

2012



Lesson 5: Partnering with Families

Mini-workbook



Updated 1/31/2012

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About the Mini-workbooks

The **mini-workbooks** are designed to use with the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). The mini-workbooks are optional. You can successfully complete the Web version of the lessons without this resource. However, the mini-workbooks offer a multidimensional learning experience for programs who want to use the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* as a training tool with groups of staff. You will find that the mini-workbooks point to the Web version to find answers and to discover more information.

The **Explore Information** tab in the Web version of each Lesson contains information, resources and materials to support your knowledge gathering and knowledge sharing. Some of the resources that are listed in the Web version are also included in the mini-workbooks. The computer symbol  indicates resources that are included in the Web version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons*. This symbol  indicates resources that are included in the mini-workbook version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons*. These symbols are used in the table on the next page.

Throughout the mini-workbook you will be asked to share your thoughts in the “Idea Box”. The light bulb is the symbol for the idea box.

This symbol  precedes instructions that direct you to a particular section of the Web version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* for answers and for more information.

The Web version can be found on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). The instructions on page 6 display how to access the ***Interactive Homelessness Lessons***.

The ***Interactive Homelessness Lessons*** take account of many real-life scenarios that may occur in programs and communities. The Lessons include a myriad of useful resources to support your learning and discovery of new strategies and ideas as you work with families experiencing homelessness.

In ***Lesson 5: Partnering with Families***, Marco Beltran talks about the importance of providing support to families in crisis situations.

In this lesson, you are asked to record useful ideas and strategies that you can refer to as you interact with families in homeless situations. You will hear parents share their experiences with homelessness. You will also hear from the staff who supported the parents. You will then record your ideas in the “Idea Box”.

About the Mini-workbooks (continued)

Resources that are listed in the Explore Information section of Lesson 5 are included in this table:

Lesson 5: Partnering with Families	
Legal Definition of Homelessness	 
Ideas for Partnering with Families	
Strategies for Partnering with Families	 
Family Partnership Agreements	
Voices from the Field	 

How to Access the Interactive Homelessness Lessons on the ECLKC

The Interactive Homelessness Lessons can be found on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).

1. Enter ECLKC.ohs.acf.hhs.gov in the browser. After the ECLKC page appears, enter 'Interactive Homelessness Lessons' in the search box. Click on 'search'.



2. Select the Interactive Homelessness Lessons icon.



3. Welcome to the Interactive Homelessness Lessons page will appear.



4. Go to the **Partnering with Families** tab.

Why Partnering with Families is Important

When a family is in the throes of experiencing a crisis, their problem-solving strategies may not be as clear cut as when they encounter everyday life situations. As a result the family may feel anxious, vulnerable or overwhelmed.

Staff may not know when a family is experiencing a crisis such as homelessness. It is important to create a program environment that continually promotes compassion, support, mutual trust and respect so that families feel staff are available to support them during their time of crisis.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards state that:

1304.40(a)(1)-

Grantee and delegate agencies must engage in a process of collaborative partnership-building with parents to establish mutual trust and to identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services and other supports...

1304.40(b)(1)-

Grantee and delegate agencies must work collaboratively with all participating parents to identify and continually access, either directly or through referrals, services and resources that are responsive to each family's interests and goals, including:

1304.40(b)(1)(i)-

Emergency or crisis assistance in areas such as food, housing, clothing and transportation.

Legal Definition of Homelessness

According to section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)), the term “homeless children and youths”—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence ...;
and

(B) includes—

(i) children and youths 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 accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths 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 and youths 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 for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Children and youth are considered homeless if they fit both part A and any one of the subparts of part B of the definition above.

What is the Meaning of Fixed, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Residence?

Fixed, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Residence

Fixed nighttime residence: Stationary, permanent, and not subject to change.

Regular nighttime residence: Used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis.

Adequate nighttime residence: Sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.

Legal Definition of Homelessness (continued)

What is Substandard Housing?

What is Substandard Housing?

The Office of Head Start Policy Clarification (OHS-PC- I-0) states:

“...In determining whether a child is living in "substandard housing", Head Start staff must evaluate whether the child's housing situation falls short of community standards or is of lower quality than the law prescribes. Staff should consider factors such as whether there are health and safety concerns related to the housing; the number of occupants per square foot; the age(s) of the occupants; and whether the housing meets State or local building codes. Does a comparison of the housing in question with community norms and laws lead staff to conclude that it is lower than what community norms or laws require?...”

