

# Quality of Life Initiatives in Santa Fe, New Mexico – A Comprehensive Survey

## Introduction

Santa Fe, New Mexico has a rich tapestry of community-led initiatives and government programs aimed at improving quality of life (QOL) across multiple domains. From affordable housing collaborations to health and education programs, and from environmental sustainability plans to social justice advocacy, Santa Fe's approach has often been collaborative and data-informed. This report surveys current and historical efforts in **housing, healthcare, education, environmental protection, public safety, economic development, and social justice**. We highlight well-known and lesser-known initiatives—both community-driven (NGOs and nonprofits) and state or city-supported—providing links to primary sources (reports, project pages, datasets). We conclude with recommended open data sources for further analysis and inclusion in the referenced GitHub repository. Key trends include a strong public-private partnership culture, innovative pilot programs to fill gaps, and remaining challenges (such as housing affordability and health disparities) that point to areas for growth.

## Housing: Affordable Housing and Homelessness Initiatives

Ensuring access to affordable, safe housing has long been a priority in Santa Fe. **City-led programs** focus on increasing affordable housing stock and supporting residents along the continuum from homelessness to homeownership. The City's Office of Affordable Housing works "proactively with the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to increase affordable housing opportunities for Santa Fe's low- and moderate-income residents" <sup>1</sup>. Santa Fe's inclusionary zoning law (the **Santa Fe Homes Program**) and the **Affordable Housing Trust Fund** provide policy and funding tools to spur affordable units and assist renters and first-time buyers <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>. For example, the City partners with major local nonprofits – **Habitat for Humanity, Homewise, and The Housing Trust** – to deliver comprehensive homebuyer training, counseling, and down-payment assistance services <sup>4</sup>. These three nonprofits are Santa Fe's primary developers of affordable single-family homes, using models like sweat-equity construction and land trust ownership to keep homes attainable <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. Over decades, they have helped hundreds of families become homeowners, supported by City contracts and federal grants (e.g. HUD HOME and CDBG funds).

On the **homelessness and rental housing** end, Santa Fe has embraced a collaborative, "housing-first" philosophy. In 2020, local stakeholders formed the **S3 Santa Fe Housing Initiative**, a community coalition using the national *Built for Zero* model to end chronic homelessness <sup>7</sup>. S3 ("Safe, Stable, and Supportive" housing) brings together leaders from emergency shelters, housing providers, social services, local government, philanthropy and advocacy groups with a shared commitment to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup>. Backed by partners like the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, Anchorum Health Foundation, and others, S3 has launched creative projects to expand housing options. For instance, the coalition purchased and converted local motels into long-term supportive housing. The **Santa Fe Suites** – a former motel with 122 units – was acquired and renovated in 2020-2021 to provide permanent affordable apartments for over 120 people, many of whom were experiencing homelessness <sup>10</sup>. Building

on that success, in 2022 S3 and partners (including Anchorum and Santa Fe County) bought the old **Lampighter Inn** to create a second affordable housing complex, with one-quarter of units reserved for unhoused individuals <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> . These motel conversions, funded by a mix of City Affordable Housing Trust Fund dollars, county funds, federal ARPA money, and philanthropy, are seen as models for addressing homelessness by quickly adding housing capacity <sup>13</sup> <sup>12</sup> .

Community advocacy has also driven policy innovations. The **Santa Fe Housing Action Coalition**, a grassroots alliance of housing advocates, developers, educators, and employers, has successfully pushed for more robust local housing policies. In recent years, this coalition secured a City commitment to dedicate at least \$3 million annually as a permanent revenue source for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund <sup>14</sup> . They also supported novel projects like **Siler Yard**, a nonprofit-developed live/work affordable rental community for artists co-located with a makerspace <sup>15</sup> . Santa Fe's approach recognizes that stable housing is foundational: for example, Santa Fe Public Schools' **Adelante Program** supports hundreds of homeless children and their families so that instability at home does not derail education <sup>8</sup> <sup>16</sup> . Numerous nonprofits complement these efforts – from **St. Elizabeth Shelter** and **Interfaith Community Shelter** (emergency housing) to **Casa Milagro** and **The Life Link** (permanent supportive housing and behavioral health services) – many of which participate in the S3 coalition <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> . In summary, Santa Fe's housing initiatives span city policies, funding collaborations, and community-driven solutions, yielding a relatively robust support system – yet the affordable housing **gap** remains a pressing challenge as demand continues to outstrip supply in the high-cost Santa Fe market <sup>18</sup> <sup>14</sup> .

