

Creating Safe Havens through Community Connections: Serving Expectant Families and Infants, Toddlers and Their Families Experiencing Homelessness

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Shannon: The following is a recording of the Zero to Three conference call taking place on Wednesday, May 13, 2009. Scheduled start time is one p.m. central. Conference Moderator is Ms. Amanda Perez and the conference title is Creating Safe Havens through Community Connections. Good morning everyone, and welcome to Creating Safe Havens through Community Connections conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time I would like to turn the conference over to Ms. Amanda Perez. Please go ahead, ma'am.

Amanda: Thank you so much Shannon and hello to everyone out there. I want to welcome all of you on behalf of the Early Headstart Childhood Resource Center to our audio conference today. This is the second, now, in our two part series on homelessness. Today on our line we have a variety of folks: program staff from across the country as well as federal staff and training and technical assistance providers. And as Shannon said, you all are being recorded -- or we all are being recorded -- as we go through this we are so happy to have everyone with us.

You should have your materials for this audio conference in front of you and as we said on the last call, there are many issues that staff are helping families negotiate as they cope with homelessness and in this two part series our goal is to address as many as we can. Part one aired in March and should be available on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center by mid-summer. Rest assured, though, you don't need to have participated on part one to participate here.

We are glad to have you, you newbies, and that call I want to tell you focused on more clinical aspects of serving young children experiencing homelessness. Here's what we'll focus on today and I just want to have you all turn to page one of your materials where our objectives are listed.

We'll include more conversation today on the federal definition of homelessness, we'll offer some information on common questions about working under the Head Start Program Performance Standards to serve families with young children experiencing homelessness, and we'll talk about community partnerships related to serving homeless families as well. We have about an hour of discussion among panelists and then the operator will come on with instructions for calling in with questions or comments.

Okay? So we look forward to having you join the discussion then. We have a really expert panel for you to hear from today and I am going to have them introduce themselves and we're going to start with Keirsten Beigel from the Office of Head Start. Kiersten.

Kiersten Biegel: Good afternoon everybody, it's great to be here with you. I am, as Amanda said, I work at the Office of Head Start and I am a family and community partnerships specialist here. I began working with the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families in 2003, and I've been with Head Start for about a year and a half now specifically. And I am a social worker by profession.

Amanda: Very good. And we are so glad to have Kiersten here to provide us with federal guidance on this work. Thanks for being here! Ellen -- Ellen Ferrar.

Ellen Ferrar: Hi everyone. I'm glad to be here with you. My name is Ellen Ferrar and I am the coordinator of Early Childhood Programs Director of Head Start for a program in Westchester County, New York state. Our program has prioritized homeless children for probably twenty years. We have two shelter-based programs and one bus-in program from all of the other shelters. Happy to be here.

Amanda: Oh Ellen, we are so glad to have you here your expertise here with us today. Ann. Ann Giordano: Hello

everyone. I am so happy to be here. My name is Ann Giordano and I am from Education Connection, which is located up in the northwest corner of Connecticut, and I have worked at this agency for about 16 years in a variety of capacities, primarily with infants and toddlers in both Part C and in our Early Head Start program.

I am most recently working as an early childhood consultant and using some of the expertise that I had gained in each of those programs. We had the good fortune to receive two small grants through our Head Start Collaboration Office to support our work with reaching out to the homeless community in this area, and I hope to be able to reflect on some of that today with you.

Amanda: Ann, we are very glad that you are here as well. We are very glad all of you are here. Now we have a lot for the three of you to cover today, so we're going to get right into it. On pages four and five of your packet, the participants' packets, you have the policy clarifications that address homelessness that are available on the ECLKC. We see that children who are homeless are categorically eligible for Head Start programs and Kiersten has said that a lot in our planning, but we really want to talk more about what it means to be homeless.

And in March we talked a little about the basics of the definition of homelessness outlined there on page four and the McKinney-Vento Act and also that definition is used in Head Start. But we wanted to go into a little more depth as -- folks, look at that definition we see that families that lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are considered homeless. And then it gives some examples of possible homeless scenarios in that definition. Kiersten, can you add some more insight here? One of the questions we got a lot of is, you know, are all the people living in trailers, are they all considered homeless?

Kiersten: Okay. Well let me say a couple of things first. First of all anything that we discuss today related to McKinney-Vento and the definition and the changes to the Head Start Act of course around eligibility for children experiencing homelessness are relevant for all programs including, of course, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs. And I do think that people continue to have questions about this. Certainly, the specific one that you mentioned and some others. What specifically does constitute homelessness under this new definition?

I think that it bears repeating because while Head Start programs have been serving homeless families since the program's inception in the sixties, and then, of course, for Early Head Start since the nineties, this is a significant change to the eligibility requirements, and we are required to understand it through the particular lens of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

So, if you do refer to your page four that Amanda mentioned you see the definition there and she already referenced that sort of overarching point about individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. That's sort of the kicker piece and that it says "and includes" and it kind of goes on to identify some of the different scenarios or situations that a family could be in, including the traditional things that one would think of. "Traditional" in quotes I guess with regards to motels and hotels and that kind of thing.

And then some other situations where you wouldn't necessarily categorize that person as homeless. I think at that point you really need to go back to that first piece of the definition -- whether or not this is a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

I think one thing to keep in mind about this is that this definition is really broad and the reason it's broad is because there are waiting lists for shelters, families may be turned away from shelters, motels may be too expensive, shelters may have time limits -- thirty days, sixty days -- and so I think there's a real acknowledgement at the time this McKinney-Vento was originally enacted to acknowledge that, you know, a lot of families may be in crisis and may be homeless, but they don't necessarily get to use the systems that have been developed to support homelessness...

... and so they may be moving in with families or kind of doubling up with friends, circumstances that may not be ideal for themselves and their children and may be considered very temporary. So that's why some of these examples are kind of, I think, itemized here. So it isn't to say that, for example, someone living in a trailer park is necessarily homeless. But it is to say that that could be a situation in which someone was homeless if these are the things that, we

kind of talked about, are part of the scenario.

I think there is, you know, as far as the policy questions again on page four and five, you know, the fact that you know these examples, you know, they may be more common situations that are listed, but they aren't meant to be exclusive and there may be some situations listed in the definition that haven't been mentioned. So really it's, you know, it's upon Early Head Start and Head Start staff to kind of gather the information that you need to make the best determination you can of eligibility in this case.

Another thing to just keep in mind about the definition just, you know, in terms of your local coordination with community partners, you know, there's different definitions for homelessness out there, so your HUD, your community HUD providers are going from a more strict definition -- based on shelters, specifically, and then folks who work on child nutrition programs and IDEA and also Violence Against Women actually go by this more broad definition as well.

Amanda: Very good. So I guess the next question that follows that one, Kiersten, is how can programs document homelessness as they're sort of working under the Performance Standards?

Kiersten: Well. So first of all let me...this obviously isn't a science, I mean, you just need to think in general about the needs of the family and prioritize them according to eligibility requirements in your selection, and determine whether, you know, determining whether a family is homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition.

It, you know, it may be really obvious in most cases, but it could be complicated in certain other circumstances, so, it's also important to know that I think that figuring out if a family is homeless in order to determine their eligibility may be one thing, and sort of how a family looks at their own situation. How they identify their situation is maybe a totally different kind of situation. I think, though, that we did have a policy question that kind of gets at this question, Amanda, that you've, you've asked about...

Amanda: Well one of the things that you're saying is that, you know, that families are not always going to self define as homeless but they may still meet the definition in other ways, is that what you're saying? Kiersten: Mmhm.

Amanda: Okay. One of the things we heard on the last call, just to call people's attention to this, is that getting to a description of a housing situation can be a very sensitive conversation to have with families. And one of the things that we want you to be aware of on page six of your packets we've included a series of questions from this faculty that can help staff get to these descriptions in a sort of sensitive and respectful way.

Kiersten: I do I think though as far as before you continue just that idea that the documentation I think, you know, it's just important to make a good, safe effort. You know, the policy question does refer to recognizing that, you know, it may be more challenging to provide the documentation right up front that you need but it would just be important to work with your community partners...

