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## Virginia Perspectives

Project HOPE-Virginia surveyed 638 early childhood educators, homeless education liaisons, and shelter providers to understand their perspectives about the primary challenges in serving young children with developmental concerns who are also experiencing homelessness.[6] The survey respondents reported that 18,878 young children were being served in their various programs. Of these, approximately 400-500 were identified as experiencing homelessness. Table 2 provides a summary of respondents' concerns regarding meeting the needs of young children with disabilities who experience homelessness. These responses illuminate the importance of planning at the child, family, and community level to address the complex issues associated with homelessness.

**Table 2. Staff Concerns across Virginia Communities**

| Concerns | Early Intervention & Early Childhood Educators | Homeless Education Liaisons | Shelter Providers |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Child Find** | Lack of awareness about shelterc21a96 Tc22.44 rea9ry ThespLack(ve(Lac-munity t0-0.001 Tc6 Tm0.00062 Tc0k of av ai447binyict0-0.001 176 TD0.0227-m.2 thei(veeHomeless Edution &)9TjT*0.001eligi withyCh | | Wait time for services |
| | | | |
| | | | • Lack of continuity due to families' short shelter stay<br>• Low cooperation<br>• Language barriers |
| | | | |
| **Interagency coordination & community resources** | | | |

# Promising Practices

How can early childhood programs increase the access, participation, and success of young children experiencing homelessness and developmental concerns? Recommended practices from early intervention, early childhood education, and homeless education provide helpful guidance, particularly with respect to Child Find, evaluations, support interventions, family connections, streamlined procedures, and interagency collaboration.

## Child Find

**Outreach.** Early identification of young children with developmental delays whose families are homeless is the first step in providing early intervention. Effective Child Find programs increase coordination among a wide variety of agencies that serve homeless families. These agencies provide assistance with the following services to families struggling with the diverse stressors associated with homelessness:

- health care,
- financial support,
- temporary and transitional housing,
- family counseling,
- service coordination,
- child care, and
- other essential support systems.

Interagency collaboration can result in more effective Child Find by increasing the awareness of professionals and families about early developmental concerns, referral procedures, and available services.

**Resources.** Family-friendly awareness materials such as brochures, videotapes, and checklists are readily available from national, state, and local agencies (see *Resources* on pages 8, 11 and 12). By providing these tools to social service offices, health clinics, shelters, subsidized child care, and other community programs, greater numbers of families and professionals can recognize early signs of developmental concerns and learn about early intervention programs that are designed to support children's developmental progress.

**Screening Tools.** Early childhood professionals can conduct ongoing screening in coordination with other agencies. Developmental screening can be provided at shelters, health departments, and social services on a regularly scheduled basis by early childhood educators or by community agency professionals.

Several developmental screening tools, such as *Ages & Stages Questionnaire*[7] and *Parents' Evalua-tion of Developmental Status*,[8] are designed for use by diverse professionals as a part of ongoing service delivery. Although these measures take only about 10-20 minutes to complete, they are reliable and valid tools for early identification of developmental problems and ongoing monitoring. Efficient and consistent developmental monitoring is one of the best ways to increase referrals for children in need of further evaluation.

To increase use of such measures by other agencies, early intervention professionals can clarify administration and interpretation procedures, provide the screening materials, identify referral contacts, and follow up periodically.

Shelters and other agencies that serve families experiencing homelessness can also help early childhood programs determine effective methods of contacting families and enhancing awareness about the availability and importance of early intervention. Effective Child Find programs involve strong partnerships among programs that devise creative methods to reach children, such as canvassing motels, shelters, and other housing situations of transient families.

**Expedited Evaluations.** To meet the urgent needs of children experiencing homelessness and developmental delays, expedited evaluations are essential to provide quicker access to services for eligible children. Usual timelines for evaluations become significant barriers to education for children whose families are moving frequently. Expediting evaluations can be accomplished through accessing and using reports from other agencies and schools, using interdisciplinary team approaches, and determining eligibility as quickly as possible so that appropriate service can be provided right away. Completing this link in accessing services helps families understand that early intervention and early childhood programs are important resources for their children and for them. If evaluation procedures become one more stressor, early childhood education may become a low priority for families struggling to find housing, economic stability, and social support.

