



# A CONVERSATION: SERVICES TO FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

## JUNE 2019



REGION NINE HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Developed from Presentations and a Round Table Discussion at the  
Region 9 Head Start Association Meeting June 5 in San Francisco

# PRESENTATIONS

## Office of Head Start

Jan Len, Regional Program Manager

“The round table event is a exchange of ideas, experience, wisdom—and aspiration for families. We know homeless families have always been with us. Region 9 communities are even more challenged by homelessness—no matter where they are. Homelessness is receiving substantial more attention than before—but it’s not going to families but to the chronic homeless in the streets. In the shadows are moms, dads, families encountering high-income housing with low-paying jobs.

We’re here to recommit ourselves to doing something for those families—to being more impactful in their lives.”

—Edward Condon  
Executive Director, R9HSA

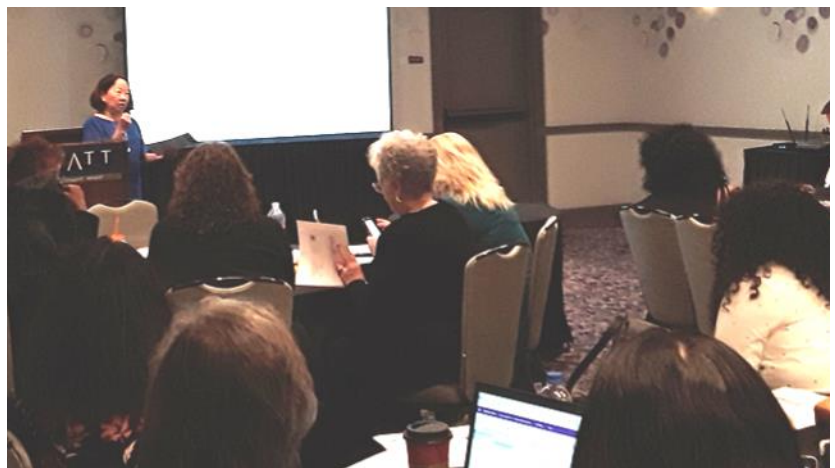
Head Start is working on a better understanding of how to serve families experiencing homelessness. Nationally, more than 50,000 are reported in Head Start—Region 9 has 10 percent of that.

We know we are serving many more families than is being reported. As the advocate for families HS agencies need to better understand the family living situation. We want to go deeper understanding all of the needs of this population, and this will help us develop strategy, solutions and new practices. We would like regional offices to share the practices they are engaged in.

In serving the homeless, there’s a problem with creating stable relationships. Children have more missed school days and lower graduation rates. Eligibility needs to be prioritized.

We think that Head Start agencies have anecdotal data in other records, other files. That’s my plea. It would help everyone across the region and country—the researchers, the national Head Start center. And we would like regional offices to share the practices they are engaged in.

Of special note: Since the issue of homelessness has become more of a concern. Head Start has special “one-time” need funding that can be used to set up classrooms to serve children experiencing homelessness, one-time funding for health and safety needs. We encourage organizations to talk to Head Start program specialists and make an application for these one-time funds, especially if there’s been a local disaster or emergency and clients are affected.



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## Community Action Partnership San Luis Obispo: Implementing EHS Services in a Shelter-Based Setting

**C**APSLO created a new homeless shelter called 40 Prado that was 10 years in the making, built from the ground up. CAPSLO owns the building and it's funded both publically and privately. The funding comes from a variety of sources—the county, state, Head Start, private funds and donors.

It serves a high proportion of homeless families. Many homeless are younger, and teens have access to the shelter. Anyone who needs help, get it. There are 180 beds total. When it's too cold or too hot, the shelter opens up for anyone. It's open in the evenings with cots and sleeping bags.

People can even have their mail sent to 40 Prado, even though they don't sleep there. The facility provides day bathroom and showers for families sleeping in cars, etc. 40 Prado is a safe parking place for cars—if clients don't want to come into the shelters, they can come into the shelter to take showers, use laundry facilities. There is a socialization room for children, a playground outside—and very importantly—kennels for clients' pets. The kennels are a big deal since for many clients their pet is a support system. The facility offers dorm rooms for single men and single women and rooms for families. It's kept in mind that families have very different needs.



There is also a community health center and exam rooms on site and staff for women's health. 40 Prado is a very comprehensive location—partnering with dental health providers. All services come together.

