



CHIME

Child Homelessness
Intercept Mapping
& Engagement

Improving Systems of Care for Children Experiencing Homelessness

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Introduction

Child Homelessness Intercept Mapping & Engagement ([CHIME](#)) began in 2021 when a consortium of Boston community leaders, organized by FamilyAid, came together to draw attention to the needs of accompanied children experiencing homelessness (i.e., children aged 0-18 experiencing homelessness with a parent or legal guardian).

CHIME is a systems level intervention and Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Change approach designed to improve access to services and positive experiences for accompanied children experiencing homelessness. PSE Change approaches aim to sustain long-lasting, equitable changes within communities to provide all residents with opportunities for improved health and safety. CHIME provides an organizational framework to identify and address the critical issues impacting accompanied children experiencing homelessness. The interactive community strategy developed by Kathleen Kemp, Ph.D. and Patricia A. Griffin, Ph.D. leverages the experience and research behind two evidence-informed practices: the Sequential Intercept Model (Munetz & Griffin, 2006)¹ mapping workshops and Ascend at the Aspen Institute's (Ascend) Two-Generation (2Gen) approach.

CHIME was created to address Boston-centric challenges specific to family homelessness, but components of the model can be replicated by other communities to improve systems vulnerable populations move through with when working towards stability and success. This document will detail the implementation of the initiative and share recommendations for communities seeking to conduct a similar effort.

Mission: CHIME engages Boston's key community champions, government administrators, service providers, and those with lived experience to map and enhance systems of care for accompanied children experiencing homelessness.

Vision: CHIME envisions a future in which whole-family services for children experiencing homelessness are easily accessed and support children in becoming healthy, thriving adults.

CHIME 2024 Impact Report: <https://bostonchime.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CHIME-Impact-Report-2024-for-Web-FINAL.pdf>

¹ The Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) is a framework and tool to facilitate cross-systems collaboration developed by Drs. Mark Munetz and Patty Griffin and implemented by Policy Research Associates, Inc.

Background

Boston currently ranks 5th in the sheer number of homeless children and parents and 3rd in the rate of family and child homelessness per 100,000 residents in the country.

Additionally, Massachusetts has had the 2nd largest increase in family homelessness since 2007, resulting in 3 out of every 4 people experiencing homelessness doing so in families with children². These large figures fail to count the thousands of children and parents who are effectively homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act³.

Family homelessness is a preventable social driver of poor health outcomes, driven primarily by intergenerational poverty and the high cost of living, that has a wide impact on children's physical, mental, social, and academic health and well-being. While the state's emergency assistance (EA) shelter system is an essential resource for parents and providers, there is little to no connected funding to support children. State and local agencies are siloed when it comes to serving children and current solutions overall lack a whole-family focus. Despite the widespread recognition of the need to reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the toxic stress they create to improve child and adult health and well-being, achieving this is difficult because current systems of supports for children experiencing homelessness are fragmented, disconnected from each other, and don't consider the need to support all family members concurrently.

Project Goals and Model

CHIME combines the evidence-based Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) mapping process widely used throughout the nation to improve services for at-risk populations, and Ascend's 2Gen framework to achieve these four goals:

- 1) Expand program capacity and/or prioritization of accompanied children experiencing homelessness.
- 2) Enhance access and coordination of child services.
- 3) Increase awareness of family homelessness and child services amongst leaders, service providers, administrators, and families.
- 4) Encourage greater utilization of available child services.

More than 20 years ago, Dr. Patty Griffin, as part of her work with the National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health

² <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

³ <https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition/>

and Justice Transformation⁴, developed the mapping workshops as a systems-level, interactive intervention to help community stakeholders identify service and policy gaps and opportunities to address the needs of their target population. Policy Research Associates, Inc. expanded, formalized, and widely disseminated the mapping workshops⁵. During SIM mappings, facilitators systematically walk stakeholders from all levels of involvement through the data, practices, resources, gaps, and policies that affect how and why the target population at hand moves through systems they interact with.

