
Missouri Roundtable on Homelessness

Sponsored by the Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office and the Missouri Head Start Association

Roundtable Proceedings

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Introduction

The Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office, in partnership with the Missouri Head Start Association, hosted and sponsored a unique opportunity for leadership and representatives from state and local organizations and agencies, including Head Start and Early Head Start, to gather together to focus on the issues and needs of young children and their families who may experience homelessness. The Roundtable focus was on those partners and policies and like-minded agencies that provide services, supports, protection, resources and programming to those at risk of becoming homeless or those families that may struggle with homelessness as a chronic or situational issue.

Nearly twenty representatives gathered to participate in the Roundtable discussion on the heels of a Missouri Head Start Association Council meeting. Council members and other individuals were invited to observe and listen to the Roundtable dialogue and were asked at the close of the event to reflect with comments or pose additional questions for the Roundtable members. Roundtable discussants came from various organizations, including the Governor's Committee to End Homelessness. (A complete listing of participating Roundtable representatives is included in the appendix along with other resources and references.)



Roundtable Questions

In order to facilitate the discussion, questions were proposed by the Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office and sent in advance to all Roundtable representatives to offer an opportunity for reflection and response to better engage in the discussion. A pre-Roundtable conference call was held to highlight the purpose, review the agenda and Roundtable questions, as well as logistics for the event. A centerpiece document published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,

entitled "Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness," was reviewed to inform the discussion, Roundtable representatives were provided the document beforehand and each person contributed a brief one-page agency/organizational profile about their services for families and children who may be homeless. The profiles were compiled and downloaded onto flash-drives along with other key resources, contact information, etc. to help retain information and to share with others, as needed. All representatives and each Head Start grantee were given a book entitled, "Hopes, Dreams and Promise: The Future of Homeless Children in America" by Ralph daCosta Nunez, President of Homes for the Homeless. It was suggested that this could be a resource used in professional learning communities to better understand the public policy perspectives of children who are homeless.

In order to document and facilitate sharing of this important discussion, the Roundtable event was video-taped by Cooperative Media Group, University of Missouri Extension.

Questions and Responses - Roundtable Representatives:

1. How are strong partnerships addressing homelessness? How can potential partnerships address family homelessness?
 - Entry points where families access their first service or resource is an important consideration in partnership work.
 - Families should be coached to know the "buzz words" in order to facilitate and ease their access of services.
 - Strength in partnerships leads to families' access to resources.
 - Ability to develop relationships with other organizations and programs is a critical factor.
 - Definitions of homelessness are varied and need to be addressed.
 - Values-based approach needs to be utilized in pursuing, developing, and stabilizing partnerships.
 - Strong partnerships need to be flexible.
 - Necessity is sometimes the impetus and opportunity to develop a partnership (i.e., lack of, or eliminated funding for individual programs).
 - Partnerships related to mental health and physical health are not always accessible in school settings.
 - Partnerships need to be thought of as a community issue, not an individual program or agency issue. (i.e., Homelessness may be an indicator of how well communities are doing.)
 - Blending, braiding funds and bundling services is a creative strategy;
 - Public and private partners need to be engaged especially when addressing the child development impact and comprehensive needs.

2. What should a successful partnership look like? What are the key components or critical strategies to make this happen?

- Processing centers help expand access using a coordinated service model with a central intake process.
- Continuity in partnerships needs to be acknowledged and addressed; continuity of roles, dedicated staff is important to keep the partnership intact.
- Collective impact should be considered as a partnership goal.
- Data need to be used, or gather data if not available, to inform coordinated services.
- Technology may be a resource to offer more opportunities in identification, tracking, and better understanding the causes of homelessness and the services that are the most effective.
- Time and a dedicated person are critical factors in order to effectively coordinate services and bring all the pieces together.
- Public school McKinney-Vento liaisons are required to have adequate time to address the needs of students who experience homelessness, as emphasized in the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, formerly known as No Child Left Behind).
- Child Care Aware entities are similar to a one-stop resource and offer a "warm hand-off" to other programs when child care providers suspect a child and family may be struggling due to homelessness.
- Child Care Development Fund (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), recently reauthorization federal legislation, includes policy changes which may impact access to quality child care, especially those children and families who experience homelessness.

3. What are the obstacles that your program or organization faces in funding or supporting the homeless population? Do you have thoughts on how these obstacles might be overcome?

- Awareness of homelessness and its challenges needs to be a focus and strengthened among all programs, policy makers, and the public.
- Promising approaches can be a leverage to influence others of the issues. (Learn more about the bus tour in the St. Louis area where McKinney-Vento liaisons and other providers and programs saw elements and challenges of homelessness, first hand.)
- Programs, providers, and public school representatives can bring their list of "unmet needs" to the Regional (Housing and Urban Development-HUD) Housing Teams in the work of Continuums of Care, responsible entities to ensure these are addressed.
- Concerns regarding the impact of human trafficking, intimate or domestic partner violence that further compounds and contributes to homelessness.