..you know, homeless liaisons we'll talk more about that, private and public shelters, HUD service providers to kind of, you know, utilize your necessary resources in order to verify and document whether families are homeless. Amanda: Um, . . . Ellen, can you talk more about how you consider a family's housing status in your program and, actually, I just have a note for you, Ellen, if you could speak up a little bit I think folks were having a little difficulty hearing you.

Ellen: I'm sorry. Well, in our community homelessness has been such a large problem for so long, our homeless documentation is provided by the Department of Social Services. Our families that we are currently working with have all been verified and have homelessness on their entrance documentation, so we know who's homeless in our county.

However, we now have an expanded population that we will be looking at because the definition has expanded the population and there are certainly many, many people in this county who fit the new definition. Our program was originally defined as working only with families who were shelter-based, but we have large numbers of shelters and very large shelters in this community.

Amanda: And we will certainly talk about the differences between different communities as we sort of move forward with the audio conference, but I also know Ellen that you consider homelessness sort of in all aspects of your service delivery. So you look a lot at community assessment when you're doing your program planning, you really look at homelessness...

Ellen: Absolutely. We don't necessarily label the family as a homeless family -- they come into us in the shelters and then we start the services. It's really been a planning process for twenty years in our community, because, as I said, in the beginning we had such a large number of homeless people that we were the largest percentage of homeless in the nation. Not the largest number, but the largest percentage, so we really had to help with this process.

Amanda: And it became a definite interest of Head Start from a very early time. Ellen: Head Start's been involved in the planning for homelessness since probably 1989.

Amanda: Wow. And I think I think other folks that are listening will be sort of at different places in that process, but I think it's really helpful to understand sort of Head Start's role, or Early Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start's program role in sort of taking leadership around those issues. And as Ellen raises those issues, again, I'll call your attention to page seven of your packet where we've included some ideas for participants if you design community assessments in particular, and consider homelessness in your communities. Ann, do you want to say more about this?

Ann: Sure. You know I think as I mentioned earlier that we had the opportunity for those two small grants which sort of paved the way for us. We did not...our community, well I'm sure as we find out, as everyone is finding out, has more homelessness than we think is there on the surface. Our situation was somewhat different than Ellen's and our...the initial grants that we had allowed us to really focus on those families that were living in shelters, and allowed us to build those relationships -- begin to build those relationships with the shelter community.

And I think that then as the definition from Head Start broadened as we've pointed out, and we just began to delve more into the whole process of serving the homelessness in a broader way in our community what we started to discover is that there were many more families that fit this broader category. And I think that another important point to have folks remember is that these may not necessarily only be new families coming into your program, but you may have already enrolled families who were in one living situation when they came in and now have become in a homeless situation.

So I think that there's many levels that I think that we may interface with this. And I think additionally that we need to think about the eligibility piece of that as we've spoken, but then we also need to think about the service side of it because serving families and children in families that are homeless bring about all different kinds of things for us to think about and how to best do that because it brings up different issues.

Amanda: Well, Ann, you tell a story about sort of the need for flexibility there and sort of a family, I guess, who was doubled up with an aunt?

Ann: Right. Sure. We had a family approach us and it was clear from the from the beginning that she was -- uh -- Mom was very open about the fact that she was living with an aunt, she had been evicted from her home, and she was living with an aunt and her young son.

And she, this mom, I should preface this by saying our Early Head Start program is a completely home-based service model so our goal, as we would start out with any family, is we would talk with the family about how we would provide the services in her home and what became very clear to us quite quickly was while this mom was most interested in participating in the services and wanted that for herself and for her son and had great goals, the aunt whose home she was in was not comfortable with someone coming into her home.

So we had to really process that and think about from the get-go sort of: How can we make this work for you? And, you know, certainly recognizing what the home-based service obligations are in terms of the Performance Standards, we all know that, but we had to sort of rethink that.

We had to think: How can we make this work for this mom? She was really reaching out to have those services, so what we tried to do was initially allow Mom to come to our office to our socialization space, and we did a few initial visits in that way so that she had an opportunity to begin to build some trust with us and then hopefully our goal was that when she began to be trusting that she would be able to share that with her family and that it would build from that end.

You know another...a second scenario similar to that was a young mom, a very young mom, living in a domestic violence shelter in our town, again with a little guy, and most interested in services. Well, unfortunately, we didn't have an opening when she was first referred to us and that's a problem. We know these families are categorically eligible but many, many times we do not have a slot when that family surfaces.

So what we did in that case was open our socializations to this mom and her little guy. They lived the shelter was quite nearby to where our office was, and so she came to a few of those socializations just as a way to kind of get to know people, understand what the model was like, see other families, and we sort of kept her in the loop in that way, and then when an opening arose she was the first one to come in, and she was eligible at that time. Amanda: Wow.

Ellen: You know, we've had many of the same kinds of situations where we've had to be flexible in our service delivery. Although our Early Head Start program is shelter-based, the shelters at the beginning did not allow staff to visit any of the units. So home visits had to be done in the beginning in the community room until we were able to work with shelter staff and management to change the regulation.

I think the key in this kind of service delivery is that it's always important to keep your regional office informed as to what you're doing because you're not always following the regulation to the letter, you're following the intent but that you've changed it a little bit because there are special circumstances that have to do with being homeless.

Amanda: Kiersten did you want to...as people are talking about what might look like conflict between the Performance Standards and sort of the meaningful services to homelessness I wonder if you wanted to add anything there.

Kiersten: Sure. I think one kind of way of thinking about this in general is... Well a couple of things first, we, you know, we intend to meet the requirements of the Head Start Act and propose standards and regulations that do decrease the barriers that maybe making it more difficult for Early Head Start, Head Start programs to serve families experiencing homelessness and you all will certainly have the opportunity to read those proposed standards and to comment on those standards when they are published.

We also have some federal work groups that are looking at different options and challenges related to things like eligibility, enrollment, transportation, service areas, program options, kind of all the areas where there's some kind of question, some room for flexibility, and some difficulty.

So we have heard many of your kind of questions along the way, but I think a general way of thinking about this at this point is that, you know, are your...are the circumstances kind of as Ellen referred to it, are they special circumstances or are they larger trends resulting from, you know, the needs of your program, the needs of your community;...

...and if you find yourself needing to make some uh...overarching changes to the way that you're working based on the needs of your families; in particular, families experiencing homelessness, then it would really be important to...to talk with your grant specialist or your program specialist and kind of problem solve that and how to move forward on that together.

Amanda: Okay. And I know, sort of following up on this line, I know that a lot of programs have questions about things like birth certificates and immunization records that we know can get lost as families move or as they try and limit their belongings. Can you all speak to that here -- Ellen?

Ellen: Okay. I'm going to start because we had a very very hard time with keeping track of health records and families very often did not have copies of their physicals, of their immunizations and of all the health records when they came

into the system although they often had had them done. Our regulations said that we had to have all of the records within thirty days in our state and we were...we were really struggling to do this and we did not want to have families just get re-inoculated, which is what happened.

We found one family that their child had been inoculated on three separate occasions so we are working closely with all of the health care systems, the open-door health center, and the state department to try and get these records computerized and they follow the families and once we have them then we are able to give the families a packet. So it's really important to set up communication channels with the local partners and make sure you're really getting a database of the...of the things that the families already have.

Amanda: Yes. And to recognize that it really can take time and sort of advocacy on the part of the Head Start program to get those things done. Ellen: Absolutely. Amanda: Ann.

Ann: I'm just thinking as we're talking through this that this is one of those areas I think where a home visitor or a teacher or anyone who is working with the family can really provide a great service for them and in by doing so it helps not only the family -- first and foremost it helps the family -- and of course inadvertently it helps the program as well. And by that I mean really, we can have a role in assisting the family in building that sort of cadre of documentation that very well may have been lost in the various moves that may have occurred to them.

