

Norwood Child & Family Resource Centre
Summer Learnings 2009
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General Overview:

The agency was undertaking an “Extreme Makeover” which planned for all staff to vacate the facility for a period of 10 weeks over the summer 2009, to ensure the construction could be completed in a safe and quick manner.

In early 2009, the agency began to look for space and partnership work that would support modified programming for NCFRC families, enhance our opportunities to work in the community and secure off site space to accommodate our administrative work.

By mid May, 2009, partnership with the Africa Centre and Big Brothers/Sisters of Edmonton was confirmed with a purpose of providing summer programming for children of African descent ages 5-15 years old in the Wellington Junior High School location. All staff from our agency would be seconded on a regular basis throughout the 6 weeks of summer programming provided. The programming schedule was from July 6 - August 14. Total cost for pre programming/planning and actual staff time at the Africa Centre was **\$209,695**

All staff would also continue to provide modified programming within their respective program teams at sites within the communities we serve.

Space was secured at the Alberta Avenue Community Centre on 118 Avenue, the Sprucewood Public Library as well as at the FCSS Clareview office. These spaces would accommodate the staffing and programming identified for the months of July and August with a move back date of August 24, 2009.

It was determined that all staff would attend every Monday, All Staff meetings and informal connections at Alberta Avenue Community Centre. This would allow for continual connectedness throughout the summer as well as afford staff the opportunity to get and receive support, provide feedback on the summer activities and connect interdepartmentally with all other staff.

Africa Centre Partnership

As stated above, the partnership with the Africa Centre evolved around the beginning of March. This opportunity was presented at the management table first and the benefits

and challenges were discussed. The benefits certainly outweighed the challenges we might face and after considerable planning, the partnership was presented to staff for their input and feedback as well.

Initially, reaction to the partnership plan was one of unease and uncertainty however the majority of staff were anxious but willing to work in a new way with this grass roots organization. The change process with staff began at an agency level with dialogue and opportunity for discussion and information sharing. The process continued within each program team as individuals were each involved in planning and developing the “modified” programming. This process created the buy in for modified programming from most agency staff, particularly the C/Y and ES teams which would be most impacted. The over laying concern was the impact on the families we currently were serving and the level of access they would have to the programming through the summer months. The staff was also well supported through supervision and had opportunity to discuss individual concerns/questions. Open and honest communication was expected and encouraged throughout this process. At times management could not provide answers to all the questions staff verbalized about feeling connected and supported however worked diligently to gather the information requested and support staff regarding the unknowns.

Key Issues Raised By Staff - specific to the Africa Centre

Prior to starting and going through the planning process staff were very involved and raised good questions for us to work through within the partnership, including:

1. The expected ratio of staff to child/youth
2. What would be the ages of the children attending
3. Were there guidelines or rules in place regarding potential safety issues
4. What forms of discipline guidelines were in place
5. Staff felt they had a real void regarding the knowledge of the African culture
6. How would the coordination work
7. Who would be providing the support/supervision
8. A general fear of the unknown
9. Concerns of the qualifications of themselves/others working with this target group

Key issues regarding NCFRC modified programming

As well, staff raised many questions regarding our own programming for Norwood families as there was no ability to access our Centre and the regular programming. Some of the concerns raised were:

1. Exactly how would families access alternate programming
2. The “respite” programming would be lost for families (we could only offer parent attended programming due to no licensed site for childcare)
3. The programming with parents and child would be very different than respite
4. An overall general uncertainty, lacking confidence of working in this manner
5. Questioning how would families find us/access us
6. Home visitation would be modified and families would have reduced access to their Family Support Workers
7. How would we ensure that we could continue to support families in a “modified” way
8. The Child & Youth programming was in 2-half day blocks rather than 1 five hour block – concern expressed by staff that this would have a negative impact on the youth
9. The Alberta Avenue facility did not have the equipment the agency has (licensed kitchen, recreational equipment etc.)
10. The administrative team would not be on-site at programming locations which created some concern by program staff

