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## AMY BEIHL AWARD

# Youth honored for a community service and volunteer work

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Albuquerque — Alejandra Carmona, a 17-year-old originally from Mexico, began her community service early

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en español

in life volunteering for ENLACE where she taught English to immigrant elementary school children.

Last weekend, with her mother, she attended The Spirit of Hope Celebration where New Mexico Voices for Children recognized her as the first place winner of the Amy Biehl Spirit Award for her civic accomplishments.

"My mom was —is—very proud," said Carmona. She received the news over the phone just three weeks prior to

the event. She would be awarded a \$1,000 scholarship for her commitment to her community. "I was jumping up and down. My mom said, 'What's happening?' She hugged me. It was nice."

In honor of Amy Biehl, Patty Jennings and Alice King, New Mexico Voices for Children, a non-profit dedicated to child and family advo-

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# YOUTH AWARDS

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cacy, recognized four youths and two adults during the Spirit of Hope Celebration, Friday October 23 held at the Albuquerque Embassy Suites. Recipients were awarded for their courage and determination to advocate for positive change in their communities.

Before the ceremony, cameras flashed, board members congratulated her with handshakes and when they asked Carmona to elaborate on her future projects, her timidity dropped away. She spoke with comfortable diplomacy.

"She is an extraordinary young woman," said Carmona's English teacher, Nancy Harmon, who attended the award ceremony. "So often students do these things to build a resume, but [Alejandra] does it because it needs to be done."

President of the South Valley Academy's chapter of the National Honor Society, and a member of the South Valley Women in Action, Carmona has stayed busy helping women and young people, focusing primarily on peer education.

"Mostly my community service has been around educating others," she said. "In South Valley Women in Action we are peer educators. We talk about teen pregnancy, teen violence, domestic violence and teen suicide prevention."

Carmona plans to use her scholarship next fall when she attends the University of New Mexico as a Psychology major. She will continue mentoring her peers, especially through South Valley Women in Action. Her present project involves bringing awareness to teens on issues concerning their body image. Presentations on the topic are in the works.

"I'm very interested in body image," said Carmona. "The media plays a big role in how women see their bodies. We are going to begin that [project] in November and December, doing presentations at schools and to the community."

This year, teachers and community leaders nominated 19 New Mexican youth for the Amy Biehl Spirit Award. The first and second place winners for the 13-18 age group were Carmona and Alex Wirth of Santa Fe, respectively, while the winners of the 19-26 age group were Fionna Walters of Mexican Springs and Arielle Hawney of Sapello.

Many Amy Biehl Spirit Award winners have gone on to accomplish great things, explained Sharon Kayne, communications director of New Mexico Voices for Children. For example, "one girl advocated for access to emergency birth control." The girl rallied for change after she had been raped.

Amy Biehl graduated from Santa Fe High School. As a young woman who hoped to make the world a better place for all, she travelled on a Fulbright Scholarship to South Africa where she communicated with country leaders in the development of a new constitution to end apartheid. During a riot, two men murdered the twenty six-year-old, two men she had planned to help. Every year since her 1993 death, New Mexico Voices for Children has bestowed the Amy Biehl Spirit Award in her honor.

The First Annual Alice King Public Service Award was presented by Attorney General Gary K. King and went to Justice Petra Jimenez-Maes, the first Hispanic female Chief Justice of New Mexico. The First Annual Patty Jennings Citizen Advocacy Award was given to Angie Vachio, co-founder and executive director of Peanut Butter and Jelly Therapeutic Preschool.

Deanna Saucedo of KRQE 13 emceed the Spirit of Hope Celebration. With teary eyes, she said, as Carmona and the other winners have shown, "Age is not a limit. It's an opportunity. When it comes from a young person, we listen."