

September 2018 Vlog

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Hello and welcome to my September 2018 vlog.

This month's blog starts with a love note again this month love note is going to a grantee out in Washington state, Washington State Community College, District 17 in Spokane, Washington. I had the pleasure of visiting a few centers out that way, and one in particular, an Early Head Start center that is located within a rec center in a very small community. The name is rec center right now is East Central Community Center but it's being changed to the MLK Center.

And I want to send my love note specifically to Frieda and to Cheryl, who are the manager. Cheryl is the Early Head Start manager and Frieda's manager of the MLK Center, and the partnership they've created is just beautiful. I could vision a parent bringing a baby to the Early Head Start program and that child not leaving that center and until he or she were, maybe, in middle school. They had everything there for children. Families. They were connected.

They had a WIC office. And they even had a police station there, where the police get involved the kids, and their, and their community, and are there as a resource. It was just really amazing to see that happening, and they're in the midst of a big overhaul of the facility. And in the meantime, the Early Head Start center is in one room, three classrooms in one space. But they so creatively divided that space that it works beautifully, and the teachers just collaborate. It's like having six teachers in one. Once they said it's wonderful. So big shout out to that group. This month's vlog topic in light of the fact that it's September is enrollment. So hopefully, by the time you're done here you have some good ideas for the moment. And I know some of you might have waiting lists, and you're thinking, "Well, enrollment doesn't really apply to me right now."

But these are good things to think about. And I really thought about enrollment. I came up with two buckets we're going to talk about the now bucket and the later bucket -- the later bucket being the bigger things that you do, the longer term, big enrollment strategies that you want to be using. And then, the now bucket. So when you're done watching his vlog, you can go do these things right now. So let's do the big things first. The later bucket, the things that need to be kind of ongoing. And I put those into three categories. The first one are partnerships. Everything is going to be about relationships. You know that. But in particular though, in terms of enrollment, you want to be looking for partners in the area of homelessness. We know that a lot of our homeless children need support, and those families need support, and it is a great resource -- Head Start is a great resource for them.

But you need to be looking for those children. They're not just going to come to you. And you can do that through partners. Homeless liaisons, community partners. Certainly, the fact that we use the McKenny-Vento law helps connect you to school buildings, anything like that. Foster care, as well, through social services, through child welfare. Make sure you're connected in with all of your foster care programs so that, should a new foster child move into the area, they know you're there. And you can have those, kind of, regular conversations. Those are really big relationships you need to build. And also, the school system. This goes back to last month's message. That school relationship is key. You have got a homeless liaison. You've got a guidance counselor. You've got a nurse, and you've got a principal.

All of those people are going to come in contact with the needy families for whatever reason, whether you're homeless, a new foster child, or just a family they know -- a parent lost his job. Something like that. And by connecting with those people and letting them know that you have space for their children, maybe there's a child coming to enroll in second grade. But they see a 3-year-old with them at that registration. So those are really good relationships to continually foster. And the other one I was thinking

about were pediatricians. And so, I went online and did some research and I learned at the American Academy of Pediatrics -- Pediatricians recommends a poverty screening. So pediatricians are screening for poverty.

It only makes sense that they know you exist. So why don't you find five or six, 10 pediatricians that are in your vicinity, and make sure they know about your program. You never know. They might be able to focus.

The second big thing in terms of long term is making sure data systems are in order. Tracking data, making sure that those systems are working for you is really important.

And the third one is doing an honest community assessment. And this is a big one. Communities change, and you may have had a thriving program in your neighborhood for a decade. And all of a sudden, you can't fill slots. Maybe it's because the neighborhood has changed. The needs have changed. And that adjustment needs to be made, whether it's changing the kind of enrollment you do, the kind of programming you do. Or moving and finding a location where the children are, need to be served. Our priority is serving children. So make sure your needs assessment matches what you, what your neighborhood actually needs, and you're providing the services. So what are the immediate things you can do. Those are the big ones.

But let's do the immediate ones. They're more fun. You can have more satisfaction. I've got five for you. The first one is create a single really good marketing piece. It should be electronic and it should be a hard copy. But it should look the same. It should be simple, a very clear message. It should have graphics, and it should have very clear contact information. If you've got that skill set in your Head Start center, somebody is really good at graphics, have somebody design it. You have to spend a little bit of money to have somebody design a really good one, do it. There are also a lot of online sources like VistaPrint, I think, and other good quick marketing sources where you can go make a really good piece. But having one constant message is important. And then, you're going to have that available for the next four things and then tell you about.