## Healthcare: Public Health, Clinics, and Partnerships

Santa Fe's healthcare landscape features both government-supported public health initiatives and a strong network of community clinics and foundations addressing health needs. **Santa Fe County's Health Action Plan** provides a strategic framework for improving health and well-being, with priorities ranging from increasing access to care and healthy food, to reducing substance abuse, expanding behavioral health services, and even addressing climate-related health impacts <sup>19</sup> . The County's Community Services Department operates programs like the **Health Care Assistance Program** (indigent care fund) and staffs a Health Policy and Planning Commission to guide health strategy <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> . One notable county-led innovation is **CONNECT**, a referral network that “connects individuals with the clinical care and community services they need to stay healthy,” linking healthcare with social services such as housing or nutrition support <sup>22</sup> . This “no wrong door” approach recognizes social determinants of health in improving outcomes.

Frontline healthcare services for low-income and uninsured residents are largely provided by community-based organizations. **La Familia Medical Center**, founded in 1972, is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that serves as Santa Fe's primary safety-net clinic, offering medical, dental, and behavioral healthcare on a sliding fee scale (including a Healthcare for the Homeless program) <sup>23</sup> . Other nonprofits like **Santa Fe Recovery Center** (addiction treatment) and **Santa Fe Indigenous Center** (which provides health outreach to Native American families) also contribute to community health. Santa Fe's only general hospital, **CHRISTUS St. Vincent**, supports community health improvement through its foundation and collaborative efforts. For example, the hospital and a major local health foundation (**Anchorum St. Vincent**) teamed up to form the **Community Health Funder Alliance**, a pooled funding collaborative to strengthen local systems of care <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> . This alliance – which also involves the Santa Fe Community Foundation and city/county government – aligns grants to nonprofit providers with identified health equity goals, reduces nonprofits' administrative burdens, and uses data (such as the hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment) to target resources <sup>26</sup> <sup>24</sup> . By “combining...community health funding resources,” the Alliance

aims to achieve deeper impact on challenges like maternal and child health, behavioral health, and social determinants of health <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> .

Santa Fe has been a pioneer in **integrating public safety and healthcare** to address issues like mental illness and substance abuse. As early as 2014, Santa Fe piloted **LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion)**, a program that allows police to redirect low-level drug offenders into treatment and case management instead of jail. LEAD, now known as “Thrive,” demonstrated success in lowering arrest and overdose rates among participants and has since become a city-backed program <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> . In 2019, Santa Fe moved LEAD under the Fire Department’s **Mobile Integrated Health Office** and expanded it citywide in partnership with EMS, reflecting a shift toward treating addiction as a public health issue rather than a crime <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> . Similarly, Santa Fe County opened the **La Sala Crisis Center**, a 24/7 triage center offering walk-in behavioral health crisis stabilization as an alternative to emergency rooms or jail for people experiencing mental health or substance crises (an initiative in line with Priority #3 of the Health Action Plan to increase behavioral health support). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Santa Fe’s public health and community organizations collaborated on testing, vaccination, and relief efforts (including mutual aid networks), underscoring a culture of cooperation. **Trends** in Santa Fe’s health domain include an emphasis on prevention and “upstream” solutions (e.g. addressing social needs via CONNECT, or the **100% Santa Fe** initiative which surveys barriers to ten vital family services like healthcare, childcare, transportation, etc. in order to close service gaps <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> ). A notable **gap** remains in recruiting and retaining healthcare workers – Santa Fe County has faced provider shortages <sup>35</sup> – but recent partnerships (such as Anchorum’s funding of nursing programs and clinics) aim to mitigate these shortages. Data-driven targeting of disparities (for instance, recognizing that certain zip codes or demographics have worse health outcomes) is guiding many current efforts.

## Education: Schools, Youth, and Lifelong Learning

Education initiatives in Santa Fe seek to improve outcomes from early childhood through adult education, often focusing on equity for disadvantaged groups. Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS), which serves a diverse student body, has benefited from community partnerships and innovative programs. One prominent effort is the **Community Schools model**: organizations like *Communities in Schools of New Mexico* place full-time social workers in 11 Santa Fe public schools to provide wraparound supports for students in poverty <sup>36</sup> . These site coordinators help meet basic needs (food, clothing, counseling) and engage families, recognizing that “a lack of stable, affordable housing and other stressors leads to trauma that makes it difficult for students to learn” <sup>37</sup> . Santa Fe has also been an early adopter of the **community schools strategy** through state support (New Mexico’s Public Education Department has funded dozens of community schools statewide, including in Santa Fe), which integrates academics, health, and social services at school sites.

