From the Director's Desk - "Making Communities Successful" - by Suzanne Bowers

My favorite definition of community is “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals”. I like this definition because it doesn’t mean that everyone needs to be related by blood, rather by your mutual interests and beliefs. There’s also no limit on the number of people who can be in the community, nor does the definition say that everyone has to be the same or equal so it allows anyone to start a community, whether they have a disability or not….. how perfect is that?!

To make a community successful, there are some important guidelines to follow. Whether you are bound to a community with a mutual interest in sports, hobbies, religion, or goals, it’s important to set some expectations for your community so that everyone is respected and treated equally. One such guideline is to respect everyone’s opinion, even if you don’t agree with it. It’s also important to ensure that everyone’s opinion is heard and considered when making plans in the community. If guidelines are established and followed, it will allow members of the community learn and grow, which results in a win-win for everyone!

So think about the communities in which you belong. What are the guidelines established for your community and are you doing your part to be a positive member of that community?
Latino Corner by Arianna Sweeney

Soñadores que están triunfando más allá del condado de Arlington

El Proyecto de los Soñadores mejor conocido como (Dream Project) es un ejemplo fijo de lo que significa trabajar con y por tu comunidad para proveer un futuro positivo para niños y familias indocumentadas que lo necesitan. El Dream Project es una organización sin fines de lucro, creado para motivar y apoyar a estudiantes inmigrantes adolescentes en la búsqueda de alcanzar una educación superior. Esto se lo hace por medio de tutorías, becas, abogacía y enlace comunitario.

El Dream Project empezó alrededor de unos cinco años, en una comunidad de Arlington y se convirtió en una organización sin fines de lucro para unir y trabajar junto a familias indocumentadas, alumnos de secundaria y de la universidad, profesionales, educadores y voluntarios que quieran aportar. Este grupo empezó como un grupo de apoyo para familias indocumentadas que se reunían para discutir formas de ayudar a sus hijos en horas después de la escuela. Es ahí cuando la fundación nació, creado por el amor de padres que no podía soportar al ver que sus sueños académicos de sus hijos estaban siendo detenidos por el hecho de ser indocumentados.

Hoy en día, esta organización sin fines de lucro apoya y auspicia alrededor de 70 talentosos adolescentes inmigrante a través de programas de tutoría por profesionales, becas y al mismo tiempo ensenándoles estrategias para abogar por sí mismos y por los demás. Afortunadamente, el grupo de padres fue adoptado por dos maravillosas congregaciones, La Iglesia Universalista Unitaria de Arlington y por la Iglesia Comunitaria Católica del Norte de Virginia, las cuales proveyeron una donación significante para la organización.

Actualmente, la organización sin fines de lucro formalmente colabora con el Colegio Comunitario Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), la Universidad de George Mason y la Universidad Privada de Marymount. Los padres mencionaron el haber trabajado muy duro, haciendo sus mejores esfuerzos para poder obtener el apoyo de instituciones importantes como, escuelas públicas, colegios comunitarios, universidades estatales y de organizaciones religiosas.

Estudiantes “Soñadores” del mismo programa del Dream Project han desarrollado varios grupos de “DREAMers” en diferentes universidades de Virginia, incluyendo “Mason Dreamers” de la Universidad de George Mason. Estos estudiantes se han convertido en líderes de la comunidad, apoyando y compartiendo sus historias; estos soñadores se han convertido en voces poderosas que exigen un cambio en Virginia. Una estudiante Dreamer dijo, “Haberse dado cuenta de los muchos estudiantes que existen en su misma situación. Mientras más cooperaba y abogaba con otros DREAMers, al haber ido a California se dio cuenta que era un problema a nivel nacional.”

Actualmente, estudiantes de 15 secundarias del Norte de Virginia asisten a varios colegios comunitarios y Universidades. La mayoría de los DREAMers son de Sud-América (especialmente de Bolivia, Perú, Colombia y El Salvador); sin embargo, el Dream Project también tiene estudiantes del Corea del Sur, Mongolia, Ethiopia y de las Filipinas. Lo cual demuestra la diversidad del Norte de Virginia hoy en día.

El primer grupo de estudiantes del Dream Project se graduara en Mayo 2015.

Fuente:

Dreamers Succeeding in Arlington and Beyond

The Dream Project is a clear example of community building collaboration with the purpose of building a positive future for children and families in need. The Dream Project is a community-based non-profit organization designed to encourage and support promising, qualifying immigrant youth students in their pursuit of higher education through mentoring, scholarships, advocacy, and community outreach.

