

mission

The BCCN aims to be national influencers and providers of outstanding information, training and support to those engaged in the Early Childhood and After School sector, where vision, collaboration, inclusion and standards are key values ensuring that children are at the heart of all that we do.

about BCCN

The BCCN exists to support the attainment of national quality standards in both Early Childhood and After School Services through the provision of information, training, on-site mentoring and networking with other agencies to increase levels of support to services. The Network operates locally, regionally and nationally with both voluntary and statutory agencies throughout the island of Ireland



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networking and partnership

'supporting attainment of national quality standards
in early childhood and afterschool services... promoting
children's health, wellbeing, learning and development.'

guidelines

for successful networking and partnership

- ✦ The first requirement of good networks or partnerships is strong groups. Individual groups need to be sure of their own identity, aims, needs, values, vision etc. All members need to be involved in deciding whether or not they want to network and work in partnership and if so, why and with whom.
- ✦ Groups need to devote real resources – time/money/people – to the networking process and commit to it. Everyone needs to understand the value and purpose of networking and partnership.
- ✦ Structures should be put in place to make sure everyone is kept involved and informed e.g. regular mail outs.
- ✦ All network or partnership members need to work together to develop a clear and agreed statement of aims, objectives and short, medium and long term goals. Essential questions to be answered are: Why was the network or partnership established? What does it hope to achieve? Who is it for? Who is it not for? What does it have the resources and the capacity to work on now and what should wait until it is stronger? What is its vision? What is its mission?
- ✦ Networks or partnerships should work together to develop a clear understanding and statement of their basis for unity - is it a shared goal, a shared location, a shared philosophy, a shared experience? What is it that is vital that all members share? Determining the basis of unity is essential to the network or partnership's identity; it also helps to establish who can

and who cannot join. Working from the broadest possible basis of unity in order to encourage and facilitate inclusiveness, needs to be balanced against maintaining an identity and remaining sincere to the group's aims and objectives.

- ✦ Regular time is required to identify the collective strengths, riches and differences of members. It is essential for all members to name, recognise, respect and work with difference.
- ✦ Groups need to develop an informed programme of work based on consultations with members giving consideration to expressed priorities, resources, capacity and needs. The programme needs to specify task, responsibilities, roles and time limits.
- ✦ Strong groups establish good structures for accountability and participation. This means developing open, two way and accurate information and financial systems, publicising decisions, policies, areas of responsibility and developing ways to ensure active participation by its members through ongoing communication.
- ✦ Effective networks and partnerships are committed to and invest in regular evaluation through which the impact of the network's work is assessed in terms of both task and process. Such evaluations pose questions like: How representative is the network? Who is missing? How are decisions made? How active/involved are the members? What needs to change? Is there a need for the group to continue? Who carries out the work of the network or partnership group?
- ✦ Networking and partnership is essentially about relationships. It is important to value meeting and working together and to invest in celebration and having fun. Social events bond people and groups and build solidarity.

For agencies to work successfully in partnership with each other the following components should be in place:



networking and partnership

- ✦ Is a valuable process whereby representatives from different groups come together to achieve common goals and to share experiences, information, knowledge and expertise.
- ✦ Can be formal or informal, structured or free flowing, one to one or with a group.

- ✦ Can provide access to a broad range of information and assist in influencing change to a degree that would not be possible were a group or individual to work in isolation.
- ✦ The Border Counties Childhood Network provides an example of how a network can operate effectively to achieve common goals whilst members still retain their own identity.
- ✦ Can provide opportunities to exchange ideas with other professionals from a variety of different backgrounds; to widen horizons, learn from others and generally expand learning experiences beyond the normal confines. This not only helps to improve practice in many areas, but also makes for innovative working and facilitates change where necessary.

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