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MY VIEW KATHERINE FREEMAN

New name but same great work for kids

By Katherine Freeman

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This year, United Way of Santa Fe County will begin the next chapter in our decadeslong story.

On Monday we are launching our new name, Growing Up New Mexico: The Early Childhood Partnership. The reasons for our name change are varied, but the most significant is simple — transforming from United Way of Santa Fe County to Growing Up New Mexico will allow us to shorten the distance between policy and action, and will fully align our work on behalf of children and young families across New Mexico. We will have a new name, but our organizational mission, vision, focus and work will remain just as they are.

Though we have been an affiliated member organization with United Way Worldwide since 1955, we have not operated as a traditional United Way in many years. Over the past two decades, we have been exclusively focused on early childhood education and care, creating and administering family support programs and influencing statewide policy that prioritizes children, prenatal through age 5, and the adults in their lives.

When we made the transition to a direct-service organization whose sole focus is early childhood education, we did so as a response to the growing academic achievement gap between Santa Fe's school-age children. Data at the time revealed a decrease in kindergarten readiness, low rates of third-grade literacy and math proficiency, and the declining high school graduation rate of young people in Santa Fe County.

We believed then, and still believe now, that high-quality early childhood programming, combined with statewide policy that prioritizes the success of our youngest children, is the most effective social and economic investment we can make.

As we collectively navigate the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, I want to assure our donors,

corporate funders, grantors, political allies and community partners alike that we are dedicated to carrying out the same high-quality work we have always done. However, even more importantly, I wish to assure the children and families we serve every day through our home visiting, pre-K and early education, home-based child care provider support, family navigation and coaching, and early literacy programs that our commitment to you is unwavering. We will have a new name, but we are the same great people doing the same great work.

More than ever, families in our state are struggling to find support and opportunities for success. Now, nine months into the pandemic, child care in New Mexico has decreased dramatically as many centers are operating at extremely limited capacity or are closing altogether.

The pandemic is forcing a broad-scale reimagining of early childhood and family support systems. The lessons we learn and actions we take now will have long-lasting consequences. Growing Up New Mexico is up to the challenge and will be there, advocating for and diligently working on behalf of current and future generations of New Mexico's children and their families.

Thank you to all who have believed in our organization throughout the years. Your support continues to have a positive impact on the children and families of New Mexico.

Katherine Freeman is president and CEO, Growing Up New Mexico: The Early Childhood Partnership.