Improving Services for Homeless Children

A presentation at the National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference

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Scope

• 2.3 – 3.5 million people homeless at least once in a given year.

• 890,000 – 1.35 million children homeless at least once in a given year.

Composition of Homeless Population

BEING HOMELESS

If you’re a kid it’s
cold
lonely
scary

People treat you mean
or
ignore you

I guess I need to hurry and grow up.

Marcie, age 7

Dear God, We need a Home

Amanda, age 9
Homelessness is Traumatic

- Path to homelessness is traumatic.
- Homelessness itself is traumatic:
  - Traumatic losses
  - Abrupt family separations
  - Violence and victimization

Impact on Children

“My house is crying today because we won’t be coming home tonight”
Impact on Children: High Rates of Mobility

- Children move three times more than low-income peers. (1)

- Mobility leads to family instability, and health, behavioral, educational problems. (2)

Impact on Children: Families Separated During Crisis

- One-fifth of homeless children separated from their immediate family.
- Five years after entering shelter, 44% of mothers separated from their children.
- 60% of all homeless women have minor children, but only two-thirds have their children living with them.

Impact on Children: Exposure to Violence

- 83% of children over 12 years exposed to violence.
- 25% witnessed violence in their family.

WHERE DID THE OLD ME GO?

I'm a different person now.
I'm more quiet than I used to be.
I'm not as much fun or as pretty either.

Where did I go?

Sometimes,
I'm afraid, I'm worried.

Will we always be homeless?

Sally, age 11
Impact on Children: Educational Challenges

- Only 15% attend preschool.
- 41% attend two schools each year.
- 14% having learning disabilities.
- Over 50% perform below grade level.
- 36% repeat a grade.

Impact on Children: Mental Health Issues

- 20% of preschoolers have emotional problems requiring treatment.
- 47% of school-aged children are anxious, withdrawn, or depressed.
- Nearly 33% of school-aged children have at least one major mental disorder.

Impact on Children: Poor Physical Health

- Sick four times as often as other children.
- High rates of acute and chronic illness.
- Twice as many ear infections.
- Five times more gastrointestinal problems.

Impact on Children: 
Unmet Service Needs

- 20% lack regular medical care. (1)
- 59% visit hospital emergency rooms each year (1)
- One-third receive no help for emotional problems (2)
- 30% of families receive no Food Stamps or WIC, though most are eligible. (3)

The PEACH Initiative
The PEACH Initiative

Physical and Emotional Awareness for Children who are Homeless
Meet the OrganWise Guys®!
The Curriculum

- Books
- Games
- Songs
- Activities
The PEACH Pilot

- 3 shelters, 3 times
- 30 different children

**Result:** An easy-to-use, highly engaging curriculum specially adapted for children living in shelters.
Emotional Health
PEACH Helps Kids
PEACH Helps Parents

- Rare break
- Positive, fun way to help their child
- Emotional and physical health
PEACH Helps Organizations!

- Structured program
- Easy to implement
- Free materials
Interested?

1. Does your organization serve young children?

2. Do you have a staff member to champion PEACH?

3. Do you think your organization's leadership will be supportive of PEACH?
Thanks!

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