

## Connecting Families Experiencing Homelessness with Early Childhood Programs

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### Key Contacts

**This guide is intended to facilitate collaboration among early childhood and homeless education programs in Maryland. It provides basic information about each program, key contact information, and suggestions for initial steps to build partnerships.**

Quality early childhood programs can change the trajectory of a child's health and well-being and help families experiencing homelessness regain stability. For early childhood programs and public schools, the term "homeless" covers families in unstable or inadequate housing, including those who are:

- sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- living in a hotel, motel, trailer park or campground due to the lack of an adequate alternative;
- staying in a shelter or transitional housing; and
- sleeping in a car, park, abandoned building, bus/train station, substandard housing, or similar setting.

The U.S. Department of Education has estimated that one in every 29 children under the age of six in Maryland experiences homelessness: 14,862 children each year.<sup>i</sup> Children experiencing homelessness have specific rights under federal and state laws, including the McKinney-Vento Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Head Start Program Performance Standards, and the Code of Maryland Regulations. These laws are designed to increase children's access to early childhood education services and programs.

This guide provides a tool for professionals working in homeless education or early childhood programs to enhance support to children and families experiencing homelessness by developing effective partnerships. Partnerships make a difference when families are facing challenges such as:

- A family staying in a motel does not have a primary care provider, and one of the young children is exhibiting signs of a potential developmental delay.
- A family who recently was evicted and is staying with a family member includes a four-year old child who is not enrolled in an early childhood program.
- A family living in a trailer without heat needs child care and educational support for a three-year old.

Use this guide to reach out to your colleagues to discuss how to connect families experiencing homelessness with services and to share information, including:

- Who is eligible for each program?
- What specific services can each program offer?
- How does each program currently support families experiencing homelessness?
- How can each program streamline and expedite enrollment for children experiencing homelessness?
- How can the programs work together to support families?

Complete the chart on page 6 with your local contact information and start the conversation today!

Public School McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program ( <a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a> )	
Brief Program Description	Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness
Every local educational agency (LEA) has a homeless liaison, and every school building has a building homeless contact, to ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness can enroll, attend, and succeed in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate enrollment without proof of residency, age, immunization, or other documents typically required.</li> <li>• Stability in the same school, with transportation provided, as long as it is in the child's best interest to remain in that school.</li> <li>• Fee waivers, school supplies and clothing, free school meals, academic support, and additional services depending on the school.</li> </ul>
Pre-K ( <a href="#">Find Your School District Pre-K Office or Local Program</a> )	
Brief Program Description	Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness
Prekindergarten is a program for 3- and 4-year-old children that helps children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary to be successful in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automatic eligibility and priority.</li> <li>• Immediate enrollment without proof of residency, age, immunization, or other documents typically required.</li> <li>• Stability in the same Pre-K program, with transportation provided, as long as it is in the child's best interest.</li> </ul>

