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GUIDES TO COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

# Building Villages To Raise Our Children: Staffing



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THE HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# Building Villages To Raise Our Children: Staffing

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“It takes a village to raise a child” is a fundamental theme in family support and education efforts. This African proverb is so powerful because it conveys what children and families need: personalized, accessible, and interconnected support. The village is an inclusive concept built on the idea of mutual responsibility. It captures the fact that the whole community and all its members, not just a particular program or agency, are responsible for what happens to children and families. The village theme explores anew a vision of family support services: No longer is it sufficient for a community to increase self-contained programs; instead, a community needs to develop a system of interrelated services. Such a system encourages agency collaboration and public-private partnerships, while nurturing the capacity of individuals to help themselves and each other.

The *Building Villages* series includes an overview volume and guides on five topics: collaboration, funding and resources, evaluation, community outreach, and staffing. The goal of the series is to provide information that will help you create a caring community for children and families, a village of services that will give children a healthy start and the family a supportive and comprehensive network of services.

Each guide provides a framework for thinking about its topic and information to apply to your own program planning effort. The guides contain practical suggestions based on the experiences of many programs. The guides also describe typical problems and the ways practitioners have chosen to resolve them. The information is relevant for programs in the process of being designed, as well as those already established.

A core group of family support principles lays the foundation for each guide. The series provides a set of building blocks for a community approach to supporting families.

**STAFFING** is a crucial component of a family support program, for without good people, even the best designed program will not succeed. Because who you hire is so important to establishing trusting and nurturing relationships with families, we urge you to think through staffing needs and options thoroughly. This guide discusses staffing choices and considerations drawn from program experience and offers suggestions about how to build and support a strong program team.

## Acknowledgments

*Building Villages to Raise Our Children* grows out of a decade of research about programs and policies to strengthen and support families with young children and the communities in which they live. The Harvard Family Research Project sought to capture the voices of those who work intimately with families across a broad range of settings — schools, social service agencies, youth-serving organizations, daycare centers, and various types of nonprofit entities. Because so much of what is contained in this series is practitioner based, we acknowledge the cooperation of directors and staff of the family support programs we were privileged to know. We thank our informants for the time they spent answering the many, many questions we posed in telephone and on-site interviews. We appreciate their allowing us to conduct field visits and the opportunity to observe first-hand the different facets of their work. Their reflections on their experiences are invaluable in helping us understand what good programs are all about as well as in framing the future directions of family support and education.

The *Building Villages* series evolved as a team effort within the Harvard Family Research Project. We met bimonthly with Heather B. Weiss, the project director, to define the issues, elaborate the themes of the series, and learn to write with a single voice. We involved other project research staff who shared information with us and commented on the manuscripts as they went through several revisions. Their challenges as well as support contributed to a much better synthesis of emerging issues in child and family services. Marji Erickson Warfield, Julia Lieblich, Ann Rittenburg, and Vicki Magee gave their critical analyses of our manuscripts. Our series coordinators and editors, Anne Pender, Elena Lopez, and Katherine Wrean, did a fine job of nurturing the writing process and keeping us to our timelines. Our research assistants went about their work with persistence and careful attention to detail. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the help of Teri Elniski, Sarah Ng, and Elaine Replogle.

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Finally, we say thanks to the children who illustrated this series. The drawings of Emily Baskin, Heather Bowden, Sarah Cohen, Sarah Haber, Katrina King, Alex Lukas, Jenny Pittman, and Amity Weiss are a reminder that children need a village in which to grow, develop, and spend the magical years of childhood.

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## Introduction

Michelle Wong, the director of Childway Education Center, handed the memo she had just written to her assistant for distribution to her program staff. The memo said:

I would like to call a meeting for 4:00 p.m. tomorrow to hear opinions on who we should hire for the new position of family services coordinator. I have narrowed the selection down to two individuals, both with warm personalities who interact wonderfully with parents and kids. One is a woman with her master's in social work who has worked in social services for many years. The other is a man, a paraprofessional with a very interesting background and unique work experience with children.

As you know, how we choose to staff this position will determine whether we have the funds to staff an associate position elsewhere in the center. I would like your input on the revised job description and how we could use volunteers or co-located staff to meet all our staffing needs.

Let's also take a few moments to discuss upcoming training opportunities and any other pressing issues. I'll bring the doughnuts!

Running a family support program is different from running other organizations. The objectives of family support programs are broad and challenging: to make children ready for school, to raise a family's self-esteem and interest in education, and to accomplish this not only by having an exemplary organization but to actually improve the way the network of services in the community is delivered to families. As in any organization, having the right people on your team makes achieving your goals possible. While the quality of staff is critical to the success of any organization, this is especially true in family support programs for these several reasons:<sup>1</sup>

- Family support workers form close relationships with participating families; they do not sit behind desks and stamp papers. If the family does not trust or like the staff member, they will be less than enthusiastic participants.
- Family support programs must maintain a low turnover of workers, as it often takes a long time for a family to feel at ease with their designated staff member. A family support worker at Brattleboro, Vermont's Early Education Services finds that staff are up against "generations of mistrust, helplessness, and hopelessness."
- Family support programs are by their nature supposed to be more sympathetic, more personal, and more helpful than traditional social service



agencies or even the school system. Staff members need to be able to live up to the higher expectations that participants will have for their services.

- Family support staff, in their efforts to provide comprehensive services, must know a little bit about everything. If the staff member cannot help the family directly, then they must know how to make effective referrals. Dr. Spock never had to worry if a mother could read or if a father had a job. But family support workers need to have effective strategies for solving these types of problems.

With staffing such a critical component of program success, choosing a staff should be a deliberate process, not a series of hit or miss hires based on the needs of the moment. Your staffing decisions must reflect an overall philosophy of human resources, which goes beyond a statement of hiring and firing procedures. It means articulating your beliefs about the kind of people with whom you hope to work and the community you envision creating. It means establishing a set of guidelines that you can refer to when weighing the pros and cons of various staffing options.

Some program directors have the opportunity to design a family support program from scratch and have the time to anticipate and control their staffing needs. Most program directors, however, face a different reality. They have inherited a staff they did not hire, the wages and benefits they can offer may be dictated from outside the program, or they may have a limited labor pool from which to choose applicants.

Whichever category you fall under, you and your staff will benefit from giving staffing issues as much thought as possible. Consider these questions as you plan your staffing strategies and procedures:

- *How do you choose staff members capable of give-and-take relationships?*
- *How do you foster these relationships or train people for them?*
- *How do you prevent burnout from working intensively with troubled families?*
- *How do you hire and retain quality staff members when your budget dictates low salaries?*
- *How do you encourage staff decision making and creativity while establishing standards of performance and accountability?*

Opinions are varied and contradictory regarding the relative importance of the cultural background and academic credentials of the staff of family support programs. Some program directors recommend considering credentials first, while others swear that the attitude of a staff member counts more than education. This guide does not tell you definitively who to hire. Rather it puts forth some principles and suggestions you should think about in the process of staffing, such as:



*Think of each staffing decision as involving a series of trade-offs, identifying the pros and cons of choosing "A" over "B."* You will make decisions such as deciding to hire a professional over a paraprofessional or to adopt an established training program instead of creating your own. In addition, staffing requires acting as a judge or arbitrator when addressing the inevitable problems that will arise among even the most well intentioned members of your team.

*Define the family support worker as both a cheerleader and mentor to families.* The staff members of family support programs form very special relationships with their participants. This bonding process is the essence of family support. It is the unique relationship between staff and family that enables participants to overcome the obstacles to bettering their circumstances. Initiating and sustaining positive staff-participant relationships is a vital part of your program and your staff's most demanding responsibility.

For family support and education programs to succeed, participants must trust the program. This will happen only if the relationship between the family support program staff and the participants is based on mutual respect. The staff needs to be a friend to the family, while also providing help in a professional manner.

*Reward staff members and establish a work environment that stimulates growth.* A survey of federal comprehensive child development programs found that "overall staff turnover was 17 percent and ranged from zero in two projects to 59 percent in one project...Turnover of four or more staff members during the first 18 months occurred in 54 percent of the projects."<sup>2</sup> For this compelling reason, we encourage you to think creatively as you manage in an age of funding scarcity and look for new and satisfying ways to compensate your staff. Without such efforts, your program will fall victim to the substantial turnover rate often found in low-paying, high-stress positions.

*Dedicate time and thought to empowering the members of your staff.* If an objective of your program is for families to recognize their own strengths and set their own course, then everyone on your staff — from the receptionist to the director — must likewise be encouraged to develop their special gifts and help determine the direction of the program. But, at the same time, staff members must also be held accountable. Defining with staff members a mutually agreed upon set of performance goals and reviewing them periodically is necessary to maintain your program's quality and positive relationships with families.

Empowerment as a policy or program goal has implications for the kind of people you hire, the kind of power structures you put into place, and the kind of training program you design or adopt. It makes no sense to hire a "yes" person if you expect staff members to be self-directed risk takers. On the other hand, it is disingenuous to talk about empowerment if you set up a chain of leadership in



which the “head honchos” set the agenda for the “underlings.” If your training program involves imparting a series of directives, you will not encourage staff members to become skillful problem solvers. Training programs that encourage staff members to assess situations and solve problems based on their experience and knowledge will help empower staff members who will, in turn, help empower families.

Lisbeth Schorr, in her study of successful family support programs, credits the staff for being the reason that the programs work:

Successful programs describe their staffs as skilled and highly committed. Often staff become models to parents of effective ways of caring for and teaching children, and models to children of roles they could aspire to. The programs emphasize that their staffs have the training, support, and time to establish solid personal relationships. Professionals in these programs are perceived by those they serve as people who care about them and respect them, people they can trust. It is hard to know to what extent these relationships are the product of acquired skills informed by the insights of psychiatry and human development, of the unusual personal attributes of a gifted staff, of the availability of sufficient time— or of some combination of these. But their importance is clear.<sup>3</sup>

Remember, too, that family support programs, due to their complex and comprehensive goals, tend to evolve over time — and consequently, your staffing needs will change. We encourage you to view your program and staffing needs as developing along a continuum of four stages:

**STAGE 1:**

A stage one program is self-contained, offering a single set of services for a well defined population. At this stage, a program develops its own staffing plan, relies on its own staff to deliver services, and carries out its own training.

**STAGE 2:**

A stage two program has formalized interagency linkages and at least some common planning procedures. At this point a program networks informally with the staff of other agencies to deliver more diverse services and cross-train its staff.

**STAGE 3:**

Programs that share funds, comprehensive service networks, and collaboration of staffing are at stage three. Now a program has developed formal arrangements for the staff of other agencies to provide services, send referrals, and vice versa. The cooperating programs meet regularly, may



have jointly sponsored training, and provide technical assistance to each other. Although there is a lead case manager, case management occurs jointly.

#### **STAGE 4:**

At stage four we see a collaboration that seeks to use all the resources a community has to serve all its members. Here a program is part of a community-wide planning effort to optimize services, staff skills, training time, and case management, throughout the public and private sectors.

Your staffing needs will change as your program moves forward on this continuum. Taking stock of where you are on it can aid the planning process. Remember these two points. 1: Not all new programs begin at stage one. 2: The different components of a program will not necessarily be at the same stage, as a program can be at different stages in terms of funding, community outreach, and staffing.

Regardless of your program's current stage, we recommend that your planning now incorporate the goal of providing comprehensive services in a collaborative manner in the future. For our vision of the "village," the supportive community in which children and families interact and thrive, requires a capable, versatile staff working not only for its own program, but contributing to a network of services.

