

Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet Survey Responses

Below are the survey responses completed by the Commissioners or Designees of your sister state agencies participating in the Early Childhood Cabinet.

Question 1.

To have a collective impact on meeting the needs of families with young children with unstable housing, we will be working together to bring our collective resources and expertise to bear. What is your organization currently doing to support children and families experiencing unstable housing? What expertise, major programs, resources, does your organization possess that could benefit families with young children experiencing unstable housing?

Responses

OEC: The Office of Early Childhood oversee a variety of early childhood programs. Our staff know best practices for how to make services developmentally appropriate for young children and family-friendly. In most cases families with unstable housing are subject to standard program eligibility guidelines and are not a targeted priority population. Programs are not currently required to actively recruit, enroll, or prioritize families with unstable housing statewide and approaches vary. Major resources of the Office of Early Childhood include:

- early care and education subsidies (infant/toddler care, preschool, etc.)
 - School Readiness programs have guidelines on serving families experiencing hardship and recruiting families,
 - Care 4 Kids has no current guidelines or exceptions for families with unstable housing, and
- home visiting programs to strengthen the family to better support their young children
 - Nurturing Families Network home visiting programs are required to actively help the family find housing,
 - an information and referral system at the United Way to help families access services (including screening, support for developmental delays, and childcare training and professional development for early childhood workforce.

Federal ACF Early Care and Education and Home Visiting

- Federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to actively recruit, prioritize, and enroll children experiencing unstable housing.

DOH: The Department of Housing has a number of Individual and Family Support Programs as well as capital funding to support the development of affordable housing. The Individual and Family

Support Programs include: 1. Section 8 vouchers and Rental Assistance Program (RAPs) certificates are administered by our contractor; 2. Eviction and foreclosure prevention funding; 3. Mobility Counseling by contractors. The Department is focused on preventing individuals and families from becoming homeless as well as educating them on their ability to re-locate to other municipalities . We have also established 8 CANs (Coordinated Access Networks) across the State, which has changed our focus in how we prevent and/or end homelessness. Now the focus is on the individual and getting them into a stable, permanent home situation as soon as possible. And, in some cases keeping them out of a shelter, because they need funding to pay for utilities or repair a car. We have approximately \$159million of capital funding to rehab and/or create units of affordable housing. We have a number of funding programs to which developer, housing authorities and providers can apply.

SDE: The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has direct oversight of the McKinney-Vento Act, the primary piece of federal legislation dealing with the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, The McKinney-Vento Act addresses educational challenges created by homelessness and guarantees homeless students, including preschool children, the right to enroll, attend, and succeed in school. The CSDE employs Louis Tallarita, the designated State Coordinator for Homeless Education, responsible for ensuring the understanding of and compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in public schools throughout the state. CSDE staff have comprehensive knowledge of the McKinney-Vento law, oversight and application of the law and serve as a credible response and technical assistance resource to local education agencies in its implementation, as well addressing needs and the delivery of services to eligible students. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act mandates a network of designated local liaisons from school districts to ensure access to public education for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Connecticut has an established network of liaisons identified from all school districts who are routinely provided access to training and professional development intended to raise awareness and focus on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, the CSDE participates in the federally funded Child Nutrition Programs and works with local districts, schools and institutions to implement and oversee the federal regulations pertaining to these programs. Through local programs, both the Child and Adult Care Food program (CACFP) and the School Nutrition programs provide direct access to nutritious meals for children in participating schools, child care centers and homeless shelters. CACFP provides nutritious meals and snacks to infants and children in child care centers, family day care homes and emergency shelters, and snacks and suppers to children participating in eligible at-risk afterschool care programs. Currently, CACFP has participating entities in six (6) designated family homeless shelters throughout Connecticut and provides cash assistance for nutritious meals (including formula) and snacks served to infants and children ages 18 and younger. All meals and snacks must meet the requirements of the CACFP meal patterns for children and infants. School Nutrition programs ensure access to free breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner to children deemed homeless and experiencing unstable housing. This is accomplished through the implementation of the federal guidelines addressing homelessness and eligibility for free meal benefits for homeless and runaway students. Children who are documented as homeless or runaway are considered to be "Other

Source Categorically Eligible” and are therefore, automatically eligible for free meal benefits. Determining Officials (those persons in the school district determine a child to be eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits) work with the district’s homeless liaison to ensure that homeless and runaway children are provided benefits seamlessly.

