



## **“Deeper Dives” for Schools**

### **Practical Strategies to Serve Young Children Experiencing Homelessness**

#### **4. Working with families**

##### Connect families to other services they may need quickly and effectively.

- Early care and education programs should ask parents if they have school-age children, and if they are enrolled in school. Offer to connect them to the McKinney-Vento liaison. If children are not enrolled, offer to meet them at the school or invite the liaison to visit the family at your program to enroll in school.
- Schools should ask parents if they have young children, and if they are connected to early care and education programs. Offer to connect them to those programs and assist them to complete screenings and enrollment documentation.
- Connect parents with peer programs, Child Care Resource & Referral programs, and information lines like 211.
- McKinney-Vento liaisons likely have resource lists they can share with early childhood contacts, such as resources for eviction prevention, utility support, and rental assistance. Programs can share that information with parents who need it.
- Early childhood programs can make sure McKinney-Vento liaisons are aware of resources for families with young children, such as diaper resources, child care subsidies, and parenting support.

##### Combine resources to provide holistic services to families where they are.

- Visit shelters with resources from many programs, such as volunteers from medical clinics and early intervention providers with screening and referral information.
- Work “both ways”, with schools sharing information from early childhood programs and early childhood sharing information about school.
- Work together to build successful partnerships with families. Whomever has the best relationship with the family should start the conversation. If no one has a relationship yet, providers should sit down together and determine who should try to start the conversation first, realizing this could change if it doesn't work.

##### Build relationships with families together, across programs. Understand and accommodate the real stressors and trauma parents are experiencing.

- Do joint visits. Early childhood programs should invite McKinney-Vento liaisons to every meeting every time for every family experiencing homelessness, starting at birth. Start young and build relationships!
  - Liaisons should try to attend or send a social worker or other representatives to those meetings, to facilitate children’s transition into kindergarten.
  - Liaisons can bring resources with them to meetings with the families, such as a backpack for preschool or a winter coat.
- Stand outside in line with families before they gain entry into the shelter, regardless of weather. You will learn a lot.
- Be flexible, considering access issues such as:
  - The hours of the day your phone lines are answered by someone: can someone be available between 5-8 pm?
  - The hours and days of the week you are available: Can someone meet parents from 7-9 pm or on weekends?
  - The days of the month you call or schedule appointments: Think of cell phone plans and when a family might run out of minutes.