

Coming Together for Children

Six Community Partnerships Make a Big Difference

Community partnerships serving young children and families take many forms. The six profiles here share stories and photographs from programs in different communities engaged in innovative, creative approaches to learning. The programs have varied goals, but they share a common focus on linking community resources to enhance learning opportunities for the children and families they serve.

Compiled by Susan Friedman

Play, Recyclables, and Teen Mentoring Fostering Social Skills in an After-School Program

— *Walter F. Drew, Cofounder,
Reusable Resources Association, Melbourne, Florida*

IN COCOA BEACH, FLORIDA, teenagers mentor younger children in creative joint play, building structures out of recycled materials from the Florida Reusable Resource Network. The project began at the Florida Kiwanis Convention in 2005. I spontaneously invited young children and Kiwanis Key Club members to play with the recycled materials I had brought to the conference to introduce our resource network. The interplay between the teens and younger children was inspiring.

Following the conference, Kathy Cool, school-age child care coordinator at Roosevelt Elementary in Cocoa Beach, and I discussed the idea of implementing a teen mentoring program focused on play with children in her program. Kathy's main interest was helping the K–6 children develop cooperative learning skills through play.

That fall Cocoa Beach High School Key Club members took part in a series of workshops sponsored by the local Kiwanis. Individually and in groups, they played with recycled materials and kept a written journal on their experiences. The workshops prepared the teens to lead play sessions

in Roosevelt Elementary School's after-school program.

When the play sessions started, the only instructions the teens gave the children were to play together in small groups and cooperatively build a common structure. As the young children engaged in imaginative play using recycled materials, such as foam tubes, blocks, and metallic



Illustration © Marti Betz

Susan Friedman, MEd, serves as assistant editor for *Young Children* and coordinator for *Beyond the Journal*.

This article is available online in *Beyond the Journal*, March 2007, at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj.

cloth, they contributed their individual ideas and together negotiated a vision for their project. They took turns placing items on the structure and cooperated to solve structural problems.

Kathy views the play sessions as a great success. "I see play as a basic learning skill," she comments. "The children pay attention and learn how much more they can do when they cooperate and work together. The parents see the joy and excitement their children express over what they have accomplished, and that helps parents value play as an important instructional activity." One high school student, having observed the interplay between children's imaginations and cooperative play, noted several things: "The children seemed very intent within their own individual imaginations even though in groups they were able to construct together. It's really amazing how they can understand each other's visions. Together they built a single structure, but in each of their minds it was their own."

All of the adults involved with the project feel so strongly about its success that they have introduced the idea in other high schools and child care settings. The project deeply impressed Kiwanis International Young Children Priority One coordinator Jane Judy-Miller, and she has proposed Kiwanis sponsorship of a similar project worldwide.

For more information about this program, visit www.reusableresources.org. Some information in this profile is drawn from the booklet *A Successful Key Club Mentoring Program: Mentored Play Sessions in a K-6 After-School Program, Implementing the Mandate: "Young Children Priority One,"* by Hugh Halsey and Walter F. Drew (Melbourne, FL: Reusable Resources Association, 2006).



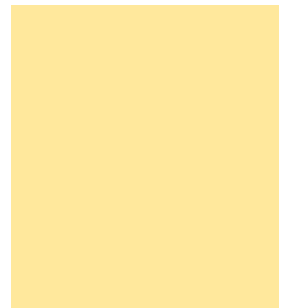
Courtesy Walter F. Drew

As the young children engaged in imaginative play, they contributed their individual ideas and together negotiated a vision for their project.



Courtesy Walter F. Drew

Together they built a single structure, but in each of their minds it was their own.



Artists in the Community

Bookmaking with Elementary-age Children

— Janet Petitpas, Deputy Director,
Bay Area Discovery Museum, Sausalito, California

THE BAY AREA DISCOVERY MUSEUM in Sausalito, California, connects children with scientists, artists, and other professionals through a variety of museum and community programs. One such project, My Artist Book, was developed with the Canal Community Alliance After-School Program in San Rafael. This project offered children in the after-school program a series of workshops led by the museum's creative arts specialist and its photographer, along with a professional book artist. They worked with the children to help them create personalized stories reflecting their experiences in the community. One of the project goals was to empower children as active participants in their community by helping them document and celebrate its history.

