

## From Vision to Reality: Early Head Start Start-Up & Implementation

Angie Godfrey: [Inaudible] ways that we serve as well as the staff.

Kevin: Sarah.

Sarah Merrill: Great. Thank you, Kevin, and good afternoon to everyone. I'm Sarah Merrill with the Early Head Start National Resource Center, which is also known as the EHSNRC, and we're located here in Washington, D.C. We're happy to be with you today for the webinar event: From Vision to Reality: Early Head Start Start-Up & Implementation. Today's web event is being recorded and will be archived for later viewing on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center or the ECLKC. And in our audience, we're joined by federal staff, TA providers, and the newly funded ARRA Early Head Start or EHS program. Regardless, if you're participating with us live, or accessing us through the archived event, we really send you a warm, hearty welcome. And we're very pleased to have a panel of guests who will share their stories and expertise with us today. Joining me at the EHSNRC offices are Angie Godfrey, the Infant and Toddler Specialist from the Office of Head Start, and you may remember seeing Angie if you attended one of the recent Early Head Start national orientations located in D.C. this past winter. Also with us is Jennifer Branch, who is the Head Start Division Director from the Early Head Start/Head Start Program in the county of Fairfax, Virginia, and Misty Horne, who is the Early Head Start Director from the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma. Misty is joining us from Perkins, Oklahoma today.

And as the webinar progresses, you will get an opportunity to hear from each of them and learn a little bit more about their program start-up process. And we really appreciate that you're able to be a part of our presentation today. Also with us in the EHSNRC offices are Laura Annunziata, Erika Ellis, and Jennifer Boss. They're providing technical assistance in our broadcast room. We appreciate their help and wanted you to be aware of them in case we call out to them during today's activities.

So, the goal of today's webinar is to provide you with lessons learned, strategies, and resources that may help you navigate the process from going from your visions and plans to the reality of implementing your program services and activities. This process can sometimes feel like a slippery slope, as seen by this polar bear in the picture, and even with guidance, and warnings, and best laid plans, you still can have this slippery slope sensation. What we really hope is that today's webinar provides you with tools and strategies that help you better navigate this process and hopefully without sliding. So, to do this, Angie and I will review the four steps of the start-up process, and we will then hear from Misty and Jennifer. They're going to share their insight and experiences of going through the start-up implementation process. We will also respond to questions posted by our audience in the live

presentation. As Kevin just mentioned, you can send in your questions through the live broadcast by going to the private tab, then to leaders and assistance, and we will answer as many of them during the Q&A segment of the broadcast. We'll be sure to post the responses to these questions and to any of the unanswered ones onto the ECLKC along with this archived broadcast. So, Angie. You've provided a great deal of leadership and support to Early Head Start Programs and particularly during the recent expansion efforts. Would you like to share an overview of what's occurred because of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act?

Angie Godfrey: Thank you, Sarah. And I also want to welcome everyone to this webinar and hope that it gives additional information for the work you're doing with your Early Head Start Program. The first thing I wanted to mention is, the webinar we're doing today is not the first we've done. We've done webinars, and audio conference calls, and webcasts. And I just would direct all of you to the ECLKC, where you can access the information and the resources that have been developed, and also to EHSNRC.org where you can also access the resources that have been developed to help all of you with your programs. As Sarah said, these are all archived. All the work that we do is archived so that you can access it whenever you need it.

Also, we've had four wonderful orientations, and I know many of you have been. We are going to have a fifth orientation, because some folks were funded late, and I think sometimes they filled up we had so many people. So, we're really excited to do a fifth and final orientation to ensure that everyone can come to that. It will also be in D.C. and I'm not sure the dates have been sent out yet. No? So, that date will be getting out to you soon. The other thing that's in full swing is the start-up planner training. Many of you have start-up planners, and we did send something out to all programs. I hope if you have it currently, or are working with the start-up planner, that they are going to be coming to the training. It's going to provide a lot of resources to help programs not just start-up, but to understand standards and to be able to fully implement Head Start Performance Standards. We know that that's a key to quality services. If you are still looking for start-up planners, I should have checked before I came over here. I did not, but the list, I know, was forwarded to ECLKC to be posted. So, that's another way that we're working with all of you. I also know there are great regional and state trainings that are going on. So, I think it's just an exciting time for Early Head Start, and I'm just really happy to be here, Sarah.

Sarah Merrill: Well, thank you Angie. And what's so nice about this start-up period is that we've learned so much from the programs who first started out their services in the early 90's and even in the early 2000's. And what we've particularly learned is that there are four steps that they utilized in their start-up process. These four steps are summarized in the slide. The first one is utilizing resources. The second step is reviewing and developing management systems and procedures. The third step is preparing for program services and activity. And lastly, the fourth step is actually implementing these services and activities.

As we know, many of you are now in the time frame of actually beginning to implement the services. And it's likely that you've encountered, or will eventually encounter, the need to adapt your service plan. So, one thought is, you may want to consider thinking of this start-up process, really, as an ongoing pathway in adapting and revising services in an ongoing way. And just so you know, we've included a four-page brief as a resource. It provides an overview of the start-up process. And the document also includes the Organizational Readiness Chart, which is a chart at the very end of the document. It's about eight pages of timelines and tasks that help with the various stages of implementation and start-up process.

