

Providing a Safe Haven to Expectant Families and Infants, Toddlers and Their Families in Your Program

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Melissa: Good day and welcome to the "Providing a Safe Haven to Expectant Families and Infants/Toddlers and Their Families in Your Program" conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time I'd like to turn the conference over to Miss Amanda Perez. Please go ahead ma'am.

Amanda Perez: Thank you so much, Melissa, and hello to everyone out there. My name again is Amanda Perez, and I am so happy to welcome all of you on behalf of the Early Head Start National Resource Center to our audio conference today. This is the first in a two-part series on homelessness, and we are delighted to have all of you with us. You are joined on the line today with staff from across the country, as well as federal staff and training and technical assistance providers and as Melissa said, please be aware that this call is being taped for use by others in the future.

So you all should have your materials for this audio conference in front of you, and we know that there are many issues that staff are helping families negotiate as they cope with homelessness, and in this two-part series we want to address as many of those ques...as many of those issues as we can.

Um...if you look at the objectives for today's call on page one of your materials you'll see that we'll include conversation here today on the federal definition of homelessness, we'll talk about what homelessness means for expectant families and for very young children and their families, and we'll also talk about how programs can support those families. I want you all to know that we'll leave some conversation about some of the more administrative issues and community partnerships issues -- those kinds of things to the audio conference on May thirteenth.

You'll see on the agenda that we have about an hour of discussion...maybe a little longer today, we've got a lot to cover among panelists and then the operator will come on with instructions for calling in with questions or comments, and we are really looking forward to having you join our discussion then. We have a very knowledgeable and experienced panel for you to hear from today, and I'm going to have them introduce themselves. We're going to start with Kiersten Beigel from the Office of Head Start. Kiersten.

Kiersten Beigel: Thanks, Amanda. Greetings everybody, I'm so glad you could be with us today. Um. Again, my name is Kiersten Beigel, and I work at the Office of Head Start. I'm a social worker by profession, and I've been with Head Start for about a year and a half and with the Administration for Children and Families for about six years now. Um...my predominant responsibilities here at the Office... for Head Start is really the focus of family and community partnerships.

So I work on policy and priority areas as well as content for training and technical assistance on family and community partnerships. So again welcome to you all and...and thank you to our panelists who you'll be hearing from in just a moment and also I just wanted thanks...send a thanks over to Amanda for organizing the call today. Amanda: Well thank you! Marlene.

Marlene: Thank you, Amanda. And I'm also very pleased to be on this call today. I am a licensed clinical social worker working with The Children's Aid Society and our program is in two community schools in Washington Heights, basically in Northern Manhattan tip, P.S. 5 and P.S. 8. We have a collaboration with the New York City Department of Education where we provide services to 75 Early Head Start home-based families and 143 Head Start families.

So our model basically is a zero to five model, ensuring that services are rendered to families that are living within the community, predominantly Mexican families and Dominican families and a small percentage of...of Central and South American families.

The parents's...the parent's language is Spanish, and they have many language barriers and cultural issues resulting in social isolation and one of the concerns that our families are facing is that their...they lack legal documentation in the United States and resources to housing and health and social services are a concern. Amanda: We're so glad to have you, Marlene. Thank you for being here. Kim Cosgrove.

Kim Cosgrove: Yes, hi! Um... I want to also thank Amanda. She's done a terrific job of pulling us all together here from different states. Uh, I'm actually down 95 a bit. I...my programs are in Baltimore City. Um...I'm a licensed clinical social worker, and I'm the director of PACT therapeutic nursery. We have two sites in Baltimore City: one that's been around for a long time, about 18 years and that's the therapeutic nursery and that program provides a therapeutic child care setting for families who have infants and toddlers.

The families are living in emergency shelter. Um...and we have about 60 families rotate through that program a year. Um...at any given time we have about 13 to 14 children. Um. That program is partnered with Early Head Start. We're partnered with a wonderful partner: Martin Luther King Early Head Start. And we also receive some funding through the core service agency, Baltimore Mental Health System. Um...the other program is a longer-term program.

It's a new program through Maryland State Department of Education, and that is for families who have experienced homelessness in the past but are now trying to get re-established in the community. The programs are very similar. Um...our primary focus is to really work on enhancing parent-child attachment. Um...and so that's sort of when I think of our program, I think of a tree and that's sort of the trunk of our tree. Um...to really try to help secure a solid core for a family.

Amanda: Very good, Kim. Kim: And that's our program. Amanda: Very good! And it's a very different kind of program than the one that Marlene serves in, but we're so glad to have you here as well. Mia Mackey.

Mia Mackey: Hello everyone. I'm Mia Mackey, and I am the center director here at Arlington Early Head Start, and we are run by Northern Virginia Family Services. We are right outside of Washington D.C. So we're a very urban/suburban area, a very, very diverse culture of families and staff that we have here. Every nationality is represented probably here in our very small center of 24 families. We're probably the most traditional of the programs that are represented on the faculty as a Early Head Start full-day center based program serving everyone in Arlington. So I'm happy to be here.

Amanda: We are so glad to have you and I have to say that of all the social workers here, Mia's a sociologist, and we're really glad to have that perspective here as well. Um...before we begin I want to refer folks to the principles for practice on pages seven and eight of your packets. I'll let you take a second to get there.

Um...in the past few months as the five of us have been talking together – and actually I've been talking with folks across the country who are doing this work – these are some of the really strong ideas that have come to the floor in terms of the way that these faculty approach their work with families and young children. We hope that they are going to be helpful to you, and we're going to highlight them as we talk about issues and strategies more in-depth as we go on.

So let's begin by looking at the federal definition of homelessness, which is outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act, and that is on page four in your packets. Kiersten, can you share that definition and talk about how that definition informs work for Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start staff here briefly?

Kiersten: Sure. Um...well as you all know the Head Start/Improving School Readiness Act which reauthorized Head Start back in 2007 now is...actually has ma -- over twenty references to serving homeless families in it -- new references. And we are now, in Head Start and Early Head Start, serving homeless families... in terms of they're categorically eligible for Head Start services. So um, so that's...that's a shift for us in terms of eligibility.

And clearly the intention of Congress was to increase our ability or to... require Head Start and Early Head Start to increase our ability to serve more...more homeless families and pregnant women as well. So that definition that we are

now using -- the definition for homelessness -- comes from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. And that definition actually broadens our...our perception of homelessness. And actually the Amanda said that there is a...a definition included in your packet. We also have sort of a slight variation on that definition.

Um...the Office of Head Start has interpreted it slightly in our policy clarifications and hopefully all of you are familiar with the the ECLKC, which is our online Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge information Center, and we have the policy clarifications there and if you go into the section on eligibility there are three questions there that can kind of help you interpret that McKinney-Vento Law.

And I think that for our purposes today, just to provide a quick, kind of, overview of it, the...the most important language in it is this notion that folks who are homeless lack a fixed, regular, and adequate...adequate nighttime residence. Um...their...this can include families who are sharing housing of other persons because they lost housing or due to economic hardship or have to live with their families because they've lost housing, or are living in motels or trailer parks or campgrounds because they've had a lack of alternative or adequate accommodations.

And I think it's just important to note because for those of you who have had a chance to read the definition, you know, it talks a lot about the traditional kind of homeless situations that come to mind -- the way that we've always thought about homelessness, but it also adds some of these others, which I've mentioned, in terms of that, you know..."doubling up" or "tripling up" in...in other homes because of a loss of housing.

Um...and there have been some questions because of the...the actual new definition refers to migrant, migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances...that well, actually, the definition talks about migratory children being homeless, and we know that what we'd like programs to...to really think is to kind of refer to that policy clarification that's about "what is the definition of homeless children" and to really think on a case-by-case basis with families to think about the primary nighttime residence of families;

whether it's fixed, regular and adequate; whether it's due to circumstances that have...you know where a fam...a family has lost housing and that kind of thing. It's a kind of because we know that homeless situations are different for different families to really take that into consideration when you're trying to determine whether a family would be eligible by um, by way of being homeless. I just want to just make one more reference to well...to the packet.

At the, at the very end of your packet, I believe there is some... some websites and resources, and there are some organizations that have been very helpful to Head Start and Early Head Start programs in terms of helping them understand McKinney-Vento and...and those are you'll see the Natio...National Center for Homeless Education is one of the web resources at the bottom of page twelve.

