

Yay Babies, NC

Promoting Access to Early Childhood Services for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

The Problem: It is estimated that 1 in 30 children will experience homelessness in the U.S. each year; almost 50% of those children are age 5 or younger. In NC, there are an estimated 28,000 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers without homes.

Homelessness is associated with a host of risks for developmental delays and mental health challenges. Early identification of developmental problems, and access to intervention and high-quality early education, are essential for success of these vulnerable children, yet few receive such services.

There are substantial barriers to accessing early intervention and high-quality child care. Few housing program staff are prepared to identify early problems and connect children to appropriate services. Although many young children enter intervention services when referred by child care providers or pediatricians, only 15% of homeless children are enrolled in preschool programs and few have medical homes or regular well-child checks with pediatricians. Even when young homeless children do come to the attention of early intervention and child care providers, those providers often face challenges to adequately serving the children and their parents.



The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness ranked NC 37th on a measure of how well homeless children of all ages are being connected to early intervention and educational services (2015).

The good news: In NC, these challenges are not insurmountable!

Our Goal: To ensure NC children birth-5 experiencing homelessness receive early intervention services for developmental and mental health needs and have access to high-quality affordable early education/care. Our objectives are consistent with US DHHS **Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness** *October 31, 2016*

1. Support a two-generation approach to meet the needs of both parents and their young children experiencing homelessness by developing and strengthening partnerships across housing and early childhood programs and systems to obtain and sustain housing, achieve stability, ensure positive early experiences, and promote family well-being;
2. Enhance integration of early childhood programs and systems with local homeless assistance systems' "coordinated entry" processes to ensure immediate needs, such as housing, are assessed and addressed quickly, and families continue to be regularly assessed for ongoing service needs;
3. Improve, leverage, and share data on early childhood homelessness to build service connections, better understand the particular challenges facing these families, and build upon evidence-based practices for serving them.

Contributors to the Work: State and local early childhood providers; early intervention (IDEA Part C); university-based researchers; homeless services, housing, and shelter providers; Head Start; child care subsidy; Smart Start; NC homeless education administrators and liaisons; NC Infant Mental Health Association; child and family advocates (local and national); Continuum of Care representative.