Building Early Links to Learning (BELL): Summary Overview of Key Learnings from Parent and Provider Focus Groups

The Cloudburst Group

BELL Community Forum
March 16, 2017
Objectives and Recruitment

Objectives

• Design and conduct a series of focus groups with parents/guardians of young children who are experiencing homelessness and residing in Philadelphia-area ES/TH programs, as well as local ECE/CC and ES/TH providers
• Help BELL Team identify and apply lessons learned from focus group analysis in enhancing cross-systems policies, practices, and training

Participant Recruitment

• Parents/Guardians – Collaborated with local homeless service providers. Utilized flyers and sign up sheets
• Housing Providers – Utilized email invites
• Provision of gift certificates to participating parents as incentive, at time of focus group
Summary of Participant Data

- 33 Parents/Guardians participating in 4 focus groups
  - 88% female
  - 82% African American
  - 67% 20-29 years old
  - 97% single/never married

- 19 staff members from Homeless Services or Early Childhood Education Programs participating in 3 focus groups
Key Findings Emerging from PARENTAL Reflections and Dialogue

- Parental Perspectives on Quality Care
- Special Challenges Facing Homeless Parents
- Challenges in Dealing with Early Childhood Education System
- Issues in Identifying and Accessing Appropriate Early Childhood Education
- Dealing with CCIS
- Parental Perspectives on Role of Housing Crisis Service Providers and ECE
Key Findings Emerging from PROVIDER Reflections and Dialogue

- Provider Perspectives on Access to Care
- Special Challenges Facing Homeless Parents
- Challenges in Dealing with Early Childhood Education System
- Role of Housing Providers and Early Childhood Education Providers
Practice Recommendations – Housing Crisis Services Providers

- Address needs of families for useful, comprehensive, and up-to-date information about quality ECE options
- Address needs of families for access to quality ECE options “close to home” (both temporary and permanent)
- Provide active/ongoing training for housing crisis staff/case managers on ECE issues, resources, and systems protocols
- Develop and consistently implement ECE assessment and referral protocols that promote parental access to affordable, accessible, quality ECE settings
- Facilitate/nurture parental skills in working with children on both cognitive and social development while in housing crisis settings
Practice Recommendations – Early Childhood Education Providers

- Recognize and respond to the centrality of trauma in homeless families’ and children’s lives
- Ensure classroom structures that support appropriate disciplinary strategies and learning environments that promote effective focus on both cognitive/social development
- Ensure presence of sufficient numbers of qualified, certified, & well-trained staff
- Ensure active and ongoing communication with homeless families participating in ECE programs
- Provide community outreach and shelter in-reach activities to inform homeless parents of ECE resources – particularly those that address challenges in dealing with enrollment/participation
Practice Recommendations – CoC and Community Homeless Response Systems

- Increase ease of access to transportation assistance to support stable participation in ECE
- Increase access to financial supports/subsidies supporting consumer enrollment in quality ECE programs
- Increase numbers of and/or access to safe, secure, affordable slots for children 0-3 -- especially infant care
- Recognize and respond to widely shared parental concerns about quality of care/trauma-informed practice
- Enhance cross-systems documentation of both parental needs and systems challenges associated with increasing access to affordable/sustainable/quality ECE
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