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Seeking and Sustaining Allies for Inclusion: Public Libraries' Partnerships to Better Serve Young Children with Disabilities and their Caregivers

ABSTRACT

In particular for children who are too young to attend school, public libraries can be a support to those with disabilities or developmental delays, and to their caregivers. However, librarians are seldom trained in early childhood special education or counseling strategies, nor should they be expected to be. Hence, they rely on partnerships and collaborations with other service providers and agencies that have that expertise. Researchers conducted interviews at 10 library sites across three states to learn about successful partnerships and collaborations that help libraries serve young children who have disabilities, developmental delays, or both. Successful partnerships are maintained with a variety of organizations, from preschools to social services agencies. New partnerships are often developed through librarians' engagement in the community. Library administrators can promote these partnerships by providing time and encouraging relationships across agencies, allowing their libraries and librarians to leverage their strengths in serving the community.

KEYWORDS

library children's programming, story times, library partnerships, children with disabilities, library services to children

The Services to Children of All Abilities: An Exploration (SCALE) research team conducted a three-state study of public library services to young children (ages 0 to 5) with disabilities, developmental delays, or both. We identified libraries that had successful services, to determine common practices other libraries could adopt to improve their services for young children with disabilities or developmental delays.

We knew going into the project that community relationships would play a role in libraries' services for this group, so a specific item of investigation was that of community partnerships. A goal of the project was to explain how partnerships strengthen libraries' abilities to provide services for young children with disabilities or developmental delays. We articulate that goal in these two research questions:

- What partnerships support libraries in serving families of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays?
- How might libraries, early intervention agencies and providers, and school districts work together to better support families of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays?

Literature Review

Young children with disabilities or developmental delays, and their families, need specific supports that typically-developing children may not need. However, these needs vary based on the abilities and affordances of the child and their family (Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2014). Though an early intervention specialist generally provides specific services, public libraries also play a role by partnering with agencies that support these children’s needs and often by providing inclusive and accepting programming. Professional literature includes many examples of libraries partnering with organizations (e.g., Lenstra, 2025; Lenstra et al., 2025; Lopez et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2023; Saunders & Corning, 2020). Previous research emphasizes the potential for library collaboration with community agencies to serve young children who have disabilities and their families (Daskalakes et al., 2023; Daskalakes et al., 2024; McKenzie & Stooke, 2012).

Support for Libraries Working with Young Children Who Have Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Public libraries’ efforts to provide services and programs to children with disabilities or developmental delays reported in literature include a variety of library offerings—sensory story times, collections of toys or manipulatives for loan, use of low-tech assistive tools, and general programs intentionally designed with an inclusivity purpose (Adkins & Bushman, 2015; Banks, 2004; Cottrell, 2013; Daskalakes et al., 2023; Galyon et al., 2023; Grafelman & Barriage, 2022; McIntyre, 2004; Prendergast, 2016). However, relatively few studies address the types of support or preparation librarians need in order to make these services or resources available to support such initiatives (Prendergast, 2016).

Information and resources for librarians intending to provide services to young children with disabilities are available in books, handbooks, and toolkits intended as resources for practitioners. Examples include volumes dedicated to the broad scope of serving children with disabilities (Banks et al., 2014; Copeland, 2022), book chapters about inclusive programming within edited works (Prendergast 2015; Prendergast & Lazar, 2010; Walling & Copeland, 2022), and more specific volumes or chapters, such as those on serving children with autism (Anderson, 2021; Farmer, 2014; Klipper, 2014). The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) created a toolkit in 2015 titled “Library Service to Special Population Children and their Caregivers: A Toolkit for Librarians and Library Workers” with sections on children with disabilities, but the toolkit is archived and a newer edition has not been published.

Public Library Partnerships

Public libraries have long been engaging in partnerships to support children with disabilities and their caregivers (see, for example, Coffman, 2022; Mannion, 2022). However, these partnerships are seldom discussed in library and information science (LIS) research literature. The only previous research we could find on public library partnerships specifically addressing young children with disabilities or developmental delays came from our project. Daskalakes et al. (2024) looked at what early childhood intervention service coordinators

had to say about library partnerships. The service coordinators noted the value of partnerships between state agencies and public libraries. Early intervention service coordinators noted the importance of “collaborative events” (pp. 417–418), such as community resource fairs, library participation in schools’ early childhood committees, and using library spaces to conduct meetings and screening services for children to determine necessary additional support.

