

Appendix H-5. Collaborating With Head Start

Louis Tallarita, Connecticut State Coordinator

The job of state coordinator is a challenge when you consider the range of children and youth who are homeless and the variation of needs associated. Similarly, serving in the role of state coordinator, specifically within a respective state education agency, it can seem somewhat isolating being the sole entity advocating for the diverse needs of children, youth and families experiencing homelessness. When the opportunity arises to involve other professionals in beneficial collaboration to expand both the awareness and the delivery of needed services, you grab it. A working collaboration between Head Start and McKinney-Vento was a clear fit considering the cross-over that exists in the target populations that each program is intending to serve.

Shortly after assuming the role of coordinator and soon after the reauthorization of ESEA, I was asked to serve on the statewide homeless advisory council that included the Head Start State Collaboration director. During our service to the council we met and began sharing information about our program efforts and finding ways to include each other in the planning and development of services to address the educational needs of young homeless children in Connecticut. Our collaboration began with offers to read one another's plans and proposals and developing cross-training events. Over the years, it has remained a stable collaborative effort and grown to include working together to fund and conduct a statewide needs assessment and developing small grant programs to improve local partnerships and increase enrollment of young children living in shelters into Head Start and other programs that meet their health and learning needs.

As a "part-time" state coordinator, collaboration items are likely to be some of the more difficult ones to accomplish. You are largely focused upon the more immediate concerns and less on long term goals and objectives that can ultimately improve systems; however, developing these important partnerships is instrumental to this work, so the time somehow seems to fit into your schedule when you plan accordingly, share responsibilities, and value the efforts that are being combined. I'd have to say that no specific challenges come to mind in the

way this partnership evolved, although I would have to point back to the “time” issue with competing priorities and a challenging workload.

It has absolutely been worth it. Not only I have I gained a partner, but also a friend and ally. We remain committed to a goal that all young children who experience homelessness arrive at the schoolhouse door, side by side with their housed peers, eager and ready to succeed. Even our small steps forward have led the way to stronger and more meaningful partnerships to assist families experiencing homelessness.