Of special note: The facility has an industrial kitchen for Head Start and Early Head Start programs and recently founded a culinary institute to provide culinary classes. Clients can take a class and receive credit and certification. A recuperative care program is in development with an additional building planned for clients who are detoxing—so they can be in a safe place and transition then to

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the shelter. 40 Prado has become a hub for families experiencing homelessness. There are a lot of volunteers helping out. It is the first place they come to where they know they have a bed, will be safe and have shelter.

There are rules to keep clients safe and moving in a positive direction. The focus is on working with clients and the individual needs they have. Most important is the case management system, with all programs working together to help clients move forward. 40 Prado also links with the school districts.

The case management system includes monthly case review sessions, where providers meet and discuss individuals and families. Coordination is provided because it can be overwhelming for families to have to deal with seven to nine people (representing different agencies). The services work together and are able to refer out clients as needed. It's been very productive for staff relationships. If EHS or HS can't provide a service, there is someone else who can. There is a definite continuity of care. Families who see a teacher in the shelter can see the same teacher when they get to their new home.

The length of stay depends is taken case-by-case. It can be extended as long as clients are following through and meeting their goals.

## E Center, Yuba, Sutter and Butte Counties: Building a Culture of Collaboration

**T**he private, nonprofit Yuba City-based E Center administers federally funded programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and Migrant Early Head Start Programs and Woman's Infant and Children (WIC) in Northern California.

E Center is working on getting known among the community and organizations—that Head Start is there to serve families experiencing homelessness.



Two factors that are key to E Center's service to families are its memorandums of understandings developed with other agencies and a focused effort that uses staff specializing in outreach to recruit new clients.

The E Center is seeing an increase in homelessness. It has, for instance, MOUs with four different homeless shelters, so when families receiving Head Start help move from shelter to shelter, they can

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be more easily tracked and provided continuous casework service. The E Center also has an MOU with a house that serves women and children.

Although ECenter has always had relationships with other agencies, the MOUs establish a system of communication, i.e. contacts at the ground level in each agency. The MOUs previously were written for longer periods of time, but now they have been reduced to six months or a year—as personnel sometime change too quickly. The MOUs are nonfiscal, develop a common goal and are revisited to make sure they are working. E Center services Head Start in nine counties, so its MOUs are many and include food banks, wellness programs, the Salvation Army, health departments, homeless shelters, clinics and more.

To improve recruitment of client families, E Center has also restructured outreach efforts—including creating three staff positions specifically for recruitment. The recruiters are supervised by one manager and all applications are filtered through the three individuals so it can be better determined if the target population is being reached.

E Center has experts going from agency to agency, to apartment complexes seeking families, working on getting referrals, because the categorically eligible clients are hard to find.

## Volunteers of America-Los Angeles: Assessing Your Community's Needs

One of the oft-expressed challenges for Head Start agencies in serving families experiencing homelessness is finding out who they are and where they might be sheltered.

Volunteers of America, founded in 1896 as an offshoot of the Salvation Army, serves children, struggling individuals, and anyone in any kind of circumstance. There are 50 facilities for children's services. It is the largest homeless service provider in Los Angeles, and it has advice and tips to offer on finding data for locating client families.



The stigma of homelessness makes families hard to find. You don't find homeless children in parks. You may see them in the garages of a neighborhood family or relative or in recreational vehicles. It is a very difficult population to find, which is why you have to locate community connections that know about homeless populations.

Data on the homeless can be found on the internet, but keep in mind three principles for gathering this: The data has to be current; it has to be drilled down to the lowest level—census tract data is preferred; and it has to be as accurate as it can be.

Methods of gathering data are sampling of community members, canvas the community with questionnaires or mailers and look to other agencies that already have gathered the information you seek.

Make sure you quote your sources for data and hold onto those data links. Know that there may be some data that is not specific. You will have to go by possible trends in the larger community and compare that to your own program.



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## Los Angeles County Office of Education: Mobile Preschool Bus to Serve Families in Transition

**B**ringing Head Start classrooms out to families via mobile services is a concept gaining traction now as homeless populations burgeon. As the number of homeless increase—there was a 12 percent annual increase alone recorded in the latest survey—Head Start’s program strategy needs to shift and consider more child care partners.



LACOE, in striving to address the unique circumstances facing that prevents families from accessing existing programs and services, has secured funding to develop a mobile pre-school, using a retrofitted school bus or RV.

