80 advocates for young children experiencing homelessness came together in the BELL Symposium to learn and share experiences aimed at improving the health, education, and well-being of children in Philadelphia.

The advocates came from both the emergency housing and early learning systems.

The Symposium featured two sessions. The first session featured Jeanette Cole, Manager, Behavioral Health at PEC, leading a discussion on the "Effects of Homelessness on Child Development: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)." The session was highly interactive with much discussion on how to recognize and better understand stressors and adversity from a child's lens of experience. Also included, was a presentation delivered by Bethany Watson, PhD candidate of The University of Pennsylvania, on how knowledge of adverse childhood experiences can be integrated into the delivery of trauma informed systems of care within emergency/transitional housing programs. She highlighted positive behavior strategies staff can use with young children, as well as the importance of prioritizing moments of self-care every day.

The second session was entitled "Family Homelessness and Resilience: Stories from the Field," and featured two leaders who overcame experiencing homelessness to develop successful careers in the housing and early childhood systems, and two youth who are developing their own adverse childhood experiences (ACES) survey for high schools.

Ms. Ineeze Gainey was four-years old when she came to PEC with her family. She described a wonderful experience that featured a welcoming reception and lots of activities. Imbued with a passion to help others, Ineeze explained that she wanted to become a teacher and work with children. Her mother's strength during their time in shelter continued to inspire her throughout her life. She knew she wanted to help provide the circle of love and trust she felt in her childhood to other children in West...
Ineeze Gainey is a successful child care program owner in Philadelphia. She is now the owner of her own child care programs which have achieved the highest quality rating, further demonstrating her passion to help children grow and thrive. She also has a fabulous book. Check it out on Amazon.

**Ms. Tambra Hall** is the Youth and Family Service Coordinator at Stenton Family Manor. She spoke passionately about her stay at Stenton many years ago. She said that this experience helps her to establish relationships with the current residents. She emphasized the importance of making sure residents know that she understands what they are going through and that at Stenton *there is no judgement here.* She described the importance of transparency when working with vulnerable populations, and that no person is above an experience of homelessness. It could happen to anyone, she said.

Anwar Jones and Jaden Molett described their project of having 250 students complete an **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) survey.** They hope to soon provide a “teach back” moment to their school’s teachers so they can better understand the various experiences of their students and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. The students described how working with their peers to identify challenging moments in their lives, helped themselves to reconcile some of their own experiences and begin the process of healing.

We thank The Salvation Army Eastern PA and Delaware Division and the Red Shield Family Residence for hosting the Symposium and for achieving 150 years of service.
It's a Date!

Sometimes you have to have fun!

We are very serious about connecting young children to early learning programs. But we can have fun while we work hard.

BELL hosted its first Valentine's Day Social as part of its Meet and Greet series, bringing together both housing and non-housing staff.

The social was jump started by a distinct "Speed Dating" event! Both housing and early learning community staff engaged each other before determining which "dater"(s) they would like to continue a conversation with after the meeting about how best to connect young children who experience homelessness to high quality early learning programs. The first speed dating duo to continue their conversation, and share it with BELL, receive a BELL swag bag! Afterwards, we received the phone call of a successful connection!

Kudos to our speed dating champs: Charlene Heeney, Community Involvement Specialist, Health Federation and Hillary Davala, Youth Advocate, Drueing Center. Charlene emailed us stating "We shared emails prior to the event but never met each other in person! We were able to meet up on 2/28 and discuss the partnership our organizations have and how we can expand our partnership and work even more closely to provide high quality services to families from Drueing that qualify for Early Head Start! It was a successful, fun and informative meeting! In addition to us, we had representatives from each of our organizations present so we were able to really connect and put some faces to names, get input and discuss program information!"

Speed Dating was followed by an invitation to participate in our Self-Care Room, BELL's response to work-place compassion fatigue. BELL strategically set up eight (8) stations whereby participants could freely explore a variety of work-place self-care options. BELL left no stone...marble, bubble, night mask, photo opportunity, or dance floor!... unturned! We laughed; some cried; we gave ourselves permission to try something new, and to have fun in the process!

We were delighted to have in our...
midst Liz Hersh, Director, Office of Homeless Services. Liz addressed the team, offering encouragement to continue working hard for children.

And, BELL thanks Teresa Mansell and Childspace West for using their space. Teresa did all of the logistical legwork!

Yay Babies Awarded To Nicol Moody of Families Forward Philadelphia

BELL honored Nicol Moody and her Education team with
Nicol and her team of Shante Quartlebaum, Laura Brown and others work consistently with the BELL Project to ensure that all children birth through 5 at Families Forward Philadelphia are connected to a high quality early education program. She frequently requests meetings and phone calls to discuss early childhood education (ECE) programs her families are already enrolled in, to determine if they are high quality and a good fit for that particular family.

