



Our July 2018 report to our supporters

How you made
child well-being *the* issue of 2018
by empowering investigative reporting
from Searchlight New Mexico



Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It has been just six months since Searchlight New Mexico launched with a tiny staff of passionate reporters and a single master photographer. In that short amount of time, we have published deeply reported, artfully written stories on a huge array of subjects. We have forged partnerships with almost every newspaper in the state, in addition to radio and television stations that week after week republish and broadcast our pieces.

Most importantly, Searchlight – with its commitment to purpose-driven journalism -- has helped drive the conversation that is making child well-being the all-important subject it is today in New Mexico. Searchlight literally shines a light on communities that have lain in darkness far too long.

But we don't simply investigate the problems of New Mexico. We take the next step and look for solutions. Because exposing problems without offering solutions can be disheartening to readers and reporters alike. We don't want to just criticize; we seek to be constructive. It is *our mission*, something we have tried to build into Searchlight's DNA.

Our work has already won recognition around the state and country. Our three-month investigation into the abuses of the foster care system sparked a statewide investigation; our published story has landed on the desks of at least 35 U.S. senators and congressional representatives. We have won an award from New Mexico Voices for Children and a highly coveted fellowship from the Annenberg Center at the University of Southern California.

But quality journalism requires time and resources. As a nonprofit news organization, Searchlight is part of a national movement that is filling the void as mainstream media struggles and newspapers everywhere slash their staffs.

We rely on support from our readers and friends in order to continue publishing. Your financial generosity allows us to practice the kind of journalism we believe is more important today than ever before. Please support us.

Sincerely,

Sara Solovitch
Executive Editor

Testimonials from leaders who value Searchlight's impact

Searchlight has taken on the job of bringing sustained attention to the question: How can we improve the well-being of children growing up in New Mexico? There is no more important issue facing our state today. – **Jeff Bingaman**, retired U.S. senator

I am impressed with the scope of [the] journalism, especially by adapting a lens of resilience of border peoples and communities. – **Lisa Cacari Stone**, Robert Wood Johnson Center for Health Policy

Searchlight reporters have a voice that needs to be heard nationally. – **Kate Cleary**, Consortium for Children

Searchlight NM is bringing to New Mexico the best of old and new journalism. There's a lot of old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting, the kind that puts faces and places before you in a way that makes the reason they're making news unforgettable. And Searchlight NM uses 21st century tools for data gathering and analysis to frame stories in revelatory ways. Must-read, must-think-about journalism. – **David Marash**, broadcast journalist

Searchlight performs an important function – a very important part of who we are as a society – to shed a light on the reality we live with. – **Archbishop John C. Wester**

We certainly need to live in a state with clean water, clean air, a clean environment and producing clean energy for the sake of our children, and especially when their little bodies are first developing. Thank you for all you keep doing! – **Kim Straus**, Brindle Foundation

What an amazing organization Those stories are powerful. – **Sandra Baltazar Martínez**, University of California, Riverside

Thanks for the excellent reporting the Searchlight New Mexico staff has produced since we began our partnership with you. – **Norris West**, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Improving child well-being is arguably the single most important issue in New Mexico. Thank goodness we have a news organization like Searchlight New Mexico, whose journalists are tasked with shining light on the problems that plague our state in this area and finding ways forward. Their work has been full of insight and embodies my belief that deep, analytical journalism is critical to improving society. – **Heath Haussamen**, NM Politics founder

Searchlight NM is exposing the factors contributing to the poor state of child well-being in New Mexico through a series of well-researched articles. Those articles will promote discussion leading to action by the legislature. – **Barbara Calef**, Los Alamos League of Women Voters

This is the finest journalism New Mexico has ever seen and it's having a profound impact on our state. – **Tamara Bates**, LANL Foundation Board

From **investigation** comes knowledge.

From knowledge comes **understanding**.

From understanding comes **solutions**.

Will children thrive in New Mexico? Quantifying impact

Investigative stories that educate minds and go beyond scripted quotes and lists of facts to present a clear framework for New Mexico. Bottom line: helping children thrive also creates the environment for economic progress.

What's at stake?

"Searchlight New Mexico is providing policy makers the human stories, the facts and the background to make decisions which will move New Mexico forward in education, in healthcare, safety and every other area that affects child well-being. We need them in New Mexico."

