Enhancing Systems to Better Meet the Needs of Young Children: Services for Families Experiencing Homelessness

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“Building Early Links to Learning”
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Philadelphia, PA
Annual Percentage Rates of Shelter Use By Age (National)

Source: 2012 AHAR (HUD, 2012) and Census Data
What can we do?

- Enroll Children and Families in Head Start
- Increase Cross-Sector Collaboration
- Child-Proof Family Shelters
Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters

EARLY CHILDHOOD SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR FAMILY SHELTERS

Updated April 2015

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

A guide to support the safe and healthy development of young children in shelter settings
National Health and Safety Standards
Earlier Version – Additional Items

**Funding**
- We target some funds from our budget for basic needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers *and pregnant women*.
- We take advantage of the CACFP to help support nutritional needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers *and pregnant women*.

**Tracking and Evaluation**
- We track the number of infants, toddlers and preschoolers *and pregnant women* and monitor service trends over time.
- We track the numbers of young children who are not with their parents while staying at the shelter.

**Building Awareness**
- Our Board/community are kept aware of the needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and families *and pregnant women*.
SERVING YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

An Example of Collaborative Implementation with Head Start
Head Start: A Perfect Match for Homeless Families

- Head Start provides comprehensive services that homeless children may not otherwise receive.

- The Head Start focus on entire family means parents receive assistance in reaching their goals.

- Community partnerships put Head Start in an excellent position to work with all agencies serving homeless families.

- Head Start programs are required to identify and prioritize homeless children for enrollment; allow homeless children to enroll while documents are obtained; and coordinate and collaborate with McKinney-Vento liaisons.
Why Partner?

• Families in homeless service programs are among the most vulnerable
  – Early learning programs can help housing programs meet the needs of young children
  – Parents are under inordinate stress
  – Children are at a critical developmental life stage – time that cannot be recaptured.

• Homeless service providers have expertise in housing resources in the community and how to help intervene with housing crises
# General Project Design

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<th>Action plan</th>
<th>Purchase list</th>
<th>Stipend</th>
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CLEAR PROJECT GOALS

Cohort 1 – 11 Shelters
Cohort 2 – 5 Shelters + 1 Recovery
Cohort 3 – 8 Recovery

Increase Head Start enrollment
Child-proof using self-assessment
Develop & Strengthen Partnerships
ORGANIZING STRATEGIES

Head Start-Family Shelter Teams

Technical assistance, team building and cross-sector training

Structured team work

Small Grants
TOOLS & WORK PLANS

Self-Assessment Tool
Child-proofing Action Plan
Enhancement Purchase List

Progress Reporting: Head Start Enrollment, Joint Activities, Accomplishments and Barriers
Average Self-Ratings Across Time – Cohort 1
Environmental Ratings – Cohort 2

**Self-Assessment Results: Cohort 2**

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**Average Rating**

Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Family Shelters Tool
Enhanced efforts to identify and engage young children experiencing homelessness
Pictures of Change: From this......
to this
And from this......
Family style meals to this
Creating family-friendly space......

Mommy & me, Daddy & me spaces
and family-friendly time

Connected spaces for attachment and support.....
Next steps...........

Parent-Child Curricula
Recent ACF Efforts:

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 programs 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 across 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.

The 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 grantee 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 that 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 comprehensively 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.

In 2012-2013 alone, Head Start served 48,505 families experiencing homelessness and assisted 51,890 families in finding safe, stable housing.

Family homelessness affects over 1.6 million children with adequate clothing at some point throughout the year. The 2013 Department of

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Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
June 2014
ACF Summary Recommendations

- Prioritize access to services for homeless families
- Provide “grace periods” that give homeless families sufficient opportunity to gather required documentation
- Coordinate with McKinney-Vento homeless education state coordinators and local liaisons
- Work with homeless coalitions to ensure that the unique needs of young children are well represented
Thank you all for all you do..........Godspeed