Part 1 of this guide discusses determining your staffing needs and the hiring process. Part 2 covers the reality of staff management, and Part 3 focuses on training. We also refer you to the Resource Guide at the back of this volume for further reading about staffing.



"The attitudes, skills, and beliefs of staff are what make a program work, not the structure or plan, but the people."

Caroline Gaston

Former Director of the New Futures School  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

# 1

## Developing the Right Staff for Your Program

### DETERMINING THE STAFF YOU NEED

As you begin to lay out your staffing needs and decide what each staff position should entail, you also will have to consider what education levels, ethnic and gender mix, and socioeconomic backgrounds you think will work best. The staffing process forces you to look carefully at your funding sources, your program's relationship to the school district or other sponsoring agency, and union affiliations to see how these criteria affect your staffing options.

We pose the following questions to help you clarify your staffing needs. Many of your choices will involve trade-offs. Given the budget constraints most programs face, compromise is inevitable. There are no right or wrong choices, but you should be aware of the implications of each option and how these options interact.

*What are the goals of your program and who do you need to carry out those goals?* The core components of a family-oriented program include parenting education and support, early childhood development and education, and linkages among social service agencies. Who you need to staff your program, then, is a function of what you hope to accomplish. If your aim is health prevention or promotion, you need a health educator. If you want to help mothers graduate from high school, you will need a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) coordinator. The more specific you are about your program's philosophy, goals, and the population with whom you hope to work, the easier it will be to determine the type of employees that will help your program succeed.

*Are other agencies or schools providing similar services?* In general, it is not a good idea for a new program to duplicate services that already exist. It is confusing for participants and can be the cause of significant turf battles, especially with regard to funding. However, this is anything but an unbreakable rule and situations that call for breaking it include:

- The services are provided elsewhere, but they are expensive and you can provide them free or at a reduced cost for low-income people.
- The services are provided elsewhere, but are not provided in a manner respectful or accessible to the participants, causing them to avoid obtaining the needed services.



- The services are provided elsewhere, but they are overextended and the facilities overcrowded and cannot help all who are eligible.

One budget-conscious alternative to duplicating a service may be to “buy” some of the time of a staff member providing the service at another agency, instead of hiring your own staff member. Perhaps a social service agency can let you buy a quarter of the time of two of their social workers to come work in your office. Better yet, maybe the social service agencies can give you this staff time for free, as an inservice contribution to your program. If this option is pursued, make certain that these staff people can practice within the family support philosophy and fit in with the rest of your staff.

*How will your budget constraints affect the type of people you can hire?* The job applicants you attract will be influenced by the pay you can offer. One theory is that if you can only pay minimum wage, chances are the people who will be able to afford to work for you are those with other sources of income, such as a high-wage employed spouse. It is less likely that these staff members’ experiences will mirror those of the program participants. The competing theory is that for many people a minimum wage job can be better than no job at all or a minimum wage job at a family support program may be more rewarding than a minimum wage job in a store.

A family support program that provides a supportive working environment can be an excellent place for someone with little professional experience to become integrated into the world of work. The person can learn valuable skills, build up a work history, increase self-esteem, and be a model for the unemployed program participants. The person would be eligible for salary increases and, as we discuss later, there are other types of benefits and nonmonetary compensation that help offset low pay. This could include paying for courses at a community college, which would increase the person’s ability to move up the career ladder within your organization.

Some programs choose to hire one person at a higher salary, rather than two at a lower one. One program director decided to pay all staff members according to the scales established by the local public schools, even if it meant hiring fewer people. Be sure that you have figured the costs of staff development and support into your budget and remember that funds from different sources can be merged to pay one full-time salary.

*What personality qualities should you look for in a family support worker?* More important than an impressive academic record, years of experience, and adeptness at paperwork is a person’s ability to relate well to the participating families. Be sure to learn whether an applicant is comfortable with both children and adults and if both generations are comfortable with her. You will need to find a person who can deal not only with eager families with a go-get-’em atti-



One program participant comments that even though she kept trying out different ways to make changes in her life, "my home visitor never laughed at me and said, 'Oh, come on. You'll never be able to do that.' She stood right beside me and if I fell down, she was there to help me get back up and try something different."

tude toward improving their situations, but also with families that are confused, easily intimidated, and possibly even hostile.

"The job of family development specialist is the most critical job in our organization, and we recognized early on that we had to treat skilled workers as our agency's own cache of gold. It required us to re-look at our organizational structure to assure these workers feel valued and respected. We can't afford to lose them."<sup>4</sup>

Gary Stokes, Director  
Mid-Iowa Community Action  
Marshalltown, Iowa

Many qualities needed for family support workers are the same as for staff in any type of organization, such as being an honest, hard working person able to handle high levels of stress. Then there are qualities that may be prized for nonfamily support staff that could prove disastrous in a family support setting. For instance, a staff member who values efficiency above all else may look at her watch while listening to a mother's problems, prove so inflexible that she cannot let paperwork slide in order to attend to a family's crisis, or be upset when a family isn't progressing "fast enough."

Kathy Brendza, director of The Center in Leadville, Colorado, is a strong believer in picking personality over experience in her teaching staff. "We have a teacher who is a former maid over in Vail, who happens to be one of the best teachers we have here. She's an absolute love, she cares about the kids, and the kids feel that, the parents feel that and with the training for the High/Scope curriculum, she's just taking to it like a natural."

Staff members need to have a positive outlook on life, as well as a strong belief that adults and children can overcome their problems and succeed. They need to be emotionally stable in their own lives while being sincerely understanding about why others may be emotionally unstable in theirs.

*Can you create positions that combine a variety of responsibilities without overloading any one person?* Think creatively when designing positions. Linda



Says one teen parent, "I'm in high school and I have a one-year-old daughter and I'm busy 24 hours a day and sometimes I just feel like saying 'I quit,' but I talk to my home visitor and she says, 'Just keep going, you can make it, you're doing good...' and it just makes me want to try even harder, you know...it's really nice to have that support."

Cantrell, director of the Family Services Center in Gainesville, Florida, created a combined bus driver and child care aide job. She expanded the position of the bus driver so that he could work as a teacher's aide in between driving shifts.

*Are there positions you could share with other programs, schools, and agencies?* Explore the possibility of sharing staff members with other agencies or school divisions. The best co-locating arrangements are reciprocal. When the Alachua County School District and the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) agreed to create the Family Services Center, both parties negotiated what they had to offer to the effort. HRS provides the eligibility worker, while the district provides the physical office space and secretarial support to aid the worker. This proved beneficial to both parties and, more importantly, to the families who have one less trip to schedule to get the services they need.

*What positions can be filled by interns and volunteers?* Think about what positions might be filled by interns from local universities, serving both their need for experience and your need for enthusiastic employees. Remember, however, that interns and volunteers require training and supervision, which costs money. Another drawback to students is that they may only want an intern position for a semester and this turnover can be disruptive to your program. Professional school departments of counseling, education, social work, and nursing all need to place students in field work and the departments will often supervise the students. See Part 2 for further information on utilizing volunteers and students.

*What "behind the scenes" positions do you need filled to keep the program running?* Don't forget highly specialized positions that could be vital to the life of your program, such as a person skilled in writing grants and securing donations, and the office and secretarial staff who are frequently the linch-pin of a program. These people are integral to a smoothly run program and careful thought should be given to their hiring, orientation, training, and ongoing support. The people filling those positions are a key link with the outside community and are often the first impression funders and participants get of the program.

*What is your relationship to the school district and how does this affect your staffing decisions?* In some programs family support and educational personnel are considered part of the regular school staff with all the personnel and salary benefits that follow. Other times, even though program staff are part of the school district, they are not in the union and this can cap their wages and benefits. Programs that are part of the regular salary and benefits system usually employ licensed or certified teachers, and report more staff stability and greater respect from other school staff. However, they sometimes find themselves in difficulties because of the system's inflexibility with respect to hiring personnel who do not have educational certification.



Some programs also indicate that the school system has forced them to hire staff, usually teachers with tenure who are not needed by elementary or secondary schools. Directors may feel that these teachers lack rapport with very young children and do not teach with the enthusiasm and family empowerment philosophy that teachers within a family support program should have. Be sure to determine up front what the restrictions are and find out if there is room to negotiate.

***What type of professional accreditation does your state require of each worker?***

Be sure to find out whether the state requires early childhood educators to be certified. Become familiar with certification requirements for social workers and other professionals. If you are offering health services, find out what credentials staff members must have to be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement.

***Are your plans in keeping with union regulations?*** Do union rules restrict who you can hire and what you can pay? If your program is sponsored by a school district or other organization that is unionized, union rules may apply to your program. Be sure to consult union representatives in the early stages of program staffing to make sure that you are not violating regulations and to create good will. Sometimes you can negotiate with unions over issues such as credentials. A union agreed to allow one program to hire a staff member without a high school diploma as long as he worked under the supervision of a licensed teacher.

***What if you can't fill a needed position given your limited hiring population?***

Family support programs can have limited applicant populations for several reasons: a rural area with a small population, the program wants applicants who have graduated from college and who also have the same ethnic and socioeconomic background of the participants, or the low salary discourages many from applying. Persistence and most likely compromise ultimately will yield an appropriate candidate. You may have to advertise out of the area and/or prioritize which criteria are most important and which you are willing to do without in the person you hire.

***Will staff members be flexible enough to pitch in when needed?*** While we strongly believe that organizations should have job descriptions, it is just as essential for staff members to be willing to step out of their job descriptions when needed. There are times when staff people need to pitch in, for example, if there is a rush to get a grant proposal out, an emergency for a participating family, or an overwhelming backlog of filing or other office tasks to be done. There's no telling what a family support worker might be called on to do. A teacher at The Center in Leadville, Colorado thinks nothing of having to oil The Center's pet pig. "He has dry skin," she notes.

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Once your staff members earn the respect of the community, it is likely that families will ask their help with tasks that are not part of their job. The commu-



In a review of Iowa's local family support programs undertaken as part of the Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Grant Program, it was found that "a diversity of staff backgrounds has been seen as a program strength by virtually all the programs — a diversity defined by professional background and life experiences."<sup>5</sup>

nity workers at the Murphy School District in Phoenix found themselves helping families fill out college financial aid applications, despite the fact that the school district only went to eighth grade. But families in the community, finding that the colleges would not give them the in-depth assistance they needed in understanding the forms, turned to the community workers at the school, whose reputations for helping families was well known. In fact, they were so well known that one community worker received a letter from a family that she didn't know who lived hundreds of miles away in Yuma. The Yuma family had some problems and nowhere to turn. Neighbors of theirs, originally from the Murphy School District, remembered the community worker who had once helped them, and suggested that they contact the same worker.

*Should the staff have similar or different professional backgrounds?* Another choice you will have to make is whether to hire a staff made up of people with similar credentials and training, such as a corps of social workers who specialize in early childhood education, or a mix of professionals and paraprofessionals with different orientations and levels of training.

The advantages of a staff with professional training from a single discipline are that staff members are likely to speak the same professional language and adopt similar methods of interacting with families. The disadvantage is that your organization may lack the diversity of ideas that can lead to more creative planning and problem solving. You may also lack the range of skills needed to serve your families adequately.

Hiring staff members with different training backgrounds will enable you to have more flexibility in matching staff members with program participants. For example, one parent may relate better to a paraprofessional parent educator who shares similar life experiences. Another parent may need more intensive counseling that can best be provided by a psychologist or social worker. This mix of perspectives can be invaluable in planning program services and finding innovative ways to work with families.

Some programs believe the cross-disciplinary approach allows them to view the whole child, parent, or family. If you use this approach, be sure to have regular cross-disciplinary staff meetings, training opportunities, and social interactions so staff members see the program philosophy from several angles and benefit from each other's multiple perspectives.

