



# **Promising Practices for Children Experiencing Homelessness: A Look at Two States**



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

**July 2014**

## Introduction

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released *Opening Doors*, the nation's first comprehensive strategy to prevent and end homelessness. *Opening Doors* serves as a roadmap for joint action by the 19 USICH member agencies along with local and state partners in the public and private sectors. *Opening Doors* seeks to:

- End chronic homelessness by 2015;
- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans by 2015;
- Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020; and
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

In September 2012, USICH released an Amendment to *Opening Doors*, which was developed to specifically identify strategies and social support services that should be implemented to improve the educational outcomes for children and youth, as well as the steps that need to be taken to assist unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> In order to support the goal of preventing and ending homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020, USICH convened an interagency workgroup on family homelessness, which created multiple sub-committees, including a sub-committee on early childhood homelessness. This sub-committee has focused on creating resources to help both the early child development field and the homeless services system become more effective at serving young children age 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness. This brief is one such resource.

This brief will provide an overview of the effects of homelessness on young children; federal initiatives that have expanded access to early care and learning for young children experiencing homelessness including Head Start and Early Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund, Early Childhood State Advisory Councils, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education programs, and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge; and how two states - Massachusetts and Oregon - have implemented innovative policies to improve early childhood outcomes for young children experiencing homelessness. Lastly, this brief will present recommendations for how states can learn from the policies established in Massachusetts and Oregon to develop their own interventions.



## The Effects of Homelessness on Developing Children

Approximately 1.6 million children nationwide, or 1 in 45, will be homeless at some point within the span of a year.<sup>3</sup> Forty-two percent, or approximately 672,000, of these children are under the age of six.<sup>4</sup> Given that the vast majority of these children experience homelessness temporarily,

the number of young children who experience homelessness at some point from birth to age six is higher than the number who experience homelessness in a given year.<sup>5</sup>

Young children, infants, and newborns that experience homelessness face a combination of barriers to healthy development and educational performance, including:



- A higher prevalence of physical disabilities, developmental delays, emotional problems, and behavioral issues;<sup>6</sup>
- Stress levels high enough to trigger harmful biochemical impacts on developing children<sup>7</sup> - also known as “toxic stress” responses; and
- Little or no positive interaction with adults due to the tremendous challenges faced by parents experiencing homelessness.<sup>8</sup>

Studies have found children who are both chronically and briefly homeless face these barriers in some capacity.<sup>9</sup>

### **Toxic Stress Response, Brain Development & Early Childhood Homelessness**

The adversity of early childhood homelessness can lead to a lifetime impact. Examples of early adversity include child abuse and neglect, exposure to violence, chaotic households, and homelessness. If unaddressed, these experiences can lead to toxic stress responses that can have damaging effects on a child’s health and well-being.<sup>10</sup> The prevalence of toxic stress responses in the lives of young children experiencing homelessness is crucial due to the lifelong impact it can have on physical health and linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills.<sup>11</sup>

The National Council on the Developing Child has proposed a conceptual view of three distinct types of stress responses - toxic, positive, and tolerable- on the basis of differences in their potential to have long-lasting impacts on brain development as a result of intensity and duration of the response.<sup>12</sup> A positive stress response is brief, mild, and provides an opportunity for the child to grow,<sup>13</sup> a tolerable stress response is associated with a young child’s exposure to abnormal experiences that involve a greater level of threat,<sup>14</sup> and a toxic stress response disrupts the function of the brain and/or other organ and metabolic systems.<sup>15</sup>

According to Dr. Jack Shonkoff of Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, “[T]oxic stress can result from strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body’s stress response systems in the absence of the buffering protection of a supportive, adult relationship.”<sup>16</sup> His synthesis of the research illustrates how such disruptions can result in anatomic and/or physiologic changes that can lead to later impairments in learning and behavior, as well as become the roots of chronic, stress-related physical and mental illness.<sup>17</sup>

The stressors that may result in toxic stress responses in young children experiencing homelessness are similar to those stressors faced by stably housed low-income children,<sup>18</sup> which

include financial distress, residential and school mobility, crowding, and hunger.<sup>19</sup> But, young children experiencing homelessness face more of these stressors simultaneously than their peers with stable housing,<sup>20</sup> often without the support of a caring adult figure.<sup>21</sup> Exposure to these extreme and chronic stressors can produce these toxic stress responses, increasing the likelihood a young child who experiences homelessness will struggle with developmental delays and poor educational performance.<sup>22</sup>

