

April Vlog

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Happy Spring. Yay, it's April, the sun is shining. I'm happy to be with you. And you know, I took a little break from my regular vlog and did the Parent Policy Council vlog last month, and that was really fun. Got some very good feedback on that; so, I'm super excited to have reached out to that group.

But here I am, and we're ready to get started on this vlog. And if you had asked me in January what April's vlog going to look like I don't think I would have told you I'd still be talking about homelessness. But I have to because you guys have been amazing. The response to this call to action has just been incredible. And I have to spend some time both paying tribute to you and then maybe addressing some questions and clearing some things up that have come through as a result of having this conversation.

So, I'm very excited to join you today to kind of take the next step, say, on this journey. And the homelessness campaign is not something that ever really ends. We need to continue doing this but it's done a really good job of shining a light on an area that I think really needed it. So, let's get started.

Love notes first. Right? We have to do love notes. I want to share this picture with you. Next Door Head Start sent me this picture, and I'm going to show it to you now. You can see this is some kids painting. You see the adult in the picture. And here's what's really cool about this photograph. This is actually career day for them. And that person helping those children learn how to paint is the Head Start's custodian. And I thought it was really awesome to see the Head Start using its own employees to teach kids about career options. And things that maybe we don't typically talk about, and how wonderful is it to pay respect to the folks in the building who are really keeping the program going. As a former administrator, I will tell you it was always very important to me to remember the people who keep the building humming, that we don't always recognize as such, and I think giving the custodian the opportunity to teach kids what it's like to be a custodian is fantastic. And of course, there's nothing more than dipping a paint brush and blue paint and being able to paint. So, good for you, Next Door Head Start.

And I also want to shout out the Playing Field, which is an Early Head Start program that sent me some information on what they're doing with homelessness, and it's really clever, and just they have a bus, and they drive the bus through town, and they pick children up who are homeless and bring them to their center every day. And it is a program that is brave because sometimes kids aren't there. So, it's not always the same children, and they reserve the slots specifically for homeless children. And of course, all of you out there who were thinking, "That's a great idea but it must be really expensive." Of course, it is. And they've figured out a way to find the funds for that in their community. So, I want to just shout out this sort of outside-the-box thinking and being really proactive and being okay with serving a community that is nontraditional, which means they might not be coming every day, and those slots are going to look a little bit different depending on what the needs of the homeless community is at the time. So, good for you.

And we're going to transition right into our homeless topic here today. And this vlog really is about you. So, I'm here to share ideas with you, to answer some questions, and, of course, to highlight you. So, the first thing I want to do is highlight you. Many of you took us up on that charge to complete the modules on the ECLKC, and I got lots of pictures, and I want to share them with you now.

So, we've got Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services and Early Head Start in Los Angeles. And Options for Learning also sent us a photograph, and they are in Los Angeles. Mission Neighborhood Center Head Start in San Francisco. And of course, you might notice that I'm in this picture. I had the chance to visit with this group. And they brought their certificates which I thought was really awesome, so we decided our picture should be together. Super, super fun. Leap Head Start in Lakewood, New Jersey. Jackson County Civic Association -- Action Head Start in Mississippi. And then we we go all the way over to Hawaii for HCAP

Head Start. They also completed the training and sent us a photo. Community Action Head Start in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. And I have to talk really slowly for the Southwestern Community Action Council in Huntington, West Virginia, because they sent us 11 pictures.

So, I'm going to -- to shout out West Virginia: way to go! And they really took this to heart. And I know many of you probably completed the training and didn't necessarily take pictures. So, big kudos to you, too. I know we have seen a big uptick in the use of this module, so I know it's working. And better than that, as I've been traveling, I've had people tell me how valuable it's been. So, even though they were already working with the homeless population, or they thought they already knew everything, they learned something, or even if it just can reaffirm what you are already doing, which feels pretty good. So, I'd -- I'd encourage if you haven't taken us up on this, to go ahead and do it. And keep sending pictures. I'll shout you out all day long. I love it.

And after completing the modules, we did get some good feedback on some changes folks made, which I thought was really fun. I had people send me emails about changing their recruiting habits. And instead of the traditional recruiting that they had been doing, they're getting out there to laundromats, to motels. They're being more proactive in looking for families that look like they may be -- have unstable housing, and reaching out to see if they need support.

And I will tell you if you talk to someone who's been with Head Start for a while -- and I mean like decades -- they'll tell you that this used to be sort of the traditional way that they recruited. And I think we got away from that, probably because technology, and media, and such has made it so that maybe we don't need to do it as much because we can get messages out to people. But we need to remember that that is still the most authentic way to get out to the community. So, good for you if you've started doing that. And of course, talking to the parents in March -- that was part of my goal -- is let's get them out there and talking for us. They know who their neighbors are and when they see change, they're going to be more aware of it than we are. Reaching out to school districts. I've got folks making relationships with their school liaison, their homeless liaison from the schools, through the school systems. This to me is such a necessary piece of this. It not only is important for us to make sure that we are a referral source, but it is a great resource for the school.

