

Transcript of Grow Your Program with Group Connections

Allison Fulton: Good morning. My name is Allison Fulton. I am the family support coordinator with the Pennsylvania Family Support Team based at the Center for Schools and Communities. I will be your moderator for today. It is my pleasure to welcome you to today's webinar session, Grow Your Program with Group Connections. Let me now introduce our presenters for today. Our presenters are Martha Faust and Kyra Miller.

Martha has been a PAT Parent Educator since 2014 and a Program Director since 2015. She has worked as a daycare director and TSS in addition to teaching Kindergarten for eight years. She has her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and her master's degree in Educational Administration from the University of Phoenix online.

Kyra has been a PAT Parent Educator for over a year. She has worked as an alternative school director and a substitute teacher. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education, Social Studies and a Bachelor's Degree in History from the University of Pittsburgh. It is my pleasure to welcome both Martha and Kyra this morning. Please be patient while I pass the presenter privileges onto them. Martha and Kyra, thank you for joining us. The microphone is now yours.

Martha Faust: Hi everybody, I'm Martha and I'm getting over laryngitis that I had yesterday, so please excuse me if all of a sudden you hear my cough drops or something.

Kyra Miller: I'm Kyra, so I'll be picking up where Martha can't and we're just going to start I guess.

Martha Faust: To start out, we're going to talk about what group connections are. Under parents as teachers, we call any event where we invite families together a group connection. This applies to many different programs, not just parents as teachers but we'll be using the parents as teachers' terminology because that's what we use. Anytime we invite families together, it's an opportunity to build social emotional skills, to build those social connections that are so important in preschool years. It helps the parents learn about child development and their own parenting skills.

It's also opportunities to collaborate with local businesses and agencies. I'll try to give a lot of detail about that later on. We do utilize a lot of our different agencies and businesses in the area to make our group connections more successful. It helps us recruit new families and promotes awareness about Early Childhood initiatives which is a big deal. Let's get the first question out there to everybody. Who gets the most out of group connections? Your families, your organization, collaborating agencies, or nobody. I find it's not useful. You just [inaudible 00:02:52].

Allison Fulton: If you haven't responded yet, please select either A, B, C, or D, for who gets the most out of your organizations group connections. All right, let's go ahead and see those results, Mike.

Martha Faust: Wow, so most of you say families get the most out of the group connections and to an extent, I think you're right but a lot of times, our organization gets a lot more from having a group connection. We learn so much from our families and collaborating agencies. We have an event we just did last month where we went to a community that doesn't know about all those services that are provided for them so we were able to get that information out there. Yes, I agree the families definitely get a lot out of the group connections but I think that focusing on the fact that more than just that happens.

Here is a picture. This is the, what we call, Outstanding Young Women. They come in and have an event every year in Kalispell and perform and it's more of a Miss America kind of a thing, but it's similar to that. They stop by as a play group and just play with the kids. I really feel like those teenage girls got a lot out of it that day. More than the little ones that came in.

What times and days' work best for your organization's gatherings? This is a really tough question that we go over and over and over in our agency. Sorry. We often [inaudible 00:04:37] learn from you as well. We have no definitive answer to this question. We try to mix it up. As you can see in these pictures, sometimes it's in the middle of the day at a park and the one on the top right corner, we are at a Christmas parade in the evening. It was 6:00 at night. We got together to watch our town Christmas parade.

We try to think about different times. Sometimes from one group connection, we offer a different, multiple times so that moms and dads that can't come at 10:00 in the morning during the work day might be able to come at the 6:00 one in the evening. We try to consider nap times, middle times, and school special times. Allison, did anybody share any good days and times that work best for them?

Allison Fulton: I do not see any comments that have come in.

Martha Faust: Okay, so obviously no one has the golden answer here. It's going to be a tricky thing coordinating times and figuring out what would work best for your organization, your families. We found that sometimes extending an event at open to longer hours fits better for parents. Naps at 1:00, they can come at 3:00. If the family naps at 10:00, they can come at 1:00. It kind of, we try and open it up so that everybody can benefit as much as possible.

Where is the best location for group connections? In your experience, what works best? At your office or organization's building, at elementary school, on a playground, or at a community event such as we had a book festival this weekend or, like I said, the Christmas parade, we get together and do here in Johnstown.

Allison Fulton: Your polling option will be coming up in just a moment. Again, you are going to respond for where is the best location for the Group Connections that your organization holds.

Martha Faust: Okay, so it looks like having it at your own place tends to be the most popular. Community events is second and that's a prior thing to me because we usually don't get as many there as other places. Elementary school, you can collaborate with the school districts. Those work well because you get a lot of families there and we will keep families that way a lot of times. Playgrounds have always been a good choice for us for Group Connections.

It's not advancing. Ah, there we go. We have a conference room in our organization which helps out so we can kind of separate. We have the program, as you can see the little girl on the top right, she's holding an egg she found in our playroom. We have a beautiful playroom here so that makes us very fortunate and we also have a conference room so we can kind of separate how the kids play when we're talking to the moms and dads about something.

Parks, we use a recreation park for our family picnic. There's pavilions and open space, a playground, swimming pool, and then we have potluck and we provide activities as you can see there. Events that are already planned like that parade and then schools, you can see a little girl with the Dr. Seuss frame. A Roll and Read they held last month in an elementary school and we also go to businesses like the bank. I think a worker is helping one of our little kids put change into the change machine and count change. The kids love going to the bank. We're doing that again here soon.