So I think that that's something that you can use as a goal. You can work together with the family and be a real resource for them to help them organize the paperwork that they will need. Very often families don't stay with us for too long of a time in these situations and they will need those things as well when they go, so assisting them even in the very most simple way of assisting them with, you know, getting releases so that you can...

they can obtain the things that they need that are current and also even just giving them something as simple as a folder or a pocket folder in order to organize those things. Assisting them in that way can be a tremendous resource to families and something that can be a great gift that they can take with them when they go. Amanda: Very good. Kiersten, did you want to sort of close this out -- this particular piece out?

Kiersten: Sure. Again I guess I think sort of the...my summarizing thought is really that the effort here is really around serving families that are, you know, the most in need and clearly, that's sort of the bottom line. If you document your efforts and, you know, you show you made a good faith effort to kind of acquire these things in a reasonable amount of time and to support families, you know, to get what they need so they can be enrolled, I think you're doing your job.

Amanda: Okay. So let's look at how you serve families experiencing homelessness. We know that especially in a time of limited resources, community partnerships take on renewed importance around a variety of different issues. The faculty on this call have many strong relationships and they certainly have strong relationships with shelters. I do want to say we know that there may not be shelters in every community and that many of the families identified in this definition do not live in shelters as Ellen and Ann were alluding to.

But we do want to start here with the understanding that we will talk about a larger array of community resources in a moment. On the last call we talked about how shelters aren't always the most friendly place for families. I think it's really helpful to understand a little bit more about shelters. Ellen, you have been working with shelters for a while, can you speak to your experiences there?

Ellen: Okay. As I said, homelessness has been a problem in this county for many, many years, and our county came together as a county, and many community agencies at the beginning committed resources to make a difference for children and families who were homeless. We said, "This is...these are our families of greatest need, so what can we do?" So we had a group called Help for the Homeless, and they got together the funding to build the shelter.

Open Door Health Center provided the medical clinic; the Mental Health Association provided mental health services on site in a group called "Parents as Partners." We, Early Head Start, was provided by our program. St. John's Hospital on-site provides drug and alcohol rehab programs. There were many groups that came together. The point of this, and

I think that's important whether or not you have shelters or what kind... Is that if you do community planning you can make a much better difference...a much bigger difference for families who have great needs.

Amanda: Well and I think the other message, Ellen, of your story is that, you know, not only is it that sort of a community effort but also it's an effort that evolves over time and that it's... Starting somewhere is really important...
Ellen: Absolutely.

Amanda: ...and then sort of building in. Now Ann, you didn't get in on the ground floor in quite the same way with the shelters in your community but you've been talking a little bit about your grant, can you share a little bit more about the work that you did under the grants that you got?

Ann: Oh certainly. As I said we had two...two very small grants that came at separate times so one was...the second was a renewal so the first one was quite small, and it gave us the opportunity to really look more closely at the needs of the homeless in our area. And one of the things we began to note as we started to do some data collection was in the period of -- and we had three...three shelters in our area of two towns. One shelter serves...I believe they have around ten family rooms and many single rooms.

We have another shelter that is primarily housing for singles with only one family room. And then a shelter designed for victims of domestic violence. So we had three main areas to draw from. We began to do some data collection and realized that, I think it was now in the year 2005, that during the course of that one year approximately 50 young children, so children under...five and under had passed through the doors of those shelters. However, we as a program, Head Start and Early Head Start, had received very few of those referrals. So that was a real, sort of, bright light for us.

And it...what it told us was we really need -- this was about relationship building. It wasn't about just dropping off fliers to a shelter and saying "Hey, we're over here." We really needed to educate them about what services we have, how we could support their work, and how we really needed to work together. And not just Head Start and Early Head Start.

What we did was through those...through some of those funds we established a series of monthly meetings where we brought shelter coordinators and staff together in a... like a community networking kind of meeting where we brought in other community partners such as people from WIC, people from the housing authority, a local legislator, some realtors, Head Start, Early Head Start, Part C partners, Nurturing Families, so a variety of people in our area and what we felt would be really helpful would be if we could be...show the shelters how we could assist them in their work.

And the shelter staff are tremendous, tremendous people and they have a very difficult job that they do every day in the hardest of circumstances. And I think with...in very trying circumstances with very vulnerable families and what...despite all their efforts what I think would have...they benefitted from was our being able to share with them how we could be a resource to them and that's really what that relationship-building did, so we established a few very simple things that we offered to them.

We offered to do some technical assistance at the shelter by coming out and saying...assisting them with how they might recreate a more friendly space for children, we assisted them in selecting some toys and materials that would fit in their areas well and then one other thing that we did...

..well in addition to giving them really current information about who is who at what program and who's eligible for which program in terms of early childhood services so if they did assist families by making referrals they were making them to the correct places, but we also set up a kind of a little triage system where we made ourselves available to the shelter staff. They had a contact person that they could call at Early Head Start at any time when they received a new family with young children living there.

And what we offered to do was to just come out and meet with the family if the family was comfortable. If not, we would be more than happy to just have them -- without even giving names -- just present to us what the situation was and we would try to help them navigate making the most appropriate referrals for those children.

And that...those sort of very small efforts, really, when you look back on it have built up...I think have laid the foundation for a very nice ongoing relationship with the shelters. They look to us for services. We...they know who to call and it's been an ongoing thing that has worked...has worked very very well. Amanda: Well that's so lovely and I know you told us I think on the phone how big those grants were that you started with. I wondered if you minded sharing that.

Ann: Oh -- not at all. The first grant was five thousand dollars and the second one was another grant for five thousand dollars and I think they were over about a three year period. So it really was not a lot of money but I think...and again small -- what seems like small steps at the time, but what really happened is, you know, as we know just in the same way that we know what works with young children everything happens in the context of a relationship.

And I think that once we learned about each other and we learned about what their limitations were and they learned about what the...what the service parameters are of many of the different agencies that serve young children are we were able to really be...kind of be a resource for them. You know, and I think again their intentions were wonderful and I think another area that we were able to assist them with was giving them some more information we brought in some outside trainers, we brought in a group from Horizons for Homeless Children, which I know is in our resource packet, that actually...

And we did some cross training so we brought the shelter staff together with early childhood providers and attended several different trainings. One in particular that I'm referencing now with the staff from Horizons really brought to...brought to light the very, very specific and important issues around the mental health concerns of children who have experienced homelessness. Amanda: How neat.

Ann: And I think that was a real piece of learning for them. Not...not in any way to sound as though they weren't doing a great job -- they were -- but having those that very...deepened understanding about the needs of very young children isn't something that the average population has access to or perhaps has background in, so we were really able to work together and...and share some of that knowledge, and it was wonderful.

Amanda: Well you talk Ann, now about how you sort of include the folks in those shelters in your work. Ann: We do and we've expanded. Other projects have grown from this, which has been great.

Amanda: And you have folks on your policy council, and I think that that's a great strategy for folks to use. On your health services advisory committee, I think was an idea that sort of grew out of our group. Your social services advisory council and you've sort of said, you know, they're a great resource to us, just as we were a great resource to them.

Ann: Absolutely. Particularly around data. You know, when you're doing your PIR, when you're doing your community assessment and you're wanting to collect data on what your community needs are they're a wonderful resource to your program as well. Amanda: Ellen I know in your work with the shelters, I mean one of the things that you were describing to us was sort of how you worked with them to understand a little more about young children in transition?

Ellen: We spent a great deal of time doing that. The shelter staff, our shelter staff are extremely dedicated people too, but they didn't necessarily recognize that when a family was dismissed from the shelter for whatever reason and did not have any chance to say goodbye, the children had no chance to say goodbye to the teachers, the parents had no time to separate, and we had no time to do any planning that it was extremely difficult on both children and staff. So we had many meetings with our shelter staff.

We said, you know one of the things that is so important if you're a young child is to be able to say goodbye to your teacher, to be able to say goodbye to your friends in the classroom, to be able to get a book when you leave that says these are my friends for memory, I mean we try and make the transition as easy as possible. We weren't able to do that at the beginning. Now the shelter staff recognizes that you can't just have a child -- unless it's an emergency -- say goodbye. And they're given an extra week while we are able to transition children.