Beyond K-12, Santa Fe’s community has rallied to create a “cradle-to-career” pipeline. **Opportunity Santa Fe: Birth to Career** is a collective impact initiative convened by the Santa Fe Community Foundation that brings together the City, County, SFPS, Santa Fe Community College, nonprofit agencies, and youth themselves. At a 2021 summit, over 300 participants (including a Youth Summit) set shared goals for children’s success, wellbeing, and equity from early childhood through young adulthood <sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup> . Working groups under Opportunity Santa Fe have launched projects such as mentoring programs, early childhood literacy initiatives, and dropout re-engagement efforts. One outcome has been improved coordination of youth services and the elevation of *youth voice* in policy – for example, the Santa Fe Mayor’s Youth Advisory Board provides input on city decisions affecting young people <sup>39</sup> .

Santa Fe also leverages **philanthropy and government funding for education innovation**. The **Santa Fe Community Foundation's Baby Fund** has directed grants to expand high-quality early childhood education in the region. Meanwhile, the City's Children and Youth Commission administers ~\$1.2 million annually (from a dedicated portion of gross receipts tax) in grants to local nonprofits for youth programs <sup>40</sup>. This citizen commission, in place since 1989, uses a results-based accountability framework to fund priority areas: (1) **Safety and Basic Needs** (e.g. food security, shelter for youth), (2) **Early Childcare & Supplemental Education** (e.g. quality preschool, after-school tutoring), and (3) **Youth Wellness** (mental health, recreation, mentorship) <sup>41</sup>. Dozens of community organizations receive support through this mechanism – from Boys & Girls Clubs and literacy programs, to initiatives for justice-involved youth. Notably, in 2019 the Santa Fe Regional Juvenile Justice Board merged into the Children and Youth Commission, aligning its state funds with the City's youth strategy to better prevent delinquency and support at-risk youth <sup>42</sup>. This collaborative funding approach has made Santa Fe a leader in youth services; **however**, challenges remain in educational outcomes. Gaps persist in high school graduation rates between student subgroups, and many families still lack affordable early childhood options. Stakeholders are responding with new ideas such as the **Santa Fe Early Childhood Education and Care Collective** (a coalition formed after New Mexico's 2020 statewide early childhood trust fund initiative) and a push for expanded community college pathways. Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) itself plays a key role in workforce development and adult education, offering programs for GED completion, job training, and even participating in social programs (e.g. SFCC was a partner in the Santa Fe **LEAP** pilot, described below, to support student-parents). In summary, Santa Fe's education sector benefits from strong NGO involvement and public funding streams that together aim to close equity gaps and ensure that youth can thrive academically and beyond.

## Environmental Protection: Sustainability and Conservation Efforts

Santa Fe's high-desert environment and natural beauty are central to residents' quality of life, and numerous efforts strive to protect these resources while promoting sustainability. **Local government has crafted long-term plans** to address climate change and environmental health. In 2018 the City adopted the **Sustainable Santa Fe 25-Year Plan**, a comprehensive sustainability blueprint. This plan lays out 91 strategies to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040 and is notable for explicitly linking environmental goals with social equity and economic vitality <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup>. The four themes of the plan – *Carbon Neutrality, Quality of Life & Social Equity, Ecological Resilience, and Economic Vitality* – recognize that “improving the city's environment and quality of life” must happen together <sup>45</sup> <sup>44</sup>. The Sustainable Santa Fe Plan was a *community-driven effort* spearheaded by a volunteer Sustainable Santa Fe Commission and shaped by citizen working groups and forums <sup>46</sup>. It includes actions ranging from renewable energy expansion, water conservation, and waste reduction to green building codes and urban green space initiatives. Santa Fe's progress earned it a *LEED for Cities Gold* certification in 2020, one of the first small cities in the U.S. to be recognized for sustainability performance <sup>47</sup>. Building on the plan, the City and County are now developing a joint Climate Action Plan (Santa Fe County joined the Cities Race to Zero and is working on community-wide climate strategies <sup>48</sup>). Practical programs such as **Solarize Santa Fe** (helping neighborhoods bulk-purchase solar installations), the **Water Conservation Office's** rebate and education programs (crucial in a region where drought is intensifying), and “TreeSmart Santa Fe” (an urban tree canopy initiative) all stem from the sustainability agenda and have publicly accessible data or dashboards tracking progress.

In parallel, **nonprofit organizations and community groups** have a long history of environmental stewardship in Santa Fe. The **Santa Fe Watershed Association**, founded in 1997, has “played an integral role in protecting the health and vibrancy of the Santa Fe River and its watershed” <sup>49</sup>. This group leads

