Serving Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

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Welcome

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• Overview of what it means to be homeless
• McKinney-Vento Act and the 2007 Head Start Re-Authorization
• Impacts of homelessness
• Two programs highlight best practices in working with young children and families experiencing homelessness
• Questions and Answers
Causes of Homelessness

Why are families homeless?

– Lack of affordable housing
– Foreclosures
– Loss of job/minimum wage jobs
– Health problems of parent or child
– Domestic violence
– Substance abuse
– Mental health issues
Causes of Homelessness

Why are families homeless?

- Lack of education
- Lack of family support systems
- Natural disasters
- Changes in welfare rules
- Teen pregnancies
- Abuse/Neglect: pregnant/parenting teens
Definition of Homelessness

725(2) McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1994):

“Homeless children” means:

Individuals who lack a
• fixed,
• regular,
• and adequate nighttime residence
Nationally approximately 500,000 children aged 0-5 years old experience homelessness in the course of a year.

-Urban Institute, 2000
Homelessness provisions
(Sec. 640. [42 U.S.C. 9835]

(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, such as proof of residency, immunization and other medical records, birth certificates, and other documents, are obtained within a reasonable time frame;
Head Start/Early Head Start Eligibility

Homeless children are categorically eligible for Head Start
[42 U.S.C. 9840(a)(1)(B)]

• Similar to existing provision for children in foster care & recipients of public assistance

• Verification of homeless living situation suffices; once a determination of homelessness has been made, a child is automatically eligible (i.e. no income documentation requirement)
Impact on Children:

- Housing/food insecurity
- Stress from transient living
- Lack of basic preventive pediatric care
- Budget trade-offs, e.g. “heat or eat” during the winter months
- Substandard housing resulting in increased rates of asthma, lead poisoning, injuries and infectious diseases
Impact on Parents:

- Parenting in public
- Loss of parental authority
- Single parenting
- Stress
- Maternal depression
- Not conducive to family life and routines
Young Children in Shelters Experience:

- “Toxic Stress”
- Increased rates of health issues
- Sleep deprivation
- Increased rates of mental health issues, the majority have witnessed domestic violence
- Shelter services designed for adults, not children
- Higher rate of developmental delays
• Lack of Appropriate Boundaries
• Aggressive Behavior
• Extremely Withdrawn
• Attachment Disorder
• Independent/“mature” beyond their years
• Hoarding
• Sleeping/eating issues
Worcester Child Development

Head Start Program

Donna Foley, Community Partnerships/
Employee Assistance Coordinator and
McKinney-Vento Grant Coordinator
• Home visiting program for 20 pregnant women, infants and toddlers living in shelters, transitional housing, motels and scattered site temporary housing

• McKinney-Vento funding

• Group socializations collaborating with community organizations and Early Intervention
Worcester Head Start, MA

Strengths of program design for homeless families:

- Building strong relationships with parents
- Provide support, community resources and referrals to families
- Flexibility to meet immediate needs as well as provide crisis intervention
Importance of Collaboration

- Developing creative strategies to maintain good working relationships with shelter staff
- Importance of ongoing communication and networking with health and community service providers
- Creating a “Team Approach”
- Resulting in a “Team Effort”
OHS National Findings:

– **Promising program options for serving homeless families:**
  Full-day center-based; centers operating within shelter settings or closely collaborating with homeless shelter/programs; enhanced services focusing on mental health/family partnerships

– **Need to explore innovative/creative program options:**
  specialized services; “mobile” HS programs; varying program hours

– **Success with intentional planning efforts:**
  staff training on homeless shelters program requirements, classroom management; transition procedures; provision of MH services
Thames Valley Council for Community Action
Norwich, CT

• Mary Guertin  Head Start/Early Head Start Director
• Anneli Lisee  Home-Based Manager
• Darlene Laiche  Home Visitor
TVCCA Head Start

- TVCCA is a Community Action Agency
- Home-based is one of their service models
- The home-based program is linked to the homeless shelter
  - The home-based socialization room is co-located with the homeless shelter
  - The home-based program shares a playground with the homeless shelter
Benefits of a Home-Based Program

• The Shelter Case Manager and the Head Start streamlined the referral process by having the Case Manager call the Head Start staff directly whenever a family moves into the shelter

• The home-based option provides stability for the child
Benefits of a Home-Based Program

- Home-based staff have the ability to follow the child regardless of where they are living
  - A transitional residency is located near TVCCA’s property
  - Families living in state subsidized housing can access the socialization site via the bus line
- Staff support families by helping them acquire the basic necessities, such as furniture, clothing, utilities when they transition out of the shelter
TVCCA’s Program

• TVCCA serves approximately 25 homeless children annually using the home-based model

• Being part of a CAP agency ensures that the TVCCA families have immediate access to energy assistance, eviction prevention funds, WIC and Rapid Response for Homeless funds
TVCCA’s Program

• Funding from the Head Start Collaboration Office to provide joint training with the homeless shelter staff and the Head Start home-based staff
  ❖ The staff of the homeless shelter presented a training on what it means to be homeless and the barriers the homeless face on a daily basis for the home-based staff
  ❖ The home-based staff presented a training on early childhood development for the staff of the homeless shelter
TVCCA’s Program

- Head Start workshops and training opportunities are offered to all shelter parents (i.e., discipline, budgeting, physical fitness for children and families)
- Both programs communicate on a regular basis to troubleshoot problems, plan and/or make program modifications
TVCCA’s Program

• As parents transition from various living situations (the shelter, transitional housing programs, their own apartment) their children are able to transition through TVCCA’s various Head Start options; home-based, center-based, extended day, full year.

• Parents are able to chose the option that best fits their needs
Homeless Eligibility

- Children who are homeless are automatically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start
- Knowing that for homeless families providing health records or other documentation can be almost impossible
- TVCCA staff admits children without all the necessary documents and begin working with the parents immediately to obtain these documents

Education Development Center, Inc.
A member of the National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Network
What OHS has learned:

- **Partnering** - Partner and develop agreements with neighboring HS grantees on transition services

- **Transition Planning** – Develop transition planning procedures captured the uniqueness of homeless/mobile populations

- **Continuity of Services** – Clarify continuity of services and the flexibility of service area boundaries for extenuating circumstances
Questions?

- Email your questions to wvalentine@edc.org.
- A technical assistance session will take place onsite at each of our state TTA Centers immediately following this webinar.
- Viewing the webinar online? Please submit your questions by email. The Q&A session will be recorded and posted online.
Thank You!

Please go to
http://ttastate.edc.org/ma/event142.php

to access additional resources
on homelessness and the online evaluation