Amanda: That's so nice to see the way that you sort of...the way that you've worked with them to learn that. I think that's great. Let's talk about the broader network of community providers. Ellen, you have definitely done some creative partnership building in serving the children in your program, can you speak to that a little bit? Ellen: I certainly can, I was one of the... Amanda: And Ellen, I'm sorry if you could talk just a

Ellen: I'm sorry. Amanda: That's okay. Ellen: All right, can you hear me now? Amanda: A little better.

Ellen: Okay. . I was one of the people who believed Head Start when they said at the very beginning you'll never have enough money to do everything that you need to do so you have to go to other people. So I think part of my.....the role of the Head Start agency is really to gather services from other agencies and to develop an understanding in the community that these Head Start and Early Head Start children are the community's children -- that we're all there to serve these children and that if we can come together to serve these children as a community, it will make a dramatic difference later on.

We have many many many many community partnerships and I will list some of them, but I'm going to give you our newest one, which is a mental health partnership where we were talking at our planning meetings about how difficult it was...we had with some of our children who had really dramatic mental health issues part of because they lived in shelters, part of because they lived in poverty and that we were having a a great deal of trouble serving them, even in Head Start programs and that we needed help.

And that we needed help from all of the agencies involved and how could we get it, and we went to the county, and the county now because they understand that these children are going to go to the public schools, that they are going to go into all of the systems has provided, I'm proud to say with tax-payer dollars, grants to our program so we have mental health services in our shelter system as well as in our other Head Start programs where we do Second Steps training and all kinds of other things.

One of the things that I think is important to know that you really do have to believe what Head Start said and that is you don't have enough money in Head Start. So we work with Reader's Digest gives us books, and the Hispanic Coalition gives us training for the parents, and private foundations have given us math grants to do math workshops. Literacy Volunteers is doing work with our families on site.

BOCES is doing training. But I think that we have to think of ourselves as kind of Robin Hoods. We have to go to the other agencies and get services for our families, or bring in services to our families because we can't pay for them, but we need them. So we have gotten many -- Dannon just gave us a thirty thousand dollar grant actually they're out there now doing a workshop to do health and fitness for our children. But again it's a constant, kind of begging out there, and this is what our children need. [Laughs]

Amanda: Well and I love the image of Robin Hood too. Ellen: [Laughing] Yeah, we steal from the rich... Amanda: I can see the tights. Ellen: ...but give to the poor

Amanda: On page eight. Ann and Ellen have sort of supplied us with a list of partners they've connected with in their efforts to serve families -- specifically families experiencing homelessness. We know that in tight times programs have to be very creative in getting those needs met and as I sort of look down this list, I'm looking at realtors, and I wondered...I'm not going to go through every one of these...we're not going to. But Ann, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about realtors because that's such an interesting one here.

Ann: Well, I think it is an interesting one. You know, like they say sometimes things happen in the most unlikely of ways. As we had formed that community networking group in our...in our...and we are a much smaller community than Ellen's community, so I think that's another thing for folks to think about, is that partnerships look different in big ways than they do in small ways but they can all equally serve you well, and we're a much smaller community and we were a much smaller group.

But the realtor...this happened to be someone who was local who had heard about the efforts we were...we were

pulling groups to look at homelessness. And she was just very interested in...I think kind of wanting to learn, you know, they're very business-oriented people, but I think it was someone who really wanted to learn a little bit more about the human side of this issue.

And as it turned out they, her office, this one office in particular became most interested in our efforts and as they learned about...more about, you know when you hear about, family stories that looks very different than doing your day-to-day work particularly, again, when as I said, they are particularly business-oriented work operation and after sort of having heard that, I could see the light bulbs going off. She was just very moved by the stories, the real stories of peoples' lives. And so what happened out of that was she -- first of all we learned from them about what are the rules that landlords have to go by?

Why are these families difficult to serve sometimes for them? And it enlightened us, and they learned about our needs and from that we became a recipient of an effort of theirs over the holidays where they -- it was just so moving to me -- where they typically did a large party at their Christmas or holiday event or whatever it happened to be around the holiday season and rather than doing that this year, this particular office, and it had about thirty, I believe thirty realtors in it, ...

... they decided they would use the funds that they typically devote to that to give to our families, and we actually purchased gift cards for our families to either purchase food or items that they needed that they needed around the winter season. And it really was a lovely...a lovely effort, and they remain accessible to us if we know of a family that ... the other side of it, I should tell you with the realtors, is that the point she made was, we often hear about families that have to leave very quickly and move from their home and, or...

...they've sold their home and they've already moved to another part of the country, and they don't want all the furniture all the household belongings that are there, so they are often called upon to somehow dispose of all of these items and they -- what she was saying was, "We'd love to know about families in need." So I think that's just a connection that maybe others might be able to make in their community, particularly if they have some personal relationships with realtors or housing people then you might make some great contacts there.

Amanda: Well I think, you know, as we're sort of looking at ways that they community sort of draws together to serve all families... I mean I think it's so lovely to hear some of these creative ideas and how they're... how they're sort of serving the families where you are. Kiersten, can you talk a little bit about others who do a lot of work with homelessness, who participants might look to as a resource to sort of potential partner in their communities?

Kiersten: Well I already mentioned a few. And these have...some of these have already been mentioned too, but just to say a little bit more. First of all, if you haven't already, you want to consider the local homeless liaisons that are part of the McKinney-Vento network. There's one person assigned to every local educational agency or district so they also...there's also a state education...homeless education coordinator in every state.

They're a really good contact. I'll talk about them more in a second but some others are of course the local housing authorities which we've talked about, the state and local homeless com...coalitions you may have in your community or state and the HUD Continuum of Care Resource networks. These positions and/or networks may look different across your community so usually it's a good place of point of contact to start with the state homeless coordinators. Many Head Start Collaboration Directors have good relationships with these folks by the way.

You can...the state homeless coordinators are as I said McKinney-Vento folks who are really knowledgeable about homelessness and community resources in terms of children and youth, and they can help you identify who your local liaisons are. If you go to the ECLKC and you click on the family and community partnerships domain, and then you'll see a section on homelessness. If you, if you go there, there's several different kinds of resources. Some of the information was provided in the last call.

But there's a link there for the state coordinators for the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and there you'll find a state-by-state list of these folks so you could contact them directly. You know, in some cases, the homeless liaisons may just be a part of their job -- they may, you know, they may not be as accessible to you as

you would like, so it's a good place to start with the directors, and they can kind of give you a sense of what's going on in your particular area and help you make those connections.

Keep in mind that they do have turnover at that position and that those directors also do sometimes share...that's a portion of their duties as well, so. Just so you know kind of...a lot of these folks are out there doing this work and really trying to do the best they can and juggling several other aspects of their job descriptions. So I know folks can probably relate to that in some regard as well, but I think generally speaking these folks can be good referral sources for you. They can help you with recruitment and outreach kind of things, understanding housing resources.

They may be good representatives for your policy councils or your health services committees. They may help you to locate good sources of community data. I think as Ann was referencing in terms of shelters they may be able to point you in some good directions as far as like local colleges or universities or different places where you can get good data for your community assessments.

And I just...one thing I would like to also just as an FYI, you know, states were awarded McKinney-Vento ARRA funds -- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act -- funds as well so they've had an increase in their funding in...back in April is when those dollars went out, and they're also getting an increase in their regular appropriation, which will be going out in June.

So, just on an FYI there may be some sort of some increased opportunities there. The McKinney-Vento funds do provide sub grants to areas in particular in the nation that are...have higher rates of homeless children, so there'll be some more...some more dollars. You may just want to inquire with your state coordinator about any new efforts or opportunities there. Amanda: And what do those sub-grants fund, Kiersten?

Kiersten: Well they fund a variety of activities, really. Anything, you know, obviously a lot of things related to education and tutoring and helping to support continuity for children's education. But in terms of, you know, Early Head Start social services, health needs, kind of family mentoring needs, there's a...there's a...there's a broad array of different things. And again you know, you could, your state homeless education coordinator would be able to kind of advise you accordingly.

