

<b>ACF</b>  <b>Administration</b>  <b>for Children</b>  <b>and Families</b>	<b>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES</b> <b>Administration on Children, Youth and Families</b>	
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### INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** State Agencies, Territories, and Insular Areas Administering or Supervising the Administration of Title IV-B, Subparts 1 and 2 of the Social Security Act (Act), and Title IV-E of the Act; Organization Designated by the Governor to Apply for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Treatment Programs State Grant Funds; Indian Tribes, Tribal Organizations and Tribal Consortia (Tribes)

**FROM:** Joint memorandum from the Administration on Children, Youth & Families, **Children's Bureau** and the Office of Head Start

**SUBJECT:** Child Welfare and Head Start Partnerships: Partnering with Families Involved in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

This Information Memorandum (IM) is jointly issued by the Commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Bryan Samuels, who oversees the management of the U.S **Children's Bureau and the Office of Head Start** Director, Yvette Sanchez Fuentes.

On July 28, 2010, ACF-IM-HS-10-04 was sent to Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies to reinforce the Head Start commitment to serving abused and neglected children through its grantees and delegate agencies and to provide guidance regarding promising practices in recruiting and serving families involved in the public child welfare system.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide this information to State and local child welfare agencies **and to reinforce the Children's Bureau commitment to supporting child welfare agencies' investment in partnerships with Head Start** and Early Head Start agencies in order to improve young **children's access** to and continuity of comprehensive, high quality early care and education services.

Over the last decade, research in the neurobiological, behavioral and social sciences point to the critical importance of early life and early childhood experiences in shaping the developmental outcomes for children in later life. Experts agree that programs and resources aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect must start early. Research shows that trauma during the early years affects long-term outcomes by impacting brain development, cognitive functioning, physical regulation, and the ability to form successful relationships. However, protective relationships with care giving adults can alleviate the effects of early trauma. In fact early intervention and attention to early development can effectively mitigate negative outcomes. In light of the research on early childhood, infants and young children who are at greatest risk for abuse and neglect are a particularly vulnerable population that need special attention, with an emphasis on continuous quality care experiences.

**The Children's Bureau encourages collaboration as evidence of commitment to and** understanding of the importance of interagency collaboration at the Federal and State level to support families that come to the attention of the child welfare and other health and human services agencies. The Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, June 25, 2003 (P.L. 108-36 Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) as amended) encourages Federal support of Child Protective Services linkages with developmental, mental health, early intervention, and health services related to evaluation and treatment of maltreated children. As a result, CAPTA State grant eligibility is now tied to several State practices intended to access services for at-risk children. Specifically, CAPTA requires CPS to refer all cases involving substantiated victims of child maltreatment under the age of 3 to Part C of the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to be evaluated for the receipt of early intervention services such as speech, language, and physical therapy, family counseling and home visits, medical care, nursing and nutrition services.

The Office of Head Start places a high value on outreach and comprehensive services to families and children with involvement in the public child welfare system, a system which includes preventive, protective, foster care and adoption services [45 CFR 1340.41 (a)(vi-vii)]. Children whose families are served by the child welfare system often are developmentally vulnerable due to trauma stemming from early abuse and neglect as well as from risk factors that commonly co-occur, such as prenatal drug exposure, prematurity, low birth weight, poverty, homelessness, parental depression and other mental health problems. The comprehensive services offered by Head Start and Early Head Start programs support children by providing a safe and enriched learning environment while facilitating early identification of developmental delays and access to early intervention, health care and mental health services. In addition, Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide a significant source of family support, parent education and adult development services for parents and other family members.

Foster children who meet program age requirements are automatically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start even if the family or foster family income exceeds income guidelines (45 CFR 1305.2(l)). OHS encourages Head Start/Early Head Start agencies to prioritize children in the public child welfare system when establishing enrollment selection criteria and selecting children and families for Head Start/Early Head Start services. Children whose custodial parents have an open case with the child welfare system but retain physical custody of their children are not automatically eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start, but a program may prioritize these children for enrollment due to the level of risk and the needs of the family.

Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) Enrollment Statistics from 2008-2009 show that 14,639 of the children who received Head Start and Early Head Start services during this time were eligible because of their status as foster children. This figure represents 9.2 percent of American children birth to five-years old who were in foster care on September 30, 2008 (AFCARS, 2008).

Head Start and Early Head Start agencies must take an active role in community planning to encourage strong communication, cooperation and the sharing of information with community partners [45 CFR 1304.41(a)]. Further, agencies must take affirmative steps to establish ongoing collaborative relationships with community organizations, and this includes child welfare agencies and service organizations [45 CFR 1304.41(a)(2)(vi-vi)].