Excerpt from Informal Guidance, May 8, 2008

Strategies for Partnering with Families

The high mobility and trauma associated with families experiencing homelessness may necessitate different approaches to partnering with these families. Families in homeless situations are often overwhelmed with what is happening in their lives and they can benefit from support and help in setting priorities. These families are often less likely to volunteer in the classroom, participate in parent meetings, attend parent-teacher conferences, or serve on policy councils. They often have extensive demands on their time, which limits the amount of time they can be involved in Head Start. In addition to supporting families experiencing homelessness, Head Start staff should also pay attention to self-care to prevent or reduce stress and burnout.

Challenge	Strategy
Develop relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make home visits available for conducting parent conferences. • Ensure that staff, particularly family advocates or family services staff, develop close relationships with families so that the families view attendance at meetings or events as an opportunity to meet with staff they know. • Be flexible and non-judgmental when working with families. For example, just telling a parent that a child needs to go to the dentist may not be enough. Staff may need to tell a parent several times or even make the appointment and accompany the parent and child to the appointment.
Involve families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold meetings at times and locations that accommodate the schedules of families experiencing homelessness. For example, in the evenings and at the shelters where they live. • Structure meetings as social occasions and offer food and child care as part of the gathering. • Use parent meetings as opportunities for parents to talk about what is going on in their lives rather than as instructional events. • Develop ways for parents to be involved without being in the classroom. For example, riding the bus with their child, assisting on the bus as a monitor, creating a parent handbook for the bus, or recording books and songs on tape to be played in the classroom. • Establish a mutually determined contract with families for them to contribute a specific number of hours each month if they are working or in training, or each week if they are not.
Support families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with social services departments or shelters so that families can obtain work or volunteer credits for the hours they work in the classroom. • Hire a parent who is experiencing homelessness to serve as a program advocate responsible for increasing parent involvement. • Provide services related to developing self-sufficiency such as workshops on job readiness, career planning, and time and

Challenge	Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financial management. • Work with families to develop individualized goals and help them become motivated to meet those goals. • Establish relationships with local businesses willing to hire the parents. • Assist families experiencing homeless with obtaining housing.
Train staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing specialized training for meeting the needs of families experiencing homelessness. • Provide informal training through staff meetings, in-service training, and contacts with specialists in areas such as mental health, child development, and working with children with special needs.
Practice self-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice self-care as a preventive measure. • Encourage staff to regularly monitor their stress level and its impact. • Recognize warning signs of stress such as increased occurrence of the following: feeling guilty for taking time off or never taking time off; having difficulty thinking positively; having strong reactions to minor stresses; not looking forward to your work; not performing well at work; not sleeping well; having more arguments or conflicts; and/or decreasing your social life. • Incorporate self-care activities in everyday life (see below). • Encourage staff to remember why they do the work they do and what motivates them. • For more information on self-care, refer to <i>What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others</i> by The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008.

Record Your Ideas

Step 1:

- ➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 5: Partnering with Families- Yvonne's Story***. As you listen to Yvonne Andersen share her experience with homelessness, think about how you can partner with her family.

Step 2:

- ➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 5: Partnering with Families- Yvonne's Story - Record Your Ideas***. As you listen to Kim Garcia, Family Advocate, think about how she partners with families. Review her strategies and, as appropriate, add them to your idea box.

Step 3:

- ➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 5: Partnering with Families - Sara's Story***. As you listen to Sara Villavicencio share her experience with homelessness, think about how you can partner with her family.

Step 4:

- ➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 5: Partnering with Families - Sara's Story - Record Your Ideas***. As you listen to Dora McKean, Home-Based Educator, think about how she partners with families. Review her strategies and, as appropriate, add them to your idea box.

Step 5:

Brainstorm more ideas with colleagues and add them to your idea box.

Step 6:

Think about how you will use the ideas you recorded when you work with families experiencing homelessness.

Step 7:

Keep your ideas available and refer to them as you work with families.

Worksheet: Ideas for Partnering with Families



Key Points About Partnering With Families

In this lesson, you listened to stories of families who experienced homelessness. They described their situations and how Head Start offered support. You also heard from the Head Start family advocate and the home-based educator who worked with the Andersen and Villavicencio families. They described how they partnered with families and the strategies they found to be important, such as:

- Providing compassionate support and letting the families know they were not alone;
- Encouraging and validating their strengths;
- Helping set priorities;
- Identifying resources and helping them access community agencies;
- Providing comprehensive services; and
- Ensuring continuity of care and consistency in personnel working with them.

