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Diversity in People: Speaking English in the United States

by *Mary Kent and Robert Lalasz*

Recent reports on the growing U.S. Hispanic population and the current debate over whether and how to stem illegal U.S. immigration have given new energy to those who want English declared the country's official language.

In late April, President George W. Bush told reporters that he thought the U.S. national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," should only be sung and recorded in English.¹ And late last month, the U.S. Senate added two

The U.S. Senate declared English the national language.

amendments to its immigration bill: the first declaring English the national language, and the second recognizing it as the country's "common and unifying tongue."²

The amendments were immediately denounced by opponents as racist or anti-Hispanic. Some analysts also argued that the measures could potentially restrict dissemination of public health and safety mes-

sages in languages other than English.³

But while nearly 50 million Americans spoke a language other than English at home in 2004—nearly one-fifth of all U.S. residents age 5 or older—what the debate misses is that today's immigrants are on average making the transition to speaking English more quickly than immigrants at any other time in U.S. history.

Young immigrants (those ages 5 to 17) almost always are speaking English over

their native tongues by adulthood, according to Rubén G. Rumbaut, professor of sociology and co-director of the Center for Research on Immigration, Population, and Public Policy at the University of California-Irvine.

"Those who arrive by age 12 or 13 make a quick transition to English—that's the dividing line," says Rumbaut, who has studied language assimilation in the

United States for three decades. "It's a piece of cake for those who arrive much earlier on, because of the dominance of English in every medium in the United States, from video to the Internet. English wins."

In addition, Spanish isn't the only fast-growing language in the United States: Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Arabic have also seen impressive gains since 1990, while European languages that were once common in the United States (such as French, German, and Polish) are becoming less prevalent. But Rumbaut says that the children of new immigrants speaking other languages will almost invariably turn to English as their primary tongue.

"The fate of all these languages is to succumb to rapid assimilation," says Rumbaut. "The idea that the United States will devolve into riots and become Quebec unless everybody speaks English and English only, is absolutely not true. Demography will take care of the problem itself—it is not really a policy issue."

Continued on page 2

More Than One-Half of All Immigrants 'Very Proficient' in English

The number of Americans speaking a language at home other than English has more than doubled since 1980, reflecting the influx of millions of immigrants to the United States in recent decades, particularly Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America. About 31 million U.S. residents speak Spanish at home—easily making it the second-most spoken language in the country.

The idea that speaking languages other than English hinders full participation of U.S. citizenship has substantial public support. For example, in a *Los Angeles Times* poll of California voters after their 1998 vote to end bilingual education in that state, three out of every four agreed with the statement: "If you live in America, you need to speak English."⁴ A majority of Hispanics share this attitude, according to a new Pew Hispanic Center survey: 57 percent of Hispanics say that "immigrants have to speak English to say that they are part of American society."⁵

But a majority of those who speak languages other than English at home report themselves already very proficient in English, according to 2004 data from the American Community Survey (see Table 1). Fewer than 50 percent of people who use Spanish or another non-English language at home speak English less than "very well"—including 48 percent of those who speak Spanish. Almost 70 percent of U.S. adults ages 18 to 64 who spoke Spanish in the home said they also spoke English either "well" or "very well."⁶

Table 1
Language Spoken at Home by U.S. Residents Ages 5 and Older, 2004

Primary language	Estimate (millions)	Speaks English less than "very well"	
		In millions	Percentage
Language other than English	49.63	22.31	44.94%
Spanish	30.52	14.64	47.96%
Other Indo-European language	9.63	3.32	34.42%
Asian/Pacific-Islander language	7.61	3.10	49.50%
Other languages	1.86	0.54	29.25%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *United States: Selected Social Characteristics: 2004* (2004).

"The last people you have to tell that English is important are immigrants," says Rumbaut. "English is already the de facto language of the country and of the world."

The Transition to English Accelerates

U.S. immigrants are making the transition to speaking English much more quickly than did past immigrants. Historically, this transition took three generations, with adult immigrants who often did not learn English, children who were bilingual in English and their parents' language, and a third generation that spoke English almost exclusively.

