



## THEME 7

# Links to Other Services and Resources

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### Related survey items

- Since coming to this program, I have become more aware of the services and resources available in my community. (Basic Survey #8)

### Related family support principle

- Family support programs complement existing services, build networks and linkages and advocate for policies, services and systems that support families' abilities to raise healthy children.

### Overcoming barriers to access

Families require access to a variety of services to sustain their parenting success, but they often have difficulty finding the services that match their needs. They may be unaware that they qualify for various services or they may feel intimidated by difficult bureaucratic systems (Onyskiw, Harrison, Spady, & McConnan, 1999). They may lack the skills needed to

manoeuvre through the service system and advocate for what they require.

Family support organizations work to make service delivery as seamless as possible from the point of view of families. Such community organizations are often unable to supply all of the services needed by a family, whether because they lack the space, the funding or the expertise (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998). They therefore use a number of strategies to make it easier for families to find services within the community: by supplying information, by making referrals, by building on family networks, by collaborating with professionals who are already involved with the child and family, and by setting up collaborative service arrangements with other organizations that can fill the remainder of a family's needs.

### Responding to needs, working from strengths

Quality programs offer comprehensive educational and social services, on site or by referral, that respond to all the individuals within a family and their domains of desired improvement (Groark et al., 2002). Using a strengths perspective and the problem-solving process, family support staff meet with the family and clearly identify family assets, issues, concerns and goals (Lang & Krongard, 1999). By including families in their own problem-solving process and gathering their ideas about possible solutions, workers create an

opportunity for family members to assess their own situation and to learn the process (Lang & Krongard, 1999). Workers also ensure that the information and referrals they provide will be consistent with the family's goals and possibilities. In particular, they will be able to include the potential for support that exists within the family's own informal networks, reducing dependence on professionalized services.

Following the process of shared assessment, staff members can provide information, programming, or referrals as needed. Families can then choose from a comprehensive list of options based on greater knowledge of what is available to them and what they are entitled to. Workers should make it clear to families how the information or referral fits into their goals, otherwise parents may be unsure of the roles they and others are to take (Statham & Holterman, 2004). Sometimes families don't follow up on referrals if they see the service as irrelevant to them or if they are not ready to accept the referred service (Statham & Holterman, 2004).

### Information

Family support workers extend an organization's services when they give parents basic information on where to find what they need (Schultz et al., 1996). Family well-being is enhanced when parents have greater access to information about child development and parenting (Silver et al., 2005; Wazir & Oudenhoven, 1998).

Staff members also strengthen their relationships with families and build trust and credibility when they give parents useful information and referrals (Onyskiw et al., 1999). Relationships between parents and staff can be one of the most significant factors in family engagement (Schultz et al., 1996).

### Referrals

When staff members determine that the services a family needs are not available in the family support organization, they generally make referrals to other

organizations and professional services within the community or beyond its borders. Part of the job of family support workers is to make connections with other organizations and workers so that they can have confidence in the quality of the services to which they make referrals.

Before making referrals, workers strive to clearly understand a family's needs and goals, as outlined above. They try to suggest only services that are accessible, available and appropriate for the families they refer (Statham & Holterman, 2004; Wazir & Oudenhoven, 1998). Moreover, insofar as possible, they work to ensure that such services will be available long enough for the needs of families facing complex problems, with follow-up at regular intervals (Wazir & Oudenhoven, 1998).

Here are some examples of situations when referrals are required: to obtain health services, to improve children's cognitive skills, to enhance parenting skills, or to deal with drug or alcohol abuse problems. Sometimes families with complex problems can benefit significantly from a referral to child care services (Statham & Holterman, 2004) or child protection services (MacAulay, 2002). Families may also appreciate access to a range of professionals, including psychologists for adolescents and lawyers for civil matters (Onyskiw et al., 1999).

Some families require support with basic needs before they are ready to tackle other kinds of problems (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998). Therefore workers must not only pay attention to interpersonal needs, but also be prepared to deal with practical needs such as food, child care, housing, clothing, medication and bus tickets (Onyskiw et al., 1999). Providing such support to families may reduce the incidence of child maltreatment since family poverty is strongly correlated with child maltreatment (CSSP, 2004).

Successful family support organizations must have an effective referral network and set this up early. The more connections and trust a family resource centre

builds with other community organizations, the more visibility it has and the more people will be likely to attend its programs (McCurdy & Jones, 2000).