She also encourages families experiencing confusion with the child care information system to reach out to BELL for further technical assistance. Nicol and her team have always attended the trainings and workshops BELL offers, such as navigating the state's COMPASS system for child care and deepening an understanding of adverse childhood experiences to better adapt trauma informed systems of care for shelter living. Throughout her career, Nicol has maintained a commitment to the children experiencing homelessness in West Philadelphia and we are honored to have the opportunity to acknowledge her and her team's dedication to facilitating educational success for those children every day.

**BELL Stories**

**BELL Story #1: Partnerships!**

**Challenge:** While visiting an emergency housing program in March, a BELL ECE Specialist learned that a mom had been on a program’s waiting list for 2 months. She asked the parent a few questions and found out that the parent had done everything necessary to enroll, but no one knew why the child was wait listed for so long.

**Resolution:** The housing staff, mom, and the ECE Specialist conferenced as a group, but reached an impasse. The next step was to communicate with the headquarters of this early learning program. The BELL ECE Specialist spoke with an agency leader, resulting in the child being able to enroll into an open slot at a nearby school, solving a potential transportation challenge! Partnerships at its best!

**Story #2: Providing Respite**

Recently, a BELL ECE Specialist had an opportunity to participate in an emergency housing program’s (EH) "Book and Make" activity! This activity was held during the evening hours so that parents and children could bond. The EH program provided a free
book, mini cupcakes, and an arts and crafts activity that both the parent and child could participate in. This opportunity created a nice family-friendly moment whereby everyone was free to do as much or as little as they wanted. During the activity the BELL ECE Specialist was able to connect with a mom who had two children under the age of five. Mom reported that both children have IEP's with a diagnosis of ADHD, behavioral concerns, speech and developmental delays (mom shared that each are two years behind developmentally) and one is on the autism spectrum. While mom is loving and attentive the BELL ECE Specialist observed that she needed support, skills and resources. When asked if she was given any strategies to help increase her son's language abilities, the parent replied "No." After inquiring about supports, the ECE specialist continue to connect with the family throughout the event and modeled engagement strategies for reading with her children. Both the mom and children responded positively to the engagement with the ECE specialist, and the specialist was happy to provide a moment of respite in the midst of these challenges. We look forward to opportunities to continue engaging with families in this way.

BELL Included in Zero To Three Journal

The national journal Zero To Three dedicated its March journal to address the needs of young children experiencing homelessness. It includes an article on the Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) project at PEC.

Read more here.

Our friend Grace Whitney of SchoolHouse Connection co-edited the journal. She writes in her intro:

"On my refrigerator is a photo of my parents' kitchen which still brings a visceral sense of belonging, of safety, of respite, and of hope. One's personal sense of home is etched early into the architecture of the brain, along with the deeply felt sense of security and belonging, or the lack of thereof. Homelessness stands in stark contrast to the image of home as refuge and safety, yet resources for families can be scarce and inadequate. From the perspective of the baby, it is vital to move away from definitions of homelessness that are based on shifting funding priorities and embrace a deeper understanding of homelessness as defined by how a child's environment provides, or fails to provide, the stable and nurturing home and relationships that are necessary to thrive."
Included in the March edition are contributions from PEC friends Marsha Basloe, JJ Cutuli, Ilene Henderson, Janette Herbers, and Sara Shaw.

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**Save the Dates - May 23 and September 16, 2019**

**BELL Summit:** Dr. Deborah Bergeron has agreed to keynote the summit on child homelessness and high quality early learning!

The summit will be in Philadelphia on Monday, September 16, 2019.

The audience for this includes homeless housing and early learning communities from southeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and Delaware.

The tri-state summit's purpose is to strengthen collaborations to increase access to high quality early learning programs for young children experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and Delaware.

Registration information will be sent out this Spring.

**BELL Training:** "How They Learn and Grow: What You Should Know (Developmental Milestones for Children 0-5 years old". This will be on Thursday - May 23, 2019, 9:30 a.m. to noon. Continental breakfast served. Location TBD.

The audience for this training are staff and parents of emergency / transitional housing and early learning program staff.

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**Location Change for Children's Work Group Early Childhood Meeting**

The April meeting will be located at the People's Emergency Center's Community Room, 325 N. 39th Street.

[Register here.](#)

Agenda includes planning the BELL Summit and developing a story book of young children experiencing homelessness.

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The Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program™ is dedicated to helping provide young children the opportunity to grow, thrive and learn in communities near each of Vanguard's major U.S. sites. The initiative is funded through a combination of Vanguard corporate gifts and Vanguard employee gifts from the company’s annual giving campaign.

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