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May 2019

Action Steps Needed: Contact Your State Representative

Early childhood advocates are asking the state legislature for **\$50 million** increase in early learning programs.

This amount would ensure the healthy development of **10,000 infants and toddlers** through consistent routines and relationships by paying STAR 3 and 4 providers closer to the full cost of high-quality care

Practically each week since February , Strong Start PA has organized meetings with legislators from throughout the Commonwealth. PEC, BELL and others have been taking this message to state legislators since February. Recently, we met with Philadelphia representatives **Ed Neilson** and **Mike Driscoll**.

In addition to the General Fund request, Strong Start PA is asking legislators to:

1. Supporting the Governor's proposal to allocate federal funds in order to:
 - Ensure 970 additional infants and toddlers benefit from a quality educational foundation offered in a high-quality program
 - Increase quality by raising tiered reimbursement rates for STAR 2, 3, and 4 programs so that families have more access to high quality child care that they can afford
 - Provide infants and toddlers consistent routines and relationships by addressing workforce education and compensation



Advocates with Rep. Ed Neilson (center)



Advocates with Rep. Mike Driscoll (center)

ACTION STEPS: Contact your **State Representatives** today and urge them to support early learning. [Find your State Representative's contact information here.](#)

BELL Story #1: Modeling Behavior!

BELL Specialist joined an emergency housing program's "**Mommy and Me Group!**"

The focus of the meeting was "**Young Toddler Development: What's Typical and When To Be Concerned.**" It was one parent's 'a-ha' moment that turned the meeting into a modeling session!

Mom was concerned when she learned that the average vocabulary for a child her daughter's age was 20 words. Mom said her daughter spoke an average of 3-5 words. This made for the perfect teachable moment. We modeled together how we might increase her daughter's language skills through reading. We started with two books.

Mom was asked to have her daughter sit on her lap as she read to her. Reading to her daughter **seemed like a new experience** that Mom would need to get used to; you could barely hear her words. After mom finished reading her book, the Specialist asked if she could read a story to her daughter. The Specialist was animated and interactive while reading the story, often pointing to pictures, and interjecting open-ended questions about the story.

There were several "a-ha moments" that happened on this day. Establishing developmentally appropriate expectations were repeated areas of discussion with the parents in the group. The Specialist knew she was on common ground when talking with the parents about the child's 'attitude' could be 'learned behavior'.

Parents took-away **three goals:** (1) parents would spend 10 minutes each evening reading and talking with their children, (2) they would practice modeling self-regulation so their children could have model examples of how to manage their frustrations, and (3) use **bubbles** as a great calming tool for both children and adults!



BELL On the Road: Representing Philadelphia to Six PA Counties

BELL ECE Specialist **Sarah Vrabic** participated in a 'roundtable' called "Community Collaborations: Improving Services for Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness."

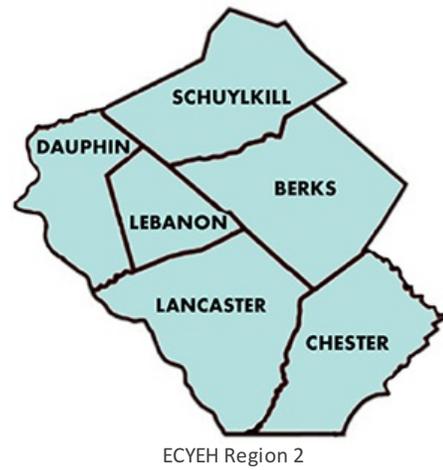
It was organized by the [PA Head Start State](#)

Six counties that neighbor Philadelphia were represented by multiple Head Start and emergency housing programs at this event held in Reading, PA. More than 60 homeless education and early childhood leaders attended.

Vrabic described BELL's current methods of facilitating connections between housing programs and high quality early learning programs. Examples shared included enrollment parties and organized forums discussing homelessness and child development for staff of housing and early learning agencies to both attend. The information was well received. For example, multiple Head Start programs said they would start putting up enrollment tables within their local family shelters to fill their empty slots with the children of most need.

It was helpful for BELL to gain enhanced perspective on other counties' approaches to reach children experiencing homelessness. It was gratifying to share some of the Project's success stories and how much we have accomplished so far in connecting the housing and early education systems in Philadelphia.

The PA Head Start State Collaboration Office works to create a visible partnership at the state level to support the development of multi-agency and public/private partnerships. The Collaboration Office is organizing Roundtables throughout Pennsylvania, helping to improve how Head Start and other early learning programs can offer their services to children experiencing homelessness.



BELL Story #2: Providing Quality Information

A family who has been living in emergency housing for a few months recently **welcomed a baby** into their family in the fall.

