

Partnerships for Change - Listening to the Voices of Families

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series

Narrator: Head Start and Early Head Start programs can become vibrant centers of their communities. Programs, families, and local partners can work together to build the community they want for their children and create a circle of care that enriches the lives of the children and families they serve, promoting wellness for the entire community. The Red Cliff Early Childhood Center is one example of a program that responded to the collective vision of their families and community leaders.

Teacher: [Speaking in Ojibwe] Then he says gaawiin, nimbakadesii. I'm full now.

Narrator: In the far northwest corner of Wisconsin lies the reservation of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Ojibwe people have been living along the magnificent shores of Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands for many hundreds of years.

Rob Goslin: Here in Red Cliff, we have roughly about 1,500 members, and the people overall have a very rich cultural history that dates back a huge amount of time.

John Hornstein: Probably more than anything else, a child needs culture — maybe with the exception of love. A child needs a place to come from, a set of ideas and beliefs and a framework for how one lives one's life. For children to be ready for school, they need to have a sense of self and a system that makes sense to them.

Narrator: At the Red Cliff Early Childhood Center (ECC), the strength of traditional culture was used to connect families, the community, and other programs that serve children and families.

Dawn Nixon: Understanding the wishes, wants, needs, hopes of the community itself comes first. So it's not a top down process. It's really going to the community and saying, "Does this make sense? What do you need? What do you see?"

Narrator: Innovative community partnerships are critical to the program's success. The ECE plays a vital role in a childhood wellness council that brings together tribal leaders and key players from all the major community service organizations.

Cultural Consultant: Community is moving toward this traditional cultural system that's being integrated into our lives every day.

Narrator: And harnesses resources for the good of the children.

Program Director: We also have TANF, which is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and that would have a lot to do with the ECC and the Head Start programs — those parents.

Narrator: At the core of this approach is the principle that family and community comes first. Coordinating services enhances those services. Family Resource Coordinator: The teachers really enjoy our support because we do know the parents. We do know the community. We know the resources that are out there.

Narrator: Coordination continues at the center itself. Community health providers make regular onsite visits.

Anna Carlson: Here at the ECC I do what I call my daily rounds. So I just go into the classrooms and I say hello to the teachers and I check in on the kiddos.

Teacher: Is it kind of contagious after the fact? I mean, you know how long it runs?

Anna: Oh, right. No, it should be mostly contagious right at the beginning.

Teacher: Okay, all right.

Anna: Almost every day there is going to be at least one kiddo who has some kind of an issue. A sore throat, they are sick, there is a rash.

Julie Erickson: Having Anna, our nurse practitioner, come in — once or twice a week she comes in — it's been really nice because it has helped us — you know, that piece that was missing — with calling the parents and knowing when to call the parents.

Anna: We are going to take a look at your teeth.

Narrator: Dental screenings and treatments are done regularly at the center.

Pediatrician: What's this called? What's that?

Narrator: Mental health and special needs assessments are routinely conducted. This integration of services has made a big difference for families.

Gretchen Morris: I had a hard time, but Early Childhood Center helped me get a home with my children, with some problem solving, with coordination of services for my children's special needs.

Liz King: The ECC is kind of like a hub of Red Cliff. I mean, you can come here for assistance. You can come here for education. You come here, for some of us, it's part of your social life.

Narrator: Excellence in early education is crucial to Head Start's success.

Rob: We implement evidence-based curriculums here in the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. And we supplement it with our cultural traditions. They work hand-in-hand together.

Narrator: Families wanted to revitalize the language and teachings of their culture.

Teacher & Child: [Speaking in Ojibwe] Nibi mashkodebizhiki (water...buffalo).

Narrator: Head Start listened and responded.

Amber Hanson: Growing up on the East Coast, I know what it's like to go for 14 years of your life not really feeling like you know where you belong.

Parent: Can you say boozhoo (hello)?

Child: Boozhoo

Narrator: It began with language immersion.

Teacher: Do you have a gaazhagens (cat) at your house? Yep.

Reggie Cadotte: Every day the children come here and they are immersed in the Ojibwa language.

Katy Butterfield: [Speaking in Ojibwa] Aaniindi gibebe (Where's your baby)? Wiindamaw gibebe wiisinidaa (Tell your baby, let's eat).

Reggie: With the language, the culture is tied right into the language.

Narrator: Signs are in Ojibwe. Traditional artwork is on the walls. The children are taught to respect their culture.

Katy: If they don't have something where they can go back to and say, "I know why." "I know why I respect the earth. I know why I respect my elders. I know why I put asemaa (tobacco) out every single day. I know why I pray. I know who I am. I know why I speak my language." If they don't have that, then you feel so lost.

Narrator: The center builds on this excitement with a host of family activities.

Rob: We do a pow-wow here at the Early Head Start, a traditional pow-wow. We are all going to drum together.

Narrator: Children and parents love it.

[Drumming]

Narrator: It's a lesson for any community and every culture.

John: In this community, we see children from a tribal community getting a sense of their culture, their language, and the system of meaning around that. But it's not just about a tribal community. All children need a sense of place and something that gives them a sense of who they are and where they are going to go.

Dee Gokee-Rindal: We want them to be able to walk in both worlds. We want them to be — become doctors, teachers.

Narrator: Just as every child is individual and unique, so too is every family and every community.

Teacher: Feel your heart.

Dee: We also want them to know who they are and their own identity.

Teacher: Who can feel it?

Child: Me!

Teacher: I can too.

Narrator: And the programs that serve them must ask themselves, "What is our gift for our children?"

Dee: It's beautiful to see that that's what the people have come to realize, it's really truly important. And so that's the gift that we're bringing to the children.

[Cheering & Applause]

[Music]