Dede Feldman, former New Mexico senator

Real news – real results

- Calls for reform and interagency coordination followed our investigation of the wasteful rivalry between state and federal early-childhood programs.
- Searchlight sparked a regional conversation with an investigation of lasting childhood trauma from family separations at the border.
- When the broadcast version went viral, our story on unmet adult education touched a person in Massachusetts who reached out to New Mexico to help solve the shortage of GED classes.
- Our story about baby brains inspired a leading child advocate to ask the city of Santa Fe to move toward becoming an "early learning city."
- The president of a state university circulated Searchlight's work to help his staff understand the critical issue of New Mexico's brain drain.
- Our investigation of the looming census undercount put facts to a growing economic-development concern that the undercount would deny state businesses and taxpayers billions in federal dollars for children and families.

Award-winning reporters offer depth and context while tackling big issues

- Why does New Mexico continue to spiral downward on child well-being?
- What were our policymakers and politicians doing while the state steadily slid in the rankings?
- What are the social and economic consequences when children lack the foundation to grow into healthy, successful adults?

Multiplier effect of the deep examination of one story – child well-being

- Searchlight, in only six months since launching, forged republication and rebroadcast partnerships with every major newspaper, television station and radio station in the state.
- Our statewide readership means that our intense focus raises public awareness to a level politicians and policymakers cannot ignore.
- We offer reports free, allowing editors to enlarge coverage in ways they might have only hoped.
- Searchlight strategically launched its investigative project to coincide with this critical political year.

Solutions-driven, evidence-based journalism produces many stories of hope

- "Brain bags" for babies give new parents ways to encourage brain development in children.
- A mom with a diploma is one factor that almost guarantees a good future for her kids; with adequate resources, educators know how to make that a reality.
- In just six months, our in-depth reporting has created a practical guide to raise rankings.

Invigorating journalism through innovation. Quantifying impact

Changing public expectations about the quality of local news. Delivering in-depth coverage to all corners, particularly to New Mexico's diverse indigenous and ethnic communities.

Why must a nonpartisan, nonprofit investigative reporting team like Searchlight exist?

- Almost daily, threats from the Trump White House aim to delegitimize the free press.
- Close to home, communities need a vigorous, independent press to give voice to the vulnerable.
- Our investigative reporters take readers into dark corners, encouraging voters and politicians to seek honest, evidence-based policy choices.

Our network of 35 media outlets is a new model for New Mexico

- We are a free voice offering a framework for empowering communities, not for consolidating media monopolies.
- Searchlight offers every news outlet an investigative team the outlet otherwise could not afford.
- News outlets in rural and underserved communities enjoy free access to Searchlight reports that let them compete on equal footing with the urban publications.
- Our intense focus on child well-being serves as a model of how single-issue, team-led investigations succeed as an innovative and effective news strategy.
- Our collaborative approach proves that sharing resources can outweigh the media's old proprietary instinct to guard scoops.

Innovative data journalism serves readers and reporters around the state

- Searchlight regularly fights for access to important public records.
- Data sets of public records are available free to reporters statewide and provide the meat for stories important across New Mexico.
- Searchlight's data editor provides ongoing on-site training to newsrooms around the state.
- Data will inform many future stories on public salaries, appointees' disclosures and state contracts – stories Searchlight will investigate, write and share.

