

First Impressions, Lasting Impressions

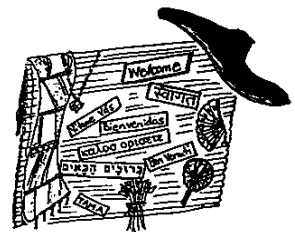
First impressions are very important, whether they be first impressions of people or places. Large hotel chains know this, and that is why they put so much effort into making a statement in their foyer. Even if their rooms are ordinary and small, their glamorous invitingly decorated foyer gives the impression that the whole establishment is decked out to the same standard. In the reverse, if the foyer was dull, plain and downright uninteresting, clients would perceive that all rooms (and the service) matched this no matter how glamorous and exciting the rooms maybe.

Now transport yourself into your children's services foyer area. If your staff teams are presenting inspiring, exciting multicultural programs using colourful and diverse resources does your foyer reflect this for that all-important first impression? Does it reflect the diversity of the people in the local community, the children and the families who use the centre? Does it reflect the centres and communities multicultural celebrations? Does it reflect the daily program? If not - read on!



Foyers in children's services centres often function as communication points, temporary storage points, points where all the fundraising things go, and the lost property sits and..... it looks anything but multicultural. So how to fix that foyer with minimum fuss and maximum impact?

- If items such as lost property, book club books etc must stay put them in interestingly shaped lidded cane baskets with a small sign (in English and community languages) saying what is inside
- If you have cloth pockets for parents notices make them out of fabric that depicts another cultures patterns, colours or images (in other words go further than the teddies and blue giraffes!)
- Display greetings in languages that reflect the local communities languages
- Have as much information as possible that is displayed in the foyer (signs, pamphlets etc) translated
- Restyle the seating available for parents - any dull chair or sofa can do with a brightly patterned ethnic style throw rug and some exotic cushion covers



Put a small coffee table or side table near the seating, cover with a cloth that compliments your seating coverings and use it as a display surface for:

- healthy potted on toxic plants such as sacred bamboo in an Asian glazed pot or succulents in painted Mexican pots
- team the plants with other cultural items (e.g. the bamboo with a lantern and a bowl of Japanese river stones on a red and gold cloth)

- display interesting books about aspects of other cultures (e.g. cookbooks that reflect the foods in the centres menu, or books about traditional art and craft that may reflect some other children's activities)
- display cultural items that families &e sharing with the centre and have notes of explanation about their origins and owners

Consider your wall displays. Sometimes it is not practical to bang nails into walls and some display items are very difficult to hang. One way to solve this is to hang a bamboo blind on the wall as the background and then using fishing line, attach items to it for display. In this way fragile and difficult items can be hung and removed easily. Some suggestions for interesting displays could include:

- fans
- hats
- cooking and eating utensils
- bunches of fragrant herbs (from the children's multicultural herb patch)
- jewellery made from natural materials (bamboo, shells, pods)
- small cultural dolls
- small baskets
- Children's art work

If you prefer more formal framed artwork on your walls there is a large range of framed prints of traditional styles of artwork available. Posters can also be block mounted or framed, and lengths of fabric can be stretched across wooden frames and hung. Multicultural wrapping paper also makes great posters.

Foyers are also good areas to display large pieces that sit on the floor. Some garden ornaments such as large concrete pagodas would be suitable. Large carved animals such as giraffes can look good singly or in a group. Add a few potted plants and pots that compliment the style of the display. Such animals are also easy to make from paper mache.

Aside from the visual aspect of your foyer, consider the other senses that may come into play for visitors to your centre. Soft multicultural background music playing would add a welcoming note, and a bowl of spicy Middle Eastern style potpourri would add an exotic fragrance.

With these ideas in mind, go now and stand in your foyer area. What impression are you making?

