

Tip Sheet 1: Challenges of the Homeless Child

Children without permanent housing face daily obstacles which are compounded as a result of their homelessness. By naming these challenges we can hope to address them individually in our communities and schools.

Obstacles to Healthy Development

Before Birth

- born to homeless, single women
- chronic and acute health problem
- depression
- lack of prenatal care
- substance abuse

Infants and Toddlers

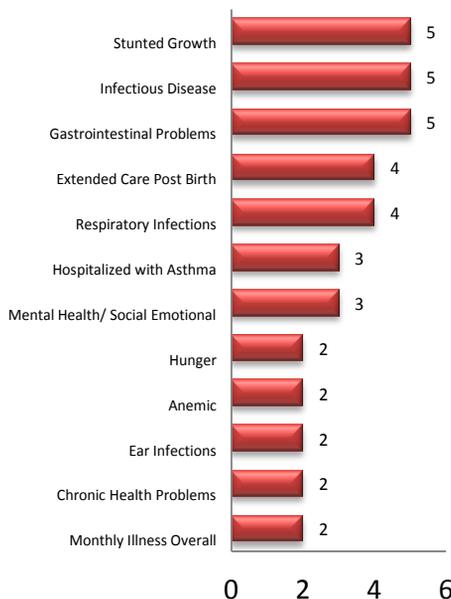
- low birth weights
- greater risk of death
- hazardous environmental factors
- lack essential immunizations
- significant developmental delays which influence later behavioral and emotional problems.

Preschoolers

- often separated from their parents
- experience major developmental delays
- suffer from emotional problems
- receive fewer services than other children their age

School Age

- more health problems
- high risk for infectious disease
- greater risk for asthma and lead poisoning
- poor nutrition
- lack access to consistent health care
- stressful and traumatic events, including exposure to violence
- constant changes
- little to no mental health services
- poor cognitive development
- score poorly on math, reading, spelling, and vocabulary tests
- held back a year in school
- greater needs do not lead to greater access to special services



■ Compounded Likelihood

The American Institute for Research, citing: The National Center on Family Homelessness; a pilot study in *Clinical Nutrition and Obesity* and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.



Tip Sheet 1: Challenges of the Homeless Child (continued)

How to Effect Change...

Relationships Matter

- ☞ Teach parents about the importance of holding and touching their children.
- ☞ Help parents feel welcome in their children's schools by actively striving to build relationships with them.
- ☞ Encourage parental involvement in children's education.
- ☞ Help children build trusting relationships with competent and caring adults other than their parents.

Services Matter

- ☞ Help families secure long-term, supportive housing.
- ☞ Help parents obtain drug and alcohol treatment
- ☞ Direct families to local parent support and parent education programs
- ☞ Help students access after-school tutoring and academic support and nutritional programs.

Accessibility Matters

- Provide...
- ☞ health screening at time of admission into emergency or supportive housing.
 - ☞ developmental screening of all children entering the housing programs, including physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and academic assessments.
 - ☞ easy access to prenatal care.
 - ☞ access to transportation.
 - ☞ WIC and other food supplement programs on-site.
 - ☞ easy access to early childhood and learning readiness programs.

Support Matters

- ☞ Teach each new mother about her child's individual, early development needs.
- ☞ Encourage the use of WIC and other food supplement programs to meet the increased nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating mothers.
- ☞ Assist parents in understanding their children's nutritional needs.
- ☞ Assist families in obtaining supplemental food resources, either on-site or through advocacy and referral.
- ☞ Monitor children to ensure that they receive the physical, mental, and special educational resources to which they are entitled.
- ☞ Assisting children in participating in after-school social and recreational activities.
- ☞ Assist parents in supporting their children's school attendance and performance. This might include ...
 - helping parents to enroll their children in school,
 - arranging for school transportation,
 - helping parent attend school functions and meetings.

With early and consistent intervention, children can overcome many of the effects of poverty and homelessness.

