


Serving Homeless Children Through Head Start

NYS-TEACHS
2009 McKinney-Vento Workshops


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Causes of Homelessness


- Lack of affordable housing
- Poverty
- Health problems
- Domestic violence
- Natural and other disasters
- Abuse/neglect/abandonment (unaccompanied youth)

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How many children and youth experience homelessness?

- 1.35 million children nationwide
- 10% of all children living in poverty
- 1.6-1.7 million youth run away each year
- Over 40% of all children who are homeless are under the age of 5
- Over 40,000 K-12 students in 2006-2007 in NYS.
- Increasing due to economy and foreclosures



Issues Facing Young Children Experiencing Homelessness


- Mobility - loss of structure, routine, stability
- Trauma and loss
- Deep poverty (deprivation, hunger)
- Higher rates of developmental delays
- Higher rates of chronic and acute health problems
- Mental health issues: stress, anxiety, and depression
- Disrupted or stressed attachments to caregivers
- Invisibility



Experiences reported by ACF-IM-92-12

Compared to non-homeless children, homeless children have:

- Greater developmental delays (language, motor-development, and/or social skills)
- More learning disabilities
- More mental health problems
- Higher frequency of withdrawal, shyness, separation anxiety, short attention disorder, flat affect, aggression, hoarding, anxiety in response to changes in environment or staff absences, concern over getting enough food, and sharing toys
- More physical health problems




Barriers to Early Childhood Education

- In 1999-2000, only 15% of homeless children participated in preschool, compared to 57% of all low-income children
- Barriers for homeless children and families:
 - Lack of awareness
 - Mobility and waiting lists
 - Transportation
 - Documents
 - Lack of full-day services





Homeless Children and the Head Start program

- Head Start's historical commitment to addressing homelessness
 - Priority to serve the "neediest of the needy"
 - 1992 IM
 - 1993 Demonstration Project
 - Head Start-State Collaboration Offices



Head Start Reauthorization: Public Law 110-134

- "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007" signed in December 2007
- New provisions for serving homeless children and families
- IMs and FAQs can be found on the OHS Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>
- Summary of provisions relating to homeless children and youth – www.naehcy.org


Setting the Context: Defining Homelessness

- The new Head Start reauthorization includes a definition of homelessness that matches the definition of homelessness in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which governs public schools
- Identical definition is in the Child Nutrition Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Violence Against Women Act
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) homeless programs use a more restrictive definition (but changes are pending)


Definition of Homelessness

- Children who **lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**—
 - Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
[16% of identified students in NYS in 2006-2007 school year]
 - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations
[Motels: 0.6% of identified students in NYS in 2006-2007 school year]
 - Living in emergency or transitional shelters
[54% of identified students in WV 2006-2007 school year]





Definition of Homelessness, Continued


- Awaiting foster care placement (not defined in law; state and local interpretations vary)
- Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children living in above circumstances

Homeless Definition: Why So Broad?



- Shelters are often full; shelters may turn families away, or put families on waiting lists
- Shelters do not exist in many suburban and rural areas
- Eligibility conditions of shelters often exclude families with boys over the age of 12
- Shelters often have 30, 60, or 90 day time limits
- Motels may not be available, or may be too expensive
- Families may turn to friends or family after initial eviction, living in over-crowded, temporary, and sometimes unsafe environments
- Families may be unaware of alternatives, fleeing in crisis







Head Start Reauthorization and the McKinney-Vento Act

- Numerous provisions in the Head Start reauthorization reference the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- McKinney-Vento originally enacted in 1987; reauthorized in 2002 by NCLB (Title X, Part C)
- Main themes:
 - Stability
 - Access
 - Support for success
 - Child-centered, best interest decision making



McKinney-Vento Personnel

- Every SEA has an Office of State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
 - Collaboration responsibilities across agencies and with communities
 - Technical assistance to LEAs
 - Compliance
 - Professional development
 - Data collection and reporting



McKinney-Vento Personnel

- Every LEA must designate a liaison for students in homeless situations
- Responsibilities
 - Ensure that children and youth in homeless situations are identified through school and community
 - Ensure that homeless students enroll in and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school
 - Make referrals for health, mental health, and other services, and ensure that homeless children receive Head Start and preschool programs administered by school districts



Local Homeless Education Liaisons (cont.)

- Inform parents, guardians, or youth of educational and parent involvement opportunities
- Post public notice of educational rights
- Resolve disputes
- Inform parents, guardians, or youth of transportation services, including to the school of origin
- Collaborate and coordinate with community and school personnel

McKinney-Vento at a Glance


- School Stability
- Transportation
- Immediate Enrollment
- Enrolled During Disputes
- Comparable Services
- Covers preschool programs administered by LEAs
- Authorized at \$70 million; funded at \$64 million
- 6% of school districts receive subgrants; those districts served 50% of all identified homeless children (including 18,673 preschool children)
- Up for reauthorization with NCLB
- Title I set-aside for homeless students





Head Start Reauthorization: Eligibility

- Homeless children are categorically eligible for Head Start - *42 U.S.C. 9840(a)(1)(B)*
- Verification of homeless living situation suffices for eligibility (*i.e.* no documentation of income required)
 - Under McKinney-Vento, determinations of eligibility are case-by-case, individualized (see NCHE brief)

NCHE's *Determining Eligibility* brief is available at:
http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf






Eligibility (cont'd)

Homeless children are eligible for Head Start, regardless of income and...

1. Head Start programs can continue to serve 10% of their enrollment with children over the poverty line.
2. Also, Head Start programs may serve an additional 35% with children from families with incomes up to 130% of poverty.