Families experiencing homelessness are facing a crisis and may not be able to handle situations as they usually do. In the introductory video, I described the anxiety-ridden responses of families in crisis as defined by Doctors Howard and Libbie Parad. In this lesson, think about Kim and Dora and how they considered these anxiety-ridden responses as they worked with families in homeless situations.

In a similar manner, we must be receptive, responsive, and respectful in our working with families.

Remember that serving children experiencing homelessness is crucial to our mission of serving the neediest children in our country. Together let's continue to make Head Start and Early Head Start a reality for as many families in homeless situations as we can.

-Office of Head Start

Voices from the Field

- **An urban program in Indiana uses a holistic approach**

Indianapolis, Indiana tries to assist families to the fullest that they can. They refer many families to their community partners. They prepare the family and explain what to expect when their child transitions from Head Start to kindergarten. They let families know whom to contact at the school district if they should experience homelessness again or if they are not currently out of that situation. They work closely with families to assign them housing and refer them to other agencies for employment assistance and education. They want the family to transition from the program well-equipped to prevent this situation from occurring again.

- **A rural program in Alabama uses a family advocate**

Cheaha wants to link people immediately to emergency services. They use a comprehensive approach to help make the family stable and self-sufficient by using a family advocate who tries to address the unique needs of each family that is experiencing homelessness. For example, if a family needs food, then the family advocate contacts the food bank or other community resource that will help them.

- **A suburban program in Los Angeles works with families to develop a plan**

At the time of enrollment, the Norwalk/LaMirada family service worker conducts a family assessment and has a one-on-one communication with the family. If the family wants to develop a plan to get an apartment, perhaps in a different area where the rents may be lower, Norwalk/LaMirada works with the family to develop a family plan.

Norwalk/LaMirada builds a relationship with the family and tailors services to the family's needs – for example, help in acquiring their own place.

- **An urban program in Ohio uses volunteers and encourages parents to volunteer**

The Child Development Council of Franklin County (CDCFC) Head Start in Columbus, Ohio has a homeless shelter in the YWCA, which is a state-of-the-art building. They

have lots of volunteers and support groups that come there and either work with the families or do activities with the children. The CDCFC also encourages parents to actively participate – in parent meetings, volunteering, reading to the children, and participating on Policy Council.

- **A rural program in Michigan helps make accommodations for families experiencing homelessness**

The communities in northeastern Michigan are small, so people know each other. Often, staff are able to support families experiencing homelessness through the collaborations already established with other programs and businesses in the area, or by their personal reputations and connections. For example, staff may ask a landlord to reduce rent in exchange for the family doing lawn work, or staff may provide references or assurances that would aid the family in waiving a security deposit.

- **A rural program in Alabama provides training**

Cheaha has established relationships with some of the local banks, which provide training for parents on how to save money, how to get their credit reports cleared, and how to apply for Habitat for Humanity or the Fannie Mae program. The training program includes topics such as saving, the importance of saving consistently, and budgeting. Cheaha also helps with other areas, such as nutrition and how to eat healthy eating while remaining on a budget. They provide 24/7 dad training and work with fathers and significant others to help them have an interactive relationship with their children. Cheaha does not have a large number of families experiencing homelessness so these programs are open to everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* was a collaborative project. The overarching goal, *to create a knowledge base with which Head Start and Early Head Start staff who work with families could enhance their skills and knowledge as it relates to their work with families experiencing homelessness*, was achieved through mutual sharing of ideas, time and an enormous amount of effort.

The Homelessness Workgroup played an integral role to ensure that the experiences in each lesson were far-reaching and all encompassing. The Homelessness Workgroup includes a dynamic group of knowledge experts: Kiersten Beigel (Federal Lead), Marco Beltran, Diana Bowman, Jacqueline Davis, Mary Lynne Diggs, Barbara Duffield, Shirley Fan-Chan, Carolyn Garmise, Khari Garvin, Christina Murphy, Tamara Perez, Mary Vanderwert, Sheri Watkins, and Grace Whitney.

A great debt of gratitude is extended to the Head Start/Early Head Start programs, local homeless liaisons, and Baltimore City Schools who allowed us to interview and chronicle their processes, strategies and ideas in the lessons and, in some cases, permitted their forms and other documents to be used as samples.

The Workgroup also extends a warm and sincere thank you to Yvonne Andersen and Sara Villavicencio who shared their personal experiences with homelessness, and to the staff who supported them, Kim Garcia and Dora McKean.

The Workgroup commends the Head Start Knowledge and Information Management Services (HSKIMS) team who videotaped, formatted, and designed the lessons for use on the Web.

You are encouraged to explore all that this dynamic resource has to offer.

Thank you