Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness

Head Start and Early Head Start programs help families experiencing homelessness move to a more stable situation by providing comprehensive supports and a healthy environment for early childhood development and by building strong partnerships with other service providers. This promising practice resource focuses on the way Head Start and Early Head Start grantees are effectively using partnerships to serve homeless children and how other service providers can build relationships with their local Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Evidence from partnerships around the country has shown that these reciprocal relationships help foster an environment of healthy development for young children experiencing homelessness and help move families out of homelessness.

This resource will:

- Provide background information on Head Start and Early Head Start programs;

- Share highlights of how strong partnerships have addressed family homelessness;

- Offer resources to encourage Head Start grantees and housing service providers to work together to expand services for children experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness; and

- Present resources to help providers connect families to other services they may need.

The comprehensive services provided by Head Start and Early Head Start programs are well suited to address family homelessness. Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide a range of health, mental health, educational, and other social service supports in order to counteract the negative impacts that homelessness has on early childhood health and development. Head Start and Early Head Start programs also connect families experiencing homelessness with a host of other services they may need to help them move out of homelessness and into permanent housing. In 2007, the passage of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act identified homeless children as categorically eligible for Early Head Start/Head Start services and provided priority enrollment to Head Start and Early Head Start programs. While Head Start and Early Head

Start programs had already been serving families experiencing homelessness, many responded to the legislation and built strong partnerships with other social service providers in order to be more effective at addressing family homelessness.[1] In 2012-2013 alone, Head Start served 46,800 families experiencing homelessness and assisted 15,696 families in finding safe, stable housing.

Family homelessness affects over 1.6 million children without adequate shelter at some point throughout the year[2]. The 2013 Department of

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[1] The percentage of families experiencing homelessness that were enrolled in Head Start rose by an average of 70.4% from 2008-2011, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *2010-11 Head Start Program Information Report, Family Information Report Multi Year Report – State Level.*

[2] Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest

Housing & Urban Development Point–in-Time Count showed that, while overall homeless numbers have decreased from 2007-2013; the number of families experiencing homelessness fell at a slower rate.[3] This is especially important to Head Start and Early Head Start programs because family homelessness has harmful effects on the development of young children, including:

- A higher prevalence of physical disabilities, developmental delays, emotional problems, and behavioral issues[4]
- Stress levels high enough to trigger harmful biochemical impacts on developing children[5] - also known as "toxic stress"
- Little or no positive interaction with adults due to the tremendous challenges faced by parents experiencing homelessness[6]

On the whole, families experiencing homelessness are similar to other very low-income families. Research has shown that the depth of social service supports has a greater impact than family demographics (e.g. family size, education level) on whether families experiencing homelessness quickly move to a more stable situation.[7] Research has also shown that a homeless child's ability to manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, problem solve, plan, and execute -- all of which are developed in Head Start and Early Head Start programs -- greatly impacts their level of resilience to negative outcomes.[8] Head Start and Early Head Start programs are in a unique position to address family homelessness due to the potential impact of comprehensive supports provided and the potential to help homeless children increase their level of resilience to the negative effects of homelessness on their development.

Background on Head Start and Early Head Start (HS/EHS)

Head Start (HS) was created in 1964 as a central piece of the War on Poverty. It was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with comprehensive programming to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. A key tenet of the program was that it be culturally responsive to the communities served. Communities ought to have an investment in the program's success through the contribution of volunteer hours and other donations that total at least 20% of program costs, which are the required non-Federal share that programs must contribute. Early Head Start (EHS) was created in 1995 to serve pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.

Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011.

[3] Henry, Meghan, Dr. Alvaro Cortes, Sean Morris, and Abt Associates. The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. 2013.

[4] Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011; Tumaini R. Coker, Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. "Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness Among Fifth-Grade Students." American Journal of Public Health 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009.

[5] Bassuk, E. L., Volk, K. T., & Olivet, J. "A framework for developing supports and services for families experiencing homelessness." The Open Health Services and Policy Journal, 3, 34-40. 2010.

[6] Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011.

[7] Culhane, Dennis, Stephen Metraux, Jung Min Park, Maryanne Schretzman, and Jesse Valente. "Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning." Housing Policy Debate 18(1): 1-28, 2007.

[8] Buckner, J. C., E. Mezzacappa, & W. Beardslee. "Characteristics of resilient youths living in poverty: The role of self-regulatory processes." Development and Psychopathology, 15, 139-162. 2003; Masten, A. S., Herbers, J. E., Desjardins, C. D., Cutuli, J. J., McCormick, C. M., Sapienza, J. K., . . . Zelazo, P. D. "Executive function skills and school success in young children experiencing homelessness." Educational Researcher 41(9), 375-384. 2012.; J. Obradović. "Effortful control and adaptive functioning of homeless children: Variable-focused and person-focused analyses." Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31, 109-117. 2010.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are comprehensive, two-generational programs that serve children from birth to age five, as well as pregnant women and their families. Children of the appropriate age can be eligible because their families meet either federal poverty guidelines or are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In addition, Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to implement policies and procedures to ensure that homeless children are identified and receive priority for enrollment. Head Start has served more than 30 million children since 1965, growing from an eight-week demonstration project to include full-day/full-year services and many program options. Currently, Head Start is administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start serves over a million children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories, including American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Migrant/Seasonal communities.

