

COMMUNITY STAR: Susan Wilger

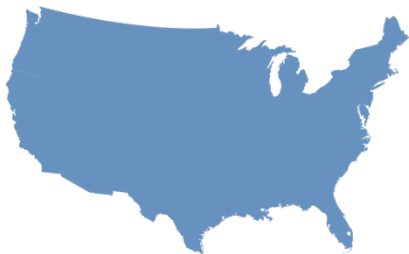


NAME: Susan Wilger

ORGANIZATION: National Center for Frontier Communities and the Southwest Center for Health Innovation

LOCATION: Silver City, NM

SUBMITTED BY:



Susan Wilger is an advocate in her community for a strong rural health presence. After growing up in an urban setting, Susan's first rural experience was when she moved to an area 25 miles outside of Silver City, New Mexico, in 2000. "You learn quickly what 'frontier' really means," she says.

The two organizations she works for, the National Center for Frontier Communities and the Southwest Center for Health Innovation, have a mission to lead collaborative advocacy for underserved communities. The goal is to develop and promote programs to address issues that can then be disseminated to other areas.

One of the inequities that can plague a frontier community is a workforce shortage. As a way to encourage local kids to consider careers in health care, the Forward New Mexico program is a "grow your own" model. Starting in middle school, kids are given exposure to the field of medicine in order to cultivate interest.

And it's not just kids who need the exposure. Susan's advocacy supports giving providers who are considering a move to the area the opportunity to experience the frontier culture, not just in the clinic but in the community as well.

In the future, she sees maintaining connectivity through telehealth and community health workers as key to supporting local providers and filling the gaps. "Frontier communities are strong collaborators," she says. "They really strive to stretch limited resources. It's all about promoting those connections."