Um...and the... Horizons for Homeless Children is also interested in sort of working...you know they've done a lot of work around early childhood and homelessness, and then the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth is another organization. They do a lot of training for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Amanda: Great and I think...I think, Kiersten, as you were sort of talking about that and talking about how each family's situation is different and people really need to sit down with each family and really learn more about their nighttime residence and what that looks like -- I think it really calls us to look at principle number one in folks' packet, which is: Watch Your Language.

So we know that this definition that you're offering is really broad, and it's important to remember that the term "homeless" carries a ton of stigma with it and especially as you all are building relationships with families, it's so important not to label that, but as we're going through this particular audio conference and talking among faculty, we are going to be using that very broad definition of homelessness, and it's important that...that folks have a sense of where we're coming from with that.

We know that there are many reasons that families are...become homeless and we've listed some of those causes on page five of your packet. While we want to spend the majority of our time here on other pieces, we want to remind you of principle number two as well, which speaks to the importance of again learning each individual's... individual

family's story. I think it's....it's particularly important to recognize that the mean income of homeless families is 46 percent of poverty.

Poverty is often a primary issue for families and faculty here, and especially our sociologist, especially Mia, have reminded me that it's important to look deep and long-term at causes. You know, for some families, poverty has been an experience in the family for many generations, and that kind of stress can give rise to a host of me -- excuse me -- mental health issues, substance abuse issues, etcetera.

For some, housing situations are deplorable because families, you know, don't feel that they have the right or legal recourse to complain, and it's just important to know that there's just not always a clear answer about cause, and sometimes pieces come out over many conversations with families. We do know that the families in these situ...in these situations are often dealing with multiple issues and children can be multiply affected.

So at this point, we'll ask our panel: What do you all see in the families you serve? Understanding families as primary in their children's lives: What do you see in the families you serve who are experiencing homelessness? And we're going to start with Marlene.

Marlene: Thank you, Amanda. Well, in our population we're seeing that we have families that are really, really struggling with some of the really basic needs such as access to food and a really safe environment in their homes. Most of the homes have -- are in dire need of repair, so this causes a high level of anxiety, and the priority is really trying to make ends meet and really survive.

The families we're serving are really working hard to make sure that their children are not disruptive to the people that are living with them in their apartment, as well as that families are really lacking space -- space for their children, for their belongings...meaning that their clothing are in garbage bags...or that they have just a bed and multiple people sleep in that same bed.

Amanda: Wow. And that really brings us to...to the principle about remembering the basics and how important that is to serving families in these situations and also to understanding sort of each individual family's learning...living situation and what is available for children there and what isn't. Um...Mia.

Mia: Sure. Well, being that we're a center-based program, we see the families...the after-effect after they've lived in these situations that Marle...Marlene has described. They come to the center in not necessarily as clean as any other child in the classroom or, you know, dressed as well or, you know, just...they're a little rushed in the morning. It's just...it's a lot more difficult for for these families to...to be a traditional childcare parent dropping them off. Sometimes to drop...they're the first ones here and they're the last ones to leave.

Um...and sometimes that's because they want to make sure that their children get snack, and sometimes they want to make sure that they get their breakfast in the mornings and maybe get a little extra if they're a little late. Um...so it's just about they're...they...they look very different. Amanda: So what you're seeing, it sounds like Mia, is you know, is some creative problem solving on that parent's part. Mia: Definitely.

Amanda: Yeah...to get that child...to get that child what that child needs. Kim. Kim: Yeah for...for our particular programs and the families that we serve because they're living in emergency shelters and we all know there's a...a range of, sort of, shelter living. They may have a private room kind of shelter, they may be in a dormitory type of shelter, or they may actually be in a day-to-day kind of shelter, so for some of our families they're very much stressed by, sort of, that living environment.

Um...and I think... Marlene said, you know...living in a dormitory shelter you've got...you're worried about your children making noise, and it's pretty hard to keep a two-year-old quiet. Um...and they've got to...they've got to sort of follow those type of rules that...that the rest of the people in there are trying to...to deal with. Um...so we see a lot of parents who are very stressed about, sort of, that group living. We also see parents who are worried sometimes about whether they're going to have a room that next night.

Um...if they're in a shelter where each day they have to arrive at the door at a particular time. So that puts just a tremendous amount of stress on...on parents and, you know, they've...they've come into this shelter and emergency situation probably from a host of difficult, challenging situations, so they may have been leaving domestic violence situation, there may be a history of mental health, you know, all that kind of stuff, and just adding on that living environment can make it even more stressful.

And so we do see parents who...who...maybe are not as...um – their children just don't get as much from them because they're just so stressed. Their energy is...is so low. So we have to deal with that. Amanda: That is so important, I think, to recognize what happens with parenting when anxiety is like that, as you say. Kim: Mmhm.

Amanda: Let's talk very quickly about expectant families. Um...Marlene, in your work with pregnant mothers experiencing homelessness under this...under this broad definition, of course, what do you see as the biggest challenges for these expectant families?

Marlene: Well, Amanda, it's so important for expectant families to set a priority for the unborn baby. We have expectant families that have really multiple stressors and accessing prenatal care or continue... continual prenatal care is so important -- making sure that the expectant mom is eating healthy and taking care of herself, her health concerns, and the concerns of the baby. Making sure that she's connected to a social support system is so important because we want to make sure that she's getting ready for the delivery of the baby.

Amanda: And it...and it...and it sounds like, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like this is not always the case for families that are struggling with homelessness. Marlene: Right. Amanda: Or sort of...sort of...these housing situations. Marlene: They're thinking about other things. Um...they're thinking about the people that are demanding things from them like their children or their partner and they...they come second.

Amanda: Mmhm. So that baby can get sort of lost in the other stress factors in the...in the family's life? Marlene: Absolutely. Amanda: Yeah. I...I want to recognize the...the picture that's being painted here is...is pretty dismal. But I...but I think that we also know that there's hope for these families and I...and I wondered if Kim could say something about that opportunity and hope that we might see here.

Kim: Yeah. I...I...I think that, you know whenever somebody is new to working with homeless families and...and I will admit that when I first was asked to...to work and head the nurseries I thought to myself, "Oh my God, what am I getting into? This is going to be the...the most difficult situation I'm ever going to be working in." And we actually sort of sometimes find the opposite of that. We find that families have gotten to the point in their lives where they're sort of at rock bottom.

Um...you know, they maybe have been using for years and now you know, they really... they're... they're homeless and they want to get...they want to get clean and they want to... you know, they've got a child with them and they're really committed to that baby and...and...and making their life better. And so we all know as family therapists that sometimes crises brings an opportunity for change.

And...and so if we can remember that, and I think our families come in with sort of - although they are very wary because they have been traumatized and stressed - if given the opportunity, they really are ready to blossom. And I think that's sort of what we see is that families that you may think are not going to change...this is an opportunity for them.

So, it sort of mirrors what's going on in our country with, you know, with all the things that have happened in the past few years, and our economy has really put a crisis on us, and we as a nation are needing to make changes. And...and I think we're, as a nation, embracing those changes. So I think the same parallel process can happen for families in crises.

Amanda: Mia, did you want to add to that? Mia: Sure. I just wanted, you know, to piggyback on what Kim said, and just that these families now...especially like Kim said with the economic situation the way it is there are families who never had to deal with the situations that they're dealing with, and now we find families coming to our programs, and

I'm sure this is everywhere...

...that have never had to deal with the things that they've dealt with or are dealing with right now, and so people want to change and I think it's...it's our duty to actually help them change and foster that...that strength that they have to want to get out of the situations that they...they are in right now, and just...and make it happen for them as quickly and most efficiently as possible.

Amanda: Well and I think that as...that as folks are working with families that message of opportunity is so important. Um...especially in the face of some really serious concerns for children and families. On page six of folks' packets we list some of the impacts of homelessness on young children, and we speak in the principles about the importance of learning the ways that young children are in...are affected. Um...Mia, what do you see in the infants and toddlers you serve who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness?

Mia: Um...well we see in our classrooms that the children are a lot more stressed out than other children because of what they're dealing with. You know, children take on a lot of the stress of the family. Um...they don't have an outlet, necessarily -- they can only go where their parents go, they can only, you know, eat what their parents eat, and so when they come to the centers everything is...is a struggle sometimes during the day. The tantrums are stronger, they're longer, sometimes they are a lot more clingy throughout the day, um, and you can just kind of see it on their faces.