## PROFESSIONALS VS. PARAPROFESSIONALS

In the early days of the family support movement, program directors showed a decided preference for paraprofessional workers. Life experience counted more than credentials earned in the classroom. As programs evolved, however, many



directors realized that devaluing professional credentials was equivalent to “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” Many families, they discovered, needed the therapeutic intervention that only a skilled therapist could offer. And, in many cases, experienced teachers had an edge in the classroom over paraprofessionals who did not have specialized training beyond that of a high school diploma or a GED.

Several factors influence the decision of whether to hire a professional or paraprofessional. In many cases the credentials required of the people you hire will be determined by the state. To be licensed most social workers need to have completed a specific course of study. For programs operating within schools, teacher credentials will also be determined by the state. The answer is not so clear cut when hiring parent educators and child care workers. It will be up to you to weigh education and professional experience against the knowledge that only the School of Hard Knocks can bring.

Two states that sponsor family support programs on a widespread basis have made different choices concerning credentials and training. The Missouri Parents as Teachers (PAT) program does not require parent educators to be certified teachers if they have acquired five years of successful experience in working with young children and parents. However, all parent educators must complete the PAT training program. Minnesota’s Early Childhood Family Education program, on the other hand, requires preexisting licensure for parent educators through vocational education and early childhood education.

Some programs will hire only professionals for teaching and counseling positions. The advantages of a professional staff are numerous. They require less training and supervision than paraprofessionals. It is likely that they will have kept abreast of the latest developments in their fields. And their level of competency has been demonstrated in the classroom and on the job.

But there can be a downside to hiring professionals. They may intimidate program participants, particularly those who have had negative experiences with social service or school professionals. One university professor writes that when “you’re dealing with a lot of people on social assistance and welfare...And when they see anybody coming in that they think is high class or has anything to do with welfare...they are scared to death that you’re going to squeal on them...”<sup>6</sup>

If the job you are filling requires occasionally doing tasks outside the job description, professionals may balk. Professionals should not spend a good deal of their



A Hispanic parent partner from the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) in Miami, Florida intuitively understood the needs of a mother who was struggling to learn English, and would stop to explain the words in the text that she herself had found difficult when first learning English.

time doing menial tasks because that is a waste of the professional level wages you are paying them. However, these positions need to be flexible and professionals should be willing to do some tasks that are beyond normal duties. Chances are, if these are tasks directly related to helping the participants, any committed professional will be quite willing.

In some cases, higher levels of education may make people more interested in theory than practice. One program director changed a job description because she was receiving applications from too many “consultants” and not enough people eager to work in the community: “We decided with a social worker we’d advertise it at the master’s level. We had a lot of applicants, but they were all academically inclined. They were interested in being consultants and we wanted hands on people. So we readvertised at a bachelor’s level and we got more appropriate candidates.”

While some directors state that they could never charge low fees if they paid professional wages, for many programs the decision to hire paraprofessionals is not determined by finances but rather philosophy. The main advantage of hiring paraprofessionals, program directors maintain, is that they can relate to the experiences of the parents they serve, often because they come from a similar background and have faced similar struggles. This is particularly true in the case of home visitors. Some programs will only hire paraprofessionals from the community they serve. Others go a step further and insist that workers are from the same ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as the families they will serve.

In the Miami Beach Healthy Learner Program, a social worker trained a group of Hispanic immigrant women from the community to provide information, support, and technical assistance to the parents of the elementary school students. The parents feel more at ease talking to their “neighbors,” and are willing to let them into their homes. The women in the program provide an excellent role model for women in the community, showing that they can learn their way around social service agencies and the school system. Some programs have even stricter criteria for their family support staff, wanting not just people from the community, but people who have gone through the program themselves. Of the staff at the Parent/Child Program in Frederick, Maryland, 95 percent had participated in the program with their own children.

Hiring paraprofessionals from the community is also a way of empowering community members. A staff member in Kentucky’s Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker Program identified local women with little education or work experience and strong interpersonal skills and trained them to work with her. For a small stipend, these helpers visited pregnant women each month. As the program developed the staff person devoted her energy to the personal and professional development of these helpers, and they became the main service providers of the program.<sup>7</sup>



"Families respect and respond to the fact that their counselors have 'made it,' and such family workers convey the belief that the families can make it too."<sup>8</sup>

Working with paraprofessionals, however, is not without difficulties. Some participants have said that staff members from their own ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds are harder on them, and have the demeaning attitude of "I got my life together by myself, why can't you be more independent?" Paraprofessionals may become overly involved with their clients. If they are from the same background, they may have trouble differentiating themselves from the families with which they work<sup>9</sup> or be uncomfortable running into participants while off the job. The participants themselves may be uneasy and unwilling to disclose personal issues to people who are from their community and peer group.

In addition, paraprofessionals may lack the clinical expertise necessary to help more severely troubled families and may require time-consuming supervision beyond the capacity of some programs. Paraprofessionals also need more extensive training in child development and sometimes need to be taught more basic skills such as time management. There is also a higher rate of turnover among paraprofessionals than professionals. Because the pay is low, paraprofessionals often move on when they find a job that pays better.

A recent study of family support program staffing patterns concluded that professionals are likely "to do their jobs more efficiently and with less training and supervision than lay workers, at least partly offsetting their higher wage costs."<sup>10</sup> As home visitors spend only 17 to 30 percent of their time<sup>11</sup> actually meeting with participants, how quickly related activities are accomplished is key. The study found that "background reading and preparation for home visits was demanding for visitors with limited formal education"<sup>12</sup> and that lay home visitors required extensive ongoing training; both of which "up" the cost of a paraprofessional worker.

Programs that employ both professionals and paraprofessionals may encounter some turf battles. A paraprofessional, for example, may reinforce conventional parenting behavior that the professional is attempting to modify. Paraprofessionals may lack credibility with other professional groups. In some cases different community sectors prefer different staff members. For instance, one program found that participants liked to work with older women with considerable life experience, while the school district and program founders valued staff members with a professional degree more.

Yet, the director of Project AHEAD in Los Angeles notes that even skeptical professionals may come around when they see paraprofessionals in action. Professionals' resistance to paraprofessionals may diminish as professionals realize paraprofessionals often have an easier rapport with and are more quickly accepted by families. Clear distinctions between paraprofessional and professional roles can also reduce tension and alleviate paraprofessionals' nervousness about competing with professionals.<sup>13</sup>



“It was important that the staff of the project represented the racial composition of the community if we were to promote community ownership and encourage trust and confidence in the mission of the project.”<sup>14</sup>

Jocelyn Garlington

*Helping Dreams Survive*

## DEVELOPING A DIVERSE STAFF

Programs should strive for diversity and for having staff with the same socioeconomic backgrounds as the participants. Unfortunately, sometimes these two concepts will seem to oppose each other. In a program that serves a Hispanic population — should the family liaisons all be Hispanic to best relate to families, or should the family liaison staff be more diverse? Each program must weigh these options, the available applicants, and the needs of their participant population to decide what makes the most sense.

Think about the relationship you envision between staff members and participants in your program. Is it important that staff members share the experiences of program participants? Should the staff members come from the same racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background? A key criterion for Minnesota Early Learning Design (MELD) for young mothers facilitators is that they have experienced the parenting circumstances of the people who they will work with, and were themselves adolescent mothers at one time. Nueva Familia facilitators must be Latino, and preferably first generation American immigrants. On the other hand, some program directors find such specifications too restrictive and believe the best person for the job is not always a person from the same background as program participants.

Most program directors make a concerted effort to hire staff members who reflect the socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial composition of their communities. A program staff member will have little success talking to African-American families about multiculturalism in the schools, for example, if parents perceive that the program lacks a commitment to diversity in its own ranks. More often than not, diversity benefits the program in that the more representative the staff is of a multiethnic community, the greater the knowledge they bring about the community's pattern of child rearing and family life.

Even in a relatively homogeneous community, diversity is crucial. A teacher points out that it is important that both white and nonwhite students are taught by staff members from minority groups so they have successful role models “from traditionally stereotyped minority groups.”<sup>15</sup> It would also be good for students to see people who are physically challenged in professional and paraprofessional roles. Some job placement programs will pay a portion of the salaries of physically challenged workers employed by nonprofit organizations.

Diversity within the organization is important not just for the participants, but also for the internal workings of your program. A consultant on managing diversity in the workplace told the *New York Times*: “There is growing sentiment that diverse employee teams tend to outperform homogeneous teams of any composition. Managers tell us that homogeneous groups may reach consensus more quickly, but often are not as successful in generating new ideas or solving problems, because their perspective is narrower.”<sup>16</sup>



## MEN AS STAFF MEMBERS

For most family support programs, attempting to have a diverse staff includes hiring men, who can be excellent role models, particularly for children from single-parent families headed by women. Men are often better able to relate to fathers, whose participation programs are eager to encourage. Many program directors make a concerted effort to seek out men to join the staff.

The great majority of family support program staffs are made up of women. While it is not necessarily bad for the program, the reasons for this imbalance are not always positive. Some of them have to do with traditional roles of men and women that turn men away from jobs with children and families, some with the tendency of women to staff low-paying social service positions.

In a study of the Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency programs, the three projects that include male family development specialists identified the special value of having men on staff for two particular family situations. One, where women could benefit from being involved with men who were nonabusive and supportive. Two, in situations where the male family development specialist could engage the man in the household and deal with issues of domestic abuse.<sup>17</sup>

Barry Shaw, coordinator of fathers' activities at Early Education Services in Brattleboro, Vermont says that a home visitor might come to him and say that a certain male is very depressed but will not talk to her. When Shaw goes to see him, that same man will "jabber the whole time when he's out with me. So I get a completely different picture than what the home visitor's getting from that same person."

Male workers face a unique set of stresses that need to be addressed up front. Attitudes about "appropriate" sex roles are deeply ingrained in our society. Men who choose to work as child care professionals are often the butt of jokes. "You mean you're a babysitter?" Tension can develop between male and female workers who assume that men will have more opportunities for advancement. Men can feel left out of conversations in a staff dominated by women. Men may not be welcome as home visitors in some communities.

Parents can be leery of having men work with their children. One preschool teacher reports that parents who were initially excited about having a man on the staff became nervous upon reflection. Their attitude was: Why would a guy



want to be around kids? What's wrong with him? Communication among staff members and with parents is crucial to helping men adjust well to your program. The preschool teacher who encountered some fear among parents sent out a weekly newsletter informing parents of their children's activities. He invited parents to drop by the classroom on a regular basis. Parents who saw him in action developed more respect for the profession, along with the talent a man could bring to the job.

Male staff members should avoid situations that could be uncomfortable for parents and children. For example, in most communities, men do not conduct home visits unless accompanied by a female visitor. Some male staff members prefer to work with a female co-worker in settings with children. This can help alleviate parents' fears, however unfounded, and protect the men from false allegations of child abuse.

## THE HIRING PROCESS

The hiring process is never easy. Here we would like to offer a few words of practical advice specific to hiring family support staff:

- Since you want flexible applicants, be sure to include phrases in your job advertisement such as: "overtime may be required" and "adjustable work week" so that you weed out applicants who do not want to accept such a situation.
- Many programs follow the practice of stating in their advertisements that they are equal opportunity employers and that people of color are encouraged to apply.
- Because applicants for paraprofessional positions may not have resumes, you may want to accept personal letters and letters of recommendation instead.
- Especially for nonprofessional positions, don't just advertise in the major newspapers, but include community papers and papers targeted to the ethnic communities that you serve.
- The most important tip: Don't rush the process. Says Joyce Hoelting, MELD resource coordinator, "We've found a higher rate of turnover among quickly made decisions." Linda Cantrell, director of the Family Services Center in Gainesville, Florida, agrees: "We advertise and readvertise till we get the right person."



