

Conducting Family-Focused Community Events

Project Maine Families Cumberland County Initiative

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Project Maine Families

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Contents

Introduction	1
How We Began	3
The Events	5
Costs	6
Planning for Attendance at the Event	7
Donations	7
Volunteers	9
Publicity	10
Barriers	11
Outcomes	12



Project Maine Families is a child abuse and neglect prevention project funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect with the goal of developing a comprehensive strategy to reduce the numbers of children at risk of abuse and neglect in Cumberland County Maine. The project began by conducting a community wide needs assessment to find out what resources were available in the community and what additional resources were needed to provide support to families. To collect more specific information we conducted focus groups with parents. By using focus groups, we hoped to gain insights into what families needed, wanted and would use in the community. We also wanted to learn whether the needs and concerns reported by families were consistent with those identified by other community representatives contacted during the assessment.

A total of ten focus groups were conducted with parents living in Cumberland County to obtain their thoughts, opinions and concerns about being parents. Parents were recruited through newspaper advertisements; through direct mailings to work places, doctors offices, and libraries; and through word of mouth. Each participant was paid \$20; food, transportation and child care were provided. The groups lasted two hours, and the number of participants in each group varied from four to fifteen. Parents were asked what life was like for them, what were their concerns, their needs, their children's needs, and their expectations of the community in supporting families. For more information about focus groups see *Focus Groups: An Effective Marketing Research Tool for Social Service Agencies*, 1992,

available from the Cumberland County Child Abuse and Neglect Council.

During all of the focus groups parents expressed a variety of concerns about parenting; feeling alone, isolated, and inadequately prepared to parent. All parents worried about the cost, availability and quality of child care; all parents felt their parenting role was undervalued; and all parents worried about the lack of community in today's society. Many parents wanted the community to offer more free, family activities so they could have opportunities to meet other families and have fun. Participants described communities that were no longer small and close knit. They remembered growing up in neighborhoods where mothers stayed at home, children played in groups and any one parent could be in charge of the group of children playing in their yard or in the neighborhood. Families felt included in a larger circle and could rely on neighbors for informal support, help in an emergency, respite from their children, and social interaction.

Parents in the focus groups felt that today's families were different. They described families where both parents were working outside the home, where child care was provided by day care centers with restricted hours and age requirements, and where their children's playmates lived longer distances from one another. The participants reported relying on out-of-town (and in some cases out-of-state) relatives for help in times of crisis or emergency. In general, support was now much harder to access.

In response to these concerns, particularly the concern for a community that cares for and supports families,

Project Maine Families identified five towns which were willing to begin the process of establishing or reestablishing this greater sense of community through organizing and implementing community-based, family-focused events.

This document is a review of the process and events that occurred in the first year of activities within these five towns. Of the five communities that participated, three were rural, two urban. Two chose to revolve their events around a school and/or school population while the others chose to involve the entire community from the beginning. Despite the many differences in these five communities and their planning processes, remarkable similarities occur. All five communities have demonstrated that communities do care about families, that they can come together to support and value families, and that any event can be successful if people work together with a common purpose.

Each community began this process by organizing a planning group. Members of the planning group were recruited through schools, PTAs, service organizations (e.g., the Lions Club or Kiwanis), churches, and through word of mouth. In many cases the planning group began small and then grew larger as the goals became clearer, the tasks more concrete and the event more defined. Often people joined the group bringing needed skills for the success of the event: security, traffic control, clean up. Some groups had members who had previous experience in organizing large scale events and were comfortable with the

How We Began



responsibilities and large numbers of tasks to be completed. In other groups, the entire membership was new to the planning process and somewhat apprehensive about their mission.

Each group worked hard at identifying its members' strengths and at respecting each member's limits. Project Maine Families encouraged the parent members of the group not to take on additional responsibilities if it increased the stress in their own families. It was important for each member to make his or her own decision about how much time he or she could give. Meeting times were scheduled differently in each community according to what was best for group members. In some communities there were many school personnel involved so meetings were held at school after classes ended in the afternoon. In other communities meetings were held in the evening as many of the group members worked during the day and could only meet at night.

In each community there were some members who spent more time on the planning than others; for example, one or two members might attend every meeting while other members might come only when their particular area of interest was on the agenda, or if there were specific tasks they had agreed to complete. All the groups remained flexible and non-judgmental about attendance. At some sites, if people took responsibility for completing tasks, but could not attend meetings, they reported their progress to a specified planning group member who brought that information to the larger group.

Child care was offered at all planning group meetings, but was not always needed. The option to utilize the child care was essential to many group members who otherwise would not have been able to participate.

A designated Project Maine Families staff person was assigned to each community and was responsible for attending meetings at each site and helping to facilitate the planning process.

Some sites took minutes of their meetings, others did not. Those groups who did take minutes said that it was helpful in keeping track of what tasks had been completed and what still needed to be done.

The following five communities participated in the planning and organizing of family focused events in their communities.

The Events



- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Buxton | A rural community bordering two major counties in Maine. A town with no physical “center” and with many families commuting to work 20-25 miles each day to Portland. |
| Steep Falls | A very remote and rural community. |
| Gray/
New Gloucester | A large community with an active school district. Recently, a highly publicized child abuse case occurred in this area. |
| Brunswick | A large, urban town currently divided about the location of a new school building. A community where people feel strongly about issues. Also, a community with a large naval base housing many families in transition. |

South Portland The second largest community in Cumberland County with many indicators of high risk behaviors: unemployment, school dropout rates, and so forth.

Each community was unique and each responded to the call for community events differently. Some of the events focused around a dinner while others focused on activities such as a talent show or a musician. Despite all of the differences several important similarities existed. The following sections describe these valuable learning processes in detail.

Costs



All the events were free and open to everyone. There were no admission fees and nothing was sold, including food. This eliminated barriers for many families who might not have been able to participate otherwise. It is not unusual for families to attend events where admission is charged, and participants must pay for food, and other items—balloons, toys, crafts, face painting. Parents told us in focus groups that they would feel badly not attending community or school events because of the cost, feeling as though they should be there and that by not going they were letting their children down. Other families reported they would attend events based on the condition of their family budget. Sometimes, when money was scarce, they would have to decide who could attend the event because they could not afford to have everyone go, so some children could go, and some would have to stay home.

Ironically, events intended for family fun would often become sources of great stress.