Why do you have group connections? I like this one because you often have to ask why, what is your purpose? Because it is a program requirement, because it helps our families connect with each other, because it helps our organization, or because it builds community, or E, all of the above.

Allison Fulton: All right. Michael, let's go ahead and publish those.

Martha Faust: All right, so, obviously you want to think that it's pretty effective for helping the community. It's a program requirement did get a few responses. That was what I was kind of expecting. If you look at it in that way, it often makes it so much more daunting to do rather than looking at the positives. Why we host collaborate group connections is to collaborate with other organizations, bringing families together, to promote your program, but mostly for those smiles. Look at the little girl smiling as she dances with Cinderella and that mom with her baby boy in the pool. If we didn't have our Group Connection out there and connected with another parent that was able to bring her there, that was the only time I know of so far that he's ever been able to swim because she didn't know how to do it by herself. They were just both so happy that day that they had that opportunity to swim and get that experience.

Basically, we're going to tell you about how we used to do things for our group connections. We used to say, "Oh, it's April. What are we going to do in May?" That obviously wasn't very effective. We used to just verbally tell families at visits and maybe hand them something about what our Group Connection was going to be. All Parent Educators were to come if they could. At that time, there were only three of us or four of us in the program so that was kind of easier, but now that we've grown to seven Parent Educators, so not all of us attend every Group Connection.

Events were often run by other organizations because if you're planning in April, you don't have much time to get ready for May. We just simply showed up and then tried to write down which families we saw. We tried to have 12 group connections per year and we struggled with getting people to 12 events a year. [inaudible 00:11:30] took over for the director. We had focused on failure is success in progress. We're working on this. Now, Kyra stepped in soon after I came and she's going to tell you about what we do now.

Kyra Miller:

What we do now which is so much easier than planning a month out is we plan for an entire year. This last October and November, we sat down at our staff meetings and we planned out what we were doing for 2017 which is amazing to do and we all know what's coming up that way. We also have weekly playgroups. Our parent and child together playgroups are every week, every Friday, and we have a Thursday one as well. Those count as group connections which is amazing because we get a lot of families that come in and then get to play with their children in our great playroom that we have.

We do a lot of advertising for events, from just telling our parents, we hand out flyers, we post on our Facebook page. We try to get as much notice out there as possible so that more families have the chance to hear about it and come to these events. We do host monthly events in addition to playgroups. Playgroups are not our only group connections. Along with that, we have usually one other group connection a month ranging from, like this month, it was emergency preparedness and that is actually tomorrow during one of our playgroups.

We try to sometimes partner with our playgroup and do it then or we hosted another completely different day. Like Martha was saying before, we really split up how we plan these events and what time and when they are. We, now, in 2016, we have approximately 65 group connections compared to try to get in 12 before. That's a huge jump in group connections especially since we started counting our weekly playgroups.

As you see here, our upcoming events for 2017, if you look at the chart we had in June, there's a self-defense class that we held and that was the only one so far that we ever provided no child care for. Mostly because we were doing self-defense in the playroom and did not want to see the parents being fake attacked in front of their children. Might not have been a great idea, but usually we do provide that child care for the parents.

As you see, we plan out what the event is. Most of the time, we have the date set up but as you see, like in August, we have to figure out when we get the pavilion for the picnic. September, the same thing, when we can go to Chuck-E-Cheese, that kind of deal, but for the most part, we plan the day and the time and we get which parent educator is going to be in charge of the group connection. That helps us out a lot. We know when we have to start planning for the event. We know who needs to get ready for that, who needs to definitely be there.

It's just awesome to see the different types of events that we can plan. We have our painting party coming up. We have the safety with gunfire, car seat, all that kind of stuff in July. We have potluck. It's just, it's awesome to see that kind of stuff. Like I mentioned before, we do have recurring events. Our weekly playgroups, our parent and child playgroups, that's always happening. Raising a thinking child, we host that once a year. Right now, actually we have a group connection going on during this webinar, our Penn State Nutrition Links. We're going to have parents coming in, that actually started at 10:00. Parents coming in to listen to the thing and we have child care being provided for them. During our parent and child playgroups, we do the PA One Book. Martha can explain more about what the PA One Book is.

Martha Faust:

The PA One Book this year decided to do a countdown of the last 12 years with their bonus program. We joined in and we followed along with their weekly progress of what book they were doing each week. We posted to our Facebook page and tagged PA One Book. Let them know we are counting down and then on Friday, our parent child together playgroup went over to our Cambria County Library which is a few blocks away and they got to hear the book read by the author and participate [inaudible 00:16:04].

This year's book is Daniel Finds a Poem, which you haven't read yet, it's a wonderful book to read to your kids and just being able to utilize what's on the onset of it is somewhat of a structure. It helps us to push our group connections along. You don't have to recreate the wheel all the time. The same with Raising a Thinking Child. I'm sure that there are other organizations that do that but we make sure to do that. Then, if we do, like we have our Nutrition Links going on now. It's a four-week group connection and they come every Wednesday for the month of April.

Then, we also have our regular group connection and our parent and child together playgroups on Thursdays and Fridays. We are utilizing all of those things to make sure that we are getting parents together as much as possible, not just as much as required. It has built our numbers of our program. Just like I said, we only had three or four parent advisors before, now we have seven. We just need to keep getting more families recruited and bringing them in. It definitely helps us out with that. Then, Kyra will tell you about the Be Strong Parent Cafes.

