This study was conducted by The Triskele Consulting Group under a sub-contract from the People’s Emergency Center, funded by the William Penn Foundation. For further information about this report, please contact Maureen Hayes at mhayes@thetriskelegroup.com
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Family Permanent Supportive Housing and Early Childhood Education: A Needs Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Although stable and quality education has been recognized as critical to achieve positive outcomes for homeless school-aged children, relatively little is known about the role of early education among children ages 0-5 who have experienced homelessness. This is particularly concerning because more than half of children in homeless families fall into this age range, and the successful attainment of developmental milestones during this phase in life is essential for healthy development into adulthood. The current report examines the challenges and needs of young children in the most vulnerable group among families that have been homeless: Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).

In fiscal year 2018, the Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS) maintained 698 units of PSH housing, managed by 21 non-profit providers. These programs served 281 children ages 0-5 among the 492 families residing in PSH. These young children represent 15% of all children served by OHS. For this needs assessment, 29 parents or guardians residing in PSH programs in Philadelphia participated in focus groups to discuss their experiences in accessing and utilizing quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs for their children ages 0-5. Additionally, focus groups or one-on-one conversations were conducted with staff from PSH programs to discuss their perspectives on the challenges facing residents with young children in finding and using ECE programs, as well as what is needed to increase enrollment ECE among families in PSH. Finally, a Point-In-Time-Survey was administered to family PSH programs to collect data on the number of PSH families with children ages 0-5, the number of PSH children receiving ECE, and the type of ECE programs that children are attending.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES IN PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

When examining the ECE needs of families in PSH, it is essential to do so with a lens that considers the unique experiences and challenges they face. Because PSH is designed for families with an adult or child with a disability, it provides housing for those who are among the most vulnerable not only in society, but also among the homeless population. It is important, therefore, to consider the characteristics of PSH families that are unique, even as compared to homeless families in Emergency or Transitional Housing. For example, the Services and Housing

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.

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Interventions for Families in Transition (SHIFT) Study\(^3\) examined long term outcomes for homeless families in different types of housing programs and found that PSH families had striking challenges, particularly in relation to mothers’ trauma and associated problems:

- 60% had been sexually assaulted as a child by a family member or known assailant (as compared to 34% of mothers in emergency housing and 46% in transitional housing)
- 60% met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD at move-in (as compared to 48% of mothers in emergency and transitional housing)
- 49% had a history of mental health hospitalization (as compared to 12% of those in emergency housing and 21% of those in transitional housing)
- 48% attended AA/NA (as compared to 15% of those in emergency housing and 28% in transitional housing)

Mother-child separations were also common among families in PSH. At PSH move-in, 73% of mothers had a child live apart from them at some point. In comparison, 56% of mothers in emergency shelter and 48% of those in transitional housing had been separated from a child. During the 30 months after entering PSH, 50% of the families had a child live apart, as compared to 36% of those in emergency shelter and 41% of those in transitional housing.

It was also found that children in PSH faced significant educational challenges. Among school age children, 42% were receiving special education services, as compared to 30% of children in both emergency shelter in transitional housing. Additionally, an astonishing 43% of children in PSH had repeated a grade, while 22% of children in emergency shelter and 18% of children in transitional housing had repeated a grade. In comparison, only 1.5% of children nationally experience grade retention\(^4\).

These challenges speak to the urgent need for stability and early interventions to develop resilience in these families and children. It is also imperative that the impact of the trauma experiences of mothers be incorporated into efforts to link their young children to ECE: survivors of trauma can be hypervigilant and have difficulty developing trusting relationships, which could complicate their efforts and willingness to engage with ECE programs.

**FOCUS GROUP DESIGN AND PROCEDURES**

The design of the focus groups was based upon an earlier needs assessment that was conducted with parents with children ages 0 – 5 who were residing in Emergency or Transitional Housing. That project was part of the Building Early Learning Links (BELL) project at People’s Emergency Shelter (PEC), which aims to improve the environments of emergency housing programs to better meet the developmental needs of young children, and to increase access to quality early education programs for families residing in these programs. The current project is expanding that work to examine the needs of families with young children in PSH.

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Recruitment of participants was conducted with a multi-pronged approach. The Project Director (Dr. Hayes) and Joe Willard of People’s Emergency Center (PEC) attended a Family Permanent Supportive Housing Provider Meeting in October, 2018, to discuss the project and request assistance with participant recruitment. A one-page description of the project and project schedule was provided. This was followed up by emails from Mr. Willard to reinforce the needs for program support in conducting the focus groups with parents. Mr. Willard also reached out to programs by phone to ask for their assistance with the parent focus groups, as well as to request participation in a PSH Provider focus group. To further aid recruitment, a flyer was provided to program staff to give to eligible parents that described the project.

Initially, only parents with children ages 0 – 5 were recruited for the focus groups. However, because recruitment was slow, eligibility was extended to parents of children age 6 as well, assuming they would have recent experiences with ECE programs. From December 2018 through February 2019, a total of 5 parent focus groups were scheduled; 4 groups were conducted (one scheduled group was canceled because no participants arrived). Participants resided in 17 different PSH programs. All groups lasted 60- 90 minutes, and were audio recorded. Participants were provided with pizza and beverages during the group, and were also given travel reimbursement as well as a $20 gift card for their participation. Additionally, childcare was provided by PEC during the groups.

Basic demographic information was collected before the discussion began. All of the participants were African-American, and none were Hispanic. They ranged in age from 19 to 62, and had children aged 2 months to 14 years old. They had resided in their PSH program for between 2 and 5 years.

One focus group was conducted with PSH providers, and two PSH program staff spoke individually with the Project Director. The Provider Group included 8 different programs, which provided a wide range of input and information. Food and beverages were provided during the group, and participants were given a $20 gift card.

**POINT-IN-TIME SURVEYS**

Twenty-one PSH programs serving families were asked to participate in a brief point-in-time survey to gather data about the number of families in PSH with young children and the ECE services they are using (Appendix 1). The survey was completed by 17 programs.

The information collected included the number of families with children ages 0-5 in the programs, the number of children aged 0-5 in programs, the types of ECE programs, if any, children were enrolled in, and the name of each program children were attending.
**Key Findings**

**Point in Time Surveys**

Table 1 presents a summary of the findings from the Point in Time Surveys regarding the number of young children in PSH, the rates of ECE enrollment, and the types of ECE programs being utilized by PSH families. It should be noted that data from the Office of Homeless Services indicates that in June 2019, a total of 221 children ages 0-5 resided in all PSH programs in Philadelphia. The 17 programs that participated in the Point-In-Time survey reported a total of 121 children ages 0-5 in their programs. Therefore, these findings represent approximately 55% of children residing in PSH.

Table 2 presents the specific programs children attend and their Keystone STAR ratings, which were retrieved on the state website: https://www.compass.state.pa.us. Only 7 different programs were reported; many PSH programs did not provide comprehensive data for this field, and therefore the information presented is only a partial representation of programs the children in PSH are attending.

The 17 participating programs reported there were a total of 86 families with 121 children between the ages of 0 and 5 residing in their PSH programs. Thirty-two percent of the children were ages 2 and younger, 30% were between the ages of 3 and 4, and 38% were age 5.
### Table 1. Point-In-Time Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Ages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 2 years</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- 4 years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Children Ages 0 – 5 years</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children ages 0-2 enrolled in ECE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Providing Care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visiting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*No information Provided</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children ages 3-4 enrolled in ECE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start or Early Head Start</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visiting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*No information Provided</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children age 5 enrolled in ECE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start or Early Head Start</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visiting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*No information Provided</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. PSH Family ECE Program Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Keystone STAR Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educare Learning Center, 3900 Monument Rd</td>
<td>4 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright Side Academy, 4829 Lancaster Ave</td>
<td>3 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elwyn, 4017 Ludlow St</td>
<td>4 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Charter Mann, 5376 W. Berks</td>
<td>1 Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APM Community Child Care Center, 2318 N. Marshall St</td>
<td>1 Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Barry Elementary School, Pre-k, 5900 Race St</td>
<td>No Keystone rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChildLink Early Intervention, 1500 Market Street</td>
<td>Not listed in Compass Database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1\(^5\) presents the rates of ECE enrollment of the children. Overall, more than half the children were not enrolled in ECE programs. The most common types of ECE programs utilized were Pre-K (18%), Kindergarten (13%), and Head Start/Early Head Start (10%). Daycare (7%), Home Visiting (3%), and Relative Providing Care (2%) were utilized the least.

---

\(^5\) “No Information Provided” data is not presented
Figure 2 presents the rates of enrollment in each type of ECE program by age. Among children ages 0 – 2, 77% of were not enrolled in ECE programs, as compared to 53% of children ages 3 – 4, and 11% of 5 year olds. Only 5% of children ages 0 – 2 were enrolled in daycare. For children ages 3 – 4, the most common type of ECE program was daycare (17%), followed by Head Start/Early Head Start (14%). Children aged 5 were most often enrolled in Pre-K (46%), with similar rates in Head Start (15%) and kindergarten (13%).

