

Secrets of Success in Volunteer Recruiting

by Heather Hawkins, Family Building Blocks

Few gifts in life compare to the joy of reaching out and changing another person's destiny. Family Building Blocks (FBB) creates opportunities to experience these treasures by serving families with infants and young children who are struggling with difficult life circumstances. Working in community, we provide early intervention that builds successful and resilient children, strengthens parents, and keeps families together.

We use newspaper articles, advertising, recruiting videos, community events, luncheons, and our website to put out the welcome mat for prospective volunteers. We are fortunate to have a superb Community Outreach Coordinator whose sole responsibility is telling people who have never heard of relief nurseries about our work. But by far the majority of new volunteers come to us through word of mouth. Their friends, colleagues, or family members share their experiences as volunteers and extend personal invitations to learn more about us.



We ask prospective volunteers and interested community members to join a bi-monthly tour. We advertise tour dates on the website, and our Community Outreach Coordinator promotes them at events she attends. Tour business cards list the upcoming dates and provide instructions for registration. *We hand these cards out every chance we get!*

On the tour, we talk about how early childhood development sets the course for the rest of one's life. Participants are astonished to learn that 80% of the brain's neural connections are forged by age 3, and 90% by age 5. We discuss risk factors that impede healthy growth, and share heartwarming stories from participants in our program. We look around the facility and check out the classrooms through viewing windows. We visit the clothes closet and food pantry. We say good-bye to the children as they get on the bus to return home.



We end each tour by showing the famous *Still Face Experiment*¹ and saying a few words about the importance of working with young children. Many attendees are deeply moved and know that they want to volunteer. Those who aren't sure usually call or email later and ask to explore possibilities. Here's one such example:

Three new DHS Child Welfare Intake workers attended the tour at the request of their supervisor. They didn't seem particularly engaged, and one gentleman seemed a little frustrated that we helped the parents along so much. His line of work may have made him slightly jaded. At the end of the tour, I acknowledged all of them in front of the other guests. I said that I knew they had very difficult jobs and saw very hard things and that we were thankful for them and the work they were doing. The next day, the gentleman who had given me a rough time sent me an email.

¹ See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hh_fw69QkqY

“Currently, I am a caseworker with Child Welfare and I just took a tour of FBB. After I took the tour, I was overwhelmed by how much of a difference FBB is making. I just never knew that services like this existed. As a caseworker, I try to go the extra mile for my clients, but it’s really difficult because of the demands of the job, and I find myself wanting to help people more, to make more of a difference for them. I think that I would like to volunteer with FBB for that reason...to truly impact people. I could be a Bus Buddy, or work in the clothes closet. You guys do the things that people truly need, and I want to be a part of that!”

Volunteer management staff meets individually with prospective volunteers to discuss interests and provide assistance in completing the volunteer application. We look through our collection of volunteer position descriptions to see how the various opportunities and associated time commitments align with their skills, experience, availability, and expectations. We’re clear about our needs for each position and encourage volunteers to be honest about whether or not they wish to contribute in that capacity. We’re open to new and creative approaches to placement if there is mutual benefit in doing so.



We work with the Oregon Childcare Division to complete criminal history checks on prospective volunteers. We then schedule an orientation between the volunteer and the program supervisor. The supervisor provides clear expectations of the volunteer duties and evaluates whether the volunteer has the ability and physical capacity to complete the assigned tasks. If all goes well, we’ll have a new member of the FBB team!

While we’re grateful for any and all interest in our program, we’re very selective when it comes to placement. The children, parents, and caregivers need the best quality care we can offer them. Our staff needs to the best support available to help them do their jobs effectively. And our program needs volunteer enthusiasts who’ll spread the word about our work and the importance of community engagement. If we can’t find meaningful roles for prospective volunteers and/or the “fit” just isn’t right, we’ll suggest options for serving elsewhere.



One final comment: Our website has been a big help! Please feel free to visit the link to our site and check out the volunteer page.² We have a video sharing the story of a boomer volunteer and why she loves to be here. I know this has helped with our recruitment.

It's a Small World After All

I was at an event in another county recently when I recognized one of our supporters. I introduced myself, and we began to chat about Family Building Blocks. When she realized that I worked with volunteers, she asked me if I knew Susan Goodman and Deana Freres. I said, "Of course! They are two of our most fabulous volunteers!" She said, "Well, I toured FBB many years ago and told Susan all about it. After she started volunteering, she told Deana about it, too!"

Susan has been a volunteer for 8 years and has contributed over 120 hours to our various programs. Deana was an amazing classroom volunteer, became a Board member, and then started our volunteer auxiliary. She has volunteered over 100 hours as well. Both Susan and Deana helped us fund several new projects and spread FBB into rural areas in our community through another joint grant with OCF. Their influence has been huge! And all because this one other woman, who they trusted, said this would be the place for them.

Each time we interface with the community and each time we welcome volunteers and ensure they have a good experience, we are investing in the future of our volunteer programs.

² See <http://www.familybuildingblocks.org/volunteer/index.html>