Today, however, more first- and second-generation Americans are becoming fluent in English. In a study that followed more than 5,200 second-generation immigrant children in the Miami and San Diego school systems, Rumbaut and Princeton University professor of sociology Alejandro Portes found that 99 percent spoke fluent English and less than one-third maintained fluency in their parents' tongues by age 17.⁷

Indeed, Census Bureau data for 2000 show that more than 67 percent of the 6.5 million U.S. children ages 5 to 17 who spoke Spanish in their homes also spoke English "very well," while 86 percent spoke English either "very well" or "well" (see Table 2).

Table 2
Ability to Speak English for U.S. Residents Ages 5-17, 2000

Primary language	Estimate (millions)	English speaking level			
		Very well (millions)	%	Well (millions)	%
Spanish	6.53	4.40	67.34	1.24	32.66
Other Indo-European language	1.54	1.19	77.67	0.23	22.33
Asian/Pacific-Islander language	1.15	0.80	69.56	0.24	30.44
Other languages	0.31	0.25	80.60	0.42	19.40

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2000 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables*, table P035 (2006).

Continued on page 3

Similar percentages of children who spoke a language other than English or Spanish at home also spoke English "well" or "very well." The Census data also show that these children are learning English at higher rates than either their parents or grandparents.

Another study conducted by Rumbaut shows that more than 73 percent of second-generation immigrants in Southern California who have two foreign-born parents prefer to speak English at home instead of their native tongue (see Figure 1).⁸ By the third generation, more than 97 percent of these immigrants—Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese—prefer to speak only English at home.

"The single most important indicator of how readily any speaker will switch to English and become fluent is the age of arrival, followed by level of education and length of stay," says Rumbaut. "But the three-generational model of language shift is happening faster today than any time in U.S. history."

Speakers of Asian Languages, Russian, and Arabic Growing Quickly in Number

The mix of languages other than English spoken at home in U.S. households has also changed in the last 15 years, according to the Census Bureau. Spanish remained the second-most spoken language in the United States between 1990 and 2000, increasing by almost 11 million speakers. But by 2000, Chinese supplanted French as the third-most spoken language in the country, almost doubling its number of users.

Use of Tagalog, Vietnamese, Russian, and Arabic also surged in the 1990s, while the number of people using European languages typically associated with older immigrant waves (such as German, Italian, and Polish) fell by at least 8 percent over the decade.

Of the 20 non-English languages most frequently spoken at home in the United States, the largest proportional increase was for Russian speakers, who nearly tripled from 242,000 in 1990 to 706,000 in 2000. The second-largest increase was for French Creole speakers (including Haitian Creoles)—more than doubling from 188,000 to 453,000.

Rumbaut says, however, that these figures are imprecise measures of the vitality of these languages. "They don't tell you anything about who is speaking them, how often, or which language is preferred," he says. "In California, many of these groups have their own radio stations, TV stations, Sunday schools—and all these efforts are failing to sustain the language into the second generation."

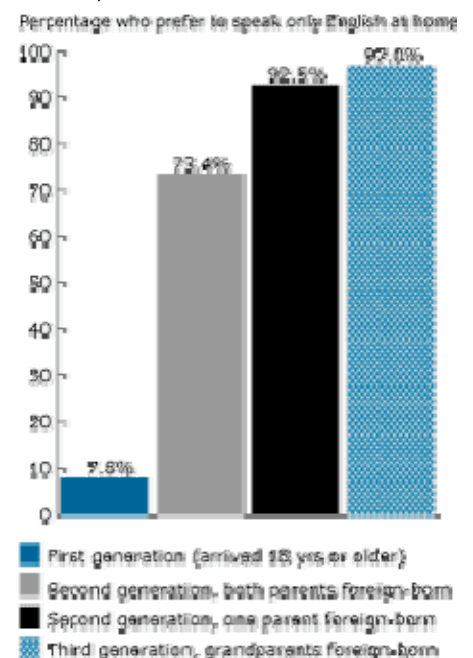
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Figure 1
Transition to Speaking English at Home Among Los Angeles-Area Immigrant Families, 2004



Source: Rubén G. Rumbaut, "A Language Graveyard? Immigration, Generation, and Linguistic Acculturation in the United States" (2005)

Diversity Activity— Affirmations

Based on an activity developed by Mary Hope Schwoebel, Craig Zelizer, and Giselle Ober