Background on Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Housing Assistance Programs

Although the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) runs numerous programs related to housing assistance, it is especially important that Head Start and Early Head Start grantees understand major programs that could impact families including those operated by local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs), Continuum of Care (CoC) program, and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program. These programs provide a broad array of services to low income and homeless individuals and families that range from homeless prevention financial assistance and services, to short, medium, and long term housing solutions, and homeless system coordination that standardizes access to community resources. Among the many challenges that accompany housing instability, many of the families in these programs likely have limited access to high quality early child care and learning programs.

HUD's office of Public and Indian Housing provides funding to PHAs to manage many different types of housing assistance including tenant-based Housing Choice Vouchers and vouchers in traditional public housing units. Local PHAs provide vouchers and other assistance based on income level, with preference given to individuals or families who are low income (80% of area median income) or very low income (50% of area median income). Local PHAs also have the power to give preference to certain groups of people, including families who are experiencing homelessness. These vouchers are permanent and stay with the family as long as they continue to meet all program requirements.

The CoC program provides funding to local communities, organized as "Continuums of Care," through an annual competition that awards projects that operate Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, Supportive Services, grants to operate the local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and small community planning grants. Housing and service eligibility is based on HUD's definition of homeless and at imminent risk of homelessness with some variation depending on the type of project. Apart from housing and services, continuums are required to maintain a database in their HMIS of all persons being served, conduct an annual point in time count of

homeless persons within their geographical territory, and to develop and implement a coordinated assessment system to standardized the access and assessment of all persons that enter the system and to coordinate all of the referrals for housing and services.

The [ESG] program provides funding based on a formula to states and local governments to prevent homeless for households at risk of homelessness through services and financial assistance, to immediately resolve a housing crisis through the development and operation of emergency shelters that include services, and to end homelessness by rapidly re-housing individuals and families. ESG grant recipients and sub-recipients are also required to participate in their local CoC, to jointly conduct needs assessments and strategic plans, to coordinate with the point in time count, and to participate in the communities coordinated assessment system.

Both CoC and ESG recipients, together with PHAs and other local stakeholders, are tasked with promoting the strategic use of community resources to address homelessness, coordinate these resources with other government and private programs, and improve data collection and performance measurements related to local homelessness. Although Head Start and Early Head Start programs do not receive funding from the CoC or ESG programs, they are eligible to participate on local CoC boards and committees in order to aid in community planning around strategic use of resources for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Definition of *Homeless* Used by HS/EHS

HS/EHS follows the definition of *homeless children* established in Sec. 725 of the [McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Act]. The Act defines *homeless children* as children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and includes:

(i) children who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

(iii) children who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Head Start and Early Head Start Programs Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

Supporting the well-being of young children and their families who experience or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness (see above) is critical to meeting families' immediate needs and improving long-term educational outcomes for children. Head Start and Early Head Start programs play an important role in ending incidences of family homelessness through community coordination, collaboration, and long-term partnerships. These partnerships look different depending on the needs of the community and families served by Head Start grantees. Three types of partnerships that allow Head Start to serve a high percentage of homeless families and assist them in finding housing are highlighted in the next section. Since Head Start is a community-based program, the following examples represent just a few of the many forms of creative collaborations Head Start and Early Head Start programs undertake.

Partnerships with Housing Assistance Providers

Telamon Buen Inc. Pastor Ministries

Some Head Start and Early Head Start programs partner with organizations to help families find housing. *Telamon Buen Inc. Pastor Ministries*, a Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program in Holland, MI, works closely with the National Farmworker Jobs Program to help migrant farmworkers. *Telamon Buen, Inc.* assesses a family's housing status when they enroll and reaches out to the National Farmworker Jobs Program to find the family housing, if needed. In 2013, *Telamon Buen, Inc.* served approximately 115 children experiencing homelessness and all were able to find safe, stable housing.

Telamon Buen, Inc. is able to effectively serve families experiencing homelessness because the family service staff conducts outreach in areas where many families are likely to spend time, such as the laundromat. In addition, *Telamon Buen, Inc.* has close relationships with the staff at the National Farmworker Jobs Program, local shelters, and a network of family service providers that discuss successful practices for serving families experiencing homelessness.

