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Conference works toward healthier children in border communities

BY CHARLES SCANLON
FOR THE HEADLIGHT

A regional conference, "Border Kids Count," examining the socio-economic challenges of growing up in Southern New Mexico took place at the WNMU Global Resources Center in Silver City on May 19, under the guidance of Carla Chavez and Lisa Adams-Shafer from Albuquerque's New Mexico Voices for Children.

The conference drew health care providers and educators from throughout the region, including the Dean of the WNMU School of Education and the Assistant Dean for Early Childhood Education, Terry Anderson. Elizabeth Burr of the Columbus Coalition and Ms. Katherine Ritterbusch of the Luna County Health Council and the Binational Health Council also participated, contributing greatly to the discussion of children on the border.

New Mexico Voices opened with a PowerPoint

presentation of the goals and mission of their organization, which was founded 22 years ago with the core values of human rights, healthy communities, economic justice and civic participation. In the next 20 years, NM Voices pledges to work towards such goals as eliminating child poverty. The children's aspect of the organization is called Kids Count, which tracks indicators of general demographics, health, education and economics.

Several charts and graphs that were presented showing the state of children in New Mexico going back a number of years can be accessed at the Web site, nmvoices.org

Burr shared the statistic from the CEO of the hospital in Deming that nonpayment of bills by Deming residents presents a greater drain than those coming from Palomas. The CYFD has also achieved a memorandum of understanding between Mexico and New Mexico to encour-

age the unification of families divided by the border. Healing House has also been able to provide confident shelter to the victims of domestic violence without fear of deportation. She also described the various ways the current federal No Child Left Behind educational policy has failed.

Ritterbusch gave funding statistics demonstrating the Border Area Mental Health agency is now required to "do as much as we've always done with less" after a four percent retroactive cut in funding. She described the frustration of not having a psychiatrist on staff for the county, and how rural areas of Luna County, including Columbus, receive even less reimbursement for services. "There is not enough for Deming, let alone Columbus," said Ritterbusch. She also pointed out there are no professionals in the field outside of Deming.





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Charles Scanlon Photo

Katherine Ritterbush shares her experiences with other health professionals during a brief morning break.