

“When we strengthen families, we ultimately strengthen the community. Our goal is that parents everywhere work with supportive providers, feel confident in their parenting role, and form strong, resilient attachments with their children. To help achieve this, providers must be responsive to parents, knowledgeable about child development, and eager to see every parent succeed.”

-T Berry Brazelton, MD

Step 1: Build a Solid Foundation

Know your philosophy and draft a mission statement. Our first and foremost strategy is to work with families within a “strength-based” model. We want our families to feel comfortable, safe and capable. During our Brazelton Touchpoints training, we learned that focusing on what works within the family unit, rather than what needs “fixing”, leads to a more open and trusting relationship. As our connection with the student-parent develops, we learn about challenges that need our help. However, in our setting at the FRC, the problem solving intentionally happens only after we have developed knowledge and trust with each other.

Step 2: Find Your Student-Parents

Finding students on campus who have children is a big challenge! There are the two main methods that we used to find our student-parents:

Build it and they will come: Start with a small project that offers a clear benefit to student-parents and that can spread quickly via word of mouth. For us, that project was offering a free baby-clothes exchange. It was a nearly cost-free program from our end and quickly got the word out about our services.

Seek them out: Use existing on-campus services to locate student-parents. Ask your office of research to administer a survey to help identify student-parents. Perhaps your financial aid office can provide you with information. Is there a child-care referral office than can give you a list of parents? What other programs exist on your campus that might serve student-parents? If you’re capable of selling your program as something that’s worth supporting, these offices will be more apt to take the time to assist you.

Step 3: Get the Word Out

Don’t let resources and funding hold you back! In the beginning it was important for us to keep our outreach costs to a bare minimum. We solicited donations from local, private preschools for the baby clothes exchange making it a free program from our end. We asked the campus bulletin to run a small feature and used student interns and workers to help spread the word through flyers. The more buzz you’re able to generate through word-of-mouth (free marketing!), the faster the student-parents on your campus will find you!

Here are some of the methods we’ve used successfully:

- Table at Back-to-School days
- School newspaper (get someone to write an article about your services!)
- Website and Blog
- Social Media (eg Instagram, Facebook, Twitter)
- Flyers around campus
- Free parent services: playgroups, baby clothes exchange, children’s and parent book lending libraries, dedicated private lactation areas
- Visibility at feeder high schools
- Events for the community – play-days, picnics, informational sessions

Step 4: Find On-Campus and Community Partners

Partnerships and collaborations can provide you with great resources and are a fantastic way to make help other groups understand the benefits an FRC can bring to the campus as a whole. Partnerships will give credibility to your program and services. On-campus partners might be housed in student services, campus childcare center, or even an academic department that focuses on families and children. Your campus may look different, but odds are there are lots of potential partners out there.

We have also found strong partners in our local community. We contacted local social service agencies that serve some of our student-parents and sent them flyers to distribute about our FRC. Once the word got out into the community that we were here, we were contacted by representatives from our local courts, regional center, and even nearby high schools! A lot of the community parents that we met this way have enrolled in courses here at the college and are some of our greatest advocates on campus.

Step 5: Gather Information from Your Student Parents

Don’t forget that your most important resource will be the student-parents and their families! Ask them what they’d like to see from you. What programs do they find the most supportive and what areas do they feel haven’t been addressed? Your programming and services will find a rhythm once they get going but don’t forget to check in periodically and make adjustments where needed. Because each student-parent and family is unique, the group you serve and their needs will continuously change. Consider assessing the group’s needs on a periodic basis, so as to ensure that the group is meeting members’ needs as accurately as possible. For instance, a basic five to ten question assessment with measurable responses submitted quarterly can help a facilitator/group leader to determine future group direction.

Remember, you can set the tone but the student-parents will define their needs.

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