

# 2012



## Lesson 1: Definition of Homelessness

Mini-Workbook

Updated 1/31/2012

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## About the Mini-workbooks

The **mini-workbooks** are designed to use with the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). The mini-workbooks are optional. You can successfully complete the Web version of the lessons without this resource. However, the mini-workbooks offer a multidimensional learning experience for programs who want to use the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* as a training tool with groups of staff. You will find that the mini-workbooks point to the Web version to find answers and to discover more information.

The **Explore Information** tab in the Web version of each Lesson contains information, resources and materials to support your knowledge gathering and knowledge sharing. Some of the resources that are listed in the Web version are also included in the mini-workbooks. The computer symbol  indicates resources that are included in the Web version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons*. This symbol  indicates resources that are included in the mini-workbook version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons*. These symbols are used in the table on the next page.

Throughout the mini-workbook you will be asked to share your thoughts in the “Idea Box”. The light bulb is the symbol for the idea box.

This symbol  precedes instructions that direct you to a particular section of the Web version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* for answers and for more information.

The Web version can be found on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). The instructions on page 6 display how to access the ***Interactive Homelessness Lessons***.

The ***Interactive Homelessness Lessons*** take account of many real-life scenarios that may occur in programs and communities. The Lessons include a myriad of useful resources to support your learning and discovery of new strategies and ideas as you work with families experiencing homelessness.

In ***Lesson 1: Definition of Homelessness***, Barbara Duffield shares why it is important to understand the definition of homelessness.

In this lesson, Rosa, Marco, Nicole and Bert, the Norhill Family, Darlene, and Olivia & Tony each represent a family story. Based on the family’s story, additional supporting documents, and your knowledge of regulations and processes you will be asked to determine if the family is experiencing homelessness. Record your thoughts in the “Idea Box”. Finally, go to the Web version of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* to read the answer and learn more about homelessness.

## About the Mini-workbooks (continued)

Resources that are listed in the **Explore Information** section of the Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1 are included in this table:

<b>Lesson 1: Definition of Homelessness – Explore Information Resources</b>	
Legal Definition of Homelessness	
McKinney-Vento Act and Head Start	
Head Start Collaboration Directors Talk About Homelessness	

## How to Access the Interactive Homelessness Lessons on the ECLKC

The Interactive Homelessness Lessons can be found on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).

1. Enter [ECLKC.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://ECLKC.ohs.acf.hhs.gov) in the browser. After the ECLKC page appears, enter 'Interactive Homelessness Lessons' in the search box. Click on 'search'.

...enter 'Interactive Homelessness Lessons' in the search box



2. Select the Interactive Homelessness Lessons icon.



3. Welcome to the Interactive Homelessness Lessons page will appear.



4. ➡ Go to the **Definition** tab.

## Why Understanding the Definition of Homelessness is Important

The 2007 Head Start Reauthorization establishes that children experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for Head Start (homeless status, rather than income, makes families eligible for Head Start). The Head Start Act uses the definition of homelessness from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to establish whether children are experiencing homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness is quite broad and it is not always easy to determine whether or not a family is homeless. Families with circumstances similar to those in the stories in this lesson could walk through your door at any time. What will you do? How will you decide if they are experiencing homelessness?

Each story in this mini-workbook includes different circumstances that you will need to consider in making your decision. Consult the information provided to help you and support your decision. Try as many stories as you wish and share them with your colleagues. The thought process you follow will help you when you need to make these decisions in your program.

## Legal Definition of Homelessness

According to section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)), the term “homeless children and youths”—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence ...;  
and

(B) includes—

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings ...

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Children and youth are considered homeless if they fit both part A and any one of the subparts of part B of the definition above.

