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## ABSTRACT

One of the first joint efforts of the collaborative partnership of the University of Rhode Island and the CHILD, Inc. Head Start program has been the design of the Early Head Start Continuous Improvement and Evaluation Project (EHS Plan), research designed to assess and continuously strengthen the quality of services offered to children and families enrolled in Early Head Start. Based on the view that forming an equal partnership between the evaluators and Head Start staff leads to collaboration in the conception, design, and implementation of an evaluation study, this collaboration enables the joint formulation of meaningful questions and determination of appropriate methods. This paper highlights the EHS Plan. The project used a multi-variable, multi-system, and contextual research design; data collection strategies included records review, questionnaires for staff and families, observation, and interviews. Three major areas comprising the project are noted: (1) assessment of progress toward program objectives; (2) collection of qualitative information on families; and (3) documentation on program management. An appended table delineates the goals for program evaluation and training, and technical assistance in the areas of child development, family development, community building, and staff development. The report concludes by asserting that the EHS evaluation plan and partnership comprise a model design that can meet the growing needs of Head Start. (KB)

## CHILD, Inc. Head Start &amp; the University of Rhode Island Partnership:

## The Early Head Start Continuous Improvement &amp; Evaluation Plan

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The Early Head Start Continuous Improvement and Evaluation Project (EHS Plan) is a research study designed to assess and continuously strengthen the quality of services offered to children and families enrolled in Early Head Start. Federal recommendations suggest that each Early Head Start initiative be accompanied by an evaluation project to determine the effectiveness of the program and increase understanding about which services work best for families with infants and toddlers. This recommendation strengthened the partnership of CHILD, Inc. Head Start and the University of Rhode Island.

The relationship between CHILD, Inc. and the University of Rhode Island dates back to the early 1990's with the evaluation of the New England Head Start Teaching Center. Since that time the two institutions have collaborated on numerous projects including using the Head Start facility as a teaching center for university undergraduate students, having Head Start staff lecture at university classes, and joint grant writing efforts to improve Head Start services. The creation of the CHILD, Inc./University of Rhode Island Partnership was a natural evolution. One of the first efforts of the Partnership was the design of the EHS Plan. From the beginning, the design of the EHS Plan followed a community collaborative, co-learning approach (Ostrom, Lerner & Freel, 1995). A basic tenet of this approach is the necessity of forming an equal partnership between the evaluators and Head Start staff that leads to true collaboration in the conception, design and implementation of an evaluation study. The collaboration enables the joint formulation of meaningful questions and determination of appropriate methods—both parties contribute their expertise and unique strengths to the design and implementation of the study (Denner, Cooper, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1999). Ostrom et al.

(1995) report that such an approach enhances cooperation and interest of the "evaluated" and greatly increases the likelihood that the results will be meaningful and used.

Following the collaborative, co-learning model, the initial activity of the partnership was to collaborate in refining program goals, developing and choosing evaluation questions that were important, identifying outcome measures that were meaningful and valid, and developing support for the evaluation project among the varied constituent groups (staff, parents, Policy Council, etc). An initial product was the development of a matrix that listed program goals and objectives for each cornerstone and program area (see Figure 1). Measures and methods to assess these goals and objectives were co-determined and a timeline for implementation was agreed upon.

The EHS plan closely parallels the National Early Head Start Evaluation currently being commissioned by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families. To create consistency and in an effort to generalize the results many of the instruments used in the National Study were adopted in the EHS Plan. The EHS Plan uses a multi-variable, multi-system and contextual research design. Data collection strategies include records review, questionnaires for staff and families, observation, and interviews. This approach to evaluation ensures that the outcomes adequately reflect the priorities and needs of the Head Start agency and that outcomes inform and modify future service delivery (McKillip, 1987). The EHS Plan focuses on three major areas: (1) assessment of progress towards program objectives; (2) collection of qualitative information on families; and (3) documentation on program management.

As Head Start continues to evolve, so do the challenges that accompany assessment and evaluation of the varying programs and models. Evaluation plans that can accurately assess all the multiple components of Head Start will be needed as Head Start transitions into the next century. The EHS Evaluation Plan and Partnership is a model design that can meet the growing needs of Head Start.

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Early Head Start Evaluation Project

Figure 1

Program Evaluation	Child Development	Family Development	Community Building	Staff Development
<p><b>Goal 1. To provide comprehensive and multidisciplinary services</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. program includes early childhood development and health services</li> <li>b. provides comprehensive &amp; multidisciplinary child &amp; family assessment</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 2. To ensure optimal child development</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. over time, children will perform at developmental norms on developmental assessment instr. in all developmental domains</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 3. Maximize the quality of all program services</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Parent involvement in all aspects of program including program design; development and evaluation; and policy and procedure development</li> <li>b. effective partnerships with community agencies to implement high quality services</li> <li>c. evidence of a high quality developmentally appropriate program that is age, individually and culturally appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Goal 1. To support parent as educator and ensure the home as the primary learning environment</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. safe home environment (psychological)</li> <li>b. parents engage with program</li> <li>c. effective parent/child interaction</li> <li>d. knowledge of child dev. and appropriate expectations</li> <li>e. child appropriate home environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 2. To enhance family empowerment/self advocacy</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. family takes advantage of social supports and networks</li> <li>b. family takes primary responsibility for FPA</li> <li>c. increased self efficacy</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 3. To facilitate progress towards self sufficiency</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. volunteering</li> <li>b. participating in community service</li> <li>c. participating in job training</li> <li>d. gainfully employed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Goal 1. Increased collaboration with other agencies</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. joint trainings</li> <li>b. provide venues to share information</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 2. Promoting awareness of critical issues and public responsibility for the prenatal through the first 3 years of life</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. disseminate info to citizens and decision makers in a variety of formats (newsletter 4X a year, annual report)</li> <li>b. enhance face-to-face interactions to build capacity and commitment for the prenatal through first 3 yrs. of life (task force, summer institute, annual seminar)</li> <li>c. high customer satisfaction with trainings and sharing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Goal 1. Increase staff competence through a variety of ways</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. use case review as a continuous improvement tool</li> <li>b. seasoned staff serve as mentors to new staff</li> <li>c. staff receives higher than average wages and benefits on an agency wide basis</li> <li>d. conference and other training</li> <li>e. collegial support</li> </ul> <p><b>Goal 2. Provide resources for discipline based specialized knowledge</b> Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. coordinators provide specialized knowledge</li> </ul>	