Research underscores the importance of addressing and preventing the effects of early adversity on children and families. Early learning programs provide an opportunity to combat the harm that extreme and chronic stress exposure and subsequent toxic stress responses may have on the healthy development of children experiencing homelessness. But, these young children are underrepresented in early care and learning programs.<sup>23</sup> Lack of resources, lack of awareness of children experiencing homelessness, high rates of mobility among families experiencing homelessness, and stringent documentation requirements (e.g. immunization forms, health records, birth certificates) are a few of the unique challenges to providing high quality early care and learning services to children experiencing homelessness. States need to address the unique situations of children experiencing homelessness in order to make their programs accessible.

## Programs for Children Experiencing Homelessness



Around the country, Head Start and Early Head Start, child care, Early Childhood State Advisory Councils, McKinney-Vento educational programs, and Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grantees are implementing interventions for young children experiencing homelessness. These programs provide promising practices that all states can build on to address the needs of children often left out of these services, such as children experiencing homelessness.

### *Head Start and Early Head Start*

In 2007, the passage of the [Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act](#) (hereafter referred to as the School Readiness Act) created specific policies for increasing Head Start and Early Head Start access for children experiencing homelessness. The School Readiness Act requires Head Start and Early Head Start programs to prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment, allows all children experiencing homelessness to enroll before their required documents and immunization forms have been submitted, and mandates that Head Start and Early Head Start grantees coordinate with the local McKinney-Vento homeless education liaison.<sup>24</sup> These policies helped to make the comprehensive services provided by Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which are already well-suited to address family homelessness, more accessible to these families.

Many Head Start and Early Head Start programs have responded to the 2007 legislation by building strong partnerships with other service providers in order to be even more effective at reaching children experiencing homelessness.<sup>25</sup> Effective partnerships have increased Head Start

and Early Head Start enrollment among families experiencing homelessness and connected these families with other needed service providers. Evidence from partnerships around the country has shown these reciprocal relationships help foster an environment of healthy development for young children experiencing homelessness and help move families out of homelessness. Yet Head Start and Early Head Start programs are unable to serve all children experiencing homelessness due to limited resources. Therefore, the work done by these programs to reach children experiencing homelessness is a model that states can learn from. Please see “[Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness](#),” for more information on Head Start and Early Head Start programs that have built partnerships with homeless service providers.

### *Child Care Development Fund*

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has focused efforts on expanding child care opportunities for children experiencing homelessness. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) made \$5.2 billion available to states in block grant funding through the authorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).<sup>26</sup> According to the Office of Child Care, “CCDF assists low-income families in obtaining child care so they can work or attend training/education. The program also improves the quality of child care, and promotes coordination among early childhood development and afterschool programs.”<sup>27</sup> States choose how to implement their funding in a method they feel fulfills this purpose and meet the needs of the state.

Although the federal government does not mandate policies for states to administer the CCDF, ACF developed [guidance for prioritizing children experiencing homelessness](#) to expand access to high quality child care for this population.

The ACF recommendations for state child care administrators expanded on the policies that Head Start and Early Head Start programs adopted following the 2007 Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act. The following ways to support children who are homeless or who are at risk of being homeless are provided to administrators:<sup>28</sup>



- Prioritize access to services for children experiencing homelessness;
- Offer flexibility on documentation requirements for families experiencing homelessness;
- Coordinate with McKinney-Vento homeless education state and local coordinators;
- Work with homeless coalitions and community organizations;
- Identify potential transportation for families experiencing homelessness;
- Coordinate and align regulations between Head Start and CCDBG policies;
- Exempt housing assistance from countable income;
- Waive co-payments for low income families;
- Expand the definition of working to including job searching;
- Leverage job training opportunities in other federal programs;

- Provide direct grants and contracts to organizations that provide childcare to families experiencing homelessness; and
- Provide ongoing training for staff related to serving families experiencing homelessness.

All states have the opportunity to implement this guidance into their CCDF administration and other relevant programming in order to increase access to high quality early care and learning programs for children experiencing homelessness.