Telamon Buen, Inc. is just one example of the many HS/EHS programs that have relationships with housing agencies and providers in their community. See below for actions that Head Start and Early Head Start programs and housing providers can take to improve collaboration between their programs.

Actions Housing Providers can take to partner with HS/EHS programs	Actions other HS/EHS Programs can take to partner with Housing Providers
• Visit the Head Start Locator to find area HS/EHS programs • Set up meetings with local HS/EHS program directors and staff to see how you can collaborate across programs • Provide your clients with HS/EHS enrollment forms • Invite HS/EHS program directors and staff to Continuum of Care (CoC) meetings • Work with HS/EHS programs to review data on the number of homeless families in the community, identify needs, and create action plans that include an annual goal for providing housing to homeless families enrolled in HS/EHS • Create a MOU that formalizes your organization's relationship with HS/EHS	• Get Involved with your local Continuum of Care (CoC) • Set up meetings with local service providers, local affordable housing providers, and your local public housing agency to see how you can collaborate across programs • Connect homeless families with local housing programs • Work with housing programs to review data on the number of homeless families in the community, identify needs, and create action plans that include an annual goal for providing housing to homeless families enrolled in HS/EHS • Create a MOU that formalizes your organization's relationship with housing providers

Partnerships with Emergency Shelter Providers

Connecticut Head Start-Family Shelter Teams

Some Head Start programs have designed partnerships with targeted services for children and families experiencing homelessness. The Connecticut Head Start State Collaboration Office coordinated eight Head Start programs who teamed with 11 Department of Social Services Family Shelters to ensure that

shelters were safe and developmentally appropriate for children. The teams worked together to enroll children in Head Start or other early childhood programs. Together, each Head Start–Family Shelter Team completed a Head Start-Family Shelter Self-Assessment Checklist that focused on seven key areas: physical environment, policies on young children and families, qualified workforce, programming, funding, tracking and evaluation, and building awareness.

Head Start–Family Shelter Teams each developed an action plan to address areas to be strengthened. They worked together to enroll all children birth to age five into Head Start, Early Head Start or other quality early childhood program and provided supports to ensure stable attendance. Each team completed another assessment and action plan at the midpoint and then again at the end of the project to determine enhancements and to make additional purchases to improve the shelter spaces for young children.

Head Start of Greater Dallas

Another example of a targeted, more intentionally designed partnership took place between Head Start programs and homeless shelters in Dallas. *Head Start of Greater Dallas* in Texas sub-awards Head Start dollars to the Vogel Alcove Center's preschool program. Vogel Alcove Center provides child care for families who are staying in one of twenty-one emergency shelters in the Dallas areas. Vogel Alcove uses Head Start funds to cover the costs of 40 children and provide these children and their families with extensive case management, parenting classes, and developmentally specific programming for children in need of such services. Vogel Alcove's staff works with community partners to help parents locate housing and t to help their children be ready for success in school. Before the families transition from Head Start, family supports and resources are identified. Vogel Alcove also supports families for one year after they transition out of their program.

The work being done in Dallas and Connecticut highlights that partnerships between homeless shelters and HS/EHS programs can have positive impacts on children experiencing homelessness. See below for actions that HS/EHS programs and shelters can take to improve collaboration between their programs.

Actions Shelters can take to partner with HS/EHS Programs	***Actions other HS/EHS Programs can take to partner with Emergency Shelters***
• Visit the Head Start Locator to find area HS/EHS programs • Set up meetings with local HS/EHS program directors and develop a plan for connecting families at the shelter to HS/EHS programs • Provide your clients with HS/EHS enrollment forms • Invite HS/EHS program directors and staff to Continuum of Care (CoC) meetings • Invite a HS/EHS program director to the shelter and to give recommendations on making the space more developmentally appropriate for young children • Create a MOU that formalizes your organization's relationship with HS/EHS	• Get involved with your local Continuum of Care (CoC) • Set up meetings with local shelter providers and identify ways in which both organizations can improve services for children staying at the shelter • Provide homeless families with information on emergency shelters • Share resources on early childhood development (including activities, childproofing, and developmental screening tools) with shelter providers • Invite shelter and CoC members to staff trainings • Create a MOU that formalizes your organization's relationship with HS/EHS •

Partnerships with Local Education Agencies

Kids & Company

In addition to partnering with housing and social services, Head Start programs also partner with local educational agencies (school districts). In Linn County, OR*, Kids & Company* Head Start works closely with the local school district's McKinney-Vento liaisons (see text box) to identify children in need of services. Family advocate staffs, who work to meet family needs, are continuously in touch with their school district counterparts to ensure that they are aware of all families in the area already identified as experiencing homelessness. *Kids & Company* also utilizes the McKinney-Vento liaisons to make families aware of services available in Head Start and Early Head Start. Many of the families in this community do not identify themselves as homeless, so they work hard to make sure that all staff understand the definition of homelessness. *Kids & Company* conducts regular training for staff on homelessness; including training by McKinney-Vento liaisons and training conducted by housing providers. To ensure that they are reaching all children experiencing homelessness, they ask specific questions through the enrollment process to identify families who may not self-identify but are eligible for Head Start under the McKinney-Vento Act definition.

