

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.

Community Partnerships

By Meghan Pallante

When it comes to children the old saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." But what does that village actually look like when it comes to early childhood education? The village starts within the early childhood education program and includes the children and their families along with the program's educators and staff. Through partnerships, the village can extend beyond that into the broader community. In fact, community partnerships are an integral part of early childhood education for several reasons.



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Partnerships:

- Help us to support children and families in a more holistic way.
- Can help connect programs to potential families.
- Are mutually beneficial- they strengthen the fabric of the whole community.

Community connections

We know that community relationships are important, but how do we begin to reach out?

- First, think about organizations that are local to your program. Make a list of those organizations and their contact information.
- Next, think about the needs of the children and families in your program. You can survey families to help identify their needs.
- Ask yourself: Are there community connections that could help your program to serve them better? Using the survey data from the families, cross-check their needs with your list of local organizations.
- Choose a few organizations to contact and inquire about establishing a partnership.

Here's one example of how a partnership might unfold:

You reach out to your local community center to ask about their services for families and children. You learn that, among other resources, they offer CPR and first aid classes. You partner with the community center to offer an evening group CPR certification class at your program location. You invite the families in your program to participate and encourage them to bring a friend or neighbor who also has young children. In this example:

- The children benefit because the adults around them have increased knowledge of key safety skills.
- Families benefit through acquiring a new skill and being connected to the resources of their local community center.
- The program benefits from inviting friends and neighbors of current families to attend, allowing them to connect with potential clients.
- The community center benefits from the opportunity to share its resources with a broader audience.

This article from NAEYC offers more ideas for [Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities- NAEYC](#)

Connecting children and families to community resources

Below is a list of some general types of organizations that may be helpful in meeting the identified needs of children and families in your program.

- Food banks
- Housing resources
- Clothing banks and second-hand clothing stores
- Police stations & fire stations- Many local stations have educational presentations and are willing to come to early childhood programs. In addition, they can provide safety information for families.
- Libraries- By partnering with a library, your program can stay up to date with community events and workshops, in addition to new materials to borrow.
- Community centers- Partnering with local community centers could be a gateway to other resources in your area.

Relationships with these types of organizations are important when putting together a plan to support the potential needs of families. See our Coach's Corner article on [Supporting Families in Crisis](#) for resources that are specific to Delaware.



Partnering with community organizations like food banks can help early childhood educators connect families with essential resources.- image iStock

Activities that connect your program to the community

Educators can also promote community-building activities within their programs.

- Pen pals- Connect with another early childhood program and have the children draw pictures or write letters to each other. Involve them in the process of actually mailing them.
- Care cards- Have the children make cards to mail to local nursing homes or children's hospitals. Talk with the children about how their cards will bring joy to the people who receive them.
- Letters to family members- Have school-age children write a letter to a family member. Let them choose what they would like to write about. Younger children can draw pictures and then educators can help them write a word or sentence about their picture. In family child care programs, school-age children can assist the younger children with writing.
- Service projects for children- Partner with a local food bank or homeless shelter. Engage the children in collecting items to donate. Talk with them about the importance of caring for others in our community.
- Service projects for staff members- Plan a few volunteer days throughout the year in different community organizations. This is also an opportunity for staff members to take the lead on these projects.

The theme of "community" can be woven into just about any lesson plan. It helps children to see how the world works and how we are all linked to each other. We just need to get creative!



Creating care cards teaches kindness and shows how small gestures can bring joy to others. - image iStock

Currently, it can be easy to feel that our society and communities are more divided than ever. The biggest act of love that we can demonstrate at the moment is to reject the idea that our individual needs are paramount over the needs of our society. Our communities grow stronger when we work together.

“There is no such thing as a self-made man. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success.” -George Matthew Adams

Professional Learning Experiences

- [Authentic Community Engagement](#) (Virtual Live)- DIEEC

Additional Resources

- [Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities](#)- NAEYC