However, broader studies address public libraries’ partnerships with community organizations as practices that engage and empower various groups in the community (e.g., Campana et al., 2022; Leung & Jeffery, 2021; Mills et al., 2021; Saunders & Corning, 2020), including examples that look at the value of partnerships for the health and well-being of community members (Lenstra et al., 2025; Morgan et al., 2016). Health-related community partnerships led to participation in community health fairs, on-site health services and lectures provided by health care workers at libraries, telehealth facilities in libraries, and resources such as health screening tests in libraries (Charbonneau et al., 2024). Partnerships have also been used to support community food access, as libraries worked with groups such as 4-H youth development organization, Boys and Girls Clubs, cooperative extensions, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Peritore et al., 2023). Other library-community partnerships have collaborated to offer safe spaces and technology access for unhoused teenagers (Farrell, 2018; Kuver, 2015).

Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Frameworks

This research focuses on partnerships and collaborations between public libraries and other agencies to benefit young children with disabilities, developmental delays, or both. As such, it draws together theoretical perspectives from prior literature of public library partnerships in general and the situations of children and libraries within larger systems.

Yuen and Liew (2022) conceptualize “partnership” as denoting the relationship between the public library and an outside agency, while “collaboration” indicates the actual acts that come from such a partnership (p. 794). Saunders and Corning (2020) created a framework for collaboration between libraries and other agencies. Building from partnerships, that collaboration framework has “seven themes [to include] diagnostics and planning; alignment; roles and responsibilities; assessment; project management; barriers; and enablers” (p. 465). Each of these elements influences the success of collaborative efforts, though “as they described engaging in the steps and processes of collaboration, some participants gave the sense that they were figuring it out as they went” (p. 468).

Looking specifically at children and child development, several research studies apply Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory (e.g., Campana et al., 2022; Prendergast, 2016; Prendergast & Sharkey, 2021). In Bronfenbrenner’s model, the child is “at the center of five overlapping and interactive systems” (Prendergast & Sharkey, 2021, p. 242). The child’s immediate environment—be it home, day care, or library—provides direct interaction with people and objects. The mesosystem is where these immediate environments connect and information is shared between people. Additional systems—government structures, cultural ideology, shifts in educational policy—indirectly influence the child. The child continues to develop based on their unique characteristics, interactions with their environments, the context of those interactions, and the passage of time. Prendergast and Sharkey state that “Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory offers ways to strengthen our understanding of how public libraries and children’s librarians contribute to children’s learning via family engagement with our resources” (p. 243). Lenstra and Peritore (2024)

similarly focus on how public libraries and library users are situated in larger spheres, in their discussion of the Health in All Policies (HiAP) framework: “A HiAP approach shifts the focus from the individual to the individual-in-the-community” and also “from the institution to the institution-in-the-community” (p. 219).

These theoretical models support the understanding of collaborations among community partners within social systems. Critically, engagement does not happen between the librarian and child alone, nor between the librarian and the partner organization alone, but across environments and within systems that influence those environments.

Methodology

This article presents findings from one aspect of the SCALE project. SCALE researchers created the SCALE Advisory Board, consisting of researchers with expertise in library services for children with disabilities and early childhood special education, as well as professionals from state library agencies, early childhood special education agencies, and early intervention agencies in Kansas, Kentucky, and Missouri, the three states where the research took place. These representatives were asked to identify public libraries recognized for their services for young children with disabilities, developmental delays, or both. Separately, the research group looked at public library web pages to find libraries that indicated strengths in serving young children with disabilities and developmental delays. The researchers generated a list of libraries, and then contacted those libraries to ask if staff was willing to participate in the research. After library staff agreed to participate, researchers conducted interviews with library directors, youth services managers, and children’s librarians.

Information about the library sites, drawn from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (2021) Public Library Survey, is conveyed in Table 1. To ensure participants’ privacy, we have identified states as A, B, and C.

