



Inclusion is community links and networking

Knowing your community, the support programs located within it and where to go to for support are an important part of working towards inclusive practices. Children's services programs are not able to operate in isolation from the community, nor can educators within children's services operate in isolation from other professionals. Building networks is one way of strengthening practices in children's services.

Working in isolation from other children's services and support providers is all too common in the busy lives of children's services educators. At times, it may seem that the effort required to build community networks yields little return. The risk in such behaviour and attitude is that programs may find themselves working in isolation and not capitalising on the knowledge, resources and opportunities within the local communities they serve.

A children's services program which works in isolation:

- Has limited relationships with other program providers
- Is an isolated program within its community
- Has limited knowledge about how other allied professionals undertake their work
- Has a lack of knowledge about what is happening politically within the children's services sector.

Moving beyond isolation and into a desire to network and enhance your community links may require educators to consider effective ways to network with other professionals. Networking can be daunting for some, or an exciting opportunity for others. Here are some tips to assist you in networking:

- Attend local community networking groups (e.g. local children's services director networks or early intervention interagencies)
- Take advantage of networking opportunities by introducing yourself to people whom you don't know
- Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations
- Keep a list of contacts and share with colleagues
- Follow up with people whom you have met (e.g. send an email)
- Respond to referrals efficiently and quickly.

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When thinking about inclusion, networking provides many benefits to children's services educators. It is important to note that as educators we cannot be experts in everything. Therefore, to augment our knowledge and skills, it is wise to draw on the knowledge and skills of others.

In pursuing networking opportunities related to supporting the inclusion of children, educators can enhance:

- Their knowledge about the various supports available through agencies
- Promote to other support agencies that their program is an inclusive program
- Their knowledge about inclusion

Children's services staff may consider building networks with a range of allied professionals:

- Local schools, teachers and educational environments

- Children and family interagencies
- Disability agencies
- Local Aboriginal elders and peak groups
- Cultural groups and peak agencies
- Refugee agencies

Building networks takes time and energy. Ultimately, the goal of building strong connections within your community is to strengthen your networks and provide reciprocal support to others who work with children and families.

Key Points

- Take time to network with others in your community
- Compile a list of support agencies
- Network in ways that help strengthen your approach to inclusion

If teams are unsure or have any further questions they can contact the *ACT Inclusion Support Agency (ISA)* for further assistance on **6287 3330** or via email **inclusion@commsatwork.org**

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