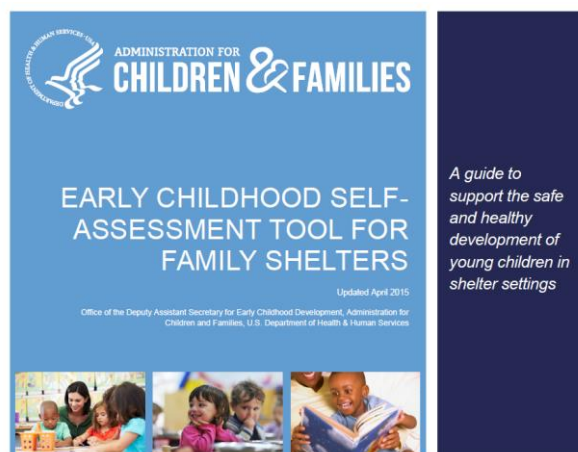


# Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

By Marsha Basloe, Senior Advisor for Early Childhood Development

Last month in D.C., I had the opportunity to participate in the [NAEH](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness) Conference. More than 1800 attendees focused on children, families, youth and adults experiencing homelessness. Although the conference focuses mostly on housing and shelter, I worked with Sharon McDonald to plan a workshop on helping young children and families in need. The following day, I was invited to attend a briefing hosted by [First Focus](#) to hear Matthew Desmond, author of [Evicted](#) and a panel on eviction from research, philanthropy and legal aid. My head was spinning after those two days! It would be too challenging to tell you about all of it so I will share a few highlights:

- I attended a session on Diversion. I'd heard about diversion but was not sure what it meant and how it impacted families. Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness by helping people experiencing a housing crisis to preserve their current housing situation or make immediate alternative arrangements without having to enter shelter. It was the first time I'd heard a session on prevention and problem solving. This could reduce the trauma of entering a shelter. An example of diversion is paying to have someone's truck fixed so he could go to work and continue to pay his rent. This kind of problem solving takes resources, and at this time, mostly private resources. Foundations are stepping up to help with prevention in different communities.
- Secretary Ben Carson of HUD was the keynote luncheon speaker. Secretary Carson talked about the loss of human potential. He wondered how many potential engineers, doctors, lawyers are out there who could be helped by giving them a new beginning? He talked about people not being able to find a steady job without an address. And, he talked about our children – "They are our human capital." This is why I work on early childhood homelessness and why ACF has developed resources that focus on supporting our young children to have quality early learning settings. The earliest years of a child's life set the stage for life-long achievement. In order to develop the potential of young children, we must think of housing and services together. Find resources [here](#).
- Helping Young Children and Their Families Thrive. I had the opportunity to present and moderate this panel with Janelle Leppa from [Simpson Housing Services](#) in Minneapolis and Joe Williard from [People's Emergency Center](#) in Philadelphia. I was able to share ACF information on the [Child Care Development Block Grant Act of 2014](#), a bipartisan re-envisioning of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program that made children who are experiencing homelessness a priority. I also shared the new [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) and their impact on serving children and families experiencing homelessness, and a variety of resources from ACF. Janelle shared her agency's efforts which included having early childhood specialists to work with their supportive housing program. Other staff in the agency focus on housing but the early childhood specialists' sole focus is on the child and family! Joe shared the progress of the [BELL](#) (Building Early Learning Links) project that included having all shelters in Philadelphia complete the [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters](#). One result of the completion of the self-assessments is that the agencies and BELL have successfully increased their relationships. They have also fostered numerous connections between local



early childhood education providers and housing providers, facilitating the enrollment of more children into high quality early childhood programs!

- In *Evicted*, author and sociologist Matthew Desmond follows eight families in Milwaukee as they struggle to keep a roof over their heads. While most examinations of the poorest poor look at those in public housing, not those who are part of the private rental market, this is exactly where most of the impoverished live, and they are evicted often. And most often if they have children. As stated in the NY Times Book Review, "[Children are scarred in the process.](#)" Families with children who are evicted often face high rates of mobility and unstable living environments that result in negative consequences for their children's education, physical health, mental health and interpersonal relationships. In fact, if you live with kids, your chances of getting evicted triple.

As an advisor for early childhood development, I can't help but ask what happens when a child and his/her family are evicted over and over again? How does that child receive the emotional, social, and behavioral support needed for success in school and life?

First Focus released a [set of recommendations](#) to address the barriers to stability faced by the millions of children and families who have experienced an eviction. Investment in early childhood education is one of the recommendations.

"Homelessness during the earliest years of a child's life can have profound impacts on their academic achievement, including their social-emotional development, self-regulation and cognitive development. These sobering statistics highlight the importance of quality child care and preschool for homeless children and their families. Securing safe and affordable child care and preschool remains one of the most significant barriers to stability for working parents and their children. Expanding access to high-quality early childhood and preschool programs prepares children for school, supports parents' ability to maintain stable employment, and provides economic benefits for our society."

Today, families with infants and toddlers are struggling to make ends meet. I am grateful that we have programs and services who work to provide quality early childhood development services and to end homelessness for those vulnerable families in our communities.