---

6 “No Information Provided” data is not presented
Parents and guardians were very forthcoming and eager to discuss their experiences in accessing early childhood education, their challenges in finding quality care, and the benefits they have derived from ECE. Following is a review of various themes that emerged from the groups, an in-depth review of a housing program that provides on-site ECE, and then an exploration of the pervasive safety concerns that were discussed at length by all parents and guardians.

**Importance of Early Learning**

Parents consistently reported a commitment to the education of their children, and a general understanding of the importance of Pre-K or Head Start as a necessity before entering kindergarten. Many also viewed ECE as important in providing support to parents:

> Education is first.

> [Head Start] is getting them ready for elementary.

> I want them to learn. I believe that I need help. You know, parenting is not easy. I’m a young mom. So I like them being in school. It helps me be able to know how to correspond, help my child with the things that they’re learning. When – especially, they’re young kids, 0-5 – they have so much to learn and the school helps.

> They helped me potty train her, they helped me understand certain things that maybe I couldn’t understand on my own, because they was with my child longer hours. They just help. Things I wasn’t there for, they was there for. So at home, I was able to keep up with things there were teaching my child.

> She was learning stuff. Certain stuff they would teach her at school, and I want to make sure I teach her the same thing that school was teaching her so that we can be on the same track, so I won’t confuse her.

“I want them to learn. I believe that I need help. You know, parenting is not easy. I’m a young mom. So I like them being in school. It helps me be able to know how to...help my child with the things that they’re learning. When – especially, they’re young kids, 0-5 – they have so much to learn and the school helps.”

~PSH Parent

“If you go to kindergarten and you don’t have the preschool or Head Start knowledge, you’re gonna be left behind the kids that did know that stuff. So that in kindergarten it’s harder for you to catch up, and then when all the other kids go to first grade, you’re gonna have to repeat kindergarten.”

~PSH Parent
The school that she’s in now [Head Start], I like it. I like it a lot actually. They teaching her to write her name, they do a lot with her, even though she don’t like doing none of this stuff. But they’re sitting there and they’re actually teaching her. And they will tell me how’s she’s doing every day, how she’s progressing. And they’ll be like, ‘Mom, can you just work with her on this, you know, when you get home.’

If you go to kindergarten and you don’t have the preschool or Head Start knowledge, you’re gonna be left behind the kids that did know that stuff. So that in kindergarten it’s harder for you to catch up and then when all the other kids go to first grade, you’re gonna have to repeat kindergarten.

Although the importance of education to child development was recognized, almost all parents and guardians reported that they first sought early childhood education because of employment. They also noted that childcare and education programs provided them with respite:

I had to work. I’d rather my child be in a learning facility than leave them at home with people that’s not doing anything, nothing beneficial. And then, the second time around [second child] was because I had to work, of course, but most importantly, the break. I just needed them to go to school. I just needed the break.

“Every time I went in the daycare center, they were asleep or they was playing. Where are the books at? Where’s the hokey pokey at? Where’s the sharing? In daycare, it’s supposed to be structured.”

**Perspectives on Quality Programs**

In terms of the characteristics of quality programs, parents spoke broadly about the importance of structure and organization. This was most often discussed in terms of negative experiences they had, particularly in daycare programs:

*Every time I went in the daycare center, they were asleep or they was playing. Where are the books at? Where’s the hokey pokey at? Where’s the sharing? In daycare, it’s supposed to be structured.*

*Now, the daycare she was in, they wasn’t teaching her nothing, and when they was trying to teach her something, she wouldn’t listen. She couldn’t sit still to actually listen...Every time I walked in there, it was like, playing with toys, running around, all the kids just sitting there playing with toys and stuff. And I didn’t like that... It was unorganized. It just wasn’t right.*
The competency of the staff was also identified as an important component to quality care. Again, this was often discussed in terms of negative experiences:

Half the teachers [at the daycare] was on their phones, just sitting there, being on their phones or busting it up talking to each other, and stuff like that, so. They make it seem it’s just babysitting, they not actually teach them nothing.

There’s a difference between a babysitter and a child care professional.

Some also discussed the importance of quality staff in terms of background checks and certifications. They also spoke of general characteristics that they felt would indicate professionalism and skills:

Daycare should have accreditation, like Head Start. Staff credentials.

I think that they should do extensive background checks on the people that’s watching your children. Nobody want to leave their child as it is, but people gotta work, other things that’s going on. So they need to have extensive background checks on the people that watching their children. They do background checks, but now they just gonna look back 7 years. That’s not cool.

I believe that – you know how you have to have certain certifications? I believe everybody should be required safety training for emergencies and evacuations, like that, because that is serious.

I don’t like young people watching kids. I like somebody older – like way older, like my grandmom or something like that. I just don’t trust them [young people]. The older, they have patience. Thirty-five and up – people with a lot of experience.
In one group, a new mother with an infant said she was looking for daycare but was feeling overwhelmed. The other mothers in the group offered her the following advice in identifying quality care:

*Make sure you ask questions, don’t let them just say “This is my center and this is what we have.”*

*Ask the director to show you the bulletin board. The bulletin board is supposed to have everything on it. Parent information, what the children are allergic to, what they serve there, and everything else. All of that’s supposed to be out and visible to all parents. If it’s not visible, then you shouldn’t take your child there.*

*Ask ‘How often you all clean?’ Because babies like that, they on the floor.*

*Ask, ‘Do the cameras work? Do they record? Or do they record and delete?’*

*Look at the kids! If they running around, snotty nosed, that’s an issue!*  

*If they [kids] running around. I mean, for playtime, that’s cool, but when it’s time to learn, then it’s time to learn. I don’t want to come in here every day and see them running around with toys.*  

*A lot of daycares now, instead of sending a form home with what your kid did, they have this app, Dojo. The good thing about that is you can always go back to the app and confront them with things. I will tell them, “Why does my child only got 4 pampers left and I bring this many and she was only changed this many times?” They help me keep track.*  

*Look at the learning environment. Do they do story times? It’s learning, it’s not just babysitting.*

**Identifying and Accessing Quality Care**

Parents reported numerous barriers to accessing quality ECE, particularly for daycare programs. Lack of local programs, transportation issues, application deadlines, and waiting lists were common challenges parents faced. Furthermore, there was a remarkable lack of information about programs available to parents, often resulting in inefficient and ineffective attempts to find quality programs.

**Identifying Programs with Limited Information**

Parents described a somewhat haphazard approach to finding programs for their children, particularly when seeking daycare programs for children ages 0-2. Parents most often relied on internet searches, word-of-mouth, or simply walking past a center:
I’ll look them up online, or I’ll do walk-bys, or if I’m catching a bus or something, I’ll see something, I’ll get off and see how it is, or if I’m walking and see a daycare, then I’ll try to go in there and see how they look.

I look at the ratings of the daycare [on Google]. You gotta watch the ratings too though because some of them be like 4 or 5 stars, but that could be the owner’s friends or cousins or something.

I just looked it up on Google, then I found it and then I just went down to go actually there and look at the place, talk to somebody about it, and I’m like, alright, well whatever, I’m gonna give it a try. It looked nice and clean in there.

I was looking for 5 stars on Google. But you got to be sure those ratings are real.

My cousin told me about the one my daughter is currently in. I actually watched her daughter go to that school and they’re pretty good, I like them.

A few parents identified the Philadelphia School District as a resource, but this was not known by most:

You can call the school district and they gave like a listing of Head Starts, daycare, stuff like that inside your area. That’s how I found a Head Start inside this area...I knew [to call them] by word of mouth.

Lack of Quality Daycare Programs and Transportation Challenges

For children ages 0 – 2, parents reported quality programs were most often not available to them, largely because of where they lived and corresponding transportation challenges:

It would be hard for me to find good childcare. You have to travel to get the daycare that I want for my kids, and that’s a really big issue.

It’s because with the neighborhood, we don’t have any 5-star day cares. I don’t want to say poor, but, low income areas, we don’t have good daycare, it’s not offered.

“I’ll look them up online, or I’ll do walk-bys, or if I’m catching a bus or something, I’ll see something, I’ll get off and see how it is, or if I’m walking and see a daycare, then I’ll try to go in there and see how they look.”

~PSH Parent
I need better childcare options. And I drive, but driving is an issue sometimes because the traffic and things like that when you’re running on a schedule. I just really feel upset that there’s no daycares where I live.

I have been to other areas where I’m like, “Oh my God, look at this center!” But because I don’t live over there, I guess I gotta travel. It’s just crazy.

Why these 5 star daycares aren’t being promoted? Do we just live in an area where there’s no 5 star daycares?

