

State of New Mexico

CHILDREN, YOUTH and FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

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CYFD Family,

The fall season is here, and I'd like to update you on some of the work that CYFD has been doing in response to COVID-19 and other work to improve child welfare in New Mexico.

New COVID cases are at all-time highs. We have seen a number of days with more than 1,000 new COVID cases recorded in New Mexico. It is important to prepare for our medical systems to be overwhelmed and to continue to exercise caution. Please stay home as much as possible. When you do have to leave your home, be sure to shop for groceries alone, wear a mask, observe social distancing and avoid businesses and locations where mask and social distancing guidelines are not being followed.

While the recent rise in cases is concerning, there are steps we can follow to cope with stress. To manage stress, each of us can focus on what we *can* control. We can limit our exposure to news, connect with loved ones through virtual means, and practice self-care —such as exercising at home.

To help children and young adults cope with stress, parents, caregivers and supportive adults can:

- Set a good example by taking care of themselves.
- Talk with them about what is happening: Listen to their concerns, answer any questions they may have, address rumors and reassure them.
- Limit their exposure to news updates and social media.

Visit [PullTogether.org](https://www.PullTogether.org) for more resources including tips for parents and caregivers, behavioral health support, easy ways to explain COVID to children and young adults, and free tutoring for students K-12.

There are additional resources available to parents and caregivers this Fall.

- Since the start of the pandemic, the department has been able to provide an additional stipend for each child in care ranging from \$100/175/month per child. This is federal money that we are able to put directly into the hands of caregivers.

- Pandemic EBT(P-EBT) is available while students are attending school virtually. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch can get food benefits. The Human Services Department (HSD) has established a P-EBT hotline for parents and caregivers who have questions about eligibility. The P-EBT hotline can be reached at 1-833-415-0569 and is open Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 6 PM. Cards are mailed by the address the child is registered for school. Please make sure your foster child has the correct address at their local school.
- The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) is supporting students in multiple ways.
 - To support students in their transition to virtual school, NMPED has started the “Engage New Mexico” program which pairs K-12 students with an academic coach who can answer questions, identify resources, and develop a plan for a strong academic year. For more information, call (505) 340-3250.
 - “Money Mondays” are virtual workshops where financial aid experts from around state colleges meet with high school students to provide guidance. Money Mondays will be the first Monday of every month through June 2021. For more information, call (505) 827-6719.
- There are numerous free Internet hotspots hosted by a range of Internet service providers and agencies throughout the state. Visit communitylearningnetwork.org for more information.

Despite the pandemic, CYFD has made great strides in the last few months to improve child well-being in New Mexico.

- In January 2020, the department had 2,347 pending investigations. In August, that number dropped to 135 pending investigations and remains at historic lows. This achievement was due to the massive project CYFD’s IT department undertook to support caseworkers to telework. This has allowed workers, for the first time, to work on cases while out of the office.
- Protective Services monthly visitation rates increased from 120% before the pandemic to more than 250% during the pandemic. Despite more than 80% of all CYFD staff working from home, we have been able to maintain the same or higher levels of communication with all of our families and youth in care.
- The Human Services Department (HSD), Protocall Services and CYFD collaborated to launch the NMConnect app, for Apple and Android phones, which provides public access to behavioral health professionals. The app is intended to support those who are experiencing behavioral health challenges during the pandemic and beyond.
- CYFD has trained Juvenile Justice staff throughout its divisions who are working in the community to carry and administer Narcan, a nasal spray utilized to counteract the life-threatening effects of an opioid overdose. In addition, Protective Services Placement staff

are being certified in the CANS assessment tool which focuses on identifying key youth and family strengths and developing individualized plans.

- CYFD launched its extended foster care program, called “Fostering Connections”, which extends the age of support from 18 to 21. Through this voluntary program, youth involved with CYFD are eligible for various services including guaranteed housing, guaranteed connection to community-based behavioral health supports, job assistance, food access, and money for college. As of the writing of this letter, 100% of youth participating in this program are in stable housing.

These achievements would not be possible without CYFD staff. I am grateful for their dedication and willingness to work in new ways during the pandemic.

We value your questions and feedback. Please contact your local County Office Manager if you have any.

Thank you for exhibiting patience and grace during these unprecedented times as we are all in this together.

Sincerely,



Annamarie Luna
Annamarie Luna, Acting Director
CYFD Protective Services Division