

## 2017 KIDS COUNT Conference Speaker Biographies



**Don Simonson: *Co-Chair, NM Voices for Children Board of Directors***

Dr. Simonson earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and is professor emeritus in finance and banking at the University of New Mexico. He has authored books on bank management and held endowed chairs in finance and banking at the University of Oklahoma, University of Missouri, Kansas City, and UNM. He has served as a financial sector advisor-in-residence at several central banks in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.



**Allen Sanchez: *President and CEO, CHI St. Joseph's Children***

During his long tenure at CHI St. Joseph's Children, Mr. Sanchez directed the startup of the largest home visiting program in the United States serving families with children from prenatal to age three. He also serves as the executive director of the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops advocating for the well-being of children.



**Amber Wallin: *KIDS COUNT Director, New Mexico Voices for Children***

As KIDS COUNT director, Ms. Wallin creates the annual data book and special reports, and oversees the New Mexico pages of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center. She also researches policies on early childhood, tax and budget, food security, and family economic security issues. She came to NM Voices in 2012 as a fellow from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' State Priorities Partnership program, after which she joined the staff as a research and policy analyst. Prior to joining NM Voices, Ms. Wallin served as a budget analyst for the city of Las Cruces. She received her masters of public administration from New Mexico State University.



**James Jimenez: *Executive Director, New Mexico Voices for Children***

Mr. Jimenez joined NM Voices in 2013 as the director of research and policy and was hired as executive director in 2016. He also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico's School of Public Administration. In both positions he draws from his considerable experience in using the budget as a strategic tool while working in state and city government. James served as chief of staff under Governor Bill Richardson from 2006 to 2008, and as cabinet secretary of the Department of Finance and Administration from 2003 to 2006. He was also city manager of Rio Rancho and serves on the boards of directors for several nonprofit organizations.



**Dennis Campa: *Associate Director for Policy Reform and Advocacy, Annie E. Casey Foundation***

As senior leadership fellow, Mr. Campa acts as secretariat to eight Making Connections sites, promotes integrative strategies at the foundation, and helps to develop promising leaders in the Family Economic Success field. Before joining the Casey Foundation, he worked as director of the Department of Community Initiatives for the city of San Antonio, Texas. His career has spanned juvenile justice, adult corrections, drug abuse prevention, and public administration. In 1997, he was selected as a fellow in Casey's Children and Family Fellowship. Mr. Campa earned a B.A. in government from the University of Texas and completed two years of graduate studies in community planning and leadership development. In 2009, he was named the first Friedman Fellow Innovator-in-Residence for the Corporation for Enterprise Development.

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**Nick Johnson: Senior Vice President, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**

Mr. Johnson serves as senior vice president for State Fiscal Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C.-based research and policy institute. He directs the Center's State Fiscal Project, which publishes frequent reports on how state budget and tax decisions are affecting families and communities, and develops policies to enhance fiscal responsibility, equity, and accountability. Mr. Johnson holds a graduate degree from Duke University's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy and an undergraduate degree from Yale University. He came to the Center in 1996 from the staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.



**Ray Rivera: Founder, Searchlight New Mexico**

Mr. Rivera is editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican and co-founder of Searchlight New Mexico. He is a former staff reporter for *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Seattle Times*, and the *Salt Lake Tribune*. His investigative stories have included: a nine-part series uncovering the federal government's fatally flawed investigation of Capt. James Yee, an Army Muslim chaplain at Guantanamo Bay falsely accused of espionage; the use of death squads by Al Qaeda and Haqqani Network insurgents along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border; and the illegal funneling of taxpayer money to bogus non-profits associated with New York city and state lawmakers. He lives in Santa Fe with his wife and three children.