Audience: Grades 1-5

Objective: To recognize the positive characteristics of their classmates

Activity:

1. For younger students, have them decorate paper bags with their names and set the bags on their desks. Older students can take pieces of paper and punch two holes on one side. Tie a piece of yarn through the holes so that the students can wear the papers like a necklace. Have the students wear the papers down their backs.
2. On slips of paper, younger students can write a note to each person in the class stating something good about that person (e.g., John is friendly, Kathy is enthusiastic, Adam is creative, Jen is athletic). Then they can place the notes in the students' name bags. Older students can walk around the classroom and write their messages on the papers that each student is wearing on his or her back.
3. When the messages are completed, allow the students to read what others had written. Ask them how it felt to write positive comments for each other. Discuss how they felt reading their papers. Share that each person in the class is unique and that each person is a special part of the classroom community. You could use this activity as part of a language arts or spelling lesson that discusses adjectives.

Source: *The National Crime Prevention Council*, http://www.mcgruff.org/Grownups/div_affirmations.htm.

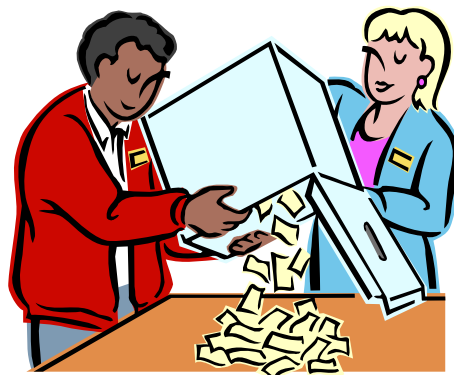
Diversity Resource—People Power

People Power, developed by the City and District of North Vancouver, is an interactive and flexible learning tool for teaching diversity and cultural inclusiveness skills. It helps youth appreciate diversity and take an active part in creating an inclusive society. *People Power* is a diversity and anti-discrimination training manual for youth.

This 123-page Facilitators Manual is designed to enhance young people's understanding of diversity and provide them with skills to effectively interact with people from diverse backgrounds. The aim is to encourage youth to examine their own perceptions, values and biases, teach them strategies to respond effectively to situations arising from diversity, offer them skills to promote positive interactions, and create awareness and encourage the use of community resources.

The objectives of *People Power* are:

- To provide facilitator training on diversity to youth leaders and professionals working with youth.
- To provide a process for youth to enhance their understanding and skills for living in a diverse world.
- To create opportunities for self-awareness and sharing with others to broaden one's knowledge, perspectives, and acceptance of other people.
- To provide a forum for challenging thoughts, beliefs, and actions.



This manual is designed to assist youth and trainers working with youth to start a process of working individually and collectively to create a truly inclusive society by:

- Offering ways to reflect about one's own attitudes on diversity and discrimination.
- Developing an understanding of the causes and history of discrimination and the courageous efforts of people to achieve equality.
- Identifying and addressing discrimination at both the personal and institutional level.
- Acknowledging the need to take individual responsibility for working toward removing barriers that isolate groups of people from full participation and enjoyment of society.
- Providing opportunities for individuals to take action against all forms of discrimination.

The following sections are included in the manual:

Section 1:	Facilitator Orientation
Section 2:	Glossary of Terms
Section 3:	Session Starter Activities
Section 4:	Diversity Activities
Section 5:	Stereotyping, Discrimination and Prejudice Activities
Section 6:	Power and Privilege
Section 7:	The "isms" – Forms of Discrimination
Section 8:	Closing Activities
Section 9:	Resources
Section 10:	Bibliography

People Power is a publication of the Settlement and Multiculturalism Division of the Ministry of Attorney General, Government of British Columbia. The entire curriculum is available at: http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/sam/publications/pdf/whole_booklet.pdf.

Diversity Around the State—Focus on Chester County

Contributed By Laurie Szoke, Chester County 4-H Youth Development Educator

Maria Navarrete-Olvera, Chester County Extension 4-H Program Assistant, is a welcomed resource for many youth and community members of Chester County, PA .

Maria has facilitated programs with children, youth, teens and communities. She has successfully engaged collaborators in bringing 4-H life skill and leadership programs to young people who live in marginalized, migrant and immigrant communities.

