A Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness

Developed as part of the

Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Family Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Program

Contents

Executive Summary

The Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness provides guidance for emergency shelters and interim housing programs to evaluate and improve their services for young children ages 0-5 and their families. It accompanies the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters (ECSAT), which helps agencies assess their current policies, environment, and programming.

Key ideas:

- Early childhood is a critical period for brain development that shapes well-being across the lifespan. Homelessness and housing instability can negatively impact children during this vulnerable time.

- The ECSAT helps agencies identify areas for improvement in services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers staying in shelters or interim housing.

- Using the ECSAT and this Toolkit can be a lead to creating systemic change in an agency and community.

- The Toolkit provides suggestions for assembling a team, setting timelines, reviewing results, creating an action plan, updating policies, budgeting, fundraising, and collaborating with partners.

- Low-cost improvements are available in addition to those requiring more resources. Evaluating progress and repeating the ECSAT supports continuous quality improvement.

- Addressing early childhood homelessness requires cooperation across agencies and systems in a community, not just individual shelters. The Toolkit offers guidance for communities and partners seeking to improve services and environments for young children experiencing homelessness.

For more information on how to access technical support implementing the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters, developing an action plan and strengthening service integration across homeless and early childhood services within your community, please visit our websites or contact us at:

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Introduction

Welcome to this Toolkit for Improving Support and Services for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness. Caring for our most vulnerable children must be a shared effort across agencies and communities. Your interest in exploring ways to provide the best possible care for families living in a shelter or other interim housing will have a lasting impact on children experiencing homelessness.

This Toolkit stems from the work of Partners for Impact and Child Care Services Association (CCSA) in the Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Project. In December 2020, Child Care Services Association contracted with Partners for Impact to develop and implement this three-year project to improve services for very young children experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters across North Carolina. More information and reports from the project can be found on Partners for Impact's website.

Additional reports and resources on early childhood homelessness can be found on the CCSA website with their Early Childhood Homelessness resources page and Bringing Families Home community awareness page.

North Carolina Technical Assistance Project

The purpose of the Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Project was:

1. To ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers experiencing homelessness receive early childhood services to promote their children's wellness and readiness to succeed in school and are connected to needed resources for their young children.

2. To help shelter staff members create shelter environments that are safe and facilitate the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as they experience homelessness.

CCSA contracted with Partners for Impact to provide training and technical assistance to emergency shelter programs serving families with children ages 0-5. Nine agencies participated in this pilot project, including family shelters and domestic violence facilities. Partners for Impact consultants provided assistance to shelter agencies in completing the validated and revised Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters (ECSAT), developing Action Plans for implementing improvements, and connecting with early care and education (ECE) programs in their communities. The project budget provided small "mini-grants" for each shelter to implement changes based on their assessments and action plans.

In this Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness, Partners for Impact has compiled the lessons learned about serving young children experiencing homelessness from working with shelters across the state. The Toolkit walks through the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters, providing additional suggestions for agencies to consider as they review their programs and practices. It also provides detailed templates for creating Action Plans from the self-assessment results and recommendations for implementing sustainable change in shelters and communities.

Funding for this project came from the US DHHS CFDA# 93.434, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Preschool Development Grants Birth-Five, NC Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina State University and Child Care Services Association. Additional funding to work with communities was provided by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation.

Partners for Impact

Partners for Impact, LLC is a North Carolina-based consulting firm that reimagines and engages the systems and organizations that make people vulnerable to create more equitable opportunities and solve community problems. This company partners with community collaboratives, agencies, and leaders to gain maximum impact through system-level thinking, targeted planning, data utilization, innovative programming, intentional communications, skilled facilitation, and continuous learning. Their consulting team has strong and diverse program design, implementation, and evaluation skills, and uses an equity lens in all of the work they do.

Partners for Impact senior consultants have over 60 years of combined experience working directly with a wide variety of nonprofit human services agencies, including serving families and youth in health and in crisis (health/mental health/developmental well-being, homelessness, domestic violence, aging out of foster care, etc.). The team has extensive experience working with organizational and community change initiatives within and comprising various types of organizations (government, philanthropy, nonprofit, faith communities, and community coalitions). They use a wide variety of tools to gather data and implement processes for the purposes of organizational and community change.

Partners for Impact consultants have worked with CCSA to design and implement the Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Project. Partners for Impact has managed the project; recruited shelters; created data collection tools, agreements, project management tools, and communication materials; gathered data; provided technical assistance and support for shelter staff; met regularly with the CCSA team, other PDG grantees, and the Yay Babies! statewide task force. Since the start of this project, Partners for Impact consultants have presented along with the CCSA team at the 2021 North Carolina Annual Smart Start conference, the 2021 PDG Birth to 5 Annual Convening, the 2022 Annual North Carolina Head Start conference, the 2022 North Carolina Bringing it Home conference and 2023 North Carolina Bringing it Home conference for homeless service providers, and the October 19, 2023 PDG Birth to 5 NC Partner Meeting. As part of a Schoolhouse Connections webinar series, Partners for Impact also highlighted the work of this project in conjunction with the People's Emergency Center whose team initiated the use of the ESCAT tool with Philadelphia shelters in 2016 through the Bell Project.

Child Care Services Association

Child Care Services Association believes in a future where all children have equitable access to affordable, high quality early care and education to lay the foundation for successful life outcomes. This organization leads efforts to strengthen accessible and affordable quality early care and education by providing supports for families, communities and the workforce. Specifically, CCSA provides free child care referral services; financial assistance to low-income working families; technical assistance and training to child care businesses; and meal services for children enrolled in participating child care programs. CCSA also provides local, statewide, and national early childhood systems research, and educational scholarships and salary supplements to child care professionals. CCSA is one of the three lead agencies of the NC Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Council. As such, CCSA provides management and oversight of five Regional Lead Agencies to ensure the delivery of high quality CCR&R services, and access to special statewide initiatives, including the Birth-to-Three Quality Initiative. CCSA also works with partners on early childhood homelessness and food insecurity at the local, state, and national level.

Purpose

This Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness is intended to encourage shelters and communities to assess the services and support they are providing for young children experiencing homelessness. It is designed as a companion document to the [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters](#) (ECSAT) and provides some additional tools to assess an agency's services and identify areas for improvement. The step-by-step suggestions, advice for common pitfalls and sticking points, and additional resources are designed to help you navigate the process with a focus on equity, feasibility, and sustainability. In addition to supporting the use of the ECSAT, this Toolkit provides guidance to help agencies create sustainable change in their agencies and their communities.

Intended Audiences

Shelters and Interim Housing Programs: This Toolkit is designed to guide agencies providing emergency shelter in improving their services through the process of using the ECSAT assessment. Many of the elements of the self-assessment and this Toolkit can also be applied to scattered-site housing, transitional housing, or non-residential services.

Funders, Continuums of Care and Coalitions: Community or regional agencies, Coalitions, Continuums of Care, and funders may also find this Toolkit useful as they seek to create plans for systems-level integrated change to improve services for young children experiencing homelessness and their families. Shelter agencies alone can not meet all of the needs of the young children they serve. Cooperation and collaboration among agencies and across communities will better provide the full range of support required for children's well-being and development.

