

# DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Building a partnership is essentially building a relationship. The same behaviors and communication skills that people use to build good relationships with family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers, apply equally in the building of good partnerships. Openness, listening, information sharing, clear communication, understanding and trust all contribute to forming effective partnerships.

*A partner is a party associated with another or others in some activity of common interest. A partner implies a relationship, in which each has equal status and certain interdependence but also implicit or formal obligations to the other or others.*

People are not partners just because they say they are. When people decide to partner with one another, they make an unspoken commitment to modify their own attitudes and behaviors in order to achieve more than they can accomplish alone.

Partners have an obligation to respect one another as equals and to share important tasks of planning, working and decision making with one another. In doing so, they help ensure their own personal success and the success of their mission.

We are partners when we accept one another's shortcomings and build on one another's strengths to achieve a purpose that is worthwhile to everyone in the partnership. However, let's recognize that partners do not always agree. Partners can agree on a common goal and can have different (even opposing) positions on other issues.

Building a partnership (collaborative) is like making a loaf of bread. Each loaf is different depending on the ingredients, and it takes time to knead it, let it rise and then bake. Partners have to "knead" their partnership and let it rise. Communication is the gluten that holds the partnership together and trust is the yeast that helps a partnership rise. With trust, partners can recognize and resolve the unavoidable differences of opinion which they will encounter.

Partnerships can be very powerful to share resources and expertise to solve problems. Parents, service providers and members of community collaboratives are constantly strengthening their partnerships with one another much like two people do in a marriage. Partners have to work at their relationship.

## **What Works: Partnerships are Effective When**

1. Purpose and goals are clear.
2. Each partner's contributions are recognized and valued.
3. Each partner receives a return on the investment made.
4. Roles and responsibility of each partner are defined.
5. Parity exists across partners.
6. Differences are respected.
7. Partners agree to resolve conflicts.
8. Decisions are made by consensus.
9. Partners are committed to stay at the table to make the agreement work.
10. Each partner helps the other to succeed and not to blame each other for shortfalls.