Good daycares exist, and good environments. But not in the city. You have to go out on the Main Line where they’ll treat your kids like they’re theirs. They care about your kids. In the city, to me, in my opinion, they’re just here for a paycheck. They’re like, ‘I got to deal with these kids, then I got to go home and deal with my own kids, oh well.’

Many parents discussed problems they encountered with unprofessional and unskilled staff in daycare programs. It was not uncommon to hear staff yelling or acting inappropriately:

I walked in one day to staff yelling at another kid, “Didn’t I say to shut up and be quiet?” One day I came in and my daughter was crying and she pointed to the same lady, and I said “What did she do?” and she said ‘She said something to me.’ So the lady was there, she said ‘Well she was throwing food on the floor and I told her to stop.’ And I said ‘Well how did you say it? Did you yell or did you ask her to stop? Because I know you be in here yelling at these kids.’ No, don’t yell at my kids.

One day I was in the old daycare my daughter was in and I couldn’t believe it. The staff had this little baby on her hip and she was talking to her girlfriend, a.k.a. another staff, about [sexual activity]. I said to my daughter, “They don’t talk around you like this, do they?” It was horrible.
Other parents reported they eventually pulled their 2-year-old children from daycare centers because of staff behavior and physical injuries:

“Never again. They was trifling. They don’t care. When I’m going to pick up my child, and I see how you’re treating another child, I got an issue, even though that’s not my child, I still feel – like, what are you doing? I walked in one day to staff yelling at another kid, like she told the kid, ‘Didn’t I say to shut up and be quiet?’”

One mother discussed trying to address her concerns before pulling her child from daycare:

Some of the teachers, they was being mean to my daughter, and so when I pick her up at school, she used to say “Mommy my teachers are being mean to me.” I ask her which teacher. I went back and told the director, and they re-assigned the teacher for me, cause my daughter wouldn’t lie to me.

This mother ultimately pulled her child from this program because when she picked her daughter up, she had nail indentations in her arm as if she had been grabbed aggressively by an adult, and the staff could not explain how it occurred. This caused significant disruption in the child’s care:

It took me a whole summer [to get her placed in another daycare]. I was so upset. The one she’s at now, she had to wait until she turns 3. And her birthday didn’t come until May. So I’m like, “Well, when will she be enrolled?” So they were like “Well she can be enrolled in September.” Well I’m like, damn, it’s only March!

**Lack of Support from Housing and ECE Programs**

Overall, parents reported that their housing program did not provide support or information in identifying and accessing quality programs:

*They don’t know nothing about childcare.*

*They ask us where our kids go. I gave my caseworker a flyer from the Salvation Army.*

*Everything I had to look up online.*

*Just because they think that we in independent living, why do they always say we have to do things or get things on our own? Everything!*

*They should know where daycare is, they should know certain things about these centers. They’re supposed to be helping us.*

---

7 This mother also reported there was a physical safety issue at the daycare program, but it was too distressing for her to discuss.
One parent reported that even when she had to pull her child from daycare unexpectedly because she had been hurt, her housing program did not provide support during the emergency:

*When I was having a meltdown [about my daughter being injured at daycare], my case manager didn’t help me with the issue. I helped myself. I said, “Ok, there is such a thing as emergency childcare,” but a lot of people don’t know that.*

*“...when I first came to [housing program], I wasn’t familiar with this neighborhood...I felt like, they’re housing us, they’re trying to provide us with certain skills, but they need to be more helpful with finding childcare. Because at the time, I didn’t know about this neighborhood at all. I actually used to get lost, walking up and down [the streets], and that’s how I found daycare. They weren’t any help.”*

~PSH Parent

The lack of support from housing programs was noted as particularly problematic because often families have to move to new communities for their housing, they are not familiar with the new area, and they do not have any information about local programs:

*We need to know what’s in the community. I don’t know about this area. Hello, can you tell me?*

*What if she [a new mother of an infant] were to move from where she lived? And she new to this area, she don’t know anything, and I’m her case manager. I believe that I should be able to provide her care because that’s one of her needs. If I’m a case manager, I can’t help you with childcare because I don’t know anything? And if the case manager don’t know, how about she go ask somebody else?”*

*I know when I first came to [housing program], I wasn’t familiar with this neighborhood. When it came time for him to start preschool, I was responsible for finding a location of which school I wanted him to go to. I felt like, they’re housing us, they’re trying to provide us with certain skills, but they need to be more helpful with finding childcare. Because at the time, I didn’t know about this neighborhood at all. I actually used to get lost, walking up and down [the streets], and that’s how I found daycare. They weren’t any help.*

A parent at one program reported the housing staff did try to help enroll their child in ECE. She was denied a childcare subsidy because she receives SSI and her program advocated for her:
Another parent reported staff suggested placing her infant daughter in daycare. Although the staff was most likely well-intentioned in trying to open a dialogue about ECE, the parent felt the worker was presumptuous in her approach to the topic:

“My case manager asks me, ‘Oh, she going in daycare?’ No. She asks again, ‘Oh, she’s going on 6 weeks. She going to daycare?’ No. Don’t ask me again. I’ll give you her report card when she’s in Pre-K when she’s 3, other than that, don’t ask me about it again.

None of the parents had an ECE program conduct outreach to their housing program about child care or education programs:

“We had information on a camp, but nothing on daycare.

**ACCESSING CARE: AFFORDABILITY, AVAILABILITY, AND BENEFIT INELIGIBILITY**

Many of the parents and guardians reported they were receiving financial assistance for childcare through Child Care Information Services of Philadelphia (CCIS). The assistance stipulates they pay a co-pay that is based on their income, and most reported that the amount of their contribution was manageable.

CCIS, however, prioritizes those who are on TANF. Those applicants typically receive assistance within a week. For applicants who are employed, the wait list can be as long as one to two years. This results in some families waiting to place their child in care until they reach pre-school age:

“CCIS has a long waiting list. They so crazy because you can be sitting at home doing nothing, and say ‘I want a welfare to work program’, they’ll put you right in. But if you find a job, you wait on the list for a year and you gotta find somebody to watch your kids.”

~PSH Parent
That’s the one reason why I put my grandkids in Head Start because I couldn’t find a daycare center that would take her because I was working! If you working, it will take forever to move up the [CCIS waiting] list. And that don’t even make no sense, you should be helping the workers. You know, everybody needs help, I understand that, but if you got the job, you should get more assistance than the people who don’t have jobs. That don’t make no sense.

CCIS has a 2 ½ year wait list or longer unless you go through welfare. Say you just have a job and you have a 2-year-old, all ready to go to work, and you need daycare, you be waiting, you’ll be paying out of pocket. But if you have welfare, and they’re ready for you to get a job, they put you right in.

They [CCIS] want you to lose your job, lose your job, lose your job, so you can get welfare.

A grandmother who is providing care for her daughter’s 6-month-old twins reported they were just told they would be on the wait-list at least another 10 months:

One [baby] is higher up on the wait list than the other. She applied at the same time so we don’t know how that happened. And another thing – her hours, cause she works from 9am-8pm. But my daughter don’t want to quit because this is a good job for her.

A parent who is a college student spoke about her frustration trying in to obtain CCIS:

They’re gonna give you a song and dance and hallelujah. First they tell you you’re eligible. Then they tell you you’re not eligible. Then they tell you gotta pay a co-pay but then when you don’t get reevaluated because you had a doctor’s appointment and you gotta make that appointment, they gonna cut you off, the daycare off, the medical off. How are you supposed to feel? “Ok, I miss one appointment, you sitting back there in your cubby not doing nothing, can I come back there, I was just in the office, I heard your voice, I seen you making coffee!”

A daunting barrier for some is the lack of childcare subsidies for parents on SSI. PSH is designed for those with a disability; correspondingly, many of the mothers in PSH receive SSI. However, CCIS denies benefits to those on SSI. This results in untenable situations for parents who have compromised functioning and therefore need SSI, but also want their children to benefit from ECE. Additionally, some parents recognize they need support from a daycare program in order to be a better parent. A parent receiving SSI explained that she would like to find some employment to supplement her SSI, but because her 2-year-old is not in daycare, she is not able to go to job interviews:
I can’t get him in daycare because welfare and CCIS can’t help me. So I’m ineligible. So if I wanted him in daycare I’d have to pay for it, and I can’t afford that. I keep getting all these job interviews but I can’t go to them cause I got [my son]. I told them [CCIS] I just want to be a normal person like everybody else. I’ll do welfare, I’ll do their programs, if they’re gonna help me find a job. If I start working and putting him in daycare, then I’ll be fine. But then SSI is telling me no, don’t turn off my benefits check or I’ll have to start all over again with them if something happens. So I have to wait until he 3 and can go to Head Start and then I’ll start working.

