

## Families as Partners

Family involvement is one of the most important elements in the Lions Quest programs. This element recognizes that families are their children's first teachers and they must be involved in insuring the success of all Lions Quest programs. Research has found that family involvement is closely related to the development of positive social skills and healthy behavior in students. An absence of family involvement is connected with many forms of negative, antisocial behavior, including drug use. Lions Quest programs understand the need to have families involved and make every effort to make this easy, rewarding, and interactive for the families, the students, the facilitators, and the entire school community. Through participation in Families as Partners, families stay engaged in their children's learning and mastery of skills.

### Goals for Families as Partners

The Lions Quest Families as Partners component has three major goals:

- To enhance communication among families, facilitators, and other adults who are significant in students' lives
- To strengthen and celebrate families in all of their diversity
- To build a network of support for students by linking the resources of the home, the school, and the community

### Classroom Engagement

**Family Connection take-home worksheets** Family Connection worksheets are designed for students to connect the skills and information they are learning in the classroom with their families. Through the worksheets they are given the opportunity to "teach" the new skills to their families while learning or reinforcing the skills in the process. Each sheet suggests an activity to be done with the family, a conversation starter to do with the family, a review of the information and skills learned in the classroom, and reflection questions about what was experienced during the family activity.

The Family Connection worksheets are not meant to be graded or returned to the classroom for feedback or for comments. They are designed to get families and young people talking to each other while informing families about what is learned in the classroom and how to reinforce it. Occasionally, facilitators will invite students to share their positive family experiences with their classmates. This is one major way in which family members can be involved with their children and the Lions Quest programs without ever coming to school.

The facilitator models enthusiasm and buy-in for the Family Connection worksheets so that the students take them home and show a desire for the families to take part. Administrators support the classroom facilitators in their effort to motivate families to take part by mentioning these in correspondence that goes home to families, perhaps creating a showcase of some of the projects that the families may want to share and promoting the Family Connection worksheets at any other opportunities.

**Family members as classroom visitors** Whenever possible, the facilitator finds out in advance what the family members are comfortable doing in the classroom and how they would like to participate. The facilitator

## Family Involvement

The partnership between schools and families in the Lions Quest programs is a continuing exchange of information and ideas. On the one hand, the school has an opportunity to inform families about the program and encourage them to reinforce at home what their children are learning in school. On the other hand, the program provides many opportunities for families to share their own knowledge, experience, and concerns and to help in the process of guiding their children to the mastery of the skills being taught in the program.

### How Lions Quest Programs Involve Families

There are three major areas in which families are encouraged to participate and guide their children through the programs:

- Classroom engagement
- Community and school network
- School Climate Team or Committee and Implementation Team

shares expectations with the family members so they know what they might be participating in or be asked to do. Family members are always welcome in the classroom, greeted as they arrive, and introduced to the class. Students know when family members are coming to class and model being welcoming of new guests. During classroom visits, family members participate in the activities with the students. The facilitator invites them to do small tasks that make them feel comfortable and part of the class.

**Guest speakers or helpers in the classroom** Family members can be encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or in school assemblies, particularly if they have relevant skills, hobbies, or specialties that would further the objectives of the Lions Quest programs. Facilitators are encouraged to find out what special skills family members may have or send out a letter asking for specific skills or specialty areas that would build on what the students are learning in the classroom. For more information on selecting and hosting a guest speaker, see page 61.

**Support for service-learning projects** Family members can be engaged with helping students carry out service-learning projects at school or in the community. They can work with the class on planning, implementing, and celebrating their service-learning projects. Often, family members have skills and interests that can serve as a model for the service-learning projects. In the planning section, they can speak about the needs of the community or their own volunteer experiences either currently or when they were the age of the students. In the implementing stages, they can help with transportation, feedback, or working side by side with the students on the project. For reflection and celebration, they can help with feedback on how the project went and how the students can share their experiences with the school or the community and celebrate their success. This could be especially helpful in cases when the project did not turn out as planned and the students are in need of some encouragement and understanding and a view of what they did learn and where there was some success.