“The most important thing a program manager does is hire the right staff. If you have the wrong staff, no matter how beautiful a structure you have, they can’t implement it.”

Caroline Gaston

Former Director of the New Futures School  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

In addition to asking the standard questions about experience and philosophy, present applicants with real-life scenarios and find out how they would respond. For example, one interviewer asked an applicant how she would react if she overheard a group of adults making fun of another adult who had not bathed in a long time. The following interviewing tips apply to almost all job applicants:

- Look for contradictions in what the candidate says or does. Did the candidate say he or she believes in empowerment, yet also reveal a desire to teach or tell parents everything they know about childrearing?<sup>18</sup>
- Be honest about the job you are offering. If funding prospects are uncertain, be sure to state this directly. Linda Cantrell says: “I have to be fair with people. I can’t tempt them by telling them the job is going to be there for good.”
- Be sure to conduct a full reference check of your final prospects. Don’t rely on instinct alone, no matter how well it has served you in the past.
- Look for nonverbal messages. Does the person make good eye contact? Does his or her body language convey warmth and openness?
- Observe the applicants with children and adults. Have applicants spend time in one of your program’s activities for children, even if their job isn’t in one, to see how at ease they are with children.
- In general, do not ask job applicants personal questions, such as religious affiliations, age, or family composition. Those questions can be interpreted as discriminatory. However, if you are trying to hire an applicant whose background is similar to those of the participants, you have a legitimate reason for wanting to know how old the applicant was when she had her children, whether she has ever been a single parent or been on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). *The reasons why you are asking these questions should be made very clear before you ask them.* Also, if the applicant appears ill at ease discussing these situations in her own life, this could be an indication that she would also be uneasy discussing these issues in the participants’ lives, making it difficult for the participants to warm to her.



## 2

### Reality of Staff Management

No matter how well you have articulated your philosophy and refined your management structure, you are bound to face unanticipated staffing situations, from the new teacher who leaves to go to graduate school to the home visitor afraid to go alone to an unsafe neighborhood. Again, we want to emphasize that the key to overseeing a successful staff is a flexible and creative approach.

### PROVIDING ADEQUATE PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

### FOSTERING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

A casual visitor may think that the pleasant atmosphere and smooth operations of a program occur because of the natural forces of collegiality. However, this is unlikely to be true. A great deal of thought goes into making an office harmonious and functional: interactive staff meetings, retreats, channels for people at every level to make suggestions and have the opportunity to be seriously considered. Efforts should be made, even in the most overcrowded office, for everyone to have a little space of their own. While the benefits of such an office environment are well-known, given all the day-to-day tasks and emergencies that must be dealt with, it is easy to let community building measures slide.

Fostering a healthy program environment needs to become an intentional goal. Be sure to:

*Set aside time for talk.* It is a good idea for staff members and administrators to meet periodically to exchange ideas and concerns. Some programs use lunch time for discussions, problem solving, and building a sense of team spirit.

*Keep staff members informed of upcoming events, new procedures, or current activities.* Make sure they get copies of newsletters, flyers, and materials being sent home to parents.

*Plan informal get-togethers on a regular basis.* One program plans low-cost celebrations at least once a month to help the esprit de corps and have some fun. Celebrating staff members' birthdays and other life events, such as securing academic degrees, helps staff morale.



Benefits should be made as flexible and comprehensive as possible to help offset the low salaries.

*Plan for time to combine fun and work.* Retreats for a day or a weekend allow time to both brainstorm and relax.

“Empowerment applies to everyone in the program, to staff, to parents, to children. We dialogue together. We decide on outcomes together. If there are certain needs we try to provide training, but it’s all done cooperatively. It’s very much the same type of idea that drives everything we do and it makes for a very healthy staff. People feel so good about themselves they are willing to go that second mile.”<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Maria Chavez  
Director and Principal Investigator  
Bernard van Leer Foundation’s Early Childhood and Family  
Education Program  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMPENSATION

Judie Jerald, director of Early Education Services (EES) in Brattleboro, Vermont, knows the value of a family-friendly office: “I don’t believe that you leave your personal lives at home when you go to work. This is clearly a women’s organization. We spend too much of our time working — and we can’t separate our work and our lives. I mean, they are integrated. We’re all mothers, or wives, or sisters. We have this as part of our lives and I think you always need to recognize that.”

At EES, “The salaries are not great,” says Jerald, “particularly for the parent educators, but we give other kinds of benefits, such as four weeks vacation.” Flexible schedules are another plus. Dot Marsden, an EES administrator remembers: “I felt pretty comfortable if it were a snow day not having staff come in because they had kids at home. I’d try to match their children’s schedules as much as possible. We also didn’t have to work in the summertime. So it’s these kinds of benefits that make it worthwhile for a woman to take the high stress and low pay.”

“We stress having a supportive atmosphere with teamwork, flexibility, and recognition of personal needs,” says Joyce Hoelting, MELD resource development coordinator. “What we’re really doing is living out in our eight to five lives what we’re asking people to give each other in our program. We are fighting for parents to have rights to consider their child while they are in the workplace and the flexibility to work at home. We have to treat parents well in our workplace because we want them to be treated well outside our workplace.”



Here are some family-friendly personnel policies you may want to incorporate into your program:

*Provide maternity and paternity leave, for adoption as well as for birth of a child.* Paid leave will probably be prohibitive for many family support programs, so flexibility will be the key. Allow parents to work part time after they return from leave or let them work at home if feasible.

*Provide health, vacation, and sick benefits for part-time workers as well as full-time workers.* That way employees will not be forced to give up benefits in order to be with their children.

*Allow a certain amount of hours per month for staff members to engage in school activities with their children.* They may work in a preschool cooperative, visit their child at daycare, go on a school trip, or attend a play or parent-teacher conference.

*Acknowledge that children aren't always in school.* The reasons are numerous: snow days, illness, school vacations. Perhaps a section of the office can be set aside for child visiting with a sleeping bag, toys and books, a small television, and tape player, so that parents can comfortably bring their child into the office.

*Establish an official policy that a certain amount of employee sick leave can be used to care for ill family members.* This saves the employees from having to lie and say they are sick, when it is really their child or elderly parent who needs care.

*Offer the Dependent Care Assistance Plan (DCAP) that enables employees to set aside up to \$5,000 of pretax income to pay for child care or elder care.<sup>20</sup>* This offers a way for the program to help defray the high costs of dependent care.

## EMPOWERING STAFF

When Early Education Services in Vermont was hiring a supervisor for home visitors, they promoted a home visitor. Director Judie Jerald says she interviewed outside applicants as well, but encouraged the inside candidate to apply. This promotion has empowered all the home visitors, who now feel that their efforts and experience have been validated.



Personnel must be respected and empowered in their jobs, just as the program participants are in their parenting.

Programs need a director that is ultimately responsible for management and operations. But within this framework, we advocate an approach to management that encourages collective action. The most effective managers understand that to empower workers is to seek their input on a regular basis, consider their suggestions seriously, and act upon their recommendations. Nothing will erode staff morale faster than a manager who encourages staff to give feedback — and then fails to act on it. Staff members need to know that their voices are being heard and that their opinions are respected.

One indicator of shared power is the frequency of staff meetings, but only if those meetings are run efficiently and result in clearer understanding of collective goals and better ways of overcoming problems to achieve those goals. Staff members need to feel that their input during meetings is taken seriously.

Another indicator is the extent to which workers make decisions about their jobs. When staff members participate in decisions that directly affect their job performance, they are more accepting of conditions, policies, and organizational structure. Many programs encourage staff people to meet on their own, without managers, to discuss work issues. At The Center in Leadville, Colorado, the preschool teachers all meet regularly to discuss the children and the work schedule, and the teachers of the younger children have similar meetings. The Center has three co-directors who prefer to think of themselves as staff facilitators that guide, not manage, the staff.

At Early Education Services in Vermont, staff members meet on their own and then present suggestions to director Judie Jerald. She finds that she takes these suggestions more seriously since they come from a group effort. Jerald, who credits her consultative management style to her background as a group leader in social work, deals with questions about her actions within and outside of her office by providing staff with as much information as possible about what is going on.

## STAFF EVALUATION AND SUPERVISION

It is important to develop an interactive system for evaluating your staff. To remove any anxiety associated with an evaluation, you should make it evident to all staff what the evaluation is supposed to accomplish. It might be a time for those being evaluated and their supervisors to set mutual goals for the job. Perhaps the evaluation is tied to merit raises, in which case it should be made clear how a staff member's behavior is reflected in the raise range. Since staff-family relations are so important, a director may include feedback from families when evaluating a staff member that provides direct services to families.



Many program directors hold planning conferences with each worker once or twice a year. Directors work with staff members to formulate both long-term and short-term professional goals. This is important to give each staff member a sense of her importance to the overall venture, and the goals agreed upon will serve as a critical tool during a subsequent evaluation. Keeping a written record of goals will prevent misunderstandings and clarify expectations. We recommend that you ask your staff members the following questions:

- *What do you want to accomplish in the next six months?*
- *With what area of your job are you most satisfied?*
- *What job responsibilities do you feel you need to improve upon?*
- *In what way can the program support you in achieving your goals?*

The last question may be the most important. The mark of good leaders is their ability to bring out the best work from their staff.<sup>21</sup>

For many staff members it is important to have a sense of a career ladder, or professional goals to which to aspire, whether it be added responsibilities at their current job or a promotion to a new position. Discuss possible career tracks and to what jobs a person can realistically aspire.

Kathy Brendza, director of The Center in Leadville, Colorado, changed her system from evaluating all her teachers and staff members annually to only evaluating three or four a year so that it would be "much more of a useful evaluation. Evaluation is supposed to be a tool that you learn from. Well, if you're all evaluated at the same time...I may tell you to work on these issues... but I'm not going to be able to help you. So now what we've done is we choose four people a year to evaluate and we're really working with these people." The benefit of this system is being able to work in depth with staff. The drawback is that other staff may "slide" — after all, if you have a large staff, several years can go by between evaluations for each individual.



An evaluation of all the federal Comprehensive Child Development Program sites summarizes the variety of ways that supervision occurs in their programs. "All projects provide some type of formal group supervision, which most often takes the form of a weekly staffing of cases. One-quarter of the projects noted that they provide individual supervision in addition to group supervision.

In several projects, different types of group supervisory meetings are held: for example, one of the rural projects uses biweekly family team conference meetings in which various types of staff discuss one particular family and its family service plan. In addition, there are monthly family updates in a nutshell meetings in which one manager and a multidisciplinary team meet to discuss the manager's entire caseload. Finally, there are coordination of services meetings, which can be called by any team member to discuss an immediate or crisis situation; relevant persons from the team and community are asked to attend.

At another rural project, the early childhood staff, case manager, and supervisor meet twice a month. And all case managers working in the five counties meet monthly as a group."<sup>22</sup>

Supervising your staff and evaluating your staff are flip sides of the same coin. Being a competent supervisor for family support staff goes beyond being a good supervisor at your convenience to being available to your staff as much as possible. The Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency study found that supervisors and project directors who are close to the workers are regarded as absolutely essential to the program's effectiveness by the family development specialists themselves. "Because we have to deal with so many situations," one family development specialist stated, "we have to get help and our supervisor is a gem. She gives us the type of guidance and advice we need and also support when we make mistakes and have to try again."<sup>23</sup>

A program director recalls a situation in her own office where a staff member was waiting to speak to her late in the day, long past the time she usually left work, because the staff member wanted the director to call one of her families who was in a crisis. The director was busy, but she was aware the staff member should not have been sitting in the office at that hour and says, "I could have waited, but I called right then, because I knew it was important to her. I wanted her to go home knowing that I had already done it. I think that people appreciate that kind of management."