Kids & Company is just one example of how Head Start and Early Head Start programs and local educational agencies can work together to make sure children experiencing homelessness have access to early learning opportunities. See below for actions that Head Start and Early Head Start programs and local educational agencies can take to improve collaboration between their programs.

Actions Local Education Agencies can take to partner with HS/EHS Programs	Actions other HS/EHS Programs can take to partner with Local Education Agencies
• Visit the Head Start Locator to find area HS/EHS programs • Set up meeting with local HS/EHS program directors and develop a plan for connecting families to HS/EHS programs • Ask families experiencing homelessness who have school-aged children if they also have children ages birth through five and connect them to local HS/EHS programs • Make sure all staff know the definition of *homelessness* used by HS/EHS (see textbox above)	• Find out who the local liaison is in your area by contacting the school district switchboard or your State Coordinator for Homeless Education. • Set up meetings with the local school district's McKinney-Vento homeless education liaison to discuss how to better connect homeless infants and toddlers to HS/EHS • Tell parents and school-aged siblings of HS/EHS children about the education liaison at their school • Make sure all staff know the definition of *homelessness* used by HS/EHS (see textbox above)

How Do Collaborations Begin?

According to the North Central Regional Education Laboratory, "Comprehensive partnerships begin because individuals reach out to like-minded people and groups to address issues that affect children and families." There are many catalysts for collaborations, including unmet needs in the community and new staff members at an organization. Once these catalysts are identified, the next step is to reach out to a potential new partner. When identifying these potential partners, it may be helpful to ask the following questions:

- Which stakeholders have an interest in the partnership you are planning?

- Who might be willing to join your collaboration? Will the attitudes and culture of the organization and the community support the partnership?

- Are potential partners willing to share their resources and capacities?

- How do the interests of each potential partner fit into the broader collaboration?

Answering these questions will help to develop a strategy for identifying potential partners and framing the opportunity to collaboration in a manner that reflects their interests. Reaching out with a clear idea of what you are asking of a potential partner is an important first step in turning potential partnerships into effective collaborations.[9]

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[9] Visit http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/css/ppt/chap1.htm for more information on building effective collaborations

Conclusion

Around the country, Head Start and Early Head Start programs have made their comprehensive services more accessible to families experiencing homelessness by partnering with housing providers, homeless shelters, local educational agencies, and other community-based organizations. These partnerships are vital to help homeless families connect with other services in the community they may need. Head Start and Early Head Start programs staff, homeless and housing providers, and state and local educators can learn from the programs and practices described in this paper in order to develop mutually beneficial partnerships that expand access to services for families experiencing homelessness. Following are some considerations and resources to support increased coordination and collaboration between Head Start and Early Head Start programs and local service providers.

Review of Resources

Steps HS/EHS programs can take to partner with homeless and housing service providers:

✓ Get involved in your local Continuum of Care (CoC).[10]

✓ Build relationships with:

    ✓ Local service providers (e.g. soup kitchens, job training programs, shelters);[11]

    ✓ Local affordable housing providers;[12] and

    ✓ The local school district's McKinney-Vento homeless education liaison.[13]

✓ Talk with families experiencing homelessness who are using your services to see if they can identify barriers to accessing Head Start, Early Head Start, and homeless services.

✓ Take advantage of the Office of Head Start's Interactive Homelessness Lessons.

✓ Review the 2013 ACF Policy Package, "Increasing Early Childcare and Education Services for Homeless Children."

Steps homeless and housing service providers can take to partner with HS/EHS programs:

✓ Visit the Head Start Locator to find a Head Start or Early Head Start program near you.

✓ Keep in mind that homeless children are a priority for Head Start and Early Head Start.

✓ Learn about the services that Head Start and Early Head Start provide for children, families, and the community.

✓ If you are a member of a HUD Continuum of Care, consider inviting your local Head Start or Early Head Start program to present at a meeting or participate on a committee.

✓ Work with HS/EHS to set an annual goal around serving homeless families with young children in the community.

✓ Review the 2013 ACF Policy Package, "Increasing Early Childcare and Education Services for Homeless Children."

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[10] Visit https://www.onecpd.info/grantees/?granteesaction=main.searchresults&programid=3 to find your local CoC
[11] Many of these organizations will likely be a part of your local CoC.
[12] Visit http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts to find your local Public Housing Agency
[13] Visit http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php for a list of state McKinney-Vento coordinators, who can connect you with local liaisons

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