



# Serving Children in Temporary Housing

## A Tip Sheet for Head Start Programs

**Did you know?** Children in temporary housing are half as likely to participate in early childhood education

### Which children are considered temporarily housed (homeless)?

- Children are considered temporarily housed or homeless if they are living:
  - With another family or other person because of a loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (also called temporarily living "**doubled-up**");
  - In a **shelter**;
  - In a hotel or motel; or
  - In a car, park, bus or train station, or campsite.
- For more examples of homeless situations under the McKinney-Vento Act, see <https://nysteachs.org/topics/mckinney-vento-eligibility/>

### What protections do children in temporary housing have?

- **All are eligible and entitled to priority enrollment.** All children living in temporary housing are eligible for Head Start and don't have to prove income eligibility. Also, they must receive priority enrollment, such as preferred access to available slots and preferential placement on waiting lists (see below for more ideas).
- **Enrollment without records.** At the time of enrollment, families are not required to provide:
  - proof of immunization records (parents have up to 14 days or 30 days if they are coming from out-of-state to get the records under Public Health Law 2164(7)(a)),
  - proof of residency/address,
  - birth certificates/proof of age, or other documentation,
  - medical statement/physical (the program should submit a waiver OCFS Form 4887, [https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/Forms/Day\\_Care/NewForms/OCFS-4887%20Request%20for%20Waiver\\_dot](https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/Forms/Day_Care/NewForms/OCFS-4887%20Request%20for%20Waiver_dot), see instructions in OCFS Policy Statement #17-1, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/policies/17-1.pdf>).Programs must give families a reasonable amount of time to hand in these documents and allow children to enroll in the meantime.
- **Transportation.** If a child is enrolled in a Head Start administered by a school district and becomes homeless, the school district must transport the child back to the Head Start. **NYC:** Parents can get a free MetroCard to take their children to Head Start. Contact the NYC Department of Education's Students in Temporary Housing Program: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/special-situations/students-in-temporary-housing>.

### What should Head Start programs do to recruit children in temporary housing (homeless)?

- **Step 1. Conduct outreach to:**
  - **McKinney-Vento Liaisons** in the local school districts. For contact information, see <https://nysteachs.org/lea-liaisons/>. The liaisons can refer younger siblings of school-age children in temporary housing and give you other ideas about how to reach families in temporary housing.
  - **Shelters.** Ask the Director of Temporary Assistance in your local Department of Social Services for contact information for local shelters: <https://otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/dss.asp> and contact local domestic violence shelters: <https://www.nyscadv.org/find-help/program-directory.html>.
- **Step 2. Prioritize enrollment** by revising your program's **Selection Criteria** to award more points to children in temporary housing. Be sure to involve your **Policy Council** (or DAPC)!
- **Step 3. Set aside seats** for children in temporary housing. Programs get an additional month to fill any seats they reserve for children in temporary housing. For more information see, <http://naehcy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Reserving-Slots-in-Head-Start-for-Homeless-Children-final.pdf> and Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.15(c).

### How can Head Start Programs identify and verify a child's eligibility as homeless?

- **Step 1. Identify** children who may be in temporary housing (homeless):
  - Use a **Housing Questionnaire** for all children who apply to your program to figure out who may be living in temporary housing: <https://nysteachs.org/resources/housing-questionnaire-head-start/>
  - Use this list of sample questions when talking to parents or caregivers about their living situations: [https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/det\\_elig.pdf](https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/det_elig.pdf)
- **Step 2. Gather documentation** about the child's temporary housing:
  - Written documentation from a homeless service provider, school personnel, or other service agency that indicates a child is experiencing homelessness;
  - Information gathered on enrollment or application forms (for example, the Housing Questionnaire);
  - Notes from an interview conducted by program staff; *OR*
  - Statement signed by the parent that his/her child is in temporary housing (for example, the Housing Questionnaire).
- **Step 3. Verification by staff.** Use the Head Start Eligibility Verification form: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/head-start-eligibility-verification-form>
- **Remember! A child's housing information should be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible.** This information should only be shared with Head Start staff members who need the information to make sure that the child's needs are met in the Head Start program. Staff can only speak to others to verify the family's living situation if the parent has given consent.

### Questions?

- New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (**NYS-TEACHS**), (800) 388-2014, [www.nysteachs.org](http://www.nysteachs.org)
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