*What is the Meaning of Fixed, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Residence?*

### **Fixed, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Residence**

**Fixed nighttime residence:** Stationary, permanent, and not subject to change.

**Regular nighttime residence:** Used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis.

**Adequate nighttime residence:** Sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.

*Why is the Definition So Broad?*

### **Why is the Definition So Broad?**

Below are some reasons why the definition of homelessness is intentionally broad:

- Shelters are often full; shelters turn families away, or put families on waiting lists

- Shelters do not exist in many suburban and rural areas
- Eligibility conditions of shelters often exclude families with boys over the age of 12
- Shelters often have 30, 60, or 90 day time limits
- Motels may not be available, or may be too expensive
- Families may turn to friends or family after initial eviction, living in over-crowded, temporary, and sometimes unsafe environments
- Families may be unaware of alternatives, fleeing in crisis
- Families fear child welfare involvement if they are on the street or otherwise unsheltered

### *Housing Challenges for Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Families*

### **Housing Challenges for Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Families**

Housing challenges for migrant and seasonal farm worker families include:

- Lack of sufficient farm worker housing traditionally provided through grower-owned labor camps results in the need to consider private housing rentals.
- Labor camps are often neglected and/or in disrepair.
- Insufficient availability of private rental housing, particularly in small rural communities.
- Rental units may be unavailable to migrant farm workers because they cannot provide deposits, qualify for credit checks, and/or make long-term rental commitments.
- Approximately 50% of farm workers rent housing from a private party but private housing is not subject to federal regulation and is often substandard and/or expensive.

The above information is from the National Center for Farmworker Health.

### *Additional Information About the Definition*

#### **Additional Information About the Definition**

The definition of homeless children in Public Law 110-134 “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” (Sec. 637. DEFINITIONS [42 U.S.C. 9832](11)) matches the definition of homelessness above:

The term “homeless children” has the meaning given the term “homeless children and youths” in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)).

This same definition also is found in the following acts:

- Child Nutrition Act
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Violence Against Women Act

## The McKinney -Vento Act and Head Start

### How does the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act relate to Head Start?

The “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” (reauthorizing the Head Start program) refers to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act when defining homelessness and when requiring Head Start to coordinate with the local implementers of the McKinney-Vento Act. In regard to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs must do the following:

1. Identify and prioritize homeless children for enrollment using the definition of homelessness as specified in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which governs public schools.
2. Attempt to address the barriers that decrease children’s ability to enroll and participate in Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs by:
  - Prioritizing homeless children for enrollment, and
  - Obtaining related documents within a reasonable time frame.
3. Coordinate with local implementers of McKinney-Vento.

### According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, what does the term “homeless children and youths” mean?

The term "homeless children and youths" means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It includes a broad array of inadequate living situations. This definition can help educators, families, and youth understand who is entitled to the Act's protections.

## Rosa

Oscar and Juanita Hernandez have a four-year-old daughter, Rosa. They rent a two-bedroom apartment. Oscar is a construction worker. Juanita was a cashier in a community supermarket until it recently closed.

As a construction worker, Oscar was making a decent wage allowing Juanita ample time to look for another job. The construction company began to fall behind on its work production, however, and within one month after Juanita lost her job, Oscar lost his job.

Oscar and Juanita are now both unemployed. Unable to find employment, they quickly used their meager savings to meet their basic needs.

As everyday needs became increasingly more difficult to meet, Oscar called his brother, Luis, explained their situation and asked if he and his family could come and live with him.

Luis lives in a two-bedroom house with his wife and four children. Although Rosa loves living with her cousins and having someone to play with each day, Oscar and Juanita are keenly aware of how difficult it is becoming to live with Luis and his family.

## Rosa: Do the Activity

**Question:** Is Rosa's family living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe she is, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe she is not, share your thoughts in the box.



➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition- Rosa- Do the Activity*** Find out which answer is correct.

## Marco

Enrique and Yvonne Martinez are migrant farm workers with three children ages 3, 7, and 12. Recently the family left Florida, where they were temporarily living with friends, to work in Michigan during the fall season. They found housing in a migrant camp and enrolled their youngest child, Marco, in the local Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and their other two children in a local elementary school.

One month into their stay, the migrant camp in which the family was living was closed by the Health Department due to unsafe conditions. Many of the families, including the Martinez family, scattered to other locations. The housing in the migrant camp was unavailable indefinitely and so the Martinez family found shelter with another migrant family of three in a small two bedroom home. Enrique and Yvonne are not sure, however, if this family will allow them to stay through the season. There is a Head Start program in the new service area in which the family is staying, and there is a waiting list.