## PREVENTING BURNOUT

Burnout may be more serious in human service professions than any other field. Pay is usually on the low side, hours can be long, and in the course of a day, staff hear the problems of a multitude of families. Adults and children are looking to the staff member for help in fixing their problems. It can be depressing, it can be frustrating, but it can be very rewarding, which is what draws people to and keeps them in human service professions.

Contradictory factors are at work in your program and in the minds of your staff. Obviously, you don't want to overload your workers and make their job situations impossible. However, you have a limited budget and a large population of people who need your services, and the program doesn't like to turn away eligible people. The same contradictions hit every staff member as an individual: The staff wants to help the participants and sometimes this means stress and overwork for themselves. This willingness to overwork in order to help families is inherent in family support staff — proof that programs are hiring the best, most committed workers. But program directors need to be aware of issues that can arise: Are families remaining dependent for too long because of the staff's willingness to do so much? Is staff time being redirected from other essential tasks? The topic of "how much help is too much help" should be stressed in training sessions and staff meetings. Remind staff that the goal is to empower families and thus independence must be encouraged. One burnout prevention expert advises:

- Don't expect your staff people to devote their entire lives to the program.
- Don't overload workers.
- Subsidize continuing education.
- Offer merit raises.
- Involve staff in decision making.
- Be sure evaluation methods are clear.
- Help your workers understand their own limitations. You want to instill in your staff a dose of realism without dispiriting them.<sup>24</sup>

Other important points are:

*Be flexible about switching and sharing jobs.* Some family support staff workers may manage better with half a caseload of family visiting and working an administrative job the other half of the time.

*Make certain that each staff member has a mix of difficult and easy families.* No one should have a dozen families in terrible crises. Everyone needs a balance.

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*Keep an open dialogue among the staff about the families in the program.* The Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency programs find that team spirit is



responsible for lowering worker turnover in their sites. “We have to celebrate our small successes with families and commiserate when we’re trying to work with a family and getting discouraged over having no success,” said one family development specialist. “If we didn’t have each other to talk with over the first nine months of the program, where none of the families seemed to be getting anywhere, we wouldn’t have stuck it out. And then, we just started experiencing some real successes.”<sup>25</sup>

*Provide professional counseling for staff, if needed.* A program in Pittsburgh hired an outside psychologist to create a weekly support group for family services workers. The group explores the impact of the program on the families they work with as well as on their own lives.

*If financial resources allow it, organizations may give bonuses to the staff.* Kathy Brendza, director at The Center in Leadville, Colorado, did so one year, using the proceeds of an excellence in education award. She provided up to \$100 for teachers who had been there the longest and found that the teachers were surprised and very appreciative.

## WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play a variety of roles in family support and education programs, from performing office work to taking a lead role in program implementation. The most obvious benefit of working with volunteers is that they don’t receive wages. But the benefits are more than economic. Giving parents and community members responsibility for the success of a program confers ownership of the program on the community.

Word of mouth is among the most effective ways of attracting volunteers. Some program staffs make a special effort to recruit by speaking at schools, play groups, support groups, parent-teacher associations, union meetings, and local farm associations. Colleges, seminaries, and vocational schools can provide a steady stream of volunteers, both those who can assist on an ongoing basis as well as volunteers for individual events, such as fundraising parties.

The drawback of using volunteers is that they usually require extensive supervision and training. If your organization utilizes more than a handful of volunteers, at least one salaried staff member should be responsible for developing and implementing a volunteer program.

It is not enough to have enthusiastic volunteers — they must be trained. The social worker that supervises volunteer women in the Healthy Learner program in Miami Beach, Florida says that her training consists of outreach do’s and



In Houston, a program called “De Madres a Madres” trained volunteers to reach out to their neighbors, recently arrived Hispanic immigrants, and give advice on where to seek prenatal and children’s health care, as well as find food and housing.<sup>26</sup>

don’t’s. She says, “then it was 20 hours of classroom participation and 20 hours of community work, so that for each assignment they would have to make five or six contacts in which they would go out in the community and knock on someone’s door and explain the program to them. And that was the most difficult part for them, doing this without anyone asking them for help, actually knocking on someone’s door, but they did it. Now they do it as if it were nothing.”

Like salaried employees, volunteers should receive a complete job description so they understand their responsibilities and feel part of the overall organization. Agreeing on a time commitment is critical. You do not want to train someone and have them leave after three months or only work one hour a week. At a Massachusetts parental stress hotline, an eight-week training class is given to volunteers, focusing on listening skills. A commitment of one year is required, working one three-and-a-half hour office shift a week and one overnight shift a month from the volunteer’s home.<sup>27</sup>

Most human service and educational organizations are required to carry insurance against malpractice. Some program managers have found after the fact that volunteers were not covered under their policies. Be sure to check beforehand. If your policy does not cover volunteers, it may be possible to purchase a rider that will.

It is useful to view volunteers as belonging to one of four categories broken down by level of expertise:

*People who volunteer because they have the time and inclination to help a program.* These might be senior citizens, homemakers, and students. If the time commitment required from volunteers is extensive, chances are they will be from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, people who have the luxury of working because they want to, without depending on a living wage. On the other hand, for low-income, unemployed people without work experience, volunteer experience can be very valuable, especially in helping their self-esteem when they see they can master new tasks outside their home. Some programs offer small stipends to volunteers to help defray transportation costs.



The Center in Leadville, Colorado is committed to using high school students as volunteer teacher aides. This benefits the classroom by providing another set of hands, but the main objective is to show teens the reality that babies are not just cute objects, but also require a lot of work. The hope is that this realization will lower Leadville's teen pregnancy rate. A second objective is to provide the students with the idea of child care and teaching as career options. One young man who was failing high school came to volunteer at The Center. Being a "teacher" to the children increased his self-esteem. This led to improved school work, and he is now away at college majoring in education.

*People who volunteer because they need to.* For example, certain undergraduates and many graduate students frequently need to work for a period of time within their field to satisfy academic requirements. For these students, the practical experience is half career training, half donated service. These students may also use volunteer opportunities as a way to explore career options.

Using student interns from professional programs is an effective, low-cost way of providing services to family support participants. Because these students must do clinical work, graduate schools have mechanisms for placing and supervising students carrying out clinical field work. This situation works particularly well for counseling and nursing. In Denver, the Family Resource Program at the Cheltenham School uses therapy services provided by interns in the master's program at the Family Therapy Training Center. The center supervises the interns, who have the choice of seeing families at the center or at Cheltenham. As it is easier for the families to be seen at Cheltenham, this volunteer opportunity is popular with interns who want their careers to be in school-based social work.

*People who volunteer because they want to contribute their expertise or professional background to a program.* These could be doctors, lawyers, accountants, and business managers.

*Finally, there are volunteers who are actual staff members.* That is, some programs or program components are staffed entirely by volunteers. Therefore, although they are volunteers, they stand out from the above categories because without them there would not be a program.



In East Boston, Community Outreach for Reconciliation and Empowerment uses a team of two volunteers to serve as family conflict mediators. Each foster care case is periodically reviewed by a panel of three, one of whom is a community volunteer. The volunteer coordinator for the state's Foster Care Review Unit finds that "volunteers bring a common-sense perspective to the table."<sup>28</sup>

The more integral the volunteer is to your program, the more extensive the interviewing process required. A volunteer who will work directly with participants will require a more thorough interview than a volunteer who will do office work. It can take several months to find the right staff members. "Every experienced site coordinator has learned (sometimes the hard way) that it is better and less time consuming to delay the beginning of service than to begin with an inappropriate facilitator," says Joyce Hoelting of MELD.

At MELD, where volunteer parent facilitators are the heart of the program, site coordinators provide applicants with a written questionnaire and ask a series of questions to determine what skills, abilities, experience, and attitudes volunteers would bring to the position. Often the interviews take place in the applicant's home, which gives the coordinators a chance to observe the potential facilitators interacting with their own children.

During the interview the site coordinator discusses some of the experiences of parents in the MELD groups, ranging from problems with chemical dependency to single parenting. The coordinator notes whether the applicant is comfortable discussing sensitive topics and with withholding judgement about persons whose experiences differ from her own.

MELD coordinators also try to determine whether a volunteer has an adequate support system. Some people see volunteerism as a way to make friends and establish a support network. While MELD volunteers often do find that they gain as much as they give from the experience, it is important that the primary motivation is to *give* support, not receive it. All applicants are asked to supply references.



If your program has tasks that can be carried out by volunteers, advertise the position in local church and community publications. Don't forget to contact senior citizens' organizations, retired teachers' organizations or retired business people. The Foster Grandparent Program specializes in placing older volunteers with children. A foster grandparent working at one of the Family Resource Schools in Denver says that "this has been very educational for me. And I'm learning something new everyday from these kids."

It is important for volunteers to feel they are welcome and valued. Here are ways to make them feel part of your program and appreciated:

- Invite volunteers to use your staff room or provide a special area for volunteers, equipped with comfortable seating, a desk, phone, and coffee pot. Some programs, wanting to be child-friendly, may put in a child play area for volunteers' families. This may work if the volunteers are performing tasks such as stuffing envelopes, but could prove impossible if volunteers are making phone calls where they need quiet and undisturbed time. If this is the case, try to recruit parents of school-age children to work during school hours.
- Ask for feedback from volunteers about the efficacy of the program and its activities.
- Solicit the input of volunteers in program planning.
- Hold volunteer meetings to brainstorm about work-related issues.
- Recognize volunteers in newsletters, community newspapers, and at parties.
- Design a poster listing the names of volunteers and what they have done for your program.
- Write thank you notes for a job well done.



## JOBS FOR VOLUNTEERS<sup>29</sup>

- Serve as a home visitor or parent group leader
- Act as bookkeeper or treasurer
- Be a child care assistant
- Serve as librarian
- Develop annotated bibliographies for children's and parents' books
- Operate a resource library branch in a remote area
- Do legislative lobbying
- Fundraise by donating time, materials, money, or talent
- Plan and implement open houses for community members
- Speak to community service clubs and agencies about the program
- Provide links and coordinate with other agencies, schools, and community groups
- Appear on TV and talk shows
- Develop a promotional slide show
- Write parent handouts, press releases, newsletters
- Design brochures and make bulletin boards
- Put up posters or deliver brochures
- Telephone to recruit new volunteers
- Paint or decorate rooms
- Call nonreturning participants to remind them about upcoming events
- Provide transportation for participants
- Plan special events and organize field trips
- Organize a filing system
- Do typing and photocopying
- Staple, collate, and label newsletters



## MANAGEMENT OF CO-LOCATED STAFF

A common way for many family support programs to provide comprehensive services is to have staff members from other agencies work out of their family support offices. This is known as co-location or the outposting of workers. Co-location is popular in family support for many reasons:

- Co-location enables a family support program that cannot afford to hire someone in a certain capacity to “borrow” a staff member with the needed expertise from another agency.
- If another agency would like to provide services through a family support program or sponsor your program but cannot afford to donate funds, co-location of staff functions as an in-kind contribution.
- Co-location is integral for establishing a one-stop shop for family support services.
- It may be more convenient for participants to travel to the family support program office than the site of the agency that agrees to outpost staff.
- It may also involve less stigma for participants to seek out some services, such as mental health counseling, at the family support program office than at the county Mental Health Clinic.
- Frequently, outposted staff people enjoy sharing their expertise more in a holistic, family-friendly environment than in their home offices.