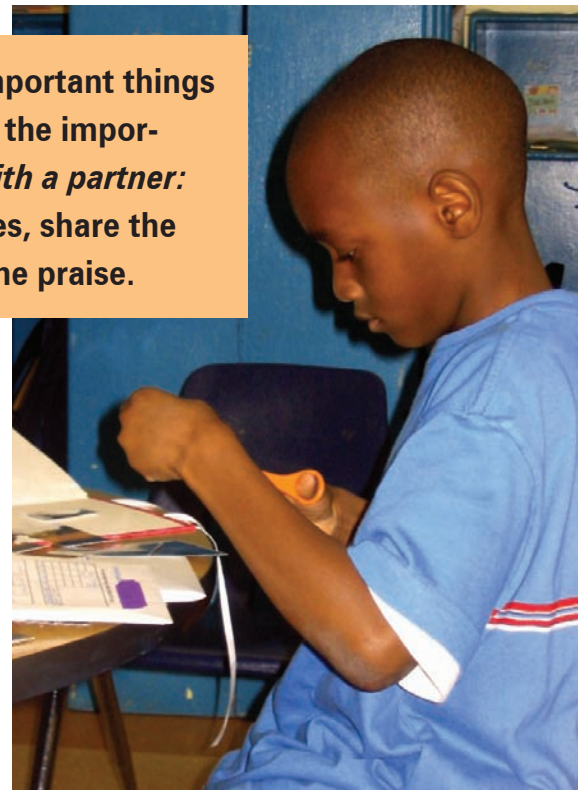
Over a series of weeks the photographer guided the children in learning photography skills, including how to compose a picture. The creative arts specialist engaged the children in thinking about the components of storytelling and considering carefully what they wanted their story to convey about themselves and their community through their books. Later, the book artist helped the children select photos that best told their stories, decide on story text placement, and construct their books.

The culminating event for the My Artist Book project took place when the children came to the museum with their families to show them the display of the books they created. In the roles of guest speakers, the children described and discussed the bookmaking process with the museum's general audience. The children and their families were proud of their book creations and excited to see that museum visitors found the exhibit interesting.

Community collaboration can be challenging. At the museum we work with groups in advance to establish project goals and to ensure that together we can create a program that serves the community's interest. One of the most important things we have learned is the importance of *sharing with a partner*: share the challenges, share the leadership, share the praise.

For more information about the museum's community programs, contact the author by e-mail at jpetitpas@badm.org.

One of the most important things we have learned is the importance of *sharing with a partner*: share the challenges, share the leadership, share the praise.



Courtesy of Bay Area Discovery Museum

Learning about Babies

Parent and Baby Sessions at a Community College

— Marni Roosevelt, Director of Special Projects,
Child Development Department, Los Angeles Valley College,
Valley Glen, California



Courtesy of Alex Fayvil, LAVC Valley Star Press

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE in Valley Glen, California, has a unique on-campus program that provides child development students with hands-on experiences in infant and toddler care while also meeting the needs of student parents in the larger campus population. For several years, child development instructors had considered ways to help student parents with babies, who often sought guidance on a variety of parenting concerns. The college does not provide a center for infant and toddler care, and we knew that child development students needed experiences with babies. Thus the child development department created Parent and Baby Sessions to meet these dual needs.

During the Parent and Baby Sessions, student parents and their babies participate in play sessions. Child development faculty talk with the moms and dads about parenting and child development, while the program's student interns, under the guidance of a child development instructor, interact with and care for the babies. For many child development interns, this is their first experience with infants and toddlers in a space designed specifically for their learning and care. In this carefully thought-out environment, a child development instructor models best practices.

The setting is a college classroom—transformed. The instructor and interns set up the room with equipment for play and learning, including floor mats, sensory tables, scarves, and laundry baskets as well as other low-cost, developmentally appropriate materials. Using familiar, common items helps parents and interns see that they can

stimulate children's development with many kinds of inexpensive, everyday resources.

Our successes are gratifying. The sessions are full and the program has a waiting list. A high number of requests for participation have come from parents in the community. We are expanding the program to offer more weekly sessions. More than 90 percent of the interns completing the program have been offered employment in the early care and education field.

This low-cost, high-quality program is easily replicable. My recommendation is to start small. If we had included everything we wanted in the program from the beginning, we might never have gotten it up and running. (Search within your immediate community to build support and identify funding sources.)

Now that Parent and Baby Sessions has strong support and interest, we feel that we can expand. The college has renovated a dedicated space for our program! The program's initial grant was broadly focused on building an infant/toddler care workforce. An additional two years' funding through a California State Chancellor's Economic and Workforce Development Grant will help us build a workforce of teachers trained in caring for babies and toddlers with special needs.

For more information, visit the Web site www.lavc.edu or contact the author by e-mail at roosevm@lavc.edu.

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Tips for Starting a Successful Community Partnership

— *Jillian Ritter, Early Childhood Specialist, EightCAP Inc., Early Head Start, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan*

These tips for partnering can be used by individuals, large agencies, specialists, or administrators. Collaboration makes everyone's job a little easier and helps to ensure that children and families receive quality services.