**Jerry Ortiz y Pino: Senator, New Mexico State Legislature**

Sen. Ortiz y Pino is a Democratic member of the New Mexico Senate, representing District 12. He was first elected in 2004 and has served as chairman of the Public Affairs Committee since 2013. He has also served on the Rules and Finance Committees throughout his time in the chamber. He earned a B.A. in Latin American studies from the University of New Mexico and a master's in social work from Tulane University, and his professional experience includes social work. Sen. Ortiz y Pino was the executive director at NM Voices (then called NM Advocates for Children and Families) from 1995 to 1998.



**Ona Porter: Executive Director, Prosperity Works**

Ms. Porter is president and CEO of Prosperity Works, a statewide organization that develops and tests strategies that build the opportunities, knowledge, and relationships required for all New Mexicans to achieve economic security and prosperity. In addition, she shines a light on the predatory lending practices that continue to marginalize America's most vulnerable citizens and calls for systemic change. Ms. Porter was educated at the University of California and Inter American University, and has distinguished herself in the fields of business, education, health, and family and child advocacy. She has produced works including *Kids In Crisis: New Mexico's Other Bomb*, *The Effects of Power and Powerlessness on Our Lives*, *First Things First: Caring for Preschool in New Mexico*, and *From Here To There: The Workbook For Families On The Move*. Ms. Porter was the very first executive director for NM Voices (originally called The Coalition for Children), serving from 1987 to 1990.

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**Veronica C. García: Superintendent, Santa Fe Public Schools**

Dr. García is the superintendent of Santa Fe Public Schools. Her past experience has included working as the executive director of the New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators, New Mexico's first cabinet secretary of education, and a teacher and principal in Albuquerque Public Schools. She holds a doctorate in educational leadership and recently won the National Education Association's H. Councill Trenholm Memorial Award (Non-Black), which is presented to two nominees, one Black and one non-Black educator, whose work has led to the eradication of racial inequities in the education community. Dr. García was executive director for NM Voices from 2012 to 2016.



**Chris Schueler: President and CEO, Christopher Productions**

An Emmy Award winning producer, Mr. Schueler has created more than a hundred television programs over the past twenty years that have been broadcast throughout the country and around the world. Focusing on educational and social issues, he creates youth programming, cultural and social documentaries, and family series television all geared to create "television to touch the heart." His clients have included the United Nations, the National Institute of Mental Health, PBS, and the CBS Network Foundation, as well as other television networks and governments throughout the world. *Everyone's Business: Protecting Our Children* is one of his more recent projects.



**Cindy Nava: Research Assistant, Center for Education Policy Research, UNM; Board Member, New Mexico Voices for Children**

Ms. Nava is a graduate research assistant at the University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research. Her work in policy, advocacy, and civic engagement has led her to lead distinctive statewide and national policy agendas to support access to higher education for minority students. In 2015, Ms. Nava became the first DREAMer to serve as an intern for the Democratic National Committee in D.C., and in 2016 became the first DREAMer to be awarded the Rising Star Award by the NM Democratic Party. She is currently completing an M.A. in higher education leadership and policy, recently served as a NM House of Representatives legislative education analyst, and does motivational speaking across the country focused on empowering minority students. Ms. Nava is a blogger for the *Huffington Post* and recently presented a TEDx talk focused on empowerment.



**Rujeko Dumbetsena: Dancer**

Ms. Dumbetsena is a Zimbabwean-born dancer, pedagogue, and scholar specializing in neo-traditional African dance. She is currently a faculty member for the dance departments at University of New Mexico and Central New Mexico Community College, and is an MFA candidate. She previously served as faculty at Sarah Lawrence College and was an ensemble member of the hit musical *FELA*. Ms. Dumbetsena has worked to bridge different cultures and has successfully been a part of innovative works, taught workshops, and directed conferences to bring together students and audiences as witnesses and participants in the profundity of African art today.