Anticipating the number of participants likely to show up at an event is an important factor in planning. The amount of space, supplies and volunteers needed will depend on how many people attend the event. It is also important not to have too much so that items, such as food, go to waste. One community assessed participation levels by requiring preregistration for the event. Preregistration was done by attaching a form to the flier that announced the event to the public. People who wanted to preregister could tear off their registration form and put it in a number of different depositories placed in local businesses and schools. By placing canisters at numerous locations around the town, participants could register for the event with ease.

Planning for
Attendance
at the Event



An important goal of the community event was to involve many sectors of the community. One way to involve local businesses and civic organizations was to ask for donations of food, supplies and labor. Each community was different in responding to the requests for donations from the planning group. Most groups were successful in getting donations of money, gift certificates used as prizes for participants, food, supplies, tables, chairs, portable

Donations



toilets, and volunteer time. In communities where there were fewer resources, Project Maine Families was able to provide support with project funds. The planning group learned many things in the process. Often when businesses saw other resources donated they were more apt to donate. Coordinating donations with other civic groups, such as the Jaycees and the Lions Club, proved easier. Many planning groups also discovered how difficult economic times can affect the amount of donations—they were harder to come by. However communities have proven that scaled down events can be just as successful. Once an event becomes established and popular, businesses, service organizations and even schools are eager to be associated with it and their participation often increases.

The Brunswick planning group designed professional looking receipts for donations so that businesses could use them in record keeping. This technique increased their ability to get donations from local business people. This same group also provided generic gift certificate forms for businesses who did not have their own. Advertising a businesses' support for the event was another popular way to elicit donations.

One group set up banners at the event that listed supporters and donations provided by community businesses, churches, and civic groups.

Another group published a listing of all the names of people who had provided donations on the reverse side of a handout that listed community resources.

Networking with friends and other groups proved helpful in getting tasks accomplished. Many groups found it helpful to draw upon resources they already knew about in the community. If someone was a Girl Scout Leader, she might call upon her troop to set up an event or a Rotarian might call on other Rotarians. Friends and family of the planning group members were often called upon for help. This informal networking was particularly helpful in those communities where business connections were either not possible or scarce.

In all cases, the groups found it better to tell people what they needed rather than ask for general help. For example; it was better to say:

we need cups and paper plates...can you find some?

we need people to hang up posters... can you do that?

Volunteers seemed to prefer being directed, although planning groups struggled with this as they often felt too directive and controlling. One volunteer said she didn't want to think about what had to be done, she just wanted someone to tell her what to do. A large church group said they had no one to represent them in the planning group but they would be there the night of the event and do the entire clean up.

Volunteers



Publicity



All groups publicized their event and all agreed that the methods used were successful in drawing people to the events. Popular methods were:

- flyers sent home from school with children;
- posters designed by group members and teens were hung throughout the town at frequented locations (e.g., grocery stores, corner stores, laundromats, community centers, YMCA/YWCA, day care centers, churches);
- banners tied on utility poles across downtown streets, similar to those that announce community fairs and carnivals;
- announcements in local newspapers;
- radio announcements;
- TV announcements.

Sending flyers home with school children was not always an appropriate method of advertising. This method was not used in community schools where children might live in towns not included in the event. The same was true of newspaper, radio and television advertisements. These methods were used only in towns where the ad would be seen by community residents. Many towns did not want to include neighboring towns and cities, preferring to keep the event local. These exceptions were necessary for planning purposes, so the event would not get too large.

All communities expressed the difficulties and barriers they faced in becoming a more cohesive community. For some, the barriers were geographical, for others it was economic, social or political. Overcoming these barriers was another focus the planning groups kept in mind while planning their events.

One community had been experiencing problems deciding on a location for a new school. The townspeople were divided over the site where the new school would be placed. It seemed as though everyone had an opinion about the subject and the fighting that resulted over the differences had been occurring for more than a year. The planning group in this community wanted to provide an opportunity for townspeople to come together and not worry about the school issue.

Another community was experiencing a disintegration of the downtown area of their city. The downtown had traditionally been a location where people gathered to shop and socialize; it was a place for informal support. Because of heavy real estate development in the outlying areas, a new mall had been built and many of the downtown stores were closing or relocating because of the competition. Townspeople no longer had a central place to congregate. This town did, however, have a park in the center of town, and chose to hold their event in the park because of its central location.

Conflicts with other events can also create barriers to participation. Groups made a special effort to plan their events around other activities so as not to conflict with other events and so as many people as possible could attend.

Barriers



Overall, each planning group was unique in its membership and experience level. Those who were new to the planning process had more to learn from the experience. Other groups were experienced at organizing and had more skills to draw upon. Also, the communities' openness to events varied; anticipating this when selecting and planning events was important for the groups. Some groups were difficult to involve not only in the planning but also in the participation of the event. Seniors and teens participated less than other groups. Each community had this problem—some more than others—but all communities mentioned it as a challenge that would be focused on in future events.

It is important to remember that each community is different and will have different experiences and skills to draw upon in organizing community events. Organizing and planning is a continuous and evolving process for every community. Remembering that it is a learning process will help when the difficulties and glitches inevitably arise.

Outcomes



In each of these five communities there is now a growing group of people who view their community differently. People now believe that their schools, recreation departments, libraries, churches and businesses must recognize the needs of all families and be actively thinking about creative and concrete ways they can support families. Many other activities have evolved from the initial

events. In one of the five communities, there are now open gym nights involving the school, the recreation department, and the Jaycees. In another community informational workshops for families were planned in conjunction with activities for children of all ages.

Most importantly in all these communities there are people who raise questions:

Is this (activity/policy) supportive of families?

Will this (method) work for families?

How can we do this (event) so that everyone feels welcome?

Even though this (event/activity) is a good idea, will it add to a family's stress?

By keeping the needs of families in mind, more activities, events and policies will begin to provide additional support to the families in these communities and bring about an awareness of the importance of family support. Raising people's consciousness about families can only improve the lives of parents and children in our neighborhoods. We are all responsible for the children. Project Maine Families has demonstrated that when people come together and share a vision of what they want their community to be, the potential for change is unlimited.

Project Maine Families
Interview Schedule for Family Events in Schools
Cumberland County

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Date: _____

1.
 - a. What was your event like?
 - b. Why did you choose this type of event/How did this type of event get selected?