Sometimes just a simple... a simple action of a child taking their toy just stresses them out, and it takes them so long to calm down. Um...we also find that naptime is a really hard time for these children. A lot of the children are used to sleeping in the same bed because of their living situation... with their family members, and so now we're asking them to sleep on a cot all by themselves and help yourself go to sleep so the teachers are having to lay by the children a lot longer.

Um...sometimes the children wake up in the middle of naps, and so you're having to deal with that screaming and crying so it's a lot of...a lot of stress we see. Amanda: Mmhm. And a lot of...it sounds like some issues around self-regulation. Mia: Yes. Definitely. Amanda: Well. Marlene, what do you see?

Marlene: I see the same thing as Mia in terms of the self-regulation and just children really struggling to play and connect with other children so their play is more parallel. Um...their social, emotional skills are struggling, and evidently later on, they're having more -- when they get more opportunities to play, then they're able to symbolically play and...and play with others.

Amanda: So th...so they're missing the opportunities to play in th...in their home environment? Marlene: Yes. Amanda: And we also see from this list that developmental delays are...are pretty common among this group often. Are you seeing that as well, Marlene?

Marlene: Absolutely...we're seeing a...a...a delay in expressive language, just because children are asked to be silent more or are put to a corner and sort of asked to behave. Amanda: Mmhm. So they're just not getting the opportunities to develop those skills in some situations, yeah? Marlene: Because parents are really stressed and worried about other things. Amanda: Mmhm. Kim we know that you've done a lot of research in this area. What is...what have you found?

Kim: Well...exactly what Mia and Marlene said. Um...we...we saw three areas that we looked at in our research and in comparison to a similar population with respect to poverty, that our children tended to fair worse.

Um...one thing that we have seen is just sort of separation anxiety that's off the charts. Um...you know...being they're either overly clingy, they can't console themselves when their parents leave. Um...you know it's very, very difficult for them, so they...they can have an assortment of attachment problems. Um...I think Marlene mentioned speech delays. In...in our program we tended to find almost 42 percent of our children had a speech delay of 25 percent or more, which is pretty significant.

Amanda: Yeah. Kim: And you know it's...it's funny people will...will come into our nursery, and they're like, "Oh, it's so quiet." Well it's so quiet because most of our children don't express themselves with language. Um...so, you know,

and everyone knows that if you don't have good language, temper tantrums arise and...and children have a hard time expressing themselves, so as a result, you know, teaching children some basic sign can be really helpful.

Um...the other piece is their play, because play is very much connected to language and cognition, we see sort of blunted play. Um...they're lacking that symbolic play that um, I think Marlene just mentioned. It tends to be parallel play or at a much more infant-like type of play. Um...so...you know, we have our work cut out for us. Um...and for many of these children if given the right, you know, environment, and if their parent is there to help provide that secure base they're...they're probably going to be moving forward nicely.

Um...what can happen, though, is children don't get that in...in homeless shelters. So they could be, you know, destined to long-term problems. Amanda: Mhm. And what about the eating and sleeping piece?

Kim: Oh. Absolutely. We...we, we definitely will find kids who...and we have to be very careful because we'll find little ones who will not eat or drink when they first come into care. Um...and so really helping that little one find ways to console themselves. Um...and to remember that mommy comes back or daddy comes back, and so we've developed a number of techniques for that. Um...and sleeping the same thing. Um...little ones who have a hard time falling asleep...infants who maybe are on absolutely no kind of a schedule...They're up all night in the shelter, so they sleep all day at our nursery.

Um...or we'll find little ones who will...will not put sleep cycles together. They'll sleep for like thirty minutes instead of an afternoon nap of two hours that, you know, you or I...our children may have done that typically. Um...you know, we find...you know those...those toddlers who don't really take good, solid naps. So they're...so as a result, they're not rested, so it makes them more irritable and...and difficult to calm.

Amanda: And for Early Head Start staff and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start staff who are following the lead of that child, that can really complicate things for them with the parents as we're sort of looking at the...at the...at the childcare classroom. I...I think it's important here just to make a note about physical health and none of you really addressed this here today, although we certainly addressed it in our...in our planning conversations. Um...children and families in these situations, we know, are rarely getting regular medical care.

They're more likely to have chronic health conditions, and they certainly are more vulnerable to illnesses. As I've been talking with folks across the country, in all kinds of communities, and particularly in talking with staff in rural communities, they've talked about the help of establishing sort of a one-stop shop within their program that allows families to access health services there to the extent possible.

We know that transportation particularly, and again in rural communities, can be a real challenge for families in these situations, and I want to let folks on the phone know that we are going to talk a little bit more about that in part...in part two of this series. Um...Kim I know you had something you wanted to add on that front.

Kim: Well I...I think it's just so important when programs are working with families who are homeless to just make sure that if they can partner with a healthcare program to bring maybe a visiting nurse into their program, so that a relationship can be developed there.

I think we all know that services for families just seem to flow better when there's good relationships between the providers, and that there's a good partnership that it just – I think families pick up on that and...and are more likely because they feel comfortable with, you know, Provider A that this Provider B who is coming into place must be okay. Um...so I think it sort of gives a leg up for those services to be successful.

Amanda: Well and I think as we sort of start to move on to talking about the strategies part of this audio conference I think it's really helpful to start at that place of relationships and...and...and how those can grow over time. That's really helpful. As we...as we work with young children, as folks across the country work with young children, we see that the approach that you all do with families, the work that you do with families is just critically important. How do you all approach work with families in these very stressful situations? And of course it begins with relationships. Um...Mia.

Mia: Sure. Um...what I've found that works best with families that I work with is that – everyone's situation is different, as we said before, and understanding that their situation is different -- there is no one set of rules or way of...of dealing with families: ask what they need. Ask questions of them. They're the ones who need the help. They need our services. We just know how to provide them with the service, but we can't tell them exactly what they need. Um...we...we can...we have the ability, we have the resources, but we need to have that relationship.

Empower the families by asking them, "What can I help you with?" And listen. It may not come on the first conversation, and it may not happen the first three or four conversations, but it will happen if you...if you're respectful and persistent enough to let them know that you're there for them. Amanda: Very good. Kim.

Kim: Well I think...I think one of the things that we sort of found over the years as a program is to recognize that being homeless is hard. It is very, very difficult. Families interface with all kinds of different agencies and bureaucracies, and...and they're not always very warm and fuzzy places, and so families may come in with a bit of a chip on their shoulder, and it really does behoove us to take a deep breath, make sure that we've got an environment that's warm and welcoming, greeting them with a smile each morning, offering to get them, you know, hot cocoa or tea.

And they may say no to that 30 out of 50 times but at some point they're going to want to receive that nurturance. You know, I think the key here is we...we really do need to woo these families. Um...we can't have the attitude that, "Well, if they want it, they'll get it," because for some of our families they really have been traumatized extensively, and we need to respect that they are very wary of others, and they may have many things going on in their lives that they...that they are feeling... that they can't trust others.

And so the more that we are present with them, with that kind of gentle welcome, and the more that we sort of woo them, you know, into the services, I think the more success we've had. Um...and really be respectful of...of who they are because we are a small service provider in their lives, and we need to be appreciative when they do allow us in. Um...and...and appreciate that they were so willing to trust us. Amanda: Marlene.

Marlene: Yes, it's so important to really understand and provide the opportunity to families and children, because they want the best – they want their children to succeed, they want their children to, to be successful in school, and throughout everything that they do. So it's really important, and staff really works hard in building that relationship with the families, with the child, and bringing play in the home visit, and really establishing a relationship of trust and listening and support where they can do activities that will promote learning in a positive direction.

Amanda: Marlene, can you talk for a second about butcher paper? Marlene: Absolutely. Amanda: [Laughs]

Marlene: Butcher paper... is...is something that the teachers can do magic with. Even cardboard boxes just taking a piece of butcher paper or a cardboard box and transforming it into a space in a home visit. To...laying out the butcher paper or the cardboard box and creating a space for the child to play or to create a nook so they can read, or they can just hang up the pa...the piece of artwork that they've just created in...in the home. So the family doesn't need to buy electronic toys or expensive toys. They just need the interaction and...and special things happen in those interactions.