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### **Armando Ortega: *Musician***

Mr. Ortega began his professional music career in 1979 while on vacation in Honduras. He returned to Albuquerque in 1981 to play with the legendary bands Aces High, The Breakers, and the Broadway Elks. Inspired by “dance groove music with a positive message,” he founded Wagogo in 1993, an eclectic group of musicians that stir up a rhythmic cocktail out of their Chicano influences, Northern Mexico folk songs, warm calypso island grooves, and the captivating spirit music of Zimbabwe with lyrics in Spanish, English, and the Shona language of Zimbabwe. They have performed at the Zimbabwe Music Festival as well as being broadcast on radio stations from New Mexico to New York, California, and Zimbabwe.



### **Sarah Ghiorse: *Program Director, NewMexicoWomen.org***

Ms. Ghiorse is the director of NewMexicoWomen.org, a program of the New Mexico Community Foundation that seeks to advance opportunities for women and girls statewide so that they can lead self-sufficient, healthy, and empowered lives. She was the executive director of Seasons Fund for Social Transformation, a national collaborative that funded movement-building work happening at the intersection of personal and social transformation. She has served as an organizational and strategic planning consultant to a range of non-profits and foundations. Ms. Ghiorse received her B.A. in women’s studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz and her M.A. in social and cultural anthropology from the California Institute of Integral Studies.



### **Lisa Cacari Stone: *Associate Professor, College of Population Health; Assistant Director, RWJF Center for Health Policy at UNM***

Dr. Cacari Stone’s equity research interests encompass the macro-level determinants of health (immigration policy, health reform), the community level (impact of neighborhood context and migration on substance use), and the interpersonal level (the role of *promotores de salud* in bridging patient and provider communication for chronic disease management). She collaborates with multidisciplinary research teams using community-based participatory policy research and mixed-methods approaches to advance knowledge for improving population health for immigrant, Latino, border, and other under-resourced communities. She has published numerous policy briefs and public reports that highlight evidence for health systems and policy changes for public and private sectors. Dr. Cacari Stone received her Ph.D. from Brandeis University, completed her postdoctoral research at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and served as a postdoctoral policy fellow with the late Senator Edward Kennedy.



### **Alicia Edwards: *Coordinator, Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Grant County***

Ms. Edwards is the coordinator for Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Grant County, which implements and supports initiatives that create policy, systems, and environmental changes that result in increased access to healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities. She is the former executive director of The Volunteer Center and the Commons Center for Food Security and Sustainability, working to end hunger and poverty in Grant County. She helped found the Grant County Food Policy Council, the Grant County Community Foundation, and the New Mexico Collaboration to End Hunger, and has served on the Southwest Regional Food Policy Council and the Grant County Community Health Council. She is also a published poet, author, photographer and sculptor. Ms. Edwards was just elected to a four-year term on the Grant County Board of Commissioners.

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**Pamela Herndon: *Executive Director, Southwest Women’s Law Center***

Ms. Herndon has served as executive director since 2011 and is deeply committed to the goals and mission of the Southwest Women’s Law Center. She has an impressive professional career that includes serving as a former deputy cabinet secretary, general counsel, and as an assistant attorney general for the state of New Mexico. She was also a senior litigation attorney with the Internal Revenue Service as well as a certified public accountant licensed in the state of Texas. She is licensed to practice law in Colorado and New Mexico, and before the U.S. Tax Court and U.S. Supreme Court. Ms. Herndon received her bachelors of business administration from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and her juris doctor degree from the University of Texas School of Law.



**Diana Maze, *Working Parents Association Member, Organizers in the Land of Enchantment***

Ms. Maze is a single mother of a beautiful 5-year-old girl. She is also a domestic violence survivor who works fulltime and advocates for early education reform. Ms. Maze worked in early education for more than ten years, holding every job possible, from cook to assistant director, each paying minimum wage. During her time at the early education center, she became involved with OLÉ through their work to reform the early education system. It was through their advocacy in early education, workers’ rights, citizenship and immigration, and democracy reform that she realized the vital impact the organization has in changing the community for the better. Ms. Maze is now an active member of OLÉ’s Working Parents Association as well as part of the OLÉ’s year-round canvass team.



