



Building and Maintaining a Neighbourhood Engagement Culture

A 'How To' Guide for Neighbourhood Engagement Practices in every Family Centre

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Introduction:

The following document was developed to assist Family Centre Teams with creating a consistent approach to neighbourhood engagement. The intent of this document is not to be prescriptive but to offer many opportunities to building the “culture” of an engaged neighbourhood.

Definition of Neighbourhood Engagement

Through neighbourhood engagement we build meaningful relationships and foster a sense of pride and belonging with people who live, work and play in our neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood engagement is an inclusive and responsive process that:

- **Is ongoing and always evolving;**
- **Builds on the strengths, assets and skills of the community;**
- **Encourages open communication, input and feedback;**
- **Supports participation and involvement;**
- **Reflects the unique characteristics and needs of a neighbourhood;**
and,
- **Nurtures shared activities and community priorities.** ¹

Additional Definitions

Neighbourhood(s): Refers to the geography surrounding the Family Centre and can be one of many areas adjacent to the Family Centre

Catchment Area: The neighbourhoods from which Family Centres or services attracts a population that accesses its information and supports. Schools in the catchment area are called a Family of Schools.

Family Centre Teams: Refers to partner organization staff, lead agency staff, and community members with a desire to provide support to Family Centres and in some case children, youth and families. This may be referred to as the Strategic Collaboration Table in some Family Centres.

Community Members: Refers to those living, working or playing in the neighbourhood surrounding the Family Centre

¹ (Endorsed by FAMILY CENTRE Governance on September 26, 2019)
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In 2011, the Community Development Planning Framework ([Alberta Recreation & Parks Association](#)), was adopted by the Child and Youth Network as the common neighbourhood community development planning approach for Family Centres and the Family Centred Service System.

As a high performing Family Centred Service System, the five steps in the Community Development Planning Framework are acknowledged as important to build an engaged culture in Family Centre Neighbourhoods. The first five steps are:

Steps 1 – 5 of Community Development

1. Ignite and Invite Others to Participate
2. Share Strengths and Successes
3. Research Your Community
4. Define Priorities
5. Engage Others Who Need to Be Involved

This document is a “blueprint” that can be used in any neighbourhood. It provides the necessary steps, resources and strategies that can be incorporated into each unique neighbourhood engagement approach, in conjunction with the Active Creative Engaged Communities Toolkit found at [link to facilitative tools](#)



1. **IGNITE AND INVITE OTHERS TO PARTICIPATE**

The first step for engaging children, youth, and families in Family Centre neighbourhoods is to spark their interest and to include them in planning and activities. The following is a list of recommended strategies for engaging others to participate in Family Centres and neighbourhoods:

- Provide an orientation for all staff and service providers working in Family Centres which includes:
 - The definition of neighbourhood engagement
 - A discussion about the welcoming culture of Family Centres
 - Information about the value of conversations with residents and other service providers and the value of encouraging team members to engage in conversation and promote relevant activities and opportunities
 - The importance of participating in Strategic Collaboration meetings and/or Family Centre Team meetings and the value in sharing what children, youth, and families in the neighbourhood are sharing with other partners at these meetings
 - A tour of the Family Centre
 - An overview of programs and services offered
 - The value of hosting community-based events for building relationships and engaging residents. Events should reflect the needs and interests of the community and could include family fun nights, barbecues or picnics, and gatherings related to activities such as back to school or holiday times.
- Establish connections with Community Organizations/Groups (such as Service Clubs, Neighbourhood Associations).
- Host community events in the Family Centre. It is recommended that each Family Centre host a minimum of one community event annually at the Family Centre, open to all community members.
- When planning events, include the following considerations:
 - Have food and activities for all ages.
 - Include community members in the neighbourhood in planning and implementation.
 - Encourage partners/volunteers who are hosting activities to speak about the benefits that the Family Centre offers to children, youth, and families.
 - Have promotional materials available such as calendars, postcards, banners, promotional items and flyers. Use Family Centre branded materials, such as table cloths for displays.
 - Family Centre staff, partners, and volunteers should wear identification at events in order to be easily recognizable (button, lanyard, t-shirt to wear that says: “Ask me about the Family Centre”).
 - Draws for prizes offer an opportunity to collect contact information to add to e-blast lists (permission required).
 - Use questionnaires or a conversation wall to ask people to provide comments or suggestions about types of activities, programs, services that they would like to be able to access through the Family Centre.

- Although it is tempting to try to have a presence at all events that take place in the community, it is suggested that the following events be prioritized.
 - School events
 - Home and School events (all schools in the Family Centre catchment area).
 - Partner events in the community.
 - Events organized by the local Community/ Neighbourhood Associations.