2.
 - a. What kind of expectations did you have about the event?
 - b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?
 - c. If so, how?
 - d. If not, why not?
 - e. Were there any surprises, either good or bad?

3.
 - a. How did the planning process go?
 - b. How did it work?
 - c. Who was involved?
 - d. How often did you meet?
 - e. Who managed the agenda?
 - f. How much time did it involve for members?
 - g. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?
 - h. How was the event publicized?
 - i. Was this method effective?
 - j. What would you do differently/What else would you include?

4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event)?

Interview Questions for Family Events in Schools

Cumberland County

Interviewee: Parent Organizer

Date: February 8, 1993

Brunswick
Family Events

1. a. What was your event like?

Event was a family dinner and entertainment. Held on a Friday evening from 5:30 to 8:30 – May 8, 1992. Entertainment included a magician, the local Jr. High and High School jazz band, and a sing-along. Spaghetti dinner was served that was made by the local vocational school (teens received course credit for participating in the coordination and cooking). Ben and Jerry's donated ice cream for desert, which was a big hit (people felt like the ice cream was a special treat—one that they may not have bought for themselves). The event was held at the local Jr. High School. This place was chosen for two reasons. First, because it was the only place big enough to house this type of event. And second, because there has been an ongoing battle in the town about the placement of a new high school. This issue is very charged and has divided the town—so the group felt it necessary to hold the event on grounds that would not generate bad feelings (like holding it at the high school) and keep the event as stress-free as possible.

The event also had an information table where a volunteer passed out a list of area resources for families. The list, compiled by the coordinators of the event listed local social service agencies by category of help that the agency offered (information and referral, health and education, support groups and resources). Every family who attended was given a list of these resources. On the reverse side of the list businesses and agencies who had made contributions to the event were listed. This was particularly positive in getting businesses to donate

time, materials and other goods to the event. The businesses saw this as “free” advertising and were more likely to donate when they could see some sort of immediate return for their involvement.

One of the important aspects of the event was that participants did not have to do any work. An effort was made to make the event as easy as possible for parents. “Runners” took trays of food from the buffet to the tables for parents who had their hands full. These helpers were instructed to help before things became difficult—so that parents would not have to ask for help. A local group also volunteered their time at the event (Seventh Day Adventist Church Group) by scooping the ice cream. This made things run smoother.

Child care was provided but was used very little. It did not work very well for the person in charge of it because other kids kept coming into the child care area and it made it confusing for the provider to know which kids to watch.

Gift certificates provided by local businesses were given to participants as door prizes. These donations were solicited by the group. A wide variety of businesses participated from video stores, florists, pizza, restaurants, pet shops, a bakery and a jewelry store. A business that was owned by one of the coordinator’s friends was consulted to determine the best way to approach businesses for donations. Businesses seemed to respond favorably to the idea of supporting a good cause (prevention of CAN) and getting something out of it (advertisement on the “resource flyer” and potentially new customers for their business). Approximately 80 percent of the businesses contacted made a donation, for a total of 39 gift certificates. Businesses were provided with a very official looking receipt of their donation, which is helpful for their record keeping. This method was also useful in lending legitimacy to the cause because it looked very professional.

An effort was made to involve local teens in this event and one of the attractions were door prizes specifically for teens. This did not seem to generate the participation of teens, however, and targeting this group was seen as unnecessary in the future due to the low turnout.

Participants were required to preregister for the event so that the appropriate amount of food could be prepared. Because the cafeteria was smaller than the space (gymnasium) where other

activities were held, it was necessary to serve smaller numbers than the event could handle. The group chose to serve participants at staggered times by grouping people based upon a number system like one that is used at a deli counter (e.g., served numbers 1-50, then 51-100).

- b. Why did you choose this type of event/
How did this type of event get selected?

This type of event was chosen by group consensus. The goal was to provide an event that was as stress free as possible; did not demand a lot of participants; and where families could come and relax, get a meal that they did not have to prepare, get help with their kids in this setting (serving helpers) and forget the politics that had been dividing the town in regards to the placement of the new high school.

2. a. What kind of expectations did you have
about the event?

Expected a low key social evening where participants did not have to invest much time or money (e.g., dinner was free so people didn't have to pay or prepare it themselves). There were also no items for sale at the event (such as balloons or t-shirts) so that all parents could come regardless of income and not feel pressured (especially by their own kids) to buy something.

- b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?

Yes. People seemed to have a good time and felt like they were being "treated."

- c. If so, how?

Evaluations provided a lot of positive feedback. Many participants have since approached group members and mentioned that they remembered the event and spoke about how fun it was.

- d. If not, why not?

Some participants said that the music was too loud. For some others, the time of the event was too late in the evening for their young children and they were forced to leave early—before all of the event was over. This was disappointing to them.

e. Were there any surprises either good or bad?

A local group began distributing a “political” flyer on the cars at the event. The flyer concerned the issue about the placement of the local high school and said “caring families support” the site for the high school. This was very disturbing to the coordinators who really didn’t want this issue to surface, nor did they want to be seen as being partisan on this volatile issue. The coordinators asked the group to remove the flyers and leave. They said they would, but after everyone had gone back indoors the group returned to distributing the flyers. The coordinators later went out and removed as many of the flyers that they could, but some were not collected and the participants and the event were exposed to it.

The group later submitted a letter to the editor of the local newspaper explaining that they were not a part of the group that distributed the flyer and apologized to participants who may have inadvertently received a copy of it.

3. a. How did the planning process go?
- b. Who was involved?

Linda Rota from Youth Alternatives, representing Project Maine Families, was the coordinator. She facilitated the group well and made them feel that they owned the project and the ideas. The rest of the group consisted of various social service agency members and parents. Many of the social service agency members also had kids in the Brunswick school system. The group had a guidance counselor (who originated the proposal to Project Maine Families for the event), a parent, someone from the Brunswick Naval Air Station family agency and Brunswick Head Start, the WIC Program coordinator, and staff from the Bath/Brunswick Child Abuse and Neglect Council.

c. How did it work?

A flyer was sent to people whom the guidance counselor thought might be interested in helping to coordinate the event (see attached). Those interested met at an after school meeting in late February. Meetings continued to be held after school and the closer to the event the more the group meet—every other week towards the end. Child care was provided at these meetings

which was used very little. However, the primary coordinator said she would have been unable to attend without this child care provision. There was noticeably little involvement from school personnel in this event. There is no explanation why.

d. Who managed the agenda?