Okay. So the second one is your homeless population. Consider non-traditional locations when you're trying to look for these children. We talked about relationship building in the long-term bucket. That's different. I'm talking about knowing where our homeless families sleeping, where are they getting meals. Public places are places you need to be looking. And it's a very non-traditional way to go out and find people. But this is an important part of what we're, what we do, being in touch with emergency emergency shelters, campgrounds, local motels. Anything like that is very important for you, and that flyer, the physical flyer, could be really useful in that effort. Number three. Create an enrollment leadership team. Take a group of your folks who want to be a part of leadership, and create a leadership team, and their main mission is enrollment. You arm them with your flyer, your electronic and physical flyer, and you have them create a plan, and carry it, out and you manage it. And I'm saying you because I'm talking to directors here. But by leveraging the leadership in your center,

You can come up with some power that you may not even know existed and giving people that level of leadership opportunity. A lot of folks want to be doing that kind of thing. They have a focused mission. They come up with a plan. You help them manage that plan, and implement the plan. But it takes it off of your plate 100 percent, and shares it, and also brings a lot of perspectives into the picture. Maybe you'll come up with some really good ideas.

The fourth suggestion I have is around social media. It's my observation in my short time of traveling around that we are under utilizing social media at Head Start. In fact, I think next month's vlog is going to be about social media. But for the purpose of this particular enrollment topic, social media should be a part of your -- if you want to call it recruitment -- your messaging. If it's not, it needs to be. So if you have

a Facebook page, if you have Twitter, use it for this purpose. If you don't, set one up. You need to be communicating through social media. That is the modern method of word of mouth. It's the kitchen table. It's the, it's the corner that people are hanging out and talking of the soccer game, or whatever. But that is how you can start to get your message out. And I've talked to some folks, and they've said to me, "Well, my feeling is we really don't have technology, and I don't really think that's going to be effective." But I'm going to say I come from a long history of working in high-needs schools. My families were very needy. They all had phones. And they used them.

I believe that we probably have more people plugged in than we know. Maybe not through traditional computer plugged into the wall, but through a cell phone. Now, reaching those people through social media is not as -- wouldn't be the traditional method, but to get started, get connected. Once you have your twitter and your Facebook set up, get your own families to follow your page. And then just post something a couple times a week. Something cool that your kids did. Something neat that one of your teachers did. Some upcoming event. Keep it going so that your folks are plugged into that. And what will happen organically is that somebody who is friends with somebody else will learn about your program through some Twitter post. That's how it works. I'm going to provide more details on that next month, I think, in general. But for right now, you can use that for recruitment.

And the fifth suggestion I have is to get off of this vlog and go walk. Walk your community. Be physically present in your community. And that's going to be the most non-traditional places. Take those flyers with you, that beautiful flyer you created, and go to the park and go to the 24-hour stores in the middle of the night, or the churches, or obviously emergency shelters. Anywhere where you know there has a potential of someone who might be needy being present. Laundromats and handing out flyers. Get to know the manager, make, make friends with the people, and let them know what you do. It's just a matter of communication but it's more of non-traditional communication than most folks would do. You're not going to see the public school system do this.

They just put out a big sign that says kindergarten registration starts Monday, and people come. It's a lot different than what we do. We're very non-traditional. And I want to end this with a story that was shared to me this week when I talked to someone about what are you doing. And she told me the story about one of her grantees who knocked on the window of a pregnant woman sleeping in a car in the middle of the night. It's an Early Head Start center. And she was homeless. She was sleeping in her car. The early Head Start director invited her to her center, provided services for pregnant moms, then provided services for her newborn baby. And now what we have is a woman who was a college graduate with a thriving child. That's how you enroll Head Start kids. It is not going to be the traditional method of enrollment. We've got to do more on the ground, in your face, kind of, enrollment. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of boots on the ground kind of work, but it's the kind of work that gets results. So that's what I encourage you to do if you're, if you're struggling with enrollment. Obviously work with your program specialist and other folks. They're very happy to help you.

And so, now my last segment, if you didn't know already, I have one for you this month. It's a really good one. I learned about a program called Museums for All. And I'm going to provide you with the link and a little flyer about it which I encourage you to give to your parents. It's a network of hundreds and hundreds of museums across the country that provide free to three dollars. It's either free or up to the most can be three dollars for admission into their museums. And it's just, it's a service that's provided and it's not just while they're in your program, it can be on the weekend, they can take their families. I highly encourage you to look into it. Get your kids and their families to go to museums. What a great place to bond as a family and to learn and grow.

So hopefully that little tidbit helped you, and remember Head Start is access to the American dream. Go make dreams happen.