Amanda: I think that's such a lovely example. And...and what I like about that strategy is, you know, you're talking about families who you serve who are very crowded, in some very crowded situations in apartments and things like that. And, you know, I think that the same thing would apply as folks are working with families in shelters or if...even if they're working with families who are living in other places – just to define that space as a place where, you know, play is going to happen, and...and this is a space for a child and what a tremendous gift of sort of ownership that that can be.

I think that gets us to sort of the next few principles. Treat families with respect and offering families a sense of ownership and control. And you...you all certainly in...in our conversation today talked about how important that can be. Marlene, can you also talk about services to expectant families? How do you...how do you help them focus on that child on the way? We know that that really can be very difficult even in these very stressful environments.

Marlene: Yes, Amanda. It goes back to the communication, the conversation with families, making sure that families are asking those questions and we're providing some answers. Or... or they're...they're able to ask someone those questions and that they're not silent or isolated. And in our program, we have established an eight week curriculum that is just for pregnant moms.

And pregnant moms begin in the first or second or third trimester, depending on when they enter into our program, and in the...in the...pregnancy group, basically the families are there and supporting each other and learning about things that they would have questions about. If they have questions about nutrition or if they have questions about labor and delivery, and we're able to provide families with resources, making sure that they're connected to either a doula when they are eight months pregnant, making sure that they are focusing on their baby.

Amanda: I think one of the things that is so nice, too, about that strategy – and we talked about defining space for a young baby, and this is defining space for expectant families so -- and pregnant women -- so that they come in and they have a space where this is their time, you know, to think about that child and to think about that baby and...and it gives them an opportunity – permission, maybe, to do that in a different kind of way.

Marlene: And to bond. Amanda: Mmhm. Very good. And...well and I guess I have a related question next for Kim. Kim: Mmhm.

Amanda: In your program you're really focused your work on the "diad", and that's after birth. Um...the parent and the child, and as we look at principle number seven -- Support those Primary Relationships -- can you talk to us about some of the strategies that folks can use in their programs to support that parent and child relationship?

Kim: Absolutely. I mean we have a...a couple of evidenced-based practices that we do that require sort of a high level of clinical work. One is using NCAT and using videotapes to help parents sort of become their baby's best teacher...and that...we sort of get two bangs for our buck with that particular program component called "We Cuddle and Grow." Um...we get a nice opportunity to give parents skills and ideas on how to help their...their child as they grow. But what we really get is an opportunity for them to connect.

Um...we also have some other program components where we do some family tradition and ritual work. Helping families have the opportunity to eat breakfast together, and that's something that I think any program can do -- you know, have an opportunity to sit with their child in the morning and eat a nutritious breakfast together. Um...having staff knowledgeable about some key principles in helping parents engage with their children during mealtime; you know, how do you have a mealtime conversation with a nine-month-old?

Um...and teaching them and...and getting to see staff modeling that you talk about the food, you...you point out what they're going to be doing that day, what you might be doing that day and just being able to have conversation because we know that those family meals are so beneficial down the road. But there are lots and lots of things that any program can do. Um...one piece, because separation anxiety is such a big piece for families who have been homeless, that making sure that parents don't sneak out of a nursery or a child care setting.

Um...and helping parents understand that, you know, in order for their child to trust that they'll come back, they need to trust that you'll say, "I'm leaving now." Um...I believe there's a handout in the packet on separation anxiety. People can certainly look at that but, you know, and it gives some pointers on how to work with families around that. But really, besides helping them say, "good-bye," it's also helping them say "hello" to their child when they return.

Sort of coaching them to make sure when they come in that their little one gets a big smile and a big hug, and we often times in our program we'll explain that they know you leave, but they don't quite have the cognitive and language abilities to remember you come back. They can't use your image as a way to console themselves throughout the day. So trying some of those strategies anyone can do, but there's, you know, there's a whole host of...of things that people can do around that.

Amanda: Marlene. Marlene: It's so important to plan for a home visit and prepare and to respect the parents' time. Staff...staff and parent have a partnership to make sure that the home visit is a safe haven where the teachers can

answer questions or the parent can have a conversation with teachers and the television is turned off. There's no interruptions and this is a time for...for teachers and parents and children to really play and focus on whatever activity is prepared for that day, and this is really empowering for parents and children.

Amanda: Can you talk too, Marlene, about sort of I know that a lot of the families you work with are working several jobs and certainly that's true of families across the country. They're working several jobs, and sometimes it's so hard for families to make that connection with a baby in sort of the few moments that they have as a family.

Marlene: Really working with parents to make sure that they know when their home visit is. Planning ahead of time, making sure that as a program we're sensitive to the parent working part-time on this day, or that parent has just finished a 14-hour shift and making sure that they are scheduled to have their home visit at the end of the week rather than in the beginning of the week. Really, it's a lot of detail work, making su... and really knowing the families.

So we give the calendars out to families a month ahead, and really families work with us to say, "No, I can't do that visit. Can you reschedule me some other time?" And the staff really just looking at the calendar, working with the family to make sure that they have that visit.

Amanda: So a lot of problem solving in sort of engaging families in making those plans, in doing that together.

Marlene: Absolutely. Amanda: Kim, I know you use photographs a lot to support that relationship as well. Kim: Yeah, we...we do. Whenever digital cameras finally came in vogue, it saved us...

Amanda: [Laughs] Kim: ...tons of money. Thank...thank you, whoever invented them. Um...we do, we use a lot of photography with our families. Um...when families first come in we, because we know that little ones are going to have a hard time with that separation, we'll...we'll ask the parent to take a picture with their child. We then laminate it and we ask the parent to give some kind of loving words or caption to it.

So, for example, "Amanda, you're my little sweet pea," might be one of...that a parent might share. Um...and we have those accessible for the children to use if they're starting to...if we start to see that maybe during a transition time that maybe that separation anxiety sort of surfacing, we can see if they want to look at the picture. We also sing some songs – I won't sing the song now... Amanda: [Laughs]

Kim: ...because I don't think our audience wants to hear me; they'd rather listen to other things but we sing something. It's a song and it's actually a real song called the "Mommy"... "Mommy Comes Back" song, and I don't have the name of the person who did it, but I think a lot of people know it...but to...to use singing and...and that same message of "Mommy comes back, she always comes back, she'll never forget you..." can really help little ones. Not just using the words, but using singing because we know from research that singing registers at a...at a more primary level.

Um...and...and we also know that singing can be very calming for children. Um...so...so being able to do that...and those pictures are oftentimes used as a transitional object for their children because most of our kids don't have blankies, they don't have – because they...they've come to the shelter perhaps with nothing. Um...so to have that sort of little picture...

Um...we also do some family photographic baby life books where, you know, while the parents are in the nursery we offer to take pictures of them and their child, and we make it really clear that we want to take the pictures of them and their child. Some of our parents will say, "Oh. No no. You just take a picture of my little one." And we explain to them that, "But, you know what? Your baby doesn't want to look at them. They want to see you. You are Mommy and you are the most, most important person to them."

And it is remarkable because when we show a picture to a two-year-old that two-year-old will oftentimes kiss that picture of their mommy. And if that doesn't make your heart feel happy, I don't know what will. Amanda: Well, and the parent's heart feel happy. Kim: Absolutely. Absolutely. Amanda: Oh wow.

Kim: So you really sort of get that bang for your...that double bang for your buck because you're helping that child feel good about themselves and feeling connected to their parent, but for the parent, maybe for the first time, when they

have that wonderful little interaction, they feel competent. They feel, "Aha! I am being a good parent, even though I'm in shelter." Um...and I...I think that's really important is to allow parents to have an opportunity to feel like they're parents -- that they're not just somebody in a homeless shelter.

Amanda: Yes. Mia, how do you do that in your center? Mia: Well we find that when the parents are happy the children are happy. And we probably – all of us who are in center-based programs can think of that one parent who always comes in just so angry, just so unpleasant and we have to remind our staff that the more pleasant you are, the...you have to kill them with kindness. Um...that adage.

Because families are dealing with so much...I mean, being a parent is just hard, but parenting while you're experiencing something such as...such as homelessness can make your life just difficult, and so smiling at someone in the morning is just the last thing you're thinking about doing. But when the children see that the parents are happy, they'll be happy at drop-off time. So remind the staff that you have to say, "Hello. Good morning Ms. So-and-so. How are you doing today? How's everything?" They may not say absolutely anything.