Maria's outreach and impact is county-wide. She is a natural conduit for networking community information and resources to families who live in isolated, compromised and at-risk environments. Maria is extremely creative and sensitive to the environmental and developmental needs of people; spanning cultural, socio-economic, and generational boundaries. Collaborative programs with Chester County Cooperative Extension provide positive outlets for community leadership, personal expression, self esteem development and goal setting.

Maria has engaged teens in service learning and leadership opportunities through Cosecha: Cultivating Community's Teens Networking Together (TNT). Many teens take the lead in the Chester County 4-H Program by establishing new clubs and community gardens (Community Gardens of Chester County) in their local neighborhoods. Maria Navarrete-Olvera is a positive role model for our young people and an inspiration.



Above Maria works with 4-H teens that participate in a Friday afternoon life skills program at the Garage youth center in Kennett Square. These youth are involved in an artistic communication program that evokes creative expression of their past, present and future through story painting on tiles and written narratives.

Maria has created this program, based on the interest of these high school students, their need to define self image, goal setting and plans for their future. Working with tile art has proven to be an effective 4-H life skill activity with students in after school and community based programs.

In April TNT sponsored an Easter egg hunt for the Kennett Friends Home. This intergeneration and inter-cultural activity was a dynamic blend of youth leaders and adult mentors, all of whom shared a morning of bringing joy, laughter and companionship to one another. Young people and seniors worked together, sharing conversations and experiences.



International Literacy Day September 8th

International Literacy Day is celebrated each year on September 8th. The objective is to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities, and societies. The theme of this year's celebration is Literacy and Sustainable Development. The following are facts related to literacy in the world:

Global View

- In 2000, one in five adults aged 15+ was illiterate.
- There were about 860 million illiterate adults in the world in 2000. If the current trend continues, in 2015 there will be some 800 million illiterate adults.
- It is projected that by 2015, the literacy rate will have increased to 85 percent, below the EFA goal of 90 per cent.

Regional View

- In 2000, about 70 percent of the world's illiterate adults lived in three regions: Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States and North Africa.
- East Asia and the Pacific reported an overall literacy rate of 86 per cent with an estimated total illiterate population of 185 million.
- The Latin America and Caribbean region has an illiterate population of 39 million, or 11 percent of the total adult population

Gender Perspective

- Women account for two out of three illiterate adults.
- In 2000, there were 236 million more illiterate women than men and it is projected in 2015 the difference will be 215 million.
- The gender gap was more pronounced in the Arab States and North Africa, and in South and West Asia (around 23 percentage points in each of these regions).

Source: UNESCO (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization)
http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=41537&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Diversity in the Workplace—Building Community Using Community Liaisons/Brokers

It is not always easy to engage families from different backgrounds without first building relationships in the communities in which the families live. The following tips are shared to provide information on building such relationships. This information was gained from the National Center on Cultural Competency Children with Special needs Project.

What is a Community Liaison/Broker?

Community brokers/liaisons are trusted individuals who may or may not live in a certain community yet who have knowledge of a community's strengths and needs. Brokers act as liaisons to help bridge gaps in information dissemination.

They are often able to enhance the capacity of the community in areas such as outreach, community engagement, family involvement and service delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse and underserved populations. Community liaisons/brokers help service providers and others gain entry into communities. Such individuals may be affiliated with a variety of agencies. They can come from many walks of life and may include an informed parent, a doctor, a nurse, an early interventionist, a teacher, a Head Start worker, the local grocer, a traditional healer, a minister, or a social worker.

How Do Community Liaisons/Brokers Help Gain Entry to Communities?

Community liaisons/brokers provide support to families, programs and agencies by helping establish relationships, providing safe meeting spaces, offering materials and resources and one-on-one help, as well as training and advocacy. This support is provided in a number of ways, including the following:

Getting Started:

- Identifying known community leaders in the faith-based community and in the community at large, leaders who often have and provide other key contacts in the community.
- Identifying healthcare system service quality issues.
- Facilitating access for families to outside agency services and access for professionals to specific areas of the community.
- Facilitating introductions and referrals to contacts on Indian reservations
- Introducing staff to the community through meetings and board membership.
- Inviting program personnel staff to meet staff and parents within a community.
- Recruiting other community brokers and creating a database of all brokers/liaisons.