This mother also expressed her frustration because she knows he would benefit from an early child education program:

“...it would be best for him if he were in an arrangement with a whole bunch of kids. Things that he can learn with other little kids. What he’s learning now are the things that I’m doing. He seen me pay the rent, he seen me go to the store, he seen me watch TV...I want him to be a kid, play with other people.”

She also discussed her son’s behavioral problems that are not being addressed:

“Right now, he don’t share. He fights. He talks back to grown-ups. He don’t care who you are. When he don’t get his way, he destroys everything. He’ll throw food at you. He’ll spit at you. He’ll knock everything off the table if he don’t get his way. He need to be with other kids, learning to share, playing with friends, not being violent against them and throwing things when he say ‘no that’s mine.’

Parents also reported encountering challenges when attempting to enroll their child in Head Start programs or preschool. The locations of programs presented transportation complications, and many programs were at enrollment capacity:

“I had to take it upon myself to start calling Head Start programs that are around. Some were all like “You gotta wait until September” or “We got too many kids.” And so I started having doubts about school, like, ok, maybe he’ll just have to start in kindergarten. But then I just realized he can’t do that cause he didn’t start learning. You know, didn’t know his colors, didn’t know his abc’s and how to count, and I’m looking at him, like, that is bad. He’s just focusing on what I’m doing, and I don’t do none of that. So I put him in Head Start.”

~PSH Parent
I looked in West Philly, I couldn’t find none. So he in North Philly. I take him there every single day. We take the bus. I get him up every single day at 6:00, and we head out there before it turns 7. And then we get there at 8. I stay there until they get out cause I don’t have time to go home.

These programs also have a rigid enrollment guidelines and deadlines that impede enrollment. If a child is born after September 1, he/she has to wait until the next school year to enroll. Additionally, if a parent seeks a program for their child after the enrollment deadline has passed, he/she may have to wait months until enrollment is offered again:

My daughter’s birthday was September 5th and [they said] she had to beat the deadline by September the 1st. And I’m looking like, “Oh my god,” they said well she has to wait until next year and I’m like “Oh my god!” I was just mad.

**POSITIVE IMPRESSIONS OF HEAD START AND PRE-K PROGRAMS**

In contrast to the concerns about infant childcare, parents with children in Pre-K and Head Start programs largely reported satisfaction with their children’s experiences. They felt the programs were preparing their children for kindergarten and elementary school, and that the staff were professional and qualified. Additionally, the parents did not have the same intensity of concern about safety as they expressed for children ages 0 – 2:

My daughter come home and she tells me about her day, and she be like, ‘We be singing, we do all this stuff…’ She get up first thing in the morning, she says, ‘Can I go to school?’ Girl, yeah!”

~PSH Parent

Now when I put him in [Head Start], he knows his numbers, he knows his colors, and I was like ‘Oh wow!’

~PSH Parent

I actually like it [Head Start]. It’s a good place for her and they actually teach her, her teacher is nice. And her teacher meets with me one-on-one, and lets me know how she’s doing and everything.

They just have patience with [my daughter]. They just taking their time with her. And the kids can sense it.

She’s learning how to write more, she’s learning how to read, colors, you know, stuff like that. They read stories to her. The school uses Dojo [daycare app] so we communicate a lot.

Now when I put him in [Head Start], he knows his numbers, he knows his colors, and I was like ‘Oh wow!’
One parent noted that she preferred the enrollment process for Pre-K as compared to locating and accessing daycare;

*I like preschool because you don’t have to go through the extra runaround [like with daycare]. You just go to the Philadelphia school district and sign them up. Now, finding one in your neighborhood – not all schools have them. But they will take you, it’s up to you to get them to and from there.*

**Reluctance to Use Daycare and Safety Concerns**

It was very common for parents in PSH to refuse or postpone ECE enrollment for their children. Some chose to keep their children home at the urging of their own mothers, or because they were following the example their mother had given them:

*[I didn’t put my children in daycare] because my mom did the same thing. She taught me, you know, the flash cards, the whole thing. So I had believed in that, you know. ‘I’m not putting my kids in no daycare!’*

*When I had my daughter, my mom got laid off, so my mom would keep my daughter. When I had my son, my sister was laid off, so my sister watched my son. So they didn’t enter school until they was 3. It was a blessing for me because I wouldn’t have gone back to work had they had to go to a center or something that young. Like, no. Because I’m a nervous wreck when it comes to my children. I have detachment issues with them. When it’s time for them to go, I don’t want them to leave.*

*Their grandmothers don’t believe in daycare. I work an 8am-8pm shift, so that was split between the 2 grandmothers. That baby was not going to daycare or I was not working.*

“I wouldn’t have gone back to work had they had to go to a center or something that young...Because I’m a nervous wreck when it comes to my children. I have detachment issues with them. When it’s time for them to go, I don’t want them to leave.”

~PSH Parent
However, the most prevalent reason for choosing to keep children home rather than in ECE was the concern about the safety of their children. This was particularly striking for parents with children ages 0-2. Many parents noted that it was common to keep a child home until age 2 or 3 because the parent is afraid to leave them in someone else’s care until the child can talk. They believed that doing so would protect the child from being hurt, and that if someone does harms their child but he/she is able to talk, he/she will discuss the assault with the parent:

Some parents, they want kids to be able to talk first, so they can say if something was wrong.

No [daycare], not until they can talk. Because I need to know what’s going on.

I’d like to wait until he starts talking. Cause I had some incidents with my other kids, so I’m not trying to go there with any daycare. It was safety issues with a couple of daycares around here.

Often, parents were concerned specifically about sexual abuse:

I’ll wait for pre-k until she’s about 2 or 3 years. Because then she can go to the bathroom on her own, she can talk on her own. She know right from wrong. And I don’t sugarcoat nothing with her. If somebody touch you – I tell you your body parts. Cause they’ll tell you “Well she touched this and she touched that.” No. My [granddaughter] is going to know the real names of them so when they ask you, you can tell them.

The only thing that bothers me is…when they have men in daycares. And they put that teacher with a bunch of little girls. You can be a teacher at a daycare center, but if you watching all girls, it should be a man and a woman working together. And not to say that it’s wrong, that men can’t take care of a child like a woman can, but my thing is going to the bathroom, changing your pampers. That’s weird! And not saying women not nasty and can’t do something too, but it’s just more comfortable for me [with women in daycare].

“If she went to daycare she could get [used to being] with people, she could interact with kids. So it’s like she needs to be with kids her age, but you just can’t trust it.”

~PSH Parent

“I would love for her to be in daycare! But no, it’s frightening. You send them there thinking they’re safe, but then you watch the news. [Keeping her home] is all about safety.”

~PSH Parent
Parents also recognized the benefits of attending a quality daycare program, but still chose not to enroll their children because of safety concerns:

*I would love for her to be in daycare! But no, it’s frightening. You send them there thinking they’re safe, but then you watch the news. It’s all about safety.*

*If she went to daycare she could get [used to being] with people, she could interact with kids. So it’s like she needs to be with kids her age, but you just can’t trust it.*

*She would like daycare. She likes other little kids. Another little girl next door, they play on the porch but she don’t share toys with her. But it took us 6 months for her to warm up to her.*

*She’s very smart. But if she was in daycare, she’d be more advanced than she is. So if it was the right daycare, I’d be more than happy to send her. But I don’t have that choice, especially not in the city. It’s not worth it.*

*It would teach her sharing, getting along with others, and everything like that. But so much happens in daycares.*

After enrolling their children in Pre-K or Head Start, some parents expressed regret that they had not enrolled them in ECE sooner:

*That was a mistake I made [keeping her out of daycare]. She didn’t speak for almost 5 months when she was in there [pre-k], she wouldn’t play with no kids. Not being around her peers, being in the house with no other kids was a downside to me keeping her home. It was hard for her to get into the routine of school. And I realized for me, that wasn’t the right move, it wasn’t fair to her to keep her home and then to just throw her in there, and she didn’t know anything.*

*You can teach them what you know, but you’re not teaching them from a school standpoint, so then they’re not ready, and you’re just throwing them in there with other kids.*

“I’m one of those types of moms, I goes above and beyond for my kids. I don’t believe in nobody, I don’t trust nobody.”

~PSH Parent
For those parents who did enroll their children in daycare programs, having access to their children at all times to ensure they were safe was a paramount concern:

I don’t like daycares that have locks on the door, where, you got to bang on the door to get in and they push that little button. I don’t like that. I like to have open access to my kid’s daycare. Cause when she was at the one daycare down the street, you had to sit there and bang, and sometimes the teachers be on the phone or asleep with the kids, they don’t hear me banging. Finally I kick the door. What are you all doing? I didn’t like that.

Locked doors get on my nerves. But it’s like a Catch 22, I know they trying to keep people out but at the same time you have to be able to get in!