But maybe later on that day, they'll think about you saying hello, and maybe they'll say hello back in the afternoon. Or maybe they won't, and if they don't, you still have to be consistent and still say hello and still smile, and still let them know that you're caring about them – and caring about what they're going through. Amanda: And that can certainly, we know, trickle down to impact children.

Mia: Yes. Amanda: Mhm. And I think, you know, the two parts to that are so important. Both to understand, you know, where some of that grumpiness might come from in the morning, and...and also to understand the importance of that consistent response. I mean I think those two pieces are critical.

Mia: Yes. Amanda: Um...in your work in the center-based program, Mia, what elements do you find to be particularly helpful in serving the children? The children, now, who are experiencing homelessness?

Mia: Um...well definitely in general whether they're experiencing homelessness or not, structured routine is important in a program, and the children expect things to happen and when they expect things to happen and they happen, they...they know how to act accordingly. Um...and also using photos. I laughed when Kim talked about the digital camera because I think we've gone through two or three because we use them so much, but they are a life-saver.

And you know, it helps children who are learning their language to understand what happens next because, especially when you're experiencing homelessness, your life is so unpredictable, and so if we can provide that bit of predictability – they know that they're going to have snack at this time, they know that, you know, we go outside at this time, that provides some type of comfort for them. Um...while we do value the consistency in our programs, we understand that we have to be flexible. The children are going to be a little hungrier, so they do may need a lot longer during breakfast.

They may need to play outside a little bit longer because, guess what? When they go ho...to the shelter there's no going back out later in the evening. Um...and you know it's, you just have to be flexible. You have to understand where the children are coming from. Flexibility with the parents and also with the children. Amanda: So the balance of those two things.

Mia: Yes. Amanda: Structure and flexibility, and not structure but really providing some predictability for that...for that child. Mia: Yes. Amanda: And I think that we talk about that in one of the principles, principle number eight: Offer that Structure and Routine. Kim, what about the kids?

Kim: Well with respect to our kids, we...we...it's sort of tricky. We...it's difficult to follow a year-long curriculum for them, but we do keep a very structured day, and when the day has to change, it's not always easy for our little ones. We also have lots of kids who are rotating through our program. We have about 60 families that rotate through, so you know, their average length-of-stay is about 11 weeks, so that means we may have kids there for four months, we may have kids there for two days.

Um...so we have to make sure we have real consistency in our day and...and providing that sort of opportunity to play and allow them to take play at their own pace. Um...I think is really important. Amanda: Very good. Marlene.

Marlene: Yes. For us we really promote interaction and socializations, so we provide families with the opportunities to come together so children can play together with other children -- mixed age-groups or the same age depending on what group socialization they're...they're enrolled in. So we're providing as a home-based program we're...we're pro...we're providing weekly socializations rather than the mandated by the performance standards of just two a month.

Amanda: Mm...so that they have more of those opportunities.

Marlene: Yes. Amanda: Very good. Kim, I know folks have in their packets – I think on page ten – some information about Peek-a-Boo. Can you talk about that as...

Kim: My favorite game in the world. Love that game. And I always joke that if I'm ever on Oprah -- Oprah, if you're out there -- I'd love to talk about Peek-a-Boo to her and spread the Peek-a-Boo word. I think that in this day-and-age of gazmos and gidgets and kids playing Game Cube and Game Boy... and I think, you know, people forget about how important it is to have face-to-face interaction with little ones.

That...nothing against Baby Einstein but, you know, putting a child in front of a television with a video with lovely colors is not going to really help them grow social/emotionally, and it's certainly not going to help affect the impact of homelessness that some of our kids have. So one of the things that we...we have realized over the years is how much we do Peek-a-Boo in our nursery. And so much so that we've...we've developed a little handout, which I think you referred to.

And we oftentimes have Peek-a-Boo cloths and we...we do a lot of trainings throughout the state of Maryland and...and a few across the country to childcare providers. And we often give out Peek-a-Boo cloths and talk about how Peek-a-Boo is just a wonderful game to help little ones really get the concept of object permanence. And it's...it's a little game that...that, you know isn't just for newborns and three-month-olds. It's something that is sort of like a continuum. If you think about it, Hide and Go Seek is basically Peek-a-Boo for kids who are school-age.

Amanda: Oh yeah... Kim: Um...you know, they're hiding and they're seeking and they're finding each other and there's the excitement of it and and so Peek-a-Boo is that and...and so playing that very simple game at every opportunity with our little ones in our nursery -- we're giving their brains an opportunity to learn that Mommy comes back.

We're get...we're helping with that wiring that's going on in there. And it sounds simple...it...it doesn't sound fancy, in fact, it doesn't cost any money. Um...other than maybe getting the receiving blanket up, or, you know, going and finding your hands. Um...but it really is a tremendous thing for people to remember.

And for children who have experienced homelessness, who may have separation issues, you know, they're in, you know, you know, they're four years old, you think, "Well they should be over this by now." Well, they may be revisiting it because of the trauma, and so having an opportunity to do tunnel play could be great for that child.

Amanda: Well and it's such a lovely strategy too, to...to talk about with families because it's sort of one of those things that you can...you really can do anywhere, and it's such a nice interaction with the child and to see the joy when they see your face again. Very lovely.

I think one of the things that we didn't talk about but is also really important to highlight is the very real focus in Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs to offer developmentally sound and language-rich experiences and sort of the simple importance of that for children whose families may not be able to provide those things at home.

Um...one person who I spoke with in Boston noticed that often children come into her program with language delays in particular – and...and you all talked about that as well – but very quickly get up to speed with focused language-rich interaction, and as Kiersten was talking about families experiencing homelessness being categorically eligible for our programs, I think we can see why in...in just the simplicity of that.

I think the rich, the individualized services that are appropriate, early intervention when that's appropriate provided through partnership with Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Early Head Start programs -- again, through that one-stop shopping as much as possible is so vital for these children.

I think another point raised in...principle...sort of the last two principles is, you know, that folks are with you for a short time, and that number ten, which is that families in homeless situations may not stay for long, it's so important to emphasize the value of each day and offer a positive experience to children and families each day. Kim, can you say something about that?

Kim: Sure. Absolutely. I think that sometimes we...we as clinicians, as program managers, as bureaucrats, or whoever...policy makers feel like we have to, you know, have the complete answer, and often time if we think in the moment. If we're in the moment with the family and realize that, "You know what?" -- if, I think...I think it was Mia who said this -- you know, greeting that family with a smile that morning, that could be something that really could be a seed that was planted for that family.

And allowing parents an opportunity to sit with their little one and be face to face and...and to get to focus on each other, that just that simple experience can really have an impact on that family's life. Um...we're currently doing some groups out of a transitional housing program, and we just were meeting with some of their staff and they were saying how that the parents love our parent group, which is actually family groups.

We're...we're....we're doing very little lecture, but we're allowing, sort of, experiences for the parents and the children to have, like Peek-a-Boo, and having an opportunity to engage with your child in a positive environment is just so important for these families -- to have that there, because they don't get that everywhere. Amanda: Mm...mmhm. Marlene.

Marlene: Yes, Amanda. Well, for our program at The Children's Aid Society we really have invested in the Ounce for Prevention Scale as an assessment tool, and there's a piece with that that goes, which is a family album, and the family album really serves as a keepsake for families to document the time with their child or pictures, and it has a section for gallery, which the parent and child can draw.

And the family album is something that stays with the family, and it moves with them as they turn...they go to the next developmental age. So we really have come back to the family album and make sure that when we leave the home visit that families have something to follow, or to go back to, or to refer if there's questions in the five domains. Amanda: And so nice to leave a keepsake so even if we know that families can be really transitory in these situations, so they can leave fairly quickly as we're saying and so...so nice for them to have something that they can take with them.

Marlene: Absolutely. And to keep the memories as well. To...to create their history. Amanda: Yeah. Well I think we have come to the point in our program when I'm going to ask Melissa to come on and give instructions for how to call in with a question. Melissa.

Melissa: Certainly. If you'd like to ask a question, please press star one on your telephone keypad. A voice prompt on your phone line will indicate when your line is open. Please state your name before asking your question. If you're on a speakerphone, please make sure that your mute function is turned off to allow the signal to reach our equipment. Once again, if you'd like to ask a question, please press star one now.

