



**Innovation in Philadelphia:
A Report on Supporting
Infants-Toddlers Experiencing
Homelessness**



March 2024

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HopePHL™

HopePHL™ (pronounced “hopeful”) was founded through an integration of two human service organizations in Philadelphia, PA:

People’s Emergency Center (PEC) + **Youth Service, Inc.** (YSI)

Leveraging 120 years of combined service experience, it is HopePHL’s mission to inspire Philadelphia’s children, youth, families and communities to thrive by providing housing, advocacy, and trauma-responsive social services designed to promote equity, resilience, autonomy, and well-being.

HopePHL helps over 25,000 community members and residents annually to reach their goals of safe homes, economically secure and healthy families, and thriving businesses. People with Hope, thrive.

HopePHL advocates for urgently needed public policy changes on behalf of families and youth experiencing homelessness and the neighborhoods we serve. We have worked successfully with local, state, and federal government agencies to advance legislation and budgets that prioritize these communities.

Learn more at www.hopephl.org.



INTRODUCTION

Resilience is the capacity to withstand and overcome adversity. Having led social work agencies for many decades, I have witnessed and studied its impact. Resilience is developed over time in a myriad of ways. Positive social supports, place-based connections, access to learning, and resources can all help moderate vulnerability and foster resilience. People who face multiple and complex hardships may not always have access to a rich array of social supports and resources – for example, families experiencing homelessness. Families living in shelter have experienced significant loss i.e. disruption of the family, social connections, privacy. The path to homelessness is in and of itself, often traumatic.

Homeless families – living in shelters, places not meant as residences, or temporarily doubled-up with other families in the community – need evidence-based, proven supports to achieve stability. Often, this requires inter-systems cooperation and closely integrated services. In Philadelphia, HopePHL™ collaborates with housing and early childhood education teams from the Office of Homeless Services, the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning, researchers and family shelters to direct resources and programs to families with young children experiencing homelessness, to help them build resilience.

This report is designed to inform anyone serving families experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia about what programs exist now to bolster resilience for infants and toddlers, examine the growing prevalence of home visiting programs in the area, and make recommendations for supporting and replicating effective programs.

We are uniquely suited to lead this charge because of our experience providing housing, services, and early childhood education; our success advocating for families and youth; and our Visiting Scholars research initiative. We invite you to join us in this work. Please get involved by emailing our policy team at policy@hopephl.org.

Kathy Desmond, President,
HopePHL

Executive Summary





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on infants and toddlers experiencing housing instability or homelessness in Philadelphia and it is intended for the agencies who work with this population. In it we discuss home visiting as a supportive strategy. We look to policymakers and leaders to support programs that innovate to drive positive impact for infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness.

Our Call-to-Action Challenges Philadelphia to:

1. Expand the availability of home visiting programs for infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness.
2. Continue the Building Early Links to Learning (BELL) Project that trains homeless housing staff to help families access high quality early learning opportunities, and the early learning community to understand the unique needs of children experiencing homelessness.
3. Foster inter-system cooperation to improve data collection and reporting.
4. Provide training and resources to the homeless housing system.

Building on Experience

This document builds on the discussions of earlier publications by HopePHL, the Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office, and others.¹ It highlights key county-level housing and early childhood sector data on infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness, with examples of organizational progress, commentary from key leaders, and links to resources.

This publication does not address other barriers to high-quality childcare like the challenge of hiring qualified teachers due to low salaries, finding teachers who want to provide infant care, the decrease in childcare seats post-pandemic, etc. These investigations are beyond the scope of this paper.

Amaya's Story

Amaya (name changed to protect her privacy) was a college student who took a break to be a first-time mom. She wanted to return to school, to increase her opportunities for a family-supporting career path but being a mom experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia had challenges. Expectations of living at a shelter, finding housing, applying for resources like WIC and SNAP support, signing up for childcare waiting lists – all weighed on Amaya as a parent. And Amaya also was concerned that her baby girl wasn't achieving physical and developmental milestones.

Thankfully, HopePHL Parents as Teachers staff were there to provide resources and support! Her Parent Educator, Latoya, helped Amaya transition her child to healthy solid foods, develop motor skills, and improve communication skills. Her daughter is now right where she should be, and although she's still working on achieving some milestones, together they celebrate every win!

"Latoya has been amazing. She has given me great advice and wonderful and fun activities to do with my daughter."