One day they had a gas leak at the daycare she was at, and they called us to come pick up the kids. So my heart dropped. We get there, we banging on the door. Like, you call me telling me there’s a gas leak and you got the door locked and with the kids in there? And then when you walk in, the gas would smack you in the face! And they have all these kids in there? That’s a big safety issue.

Parents also discussed the wanting security cameras in daycares and on buses:

Cameras is definitely a big thing as far as ‘Do these cameras record? And do they hold recordings? Do the recordings delete after a certain amount of time? What do these cameras do?’ I’m not comfortable with just seeing a thousand cameras and ‘oh yeah, y’all got cameras here to watch this and this.’ No. I need to know if they audio, everything.

The daycares, they need cameras. I’m one of those types of moms, I goes above and beyond for my kids. I don’t believe in nobody, I don’t trust nobody. My interest is in cameras. I think they’re good and the teachers don’t have to know about them. You can put them in a book or something. Place them in walls or something, and the teachers don’t even know they’re there. I think they should have some of them because I don’t trust no one in daycares.

They also discussed their frustration with programs that seemingly have security cameras, but when an incident occurs, claim they do not have a recording of it:

And then when something’s happening, it’s always like, ‘Oh well, this camera don’t work.’ Like, what? It wasn’t broken when I brought my child in! I was told it was working and that they delete after a certain amount of time. They give you so many excuses. It drove me crazy. I felt bad for myself. I knew that cameras was a safety thing, but I didn’t think it was that deep and it really pissed me off cause it was just a runaround. Now my child gets hurt, and the camera was broke.
My son has abrasions like someone scraped off all his skin...and their van supposedly has cameras. My son still hasn’t been back because nobody can tell me what happened to him.

This mother pulled her son from his program until she could determine how he was injured:

He’s traumatized. He won’t let anybody touch him. He won’t sleep. I’m not even working right now because of it, because of this situation, sitting at home, me and him just staring at each other, and I’m thinking ‘I need to work!’

**STRATEGIES TO ENSURE SAFETY AND QUALITY CARE OF CHILDREN**

Parents report using different strategies in their efforts to assure their children are safe and to monitor the quality of their early childhood program. “Pop-ups” – dropping into the program unannounced – and calling the program to check on their child were common practices for many parents:

I’m a ‘pop up parent.’ So I just pop up to see what they’re doing, how they’re doing.

I like to pop up. I don’t care, you all could have just had breakfast, story time, I’ve popped up so many times they’re scared.

A daycare told me I can’t do pop-ups. Oh well then I can’t put my daughter in your daycare because you’re doing something sneaky.

I don’t want to come in here every day and see them running around with toys. No. That’s why I do pop-ups sometimes though. I don’t want to see them watching TV all day.

And I’m the one that does pop-up visits and everything else. Because I need to know what is going on. Because by them not being able to talk, the staff will tell you anything and I don’t want that.

I call every day. Like I called the other day, and she be crying. I call back in an hour, “Is she still crying? What you all do to calm her down?” I want to know. I’m always trying to find out what’s the background noise, for real. You gotta really be on board.

“I’m the one that does pop-up visits and everything else. Because I need to know what is going on. Because by them not being able to talk, the staff will tell you anything and I don’t want that.”

~PSH Parent
It was also noted that it was important to present yourself to staff as a parent/guardian that takes good care of the child and that you are very invested in their well-being:

*If they see that you are one of the parents that’s hands on, and you care about your kid, they ain’t gonna do too much to your child. They be like, listen, this one’s annoying, she come too much, you know what I’m saying? Because that’s how people is. Because if you lagging, don’t care, kids coming to school looking like I don’t know what, they look at stuff like that, “If something happens to the child, who would really care?” For real! People really think about stuff like that.*

Having regular communication and good relationships with teachers and staff was another strategy parents used:

*I got a close relationship with my granddaughter’s teachers. How you argue with someone who takes care of your child for 8 hours? Are you crazy? Do not argue with anybody who’s taking care of your child because they will purposely do something to your child to get back at you. So you gotta be careful. You can curse at them like hell without actually cursing at them. You can halfway curse them out with a smile on your face and then say “Have a great day!”*  

*As a parent, you want to stay in close communication with who has your child all day.*

Others have volunteered or sought employment in their child’s ECE programs so they can monitor the environment themselves:

*I’m a teacher myself, so wherever a daycare was for my kids at, I make sure I get hired. Cause I don’t play that. Education is first. So I make sure whatever daycare, Head Start program they’re at, I make sure to either volunteer or I get hired. I have to make sure that the environment my kids are in, that they’re learning at all times.*

*I really got it [volunteer position] because I really want to see you know, what the environment, what they teaching my daughter, stuff like that, see what she learning, see what she’s lacking in, what I gotta work on more with her.*
I volunteer in the school [Head Start], and see what they do in school when I’m not around. I have my 2-year-old with me too. They [teachers] be like, ‘Mom, he can’t be with you.’ I don’t care what you talking about. It’s a school for kids, so he’s a kid, he’s gonna be in here.

One parent volunteers with the school board, which is something she saw her older cousin do.

I volunteer for the school board now so I have more hands on with my daughter and things that they’re doing and stuff. So yeah, I’m very nosey. And then my cousin, she actually got a job with the school board because she was doing what I’m currently doing now, she was volunteering while her daughter was there too, so she had hands-on with her daughter too. So when she found out I got my daughter in [a good preschool], and I’m volunteering, she told me, ‘Stick with it because it’s real good.’

Another parent decided to study early child education so she would be better prepared to help her children:

I started out in school for culinary arts, but then I had children and both my sons had special needs, so I switched over to the education division. I just felt like maybe I should push myself to take the childcare because I want to help them.

CASE EXAMPLE: ON-SITE SERVICES

Methodist Services provides on-site daycare, Early Head Start, and Head Start at is PSH program. While the parents and guardians at Methodist Services expressed many of the same concerns as those in the other focus groups, their experiences were markedly different because having ECE programs on-site largely relieved their concerns. Because these parents and guardians had such different experiences than the parents in the other program, the findings and insights from this group are presented separately.

Parents and guardians at Methodist Services reported feeling very comfortable about leaving their children in the ECE programs, including the daycare. There were very few concerns about safety:

They made me feel comfortable when they gave me a key [to the daycare]. I can go right in myself. The safety is a plus. I trust them. I ain’t come across no problems that was out of my hands.
One mother reported that when she moved into the program, she was initially hesitant to place her child with behavioral challenges in daycare, but then was reassured by the other parents’ trust in the daycare. However, she also noted that her daughter was talking by the time she was enrolled:

For me, at first, I didn’t want to jump and put [my daughter] straight in. I was kinda like, taking my little time, procrastinating, because I was having separation anxiety, with ‘They don’t understand my child the way I do. She don’t mean no harm.’ You know, every little thing about it, I’m like, ‘Oh God!’ But learning through my fellow peers, I don’t hear them complaining. But she could talk when she went.

Parents and guardians found several advantages to the program being on-site. Having the program so close to home reduced their anxiety about having to get to their children if there was an emergency. It was also very convenient when they were running late to pick up their children; they could call the center and let them know another parent will get their child:

Having the program on site is very, very convenient. I work at 7:00 in the morning. And then when I’m running late, I can just call them.

It’s convenient, because everybody don’t got no car [to drive to a daycare].

I feel like I’m the emergency person! I get moms calling me all the time to get their kids cause they running late. But that’s fine, we all take care of each other.

Here, they [ECE staff] all know everybody, so they like, “Oh, you coming to get such and such kid, ok.” You know, “Such and such mom gonna come over and grab my kid.” “Oh, ok.”

One parent also noted that she had kept her 2 older children home until they were in kindergarten, but if she had been in this program at the time, she would have used the ECE programs:

If I was living here, they would have been in daycare. Because it’s right there, so why not?
They also felt that having the ECE programs on site helped to create a sense of a community among the families:

When it’s nice out, the kids walk around the neighborhood, say hi to everyone.

The best part is the kids are actually kind of close, they have a good bond. Because they’re outside playing with each other, then they’re at school together.

My daughter and her daughter, they 5 now, but they met when they were 2 years old.

It’s a community.

Parents and guardians were also pleased with the quality of the staff in the ECE programs:

They support us. [My daughter] leave with information every day, what they read, times they go to the bathroom.

I feel real good [about the staff], actually I do.”

They just have patience with [my daughter]. They just taking their time with her. And the kids can sense it.

With my son, they’re helping him with potty training, cause he’s hard.

The teachers are nice. They post pictures of the kids on Facebook all day long.

They [staff] support us and we support them.