So, I'm wondering how many of you actually have used the Organizational Readiness Chart? I just wanted to give you a moment to use the yes-or-no survey tool. So, if Kevin can put that icon back up. Thank you, Kevin. And the question is: Do you use the Early Head Start Organizational Readiness Chart as part of your start-up and expansion effort? It looks like we have a fair amount who actually do, and I hope it's been helpful. It's been set up to be a nice timeline. And for those of you who don't, you may want to just check it out as a resource and see how it matches with your plans today. So, thank you for taking that time. Angie, you were once a Head Start Director, and I'm just wondering what helped you stay focused on the important work of planning and delivering quality services?

Angie Godfrey: Thank you, Sarah. It was such a wonderful time to be a Director, but I know that many of you are probably feeling overwhelmed by all of the work that you have to do. And I think it's important to remember that there are both challenges and triumphs. That there are so many issues that you are going to have to grapple with and work with, but there are many people out there to help you. And so, I think just take a deep breath. Stay focused on the babies, and toddlers, and families that you are going to be working with. Know that they need you. Stay focused on supporting the staff, and the families, and the children. And then, really learn to understand and to work with the Head Start Performance Standards. The Head Start Performance Standards are there to support you. I always felt, as a Director, that it was wonderful to have the Standards because that's where we could always go for the answers and to really understand what it meant to fully implement Early Head Start. So, they really are helpful, and they can give you incredible support as you move forward. And they're also helpful to your families and your staff. And again, I want to remind you that the standards are important in implementing quality. Research has shown us that the more fully Head Start Program Performance Standards are implemented in Early Head Start, the greater the outcomes for children and families. So, it's a wonderful framework. It's up to you to think about how you are going to provide services and activities in your community, and what it is that you're going to do to ensure quality services for families in your community. But know that you have the performance standards and all of us to support you in your work. Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Merrill: You're welcome, Angie. I know implementing the performance standards can indeed be a challenge. But when it's done effectively, it really becomes that triumph that you've been talking about, and it's a triumph for everyone involved. The children, the families, the program, and the community. And part of beginning and expanding services entails hiring new staff, partnering with new colleagues, enrolling new families. And so, how does a program ensure that everyone who's new knows what Head Start is and what the Head Start Program Performance Standards entail? To help us answer this, I want to reintroduce Misty Horne. Misty is the Early Head Start Director from the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma. So, Misty, why don't you first get started by telling us a little bit about your Early Head Start Program, and then share how your program helps new staff and new partners understand Head Start.

Misty Horne: Thank you. Sarah. Well, to let you know a little bit about us; we're an American Indian/Alaskan Native Early Head Start Program here in Oklahoma. Our program serves a total of 32 Early Head Start children and families. And 24 of those slots are center-based and eight of those slots are expectant families. And, as you can see, here's a photo of our center during our recent ice storms. But it is set up very different than most Head Starts as you see with the small equipment. We definitely found that it was important, early on during our development, to share an understanding of what Early Head Start and Head Start is. Most of our general community tended to think that Early Head Start was childcare. And we first started out trying to explain the comprehensive approach that Head Start and Early Head Start offers us. We took the responsibility to utilize teachable moments within our community and with our new staff. A lot of times, it was hard to find staff that really understood Early Head Start because it was so new.

Sarah Merrill: Absolutely, and I know partnering and collaboration are critical to providing comprehensive services. So, how does that process especially when you are in the beginning phases?

Misty Horne: We've collaborated with many different agencies. One, to start with, is we had the availability to collaborate with our tribe, with our local WIC., and TANF. We've also needed to look at many things during our collaboration to remember that all the partners in the collaboration provide different things, such as our tribal childcare, and we need to make sure we are giving those meaningful and quality services to the whole community. And also by letting each of our collaborative partners know what we involve for our program, and what's involved in their programs, to make sure that we work together. Not to duplicate the services but to find out what's missing and what we need to do together to fill in those gaps and share those tasks. And we want to make sure, most importantly, is that we are providing essential and quality services to our families and to the children. And one challenge that we experienced with our local partners was that a lot of people didn't realize what it meant to have a federal grant, nor did they realize the [inaudible] the changes of what's going on and what federally funded programs really included. That there were a lot of rules, and regulations, and mandates that came with that. And because of this, or maybe in spite of it, we still showed our partners that we could

work together. And we just needed to think of how we could do this and just have the attitude of "we can" and not "we can't." And that was the main focus is that we're here for the families and the children and working to provide those collaborative partnerships.

Sarah Merrill: That's a great key for success, and I know part of the process is taking time to communicate. And with this in mind, I just wanted to offer a piece of advice that we learned as we were planning for this call is taking time to learn each other's lingo. You have to be aware of acronyms and terminology. And what can be clear to the internal staff to one organization, such as what this little boy is writing. He knows what he's writing, but other folks may not know what he's trying to get across. So, we have to take the time to figure out what things mean, and we can't assume that we're all using the same terminology. For example, the [inaudible] use of the word assessment is what Head Start calls for their evaluation.