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experiencing homelessness who may be wary of strangers and new environments, be unaccustomed to structured tasks in standardized assessments, or behave atypically because of recent illness or trauma.

Play-based assessment methods allow family members or familiar adults to facilitate the child's play with engaging toys while the interdisciplinary team observes the child's developmental skills in various new play activities. As outlined in the *Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment,*[9] all team members can be fully included in play-based assessment by interviewing family members first, and then carefully planning the play session to address all areas of development and specific questions raised by professionals from different disciplines. By videotaping the play session, the full assessment team can review and discuss their observations, while confirming with the parent whether this is typical behavior for the child and clarifying any concerns or priorities regarding the child's development.

**Family-Focused Assessment.** High quality assessment tools are available that focus on the child's development within the broader family context, with attention to the family's concerns and priorities, as well as the child's responses to their current situation. Family interviews can be conducted using assessment tools appropriate for specific situations.

- The *HELP Family-Centered Interview*[10] provides a process for learning more about a child's functioning during daily activities, such as meals, dressing, and play. While many families' daily routines are disrupted by frequent moving, discussing how a child is eating, sleeping, and playing can provide valuable insight into the child's and family's strengths and needs for additional support.
- The *AEPS Family Interest Survey*[11] is another tool that gives professionals a systematic way to ask families about their priorities for information regarding their child's development, family supports, and community resources.
- The *Infant-Toddler and Family Instrument*[12] uses an ecological approach (i.e., observing children in their natural environments), by interviewing the family caregiver, observing the infant, and evaluating child and environmental factors affecting development, health, and safety. This assessment tool focuses on some of the difficult circumstances that may be associated with homelessness, such as domestic violence, adequate nutrition, and safe housing, which should be considered by the assessment team.

- The *Devereux Early Childhood Assessment*[13] focuses on preschoolers' resilience by having family caregivers and early educators rate three protective factors (initiative, self-control, and attachment) as well as behavioral concerns. Parent and teacher ratings provide a useful picture of how children are cow6 411ure ofsro beeir m9d such as domestic viofrncefsromoe byessness,sresTwyouvand chi4.7w(for(s and ftrnceir(stanceatifey per reld feel)TjT*0.05

Close coordination among early childhood programs, homeless education liaisons, and shelter providers can help families access the best early childhood program(s) for their children. If infants are not eligible for Part C services, they may be eligible for Early Head Start or qualify for a scholarship in a high quality infant care setting. Likewise, referral and coordination services are needed for preschoolers dually-qualified for programs, such as early childhood special education and Head Start. Speedy referrals and shared evaluation results among programs (with family permission) can accelerate children's and families' participation in a wide array of early childhood services. Overall, the best standard for judging evaluation procedures is the parental guidance that, "developmental assessment should feel like help."[14]

Volunteer groups can help secure resources for these basic needs, and staff can plan ahead to make sure there is a private and safe place for children who need extra care, rest, or attention. Children also may come to school in need of medical attention or sustained emotional support. In school settings, the school nurse, social worker, counselor, and school psychologist can be invaluable resources to early childhood educators, through direct assistance to children and families, as well as consultation to classroom staff.

*Al's Pals*[17] is focused on helping children cope effectively with difficult situations, such as exposure to substance abuse and violence. Using puppets, music, photographs, and other visuals, early educators promote children's resilience by helping them explore their own ideas, understand their feelings, show respect, learn about healthy choices, solve problems, and choose self-control. A family guide, *Here, Now and Down the Road...Tips for Loving Parents*, accompanies this curriculum with a focus on guiding children toward healthy, drug-free, non-violent lifestyles.

In a therapeutic preschool,[16] familiar early childhood activities are used to help young children deal with significant emotional concerns. For example, *Go Away – Come Back* helps children dealing with separation anxiety, through songs ("Where is Thumpkin"), stories ("Will You Come Back for Me?"), games (pop-up toys, hide-and-seek), and art (making peek-a-boo books). Other

- Visiting the shelter or the family's current residence is an important way to learn about the realities of a family's living circumstances, demonstrate commitment to including caregivers, and develop collaborative activities with shelter providers.
- Creating partnerships with community mental health, adult education, the local library, or volunteer groups, fosters connections so that early education programs can organize family literacy activities, picnics, developmental play groups, and other family-focused activities in shelters or nearby community centers. These family-focused activities can enhance child-caregiver interactions and promote children's learning across many developmental domains.
- Traditional methods of staying in touch (such as home-school notebooks, or learning kits loaned for home use) also could be used, although storing and returning materials may be difficult when fami-