river clean-ups, water quality monitoring, and education programs, and it advocated successfully for the Santa Fe River's revival – the City now implements a “Living River” policy that releases stored water to restore flow in the once-seasonal riverbed. Thanks to such efforts, the Santa Fe River (which was named America's most endangered river in 2007) now has stretches of year-round flow and improved habitat. Land conservation and trails are another focus: the **Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT)** has, since 1993, partnered with landowners to protect over 39,000 acres of open space through conservation easements in Santa Fe and surrounding counties <sup>50</sup>. SFCT also promotes outdoor recreation by building and maintaining trails (like the Dale Ball Trails and city trail networks) and leads the “Vámonos: Santa Fe Walks” program to encourage walking for health <sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup>. These conservation efforts enhance quality of life by preserving scenic vistas, ensuring access to nature, and safeguarding wildlife habitat in and around the city. Other notable NGOs include **WildEarth Guardians** (headquartered in Santa Fe, tackling climate and wildlife issues regionally) and **Earth Care**. *Earth Care* is a youth-driven environmental and social justice organization that, for example, incubated the **Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA)** movement. Earth Care “provides youth and families with the tools we need to secure a healthy, just, and equitable future” <sup>53</sup> – from training young climate activists to running community gardens on Santa Fe's Southside (an area with environmental justice concerns). Through YUCCA, Santa Fe youths have organized climate strikes and successfully lobbied local government for a climate emergency declaration and just transition investments <sup>54</sup>.

**Major trends** in Santa Fe's environmental domain include the integration of sustainability across city planning (e.g. tying renewable energy and energy efficiency to affordable housing programs, so lower-income households benefit from lower utility bills) and an emphasis on community engagement (regular “Green Drinks” meetups and a Climate Action Task Force invite public participation). **Santa Fe's environmental initiatives benefit from significant data transparency: the City's sustainability dashboard publishes metrics on greenhouse gas emissions, water usage, recycling rates, and more, allowing the public to track progress toward goals** <sup>55</sup> <sup>47</sup>. One gap\*\* that observers note is funding – while plans are ambitious, full implementation (such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2040) will require continued investment and possibly state/federal support. Nonetheless, Santa Fe's combination of grassroots environmentalism and official policy has made it a leader among small U.S. cities in climate action and conservation.

## Public Safety: Innovative and Community-Focused Approaches

Santa Fe's public safety efforts have evolved to emphasize community trust, diversion, and addressing root causes of crime. The Santa Fe Police Department (SFPD) and Santa Fe Fire Department collaborate with social service agencies in several forward-looking programs. As mentioned, the **LEAD/Thrive program** diverts individuals with substance use or mental health issues away from jail and into case-managed treatment, reflecting a harm-reduction philosophy <sup>56</sup> <sup>32</sup>. Santa Fe was one of the first cities outside Seattle to implement LEAD, and after an initial five-year pilot (2014–2019) that showed reduced re-arrests and emergency calls among participants, the City and State institutionalized the program with public funding <sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup>. It now operates under the Fire Department's Mobile Integrated Health Office alongside an **opioid overdose outreach** initiative, meaning police can refer individuals and EMTs/social workers follow up with healthcare and support services <sup>31</sup> <sup>30</sup>. This integration of public safety and public health is a hallmark of Santa Fe's approach. Likewise, Santa Fe County's jail has partnered with behavioral health providers to ensure those re-entering the community get “wraparound” support (for example, connecting inmates with housing and job services upon release, often through the CONNECT network).

Community-led organizations also contribute to public safety in indirect ways. **Street outreach** teams from nonprofits (like the *Life Link* or *Youth Shelters*) build relationships with people on the streets, aiming to prevent crises before police involvement is needed. Santa Fe's **Domestic and sexual violence services** are robust: the **Solace Crisis Treatment Center** provides a 24-hour rape crisis line, counseling, and forensic interviews, while **Esperanza Shelter** offers emergency shelter and advocacy for survivors of domestic violence. These NGOs frequently coordinate with law enforcement and the courts, and they receive support via the City's Human Services Fund. To engage youth and prevent crime, Santa Fe relies on programs such as **YouthWorks** (described earlier) and the city-sponsored Youth and Family Services Division initiatives. *YouthWorks in particular has a proven track record: approximately 1,000 young people (many of them court-involved or out-of-school youth) come through YouthWorks each year, where they receive alternative education, job training, counseling, and mentoring to get on a positive path* <sup>59</sup>. By "never giving up on the youth who seek our help," YouthWorks and similar programs address the social conditions that often underlie juvenile crime <sup>60</sup>. Santa Fe's Police also run community programs like **Police Activities League** sports and "Coffee with a Cop" events to build positive relationships with residents.

