

BEST PRACTICES FOR IDENTIFICATION AND ENROLLMENT OF HOMELESS PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

It is important for children from families without permanent housing to have opportunities for early development and enrichment experiences. Nationally, forty-seven percent (47%) of homeless children are under the age of six. In the Midwest, seventy-seven percent (77%) of these children attend preschool.¹ Listed below are recommendations for the identification and enrollment of preschool children from homeless families into quality early education programs.

- Provision of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, health care, and safety, along with dependable, consistent care by a responsible adult, are of primary importance to effectively educate preschool children from families experiencing homelessness.
- Identification of families without permanent housing is more effective when personal relationships exist between community service providers and school homeless liaisons.
- Collaboration between school staff and community partners, such as emergency shelters, Birth to 3, Head Start, Child Care, Public Health and Human Services, improves recruitment into preschool programs and increases the potential for providing additional services to families and for cross-training of staff and parents.
- Development of relationships between the school homeless liaisons and Head Start agencies aids identifying and enrolling children into Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Participation of school district staff on community interagency councils develops a common understanding of available resources for better coordination of services.

¹ Institute for Children and Poverty and Homes for the Homeless, *Homeless in America, Part Two: A Statistical Reader* (2005).

- Use of “Release of Information” agreements between community agencies and school districts expedites enrollment into early education programs.
- Inclusion of families without a permanent residence in Child Find efforts is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Schools should develop an informed referral network and include families residing in emergency shelters (domestic abuse and homeless), transitional housing programs, and temporary housing arrangements in Child Find efforts.
- Transportation of preschool children to early education programs enables consistent access to care and education and helps them to experience marked progress in their growth and development. Schedules which involve the least amount of transition and travel for the child are less costly and offer more stability for the child and family.

- Attention to both the physical and social-emotional needs of parents and children who lack permanent housing is an important component of a preschool program.
- Affirmation of parents in homeless situations as the primary educators of their children and involving them in their child's educational planning and assessment increases the potential for the success of their child.

- Support for parents that strengthens their parenting and coping skills helps them to effectively manage stress and benefits both them and their children.

- Staff development on the legislative requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act should be offered to school districts, Head Start agencies, and professionals in community early care and education programs.

- Training for teachers, community service providers, and family advocates on the topics of "hidden class rules" and homelessness encourages development of common strategies to help families in homeless situations.

- Alignment of curriculum and assessment with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards ensures that programs for preschool children from homeless families will focus on the social, emotional, and cognitive skills needed to prepare them for their formal educational years.

Visit <http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless> or contact DPIhomeless@dpi.wi.gov for additional information regarding preschool age children who may be experiencing homelessness.