***Early Childhood State Advisory Councils***

From 2009 – 2013, ACF administered \$100 million in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to enable states to lead the development and enhancement of high quality, comprehensive systems through the creation of [Early Childhood State Advisory Council \(SAC\) grants](#). Among other requirements, SACs were charged with conducting a needs assessment to identify barriers to high quality early childhood education and care, identifying opportunities for collaboration among existing programs, and developing recommendations for increasing participation in early childhood education and care programs for underrepresented and special needs populations.<sup>29</sup>

Four SACs gave specific attention to children experiencing homelessness in their needs assessment and plan. For example, Montana’s SAC focused on increased family homelessness due to rising housing prices and the barriers these families faced accessing high quality early child education and care.<sup>30</sup> Their recommendations included educating local, State, and Federal officials on housing’s crucial role in supporting stable environments for children and implementing crisis and prevention support services for families experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.<sup>31</sup> Three other states (Connecticut, Vermont, and Kentucky) identified the needs of children experiencing homelessness and proposed recommendations.<sup>32</sup>

All states have the opportunity to develop early childhood systems that support the early learning and healthy development of children experiencing homelessness. States can build on the work of the SACs that have focused on homelessness and incorporate the lessons learned into their future early childhood plans.

***McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Programs***

[The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act](#) (hereafter referred to as McKinney-Vento) was passed in 1987 as the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. The passage of this act created the first comprehensive federal law to address homelessness.

McKinney-Vento was reauthorized in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, where it obtained its present name. Under McKinney-Vento, each state educational agency is required to ensure that children who are experiencing

<b>Table 1. Federal Definitions of Homelessness</b>	
<a href="#">Dept. of Education Homeless Definition</a>	<a href="#">Dept. of Housing and Urban Development Homeless Definition</a>
Unwillingly doubled up with family or friends	Imminent risk of homelessness
Residing in hotels or motels, trailer parks, or camp grounds	Fleeing and/or attempting to flee domestic violence
Residing in an emergency or transitional shelter, abandoned in hospitals, or awaiting foster care placement	Homeless under other Federal Statues*
Unsheltered or living and/or sleeping in a place that is unfit for human habitation	Unsheltered or living and/or sleeping in a place that is unfit for human habitation
*Not funded under most HUD programs and Need HUD Permission	

homelessness have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children in the state.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the Department of Education has a more expansive definition of homelessness than the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as shown in Table 1.<sup>34</sup>

Through the McKinney-Vento Act, states must present a plan to give students experiencing homelessness the opportunity to meet the academic achievement standards that all students are expected to meet.<sup>35</sup> States appoint a homeless education coordinator and local school districts appoint local homeless education liaisons.<sup>36</sup> The coordinator and liaisons facilitate programs designed to ensure children experiencing homelessness are able to achieve academically, be placed in a school they select, enroll in school without incidence, resolve disputes, and obtain transportation to and from school.<sup>37</sup>

All states have the potential to build on the work done by McKinney-Vento programs by connecting preschoolers experiencing homelessness to these programs and by involving McKinney-Vento coordinators in their early care and learning systems.

### ***Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge***

The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) is a grant program that is co-administered by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. RTT-ELC supports states' efforts to raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs.<sup>38</sup> To date, there have been three funding cycles (2011, 2012, and 2013) and 20 states have received RTT-ELC grants. States received funding to focus on five areas, or "change levers," for system reform.<sup>39</sup>

Each of the five reform areas is an important aspect of increasing access to high quality early learning for children with high needs. The five reform areas are:

- *Successful State Early Learning Systems* that are built on broad-based stakeholder participation and effective governance structures;<sup>40</sup>
- *High-Quality Accountable Early Learning Programs* that are based on a common set of standards and alignment of Head Start, CCDF, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), state-funded preschools, and similar programs to create a unified statewide system of early learning and development;<sup>41</sup>
- *Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children* through the implementation of common statewide standards for young children, comprehensive assessments that align to those standards across a range of domains, and the provision of clear guidelines for improving the quality of programs and services that promote health and engage families in the care and education of young children;<sup>42</sup>
- *Developing a Great Early Childhood Workforce* through professional development, career advancement opportunities, differentiated compensation, and incentives to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities to promote the learning and development of young children;<sup>43</sup> and
- *Measuring Outcomes and Progress* through the collection, organization, and understanding of evidence of young children's progress across a range of domains, as well as though the

implementation of comprehensive data systems and the use of data to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.<sup>44</sup>

The 2013 RTT-ELC application defined children with high needs as “children from birth through kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays; who are English learners; who reside on “Indian lands” as that term is defined by section 8013(7) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended; who are migrant, homeless,<sup>45</sup> or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.”<sup>46</sup> The broad definition of children with high needs has allowed states to develop plans that use “change levers” to reach their specific high need population.

