

Parent Partners

What is a parent partner?

A parent partner is a parent that has had first hand experience with the facility and can provide a parent's perspective in discussions and advocate for parents in policy and program development. They can also serve as an advocate and resource for other parents.



Why is parent partner involvement important?

Parent partner involvement helps facilities meet the needs of the population receiving their services. Parent partners are experts on the health care experience. They represent the family perspective and can provide constructive feedback to help ensure that the facility's interactions with families are always improving. Parent partners also provide parents and families with peer support and facilitate parents being active members of the health care team. Parent partnership improves the patient/client experiences and the overall quality of care.

How can a facility recruit parent partners?

Facilities can recruit parent partners by talking with individual parents, social media posts, distribution of brochures within the facility, and through networking channels.



Here are some suggestions:

- It is helpful if the facility can show that they embrace a philosophy of partnership. Staff and families receiving care from the facility need to see that healthcare is collaborative process at the facility and that parents' perspectives are valued.
- Make the approach personal - E.g., if a facility provides care to many indigenous families, it is important to include representation from the indigenous community in their parent partner group.
- Leverage of existing community groups and partnerships.
- Create flexible parent partner role descriptions – participation needs to be as convenient as possible.
- Empower family voices – focus efforts on developing trusting and respectful relationships with families.

What qualities are important in a parent partner?

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to be respectful of every person and mindful of cultural and ethnic diversity
- Empathy and ability to advocate for others
- Integrity and transparency
- Reliability
- Commitment

What training do parent partners need?

Training needs vary based on the specific expectations of the role of the parent partner.

Suggested topics:

- General orientation to the facility
- Role expectations
- Cultural safety and trauma informed care
- Overview of the Baby-Friendly Initiative and related practices
- How to fulfill role safely and what to do in the event of an emergency
- How to complete and submit any required paperwork



What are the expectations of the parent partner role?

Facilities have involved parent partners in various ways:

- **Family involvement** - When parent partners connect with families they can provide a friendly welcoming face, give general information, provide support and mentoring, and notify staff of any needs that families have. Sharing personal stories and perspectives with other families can improve the patient/client experience e.g., babies with special needs.
- **Champions of the parent voice** – Involvement of parent partners in the review of policies and procedures and creation of resources can enable them to suggest changes and provide feedback that the facility wouldn't otherwise receive.
- **Networking among families** - Parent partners can organize social events for families e.g., NICU graduate get together every year.
- **Ambassadors for the family perspective** – Parent partners can talk about their role and experiences in educational settings, advocate for various support groups for families, and build awareness in the community about resources to support families.



How can a facility sustain parent partner involvement?

It is important to build relationships with parent partners through ongoing communication, demonstrating that their contributions are valued and recognizing their efforts.

Here are some tips to help sustain parent partner involvement:

- Provide flexibility to allow parent partners to be involved in a way that fits into their schedule and commitments.
- Consider the parent partner's goals and interests as well as the needs of the parent partner program
- Speak clearly and explain acronyms and medical terminology
- Create time on meeting agendas to hear from parent partners
- Send messages of appreciation
- Publicly recognize parent partners on the facility's website and/or social media pages
- Schedule meetings involving parent partners at times that are suitable for parent partners, provide free parking if the meeting is not virtual, and allow child to attend meeting with parent if possible.

A handwritten-style graphic in blue ink that says "We thank you!". The text is written in a cursive, flowing font.

