



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

Strategies for Increasing ECE Services for Homeless Children

A variety of federal laws and policies impact the ability of homeless families to access early care and education programs. Service providers and advocates at the state and local level can better coordinate existing policies, reaching across programs to ensure that young homeless children are served in America's early care and education (ECE) programs.

At the State level, collaboration and coordination amongst Head Start Collaboration Directors, State Child Care Administrators, State Homeless Education Coordinators, State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care and statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies can help to ensure that young children experiencing homelessness are accessing quality early childhood programs.

At the local level, many partners play a role in supporting young homeless children. These collaborations and individual partnerships within these networks can expand an agency's capacity to meet the needs of families and children experiencing homelessness. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Local early intervention or early learning councils;
- Local educational agencies/school districts/local homeless liaisons;
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs;
- Local child care providers;
- HUD Continuums of Care;
- Domestic violence shelters;
- Homeless coalitions; and
- Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

Reaching the homeless community requires positive, respectful, and goal-oriented relationships by staff and providers with families experiencing homelessness, both at intake and throughout participation in early childhood programs. Listed below are additional strategies for improving access and services to ECE programs for families experiencing homelessness.

- **Provide ongoing training** for staff related to serving families experiencing homelessness.
- **Serve on task forces or coalitions** on homelessness in your community. ECE programs are important voices to have at the table for strategic planning to address the needs of homeless families and children. Your community assessment data can play a vital role in strategic planning with partnering agencies and local homeless coalitions.
- **Work with families and local health programs** to acquire medical records and to ensure that children receive appropriate immunizations, health, medical, and dental services.
- **Identify potential resources for providing transportation** to ECE programs for homeless children.

- **Contact your homeless education State Coordinator or local liaison** and establish routine communication to coordinate services for young children, wherever possible. State Coordinators (for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program) and Local Educational Agency homeless liaisons help support the educational rights of homeless children as part of the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. These State Coordinators and local liaisons are key partners in building effective services for families experiencing homelessness.
- **Think broadly about community partnerships** that may be supportive to helping homeless families:
 - Local Housing Authority will have information on public housing and housing vouchers to assist with rent;
 - Civic and faith-based organizations and local businesses may provide volunteers to help renovate family housing and facilities or can donate clothing, toys, food, and furniture; and
 - Free household items may be available through various internet resources.
- **Consider innovative program and policy solutions.** For example, innovative program options for Head Start and child care include adjusted hours, home-based, center based combinations, and mobile programs. Innovative human resource approaches include specialized staffing patterns and mental health consultation enhancements that support homeless families. Health and school readiness strategies can offer innovative solutions to serving this highly-mobile population, including the use of portable child and family files that families can take with them for sudden moves.
- **Facilitate a smooth transition for highly mobile children and families** by considering placement with another Head Start grantee or other early education provider, or continuing to serve the child/family for the remainder of the program year with an ongoing transition plan.