Due to the variety of reasons for co-locating and the personalities of the involved agencies and staff, co-location looks different in almost every circumstance. In some cases, the benefits of co-location are almost all physical: the advantage is that people have their offices in a place that is more convenient for the participants. In other cases, the outposted staff become fully integrated into the workings of the family support program, and the fact that their salary is paid by another office is of minor consequence.



In the Murphy School District in Phoenix, Arizona a school building is leased to the Department of Employment Security (DES) for a dollar a year so that intake workers for AFDC, Food Stamps, and other programs can be located on the school premises. Since 95 percent of the district's families are on AFDC and many families lack cars, this is much more convenient than having to wait for a sporadic public bus to go to a very large office with long waits and delays.

When this branch office opened at the school, the intake workers were given smaller caseloads than they had at their other office and were thus able to provide more in-depth, family-friendly help. As one intake worker says, "Over here, we get to know our clients, we get to know the family situation. In talking to the school, we get to know personal things that we normally wouldn't know, and that puts us in a better position to understand what the client needs and how to go about giving it. And this is what I thought our job was from the beginning, and in the big offices, unfortunately, you can't do that."

Participants are surprised when they come back for their periodic reviews to find they are seeing the same case workers. In larger offices this is atypical. But as more eligible people find out about this new office, the caseload grows and this advantage may disappear. Fortunately, just the small size of this facility eases bureaucratic problems. For example, forms can be handed from one intake worker to the next, without having to go through a paper trail system that could take days. Later on DES opened a Child Protective Services office on school premises in the hope that more families would partake of these services at this location.

The school district does not supervise the DES workers in any way, as the Superintendent explains, "Other than if we have a problem we will let them know, and if they have a problem they let us know. We continue to meet. Originally it was every two weeks, then about once a month... and we are like family here now, and we meet about quarterly."

The usual procedure for the agency that is co-locating its staff is to ask staff members to volunteer to make the move over to the new facility. It should be made clear that the new position involves more than just business as usual and requires the desire to be more deeply involved with families' lives and needs. Often the move is seen as a positive step and co-located individuals are eager to work in a less bureaucratic environment where they can have more impact on



participants' lives. Whether or not the family support director has a say in which staff make the move depends on the lines of authority agreed on by the family support program and the staff's home agency.

Co-location is not necessarily an easy proposition, but the difficulties that may arise can be anticipated and dealt with at the start. Co-location requires introducing the new staff to the program's organizational culture, one in which members work as an interdisciplinary team and approach families with a holistic outlook. Staff managers should bear in mind that co-located staff members need time to adjust to flexible duties and less rigid job descriptions. Because outposted staff people may feel isolated from their agency counterparts, providing them with opportunities to touch base regularly with their main office is important. And remember, meetings to discuss staff roles are crucial to avoiding turf conflicts.<sup>30</sup>

In Gainesville, Florida, workers outposted from the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, the University of Florida's College of Nursing, Mental Health Services, and Santa Fe Community College blend completely into the Family Services Center (FSC). Linda Cantrell, director of the FSC, believes strongly in co-location, not just because of the convenience for the participants, but because she doesn't want to duplicate efforts and realizes that "we'll never be as good as the county public health agency or the University of Florida College of Medicine, we just don't have the training. [So we] use them and work with them in a contractual way to make them part of the one-stop shop."

Cantrell screens outposted applicants, participates in their evaluations, and directly supervises them. "The issue of who governs is really important in this kind of an enterprise and that has to be established and some agency has to take the lead."

## INFLUENCING STAFF OUTSIDE YOUR AGENCY

Since an objective of family support programs is to influence local social service providers to treat families with respect and in the context of their community, you should think about how your program can facilitate this process.



## STAFFS OF COLLABORATING AGENCIES

It is a good idea to meet regularly with other social service agencies for reasons of networking and good will. Another reason is that if you hear that families in your program are upset with their treatment at these agencies, your concerns can be raised at the meetings. You may want to consider holding training sessions for the staffs of these agencies, explaining the empowerment aims of family support and how you expect families to be treated.

In Miami Beach, for example, the Healthy Learner volunteers held meetings with local agencies that their families received services from. The director of the local health clinic was surprised and upset to hear the grievances the mothers had about her staff. Families had to wait too long to see the staff, they complained, and the staff failed to treat them with the respect they deserved.

"I spent 15 minutes saying, 'I'm sorry,'" the director recalls. "I thought, 'Well, it's the first meeting, let them ventilate.' By the second and third meeting, however, I was tired of being beaten to death. I wanted to shout: 'We're doing the best we can!'" But the mothers' words had gotten to her. "I was very upset. I came back to my office and sent out a memo saying that any complaints about being treated badly are cause for dismissal. I wrote, 'I don't care how harassed you are. I don't care if a person swears at you or throws a pot at you. I don't expect anyone to be anything but polite.'"

"I realized that the staff was not insensitive to the needs of the families, because many of them were from the community they served. But they were not trained in how to handle a [difficult] situation." Training, she realized, was the necessary remedy. And if her staff needed guidance she figured other human services workers might as well. She contacted the director of Head Start and two other programs and suggested they pool their resources. The result was a four-week course at the local adult education center covering topics ranging from answering the telephone to responding to angry parents. Today the mothers' meetings with the directors have taken a different tone. While they still say, "We have to wait," the director says, "They add, 'But everyone is so nice.'"

## PRIVATE CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Family support programs trying to encourage high quality and developmentally appropriate early childhood education and daycare will need to go beyond just their own programs to influencing the larger daycare and preschool organizations in the community. As these organizations and businesses may view the family support program as their competitors in attracting children for daycare and preschool, offering them training and technical assistance can improve this relationship.



In Leadville, Colorado, The Center offers technical assistance to the private daycare providers and takes in the providers' children when the providers are ill. In Vermont, Early Education Services (EES) staff members pay monthly visits to the family daycare providers that watch children whose families are funded through its federal Comprehensive Child Development Program. The EES staff offers assistance on developmentally appropriate activities, communicating with parents, and any concerns that the provider may have.

## PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Strengthening the relationship between families and the school system is often a primary focus for family support programs, especially those concerned with school readiness. Experience shows formal teacher education is generally inadequate when it comes to training teachers to deal with parents and see each child in the context of his or her family.

Teachers and administrators need information about the family life, cultural backgrounds, needs and strengths of diverse kinds of families, and techniques and strategies for working with them. Based on the accumulated research evidence, helping school staff assist parents to improve the home educational environment would produce substantial gains for students.<sup>31</sup>

Family support programs that are part of the school district are in an excellent position to provide such training for elementary school teachers. The family support program could develop its own training for teachers or use published materials, such as those developed by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education.



## 3

### Training Family Support Staff

No matter how experienced, nonjudgmental, empathetic, and intelligent your staff members may be, they will need training. Training is an equalizer. It fills in the gaps in staff members' previous education and experience, and gives them a common base of knowledge from which to work.

Training also enables you to impart information to your staff using the philosophy to which your program adheres. The way child development, case management, and other topics are seen in the family support philosophy may be different from the way the staff has learned them before. Consider training as a way to undo previous education. According to Bernice Weissbourd, president of Family Focus in Illinois, many social workers and child development specialists were taught that parenting was not "of primary importance in the life of children." Parents, she notes, "may have even been looked at as hindrances to their child's development." Consequently, training is required to help staff members recognize the strengths of parents in interacting with children and to help them develop those strengths.<sup>32</sup>

Training also updates your staff on new issues. Education 10 years ago did not mention children whose mothers took crack or families with HIV positive members. A new state or federal administration will bring changes in public policies relating to children and families, benefits and entitlement, that your staff will need to be informed of. Training is also an opportunity to introduce staff members to new research developments in the field, as it is unlikely that they have time to keep up with all the latest journals. Training supplements the staff's previous education and experience, which most likely focused on how to respond to symptoms and problems. It reorients them to a prevention mode of service delivery.

Less concretely, but most importantly, training tells your staff members that you feel they are worth investing in and that you recognize it is their work that makes the program succeed.

As Gloria Rodriguez, executive director of Avancé, a family support and education program in San Antonio, Texas, told a conference audience: "It is imperative that effective preparation and training strategies for future early childhood personnel, teachers, social workers, and health practitioners be established to adequately serve low-income, high-risk, multiproblem families." The services these families need, she continued, "are nonconventional, nontraditional, and are



not being taught in institutions of higher learning to future educators, social workers, and health practitioners.”<sup>33</sup>

## ORIENTING NEW STAFF

There are several ways to orient a new staff member to the family support philosophy and practices. One is to pair the new employee with a seasoned employee in the same position and have the new person observe for a while. Another is to start the new employee off with families that are not in terrible crisis, so that the employee is not overwhelmed at the beginning. The federal Comprehensive Child Development Program study found, “As staff members became more accustomed to the uncertain nature of the day-to-day work, became more familiar and comfortable with their roles, they increased their flexibility to respond to multiple tasks with less tension and confusion.”<sup>34</sup> After a designated period of time, say three months, hold a review with the new staff member to see what they have learned and assess whether they are ready to undertake more demanding tasks.

New employees should be given any written materials that have come out of former training sessions. They should also be taught the procedures and bureaucracies of collaborating organizations, local social service agencies, schools, and relevant public institutions, so that they can help participants maneuver through these agencies to get their needed services.

The Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency programs use an eight-day training program to orient new workers. It was developed by the National Resource Center on Family Based Services in Iowa City and is “designed as a family-based equivalent to Head Start’s Child Development Associates training and works to develop competencies in: family systems theory and principles of family development work; relationship-building, interviewing, and family assessment skills; goal setting and planning; coordination of community services; identification of and response to family violence, chemical dependency, and depression; empowerment strategies, including assertiveness, self-esteem building, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills; techniques of group work, community development, and advocacy; and professional development.” The National Resource Center also offers training programs for family development supervisors and family development trainers.<sup>35</sup>



Training for Minnesota Early Learning Design (MELD) for young mothers starts with a weekend retreat, attended by two to five facilitator teams, each consisting of two to four parents. The theme of the training is empowerment. The method includes discussion, lecture demonstrations, role playing, and group decision making. Among the topics addressed: the historical and philosophical framework of MELD; the role of support and information for MELD groups; different support styles and listening skills; and group process, team building, and planning techniques.

Once the MELD volunteers are facilitating groups, they have regular telephone consultations to process what is happening, problem solve, and plan future activities. They also get support for a job well done. At least once every six months, MELD site coordinators talk to facilitators about their delivery and support of information in group settings, their demonstration of knowledge of group dynamics, and their ability to work as a team. The facilitators are asked to measure their satisfaction with the experience and the training and support they receive from the site coordinator.

## DESIGNING INSERVICE TRAINING

Training should be a combination of sessions on interrelated long-term themes, along with isolated workshops that can address a topic in a single session. The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) believes that programs should develop a long-term plan that involves the staff in both teaching and learning. In-house and outside staff members can lead training in areas in which they have expertise.<sup>36</sup>

Programs that have chosen to adopt an existing program have the advantage of starting out with a training package that has been tested by other programs. Parents as Teachers educators, for example, attend one-week training sessions at the national center and periodic inservice sessions. They study such topics as program planning, personal visit lesson plans, key parenting issues (i.e. attachment, language, toilet training, discipline), screening, and evaluation.

Designing your own training program is tougher, but you don't have to go it alone. Start out by learning what other programs, agencies, and schools have to offer in terms of training resources. Perhaps a local agency with similar training needs wants to collaborate on a portion of the program.



Look into whether the local college has a course of study that would be appropriate for your staff members. The Center in Leadville, Colorado works very closely with the local community college. The college runs preservice training paid by federal Job Training Partnership Act funds, holds relevant inservice classes for the staff to attend, and teaches training and adult education classes at The Center.