Amanda: Okay. Very good. Very good. On the state front I wanted to call people's attention to the state resource list you all have the National Center on Family Homelessness there on the bottom left. That, I just saw a report that has come out from that organization, and it's basically a report card issued state by state on how states are handling homelessness and issues of homelessness in their communities and so that might just be a very interesting place for folks to start, sort of an exploration of what might be happening locally.

Okay. Now we talked a good deal on the first call about the importance of relationships with families experiencing homelessness and Ann certainly alluded to that earlier. Can you all speak to other ways that you at the administrative level offer your staff tools to build relationships with families? And we'll start with Ann.

Ann: Sure, I think that as we spoke earlier this is this is a pretty vulnerable population they often have very limited resources in order to conduct the business that they need to do to get all of their services in place. So I think one of the most important things that you can do from the get-go is -- that's very helpful -- is that if you give the shelter staff a contact person at your program that they know that they can call and they have been able to build trust with one another I think that comes through to the families.

Because as you might all realize, this is a very vulnerable population who have very often had unfortunate...perhaps unfortunate, partnerships with in previous relationships with service systems and things like that. So any way we can support this to be a positive experience I think is very helpful so if the shelter staff has a point person that they can call and they're...they have a good relationship with I think that as they then share that information with families coming in...that trust and the fact that they know who they're referring you to can be very helpful.

I think the other thing that you can do is to be sure that you update the information that you share with shelters so that if you give them information about different programs and service systems that are available to families with young

children in your area, or any service for that matter, that you're certain that the information that you're giving them has current contact names.

As we know, our...people change all the time, systems change all the time so it's important to revisit that a few times a year and be sure that the information package...we...we made resource packets for each shelter so they would know who at each at each agency, for example WIC or Head Start or Birth to Three, who should they call and very brief descriptions about who is eligible for that system. And the purpose for that is to kind of cut down on futile referrals, multiple futile referrals that then leave families waiting for things that may not even be something that is appropriate for them.

Amanda: And frustrated. Waiting and ... Ann: Very much... Amanda: ...frustrated.

Ann: ...so. As I said, they have limited opportunities to make phone calls or to be placed on hold then they certainly have limited opportunities perhaps to be visiting different offices so it can be really helpful if the information they have is current, accurate, and correct. Amanda: Now Ellen, or Ann, both you and Ellen talk about how important it is to sort of continue to be a presence at community meetings. Ellen, I wondered if you could just say a little word about that?

Ellen: Okay. I wanted to just also say one thing about the, you know, working with the families, because we're co-located at the shelter with the shelter staff but we have found it absolutely essential that we have weekly meetings with the shelter staff and the family. When we have communication day, the family is included because we're doing planning with them.

And we always, with assignments, because we do not want the families to leave without feeling that they have been really supported to the...to the very best of all of our abilities together and we leave and everybody has an assignment. What they're going to do to help get this family on its feet. What was the next question you just asked me? Amanda: I was asking about sort of making sure that Head Start was at or Early Head Start was at every community meeting.

Ellen: Oh. Well. We're at...our central coordinating staff is involved on every community meeting and that's how this county is, I think I started at the beginning, works. We have a zero to six planning group, we have an integrated services planning group, and all of the county departments and private not-for-profits work together, and it's just been...we had a grant from the state early on I...probably in '92 to get this system started and we've been working like that ever since, so.

But we have coordinators who serve on the child abuse task force, on the zero to six planning, on the mental health task force. We really are a very...Head Start and Early Head Start are very visible within the community, and I think that's what makes a difference for our county.

Amanda: Well and I think it also makes a difference in terms of...because your staff is so knowledgeable about serving families who are homeless, or are experiencing homelessness, I think that they bring that expertise there and it also offers opportunities for those individual relationships to grow between community providers so that when families need a referral they know not only what organization to call but which person at what organization to call which can make such a huge difference.

Ellen: That's right. Amanda: Ann. You find that it's so important to keep individual families connected, and you talked a little bit about this already, but when you do that initial visit with families that come in with young children, can you talk a little bit about how you kind of make sure that they keep connected with you?

Ann: Sure. And I should be clear too that not all families welcomed our initial visit. We made it available to them and we made it available to the shelter if it was something that would be helpful. But depending on where the family is in their own...in their own journey here, they would sometimes be trusting and welcoming and some chose not to do that, but I think the key point you want to make is that there are simple ways to stay connected -- just giving a call back to a family who you know is on your waitlist.

Just checking in to say "How are things going? Are there other things that we can support you with in the meantime?" If they are willing to let you visit with them for a short time, you might notice right away, you know experienced people that have worked in early childhood for a long time can kind of gauge quickly what other services this family might need.

You might go out and do a quick visit and realize, "Gee it really looks like this child could re-...could benefit from a referral to Birth to Three." How about just talk to the family briefly about that and get that other service system rolling in the meantime, so families aren't just kind of waiting idly. And hopefully you can stay connected to them so that when that opening happens in your program, you're able to draw them in at that time.

Ellen: I think that's a really good point, Ann. One of the major things that you have to develop in working with the homeless families is a relationship of trust. At the very beginning the families don't trust us. They've gone through a lot, and the shelter has to...the shelter and the Early Head Start program within the shelter has to and all of the services...The key is the respect and the way that we talk to families and deal with families. I think that really does make the difference.

When we first came in nobody wanted to put their children in the...we have a full day Early Head Start program, and now we have waiting lists because we developed the trust, and it passes on from one family to the next family.

Amanda: That informal network, so... Ellen: That's right. Amanda: ...important. Ellen: It is a network.

Amanda: Now...now one of the things that we heard on the last call, and we talked about it some today, is that families in these housing situations move frequently and sometimes without warning, and Ellen, you've certainly done work in your area around helping people understand how difficult that can be, but if families are leaving so quickly, how do you all support them in transition when it does happen? And I'll start with Ellen here.

Ellen: Oh it's really difficult. We start transitioning out the day that the families transition in. As an organization with a presence in forty-seven school districts, it's not easy to make sure that those families have the relationships when they leave. When they come in they get a book on what they're going to have when they come in, and they get a book that's going to help them transition out. We put a release in place so that we can discuss things with other agencies so that we can help them find services.

If they come into our communities where we have other Early Head Start programs, they're put first on the list for coming in. We believe the continuity for the children is essential. So it's really a continuous process of working with them because as I said we don't know when they're leaving. Most families stay an average of four months, but some may leave in four weeks, and some may stay six months, but when they go, we don't want them to go without support. So they have a piece of paper that talks about the community in which they're going and what the services are that they can get there.

Amanda: Well we talked about in our planning calls how it can really be a little bit off-putting for families to come into a program where people are already talking about how they're going to move out. Ann, how do you deal with that?

Ann: Well, you know, I think again it's all about how the information is presented. And I think that if everyone recognizes that from the beginning, staff as well, because the transitions are difficult for the staff too, and I know we're going to talk a little bit about that, but I think saying to the family right up front, "Let's use this time. Let's make this a positive experience. If you should be offered..." and this is how it happens as Ellen referred to they can be gone in a matter of days.

If you can say to them from the get-go, "I know that you may move quickly, and there may be other opportunities that happen for you, so let's be sure that the important work that we've done together can go with you." And by that I mean going back to reminding them, "Remember we made the folder together.

You have your things with you so that if you need to move on," and again and as Ellen referenced, having that release in place so that you have permission to speak with the shelter about what their forwarding address is, even if you don't

have it, you can...you can channel information through the shelter to their new place so that if you've done evaluations, if you've done other pieces of information, they have that with them and they're not starting all over in a new place. It can be very valuable.

Amanda: Well and you referenced this. Those sudden transitions can be really tough on young children, really tough on families, but also really tough on staff. Ellen, how do you prepare staff for that?

