



People's Emergency Center

Nurturing Families, Strengthening Neighborhoods, Driving Change.

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Giving a Strong Start to Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Philadelphia

New program promotes early childhood education and developmentally informed practices in emergency housing with support from The Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program™

(Philadelphia, PA – June 1, 2018) Families and homeless shelters will get a new service to help young children participate in high quality early childhood education thanks to a \$1.48 million grant over three years from The Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program™ to People's Emergency Center (PEC). In collaboration with J. J. Cutuli, an assistant professor at Rutgers-Camden, and the Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services, the new program expands on the work of the Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) initiative, which has reported a 25% increase in early education enrollment for 3- to 5-year old children staying with their families in emergency housing. **PEC will host an event celebrating the announcement on Tuesday, June 12 at 1pm at 325 N. 39th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.**

With Vanguard's support, the new program will help family homeless shelters and early childhood educators in Philadelphia work in synergy to engage families to take advantage of early childhood programs, particularly ones of high quality like Head Start, Early Head Start, PHL Pre-K, and others. Additional work at the shelters will inform practices and policies with principles of child development and supporting resilience for young children. About 2,000 children under the age of six lived in Philadelphia family homeless shelters last year, accounting for the majority of the children in emergency housing.

PEC has a 45-year record of accomplishment in working with families in shelter and in leading collaborations like BELL and the Family Service Provider Network, among others. PEC relies on the power of partnerships to improve the lives of families in shelter, according to Kathy Desmond, PEC's President.

"PEC is grateful to Vanguard for the commitment and investment they have made to improving kindergarten readiness for the city's most vulnerable children and is proud to partner with them as we continue the work we began two years ago with funding from the William Penn Foundation. By connecting families, shelters, early childhood programs, and researchers, we can make a lasting positive impact on the lives of children experiencing homelessness."

According to several studies, it can be difficult for families in emergency housing to participate in early childhood programs because of challenges associated with homelessness, like residential mobility, separating from communities and loved ones, lack of transportation, and losing important documents needed to enroll their children. Working together, early childhood programs and emergency housing providers can reduce or remove these barriers, opening doors to high quality early childhood education for young children in emergency housing.

"High quality early childhood programs help children do well in life, even in contexts of homelessness and adversity," said J. J. Cutuli, a principal in designing the program. "Just because a family is homeless does not mean that they should be left out of the great things happening right now in Philadelphia with respect to early childhood education."

Administration & Policy

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The new program looks to build on gains in enrollment under BELL for preschool-age children, better support families with infants and toddlers, and assist families in identifying high quality early childhood programs.

About People's Emergency Center (PEC)

PEC's mission is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods and drive change. For families and youth experiencing homelessness, PEC offers more than 235 affordable housing units, job training, parenting and early childhood education, financial education and planning, life skills and technology classes. Our community development programs respond to community needs and build on neighborhood assets to help bridge the digital divide, expand mixed-income housing opportunities, stimulate economic growth, create wealth, and improve the quality of life for all West Philadelphia residents. PEC advocates for urgently needed public policy changes on behalf of families and youth experiencing homelessness.

About The Vanguard Strong Start for Kids Program™

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

About the William Penn Foundation

The William Penn Foundation, founded in 1945 by Otto and Phoebe Haas, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that increase educational opportunities for children from low-income families, ensure a sustainable environment, foster creativity that enhances civic life, and advance philanthropy in the Philadelphia region. In partnership with others, the Foundation works to advance opportunity, ensure sustainability, and enable effective solutions. Since inception, the Foundation has made nearly 10,000 grants totaling over \$1.6 billion.

About the City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services

The City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services is the public entity charged with the policy, planning and coordination of the City's response to homelessness. The mission of the Office of Homeless Services is to assist individuals and families move toward independent living and self-sufficiency in safe and stable housing. Major areas of work include the coordination of the Homeless Continuum of Care and implementation of a wide array of services including emergency, transitional and supportive housing to individuals, couples, and families.

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