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This Practice Brief is the fifth in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at ncase@ecetta.info.



Aligning Out-of-School Time Services for Children Experiencing Homelessness

The definitions of homeless children and youth used by CCDF and the Department of Education have become aligned, providing better opportunities for collaboration between Lead Agencies and state departments of education and child care providers. This is especially true for public schools and providers serving school-age children.

With the adoption of the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless children and youth, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies now use a broader definition that includes a larger population than is typically recognized as homeless—in particular, those children who may be sharing homes with friends or relatives due to loss of housing or other economic hardship. Families sharing homes under these circumstances are described as *doubled up*.

During the 2015-16 school year, the National Center for Homeless Education

(NCHE) reported there were 1.3 million children enrolled in public schools who were experiencing homelessness.¹ This included 45,000 three-to-five-year-olds and ungraded students who were homeless. Of these, the largest percentage—75 percent—were doubled up, compared to 16 percent who lived in shelters, 6 percent who lived in hotels/motels, and 3 percent who were unsheltered. We can assume that a large percentage of these children also attend afterschool or other out-of-school time programs.

¹ National Center for Homeless Education. (2017). Federal data summary: School years 2013–14 to 2015–16. Retrieved from <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/data-comp-1314-1516.pdf>

Who Is Considered Homeless?

According to the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) Subtitle B, Section 725 Definitions, homeless children and youth are those who:

- » Lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

This includes children who:

- » Share the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
- » Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation
- » Are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing and similar settings
- » Are considered migratory

A challenge for all providers is to effectively and sensitively reach out to and identify those children who may be doubled up. Because the traditional view of homelessness is that of someone living on the street or in a shelter, it can be difficult to assess whether a family's housing situation puts them in the category of homelessness. Further, it is likely the family is not aware that doubling up means they are homeless.

Therefore, it may not be effective, and it is insensitive, to ask a family if they are homeless. Instead, the NCHE recommends incorporating a housing questionnaire with applications to determine an individual child's living arrangement.² The center also acknowledges that the housing questionnaire alone may not provide a clear-cut understanding of whether the child meets the McKinney-Vento definition and, therefore, provides a further [guide](#) for determining eligibility.

Impact of being homeless on children

Experiencing homelessness adds a level of stress for children of all ages that can have lifelong impacts. School-age children experiencing homelessness have two to four times the rate of mental health issues requiring clinical evaluation compared to other low-income children.³ In particular, school-age children experiencing homelessness are more likely than their counterparts in the general population to experience anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and manifestations of aggressive behavior.⁴

Homelessness often results in chronic absenteeism from school, a precursor to school failure. In fact, researchers estimate that school-age children experiencing homelessness are chronically absent at double the rate of the overall student population.⁵

Research has shown that the impact of homelessness on children depends on the type of housing instability a family is exposed to. For instance, children living

2 National Center for Homeless Education. (2017). Best practices in homeless education brief series: Determining eligibility for McKinney-Vento rights and services. Retrieved from https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/det_elig.pdf

3 Rog, D. J., Holupka, C. S., & Patton, L. C. (2007). Characteristics and dynamics of homeless families with children: Final report to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/75331/report.pdf>

4 National Center for Homeless Education. (2017). Best practices in homeless education brief series: In school every day: Addressing chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness. Retrieved from <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/chron-absent.pdf>

5 Deck, S. M. (2017). School outcomes for homeless children: Differences among sheltered, doubled-up, and poor, housed children. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 23(1), 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2016.1247347>

in shelters have poorer school outcomes than children who are doubled up.⁶ Experts recognize that families may experience a continuum of housing instability, beginning with housed children and ending with those in shelters. Children living with friends or relatives due to housing instability fall within this continuum. Regardless of where a child is on the continuum, the average child experiencing homelessness moves two and half times each year, and it takes about six months for a child to recover academically.⁷

Understanding that there is a continuum provides an incentive for those working with children and families to assist them before their housing situation becomes worse. According to Deck,

The broader ED (and CCDF) definition of homelessness allows families to be assisted before they are in extreme crisis. Therefore schools, child care programs supported by CCDF and lead agencies are in a good position to identify and support families who are doubled up (2012).⁸

Supporting children experiencing homelessness through collaboration

The most effective approach to serving children experiencing homelessness is to do so collaboratively with other agencies that can support the child. Out-of-school time programs are in a pivotal position to collaborate with public schools to ensure that children experiencing homelessness receive extra support. In fact, many out-of-school time programs already collaborate with public schools to align curricula and coordinate outreach and enrollment to

include mentoring, homework help, and tutoring. They can also link families to other community resources that may support their children or families.

