

**FAMILY PLACE LOGIC MODEL
FOCUS GROUP REPORT OF
PARENT/CAREGIVERS FOR
FIVE BLAIR COUNTY LIBRARIES**

ALTOONA

BELLWOOD

HOLLIDAYSBURG

ROARING SPRING

TYRONE

**Prepared by facilitator
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FOCUS GROUP REPORTS

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Introduction

A focus group is a group interview which uses the synergy of group dynamics to provide qualitative data concerning a set of questions constructed around a specific topic. Groups consist of 6-12 participants selected randomly or chosen to represent specific voices from a population. A facilitator trained in group process conducts the group which lasts one to two hours.

Most focus groups are audio taped with the tapes being destroyed once a written analysis is completed by the facilitator. An observer/recorder may also be used to take notes. The written analysis is prepared by the facilitator and provides confidentiality by attributing all data to the group and not to a specific, identified individual.

Focus groups solicit participant perspectives on the given topic. They are not about solving problems, gaining consensus, or debating issues. Focus groups are useful in discovering what people think and how they feel. Data analysis is always qualitative and never quantitative.

Guidelines for Reviewing Focus Group Reports

1. Do not let positive comments inflate your ego.
2. Do not act defensively regarding negative comments.
3. Do construct questions to help you understand and clarify the data.
4. Keep in mind the data is qualitative, not quantitative.
5. Think about immediate actions you and/or the organization can take to improve both positive and negative situations.
6. Generate some ideas for long range and strategic planning for the organization.

FAMILY PLACE LOGIC MODEL
PARENT/CAREGIVERS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. HOW HAVE YOU INCREASED YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN’S USE OF THE LIBRARY AS A RESOURCE AND “FAMILY PLACE”?
 - A. IS THE LIBRARY A DESTINATION FOR A SPECIFIC ITEM, OR IS IT A PLACE TO SPEND SOME TIME?
 - B. WHICH SPECIFIC LIBRARY SERVICES HAVE YOU USED?
 - C. WHICH ADDITIONAL SERVICES ARE YOU AWARE OF, BUT, HAVE NOT USED, YET?
 - D. WHICH SERVICES MIGHT YOU USE IN THE FUTURE?
 - E. WHICH SERVICES HAVE YOUR CHILDREN ENJOYED THE MOST?
 - F. WHICH SERVICES DO YOU THINK HAVE THE MOST LONG-TERM VALUE FOR YOUR CHILDREN?

2. HOW HAS THE FAMILY PLACE PROGRAM ENHANCED EMERGENT LITERACY (ACTIONS THAT ENCOURAGE READING AND LEARNING) ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CHILDREN?
 - A. WHICH BOOKS AND TOYS HAVE INTERESTED YOUR CHILDREN THE MOST?
 - B. HOW HAS YOUR CHILDREN’S ATTITUDE CONCERNING BOOKS, READING AND MUSIC CHANGED THE LAST FEW WEEKS?
 - C. DO YOU HAVE ANY EXAMPLES OF YOUR CHILDREN’S INITIATIVE IN SELECTING SPECIFIC BOOKS AND TOYS AT THE LIBRARY, AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY?
 - D. WHEN DO YOU SELECT ITEMS TO TAKE HOME FROM THE LIBRARY?
 - E. WHICH SPECIFIC CONCEPTS AND IDEAS DID THE STAFF EMPHASIZE AND ENCOURAGE? i.e. “play early and often”, “parent as first teacher”, etc.
 - F. HOW HAS READING/INTERACTION WITH PARENTS/CAREGIVERS CHANGED?
 - G. WHAT SPECIFIC CREATIVE ACTIVITES HAVE YOU OBSERVED IN YOUR CHILDREN?

3. HOW HAS THE FAMILY PLACE PROGRAM ENHANCED PARENTING SKILLS AND PARENT-TO-PARENT INTERACTION?
 - A. IN WHICH AREAS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT DID YOU GAIN THE MOST UNDERSTANDING?
 - B. WHICH EXPERTS WERE MOST HELPFUL AND INFORMATIVE?
 - C. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM OTHER PARENTS/CAREGIVERS?
 - D. WHICH RELATIONSHIPS DEVELOPED IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS DO YOU PLAN TO CONTINUE?
 - E. WHICH SPECIFIC INFORMATION FROM BROCHURES, PAMPHLETS AND THE PARENTING COLLECTION DID YOU FIND HELPFUL?
 - F. HOW ACCESSABLE AND CONVENIENT WAS THE PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND LOCATION FOR YOU?
 - G. DOES THIS "INFORMAL" MODEL WORK FOR YOUR FAMILY?
 - H. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE TIME SPENT WITH YOUR CHILD IN THIS LIBRARY? (provide note cards for all to respond)

4. WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS CAN THE LIBRARY MAKE TO ENHANCE ITS ROLE AS A COMMUNITY PARTNER?
 - A. IN WHICH ADDITIONAL LIBRARY SPONSERED PROGRAMS ARE YOU INTERESTED PARTICIPATING?
 - B. WHAT NEW PROGRAMS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE LIBRARY SPONSER?
 - C. WHAT EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY COOPERATION IS THERE TO PROMOTE THE LIBRARY AS A VALUED PARTICIPANT?
 - D. WHAT NEWS MEDIA SOURCES OFFER INFORMATION ABOUT THE LIBRARY, ITS STAFF AND ITS PROGRAMS?
 - E. HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY VIEW THE LIBRARY?

5. WHAT QUESTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN ASKED THAT MIGHT NEED TO BE DISCUSSED?

CRITICAL INSIGHTS SUMMARY

The entire program was an outstanding success. There was not a single negative comment about the program or the staff in all five focus groups. The goals of the program were achieved. Parents viewed the program as an opportunity to spend quality, one-on-one time with their children in a stimulating learning environment. Children had a fun time, talked about the fun at home and looked forward to coming to the library and to see the staff. Ten specific critical insights are presented below:

- The staff members are the most critical component to a successful program.
- Parents prized the informality and the relaxed atmosphere of the format.
- The development of the child's social skills was a valued outcome.
- The program format encouraged curiosity and discovery learning.
- The positive habit of regular library attendance and usage was encouraged and reinforced.
- The resource experts made a valuable contribution in their areas of expertise and enjoyed talking informally with the parents.
- The selection of play and learning items was unique to each library, but proved to be interesting and exciting to all the children and typically were not things found at home.
- Different starting times at each library attracted a group who preferred that specific time.
- The library is viewed by the community as a clearing house for educational, informational and leisure resources.
- Each participant used the library to meet a variety of specific needs and frequently discovered something new with each visit.

USE OF THE LIBRARY

How have you increased you and your children's use of the library as a resource and a "family place?"

A number of participants noted that they now come to the library every week and some more than once a week. Almost all increased their attendance, although many viewed this program as a continuation of other offerings for young children (i.e. story times, holiday programs, special events and celebrations, etc.). A visit to the library was like a treasure hunt. A frequent response was that our children wanted to come to get new books to read at home. Recent arrivals to the county cited the library as an excellent source of information and programming to assist in adjusting to a new community. It was also an excellent place to form new friendships.

- A. The library was seen as both a destination and as a place to spend time engaging in planned activities. The major influence encouraging family attendance for both groups was the friendly and helpful staff, particularly those in charge of the children's section. Interacting with the staff was frequently noted as a reason for the children wanting to come to the facility and be involved in a particular program. Those in charge of the children's section seem to know how to interact with children. The library was particularly inviting for this young age group during the winter months when they spend a lot of time at home and there is a decreased amount of daylight. Many parents noted that it was a challenge to get their child to leave when it was time to go home.
- B. The library services used by participants included the children's programs noted above plus interacting with children's books, videos and toys. Parents enjoyed the opportunity to engage in the leisure reading of books and magazines not available at home. Checking out many of the books and videos for children was seen as more economical than purchasing them. One participant noted how valuable the inter-library loan program was for her. One parent noted how helpful the library staff has been in securing language materials and offering tutoring as English as her second language. Another parent cited the display of parenting materials during the Family Place program as being very useful. A home schooling parent praised the resources available in the library for her children's education.
- C. Computers and reference sources were not mentioned as services being used frequently, but might have more value as the child grows older. Most parents cited having a computer at home. Parents of large families who must share a computer at home stated that their older children often used those in the library. One participant had used the fax machine and another used the library resources to obtain her United States citizenship. One participant also mentioned the coupon exchange opportunity.