On a policy level, Santa Fe was an early adopter of progressive public safety reforms. The City has had a **Municipal Drug Strategy Task Force** advising on moving from punitive approaches to prevention and treatment <sup>32</sup>. Santa Fe was also among the first cities in New Mexico to implement the **Crisis Intervention Team** model; many SFPD officers are trained in de-escalation and mental health response. More recently, in 2020, Santa Fe's city government began exploring creation of an unarmed **Community Response Team** for certain 911 calls (following national best practices for sending mental health professionals or medics to non-violent behavioral calls). **Gaps and challenges** remain, of course. Property crime and opioid-related incidents have been concerns in Santa Fe; while violent crime rates are relatively low, the City has faced spikes in vehicle thefts and overdoses in some years. Efforts like LEAD/Thrive and the new Crisis Center are aimed at these very issues, but scaling them up (ensuring they have capacity for all who need help) is an ongoing process. One notable trend is the **emphasis on data**: SFPD and Santa Fe County participate in data-sharing through the New Mexico *Results First* initiative and publish annual crime statistics, which are used to target hotspot areas and evaluate program effectiveness. Overall, Santa Fe's public safety paradigm is increasingly one of "**smart justice**" – combining enforcement with prevention, and recognizing that safer communities are achieved not only by policing, but by social support, youth engagement, and trust-building.

## Economic Development: Equity, Creativity, and Resilience

Santa Fe's economy is unique, driven by government, tourism, art, and a growing knowledge sector. Efforts to improve quality of life through **economic development** focus on creating opportunities for residents and making the economy more inclusive. One of the most significant government-led steps was the adoption of a **Living Wage Ordinance**. In 2004, Santa Fe became one of the first U.S. cities to enact a citywide minimum wage higher than the federal level – initially \$8.50/hour (when the federal was \$5.15), rising to \$10.50 by 2008 <sup>61</sup>. Despite legal challenges, the ordinance was upheld, and it "set an example" that inspired other cities to follow <sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup>. Today, Santa Fe's minimum wage (which is indexed to inflation and applies to nearly all employers) has reached \$15.00 as of March 2025 <sup>64</sup>, one of the highest in the region, boosting incomes for the lowest-paid workers. Complementing this, the City has offered incentives and workforce programs to encourage the creation of better-paying jobs. For instance, Santa Fe's Office of Economic Development supported the growth of the local film industry (helping establish Garson Studios and training programs at SFCC for film crew jobs) and the tech sector (through grants to incubators and co-working spaces). The **Santa Fe Business Incubator**, a nonprofit launched in 1997, has provided space and

mentoring to over 150 start-ups (in fields like software, biotech, and artisan manufacturing), which collectively have created thousands of jobs. In recent years, the Incubator partnered with Creative Startups to run an accelerator for creative industries, leveraging Santa Fe's strength in arts and culture.

Nonprofits and foundations also play a role in inclusive economic development. The **Thornburg Foundation** and **Santa Fe Community Foundation** have funded local food system initiatives to support farmers and improve access to healthy food (strengthening a piece of the economy that also has public health benefits). **Creative Santa Fe**, an NGO, convenes cross-sector collaborations on challenges at the intersection of art, technology, and community development – one example was their “Disruptive Futures” series, which led to projects like Siler Yard (affordable live/work space for creative entrepreneurs) and discussions on diversifying the economy beyond tourism. Meanwhile, Santa Fe's sizeable immigrant population has been supported by organizations like **Somos Un Pueblo Unido** in accessing economic opportunity. Somos operates a *worker center* that educates immigrant workers on their rights and helps combat wage theft. Notably, Somos led a successful statewide campaign for paid sick leave – in 2021, New Mexico enacted a law guaranteeing all workers can earn sick leave, “regardless of their immigration status,” a victory rooted in Santa Fe activism <sup>65</sup>. This kind of policy improves job quality and economic security for low-wage workers, a core social justice goal.

Santa Fe's economic development strategy has increasingly emphasized **equity and resilience**. The City is a member of the *Cities of Opportunity* initiative focusing on equitable economic recovery. In 2020, when COVID-19 hit Santa Fe's hospitality-centric economy hard, the City quickly stood up relief programs, including grants to small businesses and artists (with help from private donors) and a rental assistance fund. Looking forward, Santa Fe is exploring ways to support homegrown entrepreneurs and the care economy. A notable pilot has been **Santa Fe LEAP (Learn, Earn, and Achieve Program)**, the *guaranteed basic income* demonstration project mentioned earlier. Launched in 2021 by the Mayor's office in partnership with Santa Fe Community College and national funders, SF LEAP provided \$400 per month for one year to 100 low-income student parents at SFCC <sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup>. The goal was to test if a basic income could help young parents afford necessities so they can stay in school and improve their long-term earning potential. The results were “resoundingly positive: guaranteed income works,” with participants (primarily Latina mothers with a median income of \$19.5k) reporting better ability to pay for food, housing, and child care, leading to higher rates of college persistence <sup>68</sup> <sup>69</sup>. One participant was able to complete her Early Childhood Education certificate while caring for four children and battling cancer, crediting the stipend for allowing her to continue her education <sup>70</sup>. This pilot – part of the national Mayors for Guaranteed Income network – is an example of Santa Fe tackling intergenerational poverty through innovation and data.

