

Steps to forming a partnership

1. Recruit a group of people with a passion to make a difference in children's lives on a local level. It is wonderful to have educators on your committee. They have an inside knowledge on how educational systems work.
2. Visit with the principal at your local/neighborhood school to be sure they WANT a partnership! There are ways to support a school, and then there are partnerships. In our Wichita district those are two different things. A partnership involves training with "downtown district folks" and registration of volunteers in their data base. It also involves setting goals. Support does not require this, although as United Methodists, it is recommended that we have Safe Gatherings if we work in the schools with children.
3. If the principal is interested, discuss a couple of ways that your church can help. If they seem uninterested, move on to another school or ask if you can visit with them at another time. Perhaps this is just an overwhelming time for them.
Depending on the size of your church, you may want to ask other churches in the community to make this an ecumenical project.
4. Meet with your committee to decide what is best to do first. Decide if this will be a budgeted ministry, or supplemental where people can donate the ministry as "above giving." Adopt goals for this ministry, then evaluate possible decisions against these stated goals.
5. Decide how to learn of needs in the school community. Perhaps the principal will be the filter. Maybe the social worker. If teachers have needs, these two professionals will filter them before they get to the committee or church staff person.
6. Take LOTS of photos! Get the word out to your congregation in a positive way. Be sure to get the principal's permission to take pictures of the children. At our partnership school, the parents sign a photo release at enrollment. Occasionally we have a child in the shelter who cannot be photographed and we just work around that!
7. Tell the story and show how **all** your people can be involved in this ministry. Put articles in your church paper, put up bulletin boards with photos, pictures on the screens, etc.
8. People may ask when these "school families" are going to "come to church." The committee must be ready to explain the purpose of the partnership. Site scripture where Christ commands us to care for the poor and note how Jesus loved the children. We are sharing Christ's love in a unique way. What better venue than one that is already established!
9. It will take time for all the church to "come around." However, even when most of the children are of another ethnicity and many are homeless and illegal, our congregants have grown to embrace the beauty of this ministry.
10. The teachers will LOVE YOU! Tell them that you are praying for them, and then do it! Remember the neighborhood children in your Sunday morning pastoral prayers. Pray for the staff. Be sensitive to their personal issues, not nosy, just sensitive. The committee can send cards when there is a birth, joy, or death in the family of a staff member.
11. You might want to have special t-shirts made for your tutors, mentors, or committee. Name tags to wear at school are also helpful, though some schools have their own nametags for security.
12. DO NOT PUT LIMITS ON GOD! Our partnership has grown exponentially in ways I never would have imagined. Start small, and see where you go! And, have fun with it!

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