Kyra Miller:

The Be Strong Parent Cafe we started in November and it really, it's a great thing to have your organization do or be a part of. The main thing about it is that you're getting parents together to discuss certain topics and it's always, it's a lead

discussion. April's Parent Cafe, and we do those once a month, April's is about technology in the family. We have questions that we created and we found through the Be Strong Parent Cafe curriculum program that kind of makes parents think like how long are we using technology? What are the effects going to be on my child for sitting and playing with an iPhone or an iPad? How can we use technology to teach our children?

That's one great thing that we're going to focus on in April and that was requested by the parents that come to these cafes is to talk about technology in the family. It's not a technology bashing by any means. It's going to be a great discussion. One great thing that we do with parent cafes is that they start at 4:30 in the evening and the parents and the kids eat dinner together at our office and then the children go into the playroom and the parents stay in the conference room and have that discussion.

The parents get adult time which some parents don't get that much of. It's great for them and every parent that has come has loved it. It's a great way for them to meet other parents that are in similar situations as they are and it's just an awesome program. I definitely, I strongly recommend that if you are not trying these Be Strong Parent Cafes that you go to the training and you do start. It's a great program to have along with your other playgroups and group connections.

We do a lot of collaborating. Just our Beginnings, our overseeing umbrella company, we collaborate constantly. Like I said, 1st Summit Bank invites us over to check some things out and find out about money and savings which is a big deal. They also sponsored last year's financial awareness group connection for parents. I kind of forgot about that we need to re-schedule for this year because it was just amazing. Parents got to ask these bank professionals, "What's the best thing for my kid's college," and just basic budgeting kinds of questions.

We often collaborate with Macaroni Kid. If you have not been to the Macaroni Kid website, I highly recommend it. It's macaronikid.com. They have them all over the nation. Ours in the Laurel Highlands area, it happens to be extremely strong and well run by Julie Fondsbry. It has a group, it lists calendars of events from lots of different organizations and then sponsors many events. They brought in a potty training party that they came and did at our office last year and that was amazing. Parents really liked that. They got materials and information about potty training.

We collaborate with school districts. Greater Johnstown School District, we did a fatherhood initiative conference last June. That's when we made everybody princesses and they got to dance with the princesses but the dads got to get extra recognition for all the hard work they do because sometimes, we just don't focus enough on dads. Then, last month, we had our Roll and Read in Northern Cambria. Like I said, it's a small, rural community and they don't always know about the services they get. They say, "Nobody comes and works with us but we would happily work with you, we would just need to be able to connect with you."

The Roll and Read opened up the opportunity to show parents what was out there.

We invited every organization that works in that area including Nurse Family Partnership, Headstart and Early Headstart, Early Interventions, Behavioral Health, there are churches in that area, they've been called the ministerium, where they all kind of work together to provide for the families. They were there. The Cambria County Library had a table. We invited two local authors. It was an amazing event that really showed the families in that rural area that we're here and we want to work with you.

The Child Advocacy Center, we work with them especially during this month because it's child abuse prevention month. We provide a front porch project, training, which is a basic training on you see something, then what? What do you do? How would I address this? What's your comfort level with trying to help in this situation? It's geared towards anybody in the community, not just media or reporters or anything like that. It's an amazing training. If you haven't heard about that, definitely look that up.

We also had a kickoff in our central park here on Friday in the rain to bring awareness to this problem. Then, throughout the month of April, we have many events that we are going to be working with the Child Advocacy Center with presenting information and getting people together to prevent child abuse. The Cambria County Library, I gave you some examples of how we collaborate with them.

United Way is our biggest funder but they're also the biggest coordinator to collaborate with these other agencies. Sometimes, United Way will call and say, "Have you gotten any referrals from this agency lately?" I'll say, "No. I have not." Then, they arrange for us to do something together to build our relationship. They were a part of the Roll and Read and they are a part of the fatherhood initiative. They join in a lot of our group connections to get the word out there.

The other organizations that we often rely on are the ones run by our parents. We have parents who sell Avon, Lula Roe, Mary Kay, Papparazi, the list goes on and on and on. Next month in May, we're going to have a parent's fair where they're going to come and set up a table here and people are going to be invited in to come and to buy things from these different organizations from our parents. All the tables have to be run by parents and teachers, parents, it's not just anybody who sells Avon. They have to already be in our program for this particular fundraiser, or it's not even a fundraiser. We're not raising money with it, but group connection. It's supporting our families in whatever way we can.

Different ways that we advertise because advertising is key, if parents and the community members have no idea what's going on, they're not going to show up. That's one thing that we kind of tried to fix, is to get the word out there more. As you can see, the self-defense flyer down there, it has the date and time, where, and that's something that we handed out to parents. The emergency

preparedness, the Parent Cafe, that's more a generic flyer. It was posted online. It's every third Tuesday of the month and it kind of shows you there's food, there's child care, all kinds of fun stuff going on.

Then, just we post on Facebook a lot. If an event means, honestly, there's different things to keep on our Facebook page active so that parents are always seeing us on their feeds. Then, when we do post an event, it pops up as well. It's not just that thing off to the side. That's something big that we've started to get better with. One of our parent educators is trying to work on Twitter, trying to get that up and going for our program, that kind of thing.

Our bi-monthly calendar which is awesome, Martha creates this every two months and it has [inaudible 00:25:28] on not just ours, it has community events that we don't go to but we tell our parents about. Anything like that has different holidays, like in April, Earth Day, March, because you never know, you might want to plant a tree that day. It's just awesome different ways that we're trying and every family gets a bi-monthly calendar so that they see what's going on in the community that they live in.