- Identify groups in your community with goals similar to those of your program. They may be interested in forming a partnership.
- Involve all programs in the planning from the beginning. Make sure representatives of all groups are involved and committed to the collaboration.
- Establish a shared vision and definition of collaboration. Create a Collaboration Agreement to detail exactly what each program's responsibilities are and what outcomes are expected.
- Remember, you do not need to spend money to start collaborating! In fact, it is possible to save money as a result of collaboration.
- Communicate clearly and frequently. Make sure each program understands the other's rules, standards, and guidelines. Ask questions.
- Schedule regular meetings at times that most of the people involved are available. Serve refreshments!
- Be patient. It takes time to see benefits of change and collaboration. The benefits are worth the effort!

Not sure where to begin? Ideas for collaboration in your community are available from the following organizations: child welfare services, Early Head Start (EHS) or Head Start, local universities or colleges, public libraries, child care centers or preschools, and public schools.

EightCAP Inc., has formally partnered with the local Child Welfare Services (CWS) for nearly four years. EHS and CWS work together to coordinate services to meet both the family's and the child's needs. For more information, contact the author by e-mail at jillianr@8cap.org.

Learning Readiness

Parents, Children, and the Culture of Kindergarten

— *Maureen Mangan, Director of Communication and Public Relations, Long Island Children's Museum, New York*

FIVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS surrounding the Long Island Children's Museum (LICM) have a higher percentage of children with limited English proficiency than the New York state average. To address the needs of these local families, LICM created the *Juntos al Kinder* [Together to Kindergarten] readiness program, which acclimates the whole family to the culture of the kindergarten classroom.

Juntos al Kinder was inspired by the combined experiences of the museum staff. The executive director saw the impact and effectiveness of the Boston Children's Museum's kindergarten readiness program. The early childhood manager had previously been a kindergarten teacher in a nearby school district and was concerned about the academic delays children with limited English proficiency face as they enter the school system. The education director grew up in an immigrant family and knew the value of addressing cultural nuances as they relate to parental participation in schools.

The program evolved through collaboration between staff members and conversations with community agencies and school districts on Long Island. The museum involved representatives from these two important groups early in the process as it mapped out its plans and the program content. We established three main goals for *Juntos al Kinder*:

1. Ease the transition from home to kindergarten for preschool children with limited English proficiency
2. Help the parents of children with limited English proficiency play a key role in their child's education

The readiness program acclimates the whole family to the culture of the kindergarten classroom.



Courtesy of Long Island Children's Museum



Courtesy of Long Island Children's Museum

3. Encourage families to use the resources of the museum for their children's lifelong learning.

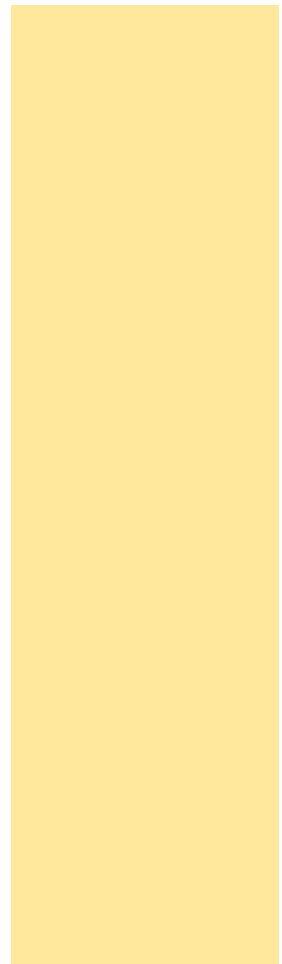
The program's four educational components include offerings for children as well as parents:

- Summer classes for preschoolers, conducted primarily in English, provide intensive language learning and give the children a base of words they will encounter in kindergarten. Children also become familiar with some of the routines and expectations in a kindergarten classroom.
- Summer workshops for parents help them learn to navigate the school system, effectively communicate with teachers and school administrators, and also understand cultural nuances associated with the education system.
- Community nights throughout the school year provide workshops for parents, museum explorations for their children, and an opportunity for families to socialize with each other.
- Year-round services include a free museum family membership and parent workshops throughout the year.

Parents and school staff agree that the program is a success. One mother expressed this feeling: "I wish we'd had this program when my son went to kindergarten." School principal Brenda Williams Jackson, Northern Parkway Elementary School in Uniondale, commented, "I believe our first day of school was especially successful. The parents who attended the program felt comfortable escorting their children to class because they were less anxious."

The parent education component is essential to the success of this program. We encourage any community undertaking a similar program to be sure to build this in as a component of kindergarten readiness.

