

Establishing Supportive Relationships

The importance of relationships cannot be underestimated. Trusting positive relationships internally and externally are essential to the success and sustainability of your programme. There are three primary groups of people that are essential to involve: parents, teachers and the community.

Please see this [video](#) which outlines how important initial and on-going interactions can be.

Parents

It is important to spend some time engaging with parents, as our branches have shown that the higher the level of parental involvement, the better the learners' attendance and, ultimately, the more likely they are to pass.

However, parents are notoriously tricky to engage. This can be for a number of reasons.

They may:

- Not understand what it is that you do
- Have conflicting responsibilities and legitimate time constraints
- Undervalue the power of education
- Have a limited view of the opportunities available to their child
- Not understand the need for their engagement

You need to determine what it is that is preventing parental engagement and then develop creative solutions to increase the level of parental involvement.

Some initial ideas to get parents engaged are:

- Hold an Open Day for parents and community generally
- Hold parents meetings each term
- Involve parents in decision-making structures
- Invite parents to get involved in branch events and activities
- Send parents SMSs about their child's attendance and progress at the end of term



Open Day

Parents should be involved right from the start of your programme. Holding an open day is an effective way of doing this as it provides an informal chance to meet. Speak to community leaders, parents, learners, tutors in the community to get advice on strategies and guidance as to when to hold an Open Day to maximise parent attendance. Put up posters advertising your Open Day in locations that parents frequent: clinics, spaza shops, taxis and trains.

Parents Meetings

Please watch this [video](#) about parents meetings for an overview.

A parents' meeting should be held every term to inform parents about events in the term and can be used to reiterate core aspects of the programme: times and days, % requirement, report collection, post-school placements applications processes, bursaries/scholarships/NSFAS.

It can also be used to educate parents on their rights in relation to the school. For instance, some schools will withhold a learners report if the 'donation fee' has not been paid by the parent. As the name suggests this is not a mandatory contribution and therefore the school has no right to keep the learner's report. This is actually against the law. Parents must be aware of this fact and be empowered to demand for the release of their child's report.

Involvement in Decision-Making

Involving parents in the decision-making structures of the organisation can substantially increase their engagement, cooperation and participation. At the SPW each year invite the parents of all the learners or just the learner representatives if you believe that too many parents will attend. You can send a letter home, follow up with a phone call, then SMS a reminder the day before.

Having parents at this workshop will enrich the discussion and provide different perspectives. It can be incredibly helpful when making decisions around times/days of



tutoring and parents meetings. It is also useful to understand the realities that parents and their children are facing and the obstacles to learning. By understanding and taking into account the home/environmental contexts of your learners it will strengthen your programme as you will be able to meet their specific needs.

At the SPW you can determine which parents want to be part of the on-going Branch Committee meetings. Even having one parent representative on this committee will significantly improve the democracy of your organisation and it is hoped better and more informed decisions will be made.

Invite to Events

If you are holding any event it is important to invite parents to these sessions. The talent show at Winter School and the end of year prize-giving event are key dates in the year. These give the opportunity for parents to revel in their child's success and for the learner to feel proud of their achievements. When parents and learners are able to see their improvement and are acknowledged for their participation they are more likely to continue to be involved.

Communicate Regularly

Regular interaction throughout the year will reaffirm these relationships and strengthen them. SMS updates that don't need replies can help parents feel part of the programme without feeling that they have to give up their time. It shows that you value them, whether or not they are heavily involved.

One of the best ways to communicate is by focusing on the learner. All parents enjoy hearing that their child is doing well. Sending a photo or a letter home acknowledging how well the learner is doing and thanking the parent for their continued support can be hugely effective for both parental involvement and learner motivation. It also serves to highlight the value that IkamvaYouth puts on education, behaviour, and commitment. These values will then be transferred to and upheld by the parent.



Schools

A visit to the school to schedule a meeting with the principal is key.

Acknowledge the work that the school does and recognise the challenges that they have. Pitch yourself as a remedy to one of their main challenges i.e. low learner engagement/low pass rates. Be clear if there is something specific that you want but, at this stage, it is enough to want to introduce yourself. It is rare that you will find an enthusiastic principal willing to get any more involved at this stage.

Principals listen to impact. However, one of the major grievances we have had with working with schools is that they often have the view that it is unfair to work with only a small section of their students. You must respect their view but be strong when arguing that by working with the most motivated students you are going to pull up the matric pass rate of those learners and, in turn, the school. Although it can be perceived as elitist, it is rather working with the people that want to work.