Using the ECSAT and this Toolkit

The Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters is a SELF-assessment. Your answers to the ECSAT are for your organization to use for your own purposes. Staff can complete the ECSAT individually, in small groups, or as an agency. You and your staff should use it in the way that provides the most information that will help improve your programming, environment, and connections to community partners to serve young children. This Toolkit is intended to offer additional guidance for making changes while recognizing the realities of limited resources of funding, time, and space and respecting the experience that staff bring to operating their agencies and serving clients.

While this Toolkit mainly focuses on the ECSAT, the project's larger mission is to effect long- term sustainable change in communities to support young children experiencing homelessness. This change begins with shifting the mindsets of service providers to consider the needs of young children separately from those of the adults caring for them. While substantial change takes time, smaller changes that each shelter can make add up to more supportive and nurturing environments for children. Each shelter and community using the ECSAT and this Toolkit to mitigate the adverse impact of homelessness can contribute to the greater vision of breaking the cycles that lead to children who have experienced homelessness becoming adults experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 1
Why Focus on Young Child Homelessness?

A child's earliest years are a critical period for brain development, influenced by their relationships, experiences, and environments. The right ingredients can prepare the brain for optimal development. Science supports the importance of giving children a safe, healthy, and nurturing start from birth. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child describes these early years as "a time of great opportunity and of great vulnerability for brain development."[1] While toxic stress, trauma, and experiences like homelessness, increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into adulthood, intervening efforts to prevent harm and promote well-being can reduce the risk of long-term adverse outcomes.[2] Intentionally-designed, child-focused shelter environments facilitate opportunities for parents and primary caregivers to develop healthy, positive relationships with their children. Having a supportive, trusted adult in a child's life can reduce the negative impact on mental and physical health across the lifespan, despite adverse childhood experiences.[3]

Agencies providing emergency shelter and other types of interim housing have good intentions to provide safe refuge for their clients. The history of homeless shelters, however, is one focused on housing single adults, not families with children. The number of families experiencing homelessness who need services has increased over time but funding and resources have not kept pace with the demand. Some shelters, particularly those designed to serve survivors of domestic violence, have been built or renovated to serve families with young children. Many others struggle to serve families in poorly adapted facilities and with no staff dedicated to serving children. Ongoing research on trauma-informed services and spaces provides opportunities for shelter agencies to implement continuous improvement to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

> **Toxic stress** describes a person's reaction when exposed to severe, frequent or chronic adversity, physical, or emotional challenge. A family's prolonged economic hardship and experience of homelessness can lead to toxic stress in children.

Effectively addressing the needs of young children requires a shift in mindset from serving adults with children to serving adults _and_ children. This means focusing on the needs of children separately and in addition to the needs of their primary caregivers. Infants, babies, and toddlers need safe spaces to live, sleep, eat, and play that support their healthy growth and development. Young children with special needs have a critical window for early intervention services for maximum impact. Connecting families to high-quality child care supports the child's development while allowing the caregivers to work, study, or look for employment that will support their long-term housing stability. As staff assist families in securing safe and sustainable housing, meeting the health and developmental needs of children can mitigate the risk of harm.

> **By supporting their youngest clients in their shelter and connecting them to high-quality partners in their communities, homeless service agencies can reduce the long-term risks associated with toxic stress and help break the generational cycle of homelessness.**

Who Are the Children Experiencing Homelessness?

Infants & Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness in North Carolina[5]

- Estimated total population aged 0-3 experiencing homelessness: 10,941
- Estimated total population aged 0-3 experiencing homelessness enrolled in a program: 574 or 5.25%

Two federal legal definitions for homelessness set precedence for most program eligibility guidelines. One comes from a housing perspective through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); the other, in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, addresses the issue from the perspective of educating children.

HUD uses a "literally homeless" definition: "an individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

McKinney-Vento defines homelessness for children and youth with a broader lens: "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

This expands the literal homeless definition from HUD to include children and youth who are living in hotels, moving from place to place, or sharing housing, often referred to as "doubling up."

During the 2020-21 school year, estimates of children 0-6 experiencing homelessness were[4]:

Nationally: 1,028,560 children
Only 4.3% of children 0-6 experiencing homelessness were enrolled in Head Start

North Carolina: 20,987 children
Only 5.1% enrolled in Head Start

These numbers may be lower than actual because of the difficulties identifying families with children experiencing homelessness during the COVID pandemic when many schools were virtual only.

All Pre-K-12 students experiencing homelessness in School Year 2020-21[7]

- NC: 49.4% Black
- NC: 18.1% Hispanic
- NC: 24.2% White
- NC: 8.3% Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or two or more races

Estimates indicate 1-in-41 school age children are experiencing homelessness; young children under 6 are experiencing homelessness at twice that rate - 1-in-18.[6]

Systemic racism leads to disproportionate representation of people of color among families experiencing homelessness. "While Black people account for only 13 percent of the U.S. population, 40 percent of all people experiencing homelessness on any given night are Black...Decades of overt and structural racism - in lending practices and employment opportunities, eviction rates and over-policing, from Jim Crow to the present day - have made it far too easy to lose your housing if you live in the United States and you're Black. Indigenous people, too, are at least three times more likely to experience homelessness in the United States than what one would expect given their proportion of the general population."[8]

Additional data on child homelessness can be found at Child and Youth Homelessness in the United States: Data Profiles

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Serving Young Children in the Current Homelessness System

The Housing First program model stresses stabilization with housing first, followed by connections to wrap-around services. Recognizing housing as a basic necessity for stabilization before individuals can build their capacity to participate in other supports, the Housing First model seeks to lower barriers to accessing shelter and housing. HUD has adopted this evidence-based model and emphasizes it in their homeless service grants, but has made no specific reference to serving children. While HUD's Housing First funding does not prohibit shelters from providing child-focused services for families, it does not include any funding specifically for this purpose. Therefore, shelters that depend primarily on HUD funding, are driven by Housing First performance measures which do not address children at all.

However, when families are in shelters there is a brief opportunity to connect clients with services for their children, including child care, developmental assessments, health care, etc. Providing more focused services for young children may require agencies to revise their budget allocations, staffing, job descriptions, or programming priorities. Not all changes require additional funding, e.g. updating policies, connecting with community partners, and training staff. Using this Toolkit and completing the ECSAT can help agencies identify needed changes that can be addressed without additional resources and areas where new funding is needed.

Role of Community-Level Collaboration

To have a meaningful impact on early childhood homelessness, communities need to address, at a systemic level, the issues preventing families from maintaining safe, stable housing.

Ending young child homelessness requires systemic changes that give families access to safe, affordable housing; employment with livable wages; high-quality child care; dependable transportation; supportive communities; and other services that support their health and well-being. Agencies serving individuals and families seeking shelter can not do this alone.

Community leaders and collaboratives, such as Continuums of Care (CoC), can prioritize addressing and ending early childhood homelessness at the community level by working across disciplines:

- To ensure that young children experiencing homelessness - by any definition - are receiving all of the services they need.