The Dream Project began five years ago in Arlington as a community-based non-profit organization bringing together undocumented families, high school and college children, educators and donors. Such started as a support group for undocumented families as an afterschool activity. That is when a group of parents who could not bear to see their children’s academic achievements and dreams undermined by barriers of being undocumented. Parents came together asking for help and support from the community to make this Dream Project come true. Nowadays, the community-based organization directly supports about 70 promising immigrant youth through a mentoring program for high school seniors, offering scholarships, and promoting advocacy.

Fortunately, early on the Dream Project was adopted and supported by two wonderful congregations, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington and the Northern Virginia Catholic Community, which provided critical donations. Entire families feel greatly supported for all the love and support, which has been an enormous help for the development of the community-based non-profit organization.

Currently, The Dream Project formally collaborates with Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), George Mason University and Marymount University. Parents said to have worked very hard and put a lot of time and effort in order to get support and be able to partner with key institutions such as public schools, community colleges, state universities, and religious organizations.

Dream Scholars from our program have nurtured student-led DREAMer groups at various Virginia colleges including the Mason Dreamers at George Mason University. By becoming part of a supportive community and sharing their stories of struggle, the Dreamers have become powerful voices for change in Virginia. As one Dream Scholar describes, “I got involved with the Dream Project and realized there are more Dreamers in Virginia. Then I got more involved with advocacy and I went to California and realized that this is a national issue.”

Currently, students from 15 different Northern Virginia high schools are attending different colleges and universities. Most of the current Dreamers are from Latin America (especially Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and El Salvador); however, the Dream Project also has students from South Korea, Mongolia, Ethiopia, and the Philippines, which reflects Northern Virginia’s diversity.

The first group of scholars from the Dream Project will graduate May 2015.

Works Cited
Mental Health Corner by Caroline Gentleman - "Healthy Minds, Healthy Community"

“Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community” is Anthony D’Angelo’s belief. As a young adult he says he spent his college days seeking an education, not a degree. They were spent learning about the world through student activities, student government and walking trails. In other words, he learned in his community. He has made it his life’s work to guide young adults to create a life worth living. What a mantra this is.

Families build a community and the community wraps around the family. Children do well when their families are working well. Families do well when they are within supportive communities.

What can each of us do to build a better community, a caring community? First, recognize that we all have some obligation to each other. Open your heart and mind to notice when someone is in need. Feeling isolated and alone can have a devastating impact. Loneliness can bring on and worsen depression and other psychological issues. Visualize fractures in the structure of the community. Our children watch us and depend on us to keep their world strong.

According to a recent report (http://speakup.childmind.org/report.html) from ChildMind, of the 74.5 million children in the United States, an estimated 17.1 million have or have had a psychiatric disorder.

“In spite of the magnitude of the problem, lack of awareness and entrenched stigma keep the majority of these young people from getting help. Children and adolescents with psychiatric illness are at risk for academic failure, substance abuse, and a clash with the juvenile justice system — all of which come at a tremendous cost to them, their families, and the community.”

There is that essential word “community”. As a community we need to understand and be more compassionate about mental health issues. Depressed individuals often recall moments of acute distress. When no one reached out and simply asked, “Are you all right?” the distress only worsened. If you sense this in someone, don’t walk away. Let your child see you care. Sometimes a kind word and smile can make a difference.

Talk to your child about bullying. Make certain he understands not to hide it from you if he is the victim. Help him understand the cruelty of it and importance of standing up for someone in his community who is being bullied. He can be the difference.

For your home and community, take a Mental Health First Aid Course. It is offered through your local Family Service Agency or search Mental Health First Aid. This teaches you exactly what a first aid course teaches you about a physical injury. It helps you understand when someone is in trouble and what best to do until professional help is in place.

Most of all, realize that mental health issues can be helped tremendously with proper intervention and support. Don’t be ashamed and don’t be afraid to offer support. Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about, be kind.

Never miss an opportunity to build your community with – and for – your family.

Read with your child:
- Is There Really a Human Race? By Jamie Lee Curtis
- The Crayon Box That Talked by Shane Derolf
Early Childhood Corner by Lakeshia Yancey - "Being an active member of a community"

Being an active member of a community is vital to people of all ages. This is even truer for our little ones and their parents. The standard version of the “play date” has changed over the years. They are no longer a group of stay at home moms corralling a group of kids in someone’s home or simply meeting at the local playground.

The play group has changed to include moms and dads and fun, interactive meeting spots, such as museums, restaurants, or participating in larger community events. There are some that are open to the general public and some are geared for children with similar needs.