Amanda: And I think as...Melissa, if it's okay as we're waiting for folks to queue up with questions, I do want to end with that...what act...what ac...what actually is the last principle, number eleven. I left number eleven off, which is so important -- Take Care of Yourself. And it's such a critical one. This is hard work, working with families who are very stressed, in these very stressful situations, this is tough. So let me ask our panelists, as folks are queuing up here, how do you support staff in doing this work? Um...and we'll start with Mia.

Melissa: Ma'am, this is the operator, Mia's line has been disconnected. Amanda: Oh! Melissa: We're trying to reconnect her now. Amanda: Okay, great. We're going to get Mia back with us. Marlene.

Marlene: For our program it's so important that administrators are available and that staff have regular, scheduled supervision once a month or bi-weekly or as needed and that staff can communicate their concerns about families and their feelings get validated about the observations that they make in home visits or during... Mia: Hello, it's Mia. I'm Sorry.

Amanda: Oh...Mia's back with us. Go ahead Marlene and we'll get back to Mia in a second. We're talking, Mia, about how...how to support staff in really taking care of themselves as they're working with families. Mia: Oh! Okay. Amanda: Go ahead, Marlene, I'm sorry.

Marlene: It's just so important to schedule regular supervision. Supervision that's reflective, that staff have the opportunity to...to share their concerns and brainstorm together and ask questions. Amanda: Very good, and that's a regular time. Marlene: Yes.

Amanda: Mia. Mia: Yes. Amanda: Supporting staff.

Mia: Um. Well I find here with staff being from all over the country, um, I find that it's hard for them to define homelessness or poverty the same way we do here in America. So it's hard for them to... as teachers see and talk about what we have to be conscious of what these families are going through and...and the struggles that they're having because they see that they have some form of food, they have some form of shelter.

In a lot of their countries, that's not...that's not poverty. And so, bringing that into your staff meetings, and like Marlene said, into your supervisions and having them understand that poverty looks very different in different places, but yet the outcome is still the same. Stressors are still the same. The feeling that you don't have or you can't provide is still the same no matter where you are in the world.

Amanda: And so to do some of that cultural bridging and really talking about culture and what that is and what it looks like... Mia: Yes. Yes.

Amanda: ...very important. Very important. And we know that there's sort of a culture that grows up around homelessness in...in this country as well and there's sort of the cultures within the shelters and cultures within each apartment and... Mia: Right. Amanda: ...all of those kinds of pieces that are a very important part of the work that people do. Kim. Supporting staff.

Kim: Yeah, I think, you know, we have sort of as one of our core roots to our program we...we really look at...at this whole process as sort of a continuum of nurturance. That, you know, it's very important for me and...and our agency to support staff so that staff can support parents, and then parents can support and nurture their children. Um...and that there's a continuum there.

And that, to set up an environment where it really is a very safe place to be. Um...we have really started to stress – not just in our nursery, but in a lot of the trainings that we do at childcare centers, of people paying attention to sort of the affect and the...in the environment. Um...you know, how you speak to children is very important, but also how do we speak to each other as staff? Um...and how do parents and...and staff speak with each other in...in the presence of children, and really promoting sort of good manners and...and being respectful.

And and not respectful, whereas if there's a problem, we don't bring it up; if there's a problem, we bring it up in a respectful manner, and that we have a forum for that. But to also be very aware that sometimes we as adults like to interact with each other in a teasing kind of way, or sort of as my kids would say, "Dissing" each other. Um...and there's sarcasm sometimes that's shared back and forth between adults, so making sure that...that we have an environment that's free of that because then you have a real safe place to be.

You don't have to worry about saying something and someone making a sarcastic comment back to you, um...and so we really promote that for staff how we as staff interact with each other. And I think it...it lends itself, and I think families pick up on that...and they know that as well because we oftentimes will talk about it and it's written in various

places throughout the program. Um...that we really want to you know, be respectful to each other and what does that mean? Um...and I think staff appreciates that because I think it filters all the way down, and children pick up on it too.

Amanda: Absolutely. Melissa, do we have any questions? Melissa: Yes we do. Let's go ahead and take our first question. Amanda: Hi. Melissa: Go ahead the line is open. Amanda: Go ahead.

First Caller: Okay my question is, um, we have a few families on our waiting list: one has lost their home to a fire, and the other one has lo -- she's separated from her husband, and she has no job. My question is do...when you start considering someone as homeless, is there a time limit you should look at to see how long the family has been with another family? Amanda: That sounds like a great question for Kiersten. Kiersten, are you there?

Kiersten: Yes, I'm here. [Clears throat] Excuse me. Um...yeah thanks for the...the question and I think at this point, um, what we're encouraging programs to do is to, again, kind of look at the individual situations. I mean...I think th...the ideal is that...that these families would be...you'd be able to enroll these families as soon....as....as...as possible, but when you're in a waiting, when they're on a waitlist, obviously that...then you don't have the spots available at that time,...

...obviously that's the first challenge, but I think you kind of have to reassess the families' circumstances along the way and...and...determine if you would consider them to still be homeless. I don't think that there's any time frame that...that anyone would, you know, that we would say...you, you know, someone is...is homeless but a certain amount of time has gone by and now they're, you know, living with family.

I think it's more...and so, you know, they're not necessarily homeless. I think the questions are really about what are the circumstances that led to this? Is this what the family...is this where the family wants to be? Um...is this...is this a planful situation for the family or are they looking to establish housing and different circumstances for themselves in the fut...in the future...near future?

Amanda: All right. Does that help? First Caller: Yes. Amanda: Very good. Are there more, Melissa? Melissa: Yes, we'll move on to our next question. Amanda: Hi, do you have a question?

Second Caller: Yes. I was wondering...you were talking about when children...like at the center home...center-based program, when children are released, do you take the time to acknowledge that to the other children? Since they might have a question as to this child is no longer here? Amanda: Oh. So you're talking about the tran...if...if, if families are moving away to really spend some time with children talking about that?

Second Caller: Correct. Amanda: Kim, do you want to answer that question?

Kim: Sure. Absolutely. Um...we absolutely...we do, to the children who when their friend leaves. One of the things that we use in our circle time is we have a book that has a copy of the picture that I spoke about earlier, and we enlarge it, so it's our circle-time book, so it's not uncommon for little ones to say, "Oh there's..." you know, "there's Mary." And we say, "Yeah, Mary's not with us anymore. We have new friends now. Mary has move...her family has moved to a new place."

Um...obviously an 18-month-old isn't going to necessarily cognitively understand that. But, we...we do...we do recognize that children leave, and little ones will ask questions, and sometimes our children – for whatever reason...um – may leave shelter, and then come back to shelter. Um... and have left our program for maybe a month or two and...and they may see some of their little friends in the nursery at the shelter, even though now they are not in the nursery. So it can be a small community at times.

Second Caller: Right. Okay. Thank you! Kim: Mhm. Amanda: Kim, do you see, or do any of you see sort of that anxiety as, that anxiety from the young children as they sort of see children sort of come in and out, I mean I would imagine that's a different kind of separation for them that they are going to need to cope with in a different way.

Kim: Yeah. Um...I can honestly say that, you know, when...when some children have...have really, sort of, developed a

little special relationship staff will note that, "Oh, you know what? I think that he's missing his little buddy." Um...they're....I think that at that point they're...they're at times numb from all of the changes that some of our little ones experience so I think what we need to be most aware of is be watchful for them, be supportive of what they might be experiencing, helping them understand their feelings and ide...identify their feelings with words.

And when their actions, you know, when they're having actions that are not appropriate, like they're pushing and they're biting, helping them learn ways of using gentle touch and soft touch because maybe they're...they're missing their mommy or their friend. Um...and being able to sort of verbalize that for little ones is really helpful and our staff does a great deal of that throughout their day. Amanda: Mia, did you want to add to that too?

Mia: I just was agreeing with Kim. I think we probably see as part of like a tactic of being resilient, a lot of the children and, you know, adults in the family, they decide not to acknowledge their feelings at all. And so if you don't, you know, the child may be fine, but it's still okay to talk about, you know, "I'm sad that, you know, you may be leaving." Or "I'm sad that your friend left," or, "Are you sad that your friend left?" You know, having feelings because sometimes in our families, they don't talk about their feelings at all, so just acknowledging that there are feelings there whether they're good and bad.