### **Actions and Strategies for Working with Head Start/Early Head Start Agencies**

The Children's Bureau and the Office of Head Start are pleased to share information that may enhance and expand the service network for children and families involved in the child welfare system. We encourage intensive collaboration and coordination between Head Start and Early

Head Start agencies and local child welfare agencies that may provide the most vulnerable children and families with access to continued child development, parenting, health, and family support services.

To that end, local Child Welfare agencies and Head Start and Early Head Start programs are encouraged to enter into a formalized agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding. In order to improve coordination and collaboration on behalf of the children and families they serve, the following are examples of specific actions that may be incorporated into a formal agreement between Child Welfare agencies and Head Start and Early Head Start agencies:

- Jointly review policies and strategize around the recruitment, selection and enrollment of foster children and children with open child welfare cases into Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Jointly establish an agreed upon standardized referral process to Head Start and Early Head Start programs by the local and/or State child welfare office(s) to be used when making referrals of foster children and other eligible children with an open child welfare case.
- Jointly establish an agreed upon screening protocol for Head Start and Early Head Start families who are involved in the child welfare system. For example, this may include **creating a referral form that identifies a child's foster care status as the basis for his/her eligibility and includes contact information for the child's child welfare worker.**
- Arrange cross-training opportunities to educate staff from each agency about child welfare services and Head Start and Early Head Start terminology, goals, objectives, policies and services offered, as well as to establish working relationships.
- Arrange joint trainings on topics of mutual interest, such as working with high-need families (e.g., families with substance abuse issues, criminal histories, and mental health problems), administering child and family assessment instruments, and the responsibilities of mandated reporters.
- Designate a child welfare liaison to Head Start and Early Head Start programs and/or consider **co-locating staff within your local child welfare agency. The liaison's duties** might include:
  - attending court hearings for Head Start and Early Head Start families involved in the public child welfare system and educating attorneys and judges about the benefits of high quality care and education and the services available through Head Start and Early Head Start;
  - educating staff from the local public child welfare agency and other agencies that work with abused and neglected children (e.g., nonprofit foster family agencies, **family preservation agencies, and children's mental health agencies**) about the benefits of high quality care and education and the services available through Head Start and Early Head Start programs;
  - communicating regularly (in accordance with agency protocols) with the public child welfare agency and court staff about the developmental progress of, and services received by, child welfare system-supervised children enrolled in Head

Start and Early Head Start programs;

- discussing with Head Start and Early Head Start programs opportunities to become community representatives on the Policy Council, the Governing Body, the Health Services Advisory Committee or other Head Start and Early Head Start program advisory committees, such as self-assessment teams; and
- inviting Head Start and Early Head Start staff to become members of child welfare citizens review boards.
- Hold joint case planning and/or service planning meetings between child welfare services and Head Start and Early Head Start (in accordance with agency protocols).
- Partner with Head Start and Early Head Start program directors to send a letter to foster family agencies, foster family social workers, foster parent associations, foster parents and relative caregivers of age-eligible children:
  - emphasizing the importance of enrolling their children in high quality early care and education programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start;
  - explaining the comprehensive services available through Head Start and Early Head Start;
  - advising them that foster children are categorically eligible for services through Head Start and Early Head Start, while addressing appropriate expectations about waiting lists;
  - alerting them that Head Start and Early Head Start services are free;
  - providing them with instructions about how to apply for Head Start and Early Head Start; and
  - providing assistance to families in the completion of the enrollment application into an Head Start and Early Head Start program.

This list is not exhaustive and represents examples of child welfare outreach and service strategies that have facilitated positive partnerships between Head Start or Early Head Start and public child welfare agencies. There are many other approaches that may be effective. Head Start and Early Head Start programs have been encouraged to pursue an active partnership with their local public child welfare agencies and to jointly develop appropriate strategies relative to their community's **specific** needs.

## **Resources**

Additional information about how to build effective, sustainable partnerships with child welfare agencies can be found in the *Early Head Start-Child Welfare Services Initiative Final Synthesis Reports (Volumes 1 and 2)* available at: <http://www.jbassoc.com/reports/summary.aspx>. These reports describe lessons learned from 23 Early Head Start grantees that participated in a Federally funded five-year initiative from 2002-2007 to promote partnerships with their local public child welfare agencies and better serve public child welfare system clients. Other resources on best practices in recruiting and serving families involved in the public child welfare system can be found in *Supporting Infants and Toddlers in the Child Welfare System: The Hope of Early Head Start* (Technical Assistance Paper No. 9), available for download at [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/resources/ECLKC\\_Bookstore/PDFs/TA9%5B1%5D.pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/resources/ECLKC_Bookstore/PDFs/TA9%5B1%5D.pdf). An

additional resource includes the Center on the Developing Child located at <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/initiatives/council/> .

Please direct any questions on this important matter to:

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