→ However, to exercise these options Head Start programs must demonstrate that they are doing outreach to, prioritizing, and meeting the needs of children who are homeless and children from families with incomes below poverty.


This provision is in effect immediately [ACF-IM-HS-08-03]




Head Start Reauthorization: Enrollment



Requires Secretary of HHS to issue regulations to remove barriers to the enrollment and participation of homeless children, including requiring Head Start agencies:

- 1) to implement policies and procedures to ensure that homeless children are identified and prioritized for enrollment;
- 2) to allow families of homeless children to apply to, enroll in, and attend Head Start programs while required documents are obtained within a reasonable time frame; and
- 3) to coordinate individual Head Start programs with efforts to implement subtitle B of title VIII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Enrollment (cont'd)


- Head Start grantees must maintain an “active” wait list and conduct outreach and activities to identify underserved populations - 42 U.S.C. 9837(g)

Enrollment (cont'd)

- If, after receiving technical assistance and developing and implementing a plan for reducing under-enrollment, a Head Start agency still operates with less than 97 percent enrollment, the Secretary of HHS may recapture or withhold funds.



→ However, the Secretary of HHS can waive or reduce funding reductions if causes of enrollment shortfalls include serving significant numbers of highly mobile children; the shortfall is not significant; or the shortfall can reasonably be expected to be temporary. 42 U.S.C. 9836a(h)




Head Start Reauthorization: Collaboration and Coordination


Requires Head Start agencies to:


- Coordinate and collaborate with the agencies responsible for programs under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act - 42 U.S.C. 9837(e)
- Establish channels of communication between Head Start staff and McKinney-Vento liaisons to facilitate coordination of programs - 42 U.S.C. 9837a(a)
- Develop and implement a family outreach and support program in coordination with outreach efforts under the McKinney-Vento Act - 42 U.S.C. 9837a(a)

Head Start Reauthorization: Collaboration and Coordination (cont'd)

- Requires Head Start State Collaboration Directors to develop a strategic plan that will enhance collaboration and coordination with and services provided for homeless children, children in foster care, and children referred to Head Start programs by child welfare agencies, including agencies and State officials responsible for such services - 42 U.S.C. 9837b(a)(4)
- Requires Early Head Start programs to coordinate services with programs in the community for homeless infants and toddlers - 42 U.S.C. 9840a(b)(5)







Head Start Reauthorization: Increasing Access and Participation

Issues for Regulations and Implementation:



- Identification
- Placement stability
- Prioritization/enrollment
- Transportation
- Community needs assessments
- Coordination
- "Reasonable time frame"
- Program options
- State licensing requirements

Where should Head Start programs begin?

PLANNING



- Include data about homeless children in their community assessments
- Conduct self-assessments to determine strengths and weaknesses regarding services to homeless children
- Contact local school district homeless education liaisons and homeless service providers to establish routine communication to coordinate planning

Community Assessment Data



Sample questions for community needs assessments:

- How many families are homeless?
- What are the trends?
- Where do homeless families stay?
- What is the level of employment of homeless families?
- What is the availability of child care?
- What resources exist in the community?
- What task forces or coalitions exist?



Community Assessment Data (continued)

- What additional state or school-district preschool programs exist? How do they serve homeless children?
- What transportation resources exist in the community that could be tapped?
- Who are the homeless education liaisons in the communities in the service area? What do the homeless education programs look like?
- What state childcare licensing policies exist that might pose barriers to enrolling and serving homeless children?


Strategies: Recruitment


- Liaisons can help HS programs identify younger siblings of school-age children who are homeless
- HS Programs can help liaisons identify school-age siblings and collaborate on transitions
- Liaisons and service providers should recruit in Head Start service areas where homeless families live: shelters, motels, other temporary locations
- Liaisons and service providers should refer eligible families to the local Head Start program; for example, liaisons or shelter intake can carry HS applications and assist families to fill them out

Strategies: Selection



- HS programs must prioritize homeless families for enrollment
- Help providers and liaisons understand what "categorical eligibility" means with regard to "selection"
- Head Start selection protocols and point systems should specifically incorporate this priority for homelessness
- Understand that priority categories are not mutually exclusive, i.e. homeless children have numerous risk factors







Strategies: Enrollment

- Retool enrollment applications by including questions that help determine homeless status, but are “family-friendly”
- Work with liaisons, providers, and other HS programs to obtain and share records expeditiously (i.e. immunizations)
- Assist families by providing the basics (i.e. stamps) as well as access to phones and faxes)
- Begin providing some services (books, etc.) or invite to socialization while waiting for slots to become available to maintain relationship with family



Strategies: Attendance and Stability

- Transportation: include school district collaboration in required MOUs; community discussion with providers
- Allow child to remain in program, when in his/her best interest, when family moves
- Assist with records transfer to new programs
- Include in parent handbook the importance of notifying program when moving
- Obtain parental consent for release of information from providers or liaison in order to obtain new addresses and continue to provide services when families move; include birth to three workers

Strategies: Collaboration

- HS programs can develop an annual plan for serving homeless children (similar to disability plan)
- HS programs can designate a contact on homelessness issues as “point person” for collaboration
- Reading grant proposals
- Collaborating on small grants
- Cross-training of staff, conference teams
- Participating on task forces, councils, advisory groups

Resources


Office of Head Start - Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
<http://www.naehcy.org>

National Center on Homeless Education
<http://www.serve.org/nche>

New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students
<http://www.nysteachs.org>

Horizons for Homeless Children
<http://www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org>




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