- To review policies and resource allocations to make sure that all families with young children, especially those made most vulnerable by structural racism, are supported and can equitably access systems and resources to support their own well-being and that of their families.

- To integrate prioritizing young children experiencing homelessness into strategic plans and initiatives across disciplines, including economic development, transportation, food security, and education.

- To create a continuum of services in the community that prevents or mitigates toxic stress in children.

Using this Toolkit at the Community Level

While the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters is designed for agencies providing shelter, this accompanying Toolkit offers additional information that can be used at the community or CoC level. Some suggested actions for CoCs and community collaboratives include:

- Encouraging community shelters and housing agencies serving families to complete the ECSAT.

- Providing financial resources to support improvements identified by shelters that will help them better serve young children.

- Reviewing the ECSAT sections on referrals and partnerships to identify and strengthen other services that families with young children need, e.g. early intervention and disability services, developmental screening, or primary health care.

- Interrogating the systemic drivers of family homelessness and addressing inequitable policies, practices, and allocation of resources that disproportionately impact families of color in their communities.

Shifting systems and agencies to prioritize the needs of young children will be a long-term endeavor. Encouraging shelters to complete the Early Childhood Self-Assessment and connect with early childhood resources in their communities are important first steps to sustainable change.

Chapter 2
Using the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters

Within the effort to address young child homelessness, improving services and the environment of emergency shelters and other interim housing comprises a concrete step at the front lines.

The **Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters** (ECSAT) is *"specifically designed to help shelter staff members **create shelter environments that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.***"[9] It is a valuable instrument for evaluating an agency's policies and practices for serving young children from birth to age 5.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) designed the original Early Childhood Self- Assessment Tool for Shelters in 2014. Dr. Sara Shaw validated the ECSAT as part of her dissertation research. This led to redesigning the ECSAT using recommendations from housing providers and early childhood professionals. The most current version of the ECSAT was published in April 2020. It can be found on the websites of ACF and Child Care Services Association.

Why Design the Shelter Environment for Young Children?

Using the ECSAT facilitates creating a living environment that reduces risks and promotes success for clients living in shelter or other interim housing. While very young children will reap the benefits of better environments, others using the spaces also stand to gain from the improvements. When an agency develops child-specific services and designs all spaces in a facility to be safe for young children:

- Parents and primary caregivers will have more places to spend time with less worry about their children experiencing harm.

- Staff members can reduce their burden of heightened vigilance when areas of potential risk are minimized and safety protocols are improved.

- Older children will encounter fewer hazards and receive age-appropriate services.

- Other clients will benefit from a trauma-informed approach to design such as soothing wall colors and warm lighting.

The ECSAT also includes steps to encourage parents and caregivers to take action for the safety and well-being of their children. The recommendations in the ECSAT can help staff provide information and resources to set parents up for success as they navigate the challenges of parenting. Parents and caregivers may not know what they don't know. The ECSAT helps agencies make information and support available and easier to access when parents need them.

> **By supporting their youngest clients in their shelter and connecting them to high-quality partners in their communities, homeless service agencies can reduce the long-term risks associated with toxic stress and help break the generational cycle of homelessness.**

Using this Toolkit and the Early Childhood Self-Assessment in Shelter and Interim Housing Agencies

Quick Assessment: Completing the Self-Assessment can be a stand-alone action to evaluate an agency's services and environment for young children. An agency can complete the ECSAT and develop a plan for action with a minimal investment of time and resources. The information gained by completing the assessment helps an agency create space and programming that supports young children's well-being and development.

Assessment + Planning (recommended): Using the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters can also be part of a larger process, bringing together staff and community partners to create a roadmap toward shifting mindsets around service delivery. This Toolkit provides information and sample documents to guide an agency from assembling an assessment team through reviewing policies and planning for sustainability to collaborating with partners to effect systemic change. You are invited to use the components of this Toolkit you find helpful and adapt the process to suit your own context.

Process Flyer (**Appendix A**) is a customized flowchart that prepares everyone involved for the journey, clearly outlines each step of the process and expectations. All of the steps in the sample chart may not apply and each agency's journey through the process will be different. The most successful approach will consider your agency's structure, capacity, and resources available for the assessment and not create unnecessary stress or unsustainable demands on staff.

> *This is a SELF-assessment - there's no one right way to use it. The best way is the one that works for your staff and your program.*

> **What's a Guiding Team?** The Guiding Team is responsible for designing and implementing the self-assessment process. This includes identifying which members of the staff will complete the ECSAT, creating a timeline, reviewing the results, assembling an action plan, and taking steps toward sustainable improvements.

Begin with agency leadership. The self-assessment is likely to identify small and large changes to space and programming to better serve young children. These are likely to require support from top management. Ensuring the buy-in from the highest leadership will facilitate changes at all levels of the organization.

Task a small group with leading the self-assessment process. This "Guiding Team" takes responsibility for identifying next steps, keeping the project moving forward, troubleshooting and answering staff questions, and ensuring that the process yields useful results for the agency. An effective Guiding Team includes agency leadership with power to authorize improvements and spending, as well as front-line staff with expertise in service delivery and relevant knowledge from first-hand interactions with young children and their families served by the agency.

Identify who will complete the ECSAT. The number of staff members completing the ECSAT will depend on the specifics of your agency. Consider which staff members work with families, including shelter directors, program leads, case managers, overnight shelter staff, and supervisors. Including both staff with years of experience at the agency as well as newer staff members can illuminate how well knowledge of policies and procedures is being passed on. A mix of staff members can also broaden the range of suggested improvements with institutional knowledge and new perspectives.

Decide how the staff will complete the self-assessment. Having staff members complete the assessment independently can be useful to identify areas where staff agree on policies and procedures and where their perceptions of what is happening diverge. Identifying assessment items where staff have differing answers can lead to rich discussion and areas of necessary change. These differences might reflect separate responsibilities or they may point to a need for more staff training or clarification of policies and procedures. Another option is to have staff complete the assessment together, choosing a single answer for each item. This approach provides an opportunity for staff to discuss each item, identify where their opinions are similar or dissimilar, and brainstorm steps to improvement together.

Set a timeline for completing the self-assessment. Completing the assessment itself does not require a lot of time. Budgeting staff effort toward reviewing the results of the self-assessment and brainstorming improvements will result in a more robust and complete Action Plan.

Complete the **Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters**

> The Design Meeting Tool in Appendix B of this Toolkit can be used as a template for determining target dates and assigning responsibilities.

Create an action plan, identifying intended improvements with goals, timelines, and persons responsible. **Appendix C** includes a more detailed template for planning improvements to supplement the form found at the end of the ECSAT. The most useful plan will include immediate actions as well as improvements that may take more time to secure materials and resources.

Implement improvements set out in the action plan. As items are completed, additional improvements may be identified and added to the action plan.

Evaluate progress by completing the ECSAT again. Another iteration of the self-assessment will help staff see the progress that has been made as well as identify areas that still need improvement.

When completing the assessment, staff may find that some items are not applicable to their facility. For example:

- The shelter may not serve food because families make their own meals
- A facility that has only one level will find items relating to stair safety not applicable.