Questions and Responses Focused on Research:

1. What are barriers that you have experienced in conducting research in this field? What are possible ways to overcome these barriers?
 - Challenges exist in varied definitions of homelessness and gathering data that looks at common data elements.
 - Data collection tied directly to access of programs and services could help facilitate opportunities to conduct research on a broader scale.
 - [Note: Database sponsored by the Governor's Committee to End Homelessness, could be an avenue for collecting data on a broader scale, although the access and workability for some partners and programs is currently challenging and would need to be addressed.]
2. What don't we know that we should know in order to make sound policy recommendations on behalf of the homeless population?
 - Problems and the best strategies to solve them can be made more clearer through research.
 - School absences are high when children are homeless which puts them further behind their peers.
3. What are the research challenges encountered in working with vulnerable populations?
 - Studies, for the most part, have been conducted on the population that accesses help in shelters; this does not give a good picture or perspective on a broader scale, homeless populations that seek assistance elsewhere.

The facilitator engaged all Roundtable representatives to respond to the aforementioned questions. At the close of the formal discussion, all other observers were invited to reflect, pose questions and comments some of which related to additional risk and contributing factors to homelessness, such as human trafficking, intimate partner and domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health.

Those present at the Roundtable discussion also posed potential next steps (see below). The majority response was that follow up to this event needs to occur. This dialogue needs to continue in order to further explore options, to gain momentum, engage other stakeholders

and potential partners and identify potential policy changes that may positively impact and reduce the homeless population, and address their needs from a broader yet consolidated perspective.

Potential Next Steps:

- ❖ Keep the discussion going!
- ❖ Plan and host a collaborative statewide conference with a broader audience than may currently be participating in annual conferences that target the homeless population.
- ❖ Capture families' stories.
- ❖ Include families in this ongoing discussion to obtain a first-hand perspective about the issues and needs.
- ❖ Include direct service staff who have first hand knowledge of barriers that families face.
- ❖ Focus on the obstacles that need most to be addressed, especially policies and the way that funding is distributed at various levels and from federal, state, local sources.
- ❖ Consider gathering information regarding the economics and how it costs more later if homelessness is not addressed earlier.
- ❖ Focus on the impact of young children.
- ❖ Consider a unified advocacy effort or organization to help sponsor and coordinate. This advocacy effort could highlight the families' stories, once captured, take a harder look at the economics, and address and build awareness of the child development needs.

Implications for Partnership & Policies

The Roundtable offered many opportunities to begin the dialogue regarding partnerships and to highlight some issues related to policies when planning or providing services to families with young children who may be homeless. Some local partnerships have been established and are well-coordinated such as the example of Springfield Public Schools, the Ozarks Area Community Corporation, Head Start and Early Head Start and the Rapid Rehousing for Families program. Other partnerships may be challenged in large part by existing policies.

It is important when working with populations, especially the most vulnerable children and their families, for all stakeholders to reflect on implications for partnerships and to probe policies in an attempt to better understand the needs. What are the strengths of partnerships, whether formal or informal? What are the outcomes or consequences for families and young children if programs and agencies do not partner? What are the benefits to families, young children, direct staff, agency or organizational leadership, and policy makers when partnerships are encouraged, established, and supported? Following are possible implications for partnership and policies that may be explored in ongoing dialogue as recommended by numerous Roundtable representatives and observers.

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- ❖ Acknowledge where there is alignment in common missions among agencies or organizations and programs. (Example: Governor's Committee to End Homelessness, Missouri Association for Community Action, and Missourians to End Poverty.)
 - ❖ Bring various like-minded entities together to work out bundled services and innovative ways to use funding (layering, blended, braided, etc.).
 - ❖ Research and document common requirements, regulations, statutes to streamline services, maximize resources, and reduce duplication of efforts.
 - ❖ Invite additional feedback from all organizations at the Roundtable and others to generate clarity regarding issues and challenges they experience in serving the homeless population.
 - ❖ Create a statewide process to share information about policy and funding changes as they occur and potential opportunities to adapt services in order to be more effective in services coordination and to implement strategies effectively.
 - ❖ Explore the expansion of Continuums of Care across the state to help with access and sharing unmet needs.
 - ❖ Articulate a system to protect and sustain partnerships (e.g., through Memorandums of Understanding) especially when relationships may change due to changes in leadership or staff.
 - ❖ Use the Roundtable group as the vehicle to create a formal statewide collaboration in order to facilitate partnership development, data collection and research efforts, and to share critical information with relevant stakeholders.
 - ❖ Create more opportunities for research that focuses on the needs of young children and their families to better understand homelessness, and the unique developmental needs of this vulnerable population and to help identify best practices for working with this population.
 - ❖ Create a public awareness effort and opportunities for a unified voice to advocate for and highlight the issues.

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MISSOURI ROUNDTABLE ON HOMELESSNESS (Feb. 11, 2016)

Participants and Organizations	
Beth Ann Lang	CHILD CARE AWARE of Missouri
Laura Malzner	Children's Trust Fund
Stacey O. Wright	Coordinating Board for Early Childhood
Donna Cash	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Sue Porting	Department of Health and Senior Services-Section for Child Care Regulation
Liz Hagar-Mace	Department of Mental Health
Marianne Dawson	Department of Social Services-Children's Division Early Childhood & Prevention Services Section
Dottie Kastigar	Governor's Committee to End Homelessness
Kathy Anderson	Governor's Committee to End Homelessness
Heather Lockard	Missouri Association for Community Action
Alyssa Murphy	Missouri Housing Development Commission
Teresa Dickey	Ozarks Area Community Corporation - Head Start/Early Head Start
Missy Riley	Springfield Public Schools
Louis Manfra	University of Missouri, Department of Human Development and Family Science
Melissa Chambers	Youth in Need Head Start/Early Head Start

REFERENCES

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Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, P.L. No. 114-95.

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Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1450.

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