

Hello to our partners and friends across the state! We are relishing in the delights of summertime – fresh, local food at the farmers’ market and warm weather for biking and hiking. In our Santa Fe office, we said goodbye to Health Educator Danella Hall and welcomed Alexana Hickmott, our much needed epidemiologist!

A New Mexico native, Alex is transitioning out of academia after recently earning her PhD in biological anthropology in Oregon. She's a trained primatologist ("Think Jane Goodall, but I don't study chimps.") who studied primates in such places as Peru and Barbados to research aging and possible treatments to offset age-related changes. Now she's applying her epidemiological skills to understand obesity, nutrition and physical activity in NM kids.



In other staffing news, we bid farewell to two of our long-term coordinators and respected community members, Mitch Gray in Curry County and JoAnn Velasquez in Guadalupe County. We will miss their contributions and wish them well.

For the last dozen years, JoAnn has been a gentle, persistent leader in the small communities of Guadalupe County. Her work has led to seven edible gardens, the Eat Smart to Play Hard program in every school, and a farmers’ market that offers Double Up Food Bucks and freshly grown food. Every school and senior center applies for NM Grown funding.

Mitch was instrumental in imbedding Eat Smart to Play Hard and Healthy Kids 5.2.1.O in local schools’ wellness policies. Every elementary school participates in the programs every year. He has coordinated BMI surveillance in all Clovis elementary schools for more than a decade. His accomplishments include partnering to develop a city trail and a sustainable community garden.



Please join us in welcoming Healthy Kids Guadalupe County’s new coordinator, Myria Mandel. Myria grew up in Albuquerque and spent summers with her grandparents in Colonias, a small village in Guadalupe. Her ancestors were one of the original grantees of the Anton Chico Land Grant, where she lives today with her 13-year-old daughter, Azalea. Myria’s excited to share healthy comfort-food recipes, promote farmers & ranchers, add vendors to NM Grown, upgrade a local park, and develop trails.



JoAnn, her husband Tim and daughter Katrina

Save the Date!

We are excited to see you at our **HKHC training July 16-18** in Farmington! Stay tuned for an agenda coming soon. Healthy Kids San Juan County has been a leader in supporting local food production, and we’re looking forward to touring Growing Forward Farm.

News & Events

Congratulations to the five HKHC communities that were awarded \$94,220 in **Farm to School mini-grants!** HKHC coordinators in Chaves, Grant, Guadalupe, Hidalgo and San Juan counties helped their school districts apply for funding to establish or expand edible school gardens, greenhouses, or aquaponics operations. Now coordinators are helping order supplies, plan garden layout, and recruit volunteers for project construction.

We have been partnering with Red Mesa Cuisine to provide **Healthy Eating in Communities Professional Culinary Arts Training** in senior centers in Tribal communities, including Laguna Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache, Navajo Nation (Shiprock) and Santo Domingo Pueblo. The trainings support senior center staff in offering nutritious, affordable meals that include locally sourced ingredients.

Upcoming Stories:

- [Farm to Preschool in Clovis](#)
- [The Family 5.2.1.O Challenge](#)
- [Walk & Roll to School](#)



Food Systems



Expanding access to healthy, affordable food in schools and communities



Growing Gardens in Healthy Kids Communities

Thank you, partners!

Healthy Kids Grant County:

The Commons
 G.W. Stout Elementary
 Harrison Schmitt Elementary
 Jose Barrios Elementary
 Southwest Seed Library
 Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

Healthy Kids Guadalupe County:

Moise Memorial Library
 La Loma, Puerto de Luna & Santa Rosa
 senior centers
 Santa Rosa Elementary School
 Anton Chico Library
 Anton Chico Head Start
 Vaughn Schools
 Cub Academy Daycare

Healthy Kids Roosevelt County:

Curt Jaynes of Garden Source
 Danny & Kay Griffith
 Roosevelt County Health Council
 City of Portales
 Portales Municipal Schools
 Carol Calderon, ICAN Nutrition Educator
 Portales Hardware
 Eastern NM University
 Joe Ortega
 Herbert Lumber
 Portales First Baptist Church
 J.P. Stone Community Bank
 Wal-Mart

In Healthy Kids communities across New Mexico, elementary-school students are learning how seeds can transform into food with the right sun, water, nutrients, and care. Healthy Kids Healthy Communities coordinators are the resource gatherers and the community builders. They find teacher champions, reliable volunteers, and partners who offer discounts and donations. Together, they are showing children the delight of growing and eating their own food.