- D. Future services noted were directly related to the growth and development of the child and the expanding interests of the parents. Specific services mentioned were more children's play groups, crafts for kids, and age related reading programs focused on a variety of children's literature topics. One parent noted that she comes for one specific reason, but finds herself staying for other things. Help with a developmental concern was noted and inviting specific resource experts back to conduct more formal programs was suggested. For example, one parent was concerned with aggressive behavior; another with potty training. It was also noted that many libraries have book clubs for teens and adults and materials to assist in learning foreign languages.
- E. The most enjoyable services for the children were programs led by the children's librarian (or person in that role). The Family Place program was noted as being one of the most outstanding activities for many of the participants. The opportunity to interact with all the staff, resource experts, other parents, and children was highly valued. The selection of toys and crafts was rated as excellent and offered the children an opportunity to play with a variety of interactive items. Introducing new items each session stimulated discovery and interest. Parents considered the purchase of those that were of specific interest to their child. The Family Place program offered toys, crafts and books that were new and different, as opposed to items at home that were now boring. The closing exercise was particularly delightful for the children, particularly if it involved a story.
- F. Participants noted the value of a number of possible long term outcomes. The enjoyment of reading and learning by being around books and related materials in the library setting was cited most frequently, as was the development of social skills through the interaction with other children and adults. Young children who are often intimidated by a new place were easily assimilated into the Family Place array of activity choices. The information provided by the resource experts was viewed as important, helpful, and timely. The opportunity to interact informally was a welcome addition. Having other adults with whom to interact who have similar interests was very rewarding. A group of women in one of the focus groups stayed awhile longer to discuss starting a Mom's Club, which another library has initiated.

EMERGENT LITERACY

How has the Family Place program enhanced emergent literacy (actions that encourage reading and learning) activities for young children?

The Family Place program provided an informal and enjoyable setting to learn a variety of social skills important in developing positive interpersonal relations and an enthusiasm for reading as an essential learning process. Following rules, listening, sharing with others, cleaning up and taking turns were cited as important skills encouraged by the informal program format. Creative actions noted included singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, craft activities, musical instruments and the freedom to choose those activities that were of interest. One parent stated that at home she frequently did multiple tasks while also playing with her child, but this program offered an opportunity to see how valuable the one-on-one time between parent and child could be. She plans to set aside a time at home for this type of play. A number of participants were pleased to discover important developmental guidelines that could be used to assess their child's growth progress. The opportunity to speak English and interact with other children was a valuable learning experience for a child being raised in a bi-lingual home.

- A. Children exhibited a preference for playing with the kitchen, shopping carts, dress-up articles, puppets, puzzles, tactile tray items, blocks, push items, musical instruments and craft activities. Some items adults thought only young children would like were attractive to older children and vice versa. Favorite books were specific to each child, but all had some that they particularly liked. Books about animals were particular favorites. Picture books with real photographs were very popular, as well. All of the craft activities proved interesting and enjoyable. Children enjoyed taking them home to show other family members. One child wore the necklace he made for three days at home. Parents inquired if the items purchased for the program would be available at other times and suggested scheduling specific play dates where these items would be available for use. One participant praised the library staff for encouraging the children to try new toys with which to play.

- B. Attitude changes were evident in the children at home. They talked about the program and staff at home in positive terms. They knew the librarians by name and the day the program was scheduled. For younger children, the library became more comfortable and less frightening place. Now, when entering the facility, the children go directly to their area. In previous visits, one parent pointed out that her child would crawl away during story times, but now will sit and listen. A few parents with somewhat shy children commented on an increased willingness to get closer to people and an openness to change. One participant stated that she has created a place designated at home to keep library materials until the items are due to be returned. Many participants praised the opportunity to view their child discovering new things and developing new skills. A frequent comment was how much a child learns by observing other children. They also appreciated the gentle guidance and assistance their child received from the library staff.
- C. Children had favorite toys, books and activities, but often tried new things when they saw others using them. They copied behaviors from the program for use at home. One child organized a parade at home with musical instruments. Many shared their visit with the parent who did not attend, as well as, with other family members. Numerous parents noted that children were singing more, drawing more and engaging in other craft activities. One parent scheduled a coloring book activity before bedtime.
- D. Families selected items to check out and take home before the program began, at the conclusion of the program and frequently stopped back one or two additional times during the week. There was continual support of learning and reading for all family members. Parents noted that the library was a key source of information when they moved into the county. Thus, for some parents, the library became a support center (and group) for them and helped them get involved in the community and make friends.
- E. Parents viewed the staff as modeling and encouraging key social skills such as respectful listening and communicating with all those present without showing favoritism. The staff made learning fun, yet, encouraged children to act responsible and share with others. They encouraged freedom of choice, as well as, participation in all of the programs activities. They were exceptionally good at finding age appropriate activities for everyone. One parent noted that the program mandated that some time be set aside (each session) for child and parent to play together, making her more aware of the need to set aside similar opportunities at home.

- F. Changes in reading related behaviors with parents involved follow up at home. Children monitored participation and made inquiries regarding the exact time to leave the house to attend the Family Place program. They looked forward to each session and some possessed agendas of specific items they would use and what books and tapes they would check out to take home. One child was quick to remind staff when they forgot to do an expected activity or when an activity occurred out of sequence. Children, over all, listened more to adults and communicated more frequently, thus, improving their pronunciation of words.