Fostering these tight knit types of communities are not only important to the children, but to the parents as well. Children get to interact with children of different ages and developmental levels, which can help to improve their social functioning, speech, and behavior skills. Parents gain a sense of companionship and develop support groups.

Today’s play group is also a new avenue of information dissemination and obtainment. Groups invite professionals or speakers from different organizations to discuss a topic of interest. This is an area in which PEATC’s Early Childhood program can be helpful. We are here to support family engagement and provide information on topics concerning Virginia’s youngest children with special needs.

We will be offering PEATC Play Dates in the near future. During each Play Date there will be activities for the little ones, useful information for families, and the opportunity to interact with other families and hopefully create a new support system. We will also come and hang out with your group as well.

For more information on upcoming dates or to request a training please visit http://www.peatc.org/.
PEATC Workshops and Events - June 2015

**Tuesday, June 2, 2015** - SEAC Region 6 Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the Hilton Garden Inn Roanoke, 4500 South Peak Blvd., Roanoke, VA 24018. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.

**Wednesday, June 3, 2015** - PEATC will be an exhibitor at the Fort Lee Army Community Service 3rd Annual Special Needs Health and Resource Fair from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Regimental Club, 2609 C. Avenue, Fort Lee, VA 23801. For further information, please contact Keiandria Dickerson at 804-734-7965 or keiandria.n.dickersonctr@mail.mil.

**Thursday, June 4, 2015** - SEAC Region 7 Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the Bolling Wilson Hotel, 170 E Main St., Wytheville, VA 24382. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.

**Tuesday, June 9, 2015** - "Collaborative Advocacy Efforts: Working Together Towards Change" Webinar, 11:00 am-12:00 pm; In this presentation Lyn Pollard, Parent Advocacy Manager with the National Center for Learning Disabilities will give a first-hand look behind the scenes of ongoing advocacy efforts at the federal, state and local level, helping highlight why community development and collaboration are keys to success. Please register HERE: https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/s/registrations/new?cid=1uj3yod3n45u

**Tuesday, June 9, 2015** - SEAC Region 5 Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the Comfort Suites Manassas Battlefield Park, 7350 Williamson Boulevard, Manassas, VA, 20109. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.
Family Engagement Corner by Tina Norris - "Building Community through the eyes of Family Engagement"

Building community does not have to be a monumental task. It really is quite simple - accept people for who they are!

If we are truly committed to building strong collaborate networks, we need to accept people as they are and stop wishing them to be different. Realizing that people perform, interact and are involved based on their current resources both internal and external. I believe all people strive for excellence as they see it and on their schedules, not on ours. The beauty of community building is that people who are different from us push our thinking. They can help us become the best of what we want to be if we remain open to the experience.

A golden rule in building communities - we must think with, not for those we are in relationship or partnership with. Here we bounce ideas off one another. This not only creates respect, it creates deeper understandings and a broader perspective for all.. People often feel powerless and frustrated because they believe they cannot contribute or make a difference. Do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it. Be clear and specific on what your needs are. Community building is a give and take.

We have all heard “it takes a village to raise a child” and it still does. Your village can be your parent support groups, your family and friends or even your church. Adults in either setting can provide wisdom, guidance and direction to help us along the way. Have passion about building communities. Your passion can be contagious and the outcome of your efforts will be rewarding. We all strategically fit in our personal communities and our handprint [our your gifts, talents, resources and more importantly our voice] should be left somewhere within the community.

Do your part and together, the world will be a better place.

PEATC On Demand and In the Spotlight by Kristin Kane - “Building a Community of Friends”

“Friendships are important not only to youth development but also to the growth and expansion of social networks. Although there has long been acknowledgment of this importance for youth, such relationships can be especially elusive for transition-age students with autism, intellectual disability, and other developmental disabilities.” [Carter, E. W., Asmus, J., & Moss, C. K. (2013). Fostering Friendships: Supporting Relationships among Youth with and without Developmental Disabilities. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1006612)]

This month’s PEATC On Demand Webinar spotlight, Friendship Fun, spends one hour discussing friendships and community in the disability community. Viewers will explore the diversity and nature of their own friendships and build a vision of possibilities for children to develop positive relationships and friendships with each other. The importance of creating a climate of acceptance, belonging, and community in schools will be stressed by infusing opportunities for creating this climate across all areas of the curriculum and throughout the school day. Lastly, viewers will identify specific strategies that parents, general educators, and special educators can use to facilitate friendships for students.

To access this webinar copy and paste this link into your browser: https://youtu.be/PFGsdp4_D94