In other sections, staff may have already discussed an issue and chosen a different option than what is recommended in the ECSAT. For example:

- A shelter may have decided that they do not have the capacity to provide classes for parents or a shelter may choose not to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Working through the self-assessment opens space to reflect on those decisions and determine what is best for young children and families given the resources available. The results of this assessment are for internal use only and you can focus on what is applicable and appropriate within the context of your agency.

The Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool

The Self-Assessment Tool has five sections, each with a different number of items for agencies to consider. Responses generally range from "We do not do this at this time" to "We have a policy we share, and we monitor implementation of this policy or practice." Response options vary depending on what is appropriate for the assessment item.

Taken together, the ECSAT provides guidelines for supporting families while reducing potential health issues and safety hazards.

> Section A: Health & Safety
> Section B: Wellness & Development
> Section C: Workforce Standards & Training
> Section D: Programming
> Section E: Food & Nutrition

Section A, Health & Safety, is the longest section. In addition to hygiene and emergency preparedness, it addresses safe sleep, diapering, health-related supplies, and assisting families with accessing health-care.

TIP: **When reviewing the items in Section A, think more broadly about reasons for policies and procedures, as well as how they are implemented.**

Example 1: *A.1.4 We have an emergency response plan for a natural disaster:* does your agency's emergency response plan include protocols for identifying who is in a facility in case of an emergency and procedures for staff to ensure that everyone has safely exited? This can inform the policies in *A.1.10: We mandate that residents sign in and out of the facility*, as well as A.1.11 and A.1.12 regarding staff and volunteers, respectively.

Example 2: *A.1.13. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are under the supervision of parents, staff, or volunteers at all times.* Reviewing this item provides an opportunity to consider how parents use spaces in the shelter facility.

- While parents use the laundry facilities or cook a meal, is there a safe space for children to play close-by?

- Do parents have access to seating in the shade while their children play outside?

- Do parents bring their children to case management or other meetings with staff because they have no alternative child care during those times? Are the case management offices equipped with toys and safe, appropriate space for young children?

TIP: **Safety goes beyond the physical environment to include the people sharing the space.**

As you assess your facilities, consider whether parents feel their children are safe around the other residents of the shelter. Consider what policies and practices are in place to ensure children's safety with adults other than their caregivers.

Section B, Wellness and Development addresses developmental screenings and referrals and other ways that agencies can support young children's development. It also covers breast feeding, connecting families to early learning programs, age-appropriate toys and materials, and space for families with young children to use.

> **TIP: Completing Section B is an opportunity to assess child-specific services and connections with community partners.**

- Do case managers have child-specific intake forms and protocols focused on the needs of the child, separate and apart from the needs of the adults accompanying them? The resources section of this Toolkit has links to several examples.

- Which agencies in the community can provide developmental screenings for children in the shelter?

- Can other agencies conduct these screenings at the shelter if families have limited transportation or other challenges getting to another location?

- Do case managers know how to help families access Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care subsidies? Do staff have connections to staff members at those agencies?

- Can the agency connect clients to partners that provide culturally-specific services when needed?

> **TIP: The resources section of this Toolkit also includes links to videos, websites, and other materials about trauma-informed spaces.**

Indoor and outdoor play space can be designed not just to be safe, but also to support children's social and emotional well-being. From colors to layout to furniture to toys, well-designed spaces can positively impact children and their families while they are staying in a shelter or interim housing. Even small spaces can be comfortable and inviting with thoughtful choices. Some questions to consider when evaluating play spaces:

- Does the area have comfortable floor space for babies, toddlers, and children to play?

- Does indoor space have rugs, pillows, and furniture with a variety of textures?

- Are the colors and lighting warm and inviting?

- Do spaces have comfortable furniture where adults can sit with children to read or play?

- Are play spaces designed so one caregiver can supervise children of different ages in separate areas?

- Are shelves or storage bins clearly marked with pictures so that children can put items away when they are finished with them?

- Do children and adults have access to quiet, soothing space when they are upset or overstimulated?

Section C, Workforce Standards and Training includes staff training on topics such as trauma-informed care, recognizing and responding to domestic violence, and CPR for infants. It also covers community collaborations.

> **TIP: Going beyond the basics, this is an opportunity to review the alignment of your agency's policies and procedures.**

- Do the written policies reflect what staff are actually doing?

- Do staff, especially newer members of the team, need additional training to fully understand policies and why it is important to implement them?

- Which policies need to be updated to reflect changing information and environments in your shelter?

- Do job descriptions need updating to reflect new responsibilities?

- Have policies and procedures been evaluated recently to ensure they are serving clients as is culturally appropriate and not perpetuating inequities or discrimination?

- Do staff need additional training to better support clients fully, including those with limited English proficiency, disabilities, from other countries or cultures, or who are neurodiverse?

Section D, Programming addresses many public programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC). This section also covers classes for parents, connection to home visiting services, and engaging with parents while they are in the shelter.

> **TIP: Many families may already be connected to services such as TANF, SNAP, and WIC when they arrive.** Additional considerations include:
>
> - Ensuring shelter staff understand any requirements placed on individuals by these programs and can provide support to families accordingly.
>
> - Identifying community partners that can offer training to parents in various topics at their offices or in the shelter.
>
> - Creating comfortable, private space at the shelter for families to meet with home visiting services, case managers, or other support professionals.

Section E, Food and Nutrition: This section includes some items around allergies, baby bottles, and food availability.

> **TIP:** **Even if a shelter does not provide meals for their residents, parents may benefit from additional information about related topics such as breastfeeding, nutrition, and food safety.**

- Caregivers may not know what information to ask for or know that support is available, for example, when breastfeeding or starting babies on solid food.

- Health departments and other agencies provide free posters about nutrition, choking hazards, and food safety.

- Making information accessible can increase parents' confidence in feeding their children and reduce any discomfort as a barrier to asking for assistance.

- Families may be more comfortable feeding their children familiar foods from their own cultures. Shelters can provide more ease to caregivers by stocking food and snacks that meet their family's needs and assist caregivers in securing their preferred foods and supplies.

Links to Resources
At the bottom of each section, the ECSAT provides a list of resources for the topics covered and links to get more information. Additional resources are included at the end of this Toolkit. If staff need more information or guidance, reach out to other interim housing providers, community partners, or statewide coalitions for assistance.

Chapter 3
Creating an Action Plan from the Results of the Self-Assessment

Within the effort to address young child homelessness, improving services and the environment of emergency shelters and other interim housing comprises a concrete step at the front lines.

The **Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters** (ECSAT) is *"specifically designed to help shelter staff members **create shelter environments that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers."*[9] It is a valuable instrument for evaluating an agency's policies and practices for serving young children from birth to age 5.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) designed the original Early Childhood Self- Assessment Tool for Shelters in 2014. Dr. Sara Shaw validated the ECSAT as part of her dissertation research. This led to redesigning the ECSAT using recommendations from housing providers and early childhood professionals. The most current version of the ECSAT was published in April 2020. It can be found on the websites of ACF and Child Care Services Association.

Why Design the Shelter Environment for Young Children?

