

SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN HAMILTON

A conversation with Marni Flaherty

Excerpts from an interview with Marni Flaherty,
former Co-chair of the *Parent and Family Engagement Committee*,
a standing committee of the *Hamilton Best Start Network*



EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH MARNI FLAHERTY, FORMER CO-CHAIR OF THE PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE, A STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE HAMILTON BEST START NETWORK

Can you describe the work you've done related to parents and caregivers of middle years children?

As the co-chair of the Parent and Family Engagement Committee one of **our priorities was to promote the important role parents play in the lives of their children.** To address this priority the committee committed to developing the [Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights](#).

How did you engage parents and caregivers?

We engaged parents through extensive public consultations which included surveys and focus groups. Skilled facilitators delivered the focus groups and used various strategies to engage diverse parents because it was important that the committee heard from families that were typically disengaged from programs and services. **To reach parents we met them where they were at** – Ontario Early Years Centres, child care centres, Boys & Girls Clubs, recreation centres and libraries – and provided child care so that they could participate. Being in a familiar setting helped parents to feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Why was the active engagement of parents and caregivers important to your work?

We couldn't have done this work without them. You know that whole idea of children being capable and competent? Well, that's what we have to think about parents—we have to treat them that way too, so their needs are met. **Parents are part of the solution.**

What did you learn from this experience?

I learned that when you meaningfully engage the audience and come up with something that resonates with them it could result in people being pushed back a bit. When you take a look at the charter and you say that parents have a right to information, well that right has to be applied by a police officer, an educator, a healthcare professional.

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Thought needs to be put into every interaction and professionals need to provide information and not simply take action because they feel they know better. **In order to be an engaged parent, parents need to be informed.**

What advice would you give others working with parents and caregivers?

Think about parent engagement as an opportunity for continuous improvement. Think about who’s missing. **Recognize that if you are working with children, children come with a family.**

Final thoughts?

The process is never over—it is just the beginning. When you create a charter, you have to use it as a tool to figure out how to make things better for communities.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

You can continue the conversation on the Knowledge Centre www.otf.ca/knowledge/promising-young-people

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

When developing the parent charter, the Parent and Family Engagement Committee referenced evidence and research that included the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Check out the **child friendly versions** as well:

[View the English, child friendly PDF](#)

[View the French, child friendly PDF](#)