Amanda: Melissa, are there more questions for the panelists today? Melissa: Uh huh, yes, we'll move on to our next question. Amanda: Hi, do you have a question?

Third Caller: Hi, thank you, this is, I'm calling from Region 9, and we have a question in regards to promoting breastfeeding. If the panelists can share successful strategies that they've used with with mothers in terms of promoting breastfeeding? Amanda: Ah! My favorite topic. Is there anybody that would like to respond to that?

Kim: Um. I probably could talk a little bit about that. It's also one of my favorite topics, having experienced it on a number of occasions and really being a supporter of that. I think that we...we certainly for parents want to be supportive of if they choose to...to nurse their child, and to allow them opportunities throughout the day if they want to come in and nurse their baby, helping work with them, and working with like our nurse practitioners to get maybe a pump so that they...if they are needing to pump and leave a supply at our nursery – sort of like any daycare, we would do.

I think it is very challenging sometimes for our families when they're homeless because it depends on what their situation in the shelter is. Um...being able to help advocate for that family that, you know, "For this mother can we...can we give her a special bin that you can keep in your refrigerator so that she can freeze her breast milk and bring it in the next day?" You know, whatever...how...how can we support and advocate for them in doing that. But absolutely. And for us, the opportunity for nursing is just such a wonderful time to sit and...and connect with your baby.

Um...because you can't prop a – well you can probably pro...prop your breast, but you know ...you're there; you're connected with your baby, whereas people may prop a bottle and leave a baby in a...in a little jumpy seat. Um...whereas, you know, we really do want to encourage families to be connected during that feeding opportunity, and nursing is just such a great way to do it. But we also don't want to push families to do anything, either. It's really the family's choice. Amanda: Well and we know that propping a bottle is never an option in an Early Head...

Kim: Nope. No it is not. Amanda: Start... Mia: [Laughing] Amanda: programs. But we do know that is something that we need to talk with families about. Kim: Yep. Yep.

Amanda: Did others want to weigh in on that? Marlene: I would, Amanda. It's so important to really support families like Kim said and for families to find the rhythm for what's going to work for...for them best because sometimes they can't not...they can't feed on demand and really working out what's going to work out better for their baby and being sensitive to the child's cues and the mother's cues, and what's on the plate for Mom and what she's juggling is also very important.

Amanda: Melissa, are there other questions? Melissa: Yes, we'll move on to our next question. Amanda: Hi.

Fourth Caller: Um...hi. My name is Joan Qwerk. I'm from [inaudible] Early Head Start. Um...I have a question -- a family of four is renting a room in a house where other families are also residing. This family's undocumented, they do not qualify for rent assistance and cannot afford their own apartment. The family lives in a one bedroom in the home and they use the kitchen and bathroom with other families. Um...you know, I...we feel this is inadequate, it's not a fixed place for them, so would they be considered homeless? Thank you.

Amanda: And I'm going to send that over to Kiersten. Kiersten: I mean, I think that again that...that this would be based on...on your interpretation of what you would consider to be substandard housing.

Um...you know, in the definition it talks about, it's not an exhaustive list in the definition of...of all the different circumstances a family might, might be in, but there is an emphasis on, you know, what would be considered to be substandard situation and you might look at factors like, you know, how many people are living in a situation per square foot, you know, what sort of safety, any safety concerns in the...in the housing situation, and I can again refer you to the policy...

...there's a policy question that talks about what type of living situation might qualify in terms of being homeless, related to...to the kind of situation you're talking about. So I think...you know, you...you just have to really kind of look at the different factors and determine the stability of the situation -- what came before, again what the family's goals are, and whether you...the circ -- the situation seems to be safe and adequate.

Amanda: And I think we're going to -- this is Amanda -- I think we're going to discuss more of that on...on our second part of this particular series on May 13, but...but in the meantime, I know we got a lot of questions that came in from the field that about, you know, "Is this a homeless situation? Is this a homeless situation?" And I think that's sort of the piece about, you know, you have to use your own judgment. Um...

Kiersten: Yeah. One thing I will say too is that there- - we're going to be developing some materials that will be on the ECLKC that will help programs to kind of start to think about the definition and, and to think about different factors... just to help people kind of start to make...you know... to make some of those kinds of decisions because there are a lot of gray areas.

Um...and the other thing, too, is the organizations that I...that I mentioned, particularly the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, they do a lot of training on...on the McKinney-Vento definition -- the broad definition, and...and there...there is a great focus on helping the folks the person...the personnel who work in different educational agencies, helping them to figure out who is eligible. Um...and it's...it's not a science because again the definition is so broad.

And the reason this definition is so broad is...is...is that, you know, we know that shelters are often full and that um, you know, many suburban and rural areas don't even have shelters. And you know that we know that motels might not always be available and...and that families often do have to turn to these different kinds of circumstances like the caller just described.

Um...so...you know, the situation clearly for that particular family described is that...that that...that there is certainly a real economic hardship there, and that is part of the... of the definition for homelessness. There is the piece about you know, considering the loss of housing and also considering economic hardship. So...so yeah, but we'll talk...we'll ...we'll get more into these kinds of things at the next call and you can also -- I encourage you to submit...you can submit questions to our office through the ECLKC on these kinds of things as well.

Amanda: Melissa, are there other questions? Melissa: Yes we do have other questions, we'll move on to our next one.

Fifth caller: Hi, Sherri Watkins and I'm calling from Bright Beginnings in Washington D.C. I have a question about repeating the cycle. Um...how do we assist parents with repeating the cycle of homelessness as relates to bringing in children into their current situation? Thank you.

Amanda: Can you Sherri before you go, could you talk a little bit more about what you mean about repeating the

cycle? Are you saying are...people are going back into homelessness and coming out and going back? Sherri: Um...that's one example, but we oftentimes find that parents come with one child and we're able to enroll that child into our program, which is great. But then we also find that they're pregnant, and then we also bring that child into the program. But then again, they become pregnant again, so what advice – what should we do in those cases?

Amanda: Um...Mia, do you want to speak to that? Mia: Sure. My Bright Beginnings family, I used to work there, so hello everyone there. Um...I think it becomes -- and I know exactly what you are talking about, and I think that it becomes bigger than just telling a parent that they can't have any kids anymore. This thing is bigger than any just one family.

This is America's – this is our situation, and I think a lot of things have to change in our system because it's... it's a mentality, and we have to change that mentality. How? I don't really have the answer and I don't know that anyone does. But this is something that...I mean, things like this...this forum right here is beginning the conversations. We can start talking about it.

We can start helping our families do better because it's...it's...it's a bigger problem than just telling them they can't do it. So it's just thinking about it differently and that's....this is what we do. This is our work and this is why we're doing it. So it's really not an answer, I don't think.

Amanda: Well this is Amanda, and of course it's never the role of Early Head Start or Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs to say you can't have another baby. I mean, I think that that's -- I think it's, you know, it speaks to sort of a much larger issue, as you say. Marlene, did you have a point on this?

Marlene: Just reiterating what...what Kim stated. That it's really...we're...we...we in situations have to adapt to the family's multiple needs. Um...it's not a simple answer and it's really accepting families choosing to have families no matter what their economic situation or religious background or, you know, beliefs are. It's really supporting families having children, if that's their choice. It's so important not to...to...not to judge and...and think that this is a repeated pattern, but what's going on that we can help support families have healthy children and...and families to be successful.

Amanda: So it's a deeper question than that. Um...Melissa, are there other questions? Melissa: Yes, we'll go ahead and move on to our next one. Amanda: Hi. Sixth Caller: Hello. Amanda: Go ahead with your question.

Sixth Caller: Um...I think that my...Amanda was speaking at the time, and I was trying to make some notes and it's... it was on page five we were goi...you were all going over that. It said "Look deep and long at the causes of homelessness." And she quoted a statistic of 46 percent and I...I wrote that down, but I don't remember what it was in reference to and I was wondering if somebody could remember and help me with that.

Amanda: Sure. I was talking about poverty and, you know in very...very bad form, I don't have a reference on this, but what I've written down here, and actually, Kiersten, I think I got this off of some of the materials that you sent me, not to put you on the spot, but...what we know about homeless families is that...is that they're often -- poverty is a huge issue for them. And the one that I gave was that the mean income of homeless families is 46 percent of poverty. So we know that poverty is often a very critical issue in the lives of the families that we serve who are experiencing homelessness.

