

A new program looking to empower young people targets New Mexico.

Their future, our future

By ALEJANDRO LOPEZ
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It
may be
the beginning
of a beautiful
relationship.

Artists, with their highly personal brand of communication, and children, so often left without a voice: The two are being brought together in New Mexico in the hopes of giving young people the tools to become heard.

The idea was conceived by the World Interdependence Fund, a national non-profit group headquartered in Sacramento, Calif. Its founder and director, Dr. William Bronston, sees New Mexico as the starting point for what he hopes will become a national movement.

"New Mexico more than any other state has a broader and more inclusive definition of the arts," Bronston said, "ranging from extremely rich and ancient disciplines such as pottery and santos to the production of complex opera and cinema.

"For the same reason this state more than any other accords the arts a high degree of respect, and this has allowed the arts to develop into a strong and viable industry on the par with mining, timber, ranching and defense," he said.

But the World Interdependence Fund believes this broad reach of the arts can stretch even further. It hopes to use the arts, with its emphasis on communication, as a tool to include youth, people with disabilities and other groups normally excluded from full participation in society.

"We want the arts to figure prominently in the career choices that youth will be making because the arts not only mirror where the society is headed, but quite frequently determine where it will go," Bronston said. "Moreover, the arts are about our whole selves."

Bronston, a longtime advocate for people with disabilities in the state of New York and California, challenged participants at a forum held last month to consider initiating in this state a campaign for the emergence of a new generation of youth leaders for whom the arts would be the principal catalyst. While the program is intended to target all young people, it will have a particular emphasis on including the disabled and minorities, groups that Bronston said are often left out of educational programs by default.

The New Mexico Interdependence Forum met for the first time on November 20 and 21 in Santa Fe to spawn the statewide plan. Participants included community organizers, people in the arts, youth, and culture and advocacy groups from throughout the state of New Mexico.

Sprinkled in with the ambitions for



Photos by Martin Perea

Above, youths from Voices from Another Planet, a Las Cruces theater group directed by nationally-recognized director Mike Medoff, perform at the November forum. Left, Albuquerque artist Linda Piper tells tales of cultural heroes at the forum.

YOUTH

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youth development, Bronston said, was the hope that the new network also would serve as an avenue for inclusion for people not usually found in positions of power. Participants in the forum came from throughout the state and included people from across the spectrum of color, people with disabilities and women.

And in a display of values the program hopes to foster, communication at the forum assumed a myriad of forms. Sign language was used for the hearing impaired, pictorial renderings presented ideas large enough for all to see, and theater and storytelling performances were given by the likes of Linda Piper, an Albuquerque artist, and Voices from Another Planet, a theater group from the Las Cruces Middle School.

As an example of the kind of development the project hopes to foster, a video entitled *Project Interdependence* was shown. The work highlights the transformation of high school youth as they learn to value diversity in those with special abilities or disabilities, and as they learn to take responsibility for societal change.

The forum consisted of work sessions in which participants explored the issues facing



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youth today and the roles the various organizations might play while pooling their energy and resources into a network.

From these beginnings, plans have begun for a spring 1993 "Anchor Training" session to produce a teaching staff consisting of youth and adults who will learn ways of facilitating youth leadership development. This faculty will in turn over-

see a youth leadership training program, employing outdoor adventure and experiential based approaches to empowerment.

While New Mexico has become a focal point, World Interdependence Fund operates under a national grant with the goal of promoting youth leader-

ship programs throughout the United States.

Funding for the Santa Fe forum included a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support coming from the N.M. Developmental Disabilities Council, the Santa Fe Community Foundation, the N.M. Community Foundation, Fenn Gallery and Sprouting Wings Productions.

The forum was also co-sponsored by the New Mexico Superintendent of Public Instruction, N.M. Office of Indian Affairs, the Office of Cultural Affairs, and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Alejandro Lopez is state coordinator for the World Interdependence Fund's New Mexico initiative. A Santa Fe resident, he holds workshops on education for schools and civic groups and is founder and director of Alejandro Lopez Internationale, a launchpad for experiential and adventure education.