Linda Rota compiled the agenda.

e. How much time did it involve for members?

Some group members participated more heavily than others. Maria spent about 20 hours per week while others spent about 6 hours per week the closer the event got.

f. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?

The planning group was very positive to work with, and very respectful of everyone. Everyone did their part without much cajoling.

g. How was the event publicized?

Posters were placed around town, and all school children (elementary, junior high and high school) received an application form to take home to parents. There were drop off sites where the applications could be sent at convenient locations around town (e.g. the local supermarket) or the forms could be brought back to school. Collections were made from the drop off sites and Maria hand tabulated all of the applications. The group also designed a press release announcing the event in the local newspaper and was on a radio talk show that focused on Project Maine Families and the philosophy behind the Family Events.

h. Was this method effective?

Yes. The group did a lot of problem solving ahead of time. The group is much smaller this time around (for planning of the next event). So a smaller event was planned that the group could handle.

- i. What would you do differently/what else would you include?

The process is very labor intensive and everyone needs to know this.

4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

People seemed to remember the event. Maria said she was approached months later by people who mentioned the event and how much fun they had. Participants also seemed to enjoy that nothing was expected of them when they attended the event—they could just come and relax with having done nothing to prepare (such as bringing a dish of food, paying for the meal, having to organize an activity). This is important respite for families.

5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event?)

The Brunswick Family Events has established a name for itself through this activity and connections with the community have been made.

Interviewee: Parent Organizer

Date: April 6, 1993

Buxton
Family
Events



1. a. What was your event like?

The first event held in conjunction with Project Maine Families was an evening of entertainment with a professional illusionist followed by an ice cream social. Participants were also encouraged to complete a survey that the group designed to find out about what events/activities families would like in the future. The initial contact with PMF was done by the principal of one of the elementary schools. He has been very active in coordinating events that are non-traditional and extend out into the community (not just school children and parents). Performing arts is a particular interest of this administrator and he continues to act as a facilitator for community events. The group that was pulled together also have had a lot of experience in organizing innovative events.

b. Why did you choose this type of event/
How did this type of event get selected?

This event was chosen because the organizing group felt that in order to attract a large and diverse crowd (fathers, elders, teens) the event would need to be “big” and appeal to all ages. The performer had previously been at one of the elementary schools and the kids loved her—so the performance had an enthusiastic review. The group thought that this would help convince people to attend. Although the event was expensive, the group felt it was necessary to get the community’s attention.

2. a. What kind of expectations did you have about the event?

To have all ages attend and have an opportunity to socialize was important. Buxton is such a diverse geographical area. Citizens of the community are very spread out and there is no town center or other place or activity that bring people together. The area is also divided socio-economically. Because the event was free some of the barriers were eliminated for some low-

income families. So the aim of the event was to provide an opportunity to be together as a community and to have fun.

b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?

Yes. The event was very successful.

c. If so, how?

People loved the performance. It was a very professional show, so folks felt like it was a real treat, especially because it was free. The ice cream social that was held after the event was also successful. This gave families an opportunity to interact (because during the performance there were no opportunities to interact).

d. If not, why not?

e. Were there any surprises either good or bad?

Participants responded well to the survey. It provided good information to use in planning future events and activities.

The group would have liked more involvement of teens and they are currently looking into ways to get teens involved.

One problem that was unanticipated was conflicts with other events. There could have been better communication so this would not have happened.

3. a. How did the planning process go?

b. How did it work?

The principal was the initial contact and he was responsible for getting others involved. Once the group meet, Deb Koral provided assistance as the facilitator and continued to encourage the group to be self-determined (not to look to her for answers but to figure things out themselves). The principal was also very task oriented and helped the group move along especially when they got bogged down with details.

c. Who was involved?

A variety of people were involved in the planning process. Many were from the school and had experience in planning and organizing events. There were teachers, a school social worker, a librarian, parents with kids in school. Other community people were also involved: the town constable, a church member involved in organizing events, a pastor. The group worked well together. Since there were so many school personnel, ideas kept focusing on school-type activities. This caused some problems for the non-school participants because it was hard for them to see where they fit in and what their roles could be. Subsequently the group has tried to involve more community people and civic groups in the process and this has been more successful. The group is providing a unique opportunity by reaching out to other groups to work together.

d. How often did you meet?

The group met bi-weekly for 1½ hours from January until the event in May. The group then took the summer off and started to plan more events in the fall. This was a problem because the momentum and excitement from the first event was lost, making it hard to start up again.

e. Who managed the agenda?

Deb Koral from Project Maine Families.

f. How much time did it involve for members?

DK.

g. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?

One of the problems that arose was the lack of involvement from other community groups, civic organizations, businesses, etc. The group learned from this process to use networking more than to rely on “outside” help.

h. How was the event publicized?

The performer had a promotional as part of the package. Several glossy posters and flyers were provided and the group

distributed them throughout the area. Flyers were sent home with school kids and other hand-made posters were distributed throughout the area. The group made a conscious effort not to publicize in the Portland Newspaper (Buxton does not have its own paper) so as not to draw people from areas outside of Buxton. This helped to keep the event community focused.

i. Was this method effective?

Yes. The event was well attended.

j. What would you do differently/what else would you include?

The group should be less event focused and have more of a vision. The group is also concerned about reaching out to other civic groups to get the entire area involved in the vision of helping families. Events have subsequently been planned by several community groups and have been very successful. The groups continue to evolve.

Communication is also a complication. It's really important to have a focal point for all of the group's work so they work together and do not duplicate efforts or create conflicting events.

4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

This provided another opportunity for families to connect. It provided reinforcement for families to get involved in extra activities.

The event provided an opportunity for more informal networking.

The event was helpful for kids because there was a lot of adult role modeling visible to the kids. Kids learn how to interact in public, with strangers, how to make friends, etc.

5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event?)

More of the community groups are getting together to plan events.

Interviewee: Project Maine Families Staff

Date: March 24, 1993

General Information:

The beginning of contact with this community and Project Maine Families followed the prescribed route. Jane Hubley sent letters to all Cumberland County Communities announcing the grant opportunity and solicited the RFPs for the grant. The Principal at a Buxton school responded. Deb Koral contacted the principle and asked him to contact people he thought would be interested in participating in the coordination and planning of a family event. A town councilor, teachers, parents, a school social worker, and an elderly citizen participated as the core planning group.

