

“How to Grow Your Pathways Connect Community”

By Alley Buschman, Pathways Connect Coordinator in SWFL

Pathways Connect is the community group associated with *Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine*. *Pathways* is the social outreach program for the International Chiropractic Pediatrics Association, a 501 c3 non-profit organization. The purpose of a Pathways Connect group is to foster a community of like-minded people. Many of us who decide to live life “unconventionally” find that it is a difficult journey, and often a lonely one, too. It’s necessary for human beings to have a tribe.

There is a growing body of research that shows how human connection contributes to health and well-being. This is our objective. A community that is focused on the well-being of each other will offer a support system that heals and sustains the individuals and families who are involved. The role of the Pathways Coordinator is to facilitate building this community.

Pathways Coordinators should be proficient at administering to a Facebook group page. It’s been our experience that people will be most active in the community through their Facebook group which allows them to access resources and to communicate between meetings. Keeping your membership local to your region allows people who seek recommendations for things like local health food stores, pediatricians, children’s activities, etc., to be better served by the Pathways Connect group. Upon a new member request, be sure to scan over their profile to see where they live or send them a private message asking if they are local to the area. For example, I often write: “Hi there! I see that you’ve requested to be added to our Pathways Connect SWFL Facebook group. We like to ensure that all members are local to the area. May I ask where you live?” If they don’t live in your respective area areas, you may direct them to <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/directory/> to help them locate a group closer to them:

Here’s what a usual day of work looks like: I open Facebook to check all the notifications for the group. If there are member requests, I process them. If there are new posts, I read them and any links that may be attached. I like to hit the “Like” button on every post so that I know I’ve already seen it. If there are comments, I read all of them. Feel free to comment to make sure that the conversations happening within the group are helpful and free from criticism or judgement and to screen for unsolicited advertising (some people think that the group is an appropriate place to promote their wellness oriented business, e.g. Juice Plus, doTerra, Pure Haven non-toxic products, etc.,) We don’t typically condemn the occasional “get the word out” post, so long as it doesn’t become spammy. It can be difficult to discern whether a post is appropriate or not, so trust your instinct and, as always, approach every situation with kindness and understanding. We aim to create a space where people feel safe to share information that may be sensitive or personal, and that won’t be achieved if they feel they’re being targeted for a sale.

On a weekday, once a week, post something in the group page. You can share a post from the Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine Facebook page or any other link or video that may be of interest to your demographic (baby wearing, breastfeeding, natural childbirth, healthy lifestyle, real food, chiropractic care.) Always read or watch what you post before sharing it. You wouldn’t recommend a book to someone that you never read and this is no different. If and when people comment on something you post, take the time to respond thoughtfully to the comments. We want this to be a dialogue rather than a broadcast. The point of posting and then replying to comments regularly is to show that your group is

an active one; people can come to you with a question and trust that there is a good chance someone may be able to address it. In fact, recommendation requests are some of our most active posts.

To plan an event, you'll need to first decide what the event is. Ideally, there will be two events for each month: one family fun event and one adult education meeting. This can be mapped out on your marketing calendar, a schedule of events for the upcoming year, which you will be responsible for creating at the end of each year.

For our Pathways Connect group in Cape Coral, the adult education meetings take place at Mama's Chiropractic Clinic, usually the last Friday of each month. **We pick a topic/article from the most recent issue of *Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine* and use that as a springboard for the discussion.**

For the family fun events, we do what the name suggests—get families together to have fun. We keep these events for weekends or whenever Mama's Chiropractic Clinic is closed. We strive to keep the events simple, free and engaging. Think playdates, potlucks, and other group activities. Once the calendar is plotted out and you've got some event ideas ready, you can get started!

Be sure to plan each event several weeks prior to the date it occurs. Giving yourself 3-4 weeks is recommended. With your event idea in hand, you'll need a location. Research different venues in the area and secure the venue you want. During certain times of the year, shelters are sold out or unavailable, so keep that in mind. We're of course big fans of outdoor activities, but you could reach out to local businesses if you're interested in partnering for something indoors. Chiropractors' offices are a great option for *Pathways Connect* groups.

Once you've secured the venue, the date and the time, start promoting! You need at least two weeks prior to an event date to begin promoting, but more time never hurts. These days, there are so many events happening on Facebook nearly every day that it becomes inundating for some, so the more time you give people to commit the better the chances of them actually showing up. You will be responsible for designing the Facebook event page and any flyers to distribute locally. I have used programs like Microsoft Word and Microsoft Publisher along with free stock photos online to design graphics for promotional materials, but you will have your own style and process. You will need an image for each event photo and flyer. Pictures that are eye catching help draw in attention as opposed to a wall of text.

For my group in Cape Coral, I also need an image to replace the Pathways Connect SWFL Facebook group banner. Any time there is a new event, we put the details on the banner image so that it's the first thing our members see in the group. You could even use the same image for both the event page and the banner. Write up a description for the event and include that on the event page as well as the flyer along with date, time and location details. When you've finished the flyers have them printed and begin distribution. I have found it helpful to have both the event flyer and the meeting flyer for any given month printed at the same time so that I can distribute them simultaneously.

Locations for flyer posting depends heavily on the target market. We're looking for people in the area who are interested in holistic healthcare, conscious parenting, and improved lifestyles, many of whom may have never heard of *Pathways Connect*. Some good places to find new people are in health food stores and restaurants, shops selling sustainable and organic merchandise, libraries and coffee shops. Basically, you're visiting local businesses and asking them if they wouldn't mind helping to spread the word about your event and support a totally awesome organization. Most people don't mind and are

happy to oblige. Libraries are a great place to reach people, however they usually only allow flyers for non-profits, as do many business chains like Starbucks or Panera. So, be sure to convey that Pathways is a non-profit organization. I have found with many franchises such as GNC and other vitamin chains that they typically don't allow flyers of any kind. When in doubt, ask an employee and it will lead you to an answer. If it seems the flyers aren't yielding results at your regular posting locations, this is a good opportunity to broaden your horizons and try some new places. You can research businesses anywhere in the area and pay them a visit.

Children are always welcome to the events and when people ask if they're allowed to bring children to an adult education meeting, we respond by saying that we trust them to use their judgement on what would be best for them and their child. We typically never exclude children from any Pathways activity. The whole point is to remove barriers that keep people from accessing social connections, and childcare is a very real limitation for many families, especially those who practice attachment parenting or breastfeed exclusively.