Healthy Kids Grant County

The fourth-grade students at G.W. Stout Elementary in Silver City light up when the “Garden lady” walks into their classroom. Healthy Kids Grant County Coordinator Cassandra Hartley spends an hour each week doing experiential learning in the school’s garden, rotating the entire grade through the year-long club during school hours.



“I think it’s most remarkable that the same kids struggling to focus and sit still in the classroom are my all-stars in the garden. They work hard,” she said.

Healthy Kids Grant County was instrumental in establishing a dedicated garden space there years ago, and has always had a teacher champion contributing to the garden’s success. Students learn about weather patterns, pollinators, growing seasons, and journal about their observations. It’s all hands-on learning.

“The more we can get kids outside, the better their overall well-being,” Cassandra said. “They work their bodies a bit and come back more focused and ready to work in the classroom.”

Almost all the schools in Cobre and Silver City have a pollinator and/or vegetable garden, but the only active ones have a garden champion at the school. Healthy Kids Grant County is bringing Jose Barrios’ students to the Commons’ community garden to reignite interest in their own garden, and looking into hosting a summer garden program at the Commons.



Growing Gardens continued...



Healthy Kids Guadalupe County

Healthy Kids Guadalupe County Coordinator JoAnn Velasquez’s gentle persistence was key in the development of seven school and community gardens across the county. She asked every year at Santa Rosa Elementary until she found someone who loves gardening.

Community members and students tend gardens at libraries, schools, and senior centers. Each location sends food home with kids and/or seniors. The gardens have been effective promotional tools too. The library director asked about getting a garden started after she noticed the Santa Rosa Senior Center’s garden.

Healthy Kids Roosevelt County

Healthy Kids Roosevelt County Coordinator Caron Powers recruited local partners to establish James Elementary School’s garden in Portales seven years ago with six beds, expanding its size every year until every classroom had its own bed.

Today, the 24-bed garden is integral to the school -- an outdoor classroom with picnic tables and benches that is embraced by the school as well as community members who donate supplies and time. Each year brings new improvements. Most recently, the school installed taller planters that are accessible for children who have physical disabilities, a new composter, and a worm farm!



Caron and community volunteers prepare baggies for students to sample each garden bed’s spinach, lettuce and radishes, and then students celebrate with a Color Run.

Caron is building on her success, adding a garden at Brown Early Childhood Center with the support of the principal and teachers, who incorporate the garden into the children’s education. Caron recommends getting the

principal’s buy-in first. “It gets folded into the school more,” she said.

The Pre-K and kindergarten students were eager to water their feed bucket-container garden, and a couple of preschoolers lingered, watching for any signs of growth.

Every time school staff changes, Caron sends information about Healthy Roosevelt County’s work expanding physical activity and healthy eating opportunities to students. “Luckily, they have all been very receptive,” she said.

Lessons Learned

- Get a principal on board first.
- Find teacher champion(s).
- Find partners for summer watering, such as a camp program for kids.
- Talk to your city about including your garden in the Clean & Beautiful Grant.
- Ask local businesses and your county’s health council for volunteer and/or funding support.
- Get volunteers on planting day - parents, senior centers, county extension staff & gardening clubs.
- Landscaping businesses may provide discounted supplies. Get good soil to help your garden grow!





Farm to Preschool Pilot Program

Strategies that increase access to healthy, local foods in NM preschools



Socorro Head Start Teaches Gardening, Nutrition Education

Eliseo Gandara studied the small, green balls sprouting on his school’s tomato plant. The 4-year-old boy had helped plant the tiny seeds next to a window in his Head Start classroom, transferred a small plant to the outdoor planter and watered it when needed. Now there was an actual tomato ripening under the Socorro sun.



Eliseo Gandara’s mom, Samantha Lopez, said she appreciates how the Farm to Preschool program is teaching both her sons to grow their own food and not rely solely on a grocery store.

That moment of curiosity and marvel has become common at the Mid-West NM CAP Early Head Start and Head Start program, which is in its fourth year of the Farm to Preschool pilot project funded by the New Mexico Department of Health. The Department’s Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Program supports eight pilot sites in diverse areas of the state.