Safe Space:

- Identifying meeting places where families feel comfortable.
- Providing meeting space.
- Providing a safe environment for families to share their concerns.

Materials and Resources:

- Providing verbal translations for both families and providers.
- Providing an information flow within and between families and service providers.
- Providing cultural and linguistic competency in materials development.
- Disseminating information and resources to and from a community.
- Reviewing materials and providing input.

What Are The Benefits Of Working With Community/Liaisons Brokers?

Troubleshooting, negotiating, and sup-

porting are just a few of the many ways in which community liaisons/brokers provide invaluable perspective and assistance.

Others include:

- Helping families to understand the mainstream culture and learn how to access needed services.
- Facilitating mutual understanding and communication between families and other service providers.
- Educating staff about cultural beliefs and customs of families in the community.
- Providing family-centered, culturally competent communication between agencies.
- Helping with outreach into culturally diverse underserved communities.
- Helping provide a safe environment for families to share their concerns.
- Helping solve problems, decreasing conflicts and misunderstandings and improving relationships among parties.
- Helping negotiate and advocate for families in system change and recommending cultural and linguistic materials and service delivery.
- Helping families receive access to information, resources and contacts, leading to more and improved services.
- Having better linkages to other families and providers who speak languages other than English.
- Improving the manner in which a community is viewed by those outside the community.

How Are Relationships With Cultural Liaisons/Brokers Established?

Relationships with cultural liaisons/brokers are established through active recruitment, capitalizing on existing relationships, and networking within agencies and during events. Other ways in which community brokers/liaisons are

Diversity Calendar

August 2006

- 1st *Fast of the Mother of God* – Orthodox Christian. Marks the beginning of the 14 day vegetarian fast in preparation for the Feast of the Dormition.
- 2nd *Tisha B'Av* – Jewish. (Begins sundown). A day of mourning and fasting for the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem and other tragedies in Jewish history coinciding with this date.
- 6th *Transfiguration of Our Lord* – Orthodox Christian. Celebrates the manifestation of Christ's Divinity to three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John on Mount Tabor.
- 9th *Obon Festival* – Japanese. Festival of Lanterns in honor of the dead.
- 15th *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* – Christ. Commemorates taking of the Virgin Mary's body and soul into heaven.
Korea Liberation Day – North and South Korea. In North Korea marks the surrender of Japan in 1945; in South Korea marks the creation of an independent government in 1948.
- 16th *Jammashdami* – Hindu. Honors the Hindu deity Lord Krishna. Celebrated with fasting.
- 21st *Laylat al-Isra'wa al-Mi'raj* – Islam (Sundown). Commemorates Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, his ascent to heaven and return the same night, and his having received God's commandment of the five daily compulsory prayers.
- 26th *Women's Equality Day* – U.S. Honors the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, granting voting rights to women.
- 27th *Ganesh Chaturthi* – Hindu. A day of offering to Lord Ganesh, god of wisdom, success, and remover of obstacles.
- 31st *Solidarity Day* – Poland. Commemorates the formation, in 1980, of the first Polish labor union, clearing the way for the downfall of the Polish Communist Party.

September 2006

Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15)

- 1st *Beginning of the Ecclesial Year* – Orthodox Christian.
- 4th *Labor Day* – U.S. Honors working people and the contribution of labor.
- 8th *Shab-e-Barat* – Islam (Begins sundown). A fast to prepare for Ramadan. Sins are forgiven on this day.
- 10th *Grandparents Day* – U.S. Honors all grandparents.
- 11th *New Year* – Coptic Christian.
Enkutatash – Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Ethiopian New Year – the term means gifts of jewels.
Patriot Day – U.S. Honors those who died during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack.
- 15th *Hispanic Heritage Month* – U.S. Celebrates the contributions and achievements of the diverse cultures within the Hispanic community.
Keiro-no-Hi – Japan (Respect for the Aged Day). National holiday honoring older citizens, especially those who are centenarians.