General Concerns raised by staff

- Lack of connection to team and others
- Reduced supervisions
- Working with a new target population
- Working in another agency
- Sharing resources/space
- Confusion regarding scheduling at more than one site
- Lack of equipment/resources
- Lack of clear expectations
- Lack of direction
- Minimal understanding of the African cultures
- Anxiety, fear and apprehension were expressed by the majority of staff

- Concern regarding the role changes and expressed dissatisfaction with the direction of the agency and the directive that all staff would support the partnership

The agency spend a considerable amount of time listening to staff concerns and put a number of strategies into place to address them as well as could be.

The Plan

In order to facilitate a successful partnership and transition for the staff the agency put in place the following:

- All staff would be seconded for a period of 1-3 days each week during the AC summer program
- All staff would provide programming in their specific program areas for NCFRC
- Early Start staff would provide child development and family connection opportunities 2 days each week at Alberta Avenue Community Centre and/or the Sprucewood Library
- Head Start staff were provided the opportunity to extend their contract to participate in the Africa Centre partnership (individual choice)
- Child & Youth staff would provide 4 half day opportunities to provide programming for children/youth ages 5-13 at Alberta Avenue, the Sprucewood Library and/or other locations in the community
- Field trips for Early Start and Child & Youth participants to be scheduled together
- Healthy Families staff would provide modified home visitation services to participants however the frequency would be reduced to accommodate the secondment opportunities
- Family Support Workers would remain connected to the specific programs to support the operations as well would reduce the frequency of home visitation/Head Start intake/orientation etc.
- Administrative staff would be seconded to the Africa Centre and were scheduled accordingly
- Managers would continue to support their respective programs as well as the staff providing support at the Africa Centre
- A site coordinator was established for the Africa Centre to coordinate and support all NCFRC staff and coordinate with the Africa Centre Director and the BBBSE coordinator
- NCFRC Program Director would oversee the programming and activities of the Africa Centre as well as all modified NCFRC programming

- Orientation/training of all staff regarding the Africa Centre and culture sensitivity was scheduled and mandatory for all staff

Orientation of Staff

- Orientation sessions with the Africa Centre Board of Directors commenced on February 23rd with the board members of the Africa Centre and the Executive Director and Program Director of NCFRC
- Orientation session with all staff of NCFRC commenced on April 20th with Morrow (AC Board member) teaching staff about the culture through the use of drumming
- Orientation session with all staff of NCFRC on May 25th with the Board Chair from the Africa Centre providing an overview of the AC and the mission etc.
- The development of a Family Resource Centre Africa Centre document was created to support the Africa Centre in their fund development and allocation specifically regarding a large grant from the Rotary Club of Edmonton (this allowed staff at various levels with expertise to participate in the development of the program outline/document and begin their orientation to the Africa Centre)
- July 2-3 mandatory orientation and training session with all NCFRC staff, BBBSE summer staff and BBBSE/AC volunteers at the Africa Centre

The Delivery of Services/Programs General (the reality)

- July 6 programming commenced, secondments began for NCFRC staff at the Africa Centre
- July 6 modified programming commenced at NCFRC
- The planning of Norwood programming was extremely comprehensive therefore there was minimal need to purchase program resources
- The resources required for the 10 week vacancy from the Centre site was well planned for in the administrative area to support the work of the staff and the agency
- The families were well informed in advance therefore we received very few formal complaints/concerns
- The schedule developed was adhered to and staff were forthcoming regarding scheduling conflicts and absences (minimal changes on final schedule were required)
- Staff found support from each other, the site Coordinator and managers as the need arose
- A communication book was established for NCFRC staff to stay connected and to share their experiences

