
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

Key Principles and Characteristics of Family Resource Centers

There are 55 Family Resource Centers in California, and each is unique, reflecting the needs of the community in which they serve. Some operate as independent sites, while others are based in various organizations including regional centers, local education agencies, public health facilities, hospitals, or homes. All Family Resource Centers, however, operate in accordance with the principles of family support practice. The nine principles are:

- 1) Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
- 2) Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.
- 3) Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs and to communities.
- 4) Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multi-cultural society.
- 5) Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
- 6) Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
- 7) Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
- 8) Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
- 9) Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance and administration.

Family Resource Centers may provide parent-to-parent support to families of infants and toddlers, birth to 36 months, who are at risk of or have developmental disabilities. Other services may include peer counseling, home visits, information and referral, parent education, support services in other languages, translation assistance, and support groups for parents.¹

Unlike traditional service providers, Family Resource Centers not only work to improve the lives of children and their families, but they also work to change the systems that serve them and the communities in which they live. The overall mission of Family Resource Centers is to promote healthy families *and* communities. Family Resource Centers may strategically address community issues such as unreliable bus service, inadequate medical care, unsafe parks, and other issues that negatively impact families.²

Consequently, Family Resource Centers provide a wonderful opportunity to support pregnant women and their families. Whether by expanding existing Family Resource Centers or by creating new ones, programs may be designed to support pregnant women such as breastfeeding classes, parenting classes, nutrition information and referral, and so forth. Family Resource Centers may offer

childcare and be a safe space for pregnant women, their families, and the surrounding community. In addition, by addressing community issues such as unreliable bus service, inadequate medical care, and unsafe parks, Family Resource Centers work to improve local environments for all community members, including pregnant women. As a result, Family Resource Centers provide social support for pregnant women and their families and also create a space to foster community building and development – all of which help to promote both healthier families and communities.

Steps to Creating a Family Resource Center

Step 1: Find People

Contact community members who might be interested in starting a family resource center, including school officials, hospital/clinic administrators, parents, families, doctors, nurses, and other health professionals. Meet with interested individuals to share ideas and discuss the needs of families and communities. Be sure to include people of different backgrounds and experiences and involve them in the planning process from the beginning.

Step 2: Establish a Planning/Advisory Group

Invite members of the community to join a planning/advisory group to carry the project forward. Make sure that community members and organizations are represented and well balanced. Encourage doctors to participate to act as clinical advisors.

Step 3: Review Resources

Familiarize yourself with family resource centers. Review the literature on family resource centers by doing

library/Internet searches. Identify currently existing family resource centers in the community. Meet with them to learn what others are doing and discuss possible collaboration.

Step 4: Identify Funding Sources

It is worthwhile to develop public-private partnerships to build a sustainable source of funding. Research other possible funding sources. Most family resource centers are funded by federal and state grants. You may want to collaborate with other organizations.

Step 5: Find a Location

Given available resources, decide where the family resource center will be located. Be sure to consider accessibility to families and space to accommodate services. Plan the layout, furniture, equipment, signs, etc.

Step 6: Define Mission Statement and Objectives

Develop a vision or mission statement to guide planning and decision-making. Be sure to incorporate the nine principles of family support practice mentioned above in your mission statement, goals, and objectives. As your center grows and expands, be sure that your programs and services adhere to your mission statement and goals.

Step 7: Develop Programs and Services

Decide what services you plan to offer at your family resource center. Unless you have substantial financial support, it may be necessary to start off modestly. You can later expand services in response to the needs of the community.

Step 8: Find Staff

Decide how many positions you need to fill so that your family resource center operates smoothly. Consider both employees and volunteers. What will be their responsibilities? What skills, education, and training are you looking for?

Step 9: Write a Budget

Include both start-up and operational costs.

Step 10: Promote the Center

Discuss marketing plans and other ways to promote the family resource center so that families and other members of the community will utilize the services and programs offered.

Step 11: Develop an Evaluation Plan

Develop a good program evaluation to see how well the center is meeting the needs of patients, families, and other users. Also use feedback from the center's users to improve its programs and operations.

Hints to Recruit, Engage, and Sustain Parent Involvement

1. Listen. Listen. Listen to families.
2. Distribute flyers where parents congregate: in schools, at playgrounds, Laundromats, at WIC offices, at Little League games, at grocery stores.
3. Remember that many children are cared for by grandparents, aunts, uncles; include them in your outreach by specifically mentioning them as caretakers in your publications.
4. Conduct community needs assessments.
5. Attend community meetings.
6. Attend community fairs.
7. Attract parents to your center by having them lead cultural celebrations and invite friends.
8. Create a center environment that is family friendly, casual and intimate, and reflects the community it serves.
9. Require everyone who receives services through your center to "give back" by volunteering time.
10. Sponsor community forums where community members can speak to the police, city council people, and school administrators.
11. Encourage sharing of culturally specific foods and recipes.
12. Develop a parental or community advisory council.
13. Welcome both critical and positive feedback from parents.
14. Develop a parent-to-parent mentoring program.
15. Have parents lead skill-building trainings such as cooking, sewing, and auto repair.
16. Pay for parents to attend trainings and workshops.
17. Involve parents in strategic planning for your center.
18. Have "adult only" activities, such as parents night out, and provide child care.
19. Plant a community garden at the center with parent and family participation.
20. Have parents and families create mission statements for their family and ask them how the center can support them in accomplishing the mission.
21. Invite local newspapers to "tell a story" of one of the parents involved with your center.

- 22. Organize community improvement activities with parents such as litter pick-ups or neighborhood watches.
- 23. Send thank you notes to parents who volunteer with the center.
- 24. Recognize special family successes or celebrations.
- 25. Have a family bulletin board up in the front of your center with photos of involved families.
- 26. Provide a suggestion box. Answer suggestions on the bulletin board.
- 27. Include fathers by installing a diaper changing station in the men's bathroom at your center.

- Corporation for National and Community Service - www.nationalservice.org

Source Materials & Useful Resources

1. CA Department of Developmental Services, Early Start – Family Resource Centers/Networks. Available at: <http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ESFamilyResource.cfm>
2. Working Strategies. Community Development and Family Resource Centers. Vol 5, Issue 1, 2001. Available at: <http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/pdf/newsletters/winter0001.pdf>
3. Institute for Family Centered Care. Special Topics: Patient and Family Resource Centers. Getting Started. Available at: <http://www.familycenteredcare.org/special-topics-frame.html>
4. Working Strategies. Parent Involvement – Making it Happen. Vol 5, Issue 3, 2001. Available at: <http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/pdf/newsletters/summer01.pdf>
5. Working Strategies. Funding Your Family Resource Center – Notes from the Field. Vol 6, Issue 1, 2002. Available at: <http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/pdf/newsletters/spring02.pdf>

Useful Funding Websites

- CA Department of Education - <http://goldmine.cde.ca.gov>
- The Foundation Center - http://fdncenter.org/for_individuals/
- Grantmakers for Education - www.edfunders.com
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families - www.acf.dhhs.gov
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Home and Communities - www.hud.gov
- U.S. Department of Education - www.ed.gov
- CA Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism - <http://www.goserv.ca.gov/index.asp>

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