

10 Quick Tips for Marketing to Families of Children with Special Needs

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Librarians excel at a great many things, especially when it comes to marketing to people who already use the library. But what about non-users? What strategies do we employ to reach those who do not currently utilize the library and its services? As we strive to reach out to the community and advocate for the value of our public library, it's important to remember that many families of children with special needs are still uncomfortable with the idea of stepping through our doors. So, even though we may develop new programs and services specifically targeting children with disabilities and their families, traditional marketing methods may not work.

If your library struggles with getting the word out to families of children with special needs, here is a list of ten quick tips you can apply to your library's marketing strategies right away.

1. Visit areas in the community that are frequented by everyone, regardless of their ability. Share information and flyers at bus stops, train stations, park districts, community centers, and your local coffee shop.
2. Lead a library focus group or an advisory group made up of stakeholders from your community about expanding accessible library services.
3. Create a Special Needs Library e-Newsletter and send it out regularly highlighting new programs, materials, and services. Check out the [“Special Child” e-newsletter](#) from Arlington Heights Memorial Library as a great model.
4. Join the conversation online. Find and contact parent support groups in your area using [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [MySpecialNeedsNetwork.com](#). Ask them if they would host you as a guest speaker, so that you could open up a dialogue about libraries.
5. Establish partnerships with local therapists, doctors' offices, and other special needs related community organizations. Many are looking to pass along free recreational opportunities to families in their network, so they may be able to post flyers or send emails about upcoming events at your library.

6. Attend disability expos, fairs, or forums that are happening in your community. Represent your library by staffing an information table.
7. Connect with your local special education district. Ask if they would be willing to email information, send flyers home in backpacks, or add your library's programs to their calendar of community events.
8. Dedicate space on your library's website to Special Needs or Accessible Library Services. Check out ["The Child's Place" from the Brooklyn Public Library](#) as an excellent example.
9. Create a community-wide survey to identify needs and to assess community interests and the perception of your library.
10. Involve parents of children with special needs in your Strategic Planning process to help inform the direction and scope of future library services.

One last tip: Empower all levels of staff to be advocates for inclusion and accessibility by offering disability friendly training. Once children age out of Youth Services, they and their families require accessible service from other areas of the library. It's important that all levels of library staff, especially staff on the front lines, are on the same page about making the library a welcoming place for patrons with special needs.