## Marco: Do the Activity

**Question:** Is Marco's family living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe they are, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe they are not, share your thoughts in the box.



➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition - Marco - Do the Activity***. Find out which answer is correct.

## Nicole and Bert

Bert has been raising his daughter, Nicole, on his own since she was three years old. Her mother is in jail because she abused Nicole. The engineering plant where Bert worked closed down. After he lost his job, the unpaid bills began to mount one on top of the other. Bert lost his electricity, water, and then the gas. Shortly after, he also lost the house.

To survive after losing his job, Bert sold everything he owned except his working tools and his SUV. They were both paid off. He knew he needed the tools for work and the SUV to help with job hunting and in a worst case, he and Nicole could sleep in it.

Bert is a trained carpenter and building maintenance engineer with twenty years of experience, but he still has been unsuccessful in finding a job. After one month of sleeping in his car trying to conserve the few dollars he did have, he decided that he and Nicole should relocate to another state with the hope that he would be able to find a job.

When Bert got to his new location, he had three goals: find a job, find a preschool program for Nicole, and find a place to live. With the little money he was able to set aside after selling everything, he rented a one-room apartment on the bad side of town. Bert visited the Finch Head Start program and is very close to selecting a preschool program for Nicole.

Unfortunately, he still has not found a job and his money is dwindling quickly.

## Nicole and Bert: Do the Activity

**Question:** Are Nicole and Bert living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe they are, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe they are not, share your thoughts in the box.



A large empty rectangular box for writing an answer. In the top left corner of the box, there is a simple line drawing of a lit lightbulb with rays emanating from it, symbolizing an idea or thought.

➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition – Nicole and Bert - Do the Activity***. Find out which answer is correct.

## **Norhill Family**

In November 2008, the Norhill family's three-bedroom home was totally destroyed in a hurricane. Given that the Norhill family includes four children and that they live in a city far from their relatives, they didn't feel comfortable imposing themselves on their friends and families.

Mom and Dad Norhill continued to work for their respective employers and they decided that the family will live in an extended-stay hotel until their house is rebuilt. They were told that it will take approximately four months before they will be able to move back into their home. They are concerned that they may not be able to afford the extended-stay hotel for four months.

## Norhill Family: Do the Activity

**Question:** Is the Norhill family living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe they are, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe they are not, share your thoughts in the box.



A large empty rectangular box for writing an answer. In the top left corner of the box, there is a simple line drawing of a lit lightbulb with rays emanating from it, symbolizing an idea or thought.

➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition – Norhill Family - Do the Activity.*** Find out which answer is correct.

## Darlene

Darlene is an expectant mother who lives with the father of her unborn child. She currently works at a clothing store part-time. As a support for her during the pregnancy, Darlene connected with the Early Head Start program in her community. She loves the work of the Early Head Start program and the support they have provided. She plans to enroll her baby in the Early Head Start home-based program.

The father of the unborn child, Fred, does not want Darlene to seek outside support. He is a chain smoker and smokes cigarettes in their one bedroom apartment. Although Darlene has explained the effects of second-hand smoke on unborn children, he doesn't believe it. He says that she is getting that 'garbage' from the wrong people. That is why he does not want her to participate in any of those kinds of community service programs.

When Fred gets home from work, he demands his dinner and all of Darlene's attention. This is why Darlene works part-time. Fred has occasionally slapped Darlene and he is verbally abusive. Recently, he has exhibited behavior that makes Darlene think he may do more than just slap her next time. She has gotten domestic violence information and support through the Early Head Start Program. She is very aware of what she needs to do to keep her and her unborn child safe but she doesn't feel that she can support herself if she leaves Fred.

Then one day it happened. Fred punched Darlene in the face and kicked her. Darlene knew she had to leave. She went to live with Stella, her cousin, and Stella's family where there was sufficient space and everyone had a comfortable living arrangement.

## Darlene: Do the Activity

**Question:** Are Darlene and her baby living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe they are, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe they are not, share your thoughts in the box.

