

New Alternatives for Children (NAC)

Resources for Recruiting and Retaining Youth

- To start, we developed detailed and eye-catching flyers and brochures, which we distributed to all of the social workers at the agency – we also created these flyers and brochures in Spanish, as we work with many Spanish-speaking families. We went around NAC and posted the flyers on the walls by all of the elevators and in the mailrooms, as well as left copies in each staff's mailbox.
- We went to all of the different department's monthly department meetings to present the new program to staff. This is something that we will continue to do repeatedly as time goes on. This is partly due to turnover of staff, but also simply the need to remind staff. The social workers have a lot going on – they have high caseloads and crises to deal with, and unfortunately a positive social support group is often overlooked. Oftentimes if a new worker is just starting out, they are being on loaded with so much new information and resources that it is just too much – they need reminders and re-orientations after they get settled into their roles.
- We send all staff emails every few months to remind the staff about the program.
- During agency-wide events, we take advantage of meeting new families and assessing who might be good fits for the program. For example, we have an annual Book Fair, as well as an annual Back to School event, so these are opportunities to sit in the front and catch families as they are walking in and present the program. After we speak with the families directly, we will reach out to their workers and explain that their client is interested in enrolling in the program, and the social worker is usually on board and grateful that we took the first step ourselves.
 - Reaching out to the social workers individually is important, in addition to the all staff emails and meetings – they are definitely more likely to respond when you are reaching out to them personally.
- Community outreach has been a big part of our work. We have formed partnerships with some organizations, like The Go Project and Children's Village. We have also outreached to schools in the families' communities. We try to organize meetings to meet directly and in person with the staff, but it is also really helpful to go to parent meetings at different organizations to present the program. We've gone to Family Resource Fairs, where we set up a table to distribute flyers and brochures to families, as well as network with colleagues at other organizations.
- We send out welcome letters and calendars that illustrate all of the exciting topics, field trips, and events planned. These are addressed to the youth and their families, so they really feel like they are becoming a part of something significant.

- We offer to do home visits to meet with parents and the kids to describe the program, as well as follow up if attendance is low. This shows the families that we truly care and offers them an opportunity to talk about any concerns they have or barriers they are facing in coming to group.
- We offer to meet with parents on Saturdays before or after the group to talk about the program and do intakes, in case they work during the week.
- If the families are interested in joining, we present the program as a commitment. In our permission form and welcome letter, we state that it is expected for the youth to attend all sessions unless they have a valid reason for being absent – it is not a “pick and choose” program. We also state that it is expected for the parents/caregivers to participate in our monthly parent education groups. This helps with keeping attendance up, and it also helps when we need to have a conversation with families about low attendance – reminding them what we had discussed at the start of the program.
 - On the flipside, if youth are resistant to joining, we give them the opportunity to give the group a try, rather than telling them they must make the decision to commit ahead of time - 9 out of 10 times they end up loving it! It is better to get the youth to come to the group once to try it out than for them to not come at all.
- We offer time for youth to do homework if it is after school, so this does not become a barrier.
- And more...
 - We provide food – snacks, water, lunch/dinner at every session
 - We provide van transportation or Metro cards
 - We ask for input from the youth – what do they want to do, make them a part of the planning process
 - Make it fun! Exciting new field trips, family days to engage the parents