

NETWORKING

Networking is a valuable process whereby representatives from different groups come together to achieve common goals and to share experiences, information, knowledge and expertise.

Networking can be formal or informal, structured or free flowing, one to one or with a group.

Networking 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 Childcare Network provides an example of how a network can operate effectively to achieve common goals whilst members still retain their own identity.

Networking provides 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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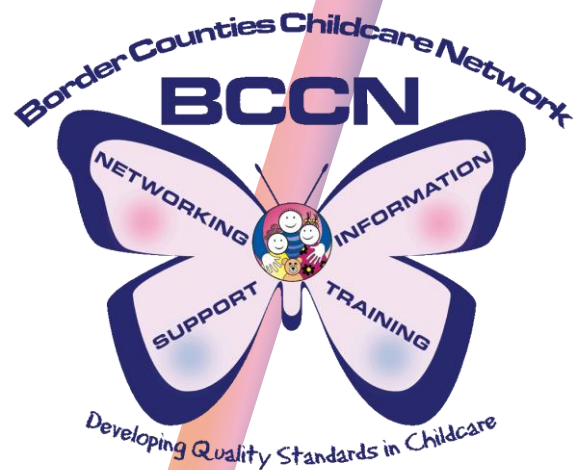
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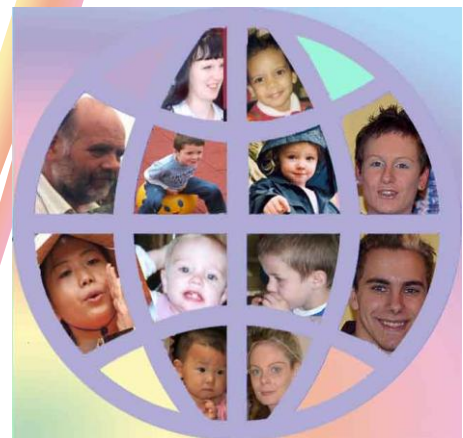
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Border Counties Childcare Network



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Supporting the Attainment of Quality Standards in Childcare Services

Guidelines for successful networking:

- ✈ The first requirement of good networks 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 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.
- ✈ Structures should be put in place to make sure everyone is kept involved and informed e.g. regular mail outs.
- ✈ All network 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 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 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'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
- ✈ Regular time is required to identify the collective strengths, riches and differences of the network's members. It is essential for all members to name, recognise, respect and work with difference.
- ✈ Networks 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.
- ✈ Good networks 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 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 network to continue? Who carries out the work of the network?
- ✈ Networking 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.