Amaya plans to return to school and finish her degree. She continues to work with Latoya and HopePHL to support developing parenting skills, searching for appropriate childcare and finding suitable housing options.

¹ A State-Level Brief, Participation of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania (January 2022); A State-Level Brief, Participation of Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in PA (July 2023); Cutuli, J. J., & Baye, O. (2023). Building Early Links for Learning: BELL activities and metrics 2020-2022. Nemours Children's Health: Wilmington, DE.

Who We Serve and Why



Credit: Fuchs Photographs

WHO WE SERVE AND WHY

Why Focus on Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness?

Very little information has been published about infants and toddlers who experience homelessness in Philadelphia. There is evidence that these children are at elevated risk for health problems, developmental delays, and social-emotional difficulties compared to non-homeless peers.² A Children’s HealthWatch report that included data from Philadelphia’s St. Christopher’s Hospital, analyzed by Drexel University researchers, provided health metrics of infants experiencing homelessness and who had special needs.³ There is a larger evidence base showing poor outcomes among older children experiencing family homelessness,⁴ but considering that infancy is a particularly sensitive period of developmental neuroplasticity,⁵ we need more and better information about risk and resilience factors for infants experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia.

According to the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, “Home visiting programs can play a critical role in mitigating the impacts associated with homelessness or unstable housing in families. By improving parents’ support for their young children’s developmental needs and fostering healthy parent-child interactions, home visiting programs can ensure relationship stability and provide consistency during periods of frequent moves and unfamiliar surroundings. Home visiting can also reduce risks associated with abuse, neglect, and parental depression by connecting parents to available community-based services and can help to create a sense of belonging in an otherwise unpredictable and rejecting environment.”⁶

In addition, there is a renewed focus on infants and toddlers across the nation. The United States Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recently distributed funds through its **“Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant”** (PDG B-5 Renewal) program to advance their early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems, which includes home visiting, Head Start and childcare. Pennsylvania and other states received



these grants to provide immediate benefits and long-term systems development.⁷

The national advocacy group SchoolHouse Connection included Pennsylvania in its 2023 report **“Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness: Prevalence and Access to Early Learning in Twenty States.”**⁸

The report estimates that **12,000 children from infancy to 3-years old**

who experienced homelessness were served by the federally funded childcare, home visiting, or Early Head Start programs.

² Cutts, D. B., Bovell-Ammon, A., de Cuba, S. E., Sheward, R., Shaefer, M., Huang, C., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Coleman, S., Sandel, M., & Frank, D. A. (2018). [Homelessness during infancy: Associations with infant and maternal health and hardship outcomes](#). *Cityscape*, 20, 119-132.

³ Margaret G. Parker, et al: Household unmet basic needs in the first 1000 days and preterm birth status, 2022.

⁴ Bassuk, et al: Resetting Policies to End Family Homelessness, 2020; Haskett, M. E., & Armstrong, J. M. (2019). The experience of family homelessness. In B. H. Fiese, M. Celano, K. Deater-Deckard, E. N. Jouriles, & M. A. Whisman (Eds.), *APA handbook of contemporary family psychology: Applications and broad impact of family psychology* (pp. 523-538). American Psychological Association; Herbers, J. E., Cutuli, J. J., Keane, J. N., & Leonard, J. A. (2020). Childhood homelessness, resilience, and adolescent mental health: A prospective, person-centered approach. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57(12), 1830-1844. DOI: 10.1002/pits.22331

⁵ Shonkoff & Garner, *The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress*, 2012

⁶ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program

⁷ Learn more at [PDG-Series-Infant-Toddler-2023.8.9.pdf](#)

⁸ SchoolHouse Connection: *Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness: Prevalence and Access to Early Learning in Twenty States*, 2023



The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) highlighted the health status of infant-toddlers in the 2020 Family Support Needs Assessment.⁹ OCDEL is the lead agency administering the MIECHV Program in Pennsylvania. Locally, the City of Philadelphia has launched multiple initiatives supporting all infants and toddlers since 2016 and continues to organize new supports like the Philly Families CAN project.

Philadelphia’s Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness

The following section offers local data on the prevalence of homeless infants and toddlers and comes from a variety of sources as there is no single entity that tracks the population. Multiple sources are used, in part, due to two definitions of ‘homeless.’ The homeless housing system has one definition and the education system another, resulting in different counts.¹⁰

1,360 Infants and Toddlers

were served by the city’s homeless housing system in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022.¹¹

Technically, children in emergency or transitional housing are considered homeless. Children served by the homeless housing system in programs like permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing,¹² and prevention/diversion (rental assistance), while not defined as homeless, are likely to have risk factors related to housing instability.