- Each Monday morning all staff attended meetings at AB Avenue to ensure interconnection and support
- Each staff person was provided with coaching, support and supervisions
- Staff holidays were allotted/approved as per usual
- Staff were provided with extra supports to fulfill their responsibilities i.e. locked briefcases, more access to laptops
- Cell phones and laptop computers were provided to all managers
- Computer access was created for all staff at the Africa Centre, FCSS Clareview and Alberta Avenue Community Centre
- Other supports/resources were put in place as the need arose

Early Start/Early Childhood Development Program

Alberta Avenue Community Centre Participation:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| • July 9 th | - 45 parents | 40 children | total: 85 (and 5 staff) |
| • July 16 th | - 29 parents | 27 children | total: 56 (and 4 staff) |
| • July 30 th | - 26 parents | 39 children | total: 65 (and 4 staff) |
| • Aug. 6 th | - 29 parents | 32 children | total: 61 (and 4staff) |
| • Aug. 20 th | - 17 parents | 24 children | total: 41 (and 4staff) |

Sprucewood Library Participation:

- | | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| • June 30 th
(and 5 staff) | 49 parents | 32 children | total: 81 participants |
| • June 7 th
(and 5 staff) | 16 parents | 23 children | total: 39 participants |
| • July 21 st | 24 parents | 5 children | total: 49 participants (and 5 staff) |
| • July 28 th | 22 parents | 36 children | total: 58 participants (and 5 staff) |
| • August 4 th
(and 5 staff) | 13parents | 8 children | total: 41 participants |
| • August 11 th | 26 parents | 35 children | total: 61 participants (and 5 staff) |

Total Number of outputs (not unique participants) all groups and field trips: **1160**

Observations

- Parents and children appeared to be interested in all presented activities.
- Parents appeared to be confident at the library (for many parents it was their first time at the library).

- Parents and children showed their enjoyment during the “circle time” activities and during other (art, outdoor, and music) activities. Dawn’s (music instructor) playful presentation was always a great addition to the program.
- Parents and children seemed to enjoy our story – stretcher activities (art, games related to the books).
- For many parents (ESL) sessions at the library were a great opportunity to explore the facility.
- Fathers who attended our sessions were active participants of the program.
- Parents met other parents (extended discussions took place after the sessions).
- Parents learned about using their local library and librarians said that they had never seen so highly attended groups at any time before at their facility.
- Some parents mentioned (ESL) those sessions at the library helped them to explore new ideas how to improve their children literacy skills (and to develop their own reading).
- Parents always showed their playful attitude during the sessions.
- Staff discovered their new skills as parent-child group facilitators.
- The atmosphere during the groups was always relaxing.
- Families enjoyed the big and comfortable space at the Community Hall.
- Parents increased their knowledge about another local facility (and another local playground).
- Detailed planning ahead helped the ES staff to be prepared for every session.
- Outdoor activities incorporated during the session allowed children to explore a new community playground.
- Parents supported staff during the routines.
- All field trips were the highlights of the summer program. Parents and their children enjoyed our trips to various sites.
- All team members supported each other.

Summary of Early Childhood Development Programming Learnings

- The above information provides evidence that our "away from the Centre" settings offered many experiences that positively enhanced children's development.
- Every one "Tuesday and Thursday" schedule provided the framework for the Norwood children summer days and our staff set the stage for their learning as well as their enjoyment away from home, but with their parents.
- All schedules of the program were developmentally appropriate and carried out consistently, and for that reason children quickly gained a sense of security in these two unfamiliar places.

- During the summer all parents greatly contributed to the child's well-being in the group
- All educators were responsible for the safety of all participants and all staff effectively carried out this role (there was no accident reported in during the program times).
- When providing programming in the summer, it is evident based on participation, that an increased number of fathers were able to attend
- Fathers expressed their desire to attend programming with their child/ren
- Programming offered in community settings attracts families and connects them to their community
- Programming offered in community settings creates/supports relationships with other people in the community i.e.) librarian
- Parent/child playgroup programming provides increased opportunity for parents to access information on child development as well as learn from the modeling presented by staff
- Parent/child playgroup programming provides increased opportunity for parents to connect with other parents based on common interests and their child/ren

Child and Youth Programming

Every Wednesday and Friday the C/Y program would provide 2 sessions of 2.5 hours each twice a day. For example; 2 – 2.5 hr session on Wednesday and repeated on Friday

The total registrants for the summer program were 66 children/youth.