- G. Reported creative activities at home involved selecting similar play items and asking to continue the craft activities. One parent noted she should get the Play Dough out more at home and others described activities with cut out shapes and glue. A large number of parents cited that they learned how valuable music activities were in their child's developmental process. One father noted he has learned to allow his daughter to work through her frustrations in learning situations rather than quickly intervene. One parent noticed that his child was using more imagination and pretending more during her play time. Parents, in general, found a gradual increase in creative activities and interests by the children.

PARENTING SKILLS AND INTERACTION

How has the Family Place program enhanced parenting skills and parent-to-parent interaction?

Participants viewed the resource experts as helpful and knowledgeable. They appreciated the information and materials concerning learning and human development. They enjoyed interacting with the resource experts and with the other parents attending the program. Getting to know other parents and developing beginning friendships was particularly rewarding. They saw the library staff as experts and excellent sources of information. The program experience also provided an exciting topic for discussion and sharing at home.

- A. All of the expert resource individuals provided helpful information that was very much appreciated. All experts were friendly and approachable. Just knowing who to contact for a specific concern was helpful in itself. One parent noted that she has learned to be more patient with her child. Understanding the role of music in child development was noted by numerous parents as something they had not considered. Learning about growth patterns and receiving a growth chart and tape measure were favorite take home items. One child measured her doll baby using the chart. Healthy diet and food choices along with suggested menus were welcomed. Participants looked forward to interacting with each resource expert at each session.
- B. The experts noted included the individual from WIC, a dentist, a pediatrician, a person from Penn Mont, the speech/hearing therapist, the family resource person and the music individual were cited by parents as being very helpful. Having a short (5 minutes) presentation by the resource person at the beginning of the session as part of the introductions was suggested by a number of parents. Some parents wanted longer and more formal presentations and suggested inviting the experts to do this at a separate time. A newsletter for mothers of young children was also suggested. A few parents were interested in knowing more about how playing with the specific toys contributed to their child's development.
- C. Being able to spend time with other adults (other parents, staff, and resource experts) who shared common interests was an unexpected outcome for some. This was quite helpful in comparing notes and assessing normal growth patterns and behaviors in their child. For parents who spent a lot of time at home with their child, this was a delightful time to interact with other adults. A few parents suggested that the scheduling of one or two sessions similar to the focus group during the Family Place program would be helpful to discuss common concerns.

- D. Parents began to recognize that the developed friendships could continue beyond this program. This group will become part of a larger group of parents in the community with children of the same age who will find themselves in community gatherings based on the interests of their children.
- E. The example of the tape measure and growth chart from WIC demonstrated the usefulness of take home materials. Another example was the Cheerios Cookbook. One parent found a book on potty training prominently displayed by library staff as part of the program information materials. Identification and grouping of children's literature by reading levels was much appreciated. Vocabulary word use by age was helpful for some parents who were concerned about their child's speaking patterns and vocabulary size. One parent suggested the *Family Fun* magazine as a good source for information and activities. Everyone found something valuable in the resource materials, which was useful for them.
- F. Participants praised the accessible and convenient location and schedule, even though each of the five libraries offered the program at differing times. All noted positive aspects relevant to their chosen library facility. Note that some participants use more than one of the county libraries. Mornings were the most preferred time as not to interfere with afternoon naps. Evening was cited as a time for working mothers and fathers to attend. It is apparent that the beginning time of the program will attract a group who find that time to be most convenient for them.
- G. Some of the highest praises were given to the informal structure of the program and the opportunity to interact at their own pace. The variety and choice of activities, toys and related instructional items interspersed with specific, short structured events made the program fun and enjoyable. The process had a comfortable and individual flow to it. One mother commented that her son is usually intimidated in strange places, but now, does not want to leave the library when the program is over. The "clean up" song was cited as an excellent structured activity and parents were amazed at how well it worked. One parent noted that she and her child do more singing around the house when faced with clean up chores.