Team journalism is part of Searchlight's mission

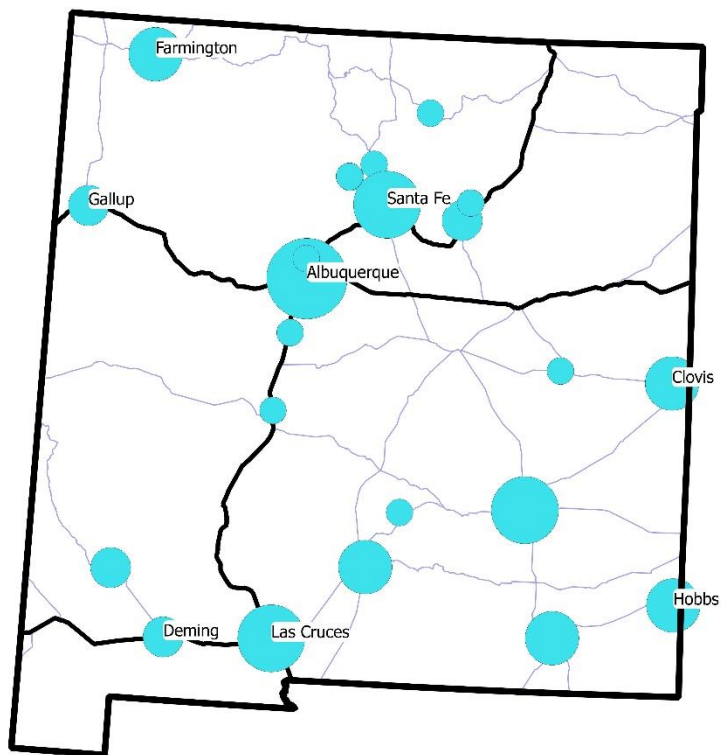
- KOAT television uses our stories to produce weekly programming for viewers statewide.
- The largest radio network in northern Mexico has agreed to rebroadcast our reports in Spanish.
- Dow Jones, publisher of The Wall Street Journal, provided advanced training to a summer intern, a skilled journalist in the making.
- We work with a Spanish language newspaper in Colorado to make reports available to Spanish speakers in New Mexico.

Our commitment to public engagement starts with collaboration

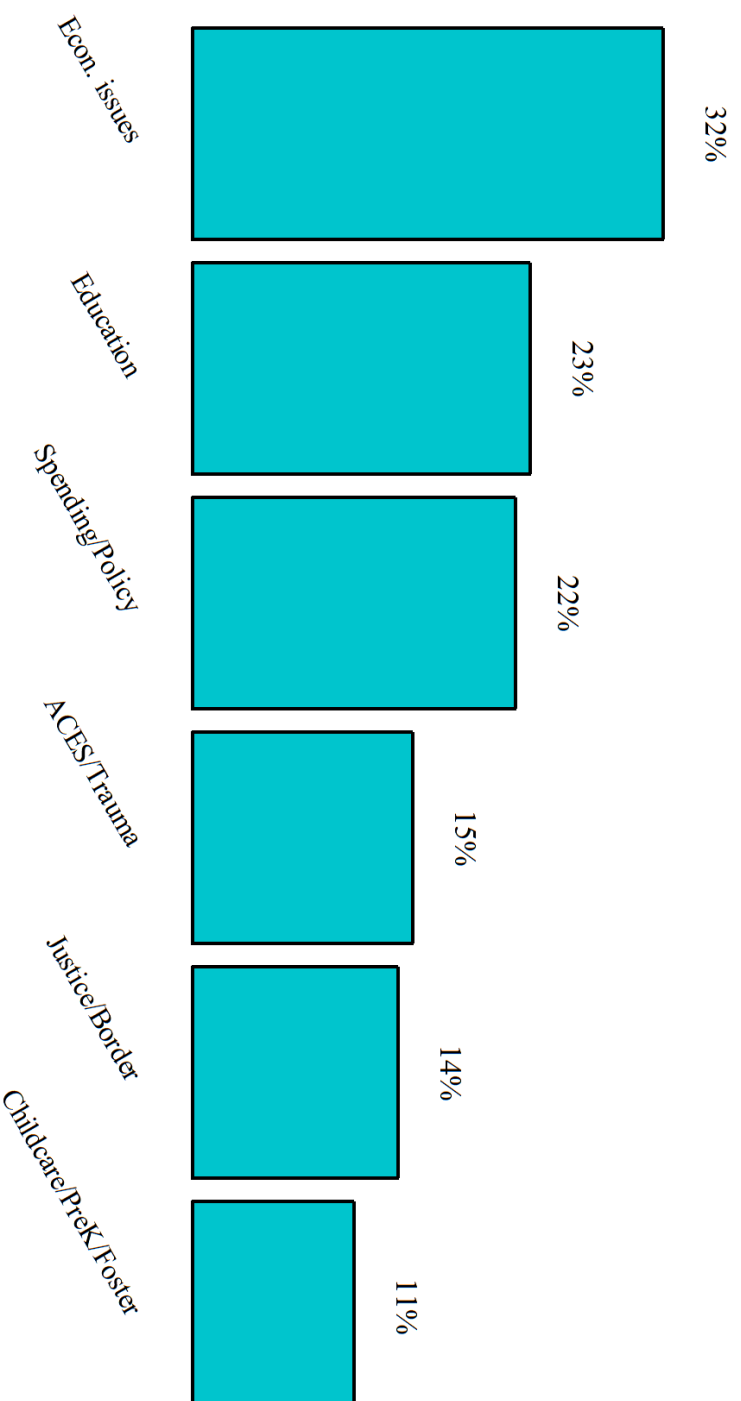
- Voices for Children honored Searchlight for public service across New Mexico.
- GroundSource chose Searchlight as one of a handful of nationwide media partners to employ its technology-based tool for grassroots reporting.
- The LANL Foundation singled us out for an invitation to its education series.
- We partner with public-service groups in Los Alamos and Albuquerque to stage voter forums.