Resources

General Websites

McMaster University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Public and Patient Engagement

- Resources: [Resources - Public & Patient Engagement \(mcmaster.ca\)](https://www.mcmaster.ca/healthsciences/publicandpatientengagement/resources)
- Toolkit: [Engage with Impact Toolkit \(evaluateengagement.ca\)](https://www.evaluateengagement.ca/)
- Supporting equity-centred engagement: [Supporting Equity-centred Engagement - Public & Patient Engagement \(mcmaster.ca\)](https://www.mcmaster.ca/healthsciences/publicandpatientengagement/supporting-equity-centred-engagement)
- Public and patient engagement evaluation tool: [Public and Patient Engagement Evaluation Tool - Public & Patient Engagement \(mcmaster.ca\)](https://www.mcmaster.ca/healthsciences/publicandpatientengagement/evaluation-tool)

University Health Network, Patient Partner Program in Toronto, Ontario

https://www.uhn.ca/corporate/AboutUHN/Patient_Experience/Patient_Partnerships/Pages/patient_partners.aspx

Volunteer Canada

- Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement <https://volunteer.ca/index.php?MenuItemID=346&lang=en>
- Volunteer Canada <https://volunteer.ca/index.php?MenuItemID=317>

Parent Partners in the NICU

- Hall, S., Ryan, D., Beatty, J. *et al.* Recommendations for peer-to-peer support for NICU parents. *J Perinatal* **35** (Suppl 1), S9–S13 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1038/jp.2015.143>
Link: <https://www.nature.com/articles/jp2015143>

- Project NICU <https://www.projectnicu.com/parent-mentor-application>
- Thomson-Kai, Pam. Nurtured in the NICU: Peer Mentorship and the value of the “lived experience”. Canadian Premature Babies Foundation (2020). Link: <https://www.cpbfbfpc.org/post/nurtured-in-the-nicu-peer-mentorship-and-the-value-of-the-lived-experience>

Involvement of Elders

- Resource from Kanesatake Health Center



Please note: This resource is currently being revised. For updates contact Karen MacInnes at k.macinnes@kanesatakehealthcenter.ca

Sample: Parent Partner Recruitment Letter

Halton Healthcare Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) Parent Partner Volunteer Recruitment

Halton Healthcare is seeking three volunteer Parent Partners to participate in planning, designing and implementing aspects of the Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI). The initiative aims to protect, promote and support breastfeeding through the 10 Steps of the Baby-Friendly Initiative.

Breastfeeding is an important, globally-recognized indicator of maternal child health. While most (96%) families in Halton Region initiate breastfeeding, many stop within the first weeks or month, and only 19% meet the target of breastfeeding exclusively to six months. The goal of the project is to increase breastfeeding rates in the region through implementation of the Baby-Friendly Initiative.

Position Summary

Parent partners will work in partnership with the Maternal Child Program and Breastfeeding Committee for Canada as a team member to assist with the process of improving breastfeeding exclusivity and duration for mothers and babies in the hospital.

This is a volunteer advisory role that will influence hospital decisions; provide an objective and balanced approach to infant feeding across a wide range of unit initiatives, programs, services and policies.

A parent partner ideally has many of the following:

- Has given birth at Oakville Trafalgar, Milton District or Georgetown hospital in the last three years
- Resides in Halton region
- Passionate about improving infant feeding practices in hospital
- Great communication skills

- Experience working as part of a team
- Willingness to share related personal experience
- Willingness to take on small projects that will help engage community and other parents.

Commitment/term:

- The project will run for approximately 2 years starting (date)
- 4-6 hours per month
- Attend meetings at hospital and review monthly progress results (parking costs will be covered)
- Attend in-person learning sessions at the hospital
- Attendance at 3 face to face workshops (2 days each) throughout the project. The first workshop will be Sept 5-6, 2019 in Oakville.

You are welcome to bring your infant to any meetings or workshops!

Sample: Parent Partner Recruitment Reminder Notification

Reminder!
**Halton Healthcare Parent Partner
Volunteer Opportunity**

There's still time to apply before the (date) deadline!
Halton Healthcare is seeking three volunteer parent partners to support our three hospitals with a new project as we work towards our Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) designation.
This exciting opportunity is your chance to have a positive impact on breastfeeding in your community!
Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital, Milton District Hospital and Georgetown Hospital were selected as three of twenty-five hospitals across Canada to participate in this quality improvement strategy.

To learn more about this parent partner role and how to apply, see the attached description.