It kind of helps to plan ahead. Some parents are bad about planning ahead and some like to do that. It's something that they can hang on their fridges to have and look at and be like, "Oh, this is going on now," or, "Oh, I forgot about this. Tomorrow we can go do this." It's a good thing to have.

The other thing I wanted to point out is all of our group connections are open to anyone. You don't have to be a member of our organization to come to them. Like the self-defense class, we had a grandma who was sitting in the audience of MOPS, Mothers of Pre Schoolers, when I was talking about our program and she heard me just casually mention we were having this self-defense class and she wanted to come and she came from pretty far out, she lived out in Somerset, because she wanted to have this free self-defense training.

Keeping your options open helps to promote your program even more and listening to the parents because some parents could not make it, for example, at self-defense class, that a lot of parents are interested in, they just could not make it that night for whatever reason so we were horrible that night. We had like a torrential downpour. It was awful. Flash flooding, that kind of stuff and we're in Johnstown on this one city so people were a little freaked out, but we are going to plan another one of those, just because many of the parents want to come to it. We're going to try a different time, different day, that's an example of that where we're very flexible and we listen to what the parents want out of these group connections.

The day of the event, I love all these pictures, they're so fun, but just decorating for an event. The palm trees, I will go into this more but we had an open house that was beach themed. As you see, people that work with us and the girl in the pool, she's not even a parent educator, she was just helping us get ready for the event, so our entire organization helps us out with that kind of stuff.

We provide food sometimes, especially with the open house, the parent cafes, so there's food here sometimes. During playgroups, the kids get snacks. That just helps. Food is always a great incentive to come to something. Registration, not so much pre-registration, but the day of the event, we usually have sign ups. We have people that help us make sure that everyone signs up on our sign in sheet. At the beach house for example, we have a raffle that if you signed up, you got a chance to win this basket. Different things like that just so that we can know how many families are coming to this and it's not just an open free for all. It's organized and real, how we can help with that.

Child care's a big one. I mentioned that before. We provide child care for almost all of our group connections. Whether it's the parents are separated from the kids or the kids are with their parents for this group connection, there's always parent educators there to help the parents out. The big thing that we've also changed is the reviewing after we have an event. It doesn't help to have an event and go, "Wow, that was great. We should do it again sometime." We like feedback from the parents. I have made my own feedback form because I have so many people circle an A when I don't think an A was necessary.

As you can see in the chart at the bottom, the family picnic, we used the group connection feedback form where I put a few N/As that they really did apply to this event. Then, I kind of tweaked it and made it a little simpler language to kind of apply to more of our events than usual. As you can see from the family picnic, everybody didn't love it. There was a mom who just thought it was completely disorganized, she wanted us to do formal introductions is what she wrote in the comments, and said that her kid didn't play but if you look at the pictures in the couple slides of the event. You can see her little boy in almost every one of those slides or pictures of the activities we had together.

Keeping it in mind that not everybody is going to have the same opinion but getting the general consensus. As you can see, most of the families did enjoy the picnic, but it obviously needed some tweaking. We'll keep that in mind when we do the picnic again this year. We might put some comments from different events on, like I really like it gave me a nice, new budget and finances. Like I said, we have that bank, people from a bank come and do a group connection about budgeting.

He also said, "I would like to have a group connection about how to get your spouse interested in budgeting," because his wife sat there and just didn't listen at all and it kind of irritated him, but you know, I really don't know how I'd address that but it was good to know and then I was able to share that with the parent educator and she kind of had touched on that slightly a little bit with the family.

I really liked the kids really enjoyed themselves. That's a big thing. If the kids aren't having fun at an event, the families aren't going to come. Even though we have the financial awareness as the group connection, we'd have the kids doing things that are age appropriate for them. I would change nothing. Well, maybe add the ocean and the real beach or just send me to Ocean City. Our beach

open house was really effective because we had it in February and everybody was ready for the beach. They wanted to go and we really decorated it up, we had ocean sounds playing, we had the smell of hot dogs, we did little smoky links on a grill so you kind of had that sound and that smell going on. We popped popcorn. We just tried to make it full on beach themed. We had sand table, water table, seashell table. Everybody just really enjoyed that event.

I really liked when my child and I went swimming at the family picnic. That mom, I don't think she will ever forget that. She just glowed about it for months and kept commenting on it. I'm sure she's going to be asking about it again here soon for summer. Like Martha was mentioning, our open house, our open beach house. I came up with this idea that we need to open up to the community more. People don't really know what our organization's Beginnings and eager Beginnings but people don't really know what we do. We talked, Martha and I talked about this at one of those supervisions and just really, we wanted the community to meet us and see what we do in the community and what we offer them.

We opened up our building from two to six. It was a long event so that people could come and go when they wanted to. That's the main thing for open house. It was in February so I was like, "Let's go to the beach." One great thing is that we did decorate and it made it feel like just a beach party. We had fish hanging from the ceiling. We had the sand table, the water table, and the seashell table was awesome because some kids have never even seen a seashell and they were just having a blast with that table. The sand table's always a big one for kids. They love making the mess and they love playing in the sand.

As you see, some of the pictures, I have some water table pictures, sand pictures. Then, if you look at the picture, the top picture on the left, in the background, we have a junior board of Beginnings and they came and helped us out. These are high school kids that come in and they work with our organization for fundraising, for events like this. They came in, all of them were having a blast just playing with the kids and in the sand table, in the water table, all of that.