For more information, contact the author by e-mail at mangan@licm.org.



Resource and Referral Responding to Family and Caregiver Needs in the Community

— Leslie Simmons, Resource and Referral Manager,
Child Action Inc., Sacramento, California

With communities ever changing, service agencies must adapt to meet the current needs of children and families.

RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES are community-focused organizations that provide referral services to families seeking child care; train and recruit child care providers; work to increase the supply of child care; and provide information about child development to families, caregivers, and the community. Regional resource and referral agencies provide these services at the local level to support each community's specific needs.

The Sacramento Quality Child Care Collaborative (QCCC), administered by Child Action Inc., has many partners serving the Sacramento area. With communities ever changing, service agencies must adapt to meet the current needs of children and families. Although the core service of resource and referral agencies is referring families to available child care, it is important to include related services and opportunities to help meet the needs of individual families.

Through focus groups and parent and provider surveys, we identified the Sacramento area's top needs and then developed a plan of action to address each one:

1. Not enough child care services are available to meet the growing demand for care.

Solution: Use state and county funds to recruit and train new family child care providers and to support groups wishing to open and expand child care centers.

2. Parents of children with special needs can't find adequate child care. Child care programs may be ill-equipped or providers may feel unprepared to care for children with special needs.

Solutions: Assign a resource and referral specialist to talk to families about their situations; then contact child care providers who can meet the families' needs. In Sacramento we offer on-site support for child care providers serving children with special needs, including behavior modeling, strategies for working with children and parents, demonstrated use of adaptive equipment, and more.

3. Child care providers need access to training and resources on caring for children with disabilities, infants and toddlers, and health and mental health best practices.

Solution: Offer providers single workshops as well as intensive, targeted 60-hour training and technical assistance programs, such as the Program for Infant/Toddler Care.



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4. Maintaining staff stability and providing effective leadership for their programs are big challenges for directors.

Solution: Offer directors information about programs that give financial stipends to staff who earn a certain number of college unit credits each year; provide special training opportunities for directors and/or family child care providers to support them in meeting the administrative challenges of running a quality child care program.

Building collaborative services is difficult work, requiring flexibility of thought and generosity of spirit. Throughout our work we have learned to pay attention to the needs of all—children, their families, and child care providers.

For more information, visit the Web site www.childaction.org.

The Museum Is Their Classroom

Preschoolers Play with the Real Stuff

— Carol Barone-Martin, Senior Program Officer, Early Childhood Education, Pittsburgh Public Schools, Pennsylvania

IN FALL 2005, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh became *school* to two Pittsburgh Public Schools' early childhood classrooms—with funding from Head Start and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Accountability Block Grant, and other sources. This unique partnership grew out of a conversation I had with the executive director of the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Jane Werner. We knew each other through participation in our local Affiliate (PAEYC) council, and we also worked together to promote Week of the Young Child.

At the time, the Children's Museum was undergoing renovation and expansion, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools system was looking for

additional space for early childhood education classrooms. Why not, we thought, create space in the museum for a few extra early childhood classrooms? Once the idea of having classrooms in the museum developed, the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education, the Children's Museum Board of Directors, and the museum's funders embraced the concept.

Even though the preschoolers have their own classrooms, they use the entire museum as their educational environment. Based on the museum's philosophy—Play with Real Stuff—the children explore the museum's hands-on activities and exhibits throughout the day. They paint, draw, and create wonderful art projects in the museum's large

studio. They make up stories and act them out in the museum's theater, using the props that are available there. In the water play area of the museum, the children explore science concepts as they play.

The museum exhibits and activities reinforce what the children are learning in the classroom through the curriculum. For example, a museum child development specialist visits the classrooms weekly to read to the children. Museum staff and classroom teachers make sure that the children's work in the studio aligns with these literacy sessions.

Excited about the integrated learning the children experience in the museum, we recently hired an arts coordinator through funding from the Pittsburgh Foundation. The arts coordinator works with artists and early childhood professionals in developing an integrated arts curriculum in which the children learn literacy, math, social studies, science, and social skills while participating in various arts projects. This integrated arts curriculum will be piloted at the Children's Museum's classrooms and in classrooms at two additional Pittsburgh elementary schools in the near future.

We have benefited greatly from engaging in this collaboration, particularly learning that it is important to talk about regulations and philosophy before beginning any partnership. The museum staff have also learned how to improve materials and exhibits from their ongoing observations of the same group of children using them every day.

For more information about this project, contact the Early Childhood Education Department, Pittsburgh Public Schools, at 412-325-4291.

The children explore the museum's hands-on activities and exhibits throughout the day.



Courtesy of Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Programs

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