<b>Judy Centers (<a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a>)</b>	
<b>Brief Program Description</b>	<b>Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness</b>
Judy Centers promote school readiness for children ages birth through 5. Judy Center Early Learning Hubs connect to high-quality, comprehensive, full-day, full-year early education services and family support, through a multigenerational approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judy Centers serve families experiencing homelessness regardless of where they reside.</li> <li>• Judy Centers offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Development screenings</li> <li>◦ Family learning activities/family engagement</li> <li>◦ Parenting classes</li> <li>◦ Connections to adult education and workforce development</li> <li>◦ Evidence-based parent/child playgroups</li> <li>◦ 5814107Referrals for services and supports</li> <li>◦ Early Intervention identification</li> <li>◦ Home Visiting</li> <li>◦ Case management with families</li> <li>◦ Service coordination with community partners</li> <li>◦ Connections to local services providers to meet a family's needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Patty Centers (<a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a>)</b>	
<b>Brief Program Description</b>	<b>Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness</b>
<p>Patty Centers (formerly known as Family Support Centers) offer free, comprehensive services to children ages birth through 3 and their parents, including expectant parents.</p> <p>Patty Centers promote the optimal development of young children and help adults develop effective parenting skills and fulfill their goals related to school, employment, and family life. Patty Centers connect parents to resources, community agencies, and support families through a two-generational approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patty Centers serve families experiencing homelessness regardless of where they reside and do not require income eligibility.</li> <li>• Patty Centers offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Quality infant/toddler developmental care, education and assessments</li> <li>◦ Education to help parents understand child development milestones and behaviors</li> <li>◦ Classes to learn positive parenting techniques, nutrition, Adult Basic Education, GED, and English as a Second Language</li> <li>◦ Assistance for adults to achieve educational, work, family, and personal goals</li> <li>◦ Tips for healthy living, family well-being, and mental health support</li> <li>◦ A network of support from other parents, center staff, and community resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Early Head Start and Head Start (<a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a>)</b>	
<b>Brief Program Description</b>	<b>Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness</b>
<p>Early Head Start (pregnant women and children up to age 3) and Head Start (children ages 3-5) programs provide intensive comprehensive child development and family support services. These programs may be administered by school districts or community agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility without proof of income. Head Start Program Performance Standards describe how programs can document homelessness.</li> <li>• A program's policies and procedures cannot require families to provide documents that confirm a child's age, if doing so creates a barrier for the family to enroll the child.</li> <li>• Programs must allow children experiencing homelessness to attend for up to 90 days or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements without immunization and other records, to give the family reasonable time to present these documents. A program must work with families to get children immunized as soon as possible in order to comply with state licensing requirements.</li> </ul>
<b>Child Find (<a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a>)</b>	
<b>Brief Program Description</b>	<b>Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness</b>
<p>The Child Find program exists across all LEAs in Maryland to support identifying children from ages 3 through 21 who are suspected of having an educational disability and who may be eligible for special education and related services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each LEA oversees its own Child Find process; a referral can be made by anyone working with a child, including a parent, family member, child care provider, advocate, or medical professional.</li> <li>• Once a referral is made, the LEA must hold an initial referral meeting. The LEA will provide an IEP team; to help them through the process, the child's parent or guardian may invite additional team members, including family members, outreach coordinators, and case managers.</li> </ul>

Infants & Toddlers ( <a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a> )	
Brief Program Description	Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness
<p>Infants &amp; Toddlers provides support to parents of children from birth through age 2 who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a significant developmental delay:</li> <li>• Have a physical or mental condition likely to result in a development delay.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States must ensure that children with disabilities experiencing homelessness are identified, located, and evaluated.</li> <li>• Consult "<a href="#">A Family Guide To Early Intervention Services in Maryland</a>" for more information.</li> </ul>
Preschool Special Education ( <a href="#">Find Your Local Contact</a> )	
Brief Program Description	Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness
<p>Preschool special education provides specialized instruction and related services, such as speech-language, physical, and occupational therapy, to children with a disability ages 3 through 5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate enrollment without proof of residency, age, immunization, or other documents typically required.</li> <li>• Stability in the same Pre-K program, with transportation provided, as long as it is in the child's best interest.</li> <li>• Requirements designed to promote timely evaluations and uninterrupted education and related services for children who change schools during the school year.</li> <li>• Consult "<a href="#">A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your IEP Rights and Responsibilities in Maryland</a>" for more information.</li> </ul>

Child Care Scholarship (Find <a href="#">Help Applying</a> or <a href="#">Locate: Child Care</a> )	
Brief Program Description	Provisions to Support Families Experiencing Homelessness
The Child Care Scholarship program helps eligible families in Maryland pay for high-quality child care and early education programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An emergency child care scholarship for 90 days will be approved within 3 business days if supported by a document from a provider or school homeless liaison verifying homelessness.</li><li>• Families have 90 days to provide additional documents for an additional 52 weeks of child care.</li></ul>

## Local Collaboration Contact List

Program	Local Agency	Local Contact	Next Steps
PreK-12 Homeless Education			
Pre-K			
Judy Center(s)			
Patty Center(s)			
Head Start			
Child Find			
Infants & Toddlers			
Preschool Special Education			
Child Care Scholarship			

<sup>i</sup> Amy Yamashiro and John McLaughlin (2021). [Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles](#). U.S. Department of Education.