We had beach themed snacks and the parents like, they just, they loved it. The parents enjoyed it so much and the kids just, they were in a playroom full of stuff. They were having a blast. This is definitely something we're going to do again. We had great feedback from it. Like you see on the flier, we gave out free beach balls that had our organization's logo on it and contact information. It's another thing that is out there in the community with our information on it.

Martha Faust:

We had 17 families come to our open beach house. I want to say about 12 of them were our PAT families. We had a family come to learn about the junior board and how their teenage sons are active on the junior board. We had a family come that was interested in our CASA program, court appointed special advocates. They were able to get information about that and they were going to consider being a volunteer for that program.

We had a family come that is not part of our program but they are considering it. The mom is a teacher at a local school so I think she just kind of is wondering if she needs to, but she was kind of on the fence. She took information. It's not just providing for the families that are currently in the program, but reaching out to others in the community [inaudible 00:35:12] we also, because there was so much going on, I was able to pull away families to do interviews to help publicize our program. We had a couple, a mom and a dad who came, and they talked and shared such wonderful things about Beginnings and our programs we have here that we're going to use those videos online to promote our programs. It's an amazing thing to have parents talking about how much they get out of parents and teachers or any other programs that are involved in our organization.

The family picnic ... Excuse me. It was a potluck. We asked families to bring food. There was such a variety. People commented on our group connection feedback forms, they loved the food. I think that's funny because they brought the food, so I would hope you liked what you brought. Then, there was so much to do at Lumber Recreation Park that we didn't have to provide anything. As you can see, we had hula hoops, a little pool that had just a tiny bit of water. We had bubbles, lots of things going on.

You can see Mr. Mike in the top right playing with, throwing balls with the kids. You can see little Theo at the bottom there eating lunch with his mom. The kids are just participating and having a good time on a hot Sunday. This year it was on a Sunday. Last year, it was on a Sunday. This year, we're planning for a Friday just because of the building, so it's cheaper.

We had eight families show up to this event. If you look, it looks like so many more because it was so active and so many people in one family came together. A lot of times it'll just be mom and a kid. This actually brought a whole bunch of dads, brothers, sisters. One family brought aunt and cousins. We had a lot of families that brought extra family with them to this particular event.

Kyra Miller: I think that's what we wanted from this family picnic. It's more ... You can do recruiting at this but it's more of like trying to get them together with other families in our program and trying to get them to interact and have a blast. As you can see from those pictures, those kids are just having the time of their lives.

Martha Faust: The Pirates Care a Van and a group connection that we can't take credit for exactly, the Pirates contact Beginnings and said, "Hey, we want to do this." Then, we get together and we let our families know. We invite a local baseball organization because those baseball players really do want to meet these people, unlike the little girl in the bottom left corner who's coloring with a Pirate. She had no clue who he is, but you know, they had so much fun.

This year, the Pirates who came out were really engaging with the kids. You can see there in this middle one here at the bottom, my son is just sitting up, this Pittsburgh Pirate is helping him color his paper. He was so excited. There's the Pirate Parrot. There's dancing, they give away winter hats and crafts and coloring

sheets. There's a photo booth that families can get together and take pictures in. It's so much fun and the dancing is the big part. After we take that big group picture down at the bottom, there's dancing. Oh, and it's dinner. I almost forgot. You get a good like the kids eat food. It's chicken tenders and macaroni and cheese and chips. Everything is provided by the Pirates. We just kind of collaborate with them to provide this amazing opportunity to our families.

Kyra Miller:

The Roll and Read which this was our first one that we did. It is a parents as teachers event, a group connection. This is the first one our organization held. As Martha said, we partnered with a number of school, Northern Cambria. As she said before, we don't really get out there enough because parents don't know what services they have out there. This was an opportunity for us to get out there and show them that there are tons of services for them if they need and if they want them.

We had authors there and the authors loved the event. They couldn't speak more highly of it. In the gym area, we had tables for organization and the parents started out in there. They could see every organization that they would come and see and get information on. Then, they would follow these little footprints because we had a Dr. Seuss theme. We put footprints all through the halls so they followed footprints to where they had to go and do the different events. Martha?

Martha Faust:

You can see the authors, they really liked that they were able to sit down with families one on one and read because it wasn't like a whole big group moved together. It was individually through the laid out track, I guess you could call it. They really got to connect with families more. They say that was an amazing part of the event. We had different classrooms where we read a book, a Dr. Seuss themed book.

[inaudible 00:40:29] as you can see in the middle, that little girl, she was using her fine motor skills to hang socks up on the clothesline because we did the foot book. There were certain agencies who were all gung ho. Sherry Smay up there loved to dress up as Cat in the Hat and so excited to get her picture taken with Tom Traninsky, our County Commissioner, and a couple of the organizations had books that they gave out, so at the bottom right corner, you see one of our early interventionists from the county. He was giving out books and activities for kids and then at the bottom left, Penn State Nutritionist was there promoting healthy eating. Pittsburgh Community Food Bank was also there.

Kyra Miller:

She gave the best granola bars ever.

Martha Faust:

They tasted delicious and I have a recipe that I will now be making often because it was amazing and it's healthy so that makes it a fabulous thing. Roll and Read's purpose is to promote nutrition and literacy and I think that this event really hit the targets that it was aiming for. There were 13 families that came through on a very cold Saturday morning after a snow day at the school district, so we were very impressed. We were hoping for 20 and I think we may have hit it in February

when the weather was actually nicer than March this year but you can't always plan those kinds of things. You got to roll with the punches and so next year, we are planning to collaborate with all those organizations again and do this event again to keep promoting and getting it out there to the families that were here. Come to find out information and join our programs. I think that's pretty much everything we had. Is there any questions? Anything you wanted to ask us about how we improved our group connections or how you could possibly do it as well?