Deck explains:

It is important to recognize that education is the primary mission of schools. Therefore, it is essential to reinforce connections among school systems, community-based service providers, and safety net programs to create networks that operate strategically and interdependently. Kilmer et al. (2012, 389) emphasized that “a coordinated emphasis on ecologically grounded and developmentally based efforts is more likely to (a) address the diverse influences on the child and family and (b) minimize the degree to which services are fragmented.”⁹



North Carolina CCDF Lead Agency at the Center of Collaborations

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) uses CCDF Quality Funds to contract with an organization that hosts outreach events throughout the state for families experiencing homelessness. These events serve as a “one-stop shop” where community providers offer families resources from a variety of organizations all in a single

6 Deck, S. M. (2017). School outcomes for homeless children: Differences among sheltered, doubled-up, and poor, housed children. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 23(1), 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2016.1247347>

7 da Costa Nunez, R. (2015, May 11). The cost of not investing in after-school programs for homeless students. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ralph-da-costa-nunez/the-cost-of-not-investing-in-after-school-programs-for-homeless-students_b_7256986.html

8 Deck, S. M. (2017). School outcomes for homeless children: Differences among sheltered, doubled-up, and poor, housed children. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 23(1), 57–77. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2016.1247347>

9 Ibid.

location. For example, families can access information on the following:

- » Child care subsidy assistance
- » Referrals to child care programs, including school-age care programs
- » Special education services
- » Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- » Mental health services
- » Housing supports
- » Other relevant programs

In its first year (2017-18), the contractor collaborated with Head Start, public school McKinney-Vento liaisons, Child Care Resource and Referral regional staff, and Smart Start partnerships to reach families at four outreach events held at homeless shelters, transitional living programs, hotels, and other venues easily accessible to families experiencing homelessness. The contractor also created three training videos highlighting the impact of homelessness on families and initiated a social media campaign to raise awareness of the statewide initiative. Recently, a job fair connected to one of these outreach events allowed a parent to find a job and become eligible for child care subsidy assistance on the spot.

In 2018-19, the contractor has been tasked with expanding its outreach to include five to seven events, reaching more than 150 families, and coordinating these events with local department of social services offices to determine child care subsidy assistance eligibility for children on site. While the primary focus of the outreach has been to link preschool early care and education services to families, the activity also benefits families needing school-age child care.

Benefits of out-of-school time programs supporting children experiencing homelessness

For the California Department of Education's Expanded Learning Division, there are specific expectations for programs that work with children of low income experiencing homelessness. They include:

- » Make afterschool a place that is different from the school day so students are engaged and want to be there.
- » Collaborate with health care providers, including medical, dental, and mental health providers.
- » Build relationships with people and organizations that can help children and youth experiencing homelessness before you need them. Programs often do not have the time to build the relationships after the children are already in their programs.
- » Seek to meet the social-emotional and academic needs of children and youth.
- » If possible, tap into the Afterschool Meal Program.¹⁰

California has an exceptional expanded learning infrastructure. Expanded learning refers to before-school, afterschool, summer, and intersession learning experiences that develop the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of schools. The state funds afterschool education and safety programs (ASES) to the tune of more than \$540 million dollars, and the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center provides an additional \$130 million in grants for afterschool. In addition, the state, through a variety of funds, including CCDF, provides \$1.8 billion to support child care for children ages birth to 12 years, with about 40 percent of those funds being used for school-age care.¹¹

¹⁰ Passafaro, B., Gomez, L., & Weaver-Spencer, J. (2016) Afterschool programs that support homeless youth: Igniting hope and opportunities in the midst of trauma, uncertainty, and displacement. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 22, 57-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2016.1141182>