- H. When asked to describe the how the time together was spent or what adjectives could be used as program descriptors, parents provided a variety of descriptions. Words and phrases included exciting, enlightening, relaxed, enjoyable, informative, action-oriented, energetic, educational, exploratory, happy time, quality time, social time and fun, fun, fun! Extended descriptions by some parents were as follows:
- The time spent was fun and distraction-free. It was very informative. The opportunity for socialization for mom and child was rewarding as was the one-on-one togetherness.
 - It was a time to observe my daughter having fun and a happy morning. I could see her as she is with others, learning, interacting and laughing.
 - It was a great time to spend one-on-one with my own child. It was positive, fun and educational. This experience laid a great foundation for the future use of the library, learning the love of books and reading.
 - My boys had fun and had some options for free play that was very interactive. It was a chance to socialize and compare with other parents. It helped me become more integrated into the community.
 - I appreciated the one-on-one interaction with my child and the opportunity to spend and learn from other adults. It was easy to stimulate the all the children due to the new and exciting toys and learning materials that are frequently not in the home. This was a great experience.
 - For me, the greatest benefit was my child getting to socialize with other children and adults and the experience of playing with the learning toys that we don't have at home. We spent lots of time doing things together at home, but here, she was safe and in a friendly environment with other kids and moms.
 - My daughter had fun. The program is stimulating and exciting. As a result, she stays in a good mood all day.
 - I enjoyed a stress-free and fun time period with my daughter. I was able to watch her venture into new areas and find toys she enjoyed in a safe and calm atmosphere.
 - Being able to just sit and observe how my three year old and one year old played reinforced my thoughts that parenting is very rewarding; I'll get through the rough patches; and I am truly blessed.

LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY

What contributions can the library make to enhance its role as a community partner?

The consensus across all focus group was that the library staff and the library materials serve the county communities extremely well. The staff, in particular, is doing a great job. They have created a fun, comfortable and informative setting that is attractive to all segments of the community. As some participants noted, there is something here for everybody. One group of participants suggested that some type of handout or handbook on how to use the library and a listing of available resources would be helpful. The physical building is often a gathering and a meeting place for a variety of community groups and organizations. The Family Place program increases its attractiveness for the under-five age group. Parents and caregivers described the library as trusting, upbeat, and fun for the children.

- A. Participants praised the program offerings for children. They cited the variety of story times, particularly those that had a theme or celebrated a special event such as a holiday. Some libraries have organized Mom's clubs which provided a support group for mothers. Another group is now discussing a similar venture. Participation in Read Across America was also cited as a valued program. The Kinder Music program was another helpful program cited by participants. Numerous resources were available through one library's Library Day. One parent noted that the event, however, was not as important as the opportunity for parents to come together and interact with one another.

- B. Participants suggested a number of programs that would be of help to them. Some were already being offered in some of the libraries of the county. Among the suggestions were a "toy time" using the newly acquired toys, a program on sign language, a parenting support group, crafts programs, a gardening program or club, discussion groups on international cultures, English as a second language tutoring and/or assistance and additional special events for very young children and parents. The success of a Family Place resulted in a large number of parents suggesting that this particular program should be offered more than the scheduled twice a year. They also noted that the winter months were times when this type of program is most needed. A number of parents were quick to point out that they thought the libraries were already doing an excellent job in programming for families and young children.

- C. Participants viewed the library as an important contributor to the community. They described it as a community resource, a place where people could obtain a variety of types of information including access to the internet using library computers. Cited as examples were the expert resource persons who participated in the Family Place program. One participant pointed out the cooperation between the library and the schools. Technical assistance was provided by one school district to help the library with their computers. They did note a number of challenges facing the library staff. Among these challenges were working parents, single parents, community activities that compete for the child's time and general apathy of individuals who fail to take advantage of the programs and activities being offered.
- D. Many participants found out about the program from their local newspaper. Participants noted that the local paper did a good job. The web site of the library was also mentioned, as was the library bulletin board, as a source for information about the program. A few people heard about the program at church, from friends or at other community functions. One parent saw the notice concerning the program on the Public Access Channel. The most prolific and effective source of information about the program came from the library staff. Some staff even called individuals whom they thought might have an interest.
- E. The community views the library as an essential institution that promoted learning and offers opportunities for all ages. Our county libraries do a great job. People are made welcome and offered assistance quickly. Parents encourage a close relationship with the librarians and trust them to be positive sources of influence for their children. The library setting is comfortable, upbeat and fun. The library experience teaches obeying rules, accepting responsibility, sharing with others, taking turns and working cooperatively. Using your "library voice" is a good example for youngsters to show respect for others. Taking care of a borrowed item and returning it on time was another example of developing responsibility and respect for property. Local businesses and the community, in general, are very supportive of the county libraries; however, all are struggling with meeting current needs on existing budgets. Those who have aspirations of expansion of programs and facilities face even greater challenges. Frequently the library receives most of its support from a small group of residents and businesses. The perception of the participants was that the community could do more. The advent and growth of home computer usage has decreased the need for a variety of information typically provided by the traditional library. The library still plays an important role in validating information that people obtain elsewhere. People expressed an interest for more formal programming and informal programming such as the Family Place.