Ascend's 2Gen approach is aimed at breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty by addressing the needs of both children and their parents simultaneously. Rooted in the belief that the well-being of families is interconnected, the approach emphasizes coordinated, holistic support that combines access to high-quality education, workforce development opportunities, economic stability programs, and comprehensive family services. The six components of 2Gen as defined by Ascend work together to address the complex needs of families and promote positive outcomes across generations.

Using this multi-dimensional framework, CHIME sought to identify practices, services, and policies in each 2Gen component that affect accompanied children and their caregivers experiencing homelessness. In total, the initiative held six CHIME mappings (one mapping for each 2Gen component) and will hold one final summit to encapsulate the work achieved in the mappings and gain state and city leadership consensus on high-level policy changes required to improve services for homeless children.

During the CHIME mapping process, facilitators, community leaders, frontline staff, and people with lived experience collaborate to achieve three primary objectives:

- 1) Map the local systems serving accompanied children experiencing homelessness including resources, gaps, and opportunities.
- 2) Determine and gain consensus on priorities for action based on community input.
- 3) Create action plans to make measurable improvements on coordination of services for homeless children and families.

⁴ <https://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice/sim-overview>

⁵ <https://www.prainc.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/FFS-SIM-508.pdf>

CHIME Implementation and Replicability

Define the Problem and Set Goals

Projects driven by collaboration require shared definitions of the work ahead that stakeholders can align to, especially in multi-system efforts. While Massachusetts' shelter system serves families that are identified as literally homeless⁶ by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), HUD's definition does not capture families teetering on the edge of homelessness or who have already lost their housing and are unstably doubled- or tripled-up with others in their network, either situation of which has a direct linkage to higher ACEs compared to stably housed children. To capture all children impacted by severe housing instability or homelessness, CHIME uses the federal McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness during mappings, as followed by the U.S. Department of Education.

The mapping process also calls for identifying “intercepts”, or relevant points along the care continuum that are needed or otherwise helpful to connect children to services. This required identification is a common thread of activities that system partners use to engage children and families in systems and services across the six 2Gen components. The foundation of SIM workshops relies on individuals moving through the criminal justice system in a reasonably predictable way; however, accompanied children with families experiencing homelessness do not have a predictable or sequential path to engaging in services that support their well-being. Drs. Kemp and Griffin identified five process points that apply to accessing services across all six components:

- a. Identification of accompanied children experiencing homelessness
- b. Screening of accompanied children experiencing homelessness
- c. Planning and accessing care to meet the needs of children experiencing homelessness
- d. Managing and coordinating care across systems
- e. Tracking care coordination and engagement

Finally, it is necessary to set specific goals based on existing data and knowledge. The four goals noted earlier were developed based on four likely issues that providers across the 2Gen components often discuss: insufficient program capacity, insufficient prioritization for children experiencing homelessness specifically, lack of awareness and understanding of the family homelessness scope and available services, and lack of utilization amongst accessible services.

⁶ <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/category-1/>

Build the Case and Secure Funding

Once a general approach and focus is established, funding is needed to sustain the project and ensure enough longevity for system changes. FamilyAid and two partners – an early education provider for homeless families in Boston and a peer shelter provider for the state – surveyed case managers across the three agencies on available city-funded services geared towards families in poverty. 50 case managers serving nearly 3,000 children at the time were asked about their knowledge and utilization of 71 services funded by the City of Boston. The goal was to determine if the aforementioned issues that CHIME's goals were based on had legitimacy to them, and the findings were staggering:

- Only 3 programs were known by the supermajority (67%) of staff.
- Only 6 programs were known by the majority (50%) of staff.
- 44 programs (62%) were recognized by fewer than 33% of the staff.

With these findings in hand and an established approach to dig deeper with the community, FamilyAid submitted for and secured funding through a Determination of Need grant disseminated by Dana-Farber Cancer Institute to implement CHIME for four years.

