

# Homelessness Online Lessons

## Training Resources

### Lesson 3: Identification and Outreach

## **Resources included:**

- Legal Definition of Homelessness
- Ideas and Procedures
- Contacts
- Locations for Outreach
- Key Points About Identification and Outreach

## 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?*

**What is the meaning of fixed, regular, and adequate?**

**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.

*What is substandard housing?*

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Excerpt from The Office of Head Start Policy Clarification (OHS-PC- I-0) states:

“...In determining whether a child is living in "substandard housing", Head Start staff must evaluate whether the child's housing situation falls short of community standards or is of lower quality than the law prescribes. Staff should consider factors such as whether there are health and safety concerns related to the housing; the number of occupants per square foot; the age(s) of the occupants; and whether the housing meets State or local building codes. Does a comparison of the housing in question with community norms and laws lead staff to conclude that it is lower than what community norms or laws require?...”

Informal Guidance, May 8, 2008

## Ideas and Procedures

Ideas	Procedures
<p>Educate Head Start staff, community partners, and government-level partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage training and awareness activities including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Learning opportunities for outreach staff that will enable them to identify and assist families experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>○ Training and awareness activities on (1) the definition and (2) signs of homelessness for program staff, including administrators, bus drivers, family support staff, social workers, teachers, and others.</li> <li>○ How to use sensitivity and discretion in following up on answers to questions.</li> <li>○ Avoiding the use of the word “homeless.” Exercise sensitivity when talking with parents and youth, who often are afraid to identify themselves as homeless due to fears of stigma or negative repercussions.</li> <li>○ Cross-training in the larger early childhood system to spread the same message that Head Start personnel are spreading and to increase cross-referrals. Educate partners, such as the McKinney-Vento liaison and families in homeless situations, to understand the McKinney-Vento Act and how it relates to Head Start. Partner with local school systems and help them understand Head Start enrollment requirements.</li> <li>○ Making staff aware of regulations and operating procedures, such as closing times or lights-out and meal schedules, of shelters and other organizations serving families in homeless situations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provide outreach materials and activities including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information on priority enrollment for children experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>○ Asking about housing status as part of the standard enrollment process.</li> <li>○ Outreach materials and posters where there is a frequent influx of families and youth in high-risk situations, including: low-cost motels; campgrounds; laundromats; libraries; social service agencies; and youth centers.</li> <li>○ Reaching out to unaccompanied homeless youth who are pregnant or parenting by collaborating with street outreach teams, drop-in centers, and youth shelters, and by working to build trust with young people.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ask the community for help. Contact local agencies to seek</li> </ul>

Ideas	Procedures
	<p>their collaboration in identifying and serving homeless children and youth, including: faith-based organizations; food banks; homeless continuum of care; Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs); housing and public health departments and programs; homeless coalitions; shelters; and soup kitchens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask families for help. Families can share information, for example, by word of mouth and by posting outreach materials where their peers will see them.</li> <li>• Ask school district liaisons for help. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every school district is required to designate a homeless liaison. The McKinney-Vento Act requires liaisons to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies. Contact local school districts to obtain the name of the state homeless education coordinator or liaison.</li> </ul>
Outreach materials and posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave materials and posters where there are low-income families (e.g., shelters, campgrounds, motels, public housing projects, laundromats, libraries, social service agencies).</li> <li>• Describe different living arrangements that qualify as homeless situations. Not all families who are experiencing homelessness think of themselves as “homeless”.</li> <li>• Keep the materials well stocked.</li> <li>• Include information on rights, who is considered homeless, and a local number to call.</li> <li>• Participate in fairs and activities that are specific to homeless populations.</li> <li>• Place materials in work rooms at hotels, cafeterias, restaurant kitchens and other job locations where parents in homeless situations may work (remember families in homeless situations may have jobs but no home to go to after work).</li> </ul>
Awareness activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide awareness activities for the community, infant, toddler, and preschool environments, and school staff through professional development training sessions. Include a list of local service providers such as food banks, clothing providers, and medical, dental, and counseling resources.</li> <li>• Conduct family nights to offer health checks, services, and resources.</li> <li>• Invite service agency personnel and homeless families to help conduct sensitivity training for school staff including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Registrars</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Ideas	Procedures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Secretaries</li> <li>○ School counselors</li> <li>○ School social workers</li> <li>○ School nurses</li> <li>○ Teachers</li> <li>○ Bus drivers</li> <li>○ Administrators</li> <li>○ Attendance officers</li> <li>● Include training on (1) the definition and (2) how to recognize common signs of homelessness.</li> <li>● Visit sites where homeless families live.</li> <li>● Conduct parent outreach sessions at facilities, such as shelters and motels, where there are families in homeless situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bring awareness of the value of Head Start.</li> <li>○ Provide informational materials about the programs and services available.</li> <li>○ Include materials in various languages.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Set up recruitment hubs at places where families experiencing homelessness might be. For example, create a mini recruitment fair at shopping malls or stores, check-cashing facilities, Goodwill clothing depots, soup kitchens, libraries, fast-food restaurants, etc. Set-up and staff tables to reach children and families in untraditional places for recruitment, but common to where families in homeless situations may gather.</li> </ul>
Procedures and paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● During enrollment and intake, use sensitive techniques to identify families experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>● Collaborate to design a universal referral form that can be used across programs (e.g., a streamlined referral form that has contact information for each agency).</li> <li>● Share applications to ensure that all collaborating agencies are represented (e.g., Head Start staff visiting a family shelter would not leave only Head Start applications but also information about local liaisons).</li> </ul>
Continuity of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Make a referral for older children to the local homelessness liaison.</li> </ul>
Avoid using the term “homeless”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoid using the word “homeless.” Exercise sensitivity when talking with parents and youth, who often are afraid to identify themselves as homeless due to fears of stigma or negative repercussions.</li> <li>● The term “homeless” is not always associated with children. Ask people if they know families who are:</li> </ul>