Searchlight journalism reaches the whole state

All media centers and their readership areas form the 35-member Searchlight media network.

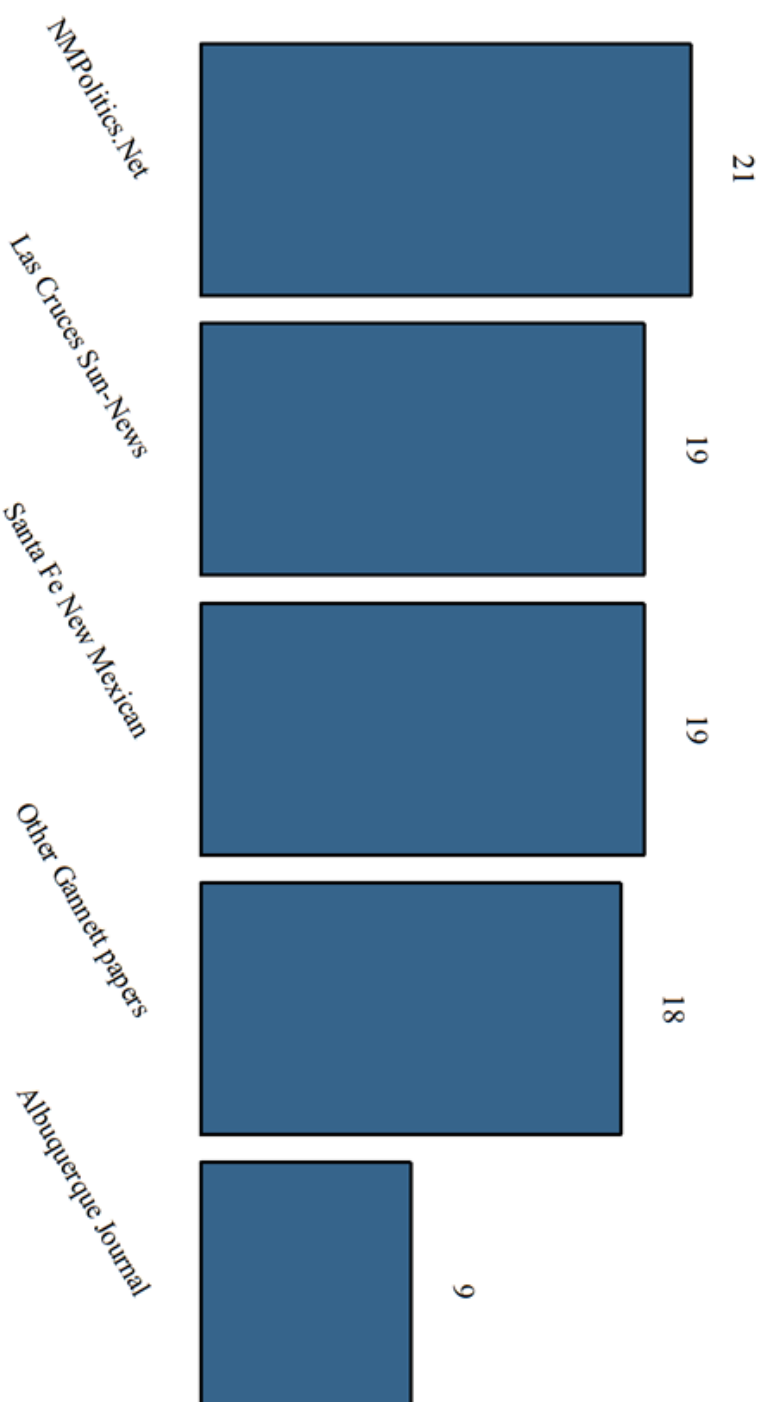


Top categories of re-published content Percentages among all re-publishing partners, Jan. - July 2018