### **Collaboration and linkages**

Besides referrals, family support organizations also build other kinds of linkages with a range of community organizations in order to create a network of seamless services. For instance, as part of regular programming in a family resource centre, an early intervention specialist may make a monthly visit to chat informally with parents about their concerns. A centre may provide space for a weekly breastfeeding clinic, run by the public health department (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998). Such collaborations, ranging from informal arrangements to formalized partnerships, are often invisible to participants, but they are essential to the provision of integrated services (FRP Canada, 2004). Studies have shown that partnerships among community organizations have resulted in many positive outcomes (Backer, 2003; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). For instance, more community programs are created when there is a functioning collaborative network in a community than when child and family organizations act alone (Mulroy, 1997).

To perform the behind-the-scenes work of collaboration, workers in family support organizations are well-versed in interdisciplinary consultation. They need to know how to build respectful relationships with other community stakeholders and how to share leadership in seeking positive community outcomes (Rapport et al., 2004). Regular meetings with network counterparts keep workers up-to-date and familiar with services and service providers to whom they make referrals. Such meetings also provide opportunities for family resource organizations to make their services known and therefore increase referrals *from* other agencies.

These networking activities thus increase coordination of services and promote more comprehensive assessment, intervention and follow-up of families

(CSDE, 1997). To benefit children in the long run, our communities require such networks for sharing information (Bertrand et al., 1999).

### **Identification of gaps and advocacy**

Community networks, although they take time and effort to develop, create a more effective service delivery system for families (Richard et al., 2005; Schultz, Lopez, & Hochberg, 1996). Community providers work together to match services to what a family needs. At the same time, the process of collecting input from families about what they need often brings to light barriers to access, duplicated programs and missing services.

Parents feel less confident about their ability to help their child when the community lacks resources (Reich et al., 2004). Healthy development is particularly threatened when families of young children face multiple problems and stressors (CSSP, 2004; Landy & Tam, 1998). Family support workers can advocate with families for the services that are lacking in their community. By providing comprehensive supports for families in need, communities can reduce the incidence of negative outcomes for children (Groark et al., 2002).

By helping families to access other services, staff in family support organizations can make a difference for family well-being. These organizations are continually evolving as a part of an existing service network and must promote themselves, share information and work to reduce duplication and increase integration of services (McCurdy & Jones, 2000).

## Annotated References

Richard, L., Pineault, R., D'Amour, D., Brodeur, J.-M., Séguin, L., Latour, R., & Labadie, J.-F. (2005). The diversity of prevention and health promotion services offered by Quebec Community Health Centres: A study of infant and toddler programmes. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 13 (5), 399-408.

The authors conducted a survey and secondary data analysis of the diversity of services within local community health and social services centres (CLSCs) in Quebec. All Quebec CLSCs were invited to complete a survey; response rate was 69%. Demographic and organizational factors were also considered. Centres varied on their preventive and health promotion services. The higher the unemployment rate in the community, the less variety in the services offered. The more collaboration with other organizations, the higher the variety in services.

Silver, S., Berman, R., & Wilson, S. (2005). *What participants value: Practices and outcomes at family resource programs. An MAFRP - Ryerson University Project*. Retrieved January 27, 2006 from <http://www.ryerson.ca/voices/pdf/participantsvalue.pdf>

The Voices project was a large-scale qualitative research study designed to uncover what participants most value about family resource programs. Four main themes emerged from interviews and focus groups conducted across Canada as regards factors that contribute to the success of family resource programs. The themes were the importance of engaging families, empowering participants, building social support and social capital, and building community. These themes were then used to develop a set of indicators for evaluating family support organizations.

Statham, J. & Holterman, S. (2004). Families on the brink: The effectiveness of family support services, *Child and Family Social Work*, 9, 153-166.

This article reports on a study of family support services offered to 40 families with complex needs living in two neighbourhoods in North Wales. The authors point out that referrals must be relevant to a family for the family to follow through. They recommend a broad approach to assessment and a cross-agency approach to providing services to families because many families' needs cannot be met by one service alone.

Wazir, R. & Oudenhoven, N. (1998). *Access to Early Childhood Development: Strategies for Enhancing Social Integration. Paper presented at the European Policy Conference on Early Childhood Education as a Structural Approach to Integrating Children and Families at Risk: A Challenge for Policy Makers (Amsterdam, Netherlands)*.

This discussion paper explores links between access to early education and social exclusion in Europe. Wazir and Oudenhoven note the societal changes affecting families and the families' need to remain connected to their communities while parenting their children. The authors argue that early childhood education can effectively decrease family isolation, and at the same time help families access other community services. They emphasize the

importance of making services fully accessible. Strategies and services must continually consider how to support children at risk.

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This literature summary is one of ten that have been prepared in conjunction with the FRP Canada e-Valuation project. Each literature summary addresses a theme or indicator from the Participant Survey or Staff and Volunteer Survey.

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