

## **Division of Child Development and Early Education**

### **Improving Access to Early Care and Education Services for Homeless Children and Families**

Early care and education (ECE) programs provide benefits to all children's learning, wellness and success in school and later in life, especially for the most vulnerable children. Homelessness is a reality for many families with young children in our country. High quality ECE programs protect and support children from the challenges and risks associated with homelessness by supporting children's learning and development in safe, stable and nurturing environments.

#### **What is Homelessness?**

##### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

In January of 2002, Congress authorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to help people experiencing homelessness. The federal law includes the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program that entitles children who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence to a free, appropriate education and requires schools to remove barriers to their enrollment, attendance and success in school.

Example of living situations that may qualify under the McKinney-Vento Act include, but are not limited to:

- Living with a friend, relative or other person/family because of a loss of housing
- Staying in a motel or hotel because of a loss of housing or fleeing domestic violence
- Living in an emergency shelter, transitional housing or domestic violence shelter
- Living in a car, park or public place, an abandoned building or bus station
- Living temporarily in substandard housing
- Living in a campground or an inadequate trailer home
- Living in a runaway or homeless youth shelter
- Youth who are living on their own, even if their families want them to come home

The McKinney-Vento Act, requires state to have Coordinators of Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) State Coordinators and local liaisons designated by all Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in the State. Local liaisons identify homeless children and youth, and connect them to other programs and services such as Head Start, preschool, health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services.

The Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) has partnered with the NC (EHCY) State Coordinators, local liaisons, Yay Babies and partner agencies to ensure that the

information on the full range of child care services available for families experiencing homelessness is identified and made available.

### **Impact of Homelessness on Babies, Toddlers, & Preschoolers:**

- More likely to be born prematurely and at low birth weight
- At high risk for a stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)
- Less likely to have well-baby visits
- Less likely to be breastfed by their mothers
- More likely to be exposed to violence (neighborhood, family)
- More likely to have chronic health conditions and /or, poor nutrition
- More likely to have mothers with mental health struggles
- More likely to have social-emotional delays

### **Barriers that Limit Access to Early Childhood Programs**

- Lack of documents needed to enroll in early care programs
- Lack of transportation to get to early care and education programs
- Lack of awareness regarding homelessness situations among early care and education providers
- Lack of flexibility in policies for required documentation families must provide for enrollment.

\*The NC General Statute allows families to submit medical and immunization records upon enrollment or within 30 days of enrollment. For more information regarding immunization requirements and exemptions visit <http://www.immunize.nc.gov/schools/ncruleslaws.htm>.

### **DCDEE Next Steps to Increase Access to Services for Homeless Children and their Families:**

- Partner with (EHCY) State Coordinator, Local Liaisons and Head Start Collaboration Director
- Collaborate with Yay Babies to convene a Homeless Focus Group Meeting for partner agencies to develop a statewide action plan
- Provide training and technical assistance for early care and educators on early identification of homeless children and families, trauma-informed care and community resources
- Outreach to families at shelters, motels and food banks
- Provide training to staff who assist homeless families in applying for child care subsidy and consumer education to ensure that they have a basic understanding of homelessness
- Develop a residency questionnaire or integrating questions about housing into existing forms, data systems or family interviews that prompt families to answer key questions about their living situation
- Raise awareness of this issue among partner agencies and develop priorities for serving homeless families
- Priority access for child care