Sixth Caller: ...poverty. Thank you so much. I just wanted to be sure I had that quote and I've enjoyed this conference call very much. Thank you. Amanda: Well very good. Other things, Melissa. Melissa: Yes, we'll move on. Amanda: We probably...we probably have time for one more question.

Melissa: One more question? Okay, this shall be our final question. Seventh Caller: Okay. Um...I have a question regarding, and I think this is probably for Kiersten...it's: How do you meet the Head Start requirements for the full enrollment if you're working within a shelter population where you have a constantly changing number of children?

Amanda: Ah...and that might be a May thirteenth question as well, but I'll let Kiersten... Kiersten: That's the...that's the question of the day, isn't it? Amanda: [laughing]

Kiersten: How do you maintain full enrollment and serve a highly mobile population? Um...listen, what I can tell you is that you know, we're...the Office of Head Start, we're going to be -- We are charged with promulgating regulations to help remove barriers to serving homeless families, and while we've been in transition for quite some time, we haven't been able to put those requirements out to the public yet for comment -- that will be forthcoming.

So...at this point we haven't been able to put anything out there that kind of clarifies that for programs, so in the meantime I think you're just going to you know, need to deter...make determinations based on how you would prioritize your enrollment. Kim: Actually, I can speak to that as a program that serves homeless families...

Kiersten: Great. Kim: ...has lots of rotation. Um...we're trying to problem-solve and plan for that. Um...so Kiersten, whenever you have some ins and outs, let us know, please, because we would love to know, you know, how we can support that whole issue. But we...we...one of the things that we are doing is, sort of, because we do have a pretty extensive waiting list...having families ready to go immediately into the program, so doing almost some of the initial paperwork even before they come in.

Seventh Caller: We have...our center is actually located in a shelter. Kim: Yeah that's a... Seventh Caller: So...so we pull from those children. So it's just sort of, you know, it's hard to dictate what age families they should let into the shelter because we need to fill our numbers.

Kim: Yeah. Yeah. And...and what we def...we serve a variety of shelters throughout Baltimore City, so and we're sort of letting parents know when they go on the waiting list that you know, that as soon as we have an opening we'll call them.

Um...we encourage them to keep calling us frequently and that, you know, if they're not available when we call them, then we may have to go to the next person on line because we've got to fill those spots and be prepared to do that, so...just trying to help the family understand that. And...and anxiously looking to see what the, you know, Kiersten's office will be coming out with.

Seventh Caller: What they come out with. Kiersten: Are you...were you saying that sometimes you don't have the right age kids coming through? Kim: Yeah. We have... Kiersten: the shelter? Kim: We have that as well.

Kiersten: Do you...are...do you guys have...and again, I...I...well I know we're going to be wrapping up here, but the you know just, I think we can maybe spend some time too on the next call talking about outreach and the way that folks are outreaching and the kinds of connections. I'm curious -- I'd be curious if you have relationships formed with the homeless liaisons in your area because sometimes, you know, they have an entire a large number of families they're working with...with children of all ages.

While they're usually typically focusing on those school-age children, they are required to to ensure that pre-K kids are also having continuity of education, and I know that we're talking Early Head Start, but a lot of times they have...um you know, small little ones in their families as well. Seventh caller: We have a good relationship; it's just... Kiersten: Oh, good!

Seventh Caller: ...just one of those questions that's kind of been out there for a while. Kiersten: Yeah, I know. I mean, we...it's...it's...it's...it's...you know, there's...there's things in the act that appear to kind of contradict themselves, so it's...it's... Seventh Caller: Yeah.

Kiersten: ...challenging. That...so...and I know there's sort of a vacuum out there right now of of resolution on that and so I know you all are waiting and...and doing the best that you can, and more will be forthcoming. Seventh Caller: You're working on it, so that's good. Kiersten: Yep. Seventh Caller: [Laughs] Okay.

Amanda: Thank you all so much for the questions and of course for the...for the answers, to the panelists. As we close, I've asked all the faculty to identify for us the one, you know, certain message that they want to make sure people leave with, and I wanted to do that now, so let's start with Mia. (Beeping of touchtone dialing.)

Amanda: Oh dear. Is that Mia? Mia? How about Marlene? Let's start with Marlene. Marlene: Marlene. It's so important to, I'm going to use Tony Lindor because that's something that we always use in our program, and it's his technique of SOUL.

Um...Silent, Observation, Understanding, and Listening, and it's just so important to be silent to...so families have the level of... that you're notyou don't have your agenda and that you're silent and you're listening to families and you're observing, and then you're able to sort of understand and come together. Amanda: Very nice. Did Mia return to us? Uh! How about Kim?

Kim: Yeah, um. I think back of a conference that I went to years ago, and actually it was probably eight years ago, maybe a little longer, and there was a young man who was talking about the three Rs. You know, it used to be "Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic." And he said really the three Rs are: relationship, resilience brings reading.

Um... and to remember that that relationship really, really, really is the key to everything that we do, and that that's so important for us especially when we're working with families who are experiencing homelessness, because it's a pretty significant trauma, and they feel very wounded, and they feel very stressed, and to be able to be a human being that reaches out to them and is open to them in a non-judgmental way.

And to have that positive relationship really will hopefully help them also have that positive relationship with their baby because we know that that will really carry the family forward. We're just a little blip in their lives. Amanda: Mm. And Kiersten, did you have something you wanted to add?

Kiersten: Well I just really like to thank everybody for coming and joining the call today and...and just you know that we really, we know that...we know that there are some programs who have been kind of diligently focused on working with this population based on the way they've designed their programs for many, many, many years.

And we know that Head Start since, you know, since inception Head Start has...has been working with families who are homeless, and we really just we really want to encourage people to seek information, participate in these forums and get the training that they need to...to for some programs make that shift to ... to some programs make that shift to focusing more on ...on this population or on a more mobile population, which...which can be harder to serve.

And it almost sometimes requires people to think...or programs to think along along different kinds of ways of...different service modalities so to speak and that that can be hard. Um...So...so we...we hope though you know, for Head Start and Early Head Start that we can...we can begin to serve more of these families, and we hope that we see our numbers go up nationally, and I obviously don't mean that in a...in a In a...a good way.

Like, we know there are more of these families to serve, so we hope that we see that we're able to serve more because that was the intention of the changes in the Act. Um...also look forward to the next call and umm...and again just thanks for your participation.

Amanda: Well and I really want to thank you, Kiersten, and Marlene, and Kim and Mia I don't know where you went... Mia: I'm here. I came back. I came back, I'm sorry. Amanda: Did you have a quick final thought?

Mia: I just wanted to let everybody know that, you know, as much as we can talk amongst ourselves about how to serve the families, the best thing we can do is ask these families. Um...talk to them. Their...their voices are the most important about how we can help them. Um...I think, I'm glad we're having these conversations now. I know those who work with...hello? Amanda: We're here.

Mia: Oh. Okay. [Laughs] Those who work with families in these situations, it's hard...it's hard work because we just don't understand why it keeps happening, and but I think again the situation is bigger than just these families. It's, you know, a national thing that we have to start talking about and thinking about and changing certain laws and policies that create this homelessness because these families don't do it by themselves. Understand that, and I think that's where...if we can change our thinking about it, we can help these families even better.

Amanda: Well and I think that that vision of families as part of a larger system helps us understand staff and programs as a part of a larger system to help families and that's certainly something that we're going to be focusing on on May 13th. We hope everybody's registered, and if you're not there's certainly registration information available on our website. Thank you so much to our faculty today and thank you so much for...to our participants for being here and for participating with us. For further information and resources on this topic, please refer to the other materials in your packet.

Um...we hope that you will take the time especially for reflection and discussion around the Applying the Information handout in particular, and of course please send your evaluations into us. We really want to hear your thoughts about this program, your questions about this program as we move forward in planning part two. Um...and we'll hope...we hope that you'll join us then. I do...I want to do one final housekeeping note. The Birth to Three Institute is coming up starting on June 22nd, that week.

Um...information, registration materials were sent to programs and are also available on our website at www.ehsnrc.org and we hope to see you there as well. Thank you again for being a part of this today now I'm going to turn it back over to Melissa to end the call. Melissa. Melissa: Thank you, that concludes our presentation. Thank you for your attendance and have a wonderful day.

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