Ellen: Well this was a tough thing in the beginning; we had a very tough time when we would be working with a child and the next day there was no child there, no family was coming in. We started to do a lot of training and work with staff on what's important, and I think the thing that our staff now realizes is...and certainly I've learned in the process, is that every day we make a child smile, we've been successful in what our work is. Our goals aren't as long term.

We...because we really need to do a day-by-day planning for these children and their families. Just remember, if your child had a happy day, you did a good thing for this family. So that's what we do. A lot of...a lot of and we have a mental health person on site three days a week, not only to work with the families because many of the families have mental health issues, but to work with the staff -- and staff go to our mental health person and talk to her about their feelings and about their concerns for the child and what they can do.

Amanda: Very good. I think at this point I want to ask Shannon to come on and give folks instructions for asking questions. Shannon?

Shannon: Certainly. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to ask a question, please press star one on your telephone key pad at this time. A voice prompt on your phonenumber will indicate when your line has been opened and please state your name before posing your question. Again, if you'd like to ask a question, please press star one.

Amanda: And I guess as we're waiting for those questions to come up, we'll do one more question here, and this really is a question about staff support. We talked about this on the last call. We know this is absolutely key. Administratively, how do you all on the panel support the staff who do this work with children and families with homelessness on a regular basis, Ellen you talked a little bit about that. Let's start with Ann.

Ann: You know I think it's really key that we recognize -- and Ellen spoke about it as well -- that this is hard on staff too. Delivering services either in a shelter -- and I think it's important for us to remind ourselves that we're not...this isn't limited to children living in shelters, but for any family who's living in a trying situation, whether that be a trailer or a campground or it be doubled up with another family, where they are uncomfortable in their living situation -- that promotes certain feelings.

And I think a good way to describe it and we've talked about it is that, you know, parents are parenting in a fish bowl. That's how it feels at times. And staff are delivering services in a fishbowl at times. And so staff really need to know that they have support --reflective supervision offered available to them on a regular basis, and I think availability of management so that when they come back from those situations, they have a way to debrief and talk about what was hard and talk about the fact that, you know, this is a loss for them as well when children leave abruptly.

We go into this work because we love children and families, and when we've worked very hard to do the very best that we can for them and then we lose them quickly, it's equally as hard on staff.

So I think that that's key and I think one other point is just if...from your administrative point of view if you have the capacity to maybe offer to do a joint visit with your home visitor, or be closely connected with your family services coordinator, whoever is meeting with that...with that family, and to do a joint visit at times so they have kind of a partner to work with, it can be just a wonderful thing and a great support for staff so that they can continue to do their good work.

Amanda: Well Ann I think that that image of the fishbowl is sort of relevant both in shelter environments well sort of you may not have the sort of privacy that you wished, and also in homes where many families are living together, or, you know, if you're living in the different spots that are of defined in the definition that Kiersten was sharing with us

earlier, I think that the fishbowl is a really important image for us to understand both for staff and for families. Ellen, did you have anything to add?

Ellen: Well I think one of the other things that I think our staff, that many of our staff are very sensitive to homelessness because, I'm sad to say that some of them are one paycheck away from it, and because they're so aware of the needs of these families, when they lose a family and they really don't know where they're gone, we really do need to do some work with them. And sometimes as Ann said we follow up with the shelter and try and find the family because they really do want to have contact, and they really do want to have a good-bye time, especially for the child.

Amanda: Very good. Shannon do we have any questions? Shannon: Yes, we sure do. First caller, please go ahead. Your line is open. Denise Gannon: Hi, this is Denise Gannon. I'm wondering about attendance issues and concerns in this regard. Amanda: Denise, can you say a little bit more about that?

Denise: Well my ERSEA manager wanted me to ask about what about attendance because sometimes with this population, it's sporadic or there may be low attendance. If we're trying to really work with them and document it and keep maintaining the standards. Ellen: Would you like me to talk to that? Amanda: Go right ahead, Ellen.

Ellen: This is Ellen. It's been a...it can be a major issue. Enrollment and attend...attendance. We had a shelter that we were serving fifteen children from a motel, and the motel closed. The next day we were down fifteen children. I think that the key here is you must keep your regional office informed. We have never been in trouble because our enrollment, our attendance was down.

We asterisk everything and say "homeless population, homeless population." And our regional office knows and helps us because they believe that this is our neediest population. So we've been at times eighty-three percent in the homeless shelters, seventy-nine percent in the homeless shelters, but our regional office has accepted it when it's the homeless shelters. Amanda: Kiersten, did you want to add anything else to that?

Kiersten: I think that Ellen made a really good point and Ellen; I remember talking to you about this a year ago or so. And it really just comes back to again, you know, good faith efforts, documenting what's going on, why those, you know, changes may occur, and I think, I think that Ellen's advice is really good. The old "asterisk" everything.

Ann: And this is Ann. I agree as well. I think we did not have as strict an attendance issue because strictly we're a home-based program, but we certainly want to keep active enrolled families, that's our mission. But I think what you can do is, again as was referenced, you know, document your efforts, make copies of notes, we would send notes to families to try to find them. Or you know another good point that someone had made to me once is that often these families especially if they're doubling up with others or whatever might have one of those phones that run out of minutes.

That's what happens a lot, so we couldn't connect with them. If you can ask families from the get-go for another person that is okay for you to speak with, whether it's a friend or someone else, because often that's where they might be. Just not to obviously share personal information, but just to say "Hey, could you let so-and-so know I'm trying to check in with them." It's a really good way to stay...to try to stay connected, and just document your efforts.

Kiersten: Yeah and I think that as far as...you know, it's one thing to sort of have your attendance drop dramatically because you're serving large numbers but if you're, you know, if you're in a program where your percentage of homeless families is a little lower and you're sort of...you're working on improving your recruitment and outreach then you expect those numbers to go up, but in the meantime, you know, homeless families struggle with a lot of stressors and a lot of...

if transportation isn't required, there may be situations where you are dealing with kind of the longer than five day absences you may need to kind of institute some special practices around that in terms of what's going on with the family, are there ways that you can assist to kind of improve some of that and those kinds of things. Unknown: Great.

Amanda: Can we have another question? Shannon: Certainly. Next caller, please go ahead. Debbie: Hi. This is Debbie

Dowd from Gogebic Head Start in Bessemer, Michigan. One question that I had, it talks about homelessness as being shared families. Would the primary family who is opening their home to extended family members or friends, would they also be considered homeless under this definition?

Amanda: Kiersten. Kiersten: So you're ... so I ... I'm assuming that you have a family who is interested in enrolling in Head Start, and they have invited other families who are homeless into their home? Debbie: Correct.

Kiersten: Is that? And would they be considered homeless. Why would you think? What's your thoughts, like why would you think they would be considered homeless? Debbie: Because according to the definition of homelessness, if they are doubled up or if they're not comfortable in their situation, or if they're sharing a home with more family members than a home should be supporting, then they should be considered homeless as well.

Kiersten: Oh, I see. Well, it's an...it's an interesting question and I think...what I would come back to with that is the most important sort of piece of the definition which is...is not so much about some of those circumstances as much as is the individual lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For example, if a family moved in with another family just by virtue of moving in with another family because they lost housing wouldn't necessarily mean that they were homeless if that was their new permanent residence -- that they were planning to live with that family indefinitely, right?

So some of it is teasing out, "How permanent is this situation? Is it fixed? Is it regular?" To my way of thinking that scenario that you described that family is not homeless because they actually have housing, they have not lost housing. Their housing is fixed, regular, and adequate. Maybe, there may be challenges around the adequacy of it, but that comes to their...sort of their choice, doesn't it? Debbie: [Laughs]

Kiersten: Would you agree? Debbie: I...I guess so. I mean we have many families who are sharing homes because they cannot afford to live on their own so they go in together. You know, as...like two sisters with kids will share a home together. Kiersten: Mmhm.

Debbie: In those situations, you couldn't necessarily say one is the primary or if, if one of them lives by themselves it could be considered adequate and permanent, but they are looking at it as this is their permanent situation, but they...if you walk into the home, you obviously know that there is too many people in the home. [Laughs] Kiersten: So it's sort of...is it a distinction, do you think, between deep poverty and challenges with poverty versus having an adequate...sort of a fixed, regular, permanent nighttime residence?

