



## Addressing Fears Amidst An Anti-Immigrant and Harmful Federal Policy Climate: Tips and Ideas for Family Shelter Practice

*Winter, 2018*

Over the course of 2017, Emergency Shelter Assistance (EA) providers have shared with us inspiring ideas for how to respond to fears induced by a harmful federal policy climate. In 2018, we want to offer this tool with positive tips and ideas that came from the provider community for addressing these fears.

Fostering meaningful experiences and opportunities with families in shelter that lead to families becoming stably housed in Massachusetts is a daily challenge for providers. Families and providers have also been faced with a fear-inducing and traumatizing political climate. There has been wave after wave of federal rhetoric, proposed policies, and changes in law that promote xenophobia, reduce critical services, and create additional barriers for families (and many staff working at EA agencies) to being stably housed. We began our annual [Visioning Day this year](#) by recognizing fears we have heard from families and providers and affirming our collective strength and ability to create change amidst great challenge. We have continued to listen to the field and hear your ongoing concerns. The following ideas and promising practices have come from providers and include additional suggestions based on Homes for Families' previous research and ongoing conversations with families and providers. Please keep your ideas and promising practices coming.

### **Communications**

There are opportunities through how agencies communicate with families and staff, to share affirming messaging, useful tools, and relevant resources. Different types of communication (e.g. group spaces versus posted flyers, versus letters distributed to all families) may be more or less effective depending on the particular agency or shelter model:

- Group Spaces:
  - Organize brown bag lunches where staff can share their feelings and different perspectives about what is going on with the goal of building empathy and a supportive staff environment. These can be scheduled in advance or be impromptu in response to a federal action or current event.
  - Create a similar space for families during weekly group meetings where families can share their concerns and how they can be best supported by the agency.
- Written Communications:
  - Distribute written statements with messages from the agency re-assuring families of the agency's commitment to inclusion and justice, and what families can do if they feel unsafe.
  - Share how to report bias-motivated threats/crimes to the attorney general's office: <http://www.mass.gov/ago/consumer-resources/your-rights/civil-rights/hate-crimes.html>.
  - Post flyers from other agencies that can support families. Share information on how to access immigration [clinics](#) and [free legal counsel](#) in the area and community education materials, for example, from the National Immigration Law Center: <https://www.nilc.org/get-involved/community-education-resources/>.

- Distribute know your rights materials and wallet cards that help immigrants assert their rights and defend themselves, for example if ICE agents want to enter their home. One resource is the National Immigration Law Center’s red cards: <https://www.nilc.org/get-involved/community-education-resources/>. Know your rights materials can also be found via [Massachusetts Law Reform Institute](#), [CASA](#), the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) and [the Catholic Legal Immigration Network](#).
- Online Resources:
  - Share trainings and information available in the form of videos for families/staff to watch at their leisure or to show during group meetings. Some videos (and fact sheets in different languages) are available through the [Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights](#) and [the National Immigration Law Center](#). Please see below under One-on-One Meetings for links to online family emergency planning resources.

### **On Site Services**

As families’ immediate community, they may turn to you first for information. Being aware and connected to services that can be brought on site, is particularly valuable:

- Agencies may be able to find free legal services via <http://www.masslegalhelp.org/>. To look up legal service agencies that may provide trainings near you, go to [Mass Legal Services](#).
- Bring attorneys and volunteers to come on site to get the citizenship processes started for interested family members. The [MIRA coalition](#) or [Project Citizenship](#) might be able to help.
- Provide “know your rights” trainings relative to the current pressing issue at hand. The [Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project \(PAIR\)](#) is offering these trainings. For a link to complete a training request form visit [this page on MIRA’s website](#).

### **One-On-One Meetings**

The following are some examples of practices that lead to optimal outcomes and strong partnerships between families and providers:

- Develop family driven plans with realistic short and long term goals that focus first on creating stability and ultimately lead to job readiness, increased income and stable long term housing. This is useful when done in a trauma informed, and family-led fashion that creates space to hear how families are feeling, and challenges they are confronting that are not necessarily housing-specific. Take the time to explore with families that may have undocumented members what possible concerns and courses of action may be.
- Case managers can meet with families to help them think about emergency planning (e.g. for immigrant families facing the threat of deportation), again, while supporting families in a strength based and trauma informed manner. Boston Medical Center’s Immigrant and Refugee Health Program has a [guide for creating an family preparedness plan](#) and Mass Legal Help offers [some resources for family emergency planning](#).

### **Trainings**

It is a valuable time to assess professional development opportunities for staff and trainings for families that promote trauma informed care, cultural competency, and advocacy skills:

- The role of cultural competency and trauma informed care are particularly important when working with families to respond to trauma inducing issues disproportionately impacting communities of color, immigrant families, and all marginalized groups. It is a good time for agencies to revisit their professional development, considering what kinds of additional training may benefit staff through agencies such as [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#), [Third Sector New England](#) and [Center for Social Innovation](#).
- Taking action through advocacy is a powerful tool for families and staff to both work to change the structural barriers impacting their lives and gain self advocacy tools that will translate into their daily lives. [Homes for Families](#) offers trainings, as do other advocacy groups with different focus areas, such as [the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Coalition](#).

### Operations

Assessing staff and family practices are as important as assessing internal practices, budget contingency planning, and strategic partnerships:

- Look at agency safety practices and procedures, enhance safety protocol where possible, and communicate agency policy and public policy that provide protections for families and staff. This applies to policies around protecting personal information and access to agency buildings by ICE.
- Engage in contingency planning: create multiple budgets that reflect the impact of likely federal cuts in the years ahead and the limitations in the Massachusetts State budget to fill gaps left by such cuts. This kind of planning can inform development and fundraising goals as well as communications with staff that demonstrate that the agency is being as pro-active and thoughtful as possible during these unpredictable times. Uncertainty around the future of an agency may cause added unease for staff, however, where approached in a way that provides space for authentic staff input, can strengthen agency culture.
- Assess strategic partnerships and where it is advantageous to formalize local partnerships with schools, community health clinics, food banks, immigrant rights and other grass roots organizing groups.

### Advocacy

Advocacy is an effective tool for not only addressing fears around shifting policies, but for taking action to *change* harmful policies:

- Partner with policy advocacy groups and help shape advocacy agendas at every opportunity. Groups to connect to for action alerts, lobby days, and other ways to influence policy include [Homes for Families](#), [Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Coalition](#), [Massachusetts Law Reform Institute](#), [Citizens' Housing and Planning Association](#), and the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#).
- Federal groups to connect to include: [The National Immigration Law Center](#), [The National Low Income Housing Coalition](#), and [The National Coalition for the Homeless](#).
- Keep your congressional delegation informed about issues impacting your agencies, so that your issues of concern remain among their top priorities. Look up your federal delegation [here](#).

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