Kyra Miller: Allison, do you have any questions?

Allison Fulton: Oh, thank you, Martha and Kyra. My apologies. Yes, there are some questions that are coming in. One, do you provide transportation for your families during community events?

Martha Faust: We try to keep our events in a local area. We have not been able to provide transportation. We have applied to different kinds of grants to do that and have not been successful in getting that. We have had, on occasion, the Cambria Country Transit Authority has given us some tokens. Sometimes, we have given to families we know we are on the bus route, we are just by the bus [inaudible 00:43:17], so we are able to help out with that sometimes. Like I said, for that one mom who was so excited about going swimming, I asked another mom who lived near her, "Can I give her your phone number so that you can bring her to the event?" and she said absolutely. A lot of times we try and work with the families. We have to get families there but like I said, transportation is one of those difficult things to work with and we've come up unsuccessful.

Allison Fulton: How much do you budget for each group connection?

Martha Faust: Low budget. We try to keep it as low key as possible. Roll and Read United Way helped out and provided bags that the families got to take in the early interventions. We're partnering with other organizations to help out with that. They were able to give out the free books, just different things like that and then we ask for donations a lot of times. The one that we did spend quite a bit was the open beach house. We did spend money on and we spent ... It wasn't that much. We bought groceries to have the food.

Kyra Miller: I want to say it was around 35, \$40. My general thing is we're not spending money on group connections. We do have a budget for up at the park. It costs about \$100 to rent the pavilions for the day but beyond that, we try not to spend much money on our group connections.

Martha Faust: We try to keep it as low as possible because the funds aren't there for that. We just are, we get donations and we kind of hope a lot of times.

Kyra Miller: We use things from our own things, like the decorations for the beach house were from Martha's aunt, which was great that she donated that stuff to us but we had some of our own beach house beach decorations but those palm trees and stuff came from Martha's aunt. We use our connections very well.

- Allison Fulton: How do you ensure that your group connections are focused on the parent and child interaction and not just having activities for children?
- Martha Faust: That's a really good question. Ms. Lauren runs our parent and child together playgroups and she had gone to the parent and child together playgroups that were run before by Beginnings by a different program so she had that background knowledge in it and she just focuses on connecting the parents so that they talk about what's going on and then the kids to interact together. Then, she steps back. If you would look back at some of the pictures in the PowerPoint, a lot of times in the background you would see Lauren just behind the parents interacting, especially that first one with the two girls and the mom at the ... They were like Legos and they were flossing the Play-Doh out between the two big Lego blocks and you saw Ms. Lauren in the background just kind of watching and she steps in and then back out. We kind of do that very facilitating thing where we focus on for just a little bit and then we back away making sure that the focus is on the family or the families connecting.
- Allison Fulton: I'm going to follow up as well if I may with people have different names for events they do or groups and you're talking about this parent child playgroup and how that will count for your PAT group connections. You gave an excellent example of it is facilitated in that you have activities for that parent and child to do together. As a reminder, if you are with PAT program, for an event to account as a group connection it must focus on one of those three areas of emphasis. You must either have a parent child interaction or the development center parenting or the family well-being, so know that it's not ... I know some organizations will host playgroups that are truly kind of ... they're unfacilitated and it's just an open time.
- It does still need to be intentional to count as a PAT group connection just to have a qualifier kind of in terms of what does count as a group connection? A group connection must be planned. It must be advertised and it must be recorded after the event. just keeping in mind for everyone who thinks about how you might host different types of events, this is wonderful example how a facilitated parent child playgroup does meet those requirements for PAT.
- Martha Faust: We have an example we're going to go to. Chuck-E-Cheese, we want to try and get families out there together but whenever we have something like that, we also have some kind of handout to go over with parents who attend. I'm not sure what, we haven't planned that one yet, what we'll give out but something to bring the focus back to being one of our three main area topics in our PAT program and not be just a free for all.
- Allison Fulton: A few more questions. One, you showed that you asked for feedback after events. Do you do that after every event that you host, do you request that feedback from families?
- Kyra Miller: We do not request feedback from every playgroup at the end of each session, like at the end in December, we ask the fall session and then in May, we'll ask for

the spring session of our playgroups, so parents aren't doing this every single week. Other events, yes. Sometimes like with the picnic, what we did is we had the parents sign up and we took that feedback at our next visit because a picnic is not a time where you sit down and fill out a piece of paper. It just didn't seem to flow with everybody trying to go swimming, and eating and all that stuff. At our next PAT visit, we had them fill out feedback forms.

We went to a farm in October, when we went there, we did a hayride and all of that fun stuff but then, all the kids got ice cream and while the kids were eating ice cream and that kind of thing, the parents were filling out the handout or before the parents went to the corn maze, then they filled out the review sheet. It really depends on what type of event it is and if there is a time that the parents can sit down and fill that out.

Martha Faust: At our Roll and Read, the last thing was a basket raffle. You got to put tickets in to win a basket donated by the different organizations and before you got your tickets, you had to fill out the feedback for so we were sure to get our feedback from that event. We kind of try and plan how and when we're going to do that.