Unexpected Problems/Complications:

None of the community businesses or organizations responded to requests for donations. This really devastated the group.

Background Info of the Town:

The principal who applied for the grant has had an active interest in art and humanities and has been very active in trying innovative programs. For example, he runs a library program for pre-schoolers. The pre-schoolers come to the school library once a week for story hour. This gets the kids used to the school and the library facilities. He also has the library open in the summertime. So there was a history with one of the key players of involving families in the schools in different ways.

Buxton is a unique geographic area. It encompasses 5 different towns into the area referred to as Buxton—so Buxton itself is not actually a town, it is more like a region. The area is very spread out and covers several square miles. There are many different elementary schools—for each of the five towns that comprise the area, but most of the kids get bused a long distance to attend the one high school. In fact, kids can ride up to an

hour on the bus to get to school. So the geography presented many barriers to the people of the area; it made life more isolated. Kids didn't see each other out of school because they lived so far away. Parents rarely had an opportunity to meet unless they had high school kids in extracurricular activities. There were no activities or areas where residents commonly congregated because they just didn't exist. Many of the people were detached. There was a sense of parochialism when it came to each individual town—they did not feel connected to the broader regional Buxton area. However, the area had recently undergone a controversial event that really brought folks together. The area was being considered for the location of a low level nuclear waste dump and the people coordinated and fought successfully against it. So there was some history of cooperation between the tiny towns.

Group Process:

The geographical distance issue was a key focus of the group. They wanted to find an activity that could bring all of the people together in ways that don't exist. They thought they could continue the unifying effects that the fight against the nuclear waste dump had produced.

The group decided that if they were going to attract families (including fathers), the event would have to be a very big deal—flashy. It was also important to get folks to an event where they could get feedback about other needs of families. So they wanted to make sure that families completed a survey at the event that would assess future needs and interests.

The event would cost a lot of money because of what was planned. A professional illusionist was chosen to be the main act and she was very expensive.

The group sent letters out to the community to solicit donations of food, funds, or whatever was needed. Some group members even went to some of the community groups to give a presentation about the event. Unfortunately, and to the great disappointment of the group, not one single community group responded to the letter or presentations. This really affected the group for a while. They became quite discouraged and were skeptical as to whether anyone would even attend the event.

The event was very well publicized. Flyers were distributed to all of the school children. There were posters displayed in several places around the regions. The event occurred May 8th on a Friday night. The group made a big effort to make sure there were no conflicting events, such as baseball games, so everyone could attend.

The event was a huge success. Over 600 people attended. The illusionist incorporated people from the audience into her act. She had three male assistants. The fact that she was female was very positive for the girls, who see little variety for role models. This performance lasted for one hour. Afterwards, there was an ice cream social, where parents and kids could for the first time just stand around and talk and eat ice cream.

Results of the Event:

First, the teachers and principal served the ice cream. This was really important to the parents because it de-stratified the positions that these people usually played. The teachers and principal were accessible and were serving parents where the parents were the focus. This seemed to break down some barriers.

Some parents did complete the survey (that the group designed) and this did yield some good information about what parents wanted.

Since the event, the principal has changed and this has changed the dynamics of the group and the scope of what the group can do.

After this event, the group members changed. They sent another letter out to community groups and again got no response. Many group members left. However, some things have grown. The library did some organizing of events and joined in with the group to coordinate an open gym. This took place a couple of times. Another activity was tried—a community calendar of events—but it never happened.

Then some other community groups joined in: the PTO and the Jaycees came together to coordinate a family fun fiesta and a fundraising dinner for a play-ground. This was really impressive because these two groups had never gotten together before. Now there are more people involved and they have a lot of momentum. The community focus is really catching on.

Another learning experience from this process was that it really takes time to work. The group learns and evolves. Especially in traditionally isolated rural areas, these activities can take longer because the people are not used to organizing in this way.

What Did the Event Do for Families:

Common Themes:

The group process is different in every community. Group members come with their own expectations about what will and should happen. This can take time to work through and can be a real barrier. But it is important to remember that not all groups are in the same place in terms of organizing community activities. This process can be viewed as a continuing growth experience. Here the rural nature of the community may have been a factor in why it seemed to take so long for the momentum to catch on.

Interviewee: School Staff

Date: March 9, 1993

Gray/New
Gloucester

1. a. What was your event like?

The event was held on a Saturday at the Gray New Gloucester Middle School from 1 pm to 10:30 pm. The event included a talent show for all age groups, lip sync contest, activities, face painting, games, art displays, a barbecue and an inter-generational dance with a disc jockey who played a variety of music. There were games in the gymnasium for older kids, games outside and an adult scavenger hunt. A tea room was held in a class-room that was decorated and run by one group. This space provided an opportunity to get away from the busy activities and to relax momentarily. The library was open and volunteers read books to children and played games. There was one room for child care but it was used very little since the event was so successful in finding activities for all ages. Parking was contained in a roped-off area and there was security and an emergency rescue crew just in case it was needed. Because of the volume of people portable toilets were needed and the local American Legion donated the money to pay for them. The theme was "It takes a village to raise a child." The event was very large—1200 people attended. All of the food was donated. Many community groups participated and numerous volunteers helped on the day of the event.

- b. Why did you choose this type of event/
How did this type of event get selected?

This event was chosen to attract all people—fathers, teens, seniors, etc. There is a local interest and enthusiasm for talent shows so that activity was a natural choice, especially since people of all ages and interests could get involved in it.

2. a. What kind of expectations did you have about the event?

That all people could attend and have a fun day and be around other families.

b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?

Yes.

c. If so, how?

There were no problems. People just came and had a good time.

d. If not, why not?

e. Were there any surprises either good or bad?

It did conflict with one other town event which prevented some people from attending.

3. a. How did the planning process go?

b. How did it work?

c. Who was involved?

The school nurse, principal and superintendent met with Jane Hubley to discuss how to organize a group. Lucky, at PMF, was the group's facilitator. The core group knew a lot of people who traditionally had been involved in organizing and called to solicit their involvement. The group also distributed flyers, and put a survey in the newspaper soliciting ideas and volunteers to help organize and participate in the event. This was very successful. A lot of people participated—about 10-15 for the core group but many others beyond that were involved in specific components of organizing events and activities.