- 16th *Fiesta Patrias* – Mexico. Celebrates independence from Spain on this date in 1820.
Oktoberfest – Germany. A two-week harvest celebration observed by feasting and drinking, music, dance, and other folk customs.
- 22nd *Rosh Hashanah* – Jewish – (Begins sundown). Marks the beginning of Jewish New Year, and commemorates the creation of the world. It is the beginning of the period of penitence and spiritual renewal.
Autumn Feast – American Indian. Day to honor the harvest and the coming and going of seasons. Includes prayer, song, and storytelling.
Fall O'Higan – Buddhist. The 6 Paramitas are virtues (generosity, morality, wisdom, honesty, endeavor, and patience) are practiced.
- 23rd *Ramadan* – Islam. The holiest month of the Islamic year – begins with the sighting of the new moon. Time of spiritual and physical purification. Commemorates the revelation of the Qu'ran to Muhammad.
Ch'usok – Korean. A harvest thanksgiving festival that includes feasts and visits to ancestors graves.
- 24th *National Deaf Awareness Week* – U.S.
Our Lady of Las Mercedes Day. Dominican Republic, Peru.
- 27th *Maskal* - Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. Commemorates the finding of the True Cross.
- 28th *Confucius's Birthday* – China, Taiwan.
- 29th *St. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, Archangels* – Catholic. A feast honoring these angels.
- 30th *Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement* – Jewish. (Begins at sundown). Full day of prayer and repentance accompanied by fasting. The holiest day of the year.

October 2006

Disability Employment Awareness Month

- 1st *Yom Kippur* – Jewish (Began sundown, September 30th).
- 2nd *Gandhi Jayanti* – India. Marks the birth of Mahatma Gandhi in 1869.
- 6th *Chung Ch'iu* – China. Celebration of the coming harvest.
Sukkot – Jewish (Begins sundown). Known as Festival of Tabernacles and Festival of Booths. Celebrates the fall harvest. Also serves as a reminder of the life of the Israelites during the wilderness years.
- 9th *Columbus Day* – U.S.
- 10th *Karva Chauth* – Hindu. Fast honors the god Shiva and goddess Parvati.
- 11th *National Coming Out Day* – Gays and Lesbians.
- 14th *Simchat Torah* – Jewish. (Begins sundown). Celebrates the conclusion of the public reading of the Torah.

Sources:

Honoring Differences, The Pro-Group, Inc.
The National Conference for Community

Continued from page 6

found include the following:

- Active recruitment and hiring of individuals from within a community who have interests and skills as cultural liaisons/brokers.
- Using staff who are known and trusted in the community to train bilingual and monolingual family volunteers.
- Having discussions with other projects that use cultural liaisons about ways to work together.
- Attending local community events to introduce selves to the community.
- Helping to set up and participate in community health fairs.
- Serving on committees, boards and task forces.
- Reestablishing linkages with former employees.
- Establishing relationships through interagency partnering and collaboration.
- Conducting on-site visits.
- Collaborating on community events, such as Fiesta Educativa, Health Fairs, Special Olympics, Head Start Family Fun Events, Child Find, and Pow Wows.
- Growing out of experiences with a child's services, such as early intervention.
- Following up with individuals met at meetings.
- Gathering business cards from individuals who share similar interests, then arranging follow-up meetings to discuss ways to collaborate.
- Capitalizing on existing relationships.

How Are Relationships With Community Liaisons Brokers Maintained?

Various methods are used to maintain and strengthen relationships and bond with community liaisons/brokers. By providing benefits such as monetary compensation, networking opportunities, and respect, community liaisons/brokers enter a win-win relationship with those they serve. Maintaining relationships can be accomplished by:

- Paying a competitive wage with benefits for community liaison/broker services.
- Providing free resources and disseminating resources and information.
- Offering benefits such as in-service training, conferences, and continuing education.
- Providing peer support, exchanging ideas and celebrating successes.
- Providing snacks and food at events.
- Providing child care support.
- Writing handwritten thank you notes with personal touches.
- Assisting with grant writing.
- Respecting each other.
- Recognition with certificates and appreciation events.
- Promoting parent professional partnerships and including players with many different points of view.
- Helping brokers prepare to sit on boards, committees and task forces – becoming more visible and thus sought out and respected for their input.

Source: Thomas, T. & Anzola, K. (2005).

Building Community Using Community Liaisons/Brokers. Family Voices National Office. Albuquerque, NM.

For the complete report and additional information visit the Web site: <http://www.familyvoices.org>.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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