In summary, Santa Fe's economic development and quality-of-life efforts are deeply intertwined. By mandating a living wage, supporting workforce training (e.g. through YouthWorks and SFCC programs), investing in affordable housing for the workforce, and fostering a diverse creative economy, the community has aimed to ensure that prosperity is broadly shared. Santa Fe's arts and cultural heritage (as a UNESCO Creative City) also feed into economic vitality and QOL, with events like markets and festivals supported by City and nonprofit partners. **Trends** include growing public-private partnerships for social enterprises and an emphasis on **measuring impact** (for example, tracking how many people move from program participation to stable jobs or housing). A continuing **challenge** is affordability: even with higher local wages, Santa Fe's cost of living (especially housing) is high <sup>71</sup>, putting pressure on families. The economic development community recognizes this and is actively linking with housing and transit solutions (such as advocating for more workforce housing and better public transport via groups like the Chainbreaker Collective, a transit and housing justice nonprofit). These cross-sector collaborations indicate a holistic

approach to QOL: acknowledging that a good job, a decent home, and accessible services all contribute to a thriving community.

## Social Justice and Equity: Inclusion, Rights, and Civic Engagement

Social justice underpins many of the initiatives already discussed, and Santa Fe has a reputation as an engaged, progressive community. Several efforts explicitly focus on **equity and rights for marginalized groups**. As the state capital, Santa Fe has been at the center of immigrant rights advocacy in New Mexico. **Somos Un Pueblo Unido**, founded in Santa Fe in 1995, is a statewide immigrant-led organization “promoting worker and racial justice” <sup>72</sup>. Somos has achieved significant policy wins that improve quality of life for immigrants and low-wage workers – from leading the fight for New Mexico’s **driver’s license law** (allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain licenses, enhancing public safety and mobility) to the aforementioned paid sick leave victory in 2021 <sup>65</sup>. During the Trump administration’s immigration crackdowns, Somos organized “know your rights” trainings and rapid-response networks to support immigrant families <sup>73</sup>. The City of Santa Fe has officially been an immigrant-friendly city (often referred to as a “sanctuary” policy) since the 1990s, barring local police from enforcing federal immigration law in most cases, a stance long advocated by Somos and allies.

Santa Fe also addresses **social justice in terms of racial and cultural inclusion**. The City’s **Office of Equity and Inclusion** (established by Mayor Webber’s administration) and a citizen **Immigrant Advisory Committee** work to identify and reduce inequities in city services. For example, after data showed that the Southside (a predominantly Latino and immigrant area) had less park space and transit access, the City secured funding for a large new urban trail and park (the Santa Fe River Trail extension) in that area. On the **Native American** front, Santa Fe has taken steps toward reconciliation and celebration of Indigenous culture (beyond the famous annual Indian Market). The **Santa Fe Indigenous Center** provides services to urban Native Americans, and there are ongoing dialogues about historical monuments and Indigenous representation, led by groups like *Red Nation* and the City’s Culture, History, Art, Reconciliation and Truth (CHART) process.

Youth and intersectional justice movements are highly active. As noted, *Earth Care’s YUCCA* has been a strong youth-of-color-led climate justice voice, linking climate policy to social justice (e.g. pushing for utility bill assistance and transition training for displaced fossil fuel workers). *Earth Care* trains young activists in community organizing and supports them in campaigns “to address stark realities faced by communities on the Southside of Santa Fe,” such as environmental pollution and lack of economic opportunity <sup>74</sup>. Another notable youth-driven effort was the push for **LGBTQ+ inclusion**: Santa Fe’s city government was ahead of its time in supporting LGBTQ rights (issuing same-sex marriage licenses briefly in 2013 before it was legal statewide, and sponsoring Pride events). Organizations like **Equality New Mexico** and **TGRC (Transgender Resource Center) – Santa Fe Chapter** work locally on these issues. The City’s **Women’s Commission** and **Veterans Advisory Board** (as listed under Community Services <sup>75</sup>) indicate an infrastructure for elevating diverse voices in policymaking.

One innovative anti-poverty initiative blending social justice and data was the **Mayors for a Guaranteed Income pilot (Santa Fe LEAP)** described earlier. By targeting young parents of color with direct cash assistance and educational opportunities, Santa Fe aimed to “break the cycle of intergenerational poverty” as a matter of equity <sup>76</sup>. Mayor Webber framed it not just as an anti-poverty program, but a chance to correct systemic imbalances and give families a “ladder of opportunity” <sup>77</sup>. The success of this pilot (with



participants reporting reduced stress and improved ability to focus on school <sup>69</sup> ) has added momentum to discussions of economic justice at the city and state levels.