Ideas	Procedures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Staying temporarily with relatives or another family,</li> <li>○ Staying at campgrounds or in their car,</li> <li>○ Living at motels, or</li> <li>○ Moving several times a year.</li> </ul>
Information fliers, brochures, newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop fliers and brochures about your program and disseminate them to agencies and facilities serving families who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Include information about the educational, health, and development needs of children and strategies to meet those needs.</li> <li>● Consider having a focus group with families experiencing homelessness to discuss whether your materials would attract them.</li> </ul>
Use databases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sort by children's addresses to identify doubled-up situations.</li> </ul>
Home visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct home visits to determine doubled-up situations.</li> </ul>

## Contacts

Who To Contact	Examples	Do This...
Low-cost motels and campgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park rangers</li> <li>• Managers of motels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform them of school services that are available to children experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>• Leave written materials, including minimum age eligibility information, for the families that stay there.</li> <li>• Include contact information for your program.</li> <li>• Ask them to help identify and contact you regarding families experiencing homelessness.</li> </ul>
Agencies that work with families in homeless situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Homeless Task Force</li> <li>• Homeless coalitions</li> <li>• Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlist these community-based groups as partners in the identification of children who are in homeless situations.</li> </ul>
Community and social service agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food banks</li> <li>• Faith-based organizations</li> <li>• Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care</li> <li>• Community resource coordination groups</li> <li>• Housing and public health departments and programs</li> <li>• Homeless coalitions</li> <li>• Shelters</li> <li>• Soup kitchens</li> <li>• Drop-in centers</li> <li>• Welfare and housing agencies</li> <li>• Nonprofit agencies</li> <li>• Police or sheriff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact local agencies and ask their assistance in identifying and referring families in homeless situations, particularly families who may not fit the traditional definition of homelessness.</li> <li>• Make the State Department of Social Services aware of the eligibility requirements for Head Start.</li> </ul>
Local Education Agencies (LEA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local liaisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage them to carry Head Start applications.</li> </ul>
Families in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families who may be sharing their home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When doing outreach, find out if families are sharing their home or have other families living in their garage or guesthouse.</li> </ul>

## Locations for Outreach

Note: You may want to conduct initial intake at these locations.

Locations	Examples	Do This...
Community service agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelters</li> <li>• Soup kitchens</li> <li>• Food banks</li> <li>• Transitional living programs</li> <li>• Street outreach teams</li> <li>• Drop-in centers</li> <li>• Community action agencies</li> <li>• Welfare departments</li> <li>• Housing departments</li> <li>• Public health departments</li> <li>• Community health centers</li> <li>• Medical clinics</li> <li>• Hospitals</li> <li>• Faith-based organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up meetings to begin to collaborate on issues such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identification of families in homeless situations</li> <li>○ Head Start enrollment process</li> <li>○ Transportation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Tell them about your Head Start program and what it has to offer.</li> <li>• Ask them to provide referrals.</li> <li>• Provide outreach materials and posters in several languages.</li> <li>• Place streamlined referral forms throughout the community. Include contacts for each program on the form and use the same form for various programs.</li> </ul>
Places with low-income families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public laundry facilities</li> <li>• Migrant housing developments</li> <li>• Low-income neighborhoods</li> <li>• Public housing complexes</li> <li>• Libraries</li> <li>• Social service agencies</li> <li>• Community events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop relationships with people who operate services or programs in these areas or who use the services.</li> <li>• Provide outreach materials and posters in several languages.</li> </ul>
Shelters and transitional housing facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motels and hotels</li> <li>• Shelters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to staff about your program's services, enrollment processes, and eligibility requirements.</li> <li>• Offer family nights to provide information and resources.</li> <li>• Be available for outreach following natural disasters when there might be many displaced families.</li> </ul>
Local daycare centers and preschools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships and collaborate to identify families in homeless situations.</li> </ul>

## **Key Points About Identification and Outreach**

In this lesson, you have begun to plan how you will identify and reach out to families experiencing homelessness. This entails:

- Gathering your ideas and determining procedures to implement those ideas;
- Listing people and places to contact;
- Targeting locations to conduct outreach activities;
- Determining a timeline; and
- Preparing outreach materials.

As a final thought, the face of homelessness has changed. Where they live, what they do, and how they look is different. The general notion of homelessness is no more. Homeless families are hiding behind the rest of the population as they don't want to be identified.

This makes the identification and outreach difficult. For this reason, we as Head Start professionals must work collectively to find these families.