The school nurse went to the student council to present and ask for the students to sign up to volunteer to help. Many students helped with face painting.

The recreation department helped organize games.

d. How often did you meet?

The group started meeting in January and met once every two weeks. As the event drew near the group needed to meet every week. Not everyone attended each meeting—a lot of

people took responsibility for portions of the event and went off and organized it without needing to be with the group meeting.

e. Who managed the agenda?

Project Maine Families, Lucky Hollander.

f. How much time did it involve for members?

Each meeting lasted about 2 hours, but many who did not attend meetings spent time organizing events. Time commitment is difficult to estimate.

g. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?

Taking minutes at the meetings was a helpful guide to what had been accomplished and what else needed to be done.

h. How was the event publicized?

Two local papers advertised the event. Flyers went home with school kids, a banner was posted across the street downtown, posters were hung in all area businesses, churches, etc. An announcement was made on public cable television.

i. Was this method effective?

Yes.

j. What would you do differently/what else would you include?

Now the focus is not driven by what event to have. Now that the event is established more time is spent on who is doing what and how.

Want to get more involvement of teens and seniors. This time the group may get a shuttle bus to offer rides to and from the local senior housing complexes. Many events were so successful that they are being repeated again this year. Other events this year include a health focus, such as blood pressure screening, eye exams, "Color Me Beautiful" displays and consultants. Beano is being offered to attract seniors. A hay ride, petting zoo, and 4-H displays will encourage the involvement of younger children.

4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

They had a wonderful day. To say more than this would be speculation.

5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event?)

Many people are still involved in the planning and organizing at this year's event. People have learned a lot about how to make an event successful.

Interviewee: Project Maine Families Staff

Date: April 9, 1993

General Information:

The principal and nurse of the Gray/New Gloucester Middle School were integral in obtaining the PMF grant. They got folks together to organize a community event including a talent show, activities, student art displays, a barbecue and an inter-generational dance. Approximately 1200 people attended the event and 1000 were served at the BBQ. The event was a great success with a lot of volunteers and participation and donations by local businesses, civic groups and citizens.

Unexpected Problems/Complications:

There were no unexpected problems or complications.

Background Info of the Town:

This community had experience in community organizing and planning events. They were very enthusiastic and had a lot of people who were interested in the Project Maine Families approach.

The Gray/New Gloucester area encompasses two towns where local kids go to separate elementary schools then join into one middle and high school. So there are community connections via the schools. This traditional separation was recognized by the group and they wanted to make the event as cooperative and inclusive of the two areas as possible.

Group Process:

The group involved 10-15 members (this year the planning group is smaller: 6-8).

The group made a clear effort to be inclusive—a philosophy that was nurtured by the Project Maine Families approach and involvement. Group members included school personnel, a local senior, parents, a minister, members of the local Legion, and a local legislator (who proved to be very helpful in soliciting donations and getting cooperation of the community).

The group had citizens from both Gray and New Gloucester.

It was important to try and hold the event in an area which everyone was comfortable with. At first the group considered holding the event at a New Gloucester location so as to include this community. After some discussion it was agreed that the event would be held in Gray because the New Gloucester facilities were inadequate.

As the event drew near meetings occurred every week and lasted for roughly 2 hours. Minor problems arose in getting through meetings in a timely fashion because group members knew each other so well they would frequently go off on tangents during the meetings. In the long run, however, this did not inhibit work from getting done.

Day care was available at meetings but because it was not being used it was cancelled.

Results of the Event:

A lot of volunteers showed up to work at the event. The talent show was very popular—this year they already have all of the performances lined-up. The inter-generational dance was well attended.

The group has gone through a good process and learned new approaches. For example, they have made efforts to include more people (seniors, teens) in the planning process and to keep them in mind when designing events. They are more in-tune to barriers to participation.

The event is now integrated into the community, it is seen as being an annual event now. Even if this event doesn't continue in the future other events will.

What Did the Event Do for Families:

Some people had commented that they saw parents show up at the event whom they had never seen before. This gave the indication that some families who do not attend other events, for what ever reason, would attend this event and perhaps experience community and support that they had never experienced. The event really brought together a diverse group.

Interviewee: Parent Organizer

Date: February 25, 1993

South
Portland
PTA/Parent



1. a. What was your event like?

A fall family festival with games, food, entertainment, displays. The event was held October 18, 1992, at the Mill Creek Park, a large park that is located at the center of town.

b. Why did you choose this type of event/
How did this type of event get selected?

It defined itself. The group was looking for a neutral and positive event where people could gather for a day of fun that was free from "town politics." Many of the event organizers were volunteers for other groups/events and had a lot of experience designing fair-type events, so this type of event was a natural choice.

2. a. What kind of expectations did you have about the event?

The group wanted to get beyond community politics. There has been a lot of negative reporting about town events in the local paper and people were divided on several issues. The group hoped to have a positive experience where townspeople cooperated to show the town and local communities that South Portland is not a negative place.

b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?

Yes.

c. If so, how?

People had a great time. They were especially surprised and pleased that the food was free. The paddle boats were a big success. There was a lot of community group involvement without having to push for donations—businesses, the Lion's Club, etc, were very generous. The time of year of the event may have contributed to the event's success because in the spring

time the local schools have small fairs and hit up community organizations for donations at that time. Enough time had passed so that these organizations were ready to donate their time and resources again.

d. If not, why not?

One thing that could have been more helpful was more media coverage. While the local paper and news station was contacted, they did not show up on the day of the event. The group would have liked to have the positive press for their town, instead of the frequent negative stories reported. Also, the event was publicized in the paper a few days before the event with the wrong date. Fortunately the date published was before the actual date so that people who showed up and found that the event wasn't being held could come back at the right time, instead of showing up at date after the event had actually occurred. It was difficult to determine how many people were inconvenienced by this situation.

e. Were there any surprises either good or bad?

Would schedule more time between events so that unforeseen complications could be dealt with better (the cloggers event could not use the space that was scheduled for them so they had to use another space that was already occupied). Some events went over their scheduled time, so if there was more time between events this would not have created an enormous scheduling problem.

There was also a minor problem with the coffee serving. The volunteers couldn't figure out how to work the machines so there was no coffee. This was not a major issue, however.