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentials Program is a national effort to provide training, assessment, and credentialing of child care workers and home visitors. Training leading to the CDA is available at more than 300 schools nationwide as well as at Head Start centers.<sup>37</sup>

A good place to start planning a training program is by forming a group of staff people to brainstorm about the type of training program that would be most effective. "When we got our first grant, the directors reflected on what we had learned in the past 10 years and what we wanted to pass onto others," says one staff member. Think of what training materials you can produce yourself, from handbooks to videos, and consult other programs, schools, and agencies about readily available training materials they have found most useful.

Be sure to include your entire staff in your training plans. Obviously, not all staff positions are relevant to all trainings. But well trained support staff are key to a well-run program. People who are left out of the training process will feel that their contribution to the program is not valued.

Programs with larger budgets may want to consider hiring consultants to design a comprehensive training program. But don't assume that a high-priced consultant will have all the answers. The more direction you provide, the more you will get for your money.

Good training should be practical and concrete, rather than abstract and theoretical. Says Ethel Seiderman, director of the Parent Services Project in Fairfax, California: "To me the ideal would be a blend of dialogue, presentation, or theories and principles, and hands-on experience." Janice Stockman of Early Education Services in Vermont says that this approach works best when training home visitors. "It became apparent that a better way of training home visitors was to go with them, watch what they did, give them support for what they did [well] and help them think of something they might do next time." Role playing is also an effective training device.<sup>38</sup> Trainers should share the collective experience of previous staff members, highlighting lessons learned from failures as well as successes.

Finally, training programs should evolve as feedback is obtained from staff members and program participants. Staff members of the Iowa Family Development and Self-Sufficiency programs were able to suggest topics for training once they were on the job that were not adequately covered in the orientation training,



"The thing I love about our training is that we honor the knowledge each person brings. We're not patronizing. I know that I have a body of knowledge and I want to know what knowledge others bring. The people who do training for the Parent Services Project have to share a similar vision. It would be incongruous to have a didactic and prescriptive trainer if we're asking that people's work with parents reflect their needs, interests, and dreams."

Ethel Seiderman, Director  
Parent Services Project  
Fairfax, California

such as "domestic violence, drug abuse, and knowing when referrals for more specialized care were needed."<sup>39</sup> Some programs have staff members fill out evaluations after trainings, which helps them to fine-tune the training program.

The Rural Alabama Pregnancy and Infant Health Program completely rethought its training strategy after input from young mothers. Initially the training had encouraged home visitors to think of themselves as teachers whose primary role was to convey health information. But young mothers objected to the didactic teaching style of the home visitors, who tended to ignore the young women's developmental needs.

The program's supervisor modified the training program so that home visitors were encouraged not to thrust information at mothers, but to share their own past experiences and beliefs and relate those to the program's methods and goals. Medical and nutritional information was discussed, but the new emphasis was on understanding the developmental tasks mothers and infants faced. The training process focused on how home visitors could build a constructive relationship based on reciprocity and how to find a role within the family context. The training stresses that the new home visitor is a role model, advisor, and friend.

For teachers, training in the chosen curriculum for early childhood educators is a major focus. At The Center in Leadville, Colorado, continuous training is offered. "We use the High/Scope curriculum and we could probably train everyday and it still wouldn't be enough because they're really eager staff," says director Kathy Brenda.

The issues to be addressed in training are a function of your program's goals. Here are some topics you may want to cover:

- Family support philosophy
- The program's history
- The local culture
- Relevant community agencies and how they function
- How the program fits into the larger community
- Networking with other agencies
- Child development and stages in family life
- Examining one's own perceptions about childrearing and how they fit—  
(or don't fit) with the program's philosophy



- Developmental assessment measures
- Family dynamics
- Legal issues for early childhood staff
- Protecting staff members from false charges of child abuse
- Hands-on use of agency reporting forms
- Emergency response systems
- When and how to refer someone to a counselor or agency
- Working with children with special needs
- Working with children who are HIV positive or have been prenatally exposed to drugs
- Being supportive without fostering dependence
- Keeping a healthy emotional distance
- Time management
- Stress management
- What to do when families grow too dependent
- How to avoid becoming overinvolved with a family
- How to determine how assertive to be with families
- How to approach families with low participation
- How to respond to negative parenting practices observed in the home without disempowering parents

Programs report that the challenge of training is ongoing because the knowledge base about family support and early childhood education is constantly expanding and the needs of families are always changing.

Many programs conduct weekly meetings to discuss ongoing training needs. Some devote a few days a month to training conducted by in-house and community staff. At Early Education Services (EES) in Vermont, they do regular in-house trainings. "We have set aside every other Tuesday and maybe one Friday a month for trainings. The training is done by in-house people, the health educator, the social worker, or we bring in someone from the community." As part of influencing the staffs of other community agencies, EES invites the public health staff to every training. In addition, they open their biannual workshops to the community at large.

Cross-agency training can update your staff on family issues and offer an opportunity to develop new curricula. Bob Brancale, who worked on the Early Childhood Family Education initiative in Minnesota, says it is more effective to share services and facilities than funding: "One of the things that we've learned to do when we try to set up cooperative relationships is to base them on resources rather than exchange of dollars. We try to figure out what we can do for them in exchange for what they do for us. One area is inservice, where the agency agrees to include my staff in their inservice activities and we agree to do the same for them. This sets in motion the development of a trusting relationship between those who are direct providers of services to families in the community."<sup>40</sup>



When a local agency held awareness training on working with gay and lesbian families, Brancale's staff attended. Later the agency asked Brancale's staff to add a parent education class for gay and lesbian parents to their program, and they added two classes.

Finally, try and keep funds available for staff members to travel to conferences on topics related to their programs. This gives staff members a chance to keep abreast of the latest research as well as to network with staff members from other programs. At conferences, staff members can trade advice, valuable information about program development and resources, and share experiences.

## FUNDING FOR TRAINING

Staff training is yet one more essential ingredient of family support competing for scarce funds. As you've seen from the wide variety of training methods, some are practically cost-free, such as inviting professionals from state and local agencies to train your staff. Others, such as paying for employees' classes at a college, paying for a nonlocal consultant to provide training, or buying a training package, can cost quite a bit of money.

Where can you get money to pay for training? Different states might have pots of money unique to that state, so here we will only mention federal sources to which everyone has access:

**Federal Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP) from the Department of Health and Human Services.** When writing your proposal for the CCDP grant, a budget for staff training should be included. Early Education Services in Vermont paid for most of its staff training with money from its CCDP grant. Says Judie Jerald: "Anybody who does not at least have an associate's degree, we pay for as many courses as they want to take. The funds come from the Comprehensive Child Development program. It's written right into the grant."

**Federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) through the Department of Labor.** Contact your local Private Industry Council to determine the priorities for how local JTPA money is being spent. This is an excellent pot of funds for training people from low-income populations that is primarily used for training before the job actually begins and then possibly for a portion of on-the-job training. JTPA funds were used very successfully by The Center in Leadville, Colorado. As The Center was starting up, local women went through JTPA-sponsored training at the community college and then did their on-the-job training as teachers at The Center during its first open month. The Center then decided ~~which workers would be hired permanently.~~



**Federal block grants** that are disbursed through the state level, such as Child Care Improvement Grants, IV-A Risk Program and Child Care Block Grants also can be used to fund training for family support and child care staff.

## THE FAMILY STRENGTHS MODEL PHILOSOPHY

A fundamental tenet of family support programs is that families should be addressed by their strengths, not their deficits. While this obviously makes sense, it is not necessarily the way many social service figures approach their participants. Thus, staff new to family support, especially those who may have worked with families in more traditional social service settings, will need training in the family strengths model.

One training program, “A Strengths Model for Learning,” has been developed by the National Center for Family Literacy to train teachers in the philosophy.<sup>41</sup> The training offers four guidelines for the strengths-minded family support staff or teacher setting up a program or curriculum:

*Focus on environment.* The physical environment will reflect the emphasis on communication. Message centers and other areas will allow members to communicate with each other verbally and in writing. The daily routine will allow for frequent student-teacher interaction. Good questioning techniques and cooperative learning strategies support student-teacher relationships. Students will be encouraged to bring artifacts from their home to share as teaching tools.

*Ground the curriculum in the group’s culture.* The instructor should begin by asking participants these questions: What strengths or traits are present in your family? Which ones would you like to develop further? The process must be group-specific in order to develop a culturally relevant set of lessons. Once traits are identified that are important to that particular group, a list of observable characteristics is compiled that the instructor can use to select materials and methods for application and intervention. For example, if the group chooses “time together” as a target trait, a few observable characteristics would be watching television together and discussing the program, or playing indoor and outdoor games together.

*Connect family interests and practices to the development of literacy.* Using materials directly connected to the healthy traits of families and observable characteristics of those traits gives meaning to the function and form of literate behavior. For example, good questioning techniques and strategies are teachable and transferable. They are essential for adult reading and writing processes, and good questioning strategies are important when parents share books and stories with their children.



Recognizing strengths of families and using those aspects of wellness as a focus for curriculum relay to the participants in the program that they are important and what they say matters. What follows is a heightened sense of self-worth, an absolutely necessary attribute in the process of adult education. Improvement in self-esteem supports, affirms, and contributes to the development of literacy. Parents are willing to participate in a teaching-learning environment with their children, understanding that reciprocal education is a legitimate function of the family. Healthy families talk together, which naturally leads to the development of oral language and the confidence to reveal thoughts and ideas outside the home.

*Individualize a course of action.* Once a family identifies its strengths and healthy traits, those strengths form the core of a family support plan and the instructor prepares an action plan based on this.

This training program requires an open, comfortable, and supportive parent-instructor relationship. The ability to empathize and approach families with a nonjudgmental attitude is a key factor in the instructor's success and the program's outcome. The instructor must be responsive to the basic human needs that contribute to self-esteem. The instructor is responsible for establishing and maintaining an environment that encourages participation and growth. The process and the atmosphere within the classroom or program site take into account how people learn. Program activities are highly flexible and can be adapted to suit particular student interests and abilities.

## TEACHING ABOUT MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism involves a lot more than "touchy feely" lessons about accepting differences between people. Training on multiculturalism must include empowerment as a central issue. "Empowering relationships differ markedly from the benevolent helping relationships that characterize much of education and social service work."<sup>42</sup> A model of empowerment views people as capable of solving their problems. A multicultural approach recognizes the specific preferences and needs of racial and ethnic groups and the barriers that prevent them from getting those needs met, whether it be the lack of an interpreter at a school meeting or discrimination on the part of society at large. Most important, it encourages people to use their own power to bring about change. A multicultural approach also recognizes discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual preference, and physical disabilities.

Any good training program will include a multiculturalism and empowerment component. The design of the program should reflect the particular needs of your community. The Cornell Empowerment Project has identified general areas of competency essential for family support staffs, and we've included some suggestions of our own<sup>43</sup>:



- Identify the racial and ethnic groups in the community
- Understand the social conditions in which they live
- Learn about their goals and needs
- Understand cultural differences in attitudes toward pregnancy, childbirth, childrearing, nutrition, and medical care
- Train in bilingual methods
- Understand the empowerment process
- Provide an overview of the historical and legislative context of multicultural education
- Analyze power — concepts of domination and subordination, cycles of personal and structural oppression, power in institutional settings
- Look at power dynamics related to sex roles
- Examine the internalization of oppression
- Support the development of self-worth — identifying and affirming individuals' strengths
- Foster group building — the facilitation of group process
- Teach parents to understand their rights within the community and school system and how to exercise those rights
- Encourage parent participation on school committees and boards
- Build on resources and networks that exist within ethnic and racial communities
- Build multicultural coalitions

Some of the best teachers on this subject are the members of various ethnic groups, whether they be political leaders in the community or parents who are willing to spend some time talking and working with your staff. It is a process of listening rather than telling, particularly if your staff members are not from the same ethnic or socioeconomic group as community members.