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non-written agreements between specific staff members across programs, clarifying these agreements in writing is important to assure broader agency support so that these coordination efforts don't disappear when staff members move to other jobs or communities.[25]

Including local shelters in these agreements helps clarify coordination concerns (such as enrollment, transportation, records transfer) that are particularly important for young children experiencing homelessness. Interagency agreements can help staff members make referrals to the right person and help families understand the services provided by each program. Starting with agreements about these specific issues can increase access and reduce frustration for families who need appropriate early educational services for their children.

With these agreements in place, programs can explore creative ways to pool their resources and enhance the quality of services that they can provide together. As described in previous sections, effective child find, evaluation, intervention, and family-focused services are enriched by the contributions of many disciplines and agencies.

Early childhood programs can also look within for professional contacts to other community programs, including:

- social services,
- shelters,
- health department,
- community services board,
- emergency food networks,
- mental health clinics,
- adult education,
- job training and housing support programs,
- faith-based organizations,
- businesses, and
- civic groups.

Social workers, health professionals, counselors, psychologists, administrators, and others can lead the way to strengthen the network of supports that can be available for children and families. This broader network also can provide opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, demonstrations, and resource materials that sustain professional development across disciplines and agencies. Working together, colleagues can enrich their own understandings and create new solutions to meet the complex challenges that homelessness can present to young children and their families.



### *Additional Resources on Early Childhood & Homeless Education*

The following resources include assessment tools, curricula, websites, and other publications that address key concerns of early educators and shelter providers.

**Child Find**

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center website: http://www.nectac.org/topics/earlyid

Reed-Victor, E., & Myers, M. (2004). *Helping young children grow and learn: A guide for families and shelter provider*s. Project HOPE-VA: Williamsburg. Website: http://www.wm.edu/HOPE

**Evaluations**

Ostrosky, M.M., & Horn, E. (Eds.). (2002). *Assessment: Gathering Meaningful Information:Young Exceptional Children Monograph 4*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

**Interventions**

Sandall, S., & Ostrosky, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Practical Ideas for Adressing Challenging Behaviors: Young Exceptional Children Monograph 1*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

**Interagency collaboration**

Virginia Department of Education. (2003) *Smoothing the way for transition from early intervention (Part C) to early childhood special education (Part B)*. Available at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sped/earlychildhoodtransitiondoc.pdf

## Share Your Reactions to Books You are ReadingYou       are

## Keep Books Handy

## Choose Good Books Your Child Will Like

## Set a Special Time for Reading

*A stack of old favorites in a basket beside a big easy chair makes them convenient to grab at those moments when a new activity is needed. A home library need not be expensive. With the low cost of paperbacks, you can have several for less than you pay for one breakable toy.*

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign  http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/

*You will pay no more money for a really good book that the child will want to read time and time again than you will pay for an uninteresting book that doesn't hold the child's attention.*

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign  http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/

*Pick a time that works for you; even better would be th2child's attention.*

[1] National Research Council. (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers.* Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy. In B. T. Bowman, M. S. Donovan, & M. S. Burns (Eds.). Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

[2] Epps, S., & Jackson, B. J. (2000). *Empowered Families, Successful Children: Early Intervention Programs that Work.* Washington, DC: APA.

[3] Better Homes Fund. (1999). *America's Homeless Children: New Outcasts.* Newton, MA: Author.

[4] Werner, E. E. (2000). Protective factors and individual resilience. In J. P. Shonkoff & S. J. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Intervention* (pp. 115-132). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Also see: Reed-Victor, E., & Pelco, L.E. (1999). Helping homeless students build resilience: What the school community can do. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 5*(1), 51-71.

[5] Reed-Victor, E., & Stronge, J. H. (2003). Homeless students and resilience: Staff perspectives on individual and environmental factors. *Journal of Children & Poverty, 8*(2), 159-183.