**Major trends and gaps:** Santa Fe's social justice ecosystem is characterized by strong nonprofit advocacy (Somos, Earth Care, Chainbreaker, NAACP-SF branch, ACLU of New Mexico based in Santa Fe, etc.) working in concert with receptive local government. This has led to progressive policies that arguably improve quality of life for marginalized residents – for example, Santa Fe's local minimum wage and tenant protections (like source-of-income discrimination bans for rentals) were influenced by these advocacy groups. A continuing gap, however, is the **disparity in outcomes** between the city's well-off households (many of whom are White, older, and homeowners) and its lower-income families (often people of color, younger, renters). Data from the Santa Fe Data Platform show differences in indicators like homeownership rates, educational attainment, and health outcomes along racial and geographic lines <sup>78</sup> <sup>35</sup> . Santa Fe is actively trying to address these gaps – each domain's initiatives (housing, health, education) have an equity lens – but the work is ongoing. One example is the **Age-Friendly Santa Fe** initiative, which has highlighted needs of elder residents (Santa Fe has one of the highest median ages in the state <sup>79</sup> ) including those of diverse backgrounds, leading to better cross-generational programs. Another example is efforts to include **Spanish language access** in all city services (important in a city where 34% of households speak a language other than English at home). In summary, social justice is not a separate silo in Santa Fe but interwoven through community-led and state-supported efforts – a strength that helps Santa Fe tackle quality-of-life challenges holistically.

## Additional Open Data Sources and Datasets for Santa Fe QOL Analysis

To support further research and local transparency, a variety of **open data sources** can be leveraged and added to the GitHub repository [rgdonohue/santa-fe](https://github.com/rgdonohue/santa-fe). These include:

- **Santa Fe Data Platform & Index** – The Santa Fe Data Platform (an initiative of the Santa Fe Community Foundation and partners) is a hub aggregating “over 1 million data points from 40 trusted sources” on topics like health, housing, economy, and environment <sup>80</sup> . Its online Data Index provides downloadable datasets and interactive dashboards for indicators (e.g. median home price, life expectancy, air quality, etc.). This is an excellent primary source for up-to-date local data; for instance, it includes **historical trend data** for Santa Fe County on measures such as poverty rates, graduation rates, crime, and more. Embedding data from the platform (or via its API, if available) in the repository would provide validated local statistics.
- **City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County Open Data/Reports** – While Santa Fe city does not have a traditional open data portal, many datasets are published through reports or online tools. The **City's Sustainable Santa Fe Dashboard** provides metrics on energy, water, greenhouse gases, and can be a source of environmental data <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> . The **Affordable Housing Office's “Required Reporting and Plans”** section (on the City website) contains PDFs of housing needs assessments, the 5-year HUD Consolidated Plan, and annual performance reports – these often have data tables on housing stock, rent burdens, homeless counts, etc., that can be extracted <sup>81</sup> . Santa Fe County's **Health Services Gap Analysis (2017)** and **Health Action Plan (2024)** <sup>82</sup> are rich in health and social data (e.g. rates of uninsured, ratios of providers to population, survey results on behavioral health needs). The County's **Sunshine GIS** site offers geospatial data (such as zoning maps, open space parcels, trail

maps). Adding these to the repository (in cleaned CSV or GeoJSON form) would bolster each domain with local data.

- **State of New Mexico Data Sources** – Several state-level open data repositories cover Santa Fe metrics. The **New Mexico Department of Health’s Indicator-Based Information System (NM-IBIS)** provides public health statistics (e.g. county-level disease prevalence, birth outcomes, death rates) that can be filtered for Santa Fe County. The **NM Environmental Public Health Tracking portal** (NMTracking.org) has environmental health data like air quality and asthma rates by county <sup>83</sup>. The **New Mexico Public Education Department** releases annual district report cards and graduation rates – Santa Fe Public Schools data could be pulled from PED’s public files. **NM Workforce Solutions** and the Department of Workforce’s LASER portal have labor force and unemployment data for the Santa Fe Metropolitan Area. Incorporating these would allow trend analysis in employment and income. Additionally, **American Community Survey (ACS)** data from the U.S. Census Bureau for Santa Fe (city and county) provide demographic, economic, and housing variables; these are readily accessible via data.census.gov or the Census API, and could be included for longitudinal analysis of QOL indicators.
- **Federal and Academic Datasets** – A search of Data.gov shows Santa Fe-related datasets, especially geospatial data. For example, the **FEMA National Flood Hazard Layer for Santa Fe County** is available (via University of New Mexico’s Earth Data Analysis Center) <sup>84</sup>, which might be relevant for environmental risk analysis. The Census **TIGER/Line shapefiles** for Santa Fe County (streets, census tracts, voting districts, etc.) are useful for mapping and have been indexed on Data.gov <sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup>. There are also historical datasets like the **Yale EPA – Santa Fe COVID-19 Social Distancing Dataset** (if analyzing pandemic impacts on mobility) or the **HUD CHAS data** for Santa Fe (housing affordability cross-tabulations). If not already in the repository, we recommend including the **Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless count data** for Santa Fe. The New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness publishes an annual PIT report (the 2024 report is available on NMCEH’s site) <sup>87</sup>, which gives counts of homeless individuals and subpopulations in Santa Fe – a critical QOL metric for housing/social services.
- **Local open data and civic tech** – Santa Fe’s civic tech community has produced some open datasets (for instance, the **Santa Fe Police Department incident-level crime data** was shared with researchers for a period, and summaries appear in annual reports). If available, crime statistics (UCR/NIBRS) for Santa Fe could be included. Similarly, **transit data** (the schedules and routes of Santa Fe Trails buses) are available in GTFS format. **Budget and finance data** for the City (expenditures, vendor payments) can be obtained from the City’s financial transparency tool or the New Mexico Sunshine Portal <sup>88</sup>, which could be useful for those analyzing public investment in QOL domains.

