

Fostering Collaboration to Create Change for Kids

**Michele Strasz, MIAAP,
Director Reach Out and Read Michigan
michele@reachoutandreadmich.org**

Introduction

- Sometimes it's easy to assume that just because we're on the "right" side of an issue—such as child abuse and neglect prevention—we will win.
- But being in the right doesn't guarantee victory as evidenced by this budget cycle where we lost a lot of ground and money for 0-3 secondary prevention and other safety net programs.
- Working in collaboration with like-minded and new partners will help multiply the power of your advocacy efforts and build strength in numbers.
- Working in partnerships includes getting other individuals, organizations, alliances, and coalitions involved to accomplish your advocacy goal.

Advocacy

- All politics is local- but it is also personal.
- Even more true with advocacy because we are so passionate about our issues
- Advocacy is about relationships with decision-makers whether they be elected officials or leaders of organizations.
- In advocacy, just like a marriage, these relationships take communication and nurturing.

Collaboration: Strength in numbers

As a professional, you are both a credible and natural advocate for children.

- You wear many hats.
- More people bring a broader set of skills, knowledge, and contacts.
- More people means increased visibility, communication, and pressure on decision-makers to act.
- Know your opposition- Better yet, engage them.

What does collaboration do for policy-making?

- Demonstrates that the issue has visible and wide-ranging support.
- Decision-makers more likely to respond to broader-based support.
- Sorts out the controversy before you come to the table.
- Note about context of political climate right now?

It's all about relationships!

- Who are your natural partners? Start with people you already know who care about children. Mapping
- What?
 - Connect your issue to other's self-interests.
 - Convey why your issue is important and why their help is needed.
 - Have a concrete request and be clear about the time commitment.

How to get parents and consumers involved?

- Create an environment that is encouraging, supportive, and safe to participate.
- Understand their strengths and limitations.
- Involve them in the planning.
- Give them leadership roles with support.
- Put a face on an issue especially from the decision-maker's community.

How to Get Organizations Involved

- Choose organizations with common interests.
- Understand the organization's processes, identity, motivations and interests.
- Balance resources against the challenges.
- Coalition participants are there because the collaboration is a means of achieving something they are not able to achieve alone.
- Remember that partnerships can include the usual suspects as well as unlikely partners. The only way to know if someone will support your issue is by asking.

How do we create change for kids?

- Common vision, mission, purpose
- Set reasonable, achievable goals
- Time limited
- Consensus process
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Followup
- Celebrate and thank
- Learn from your mistakes
- Evaluate

Rules for Collaboration

- Identify stakeholders
- Commit to collaboration
- Establish ground rules
- Teach process skills
- Build trust, learn process skills, and explore beliefs
- Identify problems

What if someone doesn't support your issue?

- When working on issues as important as child abuse and neglect, it can be hard to imagine why others wouldn't support your issue, much less oppose it.
- However, your issue will almost always be competing with other issues for resources or may reflect a different view of the best way to address the issue. Understanding the differences may help you find common ground.
- Building strength in numbers helps demonstrate to decision-makers that children's safety and well-being are a priority and support for your issue is larger and more powerful than any potential opposition's interests.
- Sometimes it's ok to agree to disagree!

Activity

● Collaborative partners: Examples

- Michigan Coalition for Children and Families
- Reach Out and Read and Borders
- Michigan's Month of the Young Child

● Additional Resources and Information

- www.miccf.org
- www.reachoutandreadmich.org
- www.miaap.org
- http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1385.htm