3. a. How did the planning process go?

b. How did it work?

One of the principals at one of the local elementary schools contacted a few key people about applying for the Project Maine Families grant. This group wrote the proposal and met with Richard Verre who informed them that their proposal was

accepted. The core group then contacted other people who they thought would be interested in volunteering to coordinate the event. The group began with about 30 people with 10-12 doing most of the work and others providing help with as much as they could.

The group is coordinating another event this year and many folks have decided to put more energy into this event than the other events they traditionally participate in (e.g., the spring time fairs sponsored by the local elementary schools).

c. Who was involved?

Local school involvement was considerable. Many school principals, parent volunteers, and the volunteer coordinator (Mary Lou Kiley) were instrumental. Representatives from the Coast Guard, UNUM and Blue Cross were involved.

d. How often did you meet?

The group met about 8 times. Meetings lasted about an hour in the early stages and then were longer the closer the event got. The goal this year will be to have the event planned earlier in the year.

e. Who managed the agenda?

The group, at first, looked to Richard to organize the meeting but he held back (as I believe was the intention so that the group would really be self-determining). Mary Lou Kiley, the school volunteer coordinator then took over.

f. How much time did it involve for members?

Roughly 20 hours for the core group—less for many others.

g. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?

That the group was all volunteer. There was a lot of cooperation and trust from the community—they took a lot of responsibility for the work.

h. How was the event publicized?

All of the local schools sent home flyers, the local grocery store put one in everyone's grocery bag. Posters were displayed around town. Announcements were made in the local paper, on local access cable and on the radio.

i. Was this method effective?

Yes.

j. What would you do differently/what else would you include?

Not much. The process worked very effectively. Because of the community cooperation there was little need for aggressive donation solicitation. May do more aggressive donation solicitation this time around.

There was some confusion about the amount of money that Project Maine Families would provide. This had implications for how aggressive the group needed to be in getting donations. They would have preferred to know sooner how much money was available and for what purposes it could be spent.

4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

It's difficult to say if there were any long lasting effects. People definitely had a great time while they were at the event. The free food was really important.

5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event?)

Again, it's hard to say. Recently, the community held a "dialogue" about restructuring of local schools due to the economic constraints on the budget. A lot of parents attended—a higher turnout than was expected (200 individuals). The schools are actively encouraging parent involvement in all aspects of the school and there is a lot of positive feedback in the community about being involved in the schools.

Interviewee: Project Maine Families Staff

Date: March 10, 1993

General Information:

The beginning of contact with this community and Project Maine Families followed the prescribed route. Jane Hubley sent letters to all Cumberland County Communities announcing the grant opportunity and solicited the RFPs for the grant. First, one of the smaller, isolated schools serving many low-income families in South Portland responded to the grant announcement. One event was done with the Redbank School: help in planning a school fair (with this event the school then decided to join the other group in their planning).

Another proposal came from the South Portland school district as well, this group being larger. Their proposal was also reviewed favorably by Project Maine Families. So, Portland was notified of the acceptance of their proposal and the receipt of the grant from Project Maine Families. Jane met with a group of interested community folks to provide detailed information about the grant, the purpose of the grant and the purpose of Project Maine Families. The Superintendent of schools was especially supportive of coordinating and sponsoring a family event.

Richard Verre was the coordinator/assistant from Project Maine Families. He first met with the larger South Portland group in January. Memos were sent to all group members announcing this meeting and all subsequent meetings.

Unexpected Problems/Complications:

At first there was some confusion about the grant and the scope of the work, and intent of the activities. This confusion seemed to linger on for several months, but in the end the group was able to understand the focus and purpose of the grant and fulfilled all the expectations incredibly well.

The two groups that had applied for separate grants attended some subsequent meetings facilitated by PMF where PMF helped negotiate the use of the housing project's community building and to begin exploring other community event possibilities.

Background Info of the Town:

South Portland had been experiencing a lot of strife. Politics was dividing the town on some issues. In addition, the town's character had been changing rapidly in the past 10 years, with the creation of the Maine Mall, located on the fringes of South Portland, the town and downtown area were diminishing in importance. South Portland's businesses were no longer locating in the downtown area, causing traffic to go to the Mall, not to the traditional town center. This helped to contribute to a sense of isolation and fragmentation of the community. There no longer seemed a natural place for the community to gather. After all, the entire state frequented the Mall, whereas the downtown area had served local residents. Neighborhoods were taking on a different importance now, and perhaps becoming the only places left for the community to gather and facilitate a "sense of community."

Geographically, the community did still have a centrally located area where community events could take place. A local park at the center of town was large enough and accessible to most of the town, and everyone knew and liked the park. Also, the committee felt there would be some political problems with holding the event at a school because of a rivalry that existed between area neighborhoods and schools. The park was a neutral location.

Much of the discussion of the group focused on these "problems" that the community was experiencing and after a few meetings it was very apparent the goal of the event they were planning should be to bring towns-people together.

Group Process:

At first, the group was unaware of how to approach the organizing of the event. After a lot of hard work by everyone, it became clear that community input into the event was key to the success of bringing people together. This was a real growth experience for the group. They were then able to start much of the organizing: soliciting donations of products, services and activities for the event; and getting community organizations, such as businesses, churches and civic groups involved. It turned out to be an enormous success. There was an incredible amount of participation from the community, with lots of fun and games,

displays, etc. where families had a memorable day. Very little money was needed from Project Maine Families because of the success that the group had in pulling together community resources.

Results of the Event:

Many people were surprised to find out that the event was coordinated by the schools because there was little emphasis on school names. This year the group has decided to be more visible in regards to the school involvement and will hold the next activity at the local high school (a neutral location, instead of one of the grade schools, because all kids go to the one high school). A benefit of this new location is that it is next to a large recreation center and the City has agreed to open up the facilities for inclusion into the event activities. This was a nice surprise to the group to get the enthusiastic cooperation from the City personnel.

There was a lack of involvement of Middle and High School kids in the planning, and the involvement of special needs members of the community because the event was not necessarily handicapped accessible. The group is currently trying to address these two issues. The new location of the event should be handicapped accessible. The group is actively seeking the participation of young people in the upcoming events planning and coordinating.

Another focus for the next event is the need to integrate senior citizens into the organization and coordination process. Seniors should be on the committee and should be present in some capacity at the event—for example, assisting handicapped people.