Allison Fulton: Are your group connections planned by parent educators? Your parent educators are kind of coming together and figuring it out or on the chart, you listed which parent educator was in charge, is it really one parent educator that is doing the planning and making all the decisions or is it a group effort?

Kyra Miller: It depends on the event. Some of the events you saw on that chart had one person, some had two. If there's two, it's both of those parent educators working together to plan the event. With the self-defense one, that was all me. I planned it. Martha helped out with getting the flier and stuff, but I chose the time of day because I had to have one of the guys that I used to train with in karate come in, so we had to work on that to deal with that kind of thing to make sure our schedules matched up but for the most part the parent educators that are assigned to the event are the ones planning the event and have a full responsibility for the event. If they need more of us to be there, they ask us.

Martha Faust: For the beach open house, it was all hands on deck because it was an open house. Kyra and I kind of planned the whole beach open house and the decorations and the activities, but all of the parent educators were there to interact with the family. Tomorrow is our emergency preparedness and Cindy and Becky had to plan, get ready. All the materials are sitting in their office at the moment and they're going to be there and I'm going to be doing the child care. It depends on our schedules and everything who's going to be doing what. We kind of coordinate that. Kyra's not going to be there tomorrow. She has business to get to, so it all depends on the event and what is necessary for it.

Allison Fulton: It appears you take a lot of photos at your events. Assuming that you receive photo releases from your families to take these pictures, in what ways, other than this webinar today, do you use the photos that you take at your events?

Martha Faust: We use our photos in our newsletter from Beginnings on our Facebook page. You can see in the Roll and Read, that one little girl who was doing the fine motor activity, she was not in our program. I don't have release, so you can't see her face. You can't see mama's face and if that's the case, we delete those photos if they accidentally get in the background or something. We do a very intense on site of making sure we have photo releases for the photos we use. It all gets coordinated through me. Then, we have a miracle worker who does a lot of our Facebook things. He and I work together to make sure that nobody's getting a picture that shouldn't be getting a picture up on the Facebook page.

Allison Fulton: I know we're coming to the end of our time. At least two more questions here, if I may. One, if you can talk about what the junior board is, as well as another question has come in. Do you have a recommendation on the type of socializations or groups that you would recommend for younger children such as zero to three?

Kyra Miller: Okay, well, I'll take the junior board question first. I'm the lead mentor for the junior board at Beginnings and it's a Beginnings creation. You have the board of directors and then you have the junior board who help with that. They were children from grades six through 12 that we get together, we have a meeting usually once or twice a month depending on if we have events coming up and the junior board will help. Some of them were planning to help out with the Christmas Parade group connections and be there with the kids. You saw them in the picture at the beach house. We have ...

Martha Faust: Pirates CARE-a-van.

Kyra Miller: ... the Pirates CARE-a-van. They came and helped out with events. We do a Cookies with Santa event in December where they come in and do the crafts with the children. Right now, at the end of April, we're planning a mini con event, which is awesome like Comic Con mini event that's all Star Wars based. The junior board is planning that event and all the money raised will go to our organizations here at Beginnings to help with the kids. That's the main focus of the junior board, is helping Beginnings help the community.

Martha Faust: Then, events for the young children, the Roll and Read was a nice one because they came in strollers and things. It was really kind of focused towards zero to five-year-olds. They're really young, the parent-child together because it's not something like you drop your kid off to play and then you leave them. Parents are required to stay. They cannot leave. We are not child care for those playgroups because it's not the point. The point is to be there. We have had 18-month-olds come to those weekly playgroups and participate. Obviously, they don't sit and listen as well as the three and four-year-olds but they do participate in the craft, in the snack, in the story somewhat. As far as focusing on just those young ones, it's so hard for us. We do have so many that are at the three and four-year-old age. I guess we could. That's probably some place we could work to improve.

- Kyra Miller: Our group connections, we try to make it so that parents who have kids zero to five can come and like Martha said, most of our demographic right now is that preschool age, so that's why most of our group connections are geared towards them but we do have, like when we went to the farm in October, I work with a family that the little boy was maybe eight months old and he was laughing and having a good old time on the hayride with his sister. It's definitely ... We welcome those kids. It's just the activities and the crafts and stuff sometimes are mainly focused on our major demographic of preschoolers.
- Allison Fulton: I realize we actually have till 11:15, so we have plenty of time. Questions are still coming in, so if folks have questions, continue to send those. How wide is the service area for your parent educators for the Beginnings program?
- Kyra Miller: Our parents and teachers program is only for Cambria County and if you would ever look at a map of Cambria County, Johnstown has the biggest population. It's in the bottom left hand corner of the county and then, you go up north and east a little bit and there's Ebensburg and we have all kinds of families there in that area. Then, in Elim is about, I don't know, a fourth of the actual county that has the most population and then there's all this room up north and to the east and we're trying to get more to those families out in the rural areas. It's just difficult because it's a big county and it's far. It takes us an hour to get to the Northern Cambria where we had our Roll and Read. To make commitments to do group connections up there is tough and I keep telling families, "You know what, If you sign up for PAT, we can start bringing more of this kind of stuff up here but until you have commitment, we can't afford to send people up there." One county is what we cover.
- Allison Fulton: Thank you. Do any of your events, is there ever a charge for the families? If you go to the farm, I don't know if that's something that there would be a cost associated but are there ever charges that a family would have to be able to purchase?
- Kyra Miller: No, we cover. That's another one of our expenses. We do pay the \$4 for them to get a pumpkin and a hayride and an ice cream cone at that farm one. That's another one where we do have a little bit of a budget but no, we don't charge our families for any of these events. They're all free for the families who participate.
- Allison Fulton: You had mentioned that for some events you have food. Is food provided for all events or does it just depend on the activity and event?
- Martha Faust: It depends on the activity and event. With our playgroup, we have snacks if for some reason, we weren't planning on but the kids are hungry, then we sneak into the playgroup snack cabinet. For example, our emergency preparedness group connection tomorrow, there's no food planned for that one. It's just-
- Kyra Miller: In the self-defense one, there's no food planned for that either. It really depends on the events that we're having.

