



ANNOUNCEMENT: OCDEL-13 #01

Effective Date: 5/9/2013

SUBJECT: Children Experiencing Homelessness

TO: Office of Child Development and Early Learning Programs (OCDEL)

FROM: Barbara G. Minzenberg, Ph.D.

Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning

PURPOSE:

It is estimated that over 40% of all children who are homeless are under the age of six (Smith, 2013). The purpose of this announcement is to provide guidance for identifying children experiencing homelessness so that their access to quality early childhood programs under the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) can be improved. This announcement is applicable to all programs managed by OCDEL bureaus: Early Intervention, Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, Early Head Start Grants, Child Care Works, Child Care, PA Pre-K Counts, Parent-Child Home and Nurse-Family Partnerships.

RELEVANT LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS (ECYEH):

McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act

On July 22, 1987 the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act became law. This was the first comprehensive federal law dealing with homelessness in America. The Act was recently included in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and it is now called the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act. Under this Act, each state educational agency is required to ensure that each child of an individual who is homeless and each youth who is homeless have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Basic Education (PDE) Circular (BEC) titled Education for Homeless Youth explains the categories of children who are homeless and entitled to the protections of the federal law. These categories include children and youth:

- i. Who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

- ii. Who have 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;
- iii. Who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- iv. Who are “migratory children” and who qualify as homeless under federal law because the children are living in circumstances described above;
- v. Who are awaiting foster care placement in shelters, emergency foster care, transitional foster care, or respite care.

PDE collects and publishes information/data about children who are experiencing homelessness (Birth-21 years of age) in the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness yearly State Evaluation Report (PDE 2012).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires infant/toddler and preschool early intervention programs to identify, locate and evaluate children with disabilities including those who are homeless, in foster care or wards of the state.

Head Start Act

Pursuant to the Head Start Act for children who are homeless they are eligible for participation in the Early Head Start and Head Start programs and should be prioritized for enrollment.

Title I

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that children who are homeless are eligible for services funded by Title I.

GUIDANCE FOR OCDEL PROGRAMS:

OCDEL programs covered by the announcement should:

- Contact and provide outreach activities as appropriate to their school district homeless liaisons, site and regional site coordinators, local shelters, bridge or temporary housing services, county Office of Children, Youth, and Families, homeless coalitions, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other local resources in their area.
- Ensure that appropriate staff know which children are considered homeless and are aware of the services and resources available.

- Develop collaborative strategies across early childhood programs and appropriate agencies to support continuity of services for families who experience frequent moves due to homelessness.
- Collaborate with families, agencies serving families confronted by homelessness and with any other additional agencies to ensure that documentation issues do not delay participation in programs and services with proper consideration given to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Privacy and Portability Act (HIPPA).
- Ensure that child find, evaluation or referral to services and programs for children and families in early intervention or Head Start are provided as required by applicable law.
- Provide your programs with the Department of Health and Human Services “Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List.” (Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2013) as well as other useful resources.

References:

Smith, Linda K., (2013). *Letter from the Administration for Children and Families, the Office of Head Start, and the Office of Child Care.*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, (2013). *Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List.*

Pennsylvania Department of Education (2012). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness-State Evaluation Report.*

Comment and questions should be directed to the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Bureau of Early Intervention Services at 717-346-9320 or: ra-ocdintervention@pa.gov

