

How Marketing Your Organization Can Help You Do Family Development

Marketing is the process whereby a product (or service or idea) is made available by a provider to a consumer, in a way that meets the needs of both the consumer and the provider. To be successful, the provider must have a product or service that consumers need *and want*, and must let potential consumers know about it in a way that will help them see the desired benefits.

The "product" you have to offer is the family development process as a way of helping families meet their goals. What must you have from the consumer? You require their participation and their willingness to trust you enough to work with you on their goals. You facilitate this relationship by the way you market your program, consciously using the "four Ps" to assure that what you are offering meets the needs and wants of consumers in the most effective way.

Your job as the "marketer" is to *reduce costs, perceived and actual, and increase benefits, perceived and actual.*

1. **Product** refers to what you are offering, how you are offering it, and the degree to which your "product" is based on the perceived needs and wants of your intended consumers. Too often well intentioned human service workers go into communities with their own "bag of tricks" and impose solutions or services that neither the community nor the families really want. To have a successful "product," start where the family's needs, wants, and interests are, providing "opportunities" that may help them meet those needs and wants.

2. **Price** commonly refers to monetary charges or program fees, but price also includes the less tangible costs of using your service or being in your program, e.g. cost of transportation to get there, child care, or the "cost" of being in the program, for example

having one's privacy invaded by home visitors, waiting in lines, making repeated phone calls to workers who are hard to reach, embarrassment for having to admit their "problems," other family members not wanting them to participate, and fear of getting their hopes up once again. How your program is perceived in the community, how people are treated the first time they call, how hard it is (or long it takes) to make a first appointment, all these can add up to a decision on a family's part that the benefits they think they may get from participation in your program are not worth the costs for participating.

3. **Place** refers to the place where you meet with families or where services are offered. What flexibility do you have about where you can meet with families? Is the location convenient for them? Are the hours convenient? What does it look like? Smell like? Is it welcoming? Is it accessible physically? Is it a place they are comfortable going, given cultural and neighborhood realities? How do the staff look? Are they dressed in ways that family members will be comfortable with? Is there diversity? Do any workers speak the language of family members?

4. The fourth P - **Promotion**, is the one we may think of first when it comes to outreach. But it is important to remember that unless the first three Ps have been thought about, so that the way services are offered meet the needs of the families you want to reach, then promotion will not work. It's like "truth in advertising." If you advertise that you work respectfully with families to help them reach their goals, then the way you work (product, price, place) must reflect that offering.

Promotion includes "word of mouth" or personal communication, advertising, publicity, sales promotions, and public relations.

➤ Personal communication or "word of mouth" includes what *you* say about your program (informal conversations, speeches, phone calls to referral sources, etc.) and what *others* say about you. The advantage of personal communication over advertising or publicity is that it is two-way. You can have a dialogue with the person you are talking with, and answer their questions. While we cannot always control what others say about us, it is important that you have a sense of what the "the word is on the street" about your program.

➤ Advertising includes ads placed in newspapers, on radio or TV (paid ads as well as public service announcements, PSAs) in directories, community event programs, phone books, as well as brochures, flyers, and posters that you create and put around the community. The advantage of ads you create is that you can control what they say and how it is expressed. You may have staff who can create ads, or you might have student interns or volunteers from local college communications departments, or ask an advertising agency to do "pro-bono" work, which means they only charge for their actual costs, not their time.

➤ Publicity or news coverage - Send a news release on your services and events to radio and TV stations and newspapers, or call them when you have a story they could cover. It helps to reach out to the reporters or editors, call them and introduce yourself and explain why this event or service is important. Remember that families you want to reach may read the Pitch Weekly or other free weekly

papers. Local cable-access stations are often looking for people to come on their program. They may also run community bulletin boards where you can list your event.

➤ Sales promotions are sometimes used by non-profits as a way of attracting new people to their program. Examples are, "Attend a parenting class and receive a free book," or if you are trying to attract teen fathers to a parenting series, offer free tickets to a ball game (donated by the team) if they attend all the classes. If you charge for your services, you could print up a "Free first visit" coupon and ask current consumers to share them with their friends, or place it in a coupon book.

➤ Public relations or PR, has to do with *what people think* and *how people feel* about your program or agency. Do they know about it? Is it respected? Do they feel like it's a place for them? Often these are very subjective responses. An example of what a company does to enhance its public relations is McDonald's running Ronald McDonald Houses for families of children in hospitals. The purpose is not promotion of hamburgers, it is to have people feel better about buying hamburgers.

You work on improving your agency or program's PR when you collaborate well with other agencies (have a reputation for cooperation), or when you co-sponsor a family fun-run to help raise money for a family whose house burnt down. These types of activities increase knowledge of your program but also have a positive effect on how people feel about it.

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