A large empty rectangular box for writing, with a small drawing of a lit lightbulb in the top left corner.

➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition – Darlene - Do the Activity.*** Find out which answer is correct.

## Olivia and Tony

Last year, Marissa Preston found herself without a job. She is a single mother raising two children: a 4-year-old daughter, Olivia, and an 11-year-old son Tony. When she found it increasingly difficult to find a job, she decided to move to another state.

Before making the move, Marissa discussed the situation with her mother. After coming to a mutual agreement, Marissa sent Olivia and Tony to live with her mother (the children's grandmother). Marissa thought it would allow her the opportunity to focus on job hunting and securing a job. After she relocated to a new state, she was successful in her quest to find a job. Marissa has not sent for her children. They continue to live with their grandmother.

## Olivia and Tony: Do the Activity

**Question:** Are Olivia and Tony living in a homeless situation?

**Your Task:** If you believe they are, share your thoughts in the box.  
If you believe they are not, share your thoughts in the box.



A large empty rectangular box for writing an answer. In the top left corner of the box, there is a simple line drawing of a lit lightbulb with rays emanating from it, symbolizing an idea or thought.

➡ Go to ***Interactive Homelessness Lesson 1: Definition – Olivia and Tony - Do the Activity***. Find out which answer is correct.

## Key Points about the Definition of Homelessness

The key point of this lesson was to become familiar with the McKinney-Vento definition and its relationship to Head Start and homelessness. There are three key reasons why understanding the definition is so important for Head Start staff:

- First, the very same definition is now included in the 2007 Head Start Act. Children who meet the definition of homelessness are now automatically eligible for Head Start. This means that homeless status, rather than income, makes families eligible for Head Start.
- In addition, Head Start is required to identify and prioritize the enrollment of children who meet the homeless definition, and remove barriers to their enrollment and participation in Head Start. This cannot occur without a firm grasp of who meets the definition of homelessness.
- And finally, it is critical for Head Start staff to understand the definition of homelessness because of the significant hardships and harm to child and family development caused by homelessness. In particular, children in homeless situations are at great risk for developmental delays, social and emotional problems, and chronic health problems.

In conclusion, Head Start is uniquely poised to assist children and families experiencing homelessness, but the first step in doing so is to understand the different kinds of living situations that are considered homeless and truly understanding how the definition of homelessness applies to Head Start.

***Remember that serving children experiencing homelessness is crucial to our mission of serving the neediest children in our country. Together let's continue to make Head Start and Early Head Start a reality for as many families in homeless situations as we can.***

***-Office of Head Start***

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of the *Interactive Homelessness Lessons* was a collaborative project. The overarching goal, *to create a knowledge base with which Head Start and Early Head Start staff who work with families could enhance their skills and knowledge as it relates to their work with families experiencing homelessness*, was achieved through mutual sharing of ideas, time and an enormous amount of effort.

The Homelessness Workgroup played an integral role to ensure that the experiences in each lesson were far-reaching and all encompassing. The Homelessness Workgroup includes a dynamic group of knowledge experts: Kiersten Beigel (Federal Lead), Marco Beltran, Diana Bowman, Jacqueline Davis, Mary Lynne Diggs, Barbara Duffield, Shirley Fan-Chan, Carolyn Garmise, Khari Garvin, Christina Murphy, Tamara Perez, Mary Vanderwert, Sheri Watkins, and Grace Whitney.

A great debt of gratitude is extended to the Head Start/Early Head Start programs, local homeless liaisons, and Baltimore City Schools who allowed us to interview and chronicle their processes, strategies and ideas in the lessons and, in some cases, permitted their forms and other documents to be used as samples.

The Workgroup also extends a warm and sincere thank you to Yvonne Andersen and Sara Villavicencio who shared their personal experiences with homelessness, and to the staff who supported them, Kim Garcia and Dora McKean.

The Workgroup commends the Head Start Knowledge and Information Management Services (HSKIMS) team who videotaped, formatted, and designed the lessons for use on the Web.

You are encouraged to explore all that this dynamic resource has to offer.

*Thank you*