Are at Risk**

- Home visits provide regular, intensive insight into family situations and allow for a deep, trusting relationship between visitor and parent.
- All staff are “extra eyes” on all children; they receive special training in observing children and families for signals of stress.
- Attendance, payment schedules, and other indicators of family stability are monitored.

### **Response Protocol**

A staff member suspecting domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, or mental illness contacts the family’s home visitor immediately. With other issues, observation may take place over a longer period before action is taken.

- Home Visits
- Resource Referrals

## Key Program Features

### Community Partnerships

The Child Development Program collaborates with New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families, Voices for Children, and the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children and participates in city and state discussions on family issues. It works with the city council to support funding for meeting family needs and domestic violence shelters as well as immigration-friendly policies.

The program's centers conduct quarterly Community Partnership meetings that bring together collaborating agencies, which address mental health, adult education, employment, and legislative agendas. At the meetings, the partners address community concerns, coordinate services, and address service issues related to the community, schools, and children and families.

The centers also participate in monthly discussions with the Albuquerque Early Childhood Collaborative, Albuquerque Public Schools, the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute, Head Start, private childcare providers, and others serving young children. Through these monthly sessions, these programs and institutions have worked together to advocate for, plan, develop, and lead a multitude of early childhood programs since 1989. The sessions influence the state legislature's agenda concerning young children and families.

### Child-specific ChildCare

Program staff and parents assess children attending the Child Development Program's centers using several tools: the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, development of Focused Portfolios, and a Bonding and Attachment Assessment. Each child is assigned a single childcare provider, providing continuity,

If staff suspect child abuse or neglect, the family's home visitor:

- Follows legal reporting protocols
- Notifies the family of when the report will be made
- Supports the family from the beginning to the end of the process
- Often goes with the child protective services worker to visit the family
- Continues to visit the children no matter what happens to their parents

### National/Federal Projects

- One of four original recipients of Comprehensive Child Development Center grant
- SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids), a Kellogg Foundation program to ease the transition from early childhood program to school

### What People Say

"Family development facilitators [home visitors] work with *parents*, not with cases or clients. Parents told us: Don't label us. It's a hole we can't get out of."  
—Family Development Facilitator

"We try to make sure that families know they have to work hard, too. It's not just the facilitator's job to find ways to help their children. It's their job and their accomplishment when it's done."  
—Family Development Facilitator

security, and a stable attachment. The centers use dramatic play, creative and sensory activities, experiences with science, self-help activities, music and movement, and play activities with toys, blocks, sand, and water to help the children learn:

- Skills for order and organization
- Sense of responsibility for self, others, and surroundings
- Awareness of community
- Social skills in relation to self and others
- Skills that enhance competence and sense of self
- Skills in language and literacy appropriate to age

### Family Mental Health Services

Individuals and families receive counseling from home visitors and other staff with whom they have formed relationships. The focus of most mental health consultation is to support parents' ability to meet the social and emotional needs of their young children. Staff receive extensive training from mental health consultants and mentoring from other staff. Since mental health services were instituted, the incidence of family crisis has decreased, further convincing staff of the value of these services.

Home visitors conduct initial mental health assessments with parents. One home visitor says this "provides staff with an effective entry point for helping parents see how the family environment affects the child, and why it's important to get services for yourself so that you can help your child in the best possible way." Staff have added sections to the assessments they use to make them consistent with the Child Development Program's strength-based philosophy. One question asks: "What do you think are the strengths of your baby?"

The University of New Mexico Department of Psychiatry provides staff themselves with group consultation and individual counseling.

