



Providing Continuity of Care to Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs: Perspectives from Two Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Child Development Specialists

The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

In March 2015, the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded 275 Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership and EHS expansion grants. In the years since 2015, Congress has approved additional funding which has resulted in additional partnerships and expansion grants. As of December 2017, the EHS-CC Partnership and Expansion Grants had preliminarily reported partnerships with 1,600+ child care centers and 1,070+ family child care homes. In 2018, Congress approved additional funding (\$115 million) for new partnership and expansion grants.

The EHS-CC Partnership grants support partnerships between EHS programs and local child care centers and family child care providers serving infants and toddlers from families with low incomes. The partnerships support working families by providing expanded access to full-day, full-year child care and comprehensive services to children and families.

A key goal of the Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships is to increase the supply of high-quality early learning environments for infants and toddlers. EHS-CC Partnerships promote consistency of relationships, environment, language, and culture to strengthen primary caregiver relationships with infants and toddlers, prepare children for transition to preschool, and promote kindergarten readiness.

Young children vary in their development, knowledge, and abilities. Effective teaching requires that teachers, family child care providers, and other staff meet the individual needs of all young learners, including those children who may need more support. Child care providers play a key role in working with families to identify issues, making referrals to early intervention providers, and facilitating service provision. The EHS-CC Partnership program can then provide support and resources to families to make sure children receive the services they need. This implementation story provides

perspectives from two child development specialists who support families in identifying any developmental, medical, oral, or mental health concerns. They also play a role in helping families plan for successful transitions for their children. The child development specialists shared information on a four-step process they use to ensure a child's special needs are met:

1. Establish and foster trusting relationships with the family.
2. Identify the child's individual needs and current level of developmental progress.
3. Refer the child to the designated agency for a formal evaluation if the child has suspected developmental delays.
4. Actively support the family through the transition process, and ensure the child receives appropriate services, if needed.





A child development specialist with Schenectady Community Action Program in New York State shared her story about a child who enrolled at a family child care partner in the EHS CC-Partnership program. Jorge¹, a 2-year-old, was displaying signs of frustration when trying to communicate with his peers and caregivers. As he tried to express himself, he was exhibiting behaviors that were challenging to others. Perhaps because he could not verbally communicate his wants and needs, he seemed to prefer playing by himself with cars and trucks, demonstrating strong investigative skills.

By fostering a trusting relationship with the child's family, the partnership program helped identify Jorge's need for services (steps 1 and 2). "We met with his mom and helped her meet with the early intervention specialists through our county. Jorge was assessed and it was determined that his expressive language was low enough to receive services. Now that he has had a full year of weekly speech sessions, he is able to express a few words and is able to be understood. He seems like a happier child who is participating more in activities and is communicating rather than hitting or grunting to communicate."

Staff said that enrollment in the program provided Jorge with the opportunity to receive the extra support he needed to develop his language skills (step 3). He and his mom will continue to have the support services they need to be successful at school and in life (step 4). Thanks to the EHS-CC Partnership, Jorge and his

"This fall, Jorge will be moving to the Preschool Center at Schenectady Head Start. He will continue to have speech/language services to ensure continuity of care. As the child development specialist, I will be able to assist with the transition. I have already spoken with the special service provider at the Head Start site to share the Individualized Family Service Plan and his growth."

Child development specialist, Schenectady Community Action Program

mom received the services they needed to foster their confidence and to help them thrive.

A child development specialist with Kingsbridge Heights Community Center in New York City shared her experiences working with a mom and her child in the EHS-CC Partnership program. She described building a relationship with the family to identify a child's language delays (steps 1 and 2), referring the child and the family to a specialist (step 3), and developing a plan to support the family as the child transitioned (step 4). The child development specialist said, "I worked with a young mother; she was a first-time mom and this was her first time in a family child care program. The family child care provider was able to form a strength-based, trusting relationship with the family." She described her experiences working with the young mom and her son,

¹ The names of the children in this story have been changed.



David. David was a 1-year-old when he began receiving family child care services in the program. When he turned 2 years old, she observed that David appeared to need further support in expressive language. The family child care provider and the child development specialist met with David's mother and discussed age-appropriate language development. During the meeting, David's mother shared concerns about expressive language as well. The program's special needs specialist also spoke with David's mom about early intervention. He was referred to

the appropriate agency for formal evaluation and received services. The child development specialist also said that David has transitioned successfully to a Head Start program and is meeting all his developmental goals.

These two stories illustrate the process of providing developmental services through the EHS-CC Partnerships, demonstrate the value of diagnosing special needs early, and show how providing services can affect young children and their families.

Implementation Stories. This brief is one in a series that highlights the ways in which specific grantees implement EHS-CC Partnerships. By highlighting the work of partnership programs through the voices of grantees, child care partners, T/TA staff, and families, the briefs aim to share stories of implementation with others in the field.

For more information, please contact:

Schenectady Community Action Program; 518-374-9181; <https://scapny.org/headstart/>.

Kingsbridge Heights Community Center; 718-884-0700; <https://www.khcc-nyc.org/program/early-head-start>.

Photos courtesy of the Partnership Center.



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