So, we really need to take the time to define everything. Angie, did you want to take a moment to talk about collaborations, because I know this is a passion of yours.

Angie Godfrey: It certainly is, and I really appreciated what Misty said. Particularly that it's true that every partner wants to provide meaningful services to families in their community and, I think, understanding that it's so important that you look for the opportunity to collaborate. I think one of the collaborations I've really enjoyed seeing, as I've gone out and visited programs, is WIC. Again, it's another program that so many families in the community depend upon. And when Early Head Start and WIC. programs work together, it provides seamless services for families. I've been in centers where there was a WIC registration on site and vouchers were handed out to families on site. I've also seen family childcare program options that have connected with WIC. offices so that families could have all the services they needed without having to go to multiple locations. So, just keep that in mind. I think you'll find many opportunities in your community to work with other agencies that also serve at-risk families.

Sarah Merrill: Absolutely. Misty, did you find you needed to bring on additional partners because you found unexpected challenges or identified new needs?

Misty Horne: Yes, we did. Initially, as I stated, we were funded for all center-based slots, but our community assessment revealed to us that there was an increase in teen pregnancies in our community. And we revamped our approach to include services for expectant families. And we found that our focus needed to be on pregnant teens. And we worked very closely with our federal program specialists to make sure that we made those changes in our grants to focus that. And with this new focus, it meant we

needed to add partners so we could better serve our pregnant moms in our teen population. For example, we connected with local hospitals, health clinics, and the La Leche League for pre- and post-natal resources. And we also worked with high schools to support the teens and making sure that they continued education while having healthy pregnancies and babies. We also needed to ensure that our staff was prepared to work with expectant families as well, and understand what and how that meant for the families, even with teenagers. And a lot of times, we looked at families as a mother and father, or an adult-based family, but now we were looking at a family with a young teenager. So, it changed our approach and definition of family.

Sarah Merrill: Absolutely. And I know services for expectant families might be a new area for many of our new programs. Were there any lessons learned regarding how you implemented these services?

Misty Horne: Absolutely. As I mentioned, our community partnerships are critical when providing these services. And one challenge is creating the best system for transitioning the newborns into our program option. And when we're enrolling our pregnant teens, we look at due dates, as well as other criteria, so we can best ensure that the center-based spaces are available when families want to enroll their children. And we also make sure that we're providing services to the child and family in the interim time. If there may not be a slot center-based immediately available, we are still servicing those families through their family service plan. It's also important to consider the mental health service side of it. Both the families and staff...one of the challenges that our program encountered was early on in our expected family services, we had a large number of losses. And that proved be a large mental health service need for not only the families but the staff as well, as they were experiencing these losses alongside the families, because they'd become very close to them.

Angie Godfrey: It's wonderful that you mentioned that, Misty. I think the collaboration and partnership with mental health agencies and mental health services in the community is so important for families with unexpected birth outcomes and for all families that we serve as well as the staff. So, that's an important partnership. The other thing you mentioned that is also so important is that you serve pregnant women, and you continue to serve expectant families after the baby is born, until you place the baby. And I think that there is oftentimes confusion about that. But services to expectant families is part of the family and community partnership area in Early Head Start. And through the family services plan that you have with families, you should be serving the family and the family and the baby once the baby comes. And I know some programs do interim home visiting and do other services to stay connected to the family, until the baby can be enrolled in one of the program options. So, thanks for talking about all of those.

Sarah Merrill: It's certainly exciting times when you have parents expecting new ones. I can attest. This is actually my family photo, and my daughter still gives her little brother the same look. And they are teenagers at this time. So, it's a time full of lots of excitement and challenges. So, Misty, you mentioned earlier that your program focuses on wanting qualified staff who are able to provide appropriate services and programming. Can you talk a little bit more about this?

Misty Horne: Absolutely. One major challenge of finding qualified Early Head Start teachers was, truthfully, qualified infant and toddler teachers really didn't exist when we first started out. Most people had the preschool experience. So, we needed to hire staff that had a certain quality suitable for very young children such as patience, flexibility, and warmth. But we had to reach out to our community to ensure that these teachers also were able to get their CDA's, as standards required of us, and to provide that quality service to our children and families. And we had to find CDA courses or training with credits in our community.

One of our partners was the University of Oklahoma and other local colleges. They helped develop CDA coursework. And we had individuals who taught CDA classes on site at the centers, or they could go to other surrounding Head Start's and take CDA classes as well. We also talked with our state and local licensing agencies, as well as our resource and referral agencies, about sharing our resources such as our staff trainings. And we did a lot of collaboration with our tribal childcare doing some staff trainings on the more traditional common areas, such as CPR/First Aid. And also learning about our state and local approaches and having ongoing conversations about quality with other local and state regulators. We started to see that our state licensing was starting to interweave Head Start Performance Standards into the state licensing regulations.