763 (52%) Infants and Toddlers Were Served in 2022
in either emergency or transitional housing and were considered to be homeless
by the City’s homeless housing system.

Rapid rehousing programs served the second largest percentage of children – 24 percent.

Twenty percent of all infants and toddlers served were provided with prevention or diversion services and did not enter an overnight housing program.

⁹ Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia 2020 Pennsylvania Family Support Needs Assessment | PolicyLab (chop.edu)

¹⁰ See more information at [Breaking Down HUD’s Definition of Homelessness: Resources & Guidance for Advocacy - SchoolHouse Connection](#)

¹¹ Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services via email from Lynda Ait-Mohand to J. Willard December 4, 2023.

¹² Rapid rehousing programs provide 12-24 months of tenant-based rental assistance accompanied by housing case management.



Infants and Toddlers Residing in Housing Programs Supported By Philadelphia's Homeless Housing System, FY 2022

| Age in Years in 2023 (7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023) | Emergency Shelter | Permanent Supportive Housing (PH) | Transitional Housing | Rapid Re-Housing (PH) | Prevention & Diversion | Grand Total |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 0 | 241 | 47 | 50 | 120 | 82 | 497 |
| 1 | 188 | 43 | 38 | 98 | 100 | 426 |
| 2 | 200 | 42 | 46 | 104 | 90 | 437 |
| Total (%) | 629 (46%) | 132 (10%) | 134 (10%) | 322 (24%) | 272 (20%) | 1,360 (100%) |

Note: By definition set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, children served in emergency or transitional are considered homeless, but are not homeless if residing in permanent supportive or rapid rehousing programs. All programs cited here are funded and regulated by the homeless housing system and families are still considered to be vulnerable.

The School District of Philadelphia reported:

1,107 children

Between birth to age two who experience homelessness¹³

In comparison, the **763 children birth to age two** who resided in emergency or transitional housing according to OHS **is 44% less than reported as homeless by SDP.**

¹³ Pennsylvania Department of Education: Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2021-22 State Evaluation Report, May 2023

Number of Children Ages Birth to Age 2, Identified as Homeless, School Year 2018 - 2022, School District of Philadelphia

| Philadelphia | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| Birth to Age 2 | 1,518 | 1,679 | 1,157 | 866 | 1,107 |

The number of children not served by either the homeless housing or the education systems is not known. Although HopePHL did not receive data from human service providers who serve infants and toddlers but who do not report data to SDP and OHS, this information offers some sense of the scale of the issue.



Early Head Start programs provide home visiting and center-based models. All the funded home visiting slots were served by just three of the EHS grantees (represented here as Agency A, B, and C):

| Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness by Three Early Head Start Programs Using the Home Visiting Model, Fiscal Year 2022, Philadelphia* | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| | Total Funded Early Head Start Seats (EHS) | Of Total Funded, # of Seats for Home Visiting | # of Homeless Families and % Total Funded Early Head Start | # of Homeless Children and % of Total Funded Slots |
| Agency A | 136 | 110 | 20 (15%) | 22 (16%) |
| Agency B | 183 | 167 | 26 (14%) | 30 (16%) |
| Agency C | 313 | 169 | 18 (6%) | 20 (11%) |
| Total | 632 | 446 | 64 (10%) | 72 (11%) |

Source: Office of Head Start Program Information Report.

* **Note:** There are three EHS grantees that provide Home Visiting services to families in Philadelphia. The PIR does not break down the data into the program models.

Innovations from the Front Line



INNOVATION FROM THE HOME VISITING COMMUNITY - ENGAGING INFANTS AND TODDLERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN PHILADELPHIA WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Childhood Education

As cited above, home visiting programs can play a critical role in mitigating the impacts associated with homelessness or unstable housing in families. HopePHL surveyed the home visiting system, using interviews, email exchanges, and website research to better understand the experiences of some home visiting programs when working with infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness. Again, this summary is not meant to be comprehensive.

HopePHL's Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) Project increases access to high-quality ECE by children ages birth to five. It is not a home visiting program but works with more than 25 homeless housing programs with training and counseling staff to support a parent's interest in accessing early learning programs for their children. In any given month, a range of 100 to 150 children ages birth through age two are residing in either emergency or transitional housing, and a range of 50 to 75 children ages birth to age two in permanent supportive housing.¹⁴ Shelter staff discussed with most parents of infants and toddlers (ages birth to three) about the value of early childhood programs during their shelter stay in 2021.