The bus is expected be a highly visible recruitment tool for LACOE, serving the homeless population and recruiting through class demos and parent education. It is anticipated that the bus will have scheduled routes throughout the week and not be stationary in one location. A similar model is Las Vegas’ Classroom on Wheels—COW. It roams on a schedule.

LACOE is also reaching out and has used new state of California bridge funding for Head Start children in foster care and developed a multi-disciplinary team in-house to address needs of families in transition. Key issues include transportation and child care problems for parents in shelters and elsewhere. Transportation doesn’t exist in rural areas and hours of child care availability are too limiting. The whole of L.A.

Of note: Part of the effort for LACOE is to address challenges of language. They are referring to people first, not a situation, so families experiencing homelessness instead of the homeless and “families in transition.” Surveys are no longer referred to as “residency questionnaire” but housing questionnaire. And it is making a priority to serve children in foster care—up to 10 percent of Head Start enrollment.



# TABLE TOP DISCUSSIONS

## Being Intentional: Innovation, Challenges and Scaling Up

**A**fter listening to presentations, participants divided into eight teams to review what they had learned and combine that with their own in-house experiences.

Below, the list of **INNOVATIONS, CHALLENGES and SCALING UP** is intended to continue the discussion at local agencies and at other Region 9 conferences that will address servicing families in transition.

### INNOVATIONS

#### Facilities

- Flexible enrollment—cap community enrollment and reserve slots for homeless
- Open classrooms at shelters
- Indoor playground
- Mobile bus for pre-school, office and socialization—a way to serve wait-list families, too.
- Home-based is better option; follow-thru w/FPAs and transition plans to show our efforts
- LDO for 21 children for homeless



#### Bureaucracy & Organization

- Remove barriers for families experiencing homelessness to enroll—such as paperwork, health documents, missing documents
- Utilize the agreements that the shelters require to fulfill Head Start requirements (family partnerships)
- Area need to target—maybe need to be more thorough with data—understanding referrals
- Create memorandums of understanding with all partner agencies
- Staff training for families experiencing homelessness—including role play practice
- Doing outreach in the evening to reach more families using community showers and homeless resources
- Partner with school district homeless liaisons
- Intentional recruitment
- Utilize agencies communication department to develop referrals and outreach
- All staff uses same screening
- Tracking tool system—how do you hear from us?
- Community assessment drill down

# TABLE TOP DISCUSSIONS

## CHALLENGES

- Mental health training needs; staff turnover; staff skill-building with boundaries setting
- Recruitment skills
- 1302.12: determining, verifying, documenting eligibility—families living together, they do not consider themselves to be homeless and there are different levels of homelessness
- Create a questionnaire with very specific questions that families fill out—their own paperwork
- Undocumented families fearful
- 1302.13—Recruitment, identify, build trust with families
  
- Staff struggle with asking tough questions and person answering questions—it's invasive or could feel that way—being able to identify homelessness in a culturally sensitive manner
- Families that become homeless during the year—does staff catch that and go back to keep or update the data
- Community outreach—finding out what they're doing and keeping in contact with families (GPS)
- Services overlap: Families that are part of a CPS or domestic violence case and attendance issue for children when they have to go to court or hearings, etc.
- Transition from program to program 1302 G
- Online referral systems for the country
- Combination of circumstances
- Transportation
- Coordination of services/partners
- Finding real data 1302.22
- Funding and regulations: HSPPS, Cal state licensing, CDL
- Not every family has children in the age group served at shelters 1302.12
- Lack of appropriate space, facilities 1303 E
- Mental health diagnosed and undiagnosed 1302.45
- Medical homes 1302.46

## SCALING UP

- Partnerships—creating MOUs
- Push work to school districts
- Professional development around families experiencing homelessness—train staff to get to positive child outcomes and understanding where clients are at
- Develop a non-invasive housing questionnaire 1302.13
- Targeting hospitals (welcome baby)
- DCF to TAY (transitioning out) to pregnant
- ACES
- Data source for homeless (creating or tapping into)
- Providing one-stop service for homeless with different sources of funding
- Affordable housing through city initiatives
- Being a part of established round tables or initiatives
- Partnering with experts working homelessness to provide staff training
- Using ACF as a resource



# PARTICIPANTS

“Head Start staffers are the luckiest, happiest people. Humans are wired to do good, and we do a lot of good.”

We see ourselves as agents of change. We are looking ahead at what's coming and we want to continue this discussion and develop a system to access organizations who work with people who are experiencing homelessness.”

—Wassy Tesfa  
Region 9 HSA Chair



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