Many kinds of connections between the OSHC service you work for and the community are important. These include connections with:

- people, places and businesses to enrich the children's experience
- other services and professionals who are concerned about supporting families and children
- other OSHC services
- networks and organisations that advocate for OSHC and provide professional development, supports and resources.

Why are connections important? Because an OSHC service can't do a good job in isolation. Staff need to be supported and to have access to additional advice and help when situations arise that require expertise, knowledge and skills they don't have. Also connections with the community will provide additional opportunities for the service in the form of resource people, places to go, materials and equipment. Most importantly, giving children in OSHC the opportunity to be out in the community or to have members of the community come into the service means that through their experiences in OSHC children are learning lessons about citizenship, what it means to be part of a community and how rewarding it feels to make a positive contribution to the lives of others. These lessons will serve them well as they get older.

Using the community and acknowledging the links you have is also a kind of advocacy, in that through working with others you increase their knowledge and appreciation of OSHC. In other words, it is good marketing and public relations.

In addition, you benefit both as a professional and as a community member yourself. You learn new skills and knowledge that make you a more effective OSHC professional, and as a member of the community you feel a stronger connection.

Take the time to stand back and think about all the connections your OSHC service has. Which connections are most valuable? What new ones can be forged? What are the service’s greatest unmet needs? Can any of these be met through links with the community?

Making visible links – taking children out into the community and bringing the community in can start on a small scale. Think about spaces and places nearby – can they be used to enhance the children’s experience? Remember that it isn’t always necessary to take the whole group away from the service. It may be easier, more appropriate and a more successful outing if only a few children go. For example, what shops are nearby? Parks? Libraries? Council facilities? Think creatively. Are there supplies or other people’s junk or rubbish that might be useful for children to use?

Bringing people in to the service is usually easier than taking a group of children out. Who in the service (it might be staff, management, or families of children) knows an entertainer, a musician, an artist, a gardener, an athlete, an adventurer, someone with an interesting job, someone with an amazing story to tell, who might be willing to come in and share their talent, interest or story with children? Again, think creatively about possibilities.

When you think about making new connections or strengthening existing ones, start with your sponsoring organisation. Does it operate other services with which stronger connections would be useful? If it is a school, what kinds of mutually beneficial links can be forged?

For children to learn about citizenship, it’s important not to focus just on what the community can give to them. It is also important to instil the rewards that can come from making a contribution to the community. Think of worthwhile ways that children in your OSHC can use their energies, ideas and talents to benefit the community in general or a specific group or individual within the community. For example, the children could grow plants from seeds for an aged care facility, make a banner advertising a community event or collect tinned food to donate to a charity. The possibilities are endless. When there are contributions to the service by individuals or organisations, children can organise and create expressions of thanks.
Effective connections with the community start with having a mind-set that they are important. It may be that the OSHC service will need to take the initiative to make the link. The effort is usually worth it.

Questions and reflections
1. Think back over the past fortnight. What connections have been evident in the operation of the service? How important are these?
2. What links would you like to strengthen?
3. What connections can you initiate that would help the service?
4. What are the ways in which you link children and the community? How can you improve on these?