

# The Future is with Children



KIM ASHLEY

The high school graduation rate for American Indian youth is the lowest among minorities in the United States, but a nonprofit organization has led a successful campaign over the past four decades to improve that tragic statistic. The group, **Futures for Children**, operates youth leadership, friendship/mentoring and family support programs that have produced a 95-percent graduation rate for the more than 20,000 students assisted so far, with more than half moving on to college or other educational tracks.

"The major impact of Futures over the course of its history is best measured in the individual lives of the young people we serve," notes CEO and President **James West** (Cheyenne). "Futures has supported young people in tribal communities who want to improve their lives through education. The vibrant young people who have participated in our Youth Leadership program or been a part of a cross-cultural relationship with a

Futures mentor are the ultimate evidence of our success. A significant number of the adult volunteers in our program have been involved in Futures growing up. We measure our success one student at a time."

The Albuquerque-based organization focuses on Native students in New Mexico and Arizona but is seeking means to expand its reach nationwide. It was founded by Dr. Richard Saunders, a sociologist and educator, and is best known for its Friendship Program, which matches American Indian children in grades K-12 with mentors from across the United States and around the world. Through letters, e-mails and phone conversations, mentors encourage their student(s) to complete high school and pursue a postsecondary education. In addition to its committed board members, who include chairman **Dr. David Beaulieu** (Chippewa), the group currently is supported by some 177 community volunteers, almost 900 mentors and many generous donors (including actor Ted Danson). For the fiscal year ending in July 2010, Futures reported an operating budget of about \$1.9 million, with more than 2,000 students involved in its programs in 61 communities.

Its vision statement guides the group: "Futures for Children seeks a world in which social and economic justice includes American Indian people. We partner with supporters to encourage American Indian students to develop into young leaders who find their voice and take action, while taking pride in their cultural identities."

There are many ways that people can contribute to the group's efforts, includ-

ing donating funds, serving as a mentor or volunteer, and shopping on their Web site store. For contact details, call the organization at 800/545-6843, write to them at 9600 Tennyson St. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122, or visit the group's Web site at [www.futuresforchildren.org](http://www.futuresforchildren.org).

Futures for Children will be hosting a fundraiser at the Indian Pueblo Culture Center in Albuquerque on Nov. 10, 6-10 p.m., with live music by Saving Damsels, the Plateros, Native Roots and Shelley Morningsong. Harlan McKosato (of *Native America Calling*) will act as emcee. Admission is \$25 per person. 🍀

## MUSIC NOTES

*Here's a look at some of the many CDs that have arrived at our desk in the past six months.*

*Full Circle* by **Shelley Morningsong** ([www.deerstarproductions.com](http://www.deerstarproductions.com)) features 10 tracks (eight of which she wrote and two she co-wrote) from this talented Northern Cheyenne musician. Most are of a contemplative, prayerful, even melancholy nature that highlights her lovely voice and big heart, as in one standout track, "Invisible People." She also provides flutes, ocarina and acoustic guitar, while Larry Mitchell backs her with guitars, bass and percussion (while also producing and engineering), and her husband, Fabian Fontenelle (Zuni Pueblo/Omaha), provides percussion and vocals. A handful of other top-notch musi-