"We have a whole Spanish-speaking women's group. ... Parent groups make sure things are *right*."  
—Parent

"I have learned very much from this women's group—how to value my children when they have been very difficult to raise."  
—Teen mom

"This program has helped me set goals for my family, and especially has opened doors for the father of my children to be a part of childcare. He has learned how to do this through his group."  
—Mother of four

"I trust [the home visitor] because she helps me reach my goals. I saw results. Everything she promises, she completes. She helps me not quit when I think I might quit on my goals."  
—Teen mom

## Home Visits

The Early Head Start program provides weekly home visits for families with children birth to three. Home visitors and parents develop close relationships. Home visitors provide information that helps parents: promote the social and emotional growth of their children, engage in sound health practices before and after birth, and make their homes safe for young children. They also help families solve problems and identify short- and long-term goals to both address and prevent crises. The visits regularly include Family Progress Reviews, which enable the home visitor and family members to discuss the family's progress toward its goals and adjust its plans as needed. Home visitors locate and refer families to additional services or resources and provide ongoing support as families use them.

## Information Resources for Families

The Child Development Program makes information on parenting and child development available to parents via two lending libraries: the Lenore Wolfe/MaryAnn Binford Resource Library and the Trumbull Lending Library. The libraries lend families children's books; books, videotapes, and other materials on parenting; toys; and activities for parents and children to engage in together at home. These resources help parents work through specific parenting issues at home, facilitate parent-child interactions that promote learning, and give families access to resources they may not be able to afford. Video- and audiotapes and other materials provide important information to parents with limited literacy, and materials are provided in the primary languages that parents in the program speak.

Each center sends out a newsletter to families on a regular basis. These newsletters describe classroom activities; give parents child development information and ways to become involved in their children's

learning; remind parents of center events, policies, and procedures; and provide parents with the opportunity to share information.

Parents also use bulletin boards to get and give information. Items posted include newspaper clippings, helpful hints, the center’s calendar, weekly menus, field trip schedules, and special announcements.

### **Neighborhood Locations**

The Program’s Child Development centers are located throughout the city in 18 locations: eight schools, five community centers, three “hubs” (see below), a science center, and a senior center. Locations were chosen based on an analysis of communities’ childcare needs, and all—even those that are not located in schools—are connected to schools. The Early Care and Education Community Resource Hubs offer training, toy lending, family support services, and staff development for those who work in family and other private childcare centers. Additional new hub buildings are being planned, and parents are involved in the design process.

### **Parent Committees**

Each center has its own parent committees. These committees give parents the opportunity to make decisions about their children’s care in their centers and develop partnerships with each other. They address issues such as health, child development, employment, disabilities, executive functions, legislative presentations, and involvement in neighborhood associations. In addition, a citywide Parent Advisory Committee and Policy Committee (which includes parents) provide opportunities for parent leadership; the members of these committees are parents who are leaders at their own centers.

## **Parent Participation**

All aspects of the Child Development Program maximize parents' involvement in their children's early care and education. On a daily basis, when parents drop off or pick up their children at centers, staff provide the responsive care giving in which they have been trained: They respond to parents in an educational way, exchanging observations and information regarding the children's learning experiences.

Twice a year and as needed, formal parent-teacher conferences are held for children in classroom settings. These promote strong communication between classroom staff and parents, as well as parents' involvement in their children's care. Parents observe their children in the classroom and are coached by classroom staff to assess their children's progress. The staff and the parent(s) review the child's Focused Portfolio together to keep parents updated on their children's growth and development. Parents and classroom staff collaborate to solve problems during this time, and classroom staff take the opportunity to provide parenting and child development information.

Through modeling and coaching by their senior colleagues, classroom staff are trained to be good observers of both children and families and to develop relationships with families that will facilitate learning.

## **Programs for Homeless Families**

A working relationship with Cuidando Los Niños, a program for homeless families, allows children to be enrolled in stable childcare while families receive regular Early Head Start services. It also provides intensive services to help families get out of crisis and set and achieve goals. Employment programs, mental health services, and other supports are offered through home visiting and at sites near centers. Cross-training and regular communication between the childcare provider and Cuidando Los Niños home visitor facilitate coordination and continuity of services.