Debbie: Right. Well that seems to be our program's situation where most of the people that we would consider homeless, they're already qualifying based on either... Kiersten: That's...well that's my next question is...you know it kind of is...are they income eligible? Debbie: Right.

Kiersten: Right, but then also I know that can...that can raise some issues in terms of how you prioritize on your waiting lists and that kind of thing. So some of those factors can come in...can come into play, but it does seem like in most the questions that programs have raised and are raising to us in these kind of...in trying to really figure out this definition...that most of these families where you're kind of identifying these scenarios...they are...they actually are eligible through their income.

Debbie: So then we don't even need to classify them as homeless any...we don't need to go any further. Kiersten: Well I mean it's sort of your call. Debbie: We would certainly support them and help them in any way we can...

Kiersten: Right. Of course. Ann, you made, or you've made this point sort, or you have a few times about what's your end goal? And I think that that...your end goal is to serve this family who you've identified has some needs and so -- or a lot of needs -- and so what makes the most sense in terms of how your program can serve them?

Debbie: We're in a community where there is no homeless...homeless...homeless Kiersten: Shelter. Debbie: Shelter. Debbie: Except for domestic violence and basically if there is a homeless person that comes to our agency they given a bus ticket out of town. [Laughs] That's how they resolve it.

Kiersten: Mhm. Debbie: So do we need to start classifying homeless people so that there is a greater, you know, awareness of it? That's my real question, I guess.

Kiersten: Well I think that's a great point. And I think what we would expect to see is that your PIR data would change in the coming years because now that we do have this broader definition we would expect programs to be identifying more families as homeless than they have.

Although, you know, we...we've talked to folks in rural areas who have certainly over time said, "You know, we actually -- before this definition were saying, "homelessness looks like this in our community, it looks a whole bunch of families living together," because they don't have any housing and there's no, you know, Section 8, and there's no resources, and so that's what it looks like in our community.

Amanda: Thank you... Kiersten: So I think it's a good point. Amanda: ...so much. Kiersten: And I don't know...I'm sure...maybe Ellen and Ann have some thoughts about it.

Ellen: Um...not really. I...I...I think that your point about if they're income eligible, you might on your enrollment form prioritize them if they're doubled up in housing. But I don't think...you know it would give them a couple of extra points, if that's what you're doing, but I don't think that the service delivery is an option. If they're income eligible you can still serve them.

Amanda: Do we have another question, Shannon? Shannon: Yes. We have two questions remaining. Next caller please go ahead.

Adele: Hi, my name is Adele and I'm calling from Mali. My first question is about verification for like the way we get verification for income. Are we required to get verification if...whether they're homeless or not? And then the other question is about confidentiality. If another community agency does not feel comfortable sharing the information of the families that are in their center, how do we go about confidentiality issues?

Amanda: Kiersten, the first question was about verification of income. Kiersten: Verification of homelessness, right. Yep. Adele: Of homelessness, yes. Amanda: All...

Kiersten: Yeah we'd refer you to...we do have a few different policies for clarification on the topic of homelessness that have been included in your packet, and there is a question on page 5: "What is required for documenting -- proving homelessness?" And I think the kind of the key point here to keep in mind is that, you know you know, just that...that if there if the circumstances kind of meet the definition that we talked about that, that that programs kind of document -- over time -- verification, but kind of in a reasonable time frame.

And that to you is kind of your community partners too, I think there's flexibility around this at this point as to how you might identify. Clearly it's easier for programs that are working closely with shelters, then you have communication established and you would identify that this family is in a shelter, so therefore they're homeless. It may be a little bit...a little bit trickier in communities where there's obvious...sort of obvious resources aren't in play, but I think, you know Ann, I don't know if you could speak to this one a little bit.

Ann: I think certainly it's quite clear cut if they're living in a shelter. It's very evident. I think ...I agree that it's somewhat different if...especially for families, many families and I'm not sure if we touched upon this...many families would not self-identify that they're living in homelessness. Kiersten: That's right.

Ann: If a family feels that they're living with, you know, a grandparent or something, and they've moved in there and they're staying for a while, they might not consider themselves homeless. So I guess I would suggest going back to the...and this is also in the handout packet that all the participants received...some of those questions, and maybe tease it out a little bit. For example, if a family, if you ask them "Well how ...how...how is it going in your living situation?" And they say "Well, not good." And, "Well are you able to stay here?" "Yes, but for only this short period of time."

Or whatever that might be. I think you have to look at each situation somewhat uniquely and listen to what the family's saying and observe the situation and make your best-faith judgment about what their current situation is. I think some of them might not always be exactly black-and-white scenarios as it is in the shelter. That's very clear.

Kiersten: And in terms of like a situation where a family has doubled up I mean, you know, documentation could, you know, revolve around the fact you did a home visit and you verified that yes in fact, this is the family circumstance, and so you would just note that. I guess similarly you would note a family's income. But income eligibility...income doesn't really relate to this particular area, and I guess I'll let you both, Ann, talk about the confidentiality question.

Ann: Sure. I think the confidentiality issue is not any different with regard to homelessness as it is in any other case in the way that I look at it, and that is that always that the family's choice always supersedes any decision that any programs would make. So, I would not expect a community provider or another program to share any information unless the family explicitly gave permission for that to happen. I think that's one of the first things, and kind of the first caveats that you have to always have to get to with a family from the beginning.

And letting them know and I think it's let them know early what your intent is...your intent is only that you are able to share ongoing information with another program. But again it would be completely up to the family and it may work in some cases and not in others. And I think as programs we have to respect that fully and foremost.

Ellen: And the agencies shouldn't share if they don't have a signed release from that family, and you shouldn't share unless you have a signed release from the family...I think that point is very clear. When you start working with the family, you talk to them about what you're going to need, information on...and if you need a signed release they should be fully informed about what you're getting that release for.

Adele: So would that...that same circumstance stand for the homeless shelter releasing information about the family once the family has moved away? Ann: Absolutely. Ellen: We would have that signed release saying they could, or they can't. That's right.

Adele: Okay. And as far as the confidentiality of doing home visits in a public area -- say the general population of a homeless shelter...are we breaching any kind of confidentiality issues with having a kind of open area?

Ellen: Well...when we did the home visits we did them in...but it was only for the family and us. There was a sign on the door saying: "Home visit going on. Conference in progress," and then nobody would come into the room while we were doing it. We had an agreement with the shelter because the shelter wouldn't let us into the units. Now, we have convinced them that Early Head Start is so important to the shelter and it is a regulation, they went to all their bosses and we can go in now.

Amanda: But Ann, I know, has a very different experience. Ann: We did. We did have a very different experience in that the largest shelter where we did visits, we were in a community space and I will agree with you it is...that's part of that fishbowl... Ellen: We would have that signed release saying they could, or they can't. That's right.

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Amanda: But Ann, I know, has a very different experience. Ann: We did. We did have a very different experience in that the largest shelter where we did visits we were in a community space, and I will agree with you it is...that's part of that fishbowl feeling. It's very difficult.

It's a hard job for staff to deliver services in that way, and I think it takes kind of a very slow give and take with families in...in being very, very respectful of what might be construed as difficult information and...you have to be very cautious every time that you're there and do your very best to maybe use that as playtime with the child, and then see if you can even just create a small, more private area at the beginning or end of the visit. It is very trying.

It is very difficult, and I think that leads us back to that whole point of why staff need a lot of support. That's one of the reasons why if you ever have the opportunity -- and I know programs are very taxed -- but if you ever have the opportunity, if that is how services need to be delivered, to have another staff from your program go -- a manager or whatever, so that you can kind of work in shifts a little bit and least give the family, maybe, an opportunity to sit in a corner and have some private conversation. It is very tough.

Amanda: I think we have time for one more question, Shannon. Shannon: Okay and the next caller please go ahead.