### **Community and School Network**

**Organizers and leaders of family meetings** There are four parent meetings each in Lions Quest. The first *parent* meeting can be a great place to explain the Family Connection worksheets as well as promote and help families be prepared to do the worksheets. See the section in the *Families as Partners* guide for further information on how to promote the Family Connection worksheets in Meeting 1. Family members can take a major role in planning, organizing, and conducting the meetings. Facilitators are strongly encouraged to attend the meetings because they gain valuable information about their students and show caring and support for the families. However, whenever possible, the facilitator may ask family members of the students in the classroom to help plan and facilitate the meetings. Family members often share real stories about struggling with their children and provide role models for learning and working with their children. They are seen as understanding the roles of families, caregivers, and other family support in a way that examples from the classroom by facilitators might not seem as relevant to families.

**Participants in the family meetings** Not all family members are willing to take the lead or may not be able to for a variety of reasons. The facilitator can encourage family members to participate to the extent

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that they are able. Attending the meetings is a huge commitment and they should be rewarded for making the effort to attend.

**Helpers in getting the word out** Helpers in getting the word out to other families and the community about the importance of family involvement and the *Families as Partners* meetings in particular can make a big difference in attendance and participation by families in the program. Family members can create a network for families in the school to help keep them apprised of activities and events that are occurring. They can encourage participation and model their own enthusiasm for the program. They can follow up and continue to keep in contact with other families and be ready and able to provide information and support.

### ***School Climate Team or Committee and Implementation Team***

**Members of the School Climate Team or Committee** Family members can serve on the School Climate Team or Committee and work with the facilitators, administrators, students, and community members to help create a positive learning atmosphere and create events and activities that promote and reinforce the skills and information that is being taught in the classroom. By serving on this committee, family members can play an active role in creating a successful program for their own child and the entire school community. The School Climate Team or Committee can also do promotional activities that explain and highlight the Family Connection worksheets. They can ask families to share tips on how to work with the Family Connection worksheets and even present their ideas at Open Houses or *Families as Partners* Meetings.

**Members of the Implementation Team** All family members are encouraged to attend the Lions Quest training when possible. This training will prepare them to support the implementation of the program and participate on the School Climate Team or Committee or the Implementation Team. The Implementation Team is the team that takes part in choosing the program, learning about the program, and following through with implementation and sustainability of the Lions Quest program.

The facilitator and administrators can be looking for family members who are willing to serve on either the School Climate Team or Committee or the Implementation Team.

## **Sustaining a Strong Home-School-Community Connection**

### ***Defining Family as Each Family Defies Itself***

To connect deeply with families, the Lions Quest programs embrace a broad definition of family. The programs recognize that families come in all sizes, shapes, and definition. The key is to find out who the most important people are in the students' lives. Some families will be defined as parents and biological children. Some may be adopted. Some students may come from homes where there are stepparents, stepsiblings and even stepgrandparents. Many students may not look like they are in the same family. Often extended family may play a role in your students' lives as well. What is most important is the fact that these are the people who answer the phone, email, or notes home. These are the people who show up at school with concerns or at Open House. These are the people who do the Family Connection take home worksheet with your students. Invite the aunts and uncles and all who are show care for your student to continue to be involved. Give them tasks and offer ways that they can continue to be a champion for their child.

### ***Keeping Contact with Families***

The Lions Quest program provides a letter to send to families at the beginning of every unit. The facilitator sends it home with a personal note that demonstrates a understanding and care for their student.

The facilitator communicates with families through the Family Connection worksheet by responding or asking questions periodically and asking students questions about the homework to encourage them to tell their families something observed or enjoyed.

Finding ways to involve families will not only make them feel welcome it will provide opportunities for a connection between the home and the school and will reinforce and show students that the social and emotional skills they are learning are valued by all. Involving families can only enhance and make what goes on in the classroom even stronger and more successful.