SCALE researchers had developed standardized protocols for interviewing library directors, children’s librarians, children and caregivers, and library partners. The team shared those protocols with the SCALE Advisory Board. Based on feedback from the advisers, the research team adjusted the wording of some questions. Ultimately,

Table 1
Population and Budget Information about the 10 Library Sites Visited

Library	State	Population of Legal Service Area (rounded to nearest 10,000)	Total Operating Expenditures (rounded to nearest \$100,000)	Community Size
Library 1	A	29,000	\$1,000,000	Town
Library 2	A	10,000	\$300,000	Town
Library 3	A	170,000	\$21,100,000	Midsize city
Library 4	B	1,330,000	\$9,000,000	Suburb
Library 5	B	30,000	\$1,900,000	Town
Library 6	B	60,000	\$2,500,000	Town
Library 7	C	760,000	\$57,500,000	Suburb
Library 8	C	140,000	\$3,300,000	Town
Library 9	C	70,000	\$2,900,000	Small city
Library 10	C	860,000	\$52,400,000	Suburb

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the interview protocols included specific questions about partnerships and collaborations.

The interview protocol for library directors specifically asked, "Have you pursued partnerships with other agencies, either to provide services to young children with disabilities or to support their families (e.g., First Steps or the agencies that serve young children with disabilities, preschools, early childhood education, parks and recreation, other city agencies)?"

The interview protocol for children's librarians asked, "Can you please describe resources or partnerships that help you provide appropriate services to children with disabilities (i.e., state or local educational agencies, other libraries, local teachers, early intervention providers, or family members)?"

Additionally, feedback was drawn from interviews with caregivers, who were asked, "What community agencies, organizations, or people might the library partner with to better support you and your child (for example, public schools or early intervention agencies)?"

Table 2 describes the numbers and types of participants interviewed for this study. We collected no demographic information about any participants. We used the entirety of the interview transcripts for this paper. Coding was done using NVivo 14.0 data analysis software, and coding results files were stored in

a shared Microsoft Teams collaborative platform space.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the research team distributed coding responsibilities, with the first and second authors doing open coding related to library

partnerships. Because interview protocols were standardized, the authors focused on questions that dealt specifically with library partnerships. Initial codes included broad concepts (e.g., agency type) as well as specific notes (e.g., "initiated by library"). For both research questions, particular themes were noted, such as "pre-existing relationships" and "libraries as connectors." After initial open coding, findings were reviewed at full-group meetings of the research team, with various group members discussing how their findings reinforced or differed from one another's, and suggesting additional topics of exploration. Based on that meeting, the first and second authors reviewed and refined codes and themes, and then rereviewed coded passages with the revised codes in mind.

Findings

Successful partnerships documented in this study had many different appearances, supporting the idea that there are many ways to engage for the benefit of the community. For example, one children's librarian provided weekly story times at a special-needs preschool in their city, and another did the same for their area Head Start early-learning program. Several librarians reported working with special education teachers to learn how to better support young children with disabilities. One library hosted their county's early child intervention specialists to hold screening opportunities so families could have their young children tested for developmental delays. Another library had employees trained to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) screening tool, referring children and caregivers to the local health department

Table 2
Participants Interviewed for this Study

Participant Type	Number
Library director	8
Children's librarian	17
Caregiver	10

for support if necessary. Multiple directors reported engagement with local service agencies (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary Club, area chamber of commerce, United Way, Parents as Teachers, YMCA), and they used those networks to promote library services in general. Four directors reported working with the local health department to ensure families were aware of library services and also reported participating in health department events to support new parents or families (e.g., County Baby Day and other family-friendly celebrations).

Despite there being no archetypal successful partnership, consistent themes emerged to support or make possible such relationships. For each research question, particular themes demonstrated successful practices. Findings and themes are discussed based on the following research questions.

Research Question 1: What partnerships support libraries in serving families of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays?

Preexisting relationships. Partnerships and collaborations public libraries have already built in the community—with schools, child care centers, early-intervention providers, and other community groups—facilitate the provision of services for children with disabilities and their families.

Public libraries have ongoing relationships with many organizations in the communities they serve. Some are formal partnerships, others more casual relationships. Our interviews with library directors and librarians revealed a wealth of organizations with which their libraries partner. One library director was excited to list some of their partnerships:

Oh, gosh! We have lots of allies and partners. So of course, [Special Needs Program Preschool], Parents as Teachers, United Way. Now, Parents as Teachers is part of our United Way in this district. So definitely the school district. And the Y[MCA]. Well, we also have a YWCA that we align with more closely than the YMCA, and it has a day care center. So, we reach out to local schools, local preschools. At this particular library, they partner with [Special Needs Program Preschool], which is a center ... for kids of all ages in an area of town that ... has a lot of poverty, and so they go and do programs there too.