Cami: Hi there, this is Cami, and I'm calling from Phoenix, Arizona, I manage an Early Head Start Program. We recently had a meeting in our state with the migrant programs and Early Head Start, and we had a variety of questions come up, and some of them I think are specifically related to the interpretation of the language in the McKinney-Vento Act. For instance, it names preschool children, migrant children, and unaccompanied youths, but we were just curious about the birth to three population.

Because it seems like they maybe were not specifically addressed because it begins with the language that says, "preschool children." So that's just a comment. And also, in the act it mentions in serving homeless families in homeless situations that they can select their school, and including immediate enrollment in their chosen school and transportation services.

So just from a programmatic standpoint, we're wondering the possible implications if our program must provide transportation to those families for instance if they choose our school and then move out of the service area, but want to have that continuity for their child. And then one more...

Amanda: Well, Cami, let's start with...let's start with... Cami: Yeah. Amanda: those two questions.

Kiersten: Those are big ones. So first of all...McKinney-Vento...the homeless liaisons and the folks who work on McKinney-Vento are focusing on pre-K through twelve. That's the population that they're serving, so I think that's why we don't see the language for infant toddler although I'm sort of...I'm told that there is an intersection around IDEA so that when.. so that if a family...an infant/toddler is receiving some Part C services that...there would be some potential intersection there.

Now most of the time that homeless liaisons and McKinney-Vento folk come into contact with Head Start or Early Head Start is most likely to be when they are...when they are serving elementary school -- kindergarten, elementary, and high school kids and there happen to be younger children in that family. So the thrust of the...the...the law is really...is really pre-K through twelve.

And I think the degree to which the pre-K piece is happening has probably been quite varied over time, and I think it is going...with Head Start now being...using this definition and with the increased kind of pre-K programming happening across the country, I think they'll be some shifting around that in the new law once the McKinney-Vento is reauthorized, which it's been up for reauthorization for a while.

Amanda: Hi Kiersten, I'm sorry to interrupt, this is Amanda. If you could just talk a little bit about your understanding of the infant/toddler piece and whether, you know, as we're talking about homelessness how that applies in Early Head Start programs and ... Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs.

Kiersten: Well it applies in terms of the definition. Amanda: So the definition for...that you just described to us applies both to preschool children and to infants and toddlers.

Kiersten: I think the thing for Head Start and Early Head Start to keep in mind is that what's required in the act is that

we use the McKinney-Vento definition for homelessness. That we, the office of Head Start, look at removing barriers to serving homeless children, and that we coordinate better with McKinney-Vento and the community. So those are distinct. We're not...We're not doing all the things that McKinney-Vento for it within...and let me go on to the second question because I think it illustrates this a little bit better.

For example, the McKinney-Vento law looks at school of origin. You know a child...and you referenced this, a child would be attending school, let's say an elementary schooler would be attending school or pre-K, public pre-K would be attending school, and they are...they become homeless let's say they move to another area they have the option of attending their school of origin and then those two school districts have to determine who pays...who pays for the...there can be some cost sharing in that...in that...

If the child in Pre-K wasn't receiving transportation through the local educational district then they're not required to receive it in the new district, that they go in... We're getting into...there's lots of complications and I'm not an expert on this all, but these things don't apply to Head Start and Early Head Start. Cami: Well that's what we were thinking, but we just ...we just...when we look at something like this...it's I guess it's just our collective minds that sort of just want to drill this all the way down.

Kiersten: Yeah. Cami: When we really can give ourselves permission, if you will, to...to back off a little bit and just respect what the act says and that's using the definition... Kiersten: The definition. Cami: ...in providing services and in reducing barriers.

Kiersten: That's exactly what...what the focus should be and the points...the points...of exploring what the points of coordination and resource sharing are because in some cases if...if you...let's say a Head Start grantee, an Early Head Start grantee, is an ed-based grantee and there were transportation services being provided to those Head Start children or Early Head Start children and that...and that family does move, they would potentially be able to tap into some of that transportation into a new Head Start or Early Head Start program.

But that's a very minor point of opportunity, you know what I mean? It's not as...so. So that...there are those linkages and those kinds of things, but I think to keep it simple, it's those three pieces that you need to be thinking about.

Amanda: I think that's such a great way to finish off question and answer. But as we close, I've asked all of the faculty here to identify for us the one message they want to make sure that people leave with, so let's start quickly with Ann.

Ann: I think the one message I would like to leave with people is to, and Kiersten touched on it quickly before when she talked about remembering what the goal is...and that these are not easy situations there are not easy answers, and it's not black, and white and we need to kind of think out of the box and be creative and look at this family and say, "How can we make this work?" Amanda: Great. And Ellen?

Ellen: I think that my message isn't that different, it's just don't be afraid to serve the homeless children as we've determined in our county. They are really the children that have the greatest need, the least resources, and that's what Head Start is all about.

And then don't be afraid, keep your regional offices informed, even if you just write them a letter and say, "I'm a little low on my enrollment because my homelessness...my homeless shelter has some slots open." Or whatever. Don't be afraid. People want you to serve these children. Everybody who's in Head Start knows the need of these families, and it's a priority and it...it certainly is our priority, and hopefully it will become the nation's priority.

Amanda: Very good. Kiersten? Kiersten: Well first of all I just want to thank everybody, and Ellen and Ann, and everyone on the call for all the work that you're doing, sort of as you're trying to figure some of these specifics out and what they mean for your program and for your community, so thank you for being here and thank you to Amanda for your excellent work in kind of coordinating this call.

And getting it all organized and your fabulous facilitation. I appreciate that. I think I just want to sort of reiterate that Head Start and Early Head Start funds are really supposed to be used to serve the most vulnerable children and

families and that's been our commitment. You know, like I said earlier, people in the Head Start, Early Head Start community have been doing this work for such a long time and, you know, we have the 1992 information memoranda on serving homeless families and we had the demonstration grants in the mid 1990s, of course the Head Start collaboration directors have had the ...

...focusing on coordination around homelessness for many years now as a priority, and now we have the act and the new stipulations in the Head Start Act, so, you know, I think we need to just continue to move forward nationally and serve more of these families and sort of understand better the needs of this population and people, and we know it's growing so we know there's sort of this great challenge ahead,

but I think it's great to kind of hear from folks who are really already considering themselves a voice in local communities about the needs of these children and families and I just hope that we can continue to kind of move that forward because your voice is so important in terms of being the local early childhood experts and that that's a real...it's a really important link between the folks serving homeless families and you all and your expertise.

Amanda: Now Kiersten, I know that sometimes that voice is asking a lot of questions, and I know that you have great interest in what those questions are...I wondered if there was a place -- unfortunately, I know we had to cut Cami off before her third question -- but I wonder if there is a place that folks could send their questions as they arrive.

Kiersten: Sure. I've been...I've been...collecting your questions and people's questions for a year now, so I'd be happy to res...receive some of those questions if you have additional ones.

Amanda: Very good. Kiersten: Yes, because we have folks working on, as I've mentioned, we have our work groups working on...on different areas. So I guess I could give you my e-mail address? Amanda: Yeah. Kiersten: It's Kiersten.Beigel@acf.hhs.gov.

Amanda: Thank you. And I really want to thank all three of you -- Ann, Ellen, and Kiersten -- for offering all that you have offered today and all of the folks that are participating. I hope that you all were able to walk away with some new ideas about how to work with this really growing population of families. We hope that you will take the time for reflection and discussion around the "Applying the Information" handout in your packet in particular and of course send your evaluations in to us. We're very curious to see what those are and to use those as we build this work in the future.

One final housekeeping note: The Birth to Three Institute as you all may know is coming up, and the registration deadline is at the end of this month, May 29th. We have a great variety of sessions including one on homelessness there. Information and registration materials are available on our web site at www.ehsnrc.org and I'm hoping to see many of you all there. Thank you so much for being here today, and as Kiersten, Ellen, and Ann have said, for the work that you all do with the most vulnerable families. I'm going to turn it over to Shannon to end the call.

Shannon: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude today's teleconference. Thank you all for your participation.

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