Massachusetts and Oregon were both effective at utilizing their RTT-ELC grant to increase access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities for children experiencing homelessness. In fact, these states were the only RTT-ELC states in the first two funding cycles that outlined a specific plan for reaching children experiencing homelessness in their application.<sup>47</sup> Pennsylvania, a third cycle grantee, also outlined a specific plan for children experiencing homelessness and has just begun to implement its work. All states, regardless of RTT-ELC status, can learn from the work of Massachusetts and Oregon (see below) in order to better serve young children experiencing homelessness by using targeted interventions.

## **Two State Plans**

Massachusetts and Oregon have both developed innovation policies to expand access to high quality early care and learning programs for children experiencing homelessness through their Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. An overview of these state policies and the strategies each used to implement them can be found below.

### ***Massachusetts***

Massachusetts has a history of investing in children experiencing homelessness through interagency collaboration, engagement of the private/philanthropic sector, and academic research.<sup>48</sup> Massachusetts sought to build on the work of the state’s Coordinated Family & Community Engagement (CFCE) program and past efforts to enroll children experiencing homelessness in childcare programs.

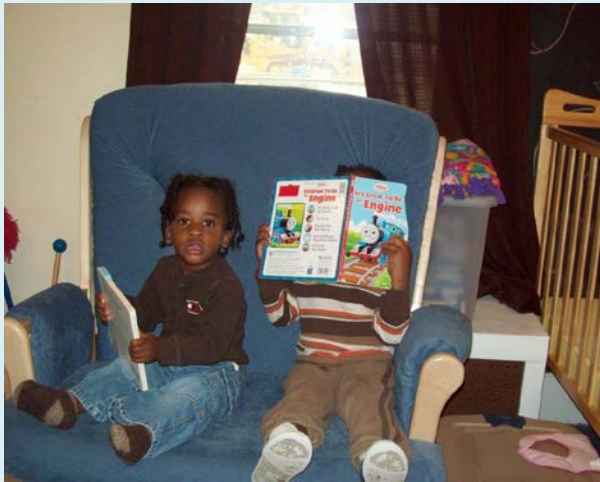
The Massachusetts RTT-ELC plan to expand access to high quality early learning programs for children experiencing homelessness has six main tenants:

- Data sharing between the Department of Early Education & Care (EEC) and the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) to identify where and how families experiencing homelessness are interacting with state programs;
- Training staff and directors of homeless service and emergency shelter staff to provide knowledge on early childhood development and encourage the use of developmental screening practices;
- Information sharing with homeless service providers to ensure they are aware of early care and learning programs that are available to families experiencing homelessness;



- Linking homeless service providers with Coordinated Family & Community Engagement program grantees through personal introductions and regional meetings;
- Social activities to bring together homeless service providers, early care and learning providers, and families experiencing homelessness; and
- Working with museums and libraries to bring high quality early learning programs into easily accessed public spaces.

The Massachusetts RTT-ELC team has had success in expanding access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities for children experiencing homelessness. The Department of Early Education & Care organized a social event for families experiencing homelessness and local service providers in order to build stronger relationships and receive feedback on the efficacy of



Massachusetts's early learning programming for children experiencing homelessness. The Department of Early Education & Care worked with the Department of Housing and Community Development to train over 120 shelter staff on child development and the importance of developmental screening. EEC also worked to connect homeless service providers with their local CFCE programs to help link families to needed services, included development screenings and referrals. Lastly, EEC, DHCD, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing &

Homelessness collaborated to support a set of regional partnerships to secure employment, stabilize housing and address the developmental needs of children for at least 150 adults from recently-homeless families participating in DHCD's HomeBASE initiative. The state hoped to develop a replicable model and to inform state and federal policy regarding homelessness, employment and child development.<sup>49</sup>

Although Massachusetts is successfully implementing its plan to expand access to early care and learning for children experiencing homelessness, there have been some barriers such as staff turnover, a lack of infrastructure, and organizational cultures that are resistant to collaboration. In response to these barriers, Massachusetts seeks to:

- Institutionalize relationships through changes in state program contracts;
- Build engagement from agency leadership;
- Create a staff position to coordinate interagency work, including work with homeless service agencies;
- Develop strong interpersonal relationships across departments and sectors;
- Highlight efforts to build on past accomplishments; and
- Use shared data to guide goals and strategies across agencies.