**Jessica Riggs: *Program Manager, Tewa Women United***

As the manager of the Indigenous Women’s Health and Reproductive Justice program at Tewa Women United, Ms. Riggs works to end all forms of violence against Native women and girls, Mother Earth, and to promote peace in New Mexico. She has been working with TWU since 2010 as a community doula, childbirth educator, certified lactation educator, and in her current position since 2015. Her bachelor’s degree in integrative health studies is from Northern New Mexico College.



**Farah Council: *Director of Development, New Mexico Voices for Children***

Ms. Council joined NM Voices in early 2017, bringing with her an extensive background in nonprofit management, program design and evaluation, and fund cultivation, among other skills. Her background centers the role of gender equity and women’s rights as essential to social justice and peaceful societies. In that vein, she most recently held an adjunct faculty position at the SIT Graduate Institute teaching gender-inclusive security and as an advisor to the Nobel Women’s Initiative and the Organization for Women’s Freedom in Iraq. She led the Institute for Inclusive Security’s work in Sudan and South Sudan, advocating for women’s inclusion in peace and transition processes. She holds an M.A. in conflict transformation from the School for International Training and a B.A. in political science from UNM.

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**Sheryl Williams Stapleton: *Representative, New Mexico State Legislature***

Rep. Williams Stapleton is a Democratic member of the New Mexico House of Representatives, representing District 19. She is currently the house majority leader and has served as majority and minority whip for several years. She was first elected in 1994, has been the chair and vice chair of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, as well as a member of many other committees including Education. Rep. Williams Stapleton earned her B.S., as well as an M.A. in multicultural education, and a doctorate in education from the University of New Mexico. Her professional experience includes working as an assistant principal at a Career Enrichment Center and as an educator for the Albuquerque Public School District.



**Mimi Stewart: *Senator, New Mexico State Legislature***

Sen. Stewart is a Democratic member of the New Mexico Senate, representing District 17, the International District. She has been in the Senate since 2015, where she is chair of the Legislative Education Study Committee. She was a member of the state House of Representatives from 1994 to 2014. She has also been the chair of the Education, and Health and Government Committees, as well as serving on the Public Affairs and Judiciary Committees. Sen. Stewart earned a B.A. from Boston University and an M.S. from Wheelock College. Her professional experience includes working as a special education teacher in the Albuquerque Public School system.



**Christine Trujillo: *Representative, New Mexico State Legislature***

Rep. Trujillo is a Democratic member of the New Mexico House of Representatives, representing District 25. She was first elected in 2012 and has since been vice chair of the Education Committee, as well as serving on the Appropriations and Finance Committee. Rep. Trujillo earned a B.A. from New Mexico Highlands University and an M.A. from the University of New Mexico. Her professional experience includes teaching in the Albuquerque Public School system.



**Georgene Louis: *Representative, New Mexico State Legislature***

Rep. Louis is a Democratic member of the New Mexico House of Representatives, representing District 26. She was first elected in 2012 and was the chair of the Government, Indian and Veteran Affairs Committee during the 2017 session. Previously, she was the vice chair of the Judiciary Committee and a member of the Health and Business and Industry Committees. Rep. Louis' professional experience includes working as an attorney and as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico.



**Bill Jordan, *Senior Policy Advisor and Government Relations Officer, New Mexico Voices for Children***

Mr. Jordan has been with NM Voices since 1998 and leads our legislative advocacy efforts in Santa Fe and Washington, D.C., working primarily with lawmakers on issues such as raising the minimum wage, creating a state-level earned income tax credit, expanding access to health care, passing the child helmet safety law, among others. He is relied upon by many legislators for data and information relating to the legislation they are voting on or writing. He was appointed to Governor Richardson's Equal Pay Task Force and his Budget Balancing Task Force. Previously, Mr. Jordan was executive director of the HIV Coordinating Council of New Mexico.