In general, parents and guardians felt the ECE programs met their needs. One drawback, however, was that they did not have extended hours to accommodate those with irregular work hours:

You have to make it work. You have to find a job that’s gonna give you the hours you need to work around your kids, what you have going on at home.
PROGRAM FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

The discussions with staff from PSH programs largely reflected the same concerns as those voiced in the family focus groups. All were earnest to support families in accessing quality early childhood education, but they largely did not have the necessary information, knowledge, or means to do so. Following is a summary of the major themes that emerged regarding challenges in identifying, accessing, and utilizing quality early childhood programs among families in PSH.

Perspectives on Early Learning and Need for Support

Providers felt there was a deficient understanding among parents in PSH of the benefits of early childhood education, particularly for children ages 0 – 2:

*Education I think is important, for parents to understand the benefit of having the kids in early childhood [education], particularly when you’re coming from a shelter, traumatic experience that a young kid will face. Mom is just so happy to get out of the shelter that she’s not thinking about those types of areas. ‘I’m just glad that I’m out of the shelter and I have my own space with me and my kids’.*

*There seems to be a higher priority for 3 to 5, because it’s ‘Ok, well they’re getting closer to kindergarten, whereas with 0 to 2, ‘Well what are they really gonna learn? I’d rather they stay with me.’*

It was noted that children in PSH need the support and opportunities that ECE programs provide, particularly because of the instability and challenges they have encountered.

*It’s a lot of transitions for the kids. They talk about once kids are in school, there’s so much research, with the whole McKinney Vento, keeping them in the same school even if they are transitional, but there’s nothing surrounding before they’re in kindergarten and up. If they’re in all these head starts and pre-k’s and childcare facilities – that’s constant transition and meeting new people and getting comfortable. I really think it’s traumatizing, constantly being in different environments. We talk about that with their housing, but it goes along with their childcare facility, whatever program it is they’re in.*

“I think [not having access to ECE is] contributing to the prevalence of the abuse. Because [parents are] frustrated. They don’t have any other outlets. They don’t have any other support… In their defense, they do need that time, even if they’re not going to school or if they’re not working, they need a break.”

~PSH Staff
Program staff also voiced concern about the impact of parents not having the support of ECE, and that children who are not enrolled in ECE are at greater risk for abuse:

*I think it’s contributing to the prevalence of the abuse. Because they’re frustrated. They don’t have any other outlets. They don’t have any other support...Last week I had to tell a mother client ‘Go take the baby to your aunt. Get a break. You need a break.’ Because I heard her yelling at the baby, and the baby is only a year old. She just needs a break. In their defense, they do need that time, even if they’re not going to school or if they’re not working, they need a break.*

Mom might not want to or dad might not want to [enroll child in ECE], but I’m like, ‘Ok, this baby can’t be here all day because you’re yelling at the baby all day. now I have to call DHS.’ It’s a problem. How do we help mom or dad and the child at the same time when mom and dad, they have trauma going on, they have this going on, and then the child isn’t being taken care of adequately.

**IDENTIFYING AND ACCESSING QUALITY CARE**

“I sat on the computer for just hours a day just looking for daycares... I don’t feel, as a case manager, that I have been given those resources to be able to disseminate [that information] that to them.”

~PSH Staff

**LACK OF SUPPORT FROM HOUSING AND ECE PROGRAMS**

Program staff wanted to support parents in identifying and accessing quality early childhood education, but did not feel they had sufficient information to provide meaningful assistance:

*As a case manager, I don’t feel like I’ve been given that information on educational resources. I sat on the computer for just hours a day just looking for daycares, looking for this, looking for that, for these families because I, they may not know how to, or 2, mom might not want to or dad might not want to...I don’t feel, as a case manager, that I have been given those resources to be able to disseminate [that information] that to them.*

Staff also did not know how to access comprehensive information about the availability, credentials, and quality ratings of ECE programs. Although this information is available via the Keystone STAR program, the PSH programs were not aware of this resource:
They should have a list that the city says, ‘Ok we’ve approved these daycares and these facilities, these educational places,’ and sending them over to human services and social services agencies, and saying ‘well hey, we know that these daycares and these facilities have special accommodations for those who have been traumatized, and have maybe mental health and maybe kids have it too, so we can address it.

Since CCIS is pretty much the provider for childcare, I think we need to invest in funding to implement a database. That way providers can access this information and CCIS can pretty much manage it. They have all the resources, they know exactly what providers are compliant... We could just go in the system, and not only that, we could actually complete the applications for our clients and submit it on their behalf. CCIS is not good to work with at all. They don’t communicate, they don’t follow up, so I just think it’s accountability with CCIS and also if they’re going to control that portion of a family’s life as far as with childcare, I think they should develop a database.

I would give funding to a new entity that’s going [to develop a database] correctly.

One staff noted that she had a vague awareness of a database that was related to state’s Keystone STARS program:

[I remember there was] a database for daycares that offer Early Head Start and Pre-K but also gave you the Keystone Stars and all the ratings...But they’re actually very limited when you actually look at the list and see the ratings on them. It’s like ‘well there’s not that many in this area first of all, second of all, the ones that are here, they’re not of the highest quality.’

Currently, there is virtually no outreach from PSE programs to ECE programs, nor from ECE programs to PSH programs. Staff believe that better collaboration, integrating the systems and embedding ECE programs within PSH programs would improve families’ access to ECE:

I believe that educating the staff from daycare and Head Start about homelessness is very important. They go to the childcare and the teacher and all the staff they, don’t know anything about homelessness because they’re just serving families that they’ve been stable in housing.”

~PSH Staff
I don’t know what the licensing requirements are to become a childcare center, but I’m just thinking about embedding [ECE programs in PSH programs]. You could have an early childhood provider on site – but you would have to set it up to find funding to pay for it, and what’s the licensing requirements for the space. It wouldn’t help with scattered sites, but it’s a start.

Our clients are all throughout Philadelphia, so [service integration] is a little bit harder, then if they’re all in one place.

It was also recommended that a PSH/ECE liaison be established to facilitate the improvement of communication between housing and education programs, and to support families accessing quality care and increasing enrollment in ECE:

Having a liaison, especially when they’re assigned to certain zip codes in Philadelphia and they know what are the good daycares, or they know what are the good Early Head Starts Centers. What’s the neighborhood schools, or what are the good ones that my client could be able to go to. So having a liaison would probably help a great deal, even if a client doesn’t feel too comfortable with their child going to school, if the liaison could come out, maybe during one of the home visits, and be able to talk to them about what that process looks like, and maybe that would help with the transition of getting kids into schools.

It was also recognized that a consensus needs to be established between organizations, as well as parents, about what constitutes a “quality” ECE program:

We need to have a conversation about what is considered high quality daycare. For a lot of these neighborhood daycares – because for one family, what’s high quality for them is different for what it is for the other one. So one of them might be ok with a certain setting, the other is like “Well I’m not gonna put my child there because x, y and z.” So I guess being able to define what would be considered to be high quality childcare for these families, and what is it that they’re looking for.
**Accessing ECE Programs: Affordability, Availability, and Locations**

Program staff identified several barriers to ECE accessibility for families in PSH. As discussed in the parent groups, the most challenging problems are related to disabilities, SSI, and a corresponding lack of financial assistance and/or appropriate programs:

*One of the major barriers that we’re facing with the mothers, the majority of them are receiving SSI benefits, and they don’t qualify for CCIS. And that’s huge.*

I had a client and her son had autism. And her issue was she had him connected to Elwyn but he was seen as needing a lot of supports, so he was only in school for about 2 hours a day. So she was trying to seek employment, she can’t do it because the child is only in school 2 hours a day. It was hard because trying to talk to Elwyn, they wouldn’t budge. And then trying to find a school that can support her child that wasn’t already at the quota – because a lot of them get booked very quickly – so then the schools that could be able to support the child, they’re already full. So then the only thing that’s left is daycares that they – and not to put them down or anything – but they just aren’t equipped with what they need to support children with disabilities. It stagnates a lot of the families who have kids with disabilities that need supports because there’s not enough out there for them.