Using the ECSAT facilitates creating a living environment that reduces risks and promotes success for clients living in shelter or other interim housing. While very young children will reap the benefits of better environments, others using the spaces also stand to gain from the improvements. When an agency develops child-specific services and designs all spaces in a facility to be safe for young children:

- Parents and primary caregivers will have more places to spend time with less worry about their children experiencing harm.

- Staff members can reduce their burden of heightened vigilance when areas of potential risk are minimized and safety protocols are improved.

- Older children will encounter fewer hazards and receive age-appropriate services.

- Other clients will benefit from a trauma-informed approach to design such as soothing wall colors and warm lighting.

The ECSAT also includes steps to encourage parents and caregivers to take action for the safety and well-being of their children. The recommendations in the ECSAT can help staff provide information and resources to set parents up for success as they navigate the challenges of parenting. Parents and caregivers may not know what they don't know. The ECSAT helps agencies make information and support available and easier to access when parents need them.

> **By supporting their youngest clients in their shelter and connecting them to high-quality partners in their communities, homeless service agencies can reduce the long-term risks associated with toxic stress and help break the generational cycle of homelessness.**

Each item in the ECSAT includes a box for "Action Needed." As staff evaluate the current services, this box captures any ideas or suggested improvements. At the end of the assessment, the Guiding Team can turn all of these notes into a single Action Plan. The ECSAT document includes a simple Action Plan template. This Toolkit includes a more detailed version with space to identify long-term goals, the short and intermediate outcomes and activities required to reach that goal, and what resources are needed. It also has space to designate who will be responsible for the actions and a timeline. The figure below shows an example of one area of change using the detailed Action Plan template.

ECSAT Section	Area of Intended Change	Intended Long-term Outcomes	Intended Intermediate Outcomes	Intended Short-term Outcomes	Action Steps	Resources needed for Action Steps	Timeframe	Lead Responsible
SAMPLE A.1	Emergency response	Agency is fully- prepared to respond to emergencies	All staff and families understand and can execute emergency plans, e.g. natural disaster, active threat, lost child	. Agency has clear policy and procedures for a natural disaster	Develop plan to inform parents of protocol; consider spending more time at intake going over emergency procedures	Example of policies and procedures for emergencies	2 months – by Dec 31	Shelter manager
				Agency has clear policy and procedures for a lost child	Document policy/ proce dure for lost child			
				All staff and families understand procedures for an active threat	Train staff on emergency protocols			
					Print copies of emergency procedures to post in shelter			

An agency's plan for action will be more robust with input from both frontline staff and leadership. While staff working directly with families will know what clients need, agency leadership will be able to integrate improvements into budgets, organizational charts and job descriptions, strategic plans, and donor appeals. Incorporating feedback from residents about their experiences of living in the shelter with children will also make an action plan stronger and more relevant to those most affected by the improvements.

The Action Plan can be a living document to be reviewed and amended regularly. While it can help guide budgeting, fundraising, and strategic planning, it can also show staff, board, and evaluators the progress that the agency has made and clear next steps to improving services for young children.

Later chapters of this Toolkit provide Information about reviewing policies and budgets to support and sustain activities in the Action Plan.

While grant writers and fundraising staff may not be tasked with completing the self-assessment, bringing them into the process as the action plan is developed can begin to connect the desired improvements with sources of funding.

Identifying Short, Intermediate, and Long-term Goals

Achieving long-term goals often requires an investment of staff time, funding, policy changes, and partnerships. They are usually the culmination of multiple efforts over a significant time period. A list of long-term goals can be daunting and feel unachievable. Identifying intended intermediate and short-term goals can help staff break larger ambitions into manageable steps. It also provides a shared map of the direction the agency is taking, laying out current and future intentions.

Specifying the long-term goals can focus staff on the overarching reasons for actions. Identifying intermediate- and short-term goals can help build the roadmap of action toward those long-term outcomes.

EXAMPLE:

- Long-term: Shelter has indoor space that supports the well-being and developmental growth of children
    - Intermediate: Space is furnished with age-appropriate toys and furniture for children and adults
    - Short-term: A dedicated space for children is identified with appropriate safety measures in place, including separate sections for children of different ages

- Long-term: Agency is fully prepared to respond to emergencies
    - Intermediate: All staff understand and can execute emergency plans
    - Short-term: All emergency plans are reviewed and updated as needed
    - Short-term: All staff are trained on emergency plans

- Long-term: All staff have skills and confidence to support parents and families, using empathy and trauma-informed principles
    - Intermediate: Staff have skills to work with parents in difficult situations
    - Intermediate: Supervisors have skills to support frontline staff in supporting parents in difficult situations
    - Short-term: All staff have training in trauma-informed care and positive parenting

Identifying Partnership Opportunities

Developing the action plan presents an opportunity to reflect on partnerships with other organizations. These relationships can benefit both agencies. For example,

- Other agencies can provide services to shelter clients

- Shelter and interim housing agencies can help partners recognize children experiencing homelessness and understand what they and their families need to navigate systems successfully

- Collaborating with partner agencies to serve families experiencing homelessness can strengthen grant proposals to funders and appeals to policy-makers for systemic change

Examples of what other agencies provide that can meet the needs of young children staying in a shelter include:

- Developmental evaluations

- Parenting classes

- Nutrition classes

- Breastfeeding support

- Transportation services

- Indoor play space renovation or playground equipment

- Children's books or toys

- Clothing

- School supplies

Other ways of using the items in this Toolkit's Action Plan template:

- Action Steps identified in the Action Plan can be added to the work plans or job descriptions of those identified as the Lead Responsible or Persons Involved

- Resources Needed can inform budgets, grant proposals, and fundraising efforts

- Assigning a timeframe for each activity prioritizes tasks, reducing the potential for overloading staff with additional immediate responsibilities

- Building a logic model for grant proposals

- Adding goals related to serving young children to the agency's strategic plan

Using the ECSAT and Action Plan for Fundraising

The results of the self-assessment and an action plan create a useful resource for an organization's fundraising efforts. Sharing the assessment process and intentional development of a plan for supporting young children in shelter can strengthen proposals to donors and other funders. A completed action plan translates easily into a logic model format often required by foundations and government agencies.

> TIP: **Turn the Resources Needed column from your action plan into a shelter wish list to provide to donors, post on your website, and share on social media.**

Improvements with Low or No Cost

While some improvements in space, services, and programming may require a financial investment from the agency, many others can be made without additional funding. For example:

- Reviewing and updating policies

- Downloading and posting signage from the local health department or other organizations about handwashing, safe diapering, universal precautions, etc.

- Requesting information to share with families about safe sleep, breastfeeding, choking hazards, nutrition, immunizations, etc. from health departments or other organizations

- Implementing a standardized process to encourage feedback from parents and incorporate their input into policies and programs

- Updating job descriptions and internal staff trainings

- Updating the shelter wish list on the agency website to include supplies and age-appropriate toys

- Decluttering children's play spaces, including discarding toys that are unsafe, broken, or missing pieces

- Creating a list of local medical providers, including specialists, who are accepting Medicaid or uninsured patients

- Making connections with local child care providers and other early education organizations

Creating an Action Plan can help agency staff document and manage in one place the ideas and intentions that emerge from the self-assessment. It can be a living document that is updated regularly as new needs and opportunities are identified. The format is less important than the content that will support frontline staff, leadership, Board, and funders in better serving young children experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 4
Policy Change and Sustainability

Sustainability Planning

Improvements need to be institutionalized to create sustainable programs that support young children. Institutionalizing change requires going beyond looking just at practices to examine the policies, budgets, and staffing associated with programming. **Appendix D** provides a template for reviewing and updating policies in an agency.

