

WHAT I LEARNED

Think | Do | Share

Step 1: Find the Space

Finding a partner who will house your program is the first step towards creating your space. Find an organization that shares your vision, and who will collaborate effectively. The plan is to work together long-term, so forming a solid partnership is necessary. Check out the space. Is it an appropriate space for young children? Where are the bathrooms located? Are they easily accessible? What is the room layout? Are there any hidden spots? How will you keep supervision of all children in the space? Community centers may work well as a Drop In space since they may not charge rent, making the program more affordable for parents. Still, if you use a public space, you will have to think of how the space will be shared. Will you be able to leave toys, furniture, and art supplies in the room? It might be a good idea to speak with the people who share the space with you to set guidelines of how the space will be used..

Step 2: Have a Vision

How do you envision the space? Need inspiration? Take guided tours of local daycares or



A Step by Step Guide to Creating Your Own Community Drop In

I heard it takes courage to follow a dream. What people don't necessarily mention is that it also takes energy, time, and money to see that the details of this dream are fleshed out. It is good practice to reflect on the process of your progress. It is even better to share your lessons so that others who have similar dreams have a rough guideline of how you got to where you are. I am still not at the finish line, but have made some progress towards reaching my goal. Here are the steps I took:



continued...

visit local preschools. For more inspiration, check out some wonderful books such as "Creative Curriculum", or "Designs for Living and Learning" by Deb Curtis. Take notes, imagine, draw. When you are ready, start planning your space. Think about the kinds of areas you will set up in your classroom. Will you have centers? What materials will you use? Will you rotate manipulatives? where will they be stored? For ideas of high quality materials and classroom furniture, Check out community playthings' website, which also offer videos and tutorials, and offers ideas of how to set up your classroom. For cheaper classroom materials, check out discount school supply or classroom direct.

Step 3: Plan, Plan, Plan

So you have a clear vision and a space. Now comes the practical part of the process: how do you make it happen? While most of us are not independently wealthy, we can reach out to organization and foundations who sponsor projects such as these. How do you market yourself? What is your mission? What will your program accomplish? Who will use your services? Is there a real need in your area for this program? What does success in your program look like? Through this process, you will gain clarity about who you are, what you want, and what your program aims to do. Create a budget and try to stick with it. Network with as many people you know, and get the word out about your program. Find ways to collaborate with organizations who share your interests. Collaborations lead to more exposure, and often incite great conversations on how to improve the program.

Step 4: Start Writing!

Sell your program to the world! Grant writing can feel like a shot in the dark. Just want does each organization or foundation want? Find out! Call ahead, if possible, and find out what sort of programs they sponsor. Most organizations or foundations have webpages that specify what they fund, and past funded projects - look through to see if you would be a good fit. Don't waste time writing grants for places who are not interested in supporting your cause. Channel all of your drive and vision on paper. Each grant is slightly different, although a common thread is that people want to sponsor programs which will improve the community, be successful, and have high attendance rates. How will you prove your program will meet all of those requirements?

Step 5: Just Do It!

Did you get the grant? Great! Now move forward! Order materials, network, create brochures, talk to parents and guardians in your neighborhood about the program, create a buzz. As you create the space, invite people down to spend a day in your program and share the experience; this is a community project. Most importantly, spend time creating hands-on lessons. Good teaching is central in the success of the program. Once the program begins, remember the importance of classroom observations, and modeling kindness in class. Invite artists and community members. Involve families and friends, and create a warm, inviting place for all who drop in.



Thinking Forward:

How will your Community Drop In operate? Will you have a director? Who will fill that role? Will there be a Board of Directors? How will you account for long-term expenses? While grants are an excellent source for start-up costs, the cost of 2 part time (9am-12pm) teachers meeting twice a week for the school year calendar runs approximately \$12,000 per year. How will salaries be paid? The program I modeled The Community Drop In after is funded through tax payer dollars, making the funding stable. If you plan on writing grants to cover yearly costs, remember that funding is not guaranteed.

That's it! Get going!

and

Good luck with your program!...