Seventy-five percent of families who have participated in Cuidando Los Niños have achieved permanency and have not returned to the program. Most families are referred to the program from the domestic violence shelter or transitional housing programs. State and federal funds pay for about half of the offered services, and local fundraising covers the rest. The program is financially viable because its services and those of Early Head Start are coordinated and complementary, not duplicative.

### **Radio and Television Programming**

Every Monday evening and Wednesday morning, KANW 89.1 FM hosts “Concerning New Mexico,” which focuses on family issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, child development, parenting, literacy, and other topics. The Child Development Program’s centers also conduct weekly television programs on the city government channel, focusing on family and community services and issues affecting families.

### **Relationships with Schools**

Today, eight Child Development Program centers are located in schools. But in the beginning, school principals were not supportive of the idea. One property manager said: “A four year-old? Here?” A principal said: “We need to serve *our* children.” Over time, he and other principals realized that these children would be “his” children in time. A similar learning process took place with regard to services for pregnant and parenting teens, which now are present in three high schools.

Today, principals welcome the Child Development Program as a way to engage parents, prevent teen parents from dropping out, and help schools become closer to their neighborhoods. When new schools are built, early childhood development is considered during design. In recent years, one school was in

danger of losing its child development program due to overcrowding, but teachers gave up their own lounge to keep the program.

### **Resource Referrals**

When families are experiencing crisis or have needs that can be met best by other agencies, program staff make referrals. These include referrals to social service agencies for food, clothing, housing, counseling, and other special needs. The Child Development Program provides families with transportation to and from these services.

Home visitors often manage referrals and coordinate services when families have multiple, complex needs. These staff receive training, mentoring, and support both individually and in groups to ensure effective case coordination. Home visitors meet monthly to present information about the families they are serving.

### **Support Groups, Workshops, and Social Events**

Support groups at each center provide support to parents and help them develop connections with each other. Included are therapy and counseling groups for mothers, and fathers' groups are offered by Planned Parenthood, a collaborating agency. Groups are conducted in Spanish and in English.

Topical workshops are offered bi-weekly or monthly. Speakers discuss positive parenting strategies, building strong relationships between parents and their children, and domestic violence issues. Parents can request workshops on topics in which they are interested.

Social events held twice each month bring parents together to interact with each other and their children. Other family events are held throughout the year, such as pajama night, picnics, zoo activities, and family night at the Barelás Science Learning Center. English-Spanish translation is provided for families during all activities.

## Teen Parent Programs

The Division of Child and Family Development operates a Teen Parent Residential Program for teen parents who are homeless or in a crisis situation. The program offers shelter, education opportunities, support in setting and achieving goals, transportation, and counseling, and Early Head Start services are offered seven days a week, 24 hours a day, with intensive staffing. Additional educational and childcare services for teen parents are offered at three high schools, one of which is exclusively for teen parents.

## Founding Leaders

Jorja Armijo-Brasher, Director of the Division of Child and Family Development, has worked to focus awareness not just on creating quality early childhood programs but on the fact that “everyone can have impact on the success of families.” “This is more than childcare,” she says. “Early childhood offers us a whole world of opportunity ... [to] promote the importance of early care and education and family support [in] building a strong, healthy, and economically viable community.”

Lenore Wolfe helped found the Child Development Program as an outspoken school board member and continues to be a consultant to the program now, in her 80s. Her perspective that early childhood programs are “not a training camp for first grade” has drawn the program’s focus to family engagement and the social and emotional development of children.

Olivia Rivera was director of early childhood education for the school district during the Child Development Program’s founding. She now directs the Barelás Science Learning Center, which houses one of the Child Development Centers.

## Challenges

- The enriched support that families receive through Early Head Start home visiting ends at age three and is not extended to the later early-childhood years.
- Although Child Development Program's centers offer childcare and basic parent services, they cannot connect parents with an extensive menu of free services, as Early Head Start can.
- Poverty poses a significant challenge to families in many communities, although the services that the city attaches to its schools help families meet that challenge.
- Providing funding to continue family support services after children leave Early Head Start is a challenge.