March 28, 2017

Key Strategies for Supporting Children & Families Experiencing Homelessness
Who are homeless children?

Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Abandoned in hospitals
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Defined as “migratory children” who are living in the above circumstances
- Unaccompanied youth who are living in the above circumstances
Fixed, regular, and adequate

**Fixed:** Securely placed; not subject to change or fluctuation

- A fixed residence is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change.

**Regular:** Normal, standard

- A regular residence is one which is used on a regular (i.e. nightly) basis.

**Adequate:** Sufficient for a specific requirement; lawfully and reasonably sufficient

- An adequate residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.
Prevalence of homelessness among children

Nationally

- 2.5 million children experience homelessness each year in the U.S.

- During the 2014-2015 school year, **schools identified 1,263,323 children experiencing homelessness**

- The number of homeless children identified by schools has grown significantly over the past 5 years; **the greatest increases were in preschool aged children** and ninth grade students.

- Between 2007 and 2014, shelter use by families increased in suburban and rural areas by 48.1%

- Children of color are disproportionately represented among all children experiencing homelessness.
Prevalence of homelessness among children

Illinois

- Estimated number of children under age 6 who experience homelessness: 50,088. That’s 1 in 19.

- The Illinois State Board of Education reported that public schools identified 53,736 homeless students during the 2015-2016 school year. That’s almost double what it was seven years earlier.

- In 2015-2016 school year, CPS identified 18,831 homeless students.

- Outside of Chicago, the 15 school districts reporting the largest homeless enrollment in 2014-15 were:

  - Rockford SD 205
  - Harvey SD 152
  - Kane County/Elgin SD U-46
  - Granite City CUSD 9
  - Springfield District 186
  - Peoria SD 150
  - East St. Louis District 189
  - Waukegan District 60
  - Valley View District 365U
  - Algonquin District 300
  - Evanston District 65
  - Joliet District 86
  - Wheeling District 21
  - South Holland District 150
  - Plainfield District 202
Annual Percentage Rates of Shelter Use By Age (National)

Source: 2012 AHAR (HUD, 2012) and Census Data
Slide courtesy of Beth Shinn, Professor and Chair, Department of Human and Organizational Development; Vanderbilt University
Impacts of homelessness on children

- Lower birth weights
- More likely to have moderate to severe acute or chronic health problems
- Three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems
- Four times the rate of developmental delays
- Twice as likely to go hungry
- Twice as likely as others to repeat a school grade, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school
- More likely to experience a traumatic event
Why does homelessness impact children so negatively?
Challenges facing homeless children and families

- Invisibility
- Transience
- Schedules
- Histories of family violence/trauma
- Extreme poverty
- Stressed attachments to caregivers
- Parenting in public
- Lack of access to food & health care
- Lack of developmentally-appropriate living spaces
Homeless living situations can shape child development
Courage Connection, Champaign, IL, http://courageconnection.org/about/about-courage-connection/our-facilities/
From “No Room at the Inn for Innocence” Los Angeles Times, http://graphics.latimes.com/san-bernardino-motel/
Compromised health and development

- Chaotic
- Noisy
- Lack of child-friendly spaces/policies
- Crowded
- Dirty
- Cramped
- Dangerous

#SIACONF20
Early care and education programs and services can help!
High-quality early care and education makes a difference!

- Developmentally stimulating and supportive environment for children
- Healthy meals
- Build resilience and strengths in children and caregivers
- Protect and support brain development during critical period
- Protect and support health
- Comprehensive supports for parents and caregivers
- Sense of normalcy
- Stability and routines
- Positive relationships
- End homelessness!
Access to early care and education for homeless children means the difference between spending your day here...
Or here...
So, how are we doing enrolling homeless children in early learning programs in Illinois?
Children in Early Learning Programs in Illinois

Known served by HS, EHS, and EHCY

Unserved homeless

Source: Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50 State Profiles
Why aren’t we serving more homeless children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/system factors</th>
<th>Family factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of awareness and understanding of homelessness</td>
<td>- Families are highly mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of outreach to/identification of homeless families</td>
<td>- Families lack documentation required to apply/enroll (birth certificates, health records, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of program availability/capacity</td>
<td>- Families have chaotic lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rigid program requirements and structures</td>
<td>- Families have histories of negative experiences with service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Complicated program application/enrollment procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of meaningful data on homeless families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can we do better?

- Improve identification and outreach
- Remove barriers
- Respond to family needs
- Engage in strategic collaborations
- Improve collection, reporting, and utilization of data
**Improve identification and outreach**

- Avoid using the word “homeless” with staff, families
- Provide awareness activities for ALL staff
- Post outreach materials and posters targeted to families experiencing homelessness prominently in programs
- Identify a liaison/point person: identify and enroll families, coordinate with community partners, support other staff
- Recruit and enroll where low-income, high-risk families are: shelters, motels, campgrounds, libraries, health center, youth services
- Make special efforts to identify young children by asking about siblings of school-aged children who are identified
- Use enrollment and withdrawal forms to inquire about living situations
A few words about forms…

Use forms to screen for homelessness sensitively

- Check box if address listed is temporary
- Describe living situation
- Provide living situation options

Follow up with a conversation whenever possible

- Tell me about where you’re staying now.
- Is your living situation temporary or permanent?
- Are you all sharing the home equally or are you more like guests?
- Do you move frequently? How many times have you moved in the past year?
- Do you expect to move again soon?
- How many people are staying in the home? How many bedrooms and bathrooms does it have?
- Do you have heat/electricity/running water where you are?
- Do you feel safe and secure where you are?

Allow for multiple modes of contact

- Email, alternative phone numbers, alternative addresses
Remove barriers

- Be flexible with documentation, screening, other enrollment requirements
- Ensure program marketing/recruitment materials are McKinney-Vento friendly
- Reserve slots
- Put homeless children at the top of waitlists
- Provide transportation
- Locate programs close to where homeless families are
- Coordinate with other community service agencies for referrals and provide expedited enrollment
- Recruit and enroll closer to beginning of program year
- Retain children in program, even when they move
Respond to family and child needs

- Expect and plan for mobility
- Expect and plan for trauma-related behaviors
- Use a progressive engagement approach
- Respond to non-academic needs
- Ask about special needs, including disabilities
  - Expedite IDEA services whenever possible, provide extra support
## Engage in strategic collaborations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify key partners</th>
<th>Encourage referrals</th>
<th>Share information and resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• McKinney-Vento liaisons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Homeless service providers/shelters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motel managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Law enforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legal aid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public assistance and housing agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mental health agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public health departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soup kitchens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Go onsite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify a staff “liaison”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop joint/streamlined procedures and forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cross-train</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborate on service provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improve collection, reporting, and utilization of data

- Identify, record, report
- Provide regular training to all staff involved in data collection and reporting
- Review enrollment data regularly and develop improvement plans
  - Improvements needed in identification? Outreach? Data collection?
- Collect and review regularly data on retention and development improvement plans
  - Identify which resources, approaches will make a difference in your community
- Consider homelessness data in community needs assessments, program planning
Carie Bires
cbires@ounceofprevention.org
312-291-2160
Helpful Resources

- National Center for Homeless Education
  - www.serve.org/nche
- NCHE’s preschool page:
  - www.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_preschool.php
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
  - www.naehcy.org
- ACF Early Childhood Homelessness resource page