## *Oregon*

The Oregon approach to increasing access to high-quality early care and learning programs for children experiencing homelessness is centered on developing local systems that encourage collaboration across early learning sectors.<sup>50</sup> Oregon took advantage of its RTT-ELC grant by focusing on the creation of 15 regional Early Learning Hubs. These hubs are tasked with increasing the number of children who are ready to learn when they enter Oregon’s kindergarten programs, with a special focus on children experiencing homelessness and other children at high risk of not being kindergarten ready. The approach seeks to take the currently disparate set of programs for children ages 0-5, including public pre-school, health care, home visiting, child care, food assistance, developmental screening, and homeless services, and coordinate them through the regional Hubs. Specifically, each Hub shares the following responsibilities:

- Identify children at risk of arriving at kindergarten unprepared for school, including children experiencing homelessness;
- Work with families to identify specific needs;
- Connect families to the supports or services that most meet their needs;
- Work across traditional silos; and
- Account for outcomes collectively and cost effectively.



To meet these responsibilities, Oregon’s Early Learning Hubs must involve representatives from early learning; K-12, health care, business, human services, and parents. This strategy builds on the existing relationship between early learning agencies and the Oregon Department of Human Services, which currently manages both the state’s homelessness programs and child care subsidy program. The increased emphasis on interagency relationships at both the state and local levels is intended to create an integrated and aligned system of services that holistically address the needs of children at a higher risk of arriving at kindergarten unprepared for school including children who are experiencing homelessness. This holistic approach allows Regional Hubs to address the five “change levers” identified by RTT-ELC in a manner that makes sense for the needs of their particular region.

Although Oregon is in the early stages of creating regional Early Learning Hubs, the state’s RTT-ELC team identified a number of barriers. These barriers include the wide variety of needs and situations that vary region-to-region, the difficulty in tracking a homeless family’s interactions with state and local programs, and the lack of affordable housing for families experiencing homelessness. In response to these barriers, Oregon seeks to:

- Emphasize regional control of policy implementation while providing support and guidance from the state level in order to encourage productive collaboration;
- Build on existing relationships between agencies at the state and local level;
- Plan and implement steps to share and disaggregate data across government agencies; and
- Use this data to guide policy decisions and show the need for policy interventions in early learning, early education, affordable housing, homeless services, and other sectors that affect the lives of families experiencing homelessness.

## **Recommendations for Other States**

Massachusetts and Oregon used the funding from their RTT-ELC grant to develop innovative policies targeted at expanding access to high quality early care and learning programs for young children experiencing homelessness. States can draw from lessons learned by Massachusetts and Oregon in order to develop their own interventions. Specifically, the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families and the Department of Education recommends that states review and consider the following policies established by Massachusetts and Oregon:

### ***Recommendation #1: Build Relationships between Agencies and Sectors at the State and Local Levels***

Massachusetts and Oregon have been able to dynamically address the need for expanding early care and learning programs to children experiencing homelessness because they have built relationships between the multiple agencies that interact with families experiencing homelessness.

- In Massachusetts, the Department of Early Education & Care built on a strong relationship with the Department of Housing & Community Development by involving DHCD in the state's RTT-ELC governance structure. This gave the RTT-ELC coordinating committee access to data, programs, and staff that work closely with children experiencing homelessness outside of traditional early care and learning settings.
- In Oregon, regional Early Learning Hubs were mandated to include representation from the Oregon Department of Human Services, which manages many of the state's homeless service programs.
- In both states, collaboration happened at both the state and local level, which allowed for sustainable relationships to be built that address the specific needs of different regions as they change over time.

Other states may replicate examples from Massachusetts and Oregon by fully understanding their state's homeless service system, identifying agencies and programs that work with children age 0-5 that are experiencing homelessness, and intentionally bringing these agencies and programs into their early care and learning conversations to create collaborations whenever possible.