Form Planning Team

Facilitators: A community-based project focused on evaluating multiple systems requires a planning team with facilitators who are agnostic to local and state systems and politics as well as cross-system expertise.

After funding was received, FamilyAid secured three consultants to inform the project's direction, build the mapping model, and ultimately facilitate mapping events. It is standard in SIM to have expert mapping facilitators who are not involved in or directly working within the community at hand, and this approach was maintained with CHIME. Facilitators are responsible for moving hundreds of people at varied levels of involvement through difficult, nuanced conversations and turn them into productivity and system improvements. They must also be able to easily and quickly adapt to fast-changing systems.

Leadership Group: FamilyAid is an expert and provider within Economic Assets - one of the six 2Gen components - but did not have the ground-level knowledge and in-depth connections across all other components to effectively lead CHIME on its own. To that end, an Executive Committee was formed consisting of leaders at local leading nonprofits across the Greater Boston area, with representation of all six 2Gen components. The makeup of the Committee considered leadership and influence, established working

connections, willingness to prioritize children, and the ability to stay involved over time in large-scale, system-level efforts in the face of their own day-to-day agency work.

Project Launch: After the Executive Committee was assembled, it was agreed that a formal launch would help get the project off the ground and the necessary community leaders at the table. It was also agreed that this launch should be headlined by someone with high status who can get early buy-in and expand the focus on children early. Then First Lady of Massachusetts Lauren Baker acted as the CHIME Kickoff champion, helping to launch the project formally in June 2020 before mappings began in subsequent months.

Project Manager/Organizational Lead: It is highly encouraged to have one point person responsible for leading the logistical efforts of the project and liaising between the several various involved parties (Executive Committee, facilitators, project participants, and the funder(s)).

Structure the Mapping Process and Secure Champions

Agenda-setting: When evaluating breaks across multiple systems through a model like SIM, it is important to standardize an agenda while considering what elements must maintain flexibility to achieve each system's stakeholders' respective goals. Generally, CHIME followed the typical SIM agenda, holding 1.5-day events for each mapping and focusing on mapping resources including their strengths and barriers, determining priorities the community wants to move forward to create change, and drafting plans for change.

Planning with the Leadership Group: Crafting the invitation list for each mapping requires thoughtfulness and partnership with the respective Executive Committee leader who is the "expert" in the 2Gen component at hand. Each system will have unique resources, processes, and policies, and the Committee should help to inform who needs to be in attendance and support outreach. For example, the mapping for the K-12 component was led in partnership with Boston Public Schools (BPS) who helped to identify necessary participants (e.g., BPS district leaders and homeless liaisons, city and state leaders, and students experiencing homelessness) and the specific areas of focus within the realm of K-12, as well as secured a champion specific to the event similar to what was done for the kickoff (BPS Superintendent Mary Skipper).

Event "Champions": It is common for stakeholders in any given mapping to have limited capacity to attend a multi-day event that may be removed from their usual work. The

CHIME team quickly learned that having at least one main headliner for each event would play a key role in driving participation and subsequent action. If the identified champion(s) has an existing role in the system and could lead efforts after, that is highly encouraged. One example of this in CHIME is the Early Childhood Education mapping, which was co-championed by the top leaders of the state and city early education departments (State Commissioner Amy Kershaw and City Director Kristin McSwain, respectively). They drove critical engagement from other providers and led major improvements within the early education system following the mapping, including an increase in early childhood vouchers specifically for homelessness children and the creation of MA's Early Education and Child Care Task Force.

Convene the Community

Participant Makeup: A key element of CHIME is the collaborative process. Meaningful cross-system collaboration is required to establish and coordinate effective and efficient services for accompanied children experiencing homelessness. This makes the composition of the group extremely important. While some SIM mappings involve advertising to an entire provider community, it was essential in CHIME mappings that the organizers gather a group that represents key decision makers and varied levels of staff from the relevant provider systems in addition to families who are currently or have recently experienced homelessness. CHIME generally followed these best practices for mapping events:

- 35 to 50 participants total. Larger groups are difficult to facilitate.
 - o State, city, and community leaders (70%)
 - o Front-facing staff: Teachers, nurses, case managers, etc. (20%)
 - o Parents and children with lived experience of homelessness (10%)
- Cross-system representation is necessary though the bulk of attendees should represent the 2Gen component being focused on.
- Following the mapping, a report reflecting the discussions, system map, and action plans is published.

