

## **Early Childhood Summit on Comprehensive Services for Homeless Children and their Families**

**October 23, 2009  
Las Vegas, Nevada**

On October 23, 2009 the Nevada Head Start State Collaboration Office in partnership with the Nevada Institute for Children's Research and Policy, Head Start State Training and Technical Assistance Office for Nevada and the Nevada Public Health Foundation sponsored the Early Childhood Summit on Comprehensive Services for Homeless Children and Their Families. The Summit brought together 142 professionals working with homeless children and families in Nevada from a variety of different organizations and backgrounds. The goal of the summit was to discuss the problem of families experiencing homelessness and offer solutions to professionals in how to better serve these populations.

Shirley Fan-Chan from Horizons for Homeless Children delivered a keynote address about the need for early education for children experiencing homelessness. She emphasized the list of reasons that people fall into homelessness: loss of jobs; health or mental issues; domestic violence; lack of affordable housing, etc. One factor will not drive family into homelessness right away. It takes multiple factors to make that happened. The living wage in Las Vegas, Nevada for two adults and two children is \$26.62 per hour. This is in sharp contrast to the minimum wage, which is \$7.28 and the poverty wage, which is \$9.83. The gap between living wage and poverty wage is about \$16.79. Most families experiencing homelessness work at ether minimum or poverty wage. It doesn't take a scientist to figure out a formula that will cause homelessness. If a parent falls ill, and loses wages, the family income drops. If a parent loses a job, there is not much to save them because living at Las Vegas is expensive and resources are in short supply.

Attendees then heard from officials within Nevada about the continuum of care plans as well as a discussion of the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as opportunities for federal funding from staff at Senator Harry Reid's office. In addition, the summit held a panel of experts who discussed helpful strategies for serving homeless populations including ways to recruit, enroll and retain them in programs and services. Finally attendees were given the opportunity to meet in their regional groups to discuss their next steps and share them with the larger group. From this session several ideas were generated about where we should go from here. These ideas were documented at the summit and are summarized in the section below.

**Next Steps:**

*Attendees were asked to sit in groups based on their geographic regions to discuss the next steps for their areas. The information shared in response to these questions is listed below and each geographic region is identified with the response.*

**1. Identify any gaps in services to this population – Overall transportation, partnerships, collaboration and systems for identifying and tracking these children were gaps identified in all areas.**

<b>Rural Nevada</b>	<b>Washoe County</b>	<b>Clark County</b>	<b>State</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transportation</li> <li>- Lack of community partnerships and resources to build partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transportation</li> <li>- Access to community activities</li> <li>- Services for 0-4 populations</li> <li>- Strength based approach to service delivery</li> <li>- Sources of available funding have different criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient systems to help this population</li> <li>- Lack of professional courtesy among agencies</li> <li>- The existence of a punitive system</li> <li>- Stigma and language used when working with undocumented workers</li> <li>- Mechanisms for identifying homeless families</li> <li>- Language barriers</li> <li>- Lack of access to healthcare services</li> <li>- Limited mental health services</li> <li>- Lack of awareness of programs and services available</li> <li>- Difficult to identify children ages 0-3</li> <li>- Transportation</li> <li>- Difficult to track these children because they move so frequently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transition across early childhood programs</li> <li>- Need links established among organizations</li> <li>- Right now we have relationships but not high level collaboration</li> <li>- Lack of awareness of who this population is and where they are</li> <li>- Need to examine procedures for information collection around residency</li> <li>- Need training for personnel about issues related to homelessness</li> </ul>

**2. What additional resources may be needed to better serve this population?** – *In all areas again improved transportation, streamline administrative processes, improved access to services and increased/improved collaboration and communication between agencies were identified as resources needed to better serve this population.*

Rural Nevada	Washoe County	Clark County	State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homeless shelter</li> <li>- Reduce the red tape associated with applying for shelter process and application – currently there are no referrals or partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transportation for children under 3 – bus passes, van programs, etc</li> <li>- Identify or develop collaborations across age groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Somehow flag these children and families so that public agencies are aware and can offer services or assistance</li> <li>- Increase legal services for undocumented victims of domestic violence</li> <li>- Increased/improved access to prenatal care</li> <li>- Increase mental health services for these populations</li> <li>- Increase child development resources</li> <li>- More funding budgeted specifically for these families so that agencies can offer more grants, vouchers, etc.</li> <li>- Create a statewide system to link databases together to prevent families from “falling through the cracks”</li> <li>- More funding for Section 8 housing and rental properties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As state and local councils form need to include key players to establish better collaboration between early childhood education providers and services for homeless families</li> <li>- Improved/enhanced mental health services – especially in the rural areas</li> <li>- Early childhood population requires more intensive services and caseloads are a barrier</li> <li>- Need more people trained in how to provide services</li> <li>- Improved transportation and access to existing services</li> </ul>

**3. How can current partnerships and resources be improved to support early childhood educators in their work with homeless children 0-5 years of age? – In all regions areas for improvements were identified for community coalition building, improved communication, and additional training for staff working with these children and families.**

Rural Nevada	Washoe County	Clark County	State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partners need to create a coalition of community members that are interested in homelessness and wants to be a part of a team to come up with solutions</li> <li>- Utilize the “Provider’s Breakfast” to discuss the topic</li> <li>- Utilize the Coalition Group to gain grant funds to assist homeless families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet with parent involvement facilitators from school districts and homeless advocates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a system where paperwork is more seamless</li> <li>- Improve communication and collaboration – we need to meet and talk more</li> <li>- Need training on how to build, maintain, and strengthen collaborative partnerships</li> <li>- Create a disk or electronic medical record</li> <li>- Create a radio channel with looping community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase communication among agencies</li> <li>- Campaign to restructure terminology to put the emphasis on system issues rather than the individuals – “persons experiencing homelessness”</li> <li>- Broaden perspectives – programs may only focus on their own responsibilities and should be aware of what happens before and after their involvement or those things that are outside the scope of their responsibilities.</li> </ul>

**4. Based on answers to the above questions what are “next steps” to providing comprehensive early childhood services for homeless children and their families in your area. In answering this question consider who is responsible for the activity, and when and how it will be accomplished.** *Next steps identified across all regions included, identification of the homeless population, developing collaborations and coalitions and working to improve communication and awareness of this issue.*

Rural Nevada	Washoe County	Clark County	State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need to really identify homeless children in their areas to gain an accurate number or count then work on grants to support services for their homeless populations</li> <li>- Each person attending the summit should go back to their areas and make a decision about how to move forward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a collaboration to be able to ask research questions and carry out that research</li> <li>- Develop a brochure of services similar to the one for Clark County</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate more</li> <li>- Create a list of current resources and update it continuously</li> <li>- Ensure that there is proper documentation and hold exit interviews to forward to new schools</li> <li>- Head Starts are reaching out through community boards and other agencies to become more informed and involved</li> <li>- Need to use UNLV as a resource to help write grants and training community organizations in how to write successful grants</li> <li>- Continue to hold summits conferences and other networking opportunities to continue toe collaborations and keep agencies linked together and informed about what is going on in the community</li> <li>- Continue to monitor legislation and be proactive in supporting Bills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be sure this issue stays on the radar for state and local councils</li> <li>- Plan to continue planning</li> <li>- Look into how existing child care subsidies policies relate to homelessness and whether these policies support serving homeless children</li> </ul>