### ***Recommendation #2: Build Connections between Parents, Service Providers, and Agencies***

Massachusetts and Oregon have increased their ability to receive and respond to direct feedback from program participants by building connections between the parents of children experiencing homelessness, service providers, and state agencies.

- In Massachusetts, the Department of Early Education & Care organized a social event to build strong relationships that allow for constructive feedback among parents of children experiencing homelessness and service providers.

- In Oregon, parents must be represented on the coordinating committee of regional Early Learning Hubs.

Other states can solicit direct feedback from program participants by hosting creative social events, engaging parents in the local governance structure of early care and learning programs, and/or capitalizing on previously established parental engagement/feedback processes in other programs, such as Head Start.

### ***Recommendation #3: Provide Cross-Training Opportunities for Homeless Service Providers and Early Childhood Agencies/Providers***

Massachusetts and Oregon have strengthened the capacity of their states' early childhood workforce by providing cross-training opportunities for early childhood and homeless service professionals. This builds skills, expertise, and relationships among the diverse group of people who have a large effect on the development of young children experiencing homelessness.

- Massachusetts hosted cross trainings for homeless service providers/agency staff and early childhood service providers/agency staff.
- In Oregon, the diverse governance structure of the Regional Early Learning Hubs will lead to natural sharing of skills and knowledge. These trainings allow representatives from multiple sectors to share their expertise and ensure that safe, developmentally appropriate environments are pursued by all who work with young children experiencing homelessness.

Other states can work to provide similar cross training by identifying programs and agencies that work closely with children age 0-5 experiencing homelessness, building relationships, and developing training materials that will provide information, resources and steps for supporting young children and families who are experiencing homelessness.

### ***Recommendation #4: Build on Past Efforts and Successes Serving Homeless Children***

Massachusetts and Oregon were largely successful in their efforts to expand access to high-quality early learning programs for children experiencing homelessness because both states built on past efforts. The RTT-ELC coordinating committees were able to tailor messages to decision makers and navigate the large, at times complicated, homeless services system based on lessons learned.

Other states can learn from the efforts of Massachusetts and Oregon by identifying successful past collaborations between the early care and learning sector and the homeless service sector. Highlighting and/or expanding on past or existing collaborations will help decision makers see the potential for successful collaborations.

### ***Recommendation #5: Share Data across Agencies***

A key aspect of the plan to expand access to high-quality early learning programs for children experiencing homelessness in both Massachusetts and Oregon was to share data collected on

families and children experiencing homelessness. Both states had difficulty tracking the interactions that these families and children had with their state's social services due to their high levels of mobility and the fragmented nature of data collection across programs. Tracking and sharing data across agencies was beneficial to have a better understanding of the range of services or benefits accessed by homeless families.

Other states may implement data sharing practices by building a better understanding of their state's homeless service system, connecting state early care and learning, family homelessness, and education agencies that collect data on children age 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness, and developing Memorandums of Understanding or other contractual data sharing agreements among agencies. Sharing data is important to identifying benchmarks to measure progress and outcomes, developing holistic interventions for children age 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness, and communicating the importance of these interventions to decision makers and the public.

## **Conclusion**

Children age 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to a host of negative outcomes, including behavioral and developmental delays, physical disabilities, and social emotional issues. Increasing access to high-quality early care and learning programs for this population will contribute to their healthy development and resiliency. Federal programs including Head Start and Early Head Start, Child Care and Development Fund, Early Childhood State Advisory Councils, McKinney-Vento Homeless Education programs, and the Race to the Top-Early Learning challenge have given states and localities opportunities to tackle this problem. Massachusetts and Oregon leveraged their RTT-ELC grants as a method to implement innovative strategies for making their state's early learning system more accessible to children experiencing homelessness. Lessons learned from Massachusetts and Oregon provide other states with an opportunity to develop targeted interventions for young children experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, states can learn from Massachusetts and Oregon by:

- Building relationships between homeless service agencies and early care and learning agencies at the state and local levels;
- Integrating direct feedback of parents of children experiencing homelessness into their early care and learning system's efforts;
- Providing cross-training for the staff of homeless service agencies and early childhood agencies;
- Expanding on past efforts and lessons learned to connect children experiencing homelessness to early childhood development services; and
- Sharing data among agencies that serve families with children age 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness.