Although CCIS provides financial assistance with ECE costs, sometimes the co-payments are prohibitive for parents. Additionally, many need to travel to their ECE programs and transportation costs are substantial:

*If they’re receiving TANF benefits, that’s [still] an issue. Because they still don’t have the resources to get their kids to childcare – transportation.*

*[Copays are] usually per child, first of all, so if you have multiple children - they don’t have any type of group discount or anything, so if you’re going in with multiple children and it’s a $60 a week co-pay, you’re looking at a couple hundred dollars a week, and that can even be with CCIS. But then as soon as they start making more, it increases – everything increases, and they can never catch up before they start drowning again.*
Enrollment deadlines and wait lists were also seen as a barrier for parents trying to enroll their children in pre-k or Head Start programs, as well as wait lists:

*The wait lists are crazy.*

*I have few families—where their child is actually older than 3, however, if they don’t enroll a child in preschool [by] November, December, they can’t enroll in preschool. So we have at this time a couple of kids or family members that are out of school because they didn’t enroll in a timely manner. So that’s been a huge barrier.*

*I have a family with a daughter whose been out of school 4 months now and she’s 4 years old. And [the mother is] on SSI, so she doesn’t have the money to pay for childcare, she doesn’t have money for transportation. There’s nothing that we can do.*

Lack of communication between agencies and complicated eligibility criteria are also seen as obstacles to accessing ECE:

*It’s an uphill battle. And it’s not even [the mother], it’s the communication between the welfare worker and CCIS. It leaves her in limbo, so she can’t work because she doesn’t have reliable supports outside of CCIS and other forms of childcare, so she has to watch the baby. But if she has an interview, no one’s there to [help]. So it’s like a back and forth.*

*[A mother] did have CCIS, but I believe welfare didn’t notify CCIS that she was unemployed. She provided the documentation, and then someone dropped the ball. Welfare is saying CCIS did it, CCIS is saying welfare did it. And so she has to pay this co-payment, she can’t pay the co-payment because she’s not working, the whole thing is spiraling and now we’re stuck with baby being home with mom.*

*CCIS is taken away if you’re in an education program. There was CCIS if you could prove you were in education programs pursuing something but now that’s not an option. And then, how are they supposed to pay the co-pays and so on, which are pretty high even if they are on a scale. They’re still too expensive.*
Many parents struggle to find quality ECE programs near their housing. Others have difficulties finding a program that can accommodate their work hours:

Restaurant work and basically shift work, I think for me that’s the biggest factor as well too that I’m seeing in terms of childcare. The fact that there aren’t set hours every week, they could be called in on a weekend, well you know, “The daycare center is closed, now what do I do? Ok, I just don’t show up to work.” And then the cycle goes over and over for years and years in terms of getting a job, there being some kind of crisis in terms of getting childcare, and then they’re back to the beginning.

I have a mother that lives in Roxborough. She works in Feasterville, the 3–11 shift, and her daughter is 4 years old. So I just found out that her daughter is not in school anymore, she was in preschool, and her mother just got this job 2 weeks ago. But she said ‘I’m so behind, I need the money. I have to work this shift. This is all I can afford.’ She did have her child in a 24-hour childcare facility but it was so hard because after she caught the bus, she wasn’t picking her up until 1:30 in the morning..

Many families live in areas that are “daycare deserts” with few ECE options. It is also common for daycares in these areas to shut down unexpectedly, leaving the family in a crisis. Additionally, some parents assume that the daycare options in their neighborhood are not good quality because the area itself is not considered a “good part of Philadelphia”:

The families that I work with, they’re mostly in residential neighborhoods. There may be a center here and there but they may only take children from 7 to 6 pm. Well they need something later, or they need something earlier. So availability is definitely a factor. Or if they find a center that can take those hours or has that availability, it’s too far and they’re too nervous to leave the neighborhood, especially in the winter time where the sun isn’t out as much, which is certainly understandable

It’s also hard when a lot of the daycares are there for a year, the next year they’re not there. Then that daycare closes, they can no longer put their child there, they have to find another one. And then being able to find, ‘Ok, well where’s the next closest one?’
A lot of [parents] want to try to put their kids in the daycares in the Northeast, which is like a really long drive, it’s like taking 3 buses. But for them, because they see it as though, there’s not – the Northeast is seen as the good part of Philadelphia, so their daycares must be amazing.

It’s hard because just being able to find a good daycare that won’t be shut down soon, or won’t get a report where the parents are scared to take their kids out because a report was called in, it’s a little hard in terms of thinking about how are we going to bridge this gap with the daycares in Philadelphia.

There are some areas that are very saturated with those facilities, like if someone lived in the Northeast as opposed to North Philadelphia or West Philadelphia, so there would be a distance someone would have to travel.”

[If you live in West Philadelphia] they’re accessible only because of the transportation. Transportation that goes all over is very accessible. But then you’re dealing with the cost.

**IMPACT OF TRAUMA**

A recurring theme among the service providers was the impact of trauma on the parents and children in PSH. They have found that trauma complicates and impedes parents’ ability to engage with ECE because of trust issues and fears for their child’s safety:

Many of you are probably familiar with the Adverse Childhood Experiences, and so I think that age [0 -5] in terms of a developmental standpoint is critical....So you got two populations you’re talking about – you’re talking about how do we deal with the kids, and then how do we deal with the parents. In order to take care of the kids, first we have to get to the parents and part of it is education.

And then with the news, it doesn’t help. When you end up hearing reports about the daycare worker ended up hitting this child, then that creates even more fear on the parents to be able to want to seek a daycare. So then they’re like, ‘Well I’ll just keep them at home until they’re at the age and I can just put them in the school district and that’s it.’

“It’s been hard trying to be able to encourage [this mother] to get the kids in school because of the trauma that’s she’s faced…She can’t go to therapy because she doesn’t have anybody to look after her kids. So…then she doesn’t have anybody to watch her kids for her to seek therapy, get some supports, and then be able to work with that to get the kids in school.”

~PSH Staff
Concurrently, parents cannot obtain mental health support to address trauma because their children are not in ECE, and so parents do not have childcare that would allow them to attend to appointments:

Trauma also plays a big part in a lot of the families. Even just having encouragement to get education for their children. Because I have a client who was the victim of human trafficking and she has three kids all under the age of 5. It’s been hard trying to be able to encourage her to get the kids in school because of the trauma that’s she’s faced. Where she’s like, ‘Well I don’t know who these people are that are gonna be taking care of my kids.’ She can’t go to therapy because she doesn’t have anybody to look after her kids. So then her own trauma hasn’t been addressed because of her fear and then she doesn’t have anybody to watch her kids for her to seek therapy, get some supports, and then be able to work with that to get the kids in school.

Additionally, some parents feel guilty about the trauma their children have been exposed to and therefore want to keep them home because they see it as more stable for the children, and so they can have more time together:

I have at least one mom now who really is wanting to be a stay at home mom as long as she can while they’re out of school. And she’s like ‘I don’t want to put them in a program. I’ve been away from them for long enough and had to put them through so much trauma in the past, I just want to spend as much quality time with them as possible.’ And so the idea of putting them in an education program is just overwhelming to her.”

**Need System Improvements**

When asked what system improvements would improve PSH families’ access to ECE, the following actions were suggested:

- Increasing subsidies for families that do not qualify for CCIS
- Increase access to ECE for children who have a disability
- Provide childcare funding for those who are in an education program to get better employment
- Increase slots for Head Start programs
- Increase quality care for children ages 0-2
- Provide education and support for parents in understanding of ECE
- Provide funding for transportation expenses
- Provide training to ECE programs so they develop a sensitivity to the importance of safety and trauma for PSH families.
Parents and guardians spoke passionately about the importance of early education for their children. It was striking, then, to hear that so many struggled to enroll their children in ECE because of a lack of quality care, limitations in eligibility for childcare subsidies, waiting lists, and transportation issues.

However, the parents’ and guardians’ preoccupation for the safety of their children, and the role that concern plays in their decisions to delay ECE for their children, remove children from programs, and perhaps miss other characteristics that are needed for a quality program, was the most salient theme from all of the focus groups. Given extremely high rates of trauma - including violent and sexual victimization during childhood – among mothers in PSH, it is not surprising to see their vigilance in protecting their own young children. This deeply ingrained concern for safety needs to be factored in to any efforts to increase the engagement of children living in PSH into ECE.

It was compelling to hear from both parents and Permanent Supportive Housing staff that so little support is provided to families from their housing program in obtaining quality ECE. Likewise, ECE programs do not conduct outreach to PSH programs or their residents to share information about their services. Parents desperately want support in identifying and accessing ECE, and PSH programs recognize the need to provide that support, but lack the depth of information and knowledge necessary to offer any practical assistance.

While parents in PSH may be reticent to use ECE programs because of their trauma, PSH programs are in a unique position to promote ECE with families. This opportunity should not be squandered. Given the commitment to the well-being and education of children expressed by parents and guardians, PSH staff should capitalize on their working relationships to reinforce this strength of parents and encourage using quality ECE to set the foundation for the later success of their children. This needs to be done with a thorough understanding of trauma and trauma-informed-care so that the impact of a parent’s trauma and the corresponding focus on safety is incorporated.

**Recommendations: PSH/ECE/Parent Liaison**

Several factors are contributing to children in PSH not being enrolled in quality ECE programs. The most striking factors include the following:

- Lack of accessible information about quality ECE programs for parents and guardians in PSH
- Many parents do not understand ECE’s role in building resilience and positioning children for later school success.
- Parental resistance to ECE enrollment before age 3 due to safety concerns
- PSH staff lack comprehensive knowledge about characteristics of quality ECE, the ECE programs in the geographical area of their program (or in various areas of Philadelphia for their clients in scattered-site programs), the various requirements and deadlines of
different types of ECE programs, and strategies to access ECE programs for their families.

- Outreach is not conducted by PSH to ECE programs, nor from ECE to PSH programs, and there is a lack of collaboration between programs

A practical and comprehensive approach to address these challenges is establishing a PSH-ECE-Parent Liaison, similar to the work that has been conducted by the BELL Project at PEC with Emergency Housing and Transitional Housing Programs. The Liaison would be the an early-childhood expert that would coordinate the various strategies to increase ECE enrollment. The Liaison’s responsibilities would encompass providing support to families, all PSH programs, and ECE programs.

Work with PSH programs would include providing guidance on identifying quality ECE programs, developing materials for families about ECE, and facilitating collaboration between PSH and ECE programs. Additionally, ECE programs would be provided information about the unique needs of families in PSH, and would be encouraged to enroll in the Keystone STAR program, which provides support to ECE programs for quality improvement. As suggested by a PSH staff person, the liaison could also act a “bridge” for families as they transition out of transitional housing or emergency shelter into PSH. This could be accomplished by meeting with families before they move, or soon after they move, into PSH to discuss how ECE could help build resilience and prepare children for school success, as well as provide information about ECE options in their area.

**Recommendations: Systems Improvement**

Specific recommendations for PSH, ECE, and the Continuum of Care are presented below. It should be noted that the PSH/ECE Liaison would play a pivotal role in addressing many of these recommendations.

**Permanent Supportive Housing Programs**

PSH programs need to be trained on trauma and trauma informed care. While programs often have a degree of understanding about trauma, a comprehensive understanding is essential to inform not only interactions with parents, but also to guide program design and delivery. Knowledge of trauma-informed care will facilitate communication with parents that will support their commitment to their children and convey the opportunities ECE presents to develop resilience. The training should emphasize the impact of trauma on the parenting of children ages 0-5, including the challenges of forming trusting relationships with service providers, hypervigilance, and separation anxiety.

Staff in PSH programs also need ongoing professional development in order to effectively support young children and their families in accessing quality ECE. This should include training on the following topics:
a. The developmental needs of children aged 0 – 5
b. The specific characteristics that are required in order to be considered a “quality” ECE program.
c. How to obtain information about ECE programs to determine if they are quality programs
d. Comprehensive information about ECE programs available in Philadelphia, the programs specifically in the area of their housing program, and instructions on how to maintain up-to-date information.

PSH programs also need to adjust their service provision to include support to families in accessing ECE for children ages 0 – 5. Front-line staff (e.g., case managers) have several responsibilities and are pulled in many directions in supporting their clients. The provision of assistance in obtaining quality ECE therefore needs to be explicitly stated as a job responsibility, and organizational support must be provided to meet this expectation.

It is clear that parents and guardians do not have access to information about quality ECE. Programs need to develop user-friendly materials that will provide information on the following topics:

a. the specific characteristics of a “quality” program and guidance on how to determine if a program has a safe environment
b. a current and comprehensive listing of ECE programs in the near the housing program (for scattered site program, a listing of programs organized by zip codes)
c. The positive role that ECE plays in child development
d. Available resources related to ECE

PSH programs also need to conduct outreach to ECE programs in their area. This will include inviting ECE programs to present to residents at the PSH program; discussing the ECE needs of PSH families; learning about ECE programs requirements and application process; contacting local ECE programs to inquire about vacancies and request tours of the facility for residents.

Additionally, PSH programs should develop partnerships with ECE programs to create on-site daycare, Pre-K, and/or Head Start programs. The success of the on-site programs at Methodist Services highlighted the importance of safety and location in enrolling children in ECE, and on-site programs address these needs. More opportunities for embedding ECE programming in PSH programs need to be created.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

ECE programs need to engage with the Keystone STARS program to become a certified provider. This includes seeking the program’s financial support that is offered to providers as they work to increase their quality ratings.

ECE programs also need to conduct outreach to PSH programs to build cooperative relationships, educate the programs about the services they provide, ages served, requirements
and application process, and their accreditation. They also need to invite PSH staff for tours of their facilities, and request opportunities to have informational sessions with residents at PSH programs. Additionally, they also need to incorporate into their practices proactively contacting PSH programs when they have vacancies to inquire if any family is in need of a program.

It is essential that additional ECE providers open programs in areas that are deficient in ECE daycares, Pre-K, and Head Start programs. They should coordinate with PSH programs to identify those areas needing additional ECE options for PSH residents. As noted above, ECE programs and PSH programs should also collaborate to open on-site programs at the housing programs.

A greater understanding of the impact of trauma on parenting and on children is needed in ECE programs serving families in PSH. Training of staff of trauma informed care is recommended, with an emphasis on the importance of safety and safety protocols, strategies to develop trusting relationships with parents, creating classroom environments that are sensitive to the needs of children exposed to trauma and instability, differentiating trauma symptoms from “problem behavior,” and behavior management strategies.

Parents were frequently distressed by the lack of skill and professionalism among staff in daycare centers. ECE programs need to make a greater effort to hire well-qualified and certified staff, and provide appropriate training to prepare them for their responsibilities. They also need to communicate with parents about the qualifications and certifications of their staff. Daycare centers need to make efforts to partner with parents in their care of their children, communicating directly and regularly about the child’s experiences each day, discussing strategies used at daycare that could be transferred to home, and sharing child successes and progress with parents whenever possible.

**Continuum of Care**

The Continuum of Care should work collaboratively to increase the number of safe, high-quality ECE programs. This includes creating programs that can meet the needs of young children with disabilities.

Too many families struggle to find quality ECE programs in their neighborhoods. Residential areas needing ECE programs should be promoted for potential programs, which could include incentives to establish a program in high-need areas. Concurrently, these programs should then be promoted at PSH programs. Additionally, subsidies and funding for transportation are needed for families that have to travel to access quality ECE.

To address the lack of professionalism and skill at many daycare programs, ECE programs that serve PSH families should be provided workshops and information about the Keystone STARS program. Enrolling in the program would provide resources to improve the quality of their services.
Parents who are enrolled in college should not be denied childcare subsidies. Higher education is an important factor in creating greater financial stability, and so parents should be supported in their efforts further their education. Likewise, parents who are employed should not be expected to wait 1-2 years for childcare assistance. These scenarios present untenable situations for parents who are responsibly taking steps to be financially independent. While CCIS used to provide subsidies for parents in college, they are now excluded from the benefit. The eligibility requirements could be adjusted again to include students. Furthermore, strategies need to be identify to remove the waiting lists for employed parents.

Lastly, childcare needs for families in PSH are unique in that many parents receive SSI and are therefore ineligible for CCIS. ECE is not simply a provision of “babysitting” while a parent works. It is an essential component of successful child development that is needed to create resilience, reach developmental milestones, and position children for later academic success. To deprive children in PSH of these programs because a parent is not working is unethical, and will ultimately result in significant academic setbacks and challenges in elementary school and beyond. Childcare subsidies need to be available to all families in PSH. This could include an expansion of eligibility in the CCIS program, or the development of a program designed specifically for parents receiving SSI.
APPENDIX I.

**FAMILY PSH NEEDS ASSESSMENT:**  
**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POINT-IN-TIME SURVEY**

Thank you for completing this survey about participation in Early Childhood Education (ECE) among families in your Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program. Please answer every question and do not leave anything blank. If you have any questions, please contact Maureen Hayes at 917-536-2229 or mhayes@thetriskelegroup.com

1. How many families in your PSH program currently have children age 0-5?

___________________________________________________________

2. What is the total number of children age 0-5 in your program?

___________________________________________________________

3. Please indicate how many children in your program are in each age group:

   ____ 0 – 12 months
   ____ 13 – 24 months
   ____ 2 years old (25-35 months)
   ____ 3 years old
   ____ 4 years old
   ____ 5 years old
4. For all children **ages 0-2** in your PSH program, please indicate the number of children attending each type of daycare/child care/school:

_____ None

_____ Relative providing child care

_____ Family child care program (in the home of provider)

_____ Day Care Center

_____ Home visiting

_____ Other (*please explain*): ________________________________

5. For all child **ages 3-4** in your PSH program, please indicate the number of children attending each type of daycare/child care/school:

_____ None

_____ Relative providing child care

_____ Family child care program (in the home of provider)

_____ Day Care Center

_____ Pre-K Program

_____ Head Start/Early Head Start

_____ Home visiting

_____ Other (*please explain*): ________________________________
6. For all child **age 5** in your PSH program, please indicate the number of children attending each type of daycare/child care/school:

_____ None

_____ Relative providing child care

_____ Family child care program (in the home of provider)

_____ Day Care Center

_____ Pre-K Program

_____ Head Start/Early Head Start

_____ Kindergarten

_____ Home visiting

_____ Other (**please explain**): ___________________________

7. Please list the name and address of each program children are currently attending:

a. ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

b. ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

c. ______________________________________________________