



Recruiting and Keeping Families in Your Programs: Techniques Used by Building Healthy Families in Enterprise, Ore.

Here are some ways BHF reaches out to families and keeps them coming back. These four ideas come from Executive Director Amy Johnson and Education Coordinator Maria Weer.

1. Yoga and Parenting Education

“We have a parent educator who is a yoga instructor,” says Maria. “We created a ‘New Year, New Mom’ group that provided 45 minutes of yoga and 45 of *Make Parenting A Pleasure*®. It was absolutely perfect. A [diverse] audience signed up to practice tools for children that we were practicing in yoga. We talked about things like self care, stress management, anger management.”

“I heard some really candid conversations that were very healthy. It was the whole sense that you are not alone. Plus, moms could do yoga with their own gender. Some came just for the yoga and then were equally interested in the parenting piece.”

Amy heard comments like, “I never thought yoga was for us.” Or “I didn’t think it was in our price range.”

“Now,” says Maria, “We want to open that wellness piece to dads. Moms and dads have different needs.”

2. Fill a Gap

“We follow the community’s lead when developing programs,” says Amy. “We find a gap, determine the direction to go, then do research. For example, what does the research say about an after-school program?”

“Most of our programming is related to the public schools. Then we hire staff to move the program forward. We don’t just see a need and act; we look at what should be in a rural model. What should the outcomes look like, how will we measure success? The number one thing at Building Healthy Families...is research. The program doesn’t just pop up. [We are very] intentional about the program.”

3. Care and Feeding

“Keep them all fed!” recommends Maria. “We do a meal and child care. [We] counted 29 at one session. That’s a crowd to feed!”

“People were asking for the recipes,” Maria recalls. “They were realizing that a homecooked recipe is less expensive [than ready-made meals]. It’s easy to do and rewarding. Again, we were modeling that family meal.”

“One way to reduce risk factors is to have a meal together,” says Amy. “So we model that.”

4. Connect with the Community

Maria says, “We’ve kind of become the go-to organization for child and family activities at events. We realized we were [not doing] kids’ activities. Now we are doing 56! We present to the families in truly fun, universal ways. We use school readiness, evidence-based activities.

“For example, we made bubbles. We had huge bins and giant bubble wands, and we served more than 1,000 children and families. We sent them home with the recipe – we’re very big on take-aways they can do at home – and we incorporated early counting/school skills. We’re showing them easy, affordable, away-from-screen-time activities.

“Be visible! We’re taking programming to the people rather than everyone coming to us.”

Amy says it’s important to have program-specific staff at events. “Our after-school program staff will be at an event so the community gets to know them. Our drug and prevention program coordinator goes to events. We do a lunch in the park and connect with 20-30 families per week. It’s such a great place to network with parents. Very natural, very grassroots. It makes parent education the norm. We’re there with our families. It almost removes the ‘Oh, you’re here because you’re struggling’ thought. We’re all in the lives of children.”

“If you can make families feel comfortable and not intimidated,” Maria adds, “it’s [easier for them] to walk through the door of a social service agency. They think, ‘Oh, that’s the bubble lady from the park.’ We’re almost on their turf.

“And it’s fun!”