Your staff members should also spend some time looking at their own beliefs about different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups and how those beliefs are manifest in the real world. The case study method is an excellent way to approach this subject. Discussing real-life examples can help staff members analyze their own assumptions and learn new approaches to dealing with differences among peoples.

## USING CASE STUDIES

One objective of training is to provide the staff with an opportunity to work on possible dilemmas before they arise. Staff members can contemplate, role play, and argue over appropriate actions. Case studies, long used in law and business education, and which are being used increasingly in teacher education, are excellent tools for conducting such training in family support programs.



Cases are written in a variety of styles in order to elicit different responses and teach different ideas. One case may illustrate the proper way of handling a situation by providing a model of how an expert functions, and trainers can use the case as an “instance of exemplary practice to show that problem framing is a creative act, an act of professional imagination.”<sup>44</sup> An equally effective and possibly more thought-provoking type of case is one that “carries no presumption that the case itself illustrates either exemplary or ineffective practice.”<sup>45</sup>

Case studies are well suited for training workshops because they stimulate discussion “through which students learn to identify actual problems, to recognize the key players and their agendas, and to become aware of those aspects of the situation that contribute to the problem.”<sup>46</sup> There are several benefits to using the case method for training. For instance, cases help students develop critical analysis and problem solving skills. Case-based instruction encourages reflective practice and deliberate action. The study of cases helps students gain familiarity with analysis and action in complex situations that may not represent a perfect match between theory and practice. And finally, the case method promotes the creation of a community of learners<sup>47</sup> — and often proves that group thinking is synergistic thinking.

Case studies are valuable to family support in order to illustrate best practices and help staff members brainstorm solutions to situations they are likely to encounter. Training programs need to encourage staff members to be creative problem solvers. Among the dilemmas you may want to address using case studies and other modes of training are:

- *How should staff members respond to community members who do not want to participate in the program? When is it appropriate and helpful to encourage participation and when is it important to back off?*
- *How can a staff member enhance family strengths in the context of families who have weaknesses? How, for example, should a staff member respond to a parent who believes that physical punishment is the only way to teach her child a lesson — and that the “experts” who say otherwise don’t understand her kid?*
- *How should staff members balance the needs of highly stressed parents and children?*
- *What should staff members do when they find that they are spending all their time arranging for social services for parents instead of teaching them how to work with their children?*
- *How can staff members gain the trust of parents who fear reprisals from social service agencies without compromising the well-being of the children? When should they report evidence of abuse and neglect?*
- *How can staff members help families without fostering dependency? How should they respond to parents who want them to continue filling out forms and arranging for vital social services?*



- *How can staff members, after gaining the trust of the family, then hold them accountable and confront them on actions that work against the family's stated goals?*<sup>48</sup>
- *How does the staff member function as both a friend and a professional to the family? What does this dual role do to objectivity?*

• • •

While emphasizing how crucial your staff is to program success, we hope that we have made you aware of the key personnel issues that may affect your program. Managing your staff can be a difficult and frustrating part of program work, but it can be equally rewarding. After all, staff members have chosen to be family support workers because they share your goal of empowering families. Reinforcing the team approach, while maintaining supervision, is a challenging balancing act. But it will be worth it when you hear from your participants how much they value your staff. As one participant recalls:

Before I knew it I was telling her (the home visitor) my whole life story. And she was very kind and listening with much concern, so that was real surprising to me. She gave me the phone number of the Family Services Center and before she was out of that door I was on the phone. I called and then got an even more devastating shock because the voice on the other end of the line was very kind, too. And I thought, this can't be true, because I've been to other agencies and I've had a rough time. They told me to come over and I think I arrived 30 minutes early the next morning.

## Endnotes

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## A Note on Research Methods

This series is based on data collected from a variety of sources. We did an extensive review of the family support literature using the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC). Using the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) database we identified programs that would provide good examples of funding, staff development, evaluation, collaboration, and community outreach. We then wrote these programs to send us up to date information from annual reports, unpublished manuscripts, brochures, and other forms of descriptive literature.

HFRP's *Raising Our Future: Families, Schools and Communities Joining Together* provided a wealth of information about programs. We did a secondary analysis of the original survey data on 75 programs. We also did a follow-up telephone survey of a sample of these programs to analyze patterns of change in their service delivery.

The series also utilized data collected from telephone and in-person interviews. A number of the series writers were simultaneously involved in field-based case study research. Their research yielded an enormous amount of taped interviews that were transcribed at the HFRP office and coded on Ethnograph software. The coded data as well as notes from telephone interviews with other programs provided a rich source of material. Statements from program staff that are quoted throughout the texts come from these two types of interviews.

Each of the volumes in the series contains a resource guide that provides the reader sources of additional information on a topic. The resource guide lists and annotates references and gives the addresses and telephone numbers of organizations where further information can be obtained.

## Resource Guide

Bruner, C., Berryhill, M., & Lambert, M. (1992). *Making welfare work: A family approach*.  
Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.

This book details the history, results, and continuing challenges of Iowa's Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Grant program. Appendices provide models of planning, implementing, and evaluating family strengths programs. Includes a section on enabling legislation. This is a good reference for getting ideas about training and research components. For more information contact:

Child and Family Policy Center  
100 Court Avenue, Suite 312  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
(515) 280-9027  
(515) 243-5941 FAX

*Courses leading to a master's degree in family support at Nova University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.*

Among the courses this unique program offers are "Adult, Adolescent, and Child Development," "Family Systems," "Assessment and Evaluation of Family Support Programs," and "Program Models." This is a good reference for getting ideas about training and research components. For more information about the curriculum, write:

Department of Child and Youth Care Studies  
Abraham Fischler Center  
Nova University  
3301 College Avenue  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314  
(305) 475-7457

Gamse, B. C., & Weiss, H. B. (1987). *What we know about home visits: A review of research and practice*.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

This paper examines the use of home visits as a service delivery strategy in family support and education programs. It also questions and challenges alternative forms of home visiting and the applicability of such programs to participants. For more information contact:

Harvard Family Research Project  
Longfellow Hall, Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
(617) 495-9108  
(617) 495-8594 FAX

Jorde, P. (1982). *Avoiding burnout: Strategies for managing time, space, and people in early childhood education*. Washington, DC: Acropolis Books.

Sound advice on preventing burnout is this book's strong point. After exploring the conditions in the human service professions that tend to foster burnout, Jorde offers suggestions for successful recovery and future prevention. Includes a list of suggested readings.

Kagan, S. L., Powell, D. R., Weissbourd, B., & Zigler, E. F. (Eds.). (1987). *America's family support programs: Perspectives and prospects*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

This book provides an overview of American family support programs — their historical and philosophical origins, as well as the different forms they take depending on their focus. Subjects covered include child abuse prevention, daycare, early childhood programs, home-school linkages, and special needs. Chapters on funding, staffing, research issues, and evaluation of programs are also helpful.

Kleinfeld, J. S. (1990). *The case method in the preparation of teachers: A. Bibliography of teaching cases in education, B. Creating your own cases*. Unpublished manuscript.

This bibliography lists general background reading, sources of cases for education courses, and suggestions and examples for creating your own cases. For more information contact:

Judith S. Kleinfeld  
Professor of Psychology  
Northern Studies Program  
College of Liberal Arts  
University of Alaska  
Fairbanks, AK 99775  
(907) 474-5266

Larner, M., Halpern, R., & Harkavy, O. (1992). *Fair start for children: Lessons learned from seven demonstration projects*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

This book details the experiences of seven demonstration projects designed to help impoverished parents and children. Chapter 10 provides in-depth coverage of staffing issues; in particular, how to choose between hiring professional or lay workers, and why time-use analysis rather than traditional cost-efficiency analysis is a preferable approach for making decisions about staffing.

Merseth, K. K. (1991). *The case for cases in teacher education*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

This author builds a "case" for importing this method of instruction into teacher training. The case method stresses a mode of shared inquiry and problem solving, which Merseth argues is critical for meeting the teacher requirements of the twenty-first century. For more information contact:

AACTE Publications  
One Dupont Circle, Suite 610  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 293-2450

Moles, O. (1991). *Schools and families together: Helping children learn more at home: Workshops for parent educators. Schools helping urban parents strengthen home learning.*  
Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

These two books are resources for training teachers to be more family support oriented. Topics include: family environments and how schools can aid home learning; school programs and how to promote family involvement; and school district policies for parent involvement programs. For more information contact:

Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
US Department of Education  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20208  
(202) 219-2050  
(202) 219-1466 FAX

*National Center for Family Literacy*

The center has developed a "strengths model" for enhancing parents' abilities. Available are materials to reinforce parenting skills and for training staff to implement their programs. For more information contact:

National Center for Family Literacy  
401 South 4th Street, Suite 610  
Louisville, KY 40202  
(502) 584-1133  
(502) 584-0172 FAX

*Networking Bulletin: Empowerment and Family Support*

The bulletin is published monthly and serves as a forum for discussion and information sharing about empowerment and increasing the productivity of "human power." It includes monthly feature articles, resources, and a directory of events of interest. For more information contact:

Cornell Empowerment Project  
G19A Martha Van Rensselaer Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
(607) 255-1819  
(607) 255-9836 FAX

*Parents as Teachers National Center*

Missouri's Parents as Teachers Program is a home-school partnership designed to give children the best possible start in life and to support parents in their role as their children's first teacher. It is a model that has been popular throughout the country. The center offers customized training and staff development programs for a curriculum designed to strengthen the foundations of learning. For more information contact:

Parents as Teachers National Center  
Marillac Hall, University of Missouri-St. Louis  
8001 Natural Bridge Road  
St. Louis, MO 63121  
(314) 553-5738

Seppanen, P. S., & Heifetz, J. (1988). *Community education as a home for family support and education programs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

This book explores how and why schools are the appropriate place to situate family support and education programs aimed at families with preschool-age children. Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) initiative is examined in depth, as are 12 similar programs across the country. For more information contact:

Harvard Family Research Project  
Longfellow Hall, Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
(617) 495-9108  
(617) 495-8594 FAX

Wasik, B. H., Bryant, D. M., & Lyons, C. M. (1990). *Home visiting: Procedures for helping families*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

This book documents the best practices of home visiting occurring around the country by examining home visiting as one component of a large service network for families. The book is geared to both the home visitors and their supervisors and covers concrete material such as: personnel issues, visiting difficult families, and conducting assessments of home visiting.

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## About the Harvard Family Research Project

The Harvard Family Research Project was established in 1983 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education by Dr. Heather B. Weiss, who continues as its director. The Project conducts and disseminates research about programs and policies to strengthen and support families with young children.

The Project's mission is to examine and assist in the development of policies and programs to empower families and communities as contexts of human development.

Specializing in applied policy research, the Project's outlook encompasses the view that to educate the whole child, parents, schools, and other community agencies must redefine their roles to include partnerships to support child development from infancy through adolescence. It maintains that to sustain gains, support initiatives must be continuous over a child's life.

The Project is nationally recognized for providing much of the data demonstrating the value of preventive, comprehensive, collaborative, and family-focused services. It has a diverse research agenda, supported by public and private funders, that is designed to inform and shape national policy debates, advance evaluation practice, and encourage progressive program development.

The audience for the Project's work ranges from national and state policy makers to researchers and local practitioners, many of whom have benefitted from the Project's ability to provide new perspectives and suggest creative solutions.