Involving People with Lived Experience: The CHIME team believes lifting the voices of families with lived experience is vital in identifying the most concerning and impactful barriers to services, and to creating the necessary change after mappings. However, families experiencing homelessness are the most challenging partners to involve in a day and a half event primarily because they must prioritize meeting their and their child(ren)'s day to day needs while working towards securing stable housing, but also because it can be triggering or otherwise trauma-inducing to ask families to share their personal

perspective on a system that has not adequately supported them. CHIME has taken several trauma-informed steps to ensure people with lived experience have an opportunity to participate in each CHIME Mapping session and encourages other initiatives to do the same:

- Providing adequate compensation for their time in the form of Amazon gift cards and cash for each day attended, to allow for more flexibility of spending.
- Holding preparation meetings between the project manager and families and their case managers in advance of their participation, to meet each other personally, discuss the project and the mapping process, and define clear expectations and roles.
- Providing any necessary accommodations for parents or caregivers and their children prior to and/or on the day-of mapping sessions, including ensuring their case managers are in attendance when possible and providing a separate, nearby space for children and parents to sit and play at. Materials such as coloring books, snacks and juice, and other supplies are provided at the space.
- Holding individual post-mapping meetings between the project manager and families and their case managers in the week following the sessions to collect additional insight that they may not have felt comfortable sharing at the in-person event, and feedback on improvements the project team can make to best engage, prepare, and accommodate families.
- Providing interpretation services and translated materials for Spanish-speaking families.

Support and Mobilize the Community to Implement Plans

Implementing Plans: While action plans are drafted at each CHIME mapping, the work must be carried forward after. In SIM, it is generally left up to participants to continue convening themselves and move plans forward. However, given the capacity limitations across each system being evaluated in CHIME, it was necessary to bring in a consultant who can act as a backbone to these working groups. After the sixth mapping was held, CHIME hired Root Cause, a nonprofit consulting organization who has deep experience in collective action and coalition building, to support plan implementation. Root Cause is responsible for assessing the current landscape (including changing state policies, underlying funding shifts for existing system levers, and stakeholder capacity) to determine the best approach to continuing or adapting action plans and priorities that were created over the course of a year or more.

The long-term goal of SIM projects is that over time, as action plans are completed in an initiative, a community can re-run a mapping on their own and create new priorities for compounding improvements.

Post-Mapping Reporting: One centerpiece of mappings is the development of a systems map. As part of the mapping activity, the facilitators work with CHIME participants to identify resources and gaps. This process is important since the landscape of services is ever changing, and the resources and gaps provide contextual information for understanding the local map. Moreover, this catalog can be used by planners to establish greater opportunities for improving outcomes for accompanied children experiencing homelessness by addressing the gaps and building on existing resources. The map is included in a comprehensive report that is published following each mapping.

Public Awareness: While stakeholders implement plans, the Executive Committee and project manager must continue to elevate the issue to the public eye and bring attention to the ongoing community efforts. CHIME has created a website, social media plan (focused on [LinkedIn](#)), quarterly [newsletters](#), and an annual [impact report](#) to continue raising awareness of the humanitarian crises that are family homelessness and child poverty.

Evaluate Outcomes and Improve the Process

An evaluation plan must be considered early on, but it should be an iterative process to ensure continuous improvements within the mapping process. It is essential to identify the tools that will be used to measure project outcomes as goals are developed, and how the project can be improved between each mapping.

