

# Strengthening Transitions in Early Childhood Education

Michelle S. Adames, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer, Jardin de los Niños

and

Jeff Hoehn, MPA, Executive Director, Cuidando Los Niños

# Organizational Backgrounds

Cuidando Los Niños, in Albuquerque and Jardin de los Niños, in Las Cruces are nonprofit organizations serving children and families experiencing homelessness.

## Jardin de los Niños

Our mission at Jardin de los Niños is to create new possibilities for homeless and near homeless children and their families through loving childcare, education, and the use of community resources.



## Cuidando Los Niños

The mission of Cuidando Los Niños is to break the cycle of homelessness for children and families. We do this by providing the highest quality early childhood education, behavioral health services, supportive housing, workforce development and wrap around case management.



# Background

New Mexico has made a historic investment in expanding early childhood education across the state which includes the most vulnerable families.

House Bill 83 was signed into law by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham in February 2020, creating an Early Childhood Education and Care Fund.

Both Cuidando Los Niños and Jardin de los Niños have benefited from increase PreK contract funding and increased childcare subsidy funding. This will enable each organization to attract and retain a high quality early childhood workforce.

# Current Situation

New Mexico Pre-Kindergarten access is expected to grow by 40%, which will include increasing the number of instructional hours in some programs, expanding the number of seats for children in classrooms and increasing early childhood workers' pay. *New Mexico Early Education and Care Department. (2023, February)*  
<https://www.nmeccd.org/2023/05/08/eccd-announces-proposed-changes-that-will-improve-access-to-high-quality-child-care-for-most-new-mexico-families/>

From 2016 to 2020, our state experienced the largest percentage increase in homelessness in the nation, at 47%—exacerbated by pandemic-related domestic violence, financial insecurity, and a housing crisis skyrocketing families' likelihood of eviction/foreclosure. *US Department of Housing & Urban Development. (2023, February). PIT and HIC data since 2007. Retrieved from*  
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>

# Children Experiencing Homelessness

Children in these situations are five times more likely than other children to experience four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (“ACES”), putting them at greater risk of physical and behavioral health issues, not completing high school, unemployment, poverty, and criminal justice system involvement—all of which perpetuate cycles of homelessness. *Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless, Inc. (2019, August). Housing and health care legislative health and human services committee.*

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/LHHS%20081419%20Item%209%20Housing%20and%20Health%20Care9.pdf>

# Supporting a Trauma-Informed Workforce

- Children who are experiencing homelessness have a greater likelihood of facing challenges such as food insecurity, low literacy, developmental delays, lack of access to vital services such as medical, dental and behavioral health/mental health services.
- When educators and staff who serve children have received Trauma-Informed training they are better equipped to deliver a responsive and holistic approach to serving the children within the classroom setting

Williams, M.E. *Integrating Early Childhood Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Care for Homeless Families with Young Children: Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*, Volume 12, Module 2, Article 2, pp. 113-123.



# Access to Early Childhood Education

While quality, trauma-informed early childhood education (ECE) is proven to help mediate the adverse developmental effects of homelessness and position children to succeed in school and beyond, ECE systems are typically poorly designed for those experiencing homelessness.

Families frequently face difficulty finding childcare during nontraditional working hours, transportation, and other barriers associated with homelessness. In New Mexico, homelessness and inequitable access to childcare are unfortunately racialized issues affecting people of color more deeply, often compounded by language and documentation barriers. *National Center for Homeless Education (2019). Early care and education for young children experiencing homelessness.*

<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Early-Care-and-Education-for-Young-Children-Experiencing-Homelessness.pdf>

# The Numbers Served in New Mexico

In New Mexico, only 5% of the State's homeless population under age six was served by an early childhood program in 2019, leaving 95% of children experiencing homelessness unserved. *U.S. Department of Education. (2021). Early childhood homelessness state profiles: Data collected in 2018-19.*

<https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/homeless/early-childhood-homelessness-state-profiles-2021.pdf>

# The Opportunity: Building a Bridge to Kindergarten

We have an opportunity to leverage our resources to build a bridge between PreK Programs and Public Schools Kindergarten Programs.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (“ECECD”) and the Public Education Department (“PED”) should consider working together more closely to create a bridge program where vital information about students and families is shared with the public school system to support the best possible student outcomes, and to make sure families continue receiving much needed services.

# Some Specifics for Potential Work Plan Study

The EPICS Child Care provider dashboard is designated for childcare providers and streamlines accepting or declining contracts as well as allows providers to review payments, view, and print payment remittances, view active childcare certifications and manage employee/secondary care giver records.

This dashboard system could be modified to include notes and information on children and families that would then be made available to the public school system through appropriate Release of Information Agreements.

# Specifics for Potential Work Plan Study

Childcare providers should have the opportunity to opt into funding to complete family assessments with the goal of connecting families to resources such as behavioral health care, substance abuse counseling and other basic needs. This information would be shared with Kindergarten programs to support student outcomes.

Provide funding so that childcare centers can receive training and staff can receive trauma informed trainings and endorsements, which will support providers in maintaining a higher standard of care. ACES data and other assessments could then be shared with the Kindergarten Programs.

# A Note on Cuidando Los Niños

Currently our program is at capacity. We are located at the John Marshall Center which is a City of Albuquerque owned facility and have been in partnership with the City since 1990. We are working with City of Albuquerque and State of New Mexico to secure additional Capital Outlay to expand our facility and serve more families.

Just under \$2 million dollars in Capital Outlay has been designated for the project and we will be seeking an additional \$3 million in the upcoming legislative session.

The expansion will include 3 additional classrooms, a cafeteria/community room and space for offices. This will double our capacity to serve 100 children and their families.

# A Note on Jardin de los Niños

- Jardin currently is at full capacity and continues to provide wrap-around services to the families who are on the waitlist.
- Through our local partnerships we refer children to other community-based centers and/or to the Las Cruces Public Schools.
- Jardin is currently launching the first phase of an expansion into the Hatch Community.
- Jardin has requested Congressionally Directed Spending funding to support the expansion and will be seeking additional Capital Outlay funds to support this expansion.

# Final Thoughts

Both Cuidando Los Niños and Jardin de los Niños are open to helping to pilot or test any of the recommendations provided and are open to discussions with ECECD and PED on how to better serve our most vulnerable students.





# Questions and Contact information

Michelle S. Adames, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer, Jardin de los Niños:

Phone: 575.522.2111

Email: [michelle.adames@jardinlc.org](mailto:michelle.adames@jardinlc.org)

Jeff Hoehn, MPA, Executive Director, Cuidando Los Niños

Phone: 505-506-9327

Email: [jeffh@clnabq.org](mailto:jeffh@clnabq.org)