Expanding Our View of Community Engagement & Collaboration
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July 2015

NMAIMH competencies addressed
Systems Expertise
• community resources
Working with Others
• building & maintaining relationships
• collaboration

_I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples._

(author unknown)

A major theme for New Mexico Home Visiting this year is community engagement and collaboration. In the May article, _Community & Recruitment_, Cathy Sánchez, addressed building connections within the community, in part, so that resources and supports are more accessible to parents (including home visiting). And she talked about the importance of developing relationships over time in order to build those connections.

In thinking about expanding our view of community engagement, we might reflect on the popular quote, “There is no such thing as a baby ... if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone” (Winnicott, 1947/1957, p. 137). The same could be said for families: if you set out to describe a family, you will find you are describing a family that is embedded in a community.

Communities occur at many different levels in terms of size, geographical areas, health or well-being and what the participants have in common. How we come to understand the communities around us will help define how we go about the work of building connections and creating opportunities. Which level of community do we want to focus on? Are there different communities we might want to get to know and tap into for different types of resources or support? With this in mind what else might be included in our expanded view of community engagement?

Home visiting programs are successful in part because they address protective factors that can help buffer families against chronic stress or stressful events. One protective
factor often discussed is social connectedness. Part of the screening process for the NM CYFD Home Visiting Program involves learning about social supports available to a family because we know that when parents are isolated, families may be more vulnerable. Whenever we bring communities together and create opportunities for social connectedness, the potential is there for additional supportive relationships. These types of gatherings can range from a family day at the park sponsored by a home visiting program, to an event that brings together a variety of community partners.

As we think about reaching out, maybe to do a craft group, to celebrate a particular cultural event, or around a specific topic related to parenting, are we thoughtful about who we are reaching out to? Do we want the entire family, mothers, fathers, grandparents as parents? How does our understanding of the communities around us inform our decisions to, in this example, help parents feel less isolated and more connected?

Another way to engage community partners in support of families is when children graduate from their home visiting program. This transition is often an important step for young children and families. It is an opportunity for both the child and the parent to grow their world and enter another community. There are a host of possibilities from library story hours to Head Start, for example. Who are your community partners here?

We started the May article talking about recruitment, which is often the reason programs reach out to the community. New opportunities for referrals to your program, however, will flow from all of these activities as the program and staff become better known in the community, or layers of communities. Recruitment, instead of a potential challenge, will be a natural outcome of building connections.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- To what extent, and in what ways, do you see families as part of a larger community in your area?
- What are some unique opportunities that might be available as you consider different ways to build connections between parents and families in your community?
- What are the resources in the community for children after home visiting?
- Are there formal or informal structures that can be set up to assist families and the community to think about transitions?
- What are some unique ways that your program can expand its views of community engagement?

References/Additional Resources