Data source: Searchlight New Mexico Impact Tracker.
John R. Roby / Searchlight New Mexico

Top re-publishers of Searchlight New Mexico content N pieces of content re-published, Jan. - July 2018



Data source: Searchlight New Mexico Impact Tracker.
John R. Roby / Searchlight New Mexico

Impact Tracker for Searchlight New Mexico

In only six months, 134 impacts have been logged as of July 26, 2018.

We have logged 101 cases of partners republishing our content. Top republishers are:

NMPolitics.Net (21 stories)
Santa Fe New Mexican (19 stories)
Las Cruces Sun-News (19 stories)
Other Gannett Papers (18 stories)
Albuquerque Journal (9 stories)

Other reliable re-publishers are:

Farmington Daily Times
Rio Grande Sun
NMPoliticalReport
New Mexico In Depth
KOAT TV
High Country News
The Weekly Issue / El Semanario

Re-publishing percentages by category of our content:

Economic issues : 32 percent
Education issues: 23 percent
Taxes/spending/policy: 22 percent
ACES/Trauma: 15 percent
Justice/Border: 14 percent
Childcare/preK/Foster : 11 percent

Other significant impacts

Government investigation

CYFD directed the Consortium for Children, the national group that creates and oversees SAFE home studies, to initiate an audit of 50 NM home studies after reading our story on treatment foster care. Consortium for Children then forwarded our story to 35 congressional offices in D.C., targeting staffers who work on child welfare -- CfC believes the story points to a larger national problem.

Organizations using our content

1. The office of the Court Appointed Special Advocates for the First Judicial District is handing our stories out to people who come through their doors, including child caseworkers foster kids and foster parents. The director, Annie Raskin, told Ed they are using our stories as training documents to help their clients and volunteers understand the community they're dealing with and the problems of child well-being in New Mexico.
2. Dave Marash podcast dedicated an episode to our Raising New Mexico series.
3. The "Best Story I've Heard Today" podcast discussed Amy's Navajo Nation GED piece.

4. The GroundSource blog wrote about our planned use of the technology.
5. The president of New Mexico Highlands University circulated our report on New Mexico's "Brain Drain" among his faculty and staff.

Award

NM Voices for Children Spirit of Hope award.

Increased knowledge and awareness

1. NMInDepth runs a series of Q and A with gubernatorial candidates on child-well-being issues, following our series launch.
2. Before the primary, the Democratic gubernatorial candidates discussed child well-being at length in an Albuquerque debate
3. Gov. candidate Jeff Apodaca talked about our treatment foster story on KTRC radio

Individual actions

1. After our Anthony story ran, a reader emailed saying he was inspired to volunteer in the community. Another reader emailed that she was going to offer to help set up a midwife clinic in Anthony.
2. At least two letters to the editor (Sun-News and Journal) referencing our reporting.
3. Benson Ndolo's GED testing license was revoked for no reason, leaving Navajo students with nowhere to take the test. The GED company refused to answer Ndolo's months of calls and emails. Amy's story ran and aired on TV nationwide (via KOAT's network). The company called Ndolo right after. He believes he'll get his license back.

Media following our lead

1. KOAT has repurposed at least three of our stories (on ACES, GED and the International District) into their own pieces, which have been distributed across their own network.
2. After Lauren's piece on infighting putting Head Start funds at risk, the Sun-News editorialized: "Stop sending childcare money back to Washington."

Direct audience feedback

More than a dozen readers have reached out, unprompted, directly thanking staffers for a story and/or suggesting new avenues of reporting.

Staff interviews

At least five appearances by our staff on other media (mainly radio), including KRWG, KTAL in Las Cruces, KSFR and KTRC.