Serving Children & Families Experiencing Homelessness

Tip Sheet: Child Care Programs

Did you know? More than one million children under the age of six are identified as experiencing homelessness. Stable access to high-quality child care provides tremendous benefits to all children, especially our nation's most vulnerable children. Children and their families who experience homelessness face many challenges. Improving access to child care can buffer children and families from the challenges and risks associated with homelessness by supporting children's learning and development in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. Knowing their child is safe, overwhelmed parents can more easily focus on reaching their goals for stable employment, career training, housing, services, etc.

2.5 million children are homeless each year in America

National Center on Family Homelessness

When are children and families considered homeless?

Children and families lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

- Children and youth sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Children and families living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Children living in emergency or transitional shelters, or who are abandoned in hospitals;
- Children and youth with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings (U.S.C. § 11434a (2)).

How are states required to use CCDF to serve children and families experiencing homelessness?

- Allow homeless children to receive Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) assistance after an initial eligibility determination but before providing required documentation (including documentation related to immunizations),
- Provide training and technical assistance to child care providers on identifying and serving homeless children and families,
- Conduct specific outreach to homeless families, and
- Collect data on children and families experiencing homelessness.

What should early care and education professionals do to support homeless children and families?

- ✓ **Step 1 – Seek** training and technical assistance from your CCDF State Administrator's office on identifying and serving families with young children experiencing homelessness. Contact the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), the U.S. Department of Education's homeless education technical assistance center, with questions about the definition of homeless or for assistance determining homeless eligibility in specific cases.
- ✓ **Step 2 – Outreach:**
  - **Local Homeless Education Liaisons** in school districts. State Coordinators for Homeless Education can connect you with the local liaison in your area. Liaisons can refer younger siblings of school-age children in temporary housing and provide other ideas about how to reach families in temporary housing.
  - **Local Department of Social Services.** Ask the Director of Temporary Assistance in your state's Department of Social Services for contact information for local transitional housing shelters and domestic violence shelters and establish a relationship with them.
  - **Identify and network with local agencies** providing services to families of young children experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.
  - **Build a resource list** of trusted community partners and service providers that can be given to families in need.
  - **Families you already serve.** Connect regularly and authentically with families currently served by your program. Purposeful family engagement builds a trusting environment in which families are more likely to share news such as housing status transitions.

How can Child Care Programs connect homeless children and families with child care assistance?

- ✓ **Step 1 – Identify** children who may be in temporary housing (homeless).
- ✓ **Step 2 – Contact** your local child care resource and referral agency or Child Care Development Fund State Administrator for assistance with connecting families to child care subsidy, subsidized child care programs (i.e., Head Start, Educare, etc.), and child care program enrollment.
- ✓ **Step 3 – Follow up** to ensure the family has been served adequately.

Questions?

- Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency
- Find your CCDF State Administrator
- See who your McKinney-Vento State Coordinator is
- Contact the National Center for Homeless Education

About Child Care Aware® of America

Child Care Aware of America® is our nation's leading voice for child care. CCAoA works with state and local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) and other community partners to ensure that all families have access to quality, affordable child care. CCAoA leads projects that increase the quality and availability of child care, offer comprehensive training to child care professionals, undertake research, and advocate for child care policies that improve the lives of children and families. To learn more, visit usa.childcareaware.org. Follow them on Twitter @USAChildCare and on Facebook at facebook.com/usachildcare.