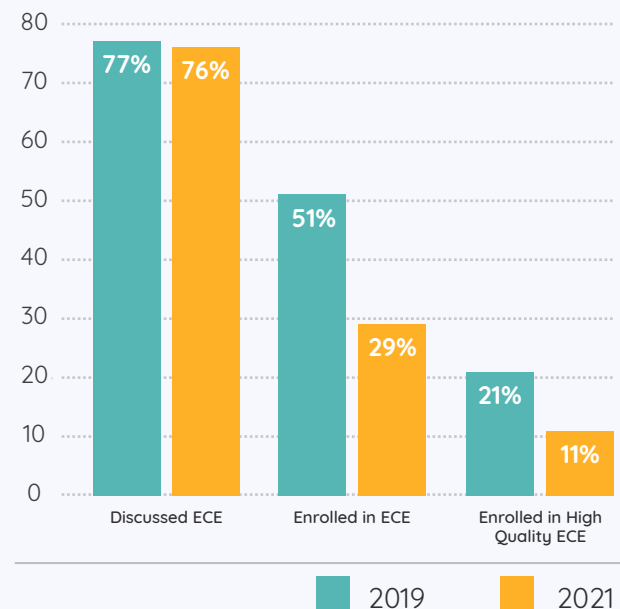
However, parents were much less likely to enroll in any early childhood program, with less than a third (29%) doing so in 2021 compared to 51% in 2019, a decline of 43%. Only 11% were enrolled in a high-quality program in 2021, compared to 21% in 2019, a decline of 48%.

It is HopePHL's experience that accessing high quality ECE for infants and toddlers is more challenging than children ages PreK to five due to parental choice (parents want their infants with them) and the availability of affordable care.



Figure 2: Rates of key metrics for infants and toddlers staying in family shelter.

Rates: Birth to 3-Year Old Children in Shelter



Note: Percentage of students enrolled in ECE are based on the subset that discussed ECE with staff.



Philly Families CAN is a recent innovation that enables parents to easily access home visiting programs and for health care professionals to make referrals. It is managed by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and offers an array of maternal health supports for all of Philadelphia’s citizens. CAN was incubated by the Community Action Network, a collective impact effort created by Philadelphia’s Healthy Start grant.¹⁵ PDPH hosted several of the workgroups and CAN was developed from those discussions.

CAN works with 14 home visiting programs, providing a web portal that parents and health care professionals use to apply for services. CAN began offering its web portal in 2020. In 2022, it referred 372 families to ten home visiting programs. CAN was created because many home visiting programs have different eligibility criteria and serve only select zip codes. Health care professionals and families were challenged to find the right program that could support family needs; CAN created easy access for them, and helps parents decide for themselves what they need and want. Homeless families find out about CAN just like anyone else, through referring providers, nonprofits, and other sources.



CAN began tracking families who are homeless or housing insecure in the fall of 2023. It put two questions on the referral form:

1. Is your living situation intended to be temporary or long term?
2. If temporary, is it due to a hardship or emergency?

By the end of 2024, CAN is expecting to have data on how many families experiencing homelessness accept home visiting services from the agencies CAN serves. CAN has several new goals for 2024. One, it hopes to increase awareness of home visiting by more health care professionals and families. Two, CAN hopes to expand referrals to 20 agencies. Three, CAN wants to establish a “goods/resources” fund to strengthen a family’s stability by providing support for utility bills, purchasing appliances, and other basic needs. And four, CAN hopes to provide general support for children ages birth – 17, like youth service connections and referrals like case management programs.¹⁶

¹⁵ Healthy Start is a [national program](#) to address the issues of maternal and infant mortality, low birth weight, and racial disparities in perinatal outcomes. See [Healthy Start | Programs and initiatives | City of Philadelphia](#) for more details.

¹⁶ Learn more at www.phillylovesfamilies.com.



Early Head Start is a federally funded child development and family support program for pregnant women and families with children birth to three years old and can be either center-based or home visiting. There are an estimated 56 EHS providers in the city educating more than 1,300 children.

Here are three agencies who provide Head Start:

Acelero Learning in Philadelphia served 39 homeless students in its Early Head Start center-based program between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022, in Philadelphia. Of those, 11 resided in a shelter (family shelter, domestic violence, youth or temporary housing) and 28 were doubled up with friends or relatives because they could not afford housing (i.e. not by choice).