[6] The summer timing of the survey had an impact on the return rate that totaled 187; however, respondents from all three groups participated:

- 99 early childhood educators from Part C programs for infants and toddlers, preschool special education, Head Start programs, and Title I preschools,
- 55 shelter providers, and
- 33 homeless education liaisons.

[7] Bricker, D., & Squires, J. (1980). *Ages & Stages Questionnaires: Parent-Completed, Child-Monitoring System.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Website: http://www.pbrookes.com

[8] Glascoe, F. (2001). *Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status.* Nashville, TN: Ellsworth & Vandermeer Press. Website: http://www.pedstest.com

[9] Linder, T. W. (1993). *Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Website: http://www.pbrookes.com

[10] Parks, S. (1994). *HELP Family-Centered Interview.* Palo Alto, CA: VORT.

[11] Cripe, J., & Bricker, D. (1993). *AEPS Family Interest Inventory*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Website: http://www.pbrookes.com

[12] Provence, S., & Apfel, N. H. (2001). *Infant-Toddler and Family Instrument.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Website: http://www.pbrookes.com

[13] LeBuffe, P. A., & Naglieri, J. A. (1999). *Devereux Early Childhood Assessment.* Lewisville, NC: Kaplan.

[14] Zero to Three National Center for Infants Toddlers, and Families website: http://www.zerotothree.org/ztt_professionals.html

[15] Eddowes, E. A., & Butcher, T. (2000). Meeting the developmental and educational needs of homeless infants and young children. In J. H. Stronge & E. Reed-Victor (Eds.), *Educating Homeless Students: Promising Practices*, pp. 21-43. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

[16] Koplow, L. (Ed.). (1996). *Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools Can Heal.* 1

# Virginia Resources

**Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC)**

    http://www.peatc.org

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|---|---|
| Northern VA | **703-923-0010** (Voice/TTY) |
| Richmond VA | **804-819-1999** (Voice/TTY) |
| Spanish | **703-569-6200** |

**Virginia Interagency Action Council for the Homeless (VIACH)**

    http://www.viach.state.va.us/index.html

    804-371-7175

Organization of federal and state agencies, local continuums of care, and non-profits who serve individuals experiencing homelessness.

**Virginia's Regional Training and Technical Assistance Centers:**

    Regions 1 and 8 VCU    800-426-1595
        http://www.soe.vcu.edu/ttac/

    Regions 2 and 3 ODU    888-249-5529
        http://www.ttac.odu.edu/

    Regions 2 and 3 W&M    800-323-4489
        http://www.wm.edu/ttac/

    Region 4 GMU    800-333-7958
        http://chd.gmu.edu/ttac/

    Region 5 JMU    888-205-4824
        http://ttac.cisat.jmu.edu/

    Regions 6 and 7 Radford    877-544-1918
        http://ru-portal.radford.edu/ttac/

    Regions 6 and 7 Va Tech    800-848-2714
        http://tac.elps.vt.edu/

**Virginia Department of Education**

    http://www.pen.k12.va.us

    800-292-3820

**Project HOPE – Virginia**

    See contact information below

The office of the state coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth, Project HOPE-Virginia is part of the Virginia Department of Education and administered through The College of William and Mary. Other information briefs developed by Project HOPE-Virginia are available on our website. There is no charge in Virginia for these resources. (Some items have quantity limits.)

**Family Access to Medical Insurance Security**

    866-873-2647

    http://www.famis.org

Virginia's health insurance program for children of working families covers all the medical services growing children need to avoid getting sick, plus the services that will help them make a speedy recovery if they do become ill or get hurt. Assistance is available in English and Spanish.

**Child Health Investment Partnership (CHIP) of Virginia**

    804-783-2667

Local offices around Virginia organize community resources for families to provide access to comprehensive care.

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**Project HOPE-Virginia**
**Virginia Department of Education**
**The College of William and Mary – SOE**
**P.O. Box 8795**
**Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795**
**(757) 221-4002  Toll Free (877) 455-3412**
**Email: homlss@wm.edu**

**This and other information briefs are available on the Project HOPE-Virginia website:**

**http://www.wm.edu/hope**

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## DEFINITION OF HOMELESS

Anyone who, *due to a lack of housing,* lives:

· In emergency or transitional shelters;
· In motels, hotels, trailer parks, campgrounds, abandoned in hospitals, awaiting foster care placement;
· In cars, parks, public places, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings;