



BrainGain@PEC

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BrainGain@PEC provides brief summaries and announcements of research or publications on family homelessness and related issues for the Philadelphia homeless services community. In 2016, PEC will provide a series focused on the intersection of the homeless housing system and preschool education in support of the “**Building Early Links to Learning**” Project (BELL). Previous issues of BrainGain@PEC can be found at <http://bit.ly/1JQKdYw>.

What affects parental preschool choices among families experiencing homelessness?

Annually, there are more than 2,000 children ages 0-5 who experience homelessness in Philadelphia.

Research demonstrates that young children living in emergency or transitional housing are more likely than their peers to experience an array of other risk factors including birth risks, maternal risks, and poor physical and mental health. The combination of these risks, coupled with the experience of being homeless is associated with poor developmental and educational well-being outcomes.



Experiences of homelessness in very early childhood are associated with poor early development and educational well-being. Experiences of homelessness during infancy and toddlerhood are associated with poor academic achievement and engagement in elementary school (Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2010).

Additionally, experiences of homelessness are associated with social emotional delays among young children (Haskett, et al, 2015) and poor classroom-based social skills in elementary school (Brumley, Fantuzzo, Perlman, & Zager, 2015). These findings underscore the importance of ensuring that young children who are homeless have access to known protective factors.

High quality early childhood services contribute to narrowing the achievement gap prior to kindergarten. These experiences promote the development of essential cognitive, social-emotional, and learning behavior competencies necessary for early school success. Furthermore, they offer the parents of these young children opportunities to actively engage in their children's education - a core component to long-term educational well-being.

What do we know about the choices that parents make?

Researchers from The Cloudburst Group interviewed 28 families who were homeless and published results in their report ***A Qualitative Assessment of Parental Preschool Choices and Challenges Among Families Experiencing Homelessness***. The report was written by Lindsey Stillman, Kate Hurd, Charles Kieffer, Jamie Taylor, Britton Gibson of The Cloudburst Group. See <http://www.cloudburstgroup.com/> for additional information.

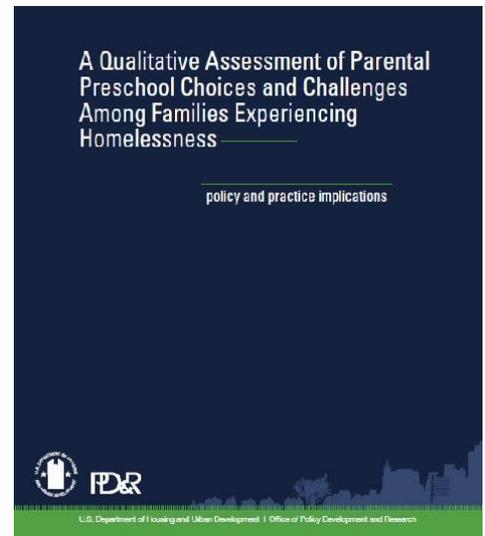


Read the full report at <http://bit.ly/1NqAYGu>.

Abstract: Quality preschool education has a critical effect on later academic success, yet only a small percentage of young children experiencing homelessness are enrolled in preschool and little is known about the challenges and decision-making processes that affect these children's participation in preschool. This paper responds to this knowledge gap.

The report includes:

- The impact of housing stability on preschool enrollment
- Parental reflections on experience with early learning environments
- A discussion on the systemic barriers and facilitators to preschool enrollment and participation
- Influential factors in preschool choice
- A theoretical model of parental preschool choice
- Implications for policy and practice, including suggestions on how to increase collaborative partnerships between homeless service providers and educators.



Summary of Findings

- 61% enrolled in formal early education program (pre-school or Head Start)
- Competing demands:
 - Parents wanted to secure housing before they could think about preschool
- Mobility/Location
 - Multiple moves lead to multiple changes in preschool programs
 - Some specifically looked for housing based on location of quality preschools
- Variability in assistance from families – some had support from other parent, some did not
- Most parents were happy with early education providers
- Barriers:
 - Waiting lists
 - Difficult to find out about open slots and how to navigate getting one
 - Some parents said they find out information about programs too late to enroll child, or at the wrong time of year – which makes it difficult to secure a spot when it is unclear about what time of a year a move may occur
 - Costs and Schedule: Looking for free/inexpensive programs that also hold extended hours – difficult to find
 - Paperwork
 - Lack of communication with the schools
 - Transportation:
 - Expensive to drop child off/ take bus to and from
 - Trauma: Many parents expressed fear of getting to their children in a timely fashion if not in walking distance
- How do parents find programs?
 - Most find programs incidentally – by walking by, or through own internet search
 - Less than 50% said housing provider helped
 - Very little help from school McKinney-Vento Liaison
 - Local service agencies: ½ said they only helped for programs located around the shelter, and were not helpful when the family had to move. However, others said they were very helpful
- Priorities
 - Location: Wanted to be close in case of emergency
 - Parents concerned about cost and safety of program

About:

Homeless advocates, early childhood educators, and developmental scientists are leading a project to support young children experiencing homelessness called **Building Early Links for Learning** (BELL). The two main goals are to enhance the developmental friendliness of emergency housing, and to increase by 20 percent the participation of young homeless children into Head Start, PA Pre-K Counts, and high quality child care in Philadelphia.

BELL partners are the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing, People's Emergency Center, Public Health Management Organization, researchers from Villanova University, Rutgers University-Camden, University of Delaware, and the Cloudburst Group, and the Children's Workgroup-Early Childhood Committee. The project is funded by a grant from the William Penn Foundation.

All inquiries can be sent to policy@pec-cares.org.