So, when they are enrolling a second grader who has two younger siblings, they can help connect them to a really, really solid resource. So, that is fantastic. Thinking about how you talk to families. I've gotten a lot of emails about changing language, trying to de-stigmatize homelessness. And I think that's a very important piece of this. I think one of the reasons we struggle with it is because folks really don't want to be associated with it, and we can understand that. And so, sometimes just shifting your language a little bit makes a big difference.

And then, one email I got talked about looking at chronically-absent children and following that thread to see if there weren't some connection between their absenteeism and a new housing situation, which could classify them as homeless, which I thought was really clever. And then finally, partnering with your local Continuum of Care. Continuum of Care providers help families and individuals experiencing homelessness move into transitional and permanent housing with the goal of long-term stability. I'm going to provide you with a list of your local Continuum of Care folks, and if you have not already reached out to these people you really should.

Again, this is just another really good connection to make. And of course, we want to be a resource for the homeless population for sure. But really, Head Start is all about building capacity, and with that, it's really trying to help them find long-term stable housing. So, if we can be the connection to that, all the better. And finally I have to shift here. I'm going to stop talking, because I had two grantees send me videos, not just pictures. So, I'm going to stop talking. Roll tape.

[Video begins]

Heissel Fischman: Hello, my name is Heissel Fischman.

Ron Portillo: I am Ron Portillo.

Heissel: And we are the ERSEA managers from Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services, Los Angeles, California.

Ron: So, in light of the modules that we watch, we wanted to share with you that we made some changes. And one of those changes is that we have put the McKinney-Vento definition at the forefront of our document eligibility form, and that's to make sure that we are following through with changing the way we look at families and to eliminate any stigma that might come from that.

Heissel: And aside from our traditional outreach efforts, we have engaged families to help us with outreach. They have access to families that otherwise would not feel comfortable being seen.

Lisa McDonald: Hi. My name is Lisa McDonald, and I am the coordinator of Community and Family Engagement for the Community Action Partnership, Lancaster Head Start, in Lancaster Pennsylvania. I would like to share with you some lessons that we have learned and things that we're going to change in our practices after doing the homeless lessons on ECLKC. We are going to extend our recruitment efforts to homeless shelters, motels, and camp grounds. We're going to expand our application process to include more questions surrounding living situations that are going to help us identify families who are experiencing homelessness. And we are going to provide additional training to all of our staff surrounding the McKinney-Vento Act and also begin to collaborate with school district homeless liaisons. Thank you.

[Video ends]

Deborah: So, there you go. We've got all kinds of creative people out there, and that's just a fantastic, you know, illustration of what's going on. And in that vein, guys, just remember when you're doing awesome things that you want to shout out, please send them to me. I love to tweet and to -- in these vlogs, really highlight what you're doing there. There's so much good stuff going on out there and it's important that we know about our neighbor's work and what folks are doing.

It can be -- it can be an inspiration to you, or it can just be again that affirmation of all the great things that Head Start is doing for the communities. So, thank you to those of you who did -- did send in pictures and the videos. I really loved seeing them, and it's really fun to be able to share them. So, I wanted next shift to answering some questions. As I've been traveling, I've gotten some consistent questions that I think probably deserved some time. Hopefully, it will help clear up some things for some of you.

One of them has to do with data. I had a lot of commentary as I've been talking to groups that -- to the extent of -- My -- my homeless -- the percentage of homeless families I'm serving is 10 percent on paper, but it's really 30 percent if I were to really categorize everybody correctly. And I've been a little surprised by this, actually. Because I didn't realize that it was that consistent an issue. But it is, because everywhere I've been I've been told the same thing.

So, here's what we're going to do. I would really, really love to see everybody go back and clean up that data. It is important that when we do the PIR in August, that whatever we collect is accurate. And if we're serving 30 percent of our children are categorized as homeless but our data only show 8 percent, that's really a significant thing. Because as we talk about programming and need, I think it's important that we represent our population appropriately. So, please take the time to ensure that your families

are categorized correctly in your system and that it gets reported correctly on the PIR. It's only April, so you have plenty of time to start to work on that and be ready in August when you do PIR to ensure that your data are as accurate as they possibly can be. So, that way, Head Start can really represent.

It'll be very interesting this year to look at that homeless data because of this kind of realization, and hopefully if we clean it up, it'll be more accurate, more representative. And that could really drive decision-making. So, appreciate the work there. And then the second thing people ask me about was doing home-based services when a child is homeless. Because sometimes the living situation isn't appropriate for home-based. And so, they just assume that they can't do it. But we want to encourage you to, you know, be smart and responsive to the need of the children. Okay?