The level or degree of library involvement in partnerships with organizations depends on many factors, including staffing needs and historical relationships. For some community organizations, like Head Start or wellness centers, libraries provide space and opportunities to conduct sign-ups, screenings, and other outreach efforts. Libraries offer their lobbies and meeting rooms, and help advertise services, bringing awareness to families about community services from which they can benefit. One children's librarian interviewed referred to the community organizations in their city:

They do a lot of good things in the community. So, we just really try to, you know, make those resources known to everyone, that they're out there. And if we have the chance to bring them to the library to help share information, we are 100 percent trying to do it as regularly as possible.

In other cases, these relationships involve librarians presenting programs on-site at the organizations' locales, especially educational institutions. From public schools to private child care centers, many librarians interviewed bring story times to classrooms. One librarian summarized how the word spreads and more schools request visits: "I didn't mention that group; we go and visit them once a month. As well, some groups have said, 'Hey, we heard you're doing this. Can you come visit us too?'" During regular visits to schools and preschools, library workers and teachers connect and share information on services or programs for children with disabilities. Many times, those

connections are personal, but they result in programs that benefit the whole community.

One librarian shared a discussion library staff were having in relation to the best language to describe their Sensory Friendly Storytime practice and how she planned to tap into her school contacts: "I need to follow up with one of the teachers and ask her about our language thing, because that's obviously something I've been struggling with, and she might have some great perspectives on that." In another example, a preschool loaned adaptive equipment and toys for the public library to try out in their program before deciding what to purchase.

Collaborative interactions between library staff and other community providers help with communication about and promotion of resources available in the community. Some caregivers said information is not readily available for everyone: "I also wish that more of the community would take part in all of this stuff that is available, because they have such really cool things."

Networking. Library participation in community-wide events and representation in organizational partnerships contribute to social awareness and communication. Not having enough staff time and resources is a challenge, and a library staff's typical strategy is to prioritize.

The public library can be instrumental in connecting service providers with families of children with disabilities, so to create those connections, library staff participate in community-wide programs and networking. Many library directors belong to community boards, alliances, or other joint groups that meet regularly. One director told us, "I'm on the board of directors for the chamber of commerce and on a community educational foundation board. And you have to put yourself out there, be willing to attend meetings and get to know people." This type of work takes time, and many libraries face staff shortages or other hardships. As another director explained, staffers resort to prioritizing and choosing which meetings and events would provide the most benefit, but these choices might deter development of other, less urgent relationships that could be fruitful in the long term.

Participation in networking meetings provides opportunities to improve communication about upcoming programs and also, in many cases, results in the library hosting tables or booths at community-wide events that reach a high number of community members. Many times, the director or staff attend these meetings to do some "marketing." One librarian shared that they attend monthly meetings of an educational institution:

Not everybody makes it every month. But we all get together, and we talk about events that we can collaborate on, or offer our services ... like, when we met last week, I was like, "Hey, Summer Reading is coming. Let me know where I can bring brochures or flyers," so we've got to take 450 flyers to the preschool.

Regarding non-library specific events such as big holiday festivals and fairs, most directors shared that they strive to have a presence. Events ranged from a Community Baby Shower to Read Across America or a Boo Fest, where staffers set up display tables to bring awareness about services offered at the library, including those for children with disabilities. A librarian shared this experience:

So, we are out there meeting people of all abilities, you know, in those situations, and people who normally would not ever walk through our door, and just giving them an idea of who we are and what we do.

Research Question 2: How might libraries, early intervention agencies and providers, and school districts work together to better support families of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays?

Sharing expertise. Library staff wish organizations with experience and knowledge around services for children with disabilities would share their expertise with them, as many library staff perceive themselves as unprepared.

One of the most common desires encountered in our interviews with librarians and directors was the need for tapping into the knowledge of those who are experts in serving children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families. Some libraries develop their own training, others send staff to workshops and conferences, and most get very creative to equip staff with the knowledge to serve children with disabilities and their families. But they also acknowledge their need for more (and more up-to-date) training. In that respect, many participants wished local organizations that work with individuals with disabilities would share their knowledge, either by offering training to the library staff or by informal exchanges of communication, such as reviewing the libraries' programs, spaces, or services to provide feedback for improvement.

Several librarians and directors interviewed suggested ways in which other organizations can share their knowledge. One library director shared this:

I would love to see more partnerships of them coming in and providing something maybe, but ... in the process of that be teaching the staff, like, this is how you kind of do this, this is what this looks like. And, somebody looking and being like, "OK, this is a hindrance. This is a place where you can improve, and this is a way that you can improve it."