Young children experiencing homelessness need these targeted interventions to support their healthy development due to the compounding barriers they face to accessing early care and learning programs. Considering the implementation of the above recommendations and identifying creative, state-specific policies can be steps in a process to strengthen early care and learning services for young children experiencing homelessness.

- <sup>1</sup> “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.” The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Washington, DC. 2010. <http://www.epaperflip.com/aglaia/viewer.aspx?docid=1dc1e97f82884912a8932a3502c37c02>.
- <sup>2</sup> “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, 2012 Annual Update.” The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Washington, DC. 2012. [http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Update2012\\_FINALweb.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Update2012_FINALweb.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. “America’s Youngest Outcasts: 2010.” National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011. [http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH\\_AmericaOutcast2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. “America’s Youngest Outcasts: 2010.” National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011. [http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH\\_AmericaOutcast2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf).
- <sup>5</sup> J. Samuels, Shinn, M., & Buckner, J. B. “Homeless Children: Update on research, policy, programs, and opportunities.” Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2010. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/10/HomelessChildrenRoundtable/index.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. “America’s Youngest Outcasts: 2010.” National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011. [http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH\\_AmericaOutcast2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf); Tumaini R. Coker, Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. “Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness Among Fifth-Grade Students.” *American Journal of Public Health* 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19542035>.
- <sup>7</sup> Bassuk, E. L., Volk, K. T., & Olivet, J. “A framework for developing supports and services for families experiencing homelessness.” *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 3, 34-40. 2010. <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/92.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. “America’s Youngest Outcasts: 2010.” National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011. [http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH\\_AmericaOutcast2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> Tumaini R. Coker, Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. “Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness Among Fifth-Grade Students.” *American Journal of Public Health* 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19542035>.
- <sup>10</sup> “Early Childhood Adversity.” The Administration for Children & Families. Washington, DC. 2104. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/initiatives/early-adversity>.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD. “Building a new biodevelopmental framework to guide the future of early childhood policy.” *Child Development*, 81:1, 357–367. 2010. [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/eez206/srb\\_conference/Building\\_a\\_New\\_Biodevelopmental\\_Framework\\_-\\_J\\_Shonkoff.pdf](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/eez206/srb_conference/Building_a_New_Biodevelopmental_Framework_-_J_Shonkoff.pdf).
- <sup>13</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>14</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>16</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Shonkoff, MD, Garner, A., MD, PhD. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.” *Pediatrics*, 129:1. January 2012. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2663.abstract>.
- <sup>18</sup> J. Samuels, Shinn, M., & Buckner, J. B. “Homeless Children: Update on research, policy, programs, and opportunities.” Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2010. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/10/HomelessChildrenRoundtable/index.pdf>.
- <sup>19</sup> Marybeth Shinn. “What Does Research Tell Us About Homelessness and Young Children.” Presentation. 2013.
- <sup>20</sup> Marybeth Shinn. “What Does Research Tell Us About Homelessness and Young Children.” Presentation. 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> Massuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. “America’s Youngest Outcasts: 2010.” National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011. [http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH\\_AmericaOutcast2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf).
- <sup>22</sup> M. Shinn, Schteingart, J. S., Williams, N. P., Carlin-Mathis, J., Bialo-Karagis, N., Becker-Klein, R., & Weitzman, B. C. “Long-term associations of homelessness with children’s well-being.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51, 789-810. 2008. <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/51/6/789.abstract>; Coker, Tumaini R., Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice

---

Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. "Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness Among Fifth-Grade Students." *American Journal of Public Health* 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19542035>.

<sup>23</sup> US Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Report to the President and Congress On the Implementation of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. 2006. [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ed.gov%2Fprograms%2Fhomeless%2Frp2006.doc&ei=UpmhU7bEH4vJsQS43YLACQ&usq=AFQjCNHADzVFKUPtGFr\\_bayvmISLrBqjQ&sig2=SXnKqh8WC6VG6AFCTTpagQ&bvm=bv.69137298.d.cWc](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ed.gov%2Fprograms%2Fhomeless%2Frp2006.doc&ei=UpmhU7bEH4vJsQS43YLACQ&usq=AFQjCNHADzVFKUPtGFr_bayvmISLrBqjQ&sig2=SXnKqh8WC6VG6AFCTTpagQ&bvm=bv.69137298.d.cWc).