Sustainability Planning through Staffing	Sustainability Planning through Policy Change	Sustainability Planning through Budgeting
What type of staffing does the agency need to ensure that young children are receiving appropriate adequate attention and care?	Which policies need to be amended to meet the higher standards identified in the self- assessment tool?	What financial resources are needed to implement and sustain improvements and new programming?
Which job descriptions need to be updated or new positions created to provide support to young children and their families?	How will maintaining children's spaces and programming after the initial improvements be institutionalized in policies and procedures?	How will new staff positions be funded?
Does staff training reflect new policies and procedures?	Are collaborations with community partners working effectively so families receive services quickly and easily?	Is funding available for additional professional development?
Do staff need additional professional development around child development, working with children who have experienced trauma, supporting families with neurodivergent children or children with disabilities, or other child-specific services?	Are policies evaluated regularly for effectiveness and equity in serving young children and their families?	Which grants and funding streams support services for young children?
How does the agency maintain institutional history and knowledge as staff turn over?		Which community partners would collaborate to find additional funding to serve young children?
What support do staff need to cope with vicarious trauma and avoid burn-out?		Does the agency have current or potential donors particularly interested in addressing the needs of young children experiencing homelessness?

Using the ECSAT and Action Plan to Evaluate Progress

After the first self-assessment and improvements, the ECSAT can be repeated for continuous quality improvement: assess, reflect, plan, implement, evaluate, assess again. This low-cost evaluation provides information that can be shared with leadership and donors to show results of the staff's efforts and the work that remains to be done.

Chapter 5
System-level Change

Engaging Community-Level Stakeholders

To have a significant impact for children experiencing homelessness, change can not be limited to shelter agencies only. Systems in the community need to work together - not just to provide better services for children and families, but also to prevent family homelessness. A larger community-wide effort across the public and private sectors can have a greater impact than any one agency working by itself.

The Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters can be one piece of this effort. Child care agencies can use the companion document, Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness, to improve their services. Both self- assessment tools encourage collaboration between the homelessness and early childhood education sectors. Community-level change initiatives could include additional stakeholders, including local and regional governments, K-12 education, social services, transportation, youth services, disability services, and healthcare, for example.

Many communities already have a Community of Care (CoC) or a similar collaborative focused on addressing homelessness. An existing local initiative may be focusing on young children. Rather than creating additional meetings, early childhood homelessness can be brought to these groups. To ensure consistent participation, homeless services and early childhood agencies can include regular attendance in those meetings in a staff member's job duties.

Work at the community level can explore different options for improving services for young children experiencing homelessness. Community leaders and collaboratives can:

- encourage agencies to complete the self-assessment tools
- provide grant funds for implementing action plans
- create strategic plans to cooperate to meet pressing needs
- address systemic causes of family homelessness
- reduce structural barriers to serving families with young children experiencing homelessness

This Toolkit contains additional resources to assist communities interested in addressing young child homelessness:

- Sample fliers to illustrate how a process may look when recruiting shelters to participate.
- Team agreement template that can be adapted for working with partners.
- Sample logic model

Shifting systems and agencies to prioritize the needs of young children will be a long-term endeavor. Encouraging shelters to complete the Early Childhood Self-Assessment, connecting early childhood resources with agencies serving homeless families, and focusing community- level efforts on vulnerable children are important first steps to sustainable change.

Chapter 6
Other Resources

Tools

Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters

Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness

Welcoming Play Spaces video

Logic Model tutorial

Community Collaboration Toolkit

North Carolina's Action Plan for an Early Childhood Homelessness Support System provides a detailed guide to ensure that children in our state who are unhoused receive all early childhood resources and services available in their communities.

Websites and Other Resources

Child Care Services Association: Early Childhood Homelessness provides research and other resources.

Child Care Services Association: Bringing Families Home campaign providing resources for raising awareness about young child homelessness in North Carolina.

North Carolina Child Care Resource & Referral Council Referral System helps families find child care programs across North Carolina, with options to search their online database, speak to child care referral counselors (including Spanish-speaking counselors), or request contact from a counselor via email.

National nonprofit working to overcome homelessness through education https://schoolhouseconnection.org/

SchoolHouse Connection: Access to Early Learning for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness, Birth to Five

SchoolHouse Connection: Federal Child Care Regulations and Homelessness Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-support-well-being/article/supporting-children-families-experiencing-homelessness

North Carolina Homeless Education Program provides information and support to local homeless education liaisons and others to ensure that all children and youth experiencing

homelessness have access to the public education to which they are entitled under the federal McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth Assistance Act.

A Housing and Shelter Providers Guide to Developmental and Behavioral Screening provides housing and shelter staff with guidance to engage clients with children under age 5 in conversations regarding the developmental and behavioral health of their children, and to facilitate referrals for further screening and evaluation when required.

States that Prioritize Child Care Subsidy Receipt for Children Experiencing Homelessness: https://www.childcareservices.org/programs/early-childhood-homelessness/supporting-families- experiencing-homelessness-child-care-policies/

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach

Resources for Improving Space and the Built Environment

Design Resources for Homelessness is "a knowledge resource that shares information about practical research, best practices and related content on the design of facilities for persons that are experiencing homelessness."

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child: Place Matters: The Environment We Create Shapes the Foundations of Healthy Development

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/place-matters-the-environment-we-create-shapes-the- foundations-of-healthy-development/

Enticing Environments for People Under Three Chock-full of colorful photographs from real- world infant and toddler settings, Enticing Environments for People under Three offers fresh ideas for making centers and classrooms inspiring for all of the people who inhabit them.

Potential Place: Using the Spatial Conditions of Emotions to design inspiring early childhood environments by Sandra Duncan, EdD

Healthy Parents Healthy Babies Recommendations developed by people with lived experience of homelessness and extreme housing instability when pregnant focusing on how to improve birth, health, housing, and other outcomes for pregnant people, parents, and their children.

The Framework for an Equitable Homelessness Response is guided by an unprecedented partnership of national organizations and experts and was launched to address both the public health and economic crises created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the inequitable impacts on people experiencing homelessness, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, and people with disabilities and/or underlying health conditions.

Reimagining Interim Housing: Stages and Action Areas for Transforming Approaches to Sheltering People Experiencing Homelessness: intended to advance priorities identified in the Framework, which calls upon communities to: sustain and expand interim housing opportunities during the pandemic; and to strive to transform their approaches to sheltering people to focus on non-congregate environments and other models, in order to better respond to public health crises, provide healthier environments, and to create more welcoming and efficient systems.