The total unique/individual registrants attending were 20. Therefore, 46 children/youth who had registered for the summer program failed to attend even one session.

The program offered three field trips. The first was to the legislature grounds by public transportation. Eight children attended and one volunteer parent. The small group allowed for more 1:1 opportunities. The size of the group also allowed us to tour the legislature with a provincial tour guide to learn about the site and the processes of government. The children were very engaged and interested in this site visit.

The second field trip was to the Museum where 10 children and 1 volunteer parent attended. The initial intent was to expose the children to the hummingbird exhibit however they were overwhelmingly engaged and interested in the wildlife exhibit and staff had some difficulty ending the trip, as the children did not want to leave. All the children and the parent who attended identified this venue as very appropriate and interesting for this age group.

The third field trip was to a ranch just inside the city limits, where the children were able to experience a variety of team building activities and develop skills in relation to communication and team work. Only 11 children attended the field trip although 14 were registered.

Observations

Parents identified prior to the summer and the attendance statistics confirm that participants preferred a full day, every week day program for their children to attend. Specifically, this was verbalized as it was too difficult to transport their child/ren to the program for each session each day (four trips required to participate in all programming offered).

Parents continued to identify that programs which are free are very important for them to access including the C/Y program however were very clear and consistently informed us that 2, half day opportunities proved difficult to attend consistently.

The staff experienced difficulties programming for small groups. The staff to child ratio was generally 1:1 or more at times where there was frequently two staff per child in the program. This allowed staff increased opportunities to work individually with the participants however the peer interaction component of the program was generally missing due to the low attendance.

The Family Support Worker contacted parents of the participants who were registered but not attending and the feedback she generally received was specifically to reduced access to programming due to half day components not full day options.

Summary of Child and Youth Programming Learnings

- Attendance in full day programming is more convenient and accessible for families (parents working/unable to transport child in mid day)
- Children generally preferred to interact with their peers rather than staff
- The use of public transportation for field trips in this program was very successful
- Exposing the children/youth to wildlife/nature was very engaging and those who participated identified great interest in this area
- Utilizing parent volunteers exposes adults to learning opportunities through the activities of supporting their child/ren
- Increased off site experiences for the children engage them in their community more effectively than processes used in a centre based activities
- Opportunity to use public transportation with support created capacity in the youth attending to further use this method of transportation

Healthy Families Programming

All participants enrolled in the HF program were assessed by each FSW caseworker as to the specific need of each family unit for the period of the summer months with relation to support and home visitation. All participants were well informed prior to the summer programming that all families would continue to receive support and home visitation however it would be modified in order to accommodate the diversity of the summer programming throughout NCFRC.

Observations

- During periods of heavy workload Healthy Families clients who are “stable” can adjust to fewer home visits as long as phone contact is maintained.
- Families in crisis or unstable situations continued to require weekly or bi-weekly visits to ensure that they did not run into more severe difficulty.
- Parents who access the ES respite program expressed concern regarding the reduced home visitation support as well as losing respite care for the same period of time.
- Supervising staff and dealing with staff issues at four different worksites is very taxing on Managers during the summer period when often only one or two Managers are available and travel time between sites can consume a good deal of time . Regular program work and supervision is difficult to complete as staffing issues and a grassroots program (Africa Centre) place large time demands on the Manager(s) available.
- Working without an office and its many resources causes hardship for staff and Managers as often “what you wish you had” in your normal worksite environment is not available.
- Providing supervision and support was more difficult to provide due to the various sites and poor access to private rooms for confidentiality