¹¹ Hay, J. & Davis, J. (n.d.) State of the state of expanded learning in California 2016-2017. Retrieved from the California Afterschool Network website <https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/state-of-the-stat-of-expanded-learning-2016-17-final-web.pdf>

Spotlight on Westminster, CA School District

Support for children and their families experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness is at the heart of collaborative efforts for the 20 expanded learning programs (ELPs) operated by the Westminster School District in Southern California. In the 2016-17 school year, nearly 11 percent of the enrolled students (1,012 of 9,338 students) were identified as experiencing homelessness, and of those, nearly 90 percent were “doubled up.” Annually about 30 families experiencing homelessness are enrolled in one of the district’s ELPs.

According to Beverlee Mathenia, executive director of Early Education and Expanded Learning for Westminster School District, “A top district priority is to make sure families experiencing homelessness have immediate access to high-quality expanded learning programs. One way we do this is by using McKinney-Vento funds while helping families apply for a more mobile and long-term solution through our county alternative payment programs, funded with Child Care and Development Fund subsidies. These stay with the family, even if they move out of the district, which is a benefit to the family.”

The district’s ELPs fall into two categories:

- » Extended school programs (ESPs): ESPs provide before-school, afterschool, and summer care in nine schools. Tuition is charged for the district-operated ESPs, and a sliding fee scale is available to families that qualify.
- » Afterschool education and safety programs (ASES): ASES programs provide tuition-free afterschool enrichment in 11 schools.

The ASES program is a result of Proposition 49, approved by California voters in 2002. The district contracts with two community-based organizations, ABRAZAR, Inc., and the Boys and Girls Club of Westminster, to operate it. The program provides tuition-free local after-

school education and enrichment at schools with the highest percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price meals. It is also linked to the district’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs.

A case carrier, who is also the McKinney-Vento coordinator for the Orange County Department of Education, works with the district staff and ASES partners who oversee the ELPs to ensure that services are seamless for children and their families and prioritized for children experiencing homelessness. Using a case management system, ELP staff meet regularly with school principals to ensure that children and families are receiving the services they need. In addition, district staff and ASES representatives meet monthly with the Westminster Family Resource Center to further identify supports for families and provide access to services. Technical Assistance on trauma-informed care and housing sensitivity is provided to out-of-school time program staff.

For example, at the SparkPoint Center, case managers work with adult family members to improve their self-sufficiency by creating step-by-step personal finance plans to tackle their specific needs. Case managers also work with local shelters and other nonprofit agencies to obtain resources for families.

Other supports include daily meals. Youth ages 18 and under receive a free snack and dinner every day during the school year and a free breakfast and lunch during the summer. Food distribution programs are available, including an emergency food program every Friday. A dental clinic is available at one of the ASES sites, and the school district provides an annual \$200 credit for free services to a minimum of 25 families of low income with children.

Key to the success of these supports is a collaborative spirit among the schools, program operators, partners, and community organizations.

Conclusion

The examples discussed in this brief show that OST programs are well positioned to provide supportive environments for youth experiencing homelessness as well as their families.

State and local agencies, school districts, and programs—including Child Care Resource & Referral agency staff, pub-

lic school McKinney-Vento liaisons, and 21st Century Community Learning Center staff—need to consider the expanded definition of homelessness and employ innovative ways to identify these families. Following this definition increases the likelihood that families with school-age children will benefit from the stable, caring services of OST programs.

Resources

da Costa Nunez, R. (2015, May 11). The cost of not investing in after-school programs for homeless students. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ralph-da-costa-nunez/the-cost-of-not-investing-in-after-school-programs-for-homeless-students_b_7256986.html

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National Center for Homeless Education. (n.d.) Enrolling children and youth experiencing homelessness in school. Retrieved from <https://nche.ed.gov/enrolling/>

Passafaro, B., Gomez, L., & Weaver-Spencer, J. (2016). Afterschool programs that support homeless youth: Igniting hope and opportunities in the midst of trauma, uncertainty, and displacement. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 22 (1), 57–66. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2016.1141182>

For more resources, see the NCASE Resource Library at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library>.

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