

## **Connecticut's Early Intervention System and Children who are Homeless**

### **Overview**

The A. J. Papanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Research, Education and Training at the University of Connecticut completed a study examining the needs of infants and toddlers and families who are homeless.

### **Methods**

The Center conducted an anonymous needs assessment with all 46 Part C program coordinators in Connecticut. The survey was conducted electronically using SurveyMonkey. The purpose of the investigation was to assess the extent to which the Connecticut Birth to Three Early Intervention Programs comply with recommended practices for early intervention services for families who are homeless.

### **Results**

The survey questions were based on guidelines for best practices written by the Connecticut Birth to Three System. A total of 49 surveys were distributed and 19 were completed, for a 39% response rate. The majority of programs responding to the survey (55%) report serving 1 to 10 homeless families per year, with 25% of programs serving no homeless families, and 15% serving 11 to 20 homeless families per year. A high percentage (68%) live in shared housing, 16% live in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds, 24% live in emergency or transitional shelters, 25% live in hospital settings, 25% live in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus, train stations, or similar settings, and another 10% are migratory or live in transient housing. In addition, 20% reported that they did not receive guidance in terms of serving the homeless families and 5% did not know if they received guidance. The majority 95% do not have an evaluation/assessment protocol that differs from the ones used with families living in permanent housing. Programs reported keeping track of, locating permanent housing, and coordinating all services to be a challenge in their service delivery. Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the results of the Part C program coordinators and/or representatives' responses to the questions in the survey.

### **Implications**

Based on the results received from the survey further research and training opportunities are warranted. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to comply with the *Mc Kinney – Vento Homeless Assistance Act*.

# **Nationwide Needs Assessment of Early Intervention Programs Services to Homeless Children and Families**

## **Overview**

The survey results from Connecticut prompted the Center to conduct a nationwide needs assessment of each of the 50 states and territories to review their policies and procedures in addressing the homeless children and families. The purpose of the investigation was to assess the policies and procedures that are in place that ensure timely assessment, appropriate services, and continuity of services for children with disabilities who are homeless.

## **Methods**

The survey was conducted electronically using SurveyMonkey.com.

## **Results**

A total of 56 surveys were distributed and 30 were completed, for a 54% response rate. One state reported they did not have specific statewide data to respond to the survey questions as their current data systems do not capture that level of detail regarding homelessness. The majority of programs responding to the survey (80%) reported not knowing how many families/children who are homeless they serve in a year, with 13% of programs serving 31 or more homeless families, and 7% serving 1 to 10 homeless families per year. Participants were instructed to skip a question about living arrangements if they did not serve or did not know if they serve families and children who are homeless. As a result, the number of respondents to the question about where the families who are homeless live was a total of six. A high percentage of these programs (83%) reported that the families who are homeless live in shared housing or emergency or transitional shelters; 67% of programs reported families live in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds or are migratory or live in transient housing; 50% of programs reported families live in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus, train stations, or similar settings, hospitals, other public or private space not designed for sleeping or for human beings.

For all respondents, 50% reported that they did not provide guidance in terms of serving the homeless families, while 40% did provide guidance, and 10% did not know whether they provided guidance. The majority (93%) of programs do not have an evaluation/assessment protocol that differs from the ones used with families living in permanent housing. No programs reported that they had an evaluation protocol used solely for homeless families and 7% did not know whether they had such a protocol. The programs reported keeping track and engaging homeless families to be the greatest challenge in their service delivery, with engaging parents in early intervention visits to be the second greatest challenge.

Qualitative analysis was used to describe the results of the Part C program coordinators and/or representatives' responses to the open ended questions in the survey. Based on the analysis, further research and training opportunities are warranted. Best practices in serving homeless families were identified as a technical assistance opportunity, with 75% of programs identifying it as potentially useful. Methods of tracking homeless families, resources for finding permanent housing and collaborating with state and community agencies were also identified as possible

opportunities for continued technical assistance.

### **Implications**

The IDEA requires states to comply with the McKinney – Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Center is eager to accomplish the following: identifying best practices in evaluation and service delivery for families and children who are homeless; develop training and technical assistance supports to help states implement those best practices in a systematic way; and ensure compliance with the McKinney – Vento Homeless Assistance Act.