The shelter, for example, isn't an appropriate place to necessarily provide home-based services and you can think of an alternative that makes sense, is safe, and meets the child's needs, you have that latitude. The other question I was asked was about there being a hard and fast rule about how much time you had to spend at every visit. Again, these are populations that have very special needs. So, adjust that to the need of the child and make sure that it is appropriate for the situation, and effective. And then, the last option you have, of course, is if you need to be really creative and you feel like it's just outside the bounds of what might make sense for a traditional home-based, is to do a locally-designed option, and create a whole program that's very specific for your homeless population and get that approved. It's not that hard to do.

We do a lot of LDOs nationwide. And I think for the most part they're working pretty well. And then, the last thing I want to talk about is McKinney-Vento. The definition is a little bit subject to interpretation. And I know this is difficult, but I want to give you a little bit of guidance here. Doubled-up can be a funny word to use. First of all, a lot of families don't consider that to be unusual. So, that's something you kind of have to talk through with parents, and they think, "Well I'm not homeless, we just have three families living in this single house."

So, there are some things that you have to sort of determine about that housing structure to figure out if it meets the definition. And the three big pieces are, fixed, regular and adequate. So, is it -- is it -- is it fixed? Is it in one place? Is it regular, in other words predictable -- I'm going to be here for a really long time -- or is it something that doesn't quite have that stability to it? And finally is it adequate? Is it safe? Is it healthy? Are there -- Is it dangerous?

You know, living in a basement that doesn't have adequate lighting, or heat, or whatever. And some of that is going to be subjective. So, you are going to have to use your professional opinion. But I think it's important that you consider this in a meaningful way with everybody that you register. Number one, so our data are correct. But also, so that parents know what resources might be available to them. And so, I think that those conversations, while are difficult, are important to have. So, I encourage you to do a little extra work on that and make sure that you're considering the McKinney-Vento definition, and if you need support with that, your regional office should be able to help you.

And also, the school homeless liaison should be really well-versed on the McKinney-Vento, since that's really their primary job, and I'm sure would be very happy to support you in any of that. So, finally, if you didn't already know, here's my factoid of the month. I learned about something that I didn't know, and I want to share it with you. And that is that every state has a dental hygienist referral person who works somewhere in the state. I learned it's not a consistent; it's not necessarily the capital; it's not necessarily in a specific division. But there is a list, and I'm going to provide it to you.

And if you're having a struggle with dental resources for your families, this person will get you connected. It's free, they're very aware of all the resources, and they're happy to help. So, if you've struggled with that at all or you just want to help a family with a special problem, know that this resource is here for you, and I hope you'll take advantage of it, it helps you out. I want to thank everybody for all of the hard work you have been doing and continue to do. And before we finish up today, I am going to pivot just a minute and talk about one topic that is completely apart from the vlog topic. And that's immunizations. You know, Head Start and Early Start play a very important in ensuring that children are immunized. And even though nationally we report 97 percent of our children are up-to-date on their immunizations, we know that there are pockets of communities where that isn't the case. It's not that high. And to be honest, 3 percent is a lot when you're talking about numbers of children who could be exposed to dangerous diseases.

So, we have the National Infant Immunization Week, NIIW, is April 27 to May 4. So, I wanted to make sure and get this into my April vlog and encourage you to highlight this week with your families. And make sure that all of your children are immunized. You know, giving babies recommended vaccinations by age two is the best way to prevent or to protect them from 14 serious childhood diseases. That includes whooping cough and measles. And you know, parents are encouraged to talk to their child's doctor to ensure their baby is up-to-date.

You know, we are seeing an increase in the number of children under two who are receiving no vaccines. And this is where Head Start and Early Start can really play a major role. Programs, you should get familiar with the Vaccine for Children, VFC program. It's federally funded, provide vaccinations at no cost to children who might otherwise not be vaccinated because of an inability to pay.

I'm going to provide you with the link the website in this vlog so that you have that if you need it. And you know, despite being eliminated in the US, we have seen an outbreak and a rise in measles, and you might know this from the news. It's been in the news. Since March 7, 228 cases have been reported in 12 states in 2019.

So, if you think about that exposure and the danger that could cause our children, this is a pretty important topic. We see that despite the MMR vaccination, the coverage level is only about 92 percent. One in 12 children in the United States is not receiving its first dose of MMR on time, which is underscoring considerable measles susceptibility across the country. So, pockets of unvaccinated people can even exist in states with high vaccination overall, and it's that pocket that makes the difference.

So, it's underscoring considerable measles susceptibility at local levels. Which is really where Head Start and Early Start come to play. And you know, it is -- in communities, it makes it very difficult to control the spread of the disease, and it makes folks vulnerable, and we want to make sure and be a part in the solution. So, I'm going to provide you with, I think three links, and they're each different. Please check them out. Get your health managers to check them out, and maybe spend that week -- again, that is April 27 to May 4 -- and really highlight National Infant Immunization Week, so that you can bring attention to this topic with your families. I appreciate having the opportunity to kind of slide that in there.

And just remember, Head Start is the American dream. Go make dreams happen.