Library spaces seemed to be a concern for directors, as mentioned several times, as this library director expressed:

[Another way] would be giving us their expertise, whether that's in the form of a consultation of our space to say, "Oh yeah, this is way too crowded and overstimulating, but you could add X to give it a break or make it more friendly."

Librarians who are regularly in touch with schoolteachers or other educators or child care providers often resort to informal ways to get information and advice, as one librarian noted, "We've also used them for just, What can we offer? What can we do? We kind of lean on them for information and advice."

Another librarian told us they were getting in touch with the school district's parent educator: "They do a lot of early-intervention stuff for families, and so I think that would be a really good resource to have. I want to develop that partnership, so that [they] can maybe help us with some ideas."

Libraries serving as connectors or hubs. Directors and librarians conveyed a need to capitalize on the public library's role as a hub for community-wide collaborations: representation in committees, hosting or helping to organize big events (health fairs, baby showers, reading days) and bringing community members together.

Most directors we interviewed mentioned connection with organizations as a vital resource to better serve families or individuals with disabilities. Many families have needs that span different areas unrelated to the disability experience, including economic, health and wellness, or various educational needs. In many cases, participants gave examples of their libraries hosting events like vaccination drives during the COVID-19 pandemic, screenings for autism spectrum disorder, food drives, and other outreach initiatives, which provide a broader source of information for the community, as indicated in our literature review.

The fact that library staff work with professionals from all of these circles is an important asset that can be tapped into for the community's overall benefit. Collaborations with teachers in public and private institutions, library staff knowledge of early-intervention providers and organizations, and connections

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with representatives of United Way or other agencies all enhance library staffs' roles. Most important, library staffers know the families that use community services. That is an opportunity for library staff to act as the node where all of these relationships connect. Library directors and librarians know these partnerships benefit everyone, as this director points out:

I think those community-wide events that we're part of—that really focuses on early literacy, not just for the kids who come to our library, but for the kids [yet] to come to our library, for the families who are part of Parents as Teachers, or that the United Way has reached out to in their organization... That alliance that has built with that organization, that our staff participate in ... in the meetings ... help these community-wide programs happen.

In addition to connecting various organizations and resources, the library's role in these partnerships ultimately benefits families. An important consequence of this service is families' perception that the library is for everyone and not just for those in need. One caregiver explained it this way:

I think by being at the library with a bigger group of people would make it feel less like ... I wasn't necessarily embarrassed because you have to be in a certain income bracket for it ... But it would be nice to, like, be around other people who are just as normal as me that are also a part of it, or maybe something that wasn't income-based—just some kind of thing, like the preschool development program at the library. It was helpful for us. It was very informational. It was nice.

Ensuring sustainability of programs and services. As existing collaborations tend to be based on individual relationships or personal contacts, library administrators need to ensure partnerships happen at the institutional level as well. Program sustainability should be weighed when considering available resources and opportunities.

Many collaborative efforts participants shared in the interviews were developed through personal connections or by specific individuals. Although this speaks to the role of library staff as being at the center of the community, it is also a challenge to make the partnerships independent of individual staff so these alliances can continue and be replicable. For example, participants mentioned programs or services that stopped due to staff changes. One library director explained, "I mean, we paused services for them ... and then the person that was doing it, she was really ... she was wonderful ... and then she got ill; she got COVID and then she moved."

Several directors mentioned specific programs started because of certain individuals, as this director described:

We have a relationship with [Special Needs Program Preschool] for a long time, and that did start with [a specific librarian]. [That librarian] started doing those story times and then when [they] left us, [another librarian] did those story times, and then [yet another library staff member] was happy to do the [Special Needs Program Preschool] story times.

This example speaks of the importance of continuity in partnerships and collaborations. One director, who was new in the role, stated this:

[The school system] is very big, and it's also very hard to break into. Yeah. And again, how much of that is ... *I'm an outsider and I'm new*, and how much of that is ... Oh, *that's just how they are*, kind of thing?

Striving for continuity as well as forming relationships between organizations at the institutional level—instead of depending on individual staff—would alleviate some disruption with staff turnover.