DSS: We do not specifically support the needs of families in the context of unstable housing, however, many of our services provide supports to help assure medical care and maintenance of income and nutrition. (DSS)

DCF: The Department of Children and Families has helped to support families in unstable housing since 1998 through the establishment of the Supportive Housing for Families Program.

The Supportive Housing for Families (SHF) case manager works closely with the DCF social worker to provide intensive case management services to assist families to develop and utilize a network of services in the following areas:

- > Substance abuse treatment, recovery support,
- > Weekly home visits
- > Mental health treatment / support, childcare,
- > Housing search
- > Employment, education,
- > Daily living skills,
- > Healthcare, medical needs,
- > Monthly budgeting,
- > Landlord negotiations and networking
- > referral to services,
- > Coordination of services for parents and children,
- > Interpreters
- > Service planning (updated every three months)
- > Disability benefits
- > Monthly safety inspection of home
- > transportation,
- > Discharge Planning

DCF SHF Program provides direct housing assistance in the form of :

- Security Deposits
- Temporary Rental payments
- Past due Rent arrearage
- Food, clothing, furniture
- Past due Utility payments
- Transportation
- Childcare/camps

Supportive Housing for Families helps to locate and inspect suitable apartments and manages access to a network of landlords who maintain a stock of suitable housing. The process can take 6-

12 weeks to locate, inspect, and set up a appropriate apartment for a family.

Supportive Housing for Families prepares applications to DSS or local housing authorities on behalf of DCF families seeking Rental Assistance Program (RAP) vouchers, Housing Choice (Section 8) or HUD's Family Unification Program Vouchers (FUP). These vouchers pay a portion of rent and remain with the family as long as they continue to meet income and tenant eligibility requirements, which equals permanent housing.

Another major resource came in May 2012, when the federal Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families issued a grant opportunity announcement seeking applicants that could show "Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System". The DCF's Supportive Housing for Families Program was featured as a successful model in the grant application. On September 12, 2012, DCF was one of five jurisdictions chosen to receive a \$1million dollar grant each year for five years. DCF's proposal was entitled "Intensive Supportive Housing for Families" which proposes an integrated, collaborative, cross-system intervention model for families who have severe housing need (i.e. chronically homeless) and have high child welfare service needs in Region 3 (Middletown, Willimantic, and Norwich). This area was chosen due to its vast demographic area along with limited resources. ACF grant funding will provide:

- Access to stable housing,
- Trauma-focused assessment
- Interdisciplinary team-based support, and
- Access to evidenced-based supported interventions for families and children, such as Triple P for parenting support, and collaboration with TF-CBT initiative for trauma informed services.
- Employment services to increase preparedness, skills and income.

Additionally, DCF has flex funding to offer families unable to access the Supportive Housing for Families Program due to ineligibility or lack of program capacity. These flex funds are utilized by families to alleviate housing barriers such as utility payments, rent arrearage, security deposits in order to prevent the removal of the child from the home due to lack of appropriate housing being one of the family's safety concerns.



Question 2.

What help do you need from other state agencies to better serve families with young children and unstable housing?

Responses

OEC: The Office of Early Childhood needs help connecting our supports to homeless families more directly and proactively. We need help identifying and recruiting families who are "at-risk" of homelessness into early care and education and home visiting programs (childcare and preschool) and training early care and education staff in how to identify and support those families with children in their care with housing and economic supports."

DOH would find input from other agencies helpful. We continue to streamline our programs and develop programs that target needs. Critical information allows us to develop the best programs to address the issues.

SDE: Families with young children experiencing homelessness and unstable housing would largely benefit from Connecticut developing a comprehensive, service delivery model that better coordinates services between state agencies and community providers. The development of policies, practices and resources in support of families would assist the CSDE and school districts with a support network to identify families who are in need of services and mechanism to provide those services and referrals.

DCF works in partnership with several other state agencies and collaboratively provides assessment of families. In order for DCF's provider agency to serve the increasingly high number of families with unstable housing the following would be necessary; - A consistent number of subsidized vouchers for needy child welfare families - Opportunities for affordable housing - Educational, vocational and employment services - Fast and efficient access to food, cash, and child care assistance

DSS: Better service to families with young children living in unstable housing can be enhanced by identification of who they are and coordination of effort across multiple agencies.

Question 3.

