



PARENT NETWORK Overview

The Lenawee County Great Start Parent Network (PN) is open to all caregivers of children ages 0-12 or community members who work with children ages 0-5. The PN represents the diversity of our community and are passionate about our vision and mission. PN members are volunteers and they each bring to the table their own personal experiences of what is like to live, work and raise children in Lenawee County.

The Parent Network works with the Lenawee Great Start Collaborative (collaborate: to work jointly with others) toward our common vision and mission.

VISION

All children in Lenawee County will start school healthy, safe, and ready to succeed.

All children – give each child the same opportunity to be successful. We strive to be a community where everyone works together to meet the needs of every family.

Healthy – Not just physically healthy but socially and emotionally healthy. Social/emotional health is the cornerstone of ALL other learning. Identification and early intervention of any health issue in children is fundamental to learning.

Safe – Each child should be in an environment free of abuse and neglect. A place where their most basic needs are always met, not only at home but in childcare as well.

Ready – We hope that each child's experiences leading up to their first day of school creates a sense of joy, possibility and hopefulness about their future, making them eager to learn.

To assure a coordinated system of community resources and services that provide a great start for all children.

Coordinated system – an interconnected system, one that is based on everything we have learned about early child development and how important early intervention is. One that recognizes how important parents are as their child's first teacher and how family shapes the future of each child. This system might look different in each community based on their specific needs and unique issues.

Community resources and services – includes both public & private resources and services. Coordination of these services includes identifying what services are being duplicated and what services are missing. Informing agencies of where other agencies or organizations can provide support and giving them the responsibility to forward families to the right support agency.

MISSION

The Parent Network strives to bring a parent voice to the Collaborative, build public support for early childhood issues, offers learning opportunities, advocates for young children, provides parent support and supports the work of the Lenawee Great Start Collaborative.

PARENT VOICE

What do we mean when we say the PARENT VOICE?

To give a parent voice to the planning, administration and ongoing improvement of the local family support system.

Why is the PARENT VOICE important?

Parent voice can help convince local programs to become better able to meet their needs. The Collaborative needs parents to provide feedback on their experiences and offer a better understanding of the needs in the community, providing the "customer" perspective. The Parent Liaisons bring parent concerns to Collaborative meetings.

What do we mean when we say SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE GREAT START COLLABORATIVE (GSC)?

The Collaborative is made up of parents, business leaders, non-profits, human services, education partners, childcare professionals, health care professionals, faith based and other community leaders. The Parent Network lends support to the efforts to the Great Start Collaborative by being present at Collaborative meetings, getting the word out to parents about community activities and to help insure the GSC is representing the views of parents in the community.

Why is SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE GREAT START COLLABORATIVE important?

Great Start is working to build a system from the bottom-up (from the users of the system – parents & families) AND the top-down (leaders of the system – decision makers & community foundations). The PN can bridge the gap between users and providers by providing information and feedback and take part in the planning and decision making process. The PN also can help plan events, be present in the community and help guide the GSC to the outcome needed by our families. The end goal of both the Parent Network and the Collaborative is the same: To make Lenawee a great place for our kids!

SUPPORTING THE GSC

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

What do we mean when we say LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

Parents are given opportunities to expand their leadership and advocacy skills through professional development and peer-to-peer learning experiences. PN members are encouraged to let the Parent Liaisons know if there is a subject they are interested in.

Why are LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES important?

Training can provide PN members with the confidence and skills to be effective public speakers and advocates. Parents will learn of the importance of investing in early childhood and can share the message with their friends, family, organizations, community leaders, business owners, and all those whose support we need to create a better early childhood system for our community. Parents spreading the word will build support of the Great Start Collaborative and our community mission to encourage school readiness.

What do we mean when we say **BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT**?

Educating business owners, community leaders, educators, healthcare providers, childcare providers, support service providers, parents, as well as local, state and national lawmakers about the importance of investing in young children ages 0-5.

Why is **BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT** important?

Government alone cannot and should not be responsible to make sure every child arrives at school ready to learn. As a community we need to come together to make sure our children start school ready to succeed. Parents are passionate about their children and that makes them great messengers. Talk about the amount of development that occurs before children arrive at their first day of school. We spread the word that we need to support families and help them to be the best parent they can be. We explain to those we meet how sending kids to school ready to learn will give Lenawee County and Michigan the future workforce needed to strengthen our economy.

What do we mean when we say **PARENT SUPPORT**?

Give parents the opportunity to connect with friends and have fun with their children while strengthening their parenting knowledge base. We also provide opportunities for families to find out about public and private supports for issues they may be facing. It is also important to state that we are not a playgroup, a support group, a service or program, we don't develop or print parent education material or lobby legislators.

Why is **PARENT SUPPORT** important?

No one understands what it is like to be a parent of a young child like another parent. Sharing our parenting successes or found resources is a rewarding way for us to help others. The system can be frustrating to parents. We don't want parents to give up in their search for help during the critical first 5 years of their child's life. Having parents find the help they need makes them feel they are in control and builds their confidence. Parents are their child's first and most important teacher and research shows strong parents make the biggest difference in a child's future.

What do we mean when we say **ADVOCACY**?

We are looking to strengthen the involvement of parents in the community on behalf of young children by asking them to contact our legislators at the local, state and federal level and let them know the importance of supporting early childhood investments. We help parents write to their legislator, send letters to the editor, and stay informed on what is going on with early childhood bills and funding in the legislature. We also attend events where we have the opportunity to meet face to face with policy makers.

Why is **ADVOCACY** important?

Our PN members come to the table understanding the concerns and needs of the parents of young children in our community. Informing lawmakers and community leaders about the policies that are barriers to parents in our community is a way to help make changes. Just talking to family, friends or neighbors regarding early childhood issues or services also makes parents advocates.