<sup>24</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. "Policies and Procedures to Increase Access to ECE Services for Homeless Children & Families." 2013. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf\\_homeless\\_policies\\_and\\_procedures.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf_homeless_policies_and_procedures.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> The percentage of families experiencing homelessness that were enrolled in Head Start rose by an average of 70.4% from 2008-2011, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010-11 Head Start Program Information Report, Family Information Report Multi Year Report – State Level.

<sup>26</sup> Office of Child Care. "OCC Fact Sheet." <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/fact-sheet-occ>.

<sup>27</sup> Office of Child Care. "OCC Fact Sheet." <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/fact-sheet-occ>.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood Development. "Policies and Procedures to Increase ECE Services for Homeless Children & Families." January 2013. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf\\_homeless\\_policies\\_and\\_procedures.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf_homeless_policies_and_procedures.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood Development. "State Advisory Councils." <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ece/programs/state-advisory-councils>.

<sup>30</sup> Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services Bureau. Best Beginnings Advisory Council: Early Childhood Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan 2013." Pg. 8. March 25, 2012. <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/EarlyChildhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services Bureau. Best Beginnings Advisory Council: Early Childhood Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan 2013." Pg. 12-13. March 25, 2012. <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/EarlyChildhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood Development. "Early Childhood State Advisory Councils: Status Report 2013." Pg. 11, 67. April 2013. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/508\\_sac\\_report\\_3.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/508_sac_report_3.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> US Department of Education. "Elementary and Secondary Education: Legislation; Part C – Homeless Education." September 15, 2004. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Project Community Connections, Inc., Fulton County Schools, Atlanta Public Schools. "Untangling the Web: Collaborations Between Housing Agencies and School Districts to Meet HEARTH Act Requirements." Presentation for the National Alliance for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. October 28, 2012. [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.naehcy.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdl%2Fconf-2012%2Fschuelke-untangling.ppt&ei=W52hU9\\_9OePJsQTRxoDYDg&usq=AFQjCNH8RESLujubTpWKCcwKcEIEDfbHQ&sig2=lq6JYzzqEq\\_x0N5ZjK6rAQ&bvm=bv.69137298.d.cWc](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.naehcy.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdl%2Fconf-2012%2Fschuelke-untangling.ppt&ei=W52hU9_9OePJsQTRxoDYDg&usq=AFQjCNH8RESLujubTpWKCcwKcEIEDfbHQ&sig2=lq6JYzzqEq_x0N5ZjK6rAQ&bvm=bv.69137298.d.cWc).

<sup>35</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, National Association for the Education of Children and Youth, and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. "The McKinney-Vento Act At a Glance." Winter 2008. <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/reauthorization.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, National Association for the Education of Children and Youth, and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. "The McKinney-Vento Act At a Glance." Winter 2008. <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/reauthorization.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, National Association for the Education of Children and Youth, and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. "The McKinney-Vento Act At a Glance." Winter 2008. <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/reauthorization.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge." 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge." 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge." 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge." 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

---

<sup>42</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.” 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.” 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.” 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-early-learning-challenge-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this case study will use the definition of homelessness used by the Department of Education & Department of Health and Human Services. See Image 1 on page 5 for more details.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services. “Application for New Awards; Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.” *Federal Register*. August 30, 2013. <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/08/30/2013-21139/applications-for-new-awards-race-to-the-top-early-learning-challenge>.

<sup>47</sup> The majority of states outlined plans to reach children who have disabilities, children who are English learners, and/or other sub-populations of Children with High Needs. A handful of states presented plans to reach Children with High Needs without specifying any sub-populations.

<sup>48</sup> Special thanks to Liz Belsito and Vicki Van Zee of the Massachusetts RTT-ELC Coordinating Committee for assistance regarding the Massachusetts plan to expand access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities among children experiencing homelessness.

<sup>49</sup> Office of the Governor, State of Massachusetts. “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge: Annual Performance Report, Massachusetts. 2012.” February 15, 2013. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/annual-performance-reports/mafina1apr.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Special thanks to Christa Shively formerly of the Oregon Early Learning Division, and Heidi McGowan of Healthy Business Systems & Associates LLC for assistance regarding the Oregon plan to expand access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities among children experiencing homelessness.