Transportation was an issue the group had not anticipated. This time around they hope to include transportation by enlisting the help of the local bus service.

What Did the Event Do for Families:

First and foremost, the event was free. This was important to families so all could participate without having to worry about admission fees, buying food, drinks, and activities. Money was not a barrier. The variety of entertainment and exhibits was also a plus. Families were exposed to so many positive messages.

There is a continuing need to identify a forum in which the community can find out about and be responsive to the needs of families. This forum does not yet exist, and it has not evolved out of the event other than the awareness that families have needs.

Common Themes:

The group process is different in every community. Group members come with their own expectations about what will and should happen. This can take time to work through and be a real barrier. But it is important to remember that not all groups are in the same place in terms of organizing community activities. This process can be viewed as a continuing growth experience.

Interviewee: Parent Organizer

Date: May 24, 1993

Steep Falls Family Events

1. a. What was your event like?

Event was held at a local elementary school during the morning hours (before lunch). Activities included a story teller, a dancing bear, and other fun games for the children. Grab bags containing small items were given to each child. Approximately 80 people attended the event held during spring vacation week.

b. Why did you choose this type of event/
How did this type of event get selected?

This type of event was selected because the planning group felt there were too few activities for children and especially moms during school vacation week. In many of the families the dads go off to work and kids go off to school while moms work at home. Moms and kids are left with little to do on those vacation weeks so the event was planned at this time.

The event was held at a local school, something that had not been done before. The school was somewhat reluctant to let the group use the space for the event. The school was concerned about things not getting broken and the space getting cleaned up after the event. They did not want to incur any costs from having the event there—such as paying a custodian to clean up. This situation prompted the planning group to respect the concerns of the school as much as possible. To be accommodating they choose not to have food at the event and scheduled it at a time when participants would not expect to have food—between 10 am. and 12 noon. This would eliminate some major clean-up issues. The group still provided clean-up after the event, as the school had requested, and this job was easier because there was no food served. The group also wanted the event to be as trouble-free on the space as possible to establish good relations with the school in hopes that they could utilize the space in the future.

2. a. What kind of expectations did you have about the event?

The goal of the planning group was to provide an experience whereby parents and schools could connect. Parents don't feel close to the schools. There are also a lot of single parents who have little opportunity to connect with the schools. Because of the rural nature of the Steep Falls area, there are limited events and opportunities where families can be together. This puts more of a demand on the schools to be responsive to parents. Teachers seem to want to involve parents more so this was a good opportunity to connect the two.

- b. Did the activities fulfill the expectations you had?

Yes. Several people attended and had a good time.

- c. If so, how?

- d. If not, why not?

- e. Were there any surprises either good or bad?

No.

3. a. How did the planning process go?

- b. How did it work?

The Assistant Principal of a local school responded to the original announcement from Project Maine Families. After notification of the receipt of the grant the Assistant Principal and other school personnel contacted parents they thought would be interested. This is how Roz got involved. She had been involved with the school previously and was seen as being active in her child's education. Roz also invited others whom she thought might want to participate. An effort was made to invite mothers of different age children who had lived in the community a long time and mothers with different backgrounds to get different perspectives.

c. Who was involved?

The Assistant Principal of one of the local elementary schools, teachers and mothers.

d. How often did you meet?

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e. Who managed the agenda?

Deb Koral of Project Maine Families managed the agenda.

f. How much time did it involve for members?

It was different for all members depending on their time constraints and what they wanted to commit to the event.

g. What were the positive/important aspects of the planning process?

It was a chance for a lot of mothers to get together and plan something positive. Many of the mothers stay home all day and this gave them something else to do—it was fun and supportive at the same time.

h. How was the event publicized?

Flyers were sent home from school. Posters were displayed throughout the town.

i. Was this method effective?

Yes.

j. What would you do differently/what else would you include?

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4. How were families impacted by this event? Why?

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5. Have other things happened in the community as a result of this event (either the process or the occurrence of the event?)

A lot of things have continued in the community as a result of the involvement of Project Maine Families. Perhaps the most notable is the formation of a Parent Recess program. This program focuses on support for parents. It is very popular and well attended. The program contains an entertainment/educational component whereby speakers come and present on a myriad of topics from gardening, crafts, cooking, self-esteem, health, etc. On-site child care is offered and utilized by many participants for \$1 per child. Donations are accepted for meeting space and refreshments that are available during the meeting (coffee, tea).

Another positive aspect that has arisen from the availability of the grant is free child care that was offered during parent/teacher conferences. While this ended up not being used very much, it seemed that it was due to lack of knowledge of its availability more than lack of need. They are considering offering this service again.

Interviewee: Project Maine Families Staff

Date: March 24, 1993

General Information:

The beginning of contact between this community and Project Maine Families followed the prescribed route. Jane Hubley sent letters to all Cumberland County Communities announcing the grant opportunity and solicited the RFPs for the grant. The principal and teachers of the local elementary school got some parents together to organize the community event.

Unexpected Problems/Complications:

None.

Background Info of the Town:

The Steep Falls area is very geographically spread out. There is no place for residents to congregate except in the school setting. To have an activity outside of the school setting would be very positive.

Group Process:

The group was eager to provide an activity to take place during school vacation (winter) because it is traditionally a time when there are no other activities occurring. This would give folks something to do but also the event would not conflict with other activities.

The event was scheduled for a Friday morning. No food was served because of the timeframe and it was important to leave the school clean so the group could perhaps use this space in the future. The event included performances of stories, poems, skits, singing, etc. Goodie bags were also passed out to each child that contained pencils, stickers, and other items. Some of the items were donated by Project Maine Families.

Results of the Event:

The event was very successful. Approximately 85 people attended. Transportation was not provided because the group was unsure about liability issues.

As a result of this event many of the group members were interested in starting a group for mothers. The community has a lot of moms that stay home with their kids while dads go off to work so having something for moms seemed like a good idea. The group started the very successful Parent Recess program. This program is for parents to come together and talk. Baby sitting is offered, events/activities are planned and it is a huge success. All types of parents attend—those with infants to teens.

Another event sponsored and planned by the group was a spaghetti supper. This was a big hit. The space was decorated, and a local child played the violin at the event.

What Did the Event Do for Families:

Families have found other ways to connect and are continuing with enthusiasm.