Discussion

Libraries have existing networks of partnerships and collaborations that contribute to better service for children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families or caregivers. Our research participants shared many examples of informal and formal collaboration in their libraries. Existing partnerships are primarily developed through networking and connections established by individual staff members who reach out to other organizations or schools. The modality of these connections implies challenges, due to staff shortages and turnover (i.e., contacts are lost) or lack of time to create and develop such relationships in the community.

In a recent article, Lenstra summarizes the problem with public library partnerships as one of perception: “Put bluntly, unless you are already working with an organization, they don’t think of you as a community partner” (Lenstra, 2024, p. 47). This is reinforced by our findings about preexisting relationships. Establishing connections is important, but more so, library staff and administrators should consider these relationships with a sustainability approach so they are embedded at the organizational level instead of dependent on individuals knowing other individuals.

Library staff conveyed concerns regarding preparation to serve young children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families. Our findings, coupled with those of earlier studies (Adkins & Bushman, 2015; Kaeding et al., 2017; Prendergast, 2016), reflect a need for more targeted partnerships in which organizations with more specific knowledge contribute to the training of and information exchange with library staff, who in turn provide their expertise in community building and programming. Sharing expertise, using the library as a hub for collaboration, and building sustainable relationships at the institutional level are the main opportunities the current study identifies.

Libraries support lifelong learning, and that applies to library staff and their professional formation. Although library systems can provide professional learning opportunities as part of staff development, partnerships with local organizations that have expertise in services for people with disabilities and developmental delays may provide added benefits for personnel and library patrons, leading to stronger community relationships. An article written on behalf of the ALSC’s Library Service to Underserved Children and their Caregivers Committee affirms that creating “partnerships with those who have a strong knowledge base of these underserved communities and can guide library staff in best practices for outreach” may result in a “relationship [that] will help both groups feel fully invested in the partnership and desired outcomes” (Leung & Jeffery, 2021, p. 28).

Library administrators and department managers need to dedicate time to nurturing existing collaborations and networks as ways to disperse information, bring awareness about existing resources, and potentially draw ideas from and collaborate in new ways with community partners to satisfy needs of families of children with disabilities and developmental delays.

Partnerships with relevant organizations help libraries support young children with disabilities or developmental delays. Partners can be a source of professional development and increased knowledge for children’s librarians, helping them overcome their fears of not knowing enough (Adkins & Bushman, 2015; Kaeding et al., 2017; Prendergast, 2016) and allowing them to recommend additional resources and services for caregivers. Public library partnerships demonstrate the value of spreading the workload, with community organizations bringing their areas of expertise together to serve a larger community goal.

Conclusion

Several elements of Saunders and Corning's framework for collaboration were manifest in this project. Successful collaborations had clear roles for library partners, and those roles were aligned with their strengths, such as providing story times at special-needs preschools or coordinating spaces and publicity for diagnostic testing in libraries. Library partners acknowledged the roles partners could play in assessing and improving library services. Although we did not see evidence of library partners engaging in project management or diagnostics and planning, it is possible some of that work was undertaken at the beginning of longer-term partnerships. Due to our focus on successful partnerships, we did not ask specifically about enablers or barriers to collaboration. However, time for meeting and engaging with partners was noted as a critical factor, as was the need to cultivate relationships with new partners.

This research echoes Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory—not through its focus on the child's interactions or environments, but by focusing on library-partner mesosystem interactions in support of the child. Interactions between libraries and partners help librarians create appropriate environments for young children with disabilities, developmental delays, or both. These interactions also inform libraries about available options and community resources to support young children with disabilities and developmental delays, as well as resources for caregivers. Librarians' interactions with parents and guardians help build parental confidence in the library as an open and accessible resource for them and their child. The library provides an immediate environment for children and caregivers. It shares information with caregivers and organizations at the mesosystem level, and it becomes part of the organizing structure of the community.

When serving young children with disabilities and developmental delays, libraries can and should partner with other agencies, including community organizations, school districts, and local preschools. The library brings its expertise as an information hub, connecting resources across the community and excelling as a provider of children's services, including reading materials, programs, and socialization space. Other agencies bring their expertise and resources. Because it is impossible for library staff to do everything for everyone, seeking allies in the community contributes to the goal of providing inclusive programs and services to young children and their caregivers. Library administrators must maintain their commitment to these partnerships at the institutional level, ensuring collaborative efforts' sustainability. Deepening existing partnerships in the community—and building new ones—buoys librarians in their work to support the community and connect families with agencies that meet their specific needs.

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