CHIME had a third-party evaluator as part of the original funding source who helped to create a logic model at the start of the project, which is updated each year collaboratively. The model acts as a basis for activities, outcomes, and short-, medium-, and long-term goals during each grant year.

CHIME created additional tools to inform progress and pivots, including:

- A community self-assessment completed by participants two times (before a mapping and roughly 12 months after a mapping) to capture how system landscapes are shifting over a one-year period. Online survey is recommended for tracking responses and evaluating data.
- A feedback survey is completed by each participant immediately after a mapping to collect insight on what can be improved and what was valuable about the event. Hard copies are recommended to ensure no participant is missed.

Results & Lessons Learned

Results

Across the CHIME kickoff event and the 6 mappings, 304 unique participants from 127 organizations were convened. Of those that participated in the mappings, an estimated 34% had lived experience of homelessness as a parent or child at some point in their life; this insight was profoundly helpful to uncovering gaps and opportunities, and to formulating priorities ground in human-centered design. Over the course of three years, CHIME led to the following outcomes:

- 23 new cross-sector collaborations
- 15 existing services prioritized for homeless children
- 12 new training programs focused on increasing knowledge and services
- 9 organizations with increased capacity to support homeless children

In addition, other “quick wins” were seen throughout the project. Many participants had not focused specifically on accompanying children experiencing homelessness in their work nor had they been in a room with each other previously, leading to new partnerships and new areas of agency focus. Some providers had not historically asked questions about social drivers of health and homelessness and left the mappings excited to do so. And notably, caregivers and children with lived experience were able to share their encounters with the system and the harsh impacts they’ve seen directly with leaders for the first time, becoming more empowered each time they spoke; several parents attended multiple mappings as an avenue to continue advocating for themselves and for other parents in similar situations. Parents and children that participated in the mappings will continue to be engaged in action plan implementation.

The mappings themselves each resulted in drafted child-centric action plans that the community aims to implement over the next year and on. While these plans can be found in full on the [CHIME website](#), the top priority for change from each mapping is listed here:

- **Economic Assets (including Shelter and Housing):** Create space and opportunity for people with lived experience (including youth) to be validated and supported by paid, trauma-informed inclusion in decision- and policy-making tables.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Create a coordinated and integrated system for supporting individual and community social/emotional health throughout the organization (children, families, staff).
- **K-12 Education:** Increase equitable access and opportunities across Boston Public School departments so that students and families experiencing homelessness are fully supported in a cohesive and inclusive way.

- **Health & Well-Being:** Develop a Boston-specific regularly updated comprehensive resource book including a decision-tree*.
- **Social Capital:** Build a cross-sector coalition including advocacy for collaborative, multi-year funding, policy change, and upstream efforts.
- **Postsecondary and Employment Pathways:** Create a no-wrong-door system referral network (adapt systems to align with no wrong door & share data).

Lessons Learned

For organizations who may be looking to replicate CHIME and improve systems of care for children in their community, some final insight from the CHIME team includes:

- Create a safe, neutral atmosphere for a diverse set of stakeholders.
- Ensure people with lived experience are at the table and provide support throughout (before, during, and after mappings).
- While exploring each component, keep the whole system in mind. Each mapping includes a lot of detail and information, so it is important to maintain a cross-system lens throughout discussions.
- Structure facilitated community discussion and self-facilitated action planning *while* keeping the group focused on more than housing. Participants may default to focusing on issues that pertain to family homelessness at large but not necessarily the children in them (e.g., housing), so centering children as the focal point throughout the event is helpful.
- Champions inspire participation, attendance, and potentially ongoing engagement after a mapping is complete.
- Keep at the forefront of the event: “where is the work going to live moving forward?”

CHIME has released three mapping reports as of January 2025, with the final three reports to be released over the coming months. Each reports includes a respective mapping agenda, system map, summary of resources, gaps and opportunities, action plans, and more:

- [Economic Assets \(including Shelter and Housing\)](#)
- [Early Childhood Education](#)
- [K-12 Education](#)

For more information, please reach out to:

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