After spending time with the new infant, the mother decided it was time for her to **return** back to her **training program to earn** her Child Development Associates for Early Childhood Education.

The mom applied for child care, but her training program started the following week. This was a stressful situation for any mother; **who would help with her infant while she attended classes?**



The BELL ECE Specialist researched different options. The Specialist presented the mom with the option of using **YSI's Baring House** temporarily until she is able to place her infant into childcare. The Specialist suggested to the mom that she could visit the space so that she would feel comfortable before making a decision. After visiting, the mom decided to enter Baring House for a few weeks and it worked out perfectly. The mom **received her child care subsidy** soon afterwards and now her infant is receiving care in a Star 3 facility.

Take Survey on Generational Homelessness Among Young Families

Pregnancy and parenting among youth and young adults who experience homelessness is disproportionately high, and about 1.1 million children - infants, toddlers, and preschoolers - have a young parent who experienced homelessness in the past year.



Thanks to generous support from the **Walter S. Johnson**

Foundation, SchoolHouse Connection, is embarking upon a new project to determine the most effective activities we can undertake to disrupt generational homelessness among young families.

Building on our existing work in early childhood, prek-12, higher education, state policy, housing, and unaccompanied youth, the result of this project will be a research-based national action plan to promote authentic two-generation approaches that focus equally and intentionally on the child and the parent.

If you are currently serving young families experiencing homelessness, **please consider completing our brief survey on the barriers, strengths, and strategies you see in this work**, and the resources that would be most helpful to you.

[Take the brief survey.](#)

Lisa Pilnik, JD, MS of Child and Family Policy Associates is the lead researcher. For more information, contact her at Lisa@childfamilypolicy.com. Learn more at www.childfamilypolicy.com.

BELL Story #3: Struggle with Staying in High Quality ECE

BELL recently encountered a parent with two children **enrolled in one of Philadelphia's top high quality early learning programs**.

Mom knew her children were receiving some of the best early childhood education this city has to offer and she expressed gratitude and relief that their educational life would remain stable and secure throughout the transitions they were experiencing outside of school.

Her children's program, like many high quality ECE's, charge an **extra fee each month** on top of Mom's reduced payments determined by her Child Care Information Service (CCIS) subsidy. Since staying in shelter, these extra payments began to pile up as Mom was struggling to make ends meet. The BELL ECE Specialist tried to negotiate with CCIS and even reached out to potential donors to see if someone would sponsor just a portion of Mom's rising costs. Unfortunately, the search bore no fruit. Mom greatly appreciated the efforts and understood there was never a guarantee of that kind of financial support.

She has now taken on extra shifts at work and is hoping her tax return will be able to supplement some of what she owes. She expressed determination in finding the strength within to work even harder to ensure her children do not have to experience yet another transition. This is an inspiring sentiment considering she is simultaneously attempting to find safe housing for her family, all while parenting alone.

As of today, her story has no resolution. The story only serves as an example of a parent's willingness to stop at no ends in order to cultivate the best life for her children. It serves as a reminder to all of us how truly precious an education is and how much the families we serve sacrifice for their children.



Upcoming Events

BELL is organizing an **'Express Training'** for staff and parents of emergency and transitional housing and early learn staff.

The training is called "*How They Learn and Grow: What You Should Know About Developmental Milestones for Children 0-5 years of age.*"

This training is scheduled for Friday, May 31, 9:30 AM to 12 Noon.



Dr. Deborah Bergeron

BELL Summit: Dr. Deborah Bergeron, the director of the national Head Start office in Washington, DC, has agreed to keynote the BELL Summit called: *Young Children Experiencing Homelessness: Educate. Collaborate. Inspire.* **Mark your calendar for Monday, September 16, 2019.**

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

Registration information will be sent out this spring.



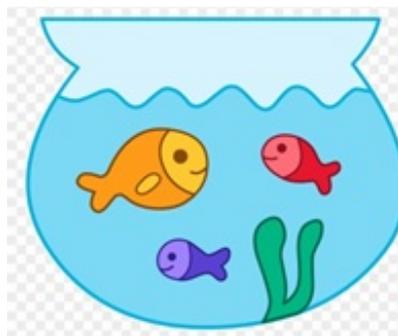
Children's Work Group Early Childhood Meeting

The May meeting will be Friday, **May 17**, 9:30 AM to 11 AM, located at the **CHOP Karabots Pediatric Center, 4846 Market Street, 2nd floor.**



[Register here.](#)

The Agenda includes a session on **hearing from the education liaisons** of the emergency housing programs. We will use a 'fishbowl' format. We hope to discuss what their typical day is like, what barriers they face, and what works for them. This should be fun and very instructive.



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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