Please describe a promising strategy your organization is currently implementing to support families with young children who have unstable housing. (Describe the strategy broadly, the goals of the strategy, if it is at scale or a pilot, etc.)

Responses

DPH: Currently, DPH implements only evidence-based strategies when serving families. The eligibility criteria for services is based on health status and/or risk factors. Some initiatives may address unstable housing as an environmental factor. However, unstable housing is not a criteria for receiving services.

DOH: Overall, our goal is to end and prevent homelessness for all individuals and families. To that end we have adopted national best practices to rapidly re-house individuals and families into appropriate, safe, stable and permanent housing. Housing near schools, services, employment and transportation ranks high. In terms of our development/capital funding our goal is to build the housing to meet our needs in CT. The funding the Governor has committed to the creation and rehabilitation of affordable housing has sparked interest from communities as well as developers. So, meeting with Chief Elected Officials, community leaders, developers, providers are important to achieving our development goals. The Department works closing with the CT Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) to fund developments.(DOH)

SDE: Ongoing federal funding to CSDE through the McKinney Vento Act supports a competitive grant process to school districts through subgrants targeted to enhance the support provided to children and youth experiencing homelessness in their district. This funding allows for the provision of developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs, not otherwise provided through federal, state, or local funding, for preschool-aged homeless children (infants and toddlers.) A limited portion of current funding supports the Preschool Enhancement Program (PEP) operated by LEARN located in the TVCCA Homeless Shelter. PEP has provided a comprehensive program for homeless children aged birth to five and their parents with play-based programming focused on the developmental stages of each child and emphasizing a parent-teacher partnership in promoting each child's growth. In partnership with Norwich Public Schools, PEP has served over 1,000 families while they are experiencing homelessness since 1992. The goal of PEP has been to promote healthy physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth. This program eliminates barriers such as transportation, waiting lists, cost and long enrollment policies.

The CSDE has contracted with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) to improve the understanding of youth homelessness and enhance the capacity to effectively count and address youth homelessness in Connecticut in partnership with schools, Youth Service Bureaus (YSB), and community providers. The CCEH activities include: providing McKinney-Vento liaisons, school administrators and educators, YSB staff, other partner agencies and state entities including youth count sites with training on the consequences of youth homelessness, the legal rights of homeless youth, and community and state resources to address youth and family homelessness.

DCF: The Supportive Housing for Families Contracted has been amended to add \$200,000 from the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Grant in March 2012. The goal was to create a specialized Supportive Housing Unit dedicated to providing housing and case management services to families with young children (0-5, out-of-home) for whom housing is a barrier to reunification. DCF has established partnerships with Child First, Reconnecting Families, Early Childhood Education, Headstart and other programs and services to support these families during reunification and beyond. The goal is for children to return to lasting permanency which begins with stable housing. This promising strategy has continued since 2012 to support families with young children in unstable housing, but unfortunately many families awaiting services due to long wait times due to limited program resources (permanent subsidy) often have a negative impact on families; longer foster care stays or termination of parental rights.

The Intensive Supportive Housing for Families Grant Project as mentioned earlier is in year three of a five year grant period. This demonstration to serve the most acute level of child welfare families with housing need has provided enhanced skill level, technique and practice guidance to that will benefit the SHF program past the grant period. Another pilot program that began in Fall 2011 that has now come to scale is the DCF Start Program, a two year transitional housing program for homeless youth/young adults. The majority of program participants are former child welfare youth. There have been 73 young adults served since the program began consisting of 52 females, 19 males and 2 transgender participants including 32 parenting young Moms. Along with the housing, education, and employment resources the Start Program offers, additional supports to young parents are provided in order to prevent child welfare involvement.

How would you categorize the goals of the strategy? (select as many as apply)

Answer	Response	%
Employment Support	2	40%
Housing Support	2	40%
Child Development	4	80%
Health and Well-being Support (including health care, access to food, etc.)	5	100%
Safety	3	60%
Parent Support	4	80%

How would you categorize the type of strategy?

Answer	Response	%
Subsidy	1	20%
Program (staffed by state employees)	0	0%
Program (funded by state, community-run)	1	20%
Referral	0	0%
Coordination	0	0%
Grant	1	20%
Bond Funds	0	0%
Internal Agency Policy and Procedure	0	0%
Other	2	40%
Total	5	100%

Other

Program (community run); Referral; Coordination; Grants

More than one applies here: Subsidy, Program (funded by the state), Grant and Bond Funds