Summary of Healthy Families Programming Learnings

- When provided with information and support prior to program modification (reduced home visitation) families are able to access supports from the community and cope with reduced 1:1 with an FSW
- Families joined field trip and play group opportunities in order to stay connected with the agency and other parents
- No family/parent was in crisis during this period of time and the modified programming did not create a greater need for crisis intervention programs or support
- Families struggled less with the modified programming than did staff

- Staff were provided with the necessary tools to complete their responsibilities and were provided with modified supervision which was adequate
- Staff relied more on each other for support and de-briefing when the manager was unavailable which created increased connectedness and capacity to manage themselves without a managers involvement

Agency Programming

Field Trips:

Date and Destination	Number of participants
July 14 th - Kinsmen Park	89 participants (7 staff)
July 23 rd - ZOO	126 participants (11 staff)
Aug. 13 th –Fort Edmonton Park	120 participants (12 staff)
Aug. 18 th – Muttart Conservatory	100 participants (15 staff)

Total number of Field Trip participants: 435 (outputs)

SUMMARY: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Observations:

- Families enjoyed opportunities to join field trips and play groups where they could meet other parents while still engaging in activities with their children
- Opportunities for parents and their child/ren to attend programming together was very popular and increased the amount of fathers in program
- Fathers attended with their child/ren when off work or on holidays in the summer
- Providing learning opportunities in the play group environment was well received by parents
- Providing access for parents to external presenters during playgroups was well supported
- Offering activities with integration of program staff provided a very rich experience for families
- Offering activities with integration of various program staff i.e.) ECE's/CY workers, created relationships and increased connectedness among staff

- Families/children exhibited resiliency that staff did not expect regarding the modified programming offered

Recommendations:

- Continue to offer agency wide field trips and play groups throughout the year
- Staff the field trips and playgroups with individuals from the various teams to provide families with increased connections to staff and a wealth of information and resources
- Staff increase their connections to each other through providing programming to families on an agency wide basis rather than program specific
- Continue to engage staff in the process of reducing dependency on the agency/programs and increasing participant connections within the community and with other parents/families for support

CHILD AND YOUTH

Observations:

- We can assume that parents have been utilizing the Child and Youth summer program as a drop off (day care)type program when it has provided full day programming in the past, as the significant decrease in the number of participants based on feedback was mainly due to the inability and/or disruption for parents to bring their child/ren to program on a reduced basis i.e.) half day
- Location was not identified by any individual as a barrier

Recommendations:

- Review the Child and Youth summer programming offered to ensure the target population is accessing the program.
- Evaluate the intake process into the Child and Youth program and ensure it is not based on first come/first served but on the program entrance criteria based on income and/or need
- Ensure the programming is based on best practice as outlined within the community networks
- Offer field trips with the children/youth utilizing the public transportation system

GENERAL PROGRAMMING

Observations:

- Working from various sites throughout the summer proved difficult for some staff. Some indicated a lack of organization, difficulty staying focused, struggles with the changing role/expectations, difficulty staying connected to their teammates
- Staff generally embraced the challenges of the partnership and modified programming.
- Some staff experienced difficulty with the change and exhibited behaviours which required re-direction and support
- Staff expressed their concerns well, on site during programming, through a communication log book, in supervisions and during the weekly Monday staff meetings

Recommendations:

- Continue to provide staff with a variety of methods to communicate their concerns/fears and to get support during times of change i.e.) supervision, team meetings, peer support, communication methods (log books), staff meetings
- Continue to place the onus on staff to honestly express their concerns/issues so as not to make assumptions and create issues that do not exist (in other words, ensure management does not create issues/fear in staff due to our own concerns/fears etc.)
- Continue to provide the resources needed for staff to complete their responsibilities with minimal difficulty
- Encourage staff to spend time in other programs to connect with other staff and learn about other programs of the agency
- Provide off site opportunities to inter-connect staff such as the activity created in the summer where C/Y and ECS staff met at the Carrot Café following a walking tour of the neighbourhood. They shared what they saw, had coffee and some shared their musical talents on the instruments provided at the cafe

