

BELL Newsletter:

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February 2019

BELL Releases Year-One Report

PEC is making available a report on BELL's first year of operations.

[Read the report here.](#)



Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) aims to support the healthy development of children ages 0-5 experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia by linking the emergency / transitional housing homeless system (EH) with the early learning community (ECE) to promote resilience by easing access to high quality early learning programs.

Highlights include:

- 60 percent of all parents in 18 programs engaged in discussion of child development and accessing high quality early education, matching the project's goal.
- 12 housing programs completed an annual self-assessment measuring how well the agency was supporting child development.
- Partnerships or linkages formed between the homeless housing and early learning systems by creating lines of communications, providing trainings, organizing networking opportunities, and advocating for expanding resources.



Yay Babies Awarded

to Olivia Hamilton

January's Yay Babies Award recipient was awarded to **Olivia Hamilton**, case manager for Women Against Abuse (WAA).

Olivia tackles barriers she encounters that hinder the children at WAA from getting connected to high quality child care. We observe Olivia as a quiet force, who is communicative and results oriented. BELL is proud to partner with Olivia to help families get connected to high quality early learning experiences as soon as possible.



l.-r., Olivia Hamilton, BELL's Dawn Nock

Developmental Friendliness of Emergency Housing Environments

One of the major goals of the BELL Project is to increase the developmental friendliness of housing program environments.

In 2016, BELL implemented the use of ACF's **Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters** in each of our 18 partnered city contracted family emergency and transitional housing programs.

The tool gives shelter staff a concrete method to assess their program's ability to serve the developmental needs of children birth through five years old. The BELL team serves as technical assistance to shelter staff during the self-assessment process, helping staff to develop an action plan post-assessment to implement any identified improvements. Often, BELL is able to fund some of the shelter's identified needed items. Examples of funded items from past assessments include glider rocking chairs, sanitary diaper changing stations, and kid size furniture.

In 2018, BELL helped 12 shelters conduct their ACF Self-Assessments, with the means to fund small needed items at most sites.

Pictured is **Nicol Moody, Director of Education**, from **Families Forward Philadelphia**. Some items we were able to fund that was based on her program self-assessment included sensory toy sets, physically interactive video games, and new audio books with extra headphones, so groups of children can listen and read along together in the shelter's Bright Space room.

BELL plans to conduct the self-assessment once per year through 2020 at each of our partnered emergency and transitional sites to support housing program staff in meeting all developmental needs of the young children they serve.



l. to r., SDP's Yvone Davis, BELL's Sarah Vrabic



Nicol Moody of Families Forward

No February Children's Work Group Early Childhood gathering!

The next meeting will be

**Friday, March 15,
9:30 AM to 11:00 AM, at
CHOP Karabots Pediatric Center
4865 Market Street**



[Register to attend.](#)

1,392 Children Ages 0-5 Served by Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services

PEC's summarized report shows the total number of children and youth served by the Philadelphia Office

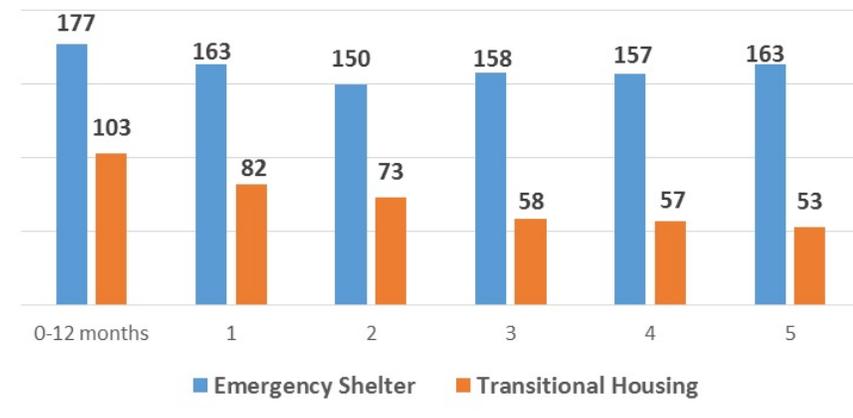
of Homeless Services (OHS) during Fiscal Year 2018, which includes those who are experiencing homelessness as well as those who are housed and residing in OHS-supported housing programs.

The summary also shows that:

- Overall, there were 2,749 in FY 2018 served in emergency or transitional housing programs. The FY 2018 numbers include:
 - 1,392 children ages 0-5, including 962 infants and toddlers ages 0-3,
 - 430 in the PreK-Kindergarten ages of 4 or 5.
 - 952 children ages 6 to 12.
 - 405 youth ages 13-17

[Read the report.](#)

Total # Children ages 0-5 Served in Emergency or Transitional Housing, By Age, FY 2018, Philadelphia



Advocacy Corner - Join *Start Strong PA*

Start Strong PA is a **statewide effort** working to improve healthy development outcomes **for infants and toddlers** by increasing support for and improving the quality of child care programs that serve them.

A child's earliest years feature the building of the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior and health depend. Supporting this progress are the parents. But in today's world, parents work, and when they do they need to know that the care for their infants and toddlers is elevating their child's potential.

"Don't agonize,
organize."

-Florynce Kennedy

Most people support a greater investment into high quality child care. An amazing [77 percent](#) of Philadelphia's voters identified "ensuring all children arrive in kindergarten ready to learn" as an important value.

Start Strong PA met on **January 29 in Harrisburg to begin the campaign**. Stay tuned for future action steps!

Individuals and **agencies** can join the campaign. [Sign up here.](#)



Strong Start PA Advocates for Early Childhood Investments

Villanova Seeks Parents

The **Parents and Children Together (PACT)** project is an NSF-funded, longitudinal study of strengths and challenges for **families with infants under the age of one who stay in emergency shelters or experience extreme poverty and residential mobility.**

We are child development researchers from **Villanova University**, focusing on the parent-infant relationship as a key protective factor to support resilient infant development. We are in the process of recruiting two groups for the study: a group of infants staying with their parents in shelters and a group of very low income infants and parents who live in similar neighborhoods.



At this point, we are beginning recruitment of our comparison (non-shelter) sample and looking to connect with **community partners** who can help reach out to eligible families. We are also looking for **locations** in the community where we could use some space to conduct our research sessions, such as child care centers, as we do not meet with families in their homes. We are looking for spaces that are accessible and comfortable for families to meet with us, and we can always adjust our schedules to accommodate the need of community partners. Sessions last about 1.5 to 2 hours, and participants can earn \$90 over the course of three sessions.

We would love to hear from you if you serve families with infants who might be interested in this project!

Contact Info: Dr. Janette Herbers and the PACT team: 484-297-9710, or janette.herbers@villanova.edu

As a Visiting Scholar with PEC, Dr. Janette Herbers from Villanova University has a strong history of collaboration with many of the family shelters in Philadelphia as well as the BELL Project, the Children's Work Group, and the Office of Homeless Services. Together with her students, she conducts research projects seeking to understand the strengths and challenges of young children who experience homelessness with their families and how programming and services can support resilience in child development.

PACT email: pactpractice@gmail.com



BELL is supported by grants from the Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program and the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey

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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