Reimagining Interim Housing Supplement: Tools for Strengthening Current Interim Housing Programs and Services

Immediate and Flexible Crisis Options for Children and Families focuses on the need for immediate and flexible crisis options paired with strong housing exits that can be replicated, adapted, and scaled up or down as needs and/or scale of resources change in each community, with the goal that "no child sleeps outside."

An Invisible Crisis: Early Childhood Homelessness - A Primer provides information, statistics, and recommended strategies for addressing young child homelessness.

Health and Parent Resources

The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome offers materials on keeping babies safe, including brochures on soothing crying babies.

La Leche League International provides extensive information about breastfeeding, including a directory to find local support for breastfeeding mothers.

American Academy of Pediatrics Safe Sleep Campaign Toolkit includes printable posters with information for caregivers about promoting sleep in infants.

American Academy of Pediatrics All About Immunization Schedules, as part of healthychildren.org, provides downloadable immunization schedules that can be printed and provided to parents.

HealthyChildren.org Ages and Stages includes information about a variety of topics related to health and safety for infants and toddlers.

North Carolina Early Learning and Development Progressions Birth to Five contains extensive lists of developmental milestones for children, broken down by multiple categories, e.g. emotional and social development, health and physical development, and in 2-3 month intervals.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Developmental Milestones provides parents with information about appropriate milestones by age. The website has links to a free Milestone Tracker app and a printable checklist of developmental milestones at different ages.

Center for Parent Information & Resources Overview of Early Intervention defines key terms around developmental delays and early intervention with information about accessing resources for screening and intervention.

The National Center for Homeless Education offers free materials with information for parents about their children's educational rights under the McKinney-Vento Act. Available in English and Spanish.

Bright Futures Pediatric Intake Form

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Intake for Child Under 2 year - Child Care Centers

Minnesota Children's Mental Health Services Child Intake Form

Endnotes

[1] "The exceptionally strong influence of early experience on brain architecture makes the early years of life a period of both great opportunity and great vulnerability for brain development. An early, growth- promoting environment, with adequate nutrients, free of toxins, and filled with social interactions with an attentive care- giver, prepares the architecture of the developing brain to function optimally in a healthy environment." (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture: Working Paper No. 5. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.)

[2] Toxic stress, characterized as strong, frequent, and prolonged for a long period of time, can affect the structure and development of the brain; this increases the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment into adulthood (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, Toxic Stress)

[3] Bellis MA, Hardcastle K, Ford K, Hughes K, Ashton K, Quigg Z, Butler N. Does continuous trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences - a retrospective study on adult health-harming behaviours and mental well-being. BMC Psychiatry. 2017 Mar 23; 17(1):110. doi: 10.1186/s12888-017-1260-z. Erratum in: BMC Psychiatry. 2017 Apr 13;17 (1):140. PMID: 28335746; PMCID: PMC5364707.

[4] SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan. Child and Youth Homelessness in the United States: Data Profiles: North Carolina. https://bit.ly/NC2020-21.

[5] SchoolHouse Connection (2022). Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness: Prevalence & Access to Early Learning in Twenty States. Washington, DC. 2022.

[6] (First Focus Campaign for Children, Policy Brief: Child, Youth, and Family Homelessness in the United States: Undercounted & Misunderstood) ("Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles," U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/homeless/early-childhood-homelessness-state-profiles-2021.pdf)

[7] SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan. Child and Youth Homelessness in the United States: Data Profiles: North Carolina. https://bit.ly/NC2020-21

[8] Gregg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern, Homelessness Is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns, University of California Press, March 2022; p 42

[9] Administration for Children & Families, Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters, 2020. Downloaded from https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CCSA-EC-Self- Assessment-Tool-for-Shelters_5-19-2020.pdf

Acknowledgements

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Yay Babies! Statewide Task Force

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: Division of Child Development and Early Education

Preschool Development Grant Program

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

Participating Shelters:

Helpmate, Asheville

Kwanzaa Family Inn and Dulatown Outreach Center, Lenoir United Community Ministries, Rocky Mount

Inter-Faith Council for Social Service, Chapel Hill SAFE, Inc. of Transylvania County, Brevard

Family Service of the Piedmont, Greensboro and High Point YWCA of Greensboro, Greensboro

Friendship Home for Women & Children and McDowell Mission Ministries, Marion Cleveland County Abuse Prevention Council, Shelby

Additional Toolkit Components

APPENDIX A: Sample Process Flyer

APPENDIX B: Design Meeting Tool

APPENDIX C: Action Plan Template

APPENDIX D: Policy Review Template

APPENDIX E: Sample Shelter Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX F: Shelter Commitment Agreement

APPENDIX G: Logic Model Template

Sample Process Flier

Getting Started

Agency leadership have conversations to explore agency interest and capacity.

→

Agency leadership sign a team commitment document indicating their agreement to the project's expectations and responsibilities.

Agency identifies staff members who will participate in the project as the Guiding Team and who will complete the assessment.

Agency leaders have a design meeting to create timelines, goals, and an outline for the project together.

The Assessment

Agency leadership hold an introductory meeting for agency staff to explain the project and introduce the ECSAT.

The Guiding Team completes the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool or the Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs.

Planning & Improving

The Guiding Team and agency leadership hold regular meetings to check in, assess progress, track improvements, and discuss ongoing needs.

The Guiding Team creates an Action Plan to identify specific steps for improvement based on results from the self-assessment.

Shelter staff undergoes training as needed based on ECSAT and Improvement Plan.

Follow Up and Support

Agency reaches out to other shelters using the ECSAT to share information about the self-assessment experience across their sites.

Agency staff complete the post-assessment to gather data on the impact of the project.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool Process Design Template

GETTING STARTED			
What	**Who**	**Implementation dates**	**Action Items & Assignments**
Initial interest conversation	Leadership		
Identify Guiding Team	Leadership		
Determine who will complete the ECSAT	Guiding Team		
THE ASSESSMENT			
What	**Who**	**Implementation dates**	**Action Items & Assignments**
Complete the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool			
PLANNING & IMPROVING			
What	**Who**	**Implementation dates**	**Action Items & Assignments**
Develop Action Plan	Guiding Team		
Training	Shelter staff		
EVALUATION			
What	**Who**	**Implementation dates**	**Action Items & Assignments**
Complete ECSAT again			
Update Action Plan			

APPENDIX C

Action Plan Template

ECSAT Section	Area of Intended Change	Intended Long-term Outcomes	Intended Intermediate Outcomes	Intended Short-term Outcomes	Action Steps	Resources needed for Action Steps	Timeframe	Lead Responsible
SAMPLE A.1	Emergency response	Agency is fully prepared to respond to emergencies	All staff and families understand and can execute emergency plans, e.g. natural disaster, active threat, lost child	Agency has clear policy and procedures for a natural disaster	Develop plan to inform parents of protocol; consider spending more time at intake going over emergency procedures	Example of policies and procedures for emergencies	2 months - by Dec 31	Shelter manager
				Agency has clear policy and procedures for a lost child	Document policy/procedure for lost child			
				All staff and families understand procedures for an active threat	Train staff on emergency protocols			
					Print copies of emergency procedures to post in shelter			