- Martha Faust: A lot of times, our parent educators volunteer to make cookies or something. For our parents there where we're having Avon and Lula Roe and selling things, we're going to be baking some cookies just to have there something extra for our families that day.
- Allison Fulton: What would you say would be your top three, if you had to limit it, ways that you think you get families to come to your groups? How are you able to get the good turnout if you had to kind of say here are the three things?
- Kyra Miller: The one way I know of is having another parent run you. That is how we've gotten a lot of our families in is like this little girl on the screen right now, her mom tells everybody about our program. The little girl in the pink shirt in the front, that's how the one in the background came to our program and she has recommended us to so many families. That is the best way, is to get our parents talking about what it is we are doing. I go and tell people about things and they're like, "Oh, that's nice," but having the families recommend our playgroups and our group connections and our program is the absolute most effective way.
- Martha Faust: Yeah, for one of our parent cafes, we got a new family come in because one of the parents that just started in our program actually, it was her first parent cafe, she was in our program for long and she brought her neighbor, and I now work with her neighbor because she wanted to sign up for PAT and she enjoyed the parent café so much that she keeps asking, "When's the next one? When's the next one?" It's all about getting the parents excited about what we do and getting them to bring their friends and neighbors and family.
- Kyra Miller: The second best one is having somebody they trust recommend like the school, the teachers in the schools, they are really working on ... Like I said, it's a whole county. There's 13 school districts in our county and so we try to really build that collaboration between the school districts in our program. Whenever they recommend families, that often works out better because you trust your teachers in the school district or, if ... Who else? Other organizations that refer. Nurse-Family Partnership is fabulous. They refer families to us often and we invite them to all our playgroups. I send our bi-monthly calendar to the program director at Nurse-Family Partnership and she gets it out to her families so they can even start seeing what we are doing in our programs when they are two and age out of that program, they can transition into ours.
- Martha Faust: We get recommendations from Birth Right. We know the one woman, she always call us. [inaudible 01:01:58] We know her rather well because she's always referring families to us. What's the third one?
- Kyra Miller: I don't know a third. Those are the top two ways we get families to participate.
- Allison Fulton: I'm actually going to offer a third because of a follow-up of what you said earlier sometimes, you will, after a group event, then you might follow up on something at the personal visit and or vice versa if there's something that most likely you parent educators are talking about at a personal event and it ties to what then is

going to be offered for a group. I can just tell in listening to you talk about the way your groups are run that definitely individuals are all tied together and all parent educators know what are the events coming and how can we support our families. I'm sure that these aren't looked at as very separate, but everything that's happening at Beginnings is a way to support the families, no matter if it's a personal event that's happening or if it's a group event or if it's a larger community event. Again, just in listening to the conversation, you can really tell that everybody at the organization has buy in for what you're offering the families that you're serving.

Kyra Miller: Thanks.

Martha Faust: We hadn't even thought about that. You're so right.

Allison Fulton: Then, I am not seeing any other questions come in so I'm going to offer that up to our participants. If anyone else has questions, please do send them in. I'm going to offer one comment and suggestion. We had one attendee offer that for your Chuck-E-Cheese event and what your focus may be, they had said because PAT has many resources related to the importance of play and how play enhances a child's development that you might be able to highlight some examples of how certain types of play at Chuck-E-Cheese might help with motor skills and connect these games to skills needed in kindergarten and beyond.

Kyra Miller: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Allison Fulton: Okay, so I am not seeing any other questions at this time. I want to thank both Martha and Kyra for participating with us today. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share how you have changed the way that you look at group connections and approach group connections and that it really is a way to help your organization just as much as it is a way for those families and that truly, collaboration is the key with success. I think that really showed in terms of how you partner with your local organizations. Thank you very much to both of you for taking your time with us today.

Martha Faust: Thank you.

Kyra Miller: Thanks for having us.

Allison Fulton: Thank you to all of our participants. I appreciate you taking the time this morning to participate with this webinar. As it was stated earlier, the webinar will be archived and saved on the Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers website under the Family Support Professional Development page. An electronic evaluation will be sent via email to all registered participants. If you were joining as a group, that registered participant is more than welcome to send that evaluation out to all that participated with the event today. As a reminder, your feedback is truly important to us as we develop professional development sessions for future events.

As you will see, there are many events upcoming. We have these on the calendar. We always say that these are tentative because sometimes, schedules do change, so please mark these dates. You will notice that in July and August, we are doing the second Wednesday of the month. Usually, we have these events as the first Wednesday of the month but both July and August, those are the second Wednesdays of the month. Just take a note for that. We will be sending out the registration information for next month's webinar on support for grand families and relative caregivers just within a few days. Watch for that email to come directly and as a reminder, we always like to say that folks can join our family support webinars in multiple ways including mobile devices such as phones and tablets, so we encourage you to do that. Again, thank you for joining us and this does conclude today's webinar.