“I think we’re creating memorable moments and healthy habits as they grow and develop,” said Sebastian Camacho Jr., the local director of the preschool for ages six months through five years. “I think this program is teaching kids how plants grow and the responsibility of caretaking, teaching them to spend time outdoors and that some things take time.”

As a Farm to Preschool pilot site, Socorro’s Head Start is implementing a comprehensive, culturally relevant program rooted in four core strategies: buying New Mexico grown produce for meals and snacks, growing edible gardens, offering nutrition education, and encouraging family and community engagement. Additional centers received mini grants to implement one of the four strategies.



Clara Blomquist-Klarkowski, 4, helped plant fruit trees at her school. She likes helping her family garden at home now.

Thank you, community partners!

City of Socorro (donated labor & topsoil)

NM Tech (donated mulch)

NM State University Cooperative Ext.
(cooking/nutrition classes)

Healthy Kids Socorro County

HKHC helps connect each pilot site to local and state resources. Volunteers and families are essential partners too, helping plant vegetables and fruit in 12 metal planters on the property.

“I think having the plants at school helps Clara be more interested at home to grow things, and she’s been more willing to try the other things that have been growing, both at school and at home,” said Julie-Anna Blomquist.

The garden is the Head Start’s primary classroom. They also do nutrition lessons and activities from the Department of Health’s educational book series for preschoolers. Students taste test fresh fruit and vegetables from local growers and meat from a Los Lunas supplier.

Camacho and staff plan to expand the garden by planting crops in a new greenhouse, decorating planters with student handprints, and installing a drip irrigation system. “The funding and support of the community has really helped us move forward with the program,” Camacho said. “We’re doing what we envisioned.”



Physical Activity



Increasing opportunities for children & families to be physically active

Grant County Kids Learn Riding Skills in Bike Club

Some students haven't missed a Wednesday in three years of a weekly bike club at Jose Barrios Elementary School in Silver City. Healthy Kids Grant County Coordinator Alicia Edwards attributes the club's success to the principal's commitment, allowing Nurse Amy Potts and Social Worker Nicole Picozzi to spend their professional development time on supporting the bike club.

The number of students has grown each year from 8-10 the first year to 22-25 this past school year. They gather on Wednesdays, their early-release day, to practice riding bikes and learn safety skills.

Parent volunteers and retired teachers enable the club to ride on streets, with a ratio of one adult rider per four to five kids. "The school has really stepped up," Alicia said.

Community members have helped Alicia incorporate field trips to give kids more riding time and introduce them to places they might not know, like the Dragonfly trail system, named for a dragonfly petroglyph. Students also toured the Silver City Fire Department, which set up an obstacle course for them, and the Silver City Co-op provided a healthy snack of organic dried mangoes.

Thank you, community partners!

Jose Barrios Elementary School

The Bike Works

Silver City Food Co-op

Gila Hike & Bike

Twin Sisters Cycling & Fitness

Silver City Fire Department

Ed and Karen Valentine

Chase Sturdevant

"We have been trying to do field trips as part of skills building and to build in Eat Smart to Play Hard," Alicia said.

They've visited Penny Park as well as The Bike Shop, a nonprofit that teaches kids how to repair bikes in exchange for volunteer hours that equal their age. Kids keep the bike they fix.

With three years of success, Alicia applied for a \$20,000 Outdoor Equity Grant to expand the club into additional schools. The funding will help with outreach efforts, and provide kids with water bottles and cages, helmets, rideable bicycles, and other supplies as needed.

To recruit more schools, Alicia and her Healthy Kids co-coordinator, Cassandra Hartley, will talk with Cobre and Silver City

elementary-school principals to gauge their interest in dedicating staff time to support a club – a necessary component. This year, the two set up a Healthy Grant County booth during Cliff School's field day, handing out healthy snacks and promoting the possibility of a bike club there.

"We're going to be as flexible as we need to be in order to work with them," Alicia said.

Some kids in Jose Barrios' club have been riding all three years. "They love it," Alicia said. "It's my hope this means parents are getting their kids out more. Some kids have gotten upgraded bikes so there is some indication that they are doing more community riding."



Volunteer Ed Valentine talks to Healthy Kids Grant County's Bike Club about safety rules.