APPENDIX D

Draft of New Policy

Current policy: _____

_____

_____

Reasons for policy change: _____

_____

_____

Suggested changes to policy: _____

_____

_____

Proposed new policy: _____

_____

_____

Review of New Policy

Is the new policy consistent with current laws and regulations? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Is the new policy consistent with the agency's mission? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Is the new policy consistent with the agency's values? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Does the new policy better support the health and well-being of young children we are serving? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Does the new policy promote equity in service delivery for young children? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Approval and Implementation

Who needs to approve this policy change? _____

_____

Does this new policy require a change in budget? ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Details:_____

Who needs to be informed of this policy change? _____

_____

Who needs to be trained on this policy change? _____

_____

Who can provide training on this new policy? _____

_____

How often should training on this new policy be offered?_____

_____

Evaluation of Policy Change

When will you re-visit this policy to see if it's working? _____

WANTED: SHELTERS TO IMPLEMENT EARLY CHILDHOOD SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

SAMPLE SHELTER RECRUITMENT FLIER

About this Project

With more than 100 criteria, the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters provides recommendations and information that shelters can use to assess their physical environments and programmatic capacities to offer safe and healthy living situations for young children. The tool lists numerous ways shelter staff can connect to resources for families including child care, Head Start/Early Head Start and pre-K programs, thereby providing access to high-quality early learning environments for children experiencing homelessness. Finally, the tool offers a planning form to help shelters set goals and make improvements.

Why Invest in Early Childhood?

Children's earliest experiences are built into their bodies – shaping the brain's architecture and creating the foundation for future health and learning. Everything a child experiences in their earliest years impacts that child's opportunity to fulfill their potential. When we provide young children with a sturdy foundation, we create a healthier and stronger North Carolina for generations to come.

Project Mission

To ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers experiencing homelessness receive early childhood supports to promote their children's wellness and readiness to succeed in school and are connected to needed resources for their young children, and to help shelter staff members create shelter environments that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In this tool, you will find recommendations and information on how your shelter environment, programming, policies, and staff can support early childhood safety and development.

For more information about participating in this project, please contact…[contact info]

Created by Child Care Services Association and Partners for Impact, LLC

Benefit to Shelters

When an agency develops child-specific services and designs all spaces in a facility to be safe for young children:

- ➢ Parents and primary caregivers will have more places to spend time with less worry about their children experiencing harm.
- ➢ Staff members can reduce their burden of heightened vigilance when areas of potential risk are minimized and safety protocols are improved.
- ➢ Older children will encounter fewer hazards and receive age-appropriate services.
- ➢ Other clients will benefit from a trauma-informed approach to design such as soothing wall colors and warm lighting.

Expectation of Shelters

- ➢ A desire to improve their services for children and families
- ➢ Utilize the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters, as well as create and implement action plans

[About your organization]

APPENDIX F

Memorandum of Agreement between

_____ (Shelter)

and

ECSAT Team Staff:(names here)_____

_____

The parties above acknowledge and agree to enter into this MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) to improve the overall support for young children experiencing homelessness in _____ (name of shelter)

The intent of this project is to ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers experiencing homelessness receive early childhood services to promote their children's wellness and readiness to succeed in school and are connected to needed resources for their young children. Using the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelter (ECSAT), the shelter will assess the current environment and develop an action plan for strengthening their response to young children upon entry and during their stay at the shelter.

The ECSAT Team Staff will support the Shelter through _____

_____

_____

Both the [Shelter] and the [ECSAT Team Staff] are committed to creating environments that support the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of young children who are experiencing homelessness and to developing and deepening relationships between [Shelter] and local early childhood care and education service providers.

The [ECSAT Team Staff] agrees to provide the following services/Support for the [Shelter]:
1. Provide technical assistance for the Shelter in completing the ECSAT, developing an action plan, strengthening connections with early childhood providers, and working with other shelters that are also completing the ECSAT for continuous improvement and peer support.
2. Provide support to ensure further development of relationships between [Shelter] and local early childhood care and education service providers in (county/region).

[Shelter] agrees to implement the following:
1. Develop a team to implement the self-assessment and improvement process.
2. Commit staff time to participate in completing the ECSAT and engage in the action planning process.
3. Share data with [Other Party] as appropriate
   [list specific data to be shared]
4. Develop an improvement plan with specific action steps based on the interpreted results of the ECSAT.
5. Complete sections of this process within the following timelines:
   o ECSAT - within _____ months of signing this MOU
   o Action Plan - complete by _____
6. Commit staff time to training as determined in the improvement plan.
7. Agree to engage in relationship building, use of resources, and strengthening the connection between [Shelter] and the local early childhood development and education resources.
8. Commit to attending at least ____ meetings with other shelters that have used or are using ECSAT for program and facility improvements.

Signatures for [Shelter]:   Signatures for [Other Party]:
_____   _____
(print & sign)   (print & sign)
Title: _____   Title: _____

Date: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX G

SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT				
Self-assessment tool Staff time	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff understand what is working, what needs improvement	Shelter has environment that supports children's well-being and development
Staff time	Shelter staff create improvement plan	Shelter improvement plan	Staff has plan to guide improvement work	
Funding for training Trainers Staff time Pre/post-test on staff understanding	Trainers facilitate training/TA on places and spaces for children	Shelter staff are trained	Shelter staff understands connections between space and well-being	
Staff time Funding for equipment or space improvements	Staff implement changes according to improvement plan	Changes implemented	Shelter improves safety, environment for children	
Staff time Self-assessment tool	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool again	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff know where changes have been made, where additional improvement is needed	
PROGRAMMING				
Self-assessment tool Staff time	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff understand what is working, what needs improvement	Shelter has programming that supports children's well-being
Staff time	Shelter staff create improvement plan	Shelter improvement plan	Staff has plan to guide improvement work	
Funding for training Trainers Staff time *Pre/post-test on staff*	Staff training on needs of children	Staff are trained	Shelter staff understand developmental and social-emotional health needs of young	

understanding			children	
Reporting form Staff time *Pre/post-test on staff understanding* Trainer	Staff training on screening	Staff are trained Policies/ protocols on screening created/ reviewed	All children are screened	
Staff time	Staff implement changes according to improvement plan	Changes implemented	Shelter improves programming for children	
Staff time Self-assessment tool	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool again	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff know where changes have been made, where additional improvement is needed	

CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Information about local licensed childcare facilities	Identify childcare resource and referral agency/local partnership Identify licensed childcare facilities	Connection between shelter and resource/referral agency List of licensed childcare facilities	Shelter has relationship with resource and referral agency and licensed childcare facilities	Shelter successfully connects families to appropriate resources in the community
List of licensed childcare facilities Staff time	Make connections with childcare facilities	Shelter staff have contact information for childcare facilities		
Information about processes Trainers/local experts *Pre/post test on staff understanding*	Information sessions for staff, if needed	Staff are informed	Shelter staff understands processes for accessing community resources that support children's well-being and development	
Reporting form Policies/protocols on referrals to resources that support children's well-being and development	Staff training on referrals, if needed	Staff are trained	Shelter staff refers families to appropriate services	