
Native youth create policy

A group of local Native-American youth wants state and tribal leaders to know more about the challenges they face and to make addressing those challenges a priority.

The Native youths' concerns are highlighted in their recently released "Native Youth Agenda," which they plan to use as an educational tool for the community and leaders.

The agenda addresses high suicide, poverty and obesity rates of Native youth.

Among the challenges highlighted:

Native-American youth have the highest suicide, poverty and obesity rates in New Mexico; and, urban youth in particular face a loss of Native culture, language and identity.

Among the solutions posed are: better access to health care via school-based health centers, and more Native-based curriculum in urban public schools.

The four-page document grew out of "Native Youth Voices," a youth-leadership development program initiated by "New Mexico Voices for Children" in

partnership with "Native Soul Youth."

The group held a series of workshops over the past year, involving Native youth aged 14 to 17 from Bernalillo, Valencia and Sandoval counties.

The 30 youngsters there identified the challenges and barriers they face as well as their hopes and goals.

The agenda has been mailed to New Mexico's tribal leaders. Plans for further dissemination are still in the works.

Visit www.nmvoices.org for more information.