AGENCY

Observations:

- Working in a grass roots organization was a new experience for many of the staff
- Staff gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of policies, procedures, structure and resources that are available at our organization
- Staff verbalized the benefits of having resources, equipment, staffing ratios and qualified staff working in programs
- Staff clearly identified the benefit of on-site coordination at the Africa Centre

- Experiences at the Africa Centre and stories told by the parents and the children led to a greater understanding of the difficulties encountered in refugee camps and of their struggles to leave family, friends and everything familiar to start a new life in Canada.
- New learnings for all staff in relation to the trauma that many families at the Africa Centre experienced in their home countries. They met many children/parents having had recent experience in refugee camps. Many stories from the children regarding the atrocities they had experienced and/or witnessed. On-going experience for staff with children who could not write their name, who had never before shown their talents outside of family gatherings, made new friends and experienced new activities in a safe and supportive environment
- Appreciation by the children by creating a talent show at the end of the summer camp for the staff and their parents Appreciation by the parents of the children in program by coordinating and providing a multicultural lunch for all staff connected to the AC summer program
- Working in partnership created new relationships, positioned the agency well in the view of the funders, the community and the participants of the project
- Working in partnership with minimal parameters created frustration and difficulty for the managers of the agency and at times the other partners
- Working in partnership without agreement posed difficulty as the framework in which to work in was continually under development
- Difficulty ensuring the needs of the agency staff would be met as all partners had varying methods of supporting staff and providing direction
- The partnership work developed by management prior to the summer was thorough and provided ample opportunity for new learning and experiences for all staff
- Working in partnership with another organizations volunteers created some frustration regarding role, direction and responsibility
- When leaders from partner organizations did not meet the expectations of the partnership or agreed to protocols/procedures it created difficulty within the work
- Providing orientation and opportunity for learning prior to the summer program commencement was invaluable for all staff
- Upon our return to the centre on August 24th, there was much excitement
- At the September All Staff meeting, we wrapped up the summer experience with a celebration of our time, a re-cap of our expectations and a presentation of a plaque of appreciation for our work by BBBSE. The Ex. Director and the Board Chair were also in attendance and spoke to thank staff for their valuable contributions
- Staff identified; extensive hands on learning, increased knowledge of various cultures and refugee experience, knowledge of the issues faced by a start up agency, benefits of rules, support and supervision and by being in the same space as others on a regular basis
- Some key words to note are: enjoyment, enrichment, fulfillment and accomplishment.

Recommendations:

- Continue to review policies/procedures, best practices for programming and involve and inform staff
- Continue to provide the resources/equipment needed to provide quality programming
- Continue to attract and retain qualified staff within all program areas
- Ensure there is a leadership role (go to person) on all projects and programs offered in order to support staff and ensure clear and consistent working practices
- Continue to seek opportunities for staff to learn about other cultures/countries and the difficulties/experiences those families face
- Re-visit/re-new the practice of showcasing our own successes in the All Staff meetings
- Share with teams/other staff the successes within programs or caseload
- Continue to showcase the work of the children through activities such as show and share, HS graduation activities, National Child Day and the AGM etc.
- Partnership work that involves the entire agency and all staff should be vetted at the Management team. Opportunity for feedback, alternatives and clear understanding should be entrenched to ensure all options/issues are addressed prior to entering into this type of partnership work
- An appropriate time frame for agreement should be in place to avoid hurried decisions and/or to ensure all information needed is available in order to make such decisions
- A complete partnership agreement should be in place prior to the commencement of future partnership work of this nature in order to ensure, clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and opportunities for conflict resolution
- Ensure proper orientation and communication with staff when engaging in partnership work with other organizations
- Continue to look for methods to create these feelings (Enjoyment, Enrichment, Fulfillment, Accomplishment) in staff on a regular basis