Fostering a relationship with your feeder schools gives your programme a huge advantage. It facilitates report collection, exemption from afternoon classes that can clash with your tutoring sessions, and can provide an avenue to get information to parents. In some cases when the schools are cooperative they will assist with sending out letters at important times of the year to parents. One way to get involved is to attend teacher meetings and School Governing Bodies (SGB) meetings. This can provide exposure for the organisation and a platform to explain what the programme is.

However, it is not an easy thing to do. You must establish the relationship as soon as you start operating in the area. It is important to stay in contact throughout the year and invite the principal and teachers to any events you are hosting. Explain that you want them to see their students performing, working hard etc.

Don't expect a queue around the block. If you are lucky you may get one or two keen teachers. These relationships **MUST** be nurtured. Do not take them for granted. Find ways to keep their interest. What do they need? How can you assist them in their jobs? What are their most pressing challenges?



Share the learners' and your programme's overall results with the school. Congratulate them on their results, and ensure that every step of the way you're affirming that these results are due to the collaborative effort and partnership.

Community

The community encompasses parents and teachers but extends beyond the walls of schools

Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is a great tool to employ when you first enter a community, to build your understanding of a community you work in. Even if you have been working there for some time you may be surprised to discover groups and organisations that you didn't know exist.

Asset mapping is described as *'the process of creating a tangible display of the people, places, and experiences that make up a community...which serves as a support, resource, or a source of strength to one's self and others in the community'* Community Science .

By conducting an asset mapping workshop with your learners, tutors, staff, parents, teachers and the wider community you will be able to identify all the; institutions, social groups, recreations programs, churches, book clubs, NGO's, women's groups, co-operatives, businesses, social services, health services, churches, libraries, schools and universities/colleges; that make up the community.

How-To Guide: Asset Mapping How-To

and homes and into the wider surrounds. There are likely to be multiple programmes that work in a community. It is important to find out who these people are and how you can work together.

You could start by visiting local facilities to ask what programmes and organisations exist: libraries, clinics, other non-profits, colleges and higher education facilities etc. If you have the time it is worth doing an asset mapping exercise.

Just knowing that these organisations exist does not mean that these are strong relationships.

Try to interact as much as possible within the community. Most communities have some form of NGO or youth forum that you or a member of your team could sit on. Or start your own!



In reality, you may all be pursuing your own agendas and not have a huge amount of time for collaboration. However, there will be times that you can draw on others and others can draw on you, so being consistent with your communication will pay off.

One of the benefits of forming strong community relationships other than an increased awareness, attraction of community-based volunteers, and learner recruitment, is building a directory of organisations for referrals. There will be times as a coordinator that a learner presents a challenge to you that you do not feel you are equipped to deal with. This could be related to sexual health, domestic violence, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy or any other of the myriad problems that our learners face.

For instance the Masiphumelele Branch established a relationship with the Desmond Tutu Centre (DTC) in 2011. This partnership was nurtured by the branch over subsequent years. Ikamvanites were encouraged to attend the centre for sexual health testing and activities for which DTC were grateful. In 2014 the Masi branch needed a female volunteer to run the ladies club and appealed to Desmond Tutu Centre. They provided a volunteer once a week to run these sessions for IY free of charge. Cultivating this sort of mutually beneficial partnership gives your organisation the chance to establish many more programmes without incurring additional workloads for your staff or costs for your programme.

Try to keep an Excel spreadsheet up to date when you hear of someone in the community. It can also help to locate and keep record of the specific volunteers for the programmes you want to run.

Tip

Be aware of what your needs are and look at who and what in the area could help you meet these needs. Ask if they offer these services? Ask if they would like to?

What do you need?

It is easy to perceive a lack of interest from the community but this can actually be a lack of engagement due to an insufficiently communicated message and 'ask' – what is it that you want from the community? Don't assume that they know. Help them to see their part in the programme and specifically explain how you want an individual/organisation to be involved.



What do they need?

People could be interested in the programme but the reality is that there are various obstacles and challenges that prevent them from participating. This is particularly true when they are unable to see the value of their participation. When attempting to engage and work with community members it is important to ask the question 'What is their personal interest and what do they want to gain from the interaction?'

Think about their primary interest; is it the individual child? Is it the child's future? Their own future? School results? A Safer community? Higher earning potential?