Early Head Start Evaluation Project

	Child Development	Family Development	Community Building	Staff Development
Program Evaluation cont...	<p>Goal 4. Fully integrate children with special needs into all program activities</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. at least 10% of children enrolled in program are children with disabilities</li> <li>b. children with disabilities are functionally engaged in all program activities</li> </ul> <p>Goal 5. Provide for positive transition into Head Start and other programs</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. program has planned transition process that includes appropriate timeliness and procedures</li> <li>b. evidence of high quality delivery and implementation</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 4. Family utilizes family health services</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. evidence of primary care physician</li> <li>b. parents use appropriate health services</li> </ul>		

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Early Head Start Evaluation Project

	Child Development	Family Development	Community Building	Staff Development
Training and Technical Assistance	<p>Goal 1. Training is provided which focuses on state of the art knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) development of infants and toddlers including those with special needs; b) comprehensive and multidisciplinary child assessment and c) implementation of a developmentally appropriate, family focused program.</li> </ul> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is the content of training appropriate?</li> <li>b. Are adequate numbers of training provided for each of the content areas above?</li> <li>c. Is trainee satisfaction achieved?</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Training is provided which focuses on state of the art knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) development and functioning of families, including those with multiple risks; b) multidisciplinary family assessment and c) implementation of a developmentally appropriate, family focused program.</li> </ul> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is the content of training appropriate?</li> <li>b. Are adequate numbers of training provided for each of the content areas above?</li> <li>c. Is trainee satisfaction achieved?</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Training is provided which focuses on state of the art knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) collaboration for administration, task force and community partners;</li> <li>b) understanding of social policy in Rhode Island; and</li> <li>c) strengthening community wide capacity, marketing and public relations</li> </ul> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is the content of training appropriate?</li> <li>b. Are adequate numbers of training provided for each of the content areas above?</li> <li>c. Is trainee satisfaction achieved?</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Training is provided that focuses on state of the art knowledge and skills in delivering staff development</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is the content of training appropriate?</li> <li>b. Are adequate numbers of training provided for each of the content areas above?</li> <li>c. Is trainee satisfaction achieved?</li> </ul>

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# Early Head Start Evaluation Project

	Child Development	Family Development	Community Building	Staff Development
Program Management	<p>Goal 1. Maintains records that a comprehensive home-based program is implemented</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. child receives weekly home visits</li> <li>b. child attends family day at center</li> <li>c. Child Indiv. Dev. Plan is completed and describes implemented activities and child's progress</li> </ul> <p>Goal 2. Maintains records that a comprehensive center based program is implemented</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. child receives center based child care</li> <li>b. child receives home visits</li> <li>Child Inc.: Once every 2 weeks</li> <li>Cranston: 2 times per year</li> <li>c. Child Indiv. Dev. Plan is completed and describes implemented activities and child's progress</li> </ul> <p>Goal 3. Implements a systematic approach to the use of program records for management decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. occurs with adequate regularity and frequency</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Maintains records that a comprehensive home based program is implemented.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. family receives weekly home visits</li> <li>b. parent/guardian attends family day at center</li> <li>c. parent and home visitor collaborate on activities to be implemented during home visit</li> <li>d. Home Visit Plan is completed and describes implemented activities and family's progress</li> </ul> <p>Goal 2. Maintains records of parent participation</p> <p>Indicator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. participation in the process of making decisions about the nature and operation of the program</li> <li>b. participation in the classroom as a paid employee, volunteer or observer</li> <li>c. activities for the parents which they have helped to develop</li> <li>d. working with their children in cooperation with the staff</li> </ul> <p>Goal 3. Implements a systematic approach to the use of program records for management decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. occurs with adequate regularity and frequency</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Adequate records are maintained about collaborative activities</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. referrals made to outside agencies that service children and families</li> <li>b. services provided by outside agencies that service children and families</li> <li>c. case notes are completed and describe implemented activities and child's progress</li> </ul> <p>Goal 2. Adequate records are maintained about public awareness activities.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. # of newsletters, annual reports or other written material</li> <li>b. # of task force, summer institutes and other face-to-face interactions</li> </ul> <p>Goal 3. Implements a systematic approach to the use of program records for management decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. occurs with adequate regularity and frequency</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1. Maintains adequate records of comprehensive training for staff development</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. records kept about # and kind of training</li> <li>b. records kept about content and quality of trainings</li> </ul> <p>Goal 2. Implements a systematic approach to the use of program records for management decision making.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. occurs with adequate regularity and frequency</li> </ul>





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