By integrating these datasets into the GitHub repository, researchers and community members can perform their own analyses and visualizations. For example, one could correlate ACS data on housing cost burden with Santa Fe’s housing programs locations, or visualize changes in air quality alongside sustainability initiatives. The combination of **quantitative data** (from the above sources) and the **qualitative/contextual information** provided in this report offers a powerful toolkit for understanding Santa Fe’s progress and challenges in improving quality of life. The Santa Fe Data Platform’s motto rings true: “Better Data, Better Decisions” <sup>89</sup> – making these data sources open and accessible will support informed decision-making and help identify any remaining gaps to focus on.

## Conclusion: Trends and Gaps in Santa Fe's QOL Efforts

Santa Fe's experience illustrates how a community can mobilize across sectors to enhance quality of life. Several **major trends** emerge from this survey. First, **collaboration** is a defining feature – whether it's city, county, nonprofits, and foundations teaming up in a housing coalition, or health funders pooling resources to amplify impact <sup>26</sup> <sup>24</sup>, Santa Fe often addresses problems through partnerships. This has enabled innovative pilot programs (LEAP basic income, motel-to-housing conversions, LEAD diversion, etc.) that other communities now look to emulate. Second, **data-driven planning** has gained prominence. The establishment of the Santa Fe Data Platform and the use of results-based accountability by commissions signal a commitment to measuring results and adjusting strategies accordingly <sup>90</sup> <sup>91</sup>. Third, there is an integrated understanding of QOL: housing, health, education, environment, economy, and justice are treated not as isolated silos but as interconnected. For example, Santa Fe's sustainability plan explicitly weaves social equity into environmental goals <sup>45</sup> <sup>44</sup>, and youth programs tie education to basic needs support <sup>37</sup>.

These strengths have yielded notable **outcomes** – Santa Fe has one of the highest rates of insured residents in NM, one of the lowest crime rates, and a thriving cultural scene – but **gaps remain**. The cost of living (especially housing) is a significant gap; despite many affordable housing efforts, Santa Fe's popularity and limited housing supply mean many working families still struggle with housing costs (the City acknowledges this and is participating in national housing accelerator programs to find new solutions) <sup>92</sup> <sup>93</sup>. Inequities persist between different parts of the city: the Southside vs. downtown, Native and Latino populations vs. Anglo, old vs. young. These gaps show up in data (e.g. median income or educational attainment differences) and are the focus of ongoing initiatives like 100% Santa Fe's surveys and the city's equity office <sup>94</sup> <sup>69</sup>. Funding is another challenge – many successful programs started with grant funding (Open Society for LEAD, MacKenzie Scott's gift boosting Anchorum, etc.), and ensuring their **sustainability** as pilot funds expire requires institutionalizing them (as was done with LEAD transitioning to city budget <sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup>). Finally, Santa Fe's ability to maintain public engagement and trust will influence future QOL efforts. Contentious issues (such as debates over historical monuments or how to manage growth without displacing locals) require continued dialogue and inclusion of all voices.

In conclusion, Santa Fe stands out as a community that leverages its small size and social capital to innovate for the public good. By prioritizing open data and cross-sector collaboration, it has made strides in improving quality of life across domains. The initiatives documented here, with their accompanying data sources, not only highlight Santa Fe's progress but also serve as learning models. Continued sharing of knowledge – for instance, via the GitHub repository and open data – will be crucial in closing remaining gaps and ensuring that **the City Different** becomes a city of opportunity for **100%** of its residents <sup>33</sup> <sup>76</sup>.

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