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2. SHARE STRENGTHS & SUCCESSES

With this step, the Family Centre Team identifies the strengths and assets of the neighbourhood. These may include: people's skills, physical spaces, and established celebrations. This approach uses this information to build on the identified strengths and successes rather than the perceived needs of the community. The neighbourhood's strengths and assets can then be harnessed and utilized to improve and inform the service planning.

Activities could include:

- Standing agenda item at the Family Centre Team meetings: Any new programs, physical locations, people, celebrations, impact stories
- Sharing photos (with permission), welcome stories of new partners and residents, impact stories on social media, bulletin boards, e-blasts, etc.
- Asking partners to champion and lead meetings

3. RESEARCH YOUR COMMUNITY

This step involves understanding who lives, works, and plays in the neighbourhood – learning more about the language, culture, history, ages of residents, built environment, and local organizations can be critical to knowing the strengths and assets of a community. There are many ways to research the neighbourhood. Listen often to those who live, work, and play in the neighbourhood and consider the impacts of what they are saying. Take regular inventory of what is being offered. Utilize the data available to understand the neighbourhood's strengths, barriers, and challenges. This can include

- Community profiles are available from City of London Policy and Planning staff with a synopsis of demographic information. This information is important to keep handy and, refer to as new partnerships and programs are being considered and designed.
- Information from London's Child and Youth Network's Family Centred Service System's annual survey of Family Centres (Measurement & Evaluation Committee) should be shared at the Strategic Collaboration Table and considered during Service Plan reviews and program planning.
- Environics is marketing research that may outline specific behaviours and demographic information of a neighbourhood. This is available from City of London Policy and Planning staff.
- Information and referral tracking from EarlyON, ON y va, and Family Centre programs and services.
- A neighbourhood inventory to understand what services and programs are offered in the neighbourhoods
- Facebook analytics.
- SoutFamilyinfo.ca and other online information
- Social media engagement opportunities to find out more about people in your neighbourhood. For example, posting questions on the Family Centre Facebook page to gather data. Encourage neighbourhood organizations (library, neighbourhood/community associations, community centres, etc.) to post as well and share the comments. Questions could include:
 - What is your favourite neighbourhood place?
 - Other than screen time, what are your family's favourite activities?
 - What do you love about our neighbourhood?
 - What do you like to do outside?
 - What do you and your family like to do in the winter?
 - What are your holiday traditions?
 - What is important to keep your family well & healthy?

4. DEFINE PRIORITIES

It is important that all feedback from community members, whether through surveys, a compilation of social media comments, or discussions during programs and services, are reviewed at the Family Centre Team meetings and are considered during annual reviews of the Family Centre Service Plan. This ongoing feedback can also be used for program development.

Where a significant number of community members are expressing interest in particular activities, types of programming or where gaps in available services have been identified, the Family Centre Team should recognize these as to best accommodate the identified needs through the Family Centre.

5. ENGAGE OTHERS WHO NEED TO BE INVOLVED

Continue to invite others who live, work or play in the neighbourhood to conversations and relationship building activities. Key relationships include:

- Family of Schools, School Principals, Vice-Principals and Other Staff
 - It is ideal to schedule specific meetings with the Principal and Vice-Principal early in the school year to share how the Family Centre can be a support to families from each school in the catchment area.
 - Request an opportunity to present at staff meetings for each school in the Family Centre catchment area (engage staff in conversations regarding some of the challenges faced by children and families they work with and discuss how the services and supports of the Family Centre could be of assistance i.e.: referrals for families to services).
- Children, youth and families residing in the Family Centre Catchment area
 - Prioritize relationship-building activities with people who aren't currently involved in the Family Centre. This means going to public spaces outside the Family Centre to meet families where they are at and engage them in conversations, surveys, games, etc. about the benefits of their local Family Centre
 - Focused efforts are needed to engage families who may be harder to reach due to barriers to participating, including those from equity-seeking populations

It is beneficial to collaborate and connect with the following groups who have a clear understanding of the neighbourhood. This may include:

- Home and School and School Councils
- Neighbourhood/Community Associations
- Local committees supporting specific issues and activities
- Service Clubs
- Residents/resident advisory committee

Invite groups to host their meetings at your Family Centre

- Partner agency staff meetings
- Community of School meetings
- Home & School and School Council Meetings
- Neighbourhood/Community Association meetings

*Offer a tour of the Centre and/or a short presentation about the Centre during their meetings

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT FAMILY CENTRES

It is important to consider volunteer opportunities to engage people more fully in the Family Centre. Different lead agencies have different policies and procedures regarding volunteers and it is important to always consider those when determining opportunities for volunteerism. Opportunities to engage volunteers in Family Centres may include:

- Community events
- Supporting play groups
- Supporting reception/phones

In addition to community-based volunteers, there may be opportunities for placement students and partners to engage volunteers in their programs under their supervision.