Overall, Acelero Learning provides four centers in Philadelphia serving 800+ children ages three to five and 240 children ages birth to three.

Jessica Yambo, Acelero’s Director of Health and Families Services, informed HopePHL that Acelero offers wholistic, wrap-around services that connect families to resources, screenings, hearing and vision screenings, and more. They work to support the goals identified by each family. And, thanks to high-quality standards, Acelero supports a family’s health and nutritional needs. Families experiencing homelessness come to know about the program through word of mouth, and recruitment drives by staff via community events and meetings.

Their infants and toddlers’ programs have waiting lists and are at full enrollment. Ms. Yambo reported that homeless families do not have the family support that could help during emergencies or appointments or lack transportation to the center as they move from place to place. She added that her homeless families are on waiting lists for housing and lack other supports like food and finances. The program’s Family Advocate staff helps families apply for housing, connects the parents to employment, and tries to help the parents with whatever is needed that helps stabilize the family.

Ms. Yambo said that some families do not enroll into her programs because it is not a childcare program, requires parental participation that some parents do not want, provides certain health care activities like flu shots that some parents do not want, and has occasional home visits. Plus, the program is only for six and a half hours a day, which is a barrier for some families who need longer hours or non-traditional hours of care.

She hopes that housing will become available for her homeless families. She also hopes that center based EHS programs would expand the number of children it could serve. She mentioned that a mobile health service like the example in Camden or St. Christopher Hospital’s Dental Van is a good example of what is needed.

The **Children’s Hospital Early Head Start** program served 20 children experiencing homelessness September 1, 2022, through



August 31, 2023. It provides a variety of services, including weekly home visits with hands-on child development activities, parent-child focused socialization, inclusive environment for infants and toddlers with disabilities, and a childcare center.

The **Health Federation of Philadelphia** promotes health equity for marginalized communities by advancing access to high-quality, integrated, and comprehensive health and human services. It manages a home visiting Early Head Start program¹⁷ that serves families in North Philadelphia.

In 2022, it served 26 families experiencing homelessness and a total of 30 children.

The program's director said that home visitors are trained to respect and incorporate diverse cultural practices, ensuring that the program is responsive to the specific cultural backgrounds of the families served. Families come to the program through community partnerships, referrals, word of mouth, and online and offline outreach. The program's director reported that families experiencing homelessness struggle with numerous challenges, including the instability of living temporarily with friends, or living in a shelter with little privacy. She reported that transportation is a key barrier that affects participation with Early Head Start and with appointments for health care. The Home Visitors work with the parent(s) to address these challenges. To help stabilize the living situation, each family is assigned a social worker to provide resources and guidance. Responding to a question about why some parents do not

participate in Early Head Start, the director said that parents experiencing homelessness sometimes perceive that the time commitment is too much, and others have a limited understanding of the benefits of home visiting.

The director recommends that Philadelphia could improve services to families experiencing homelessness by:



Enhancing outreach efforts to increase awareness of available services.



Streamlining access to resources to simplify the process to access transportation, healthcare, and educational supports.



Increasing affordable housing options.



Ensuring service models are flexible and customized to meet the unique needs of families experiencing homelessness.

¹⁷ Learn more at [Early Head Start \(EHS\) | Health Federation of Philadelphia](#).



Maternity Care Coalition (MCC): The mission of Maternity Care Coalition is to improve the health and well-being of pregnant women and parenting families and enhance school readiness for children from birth to age three, serving the southeastern Pennsylvania area. They manage many services, including home visiting programs using the models Parents as Teachers and Healthy Families America. These programs provide nutritional meals to children and families, help families work on various supports, overcome health and safety challenges, and use parent engagement coordinators to help address social determinants of health, which includes housing instability.

In 2022, their Early Head Start program served 10 homeless children and their Healthy Families America served another 10 children. Families learn about MCC's programs through word of mouth and from referrals from other maternal and health providers. Their families struggle with maintaining stability and keeping a child's routines. Transportation and domestic violence are two challenges that MCC staff say families need help overcoming.

MCC recommended to HopePHL that Philadelphia's leaders work to support families experiencing homelessness by developing creative ways to meet the family where they are. For instance, the mobile literacy program that has recently launched goes into communities where families reside. Another recommendation was that the city could create pathways for infants and toddlers using similar strategies that are used to support children ages three to five.

National Nurse-Led Care Consortium: The National Nurse-Led Care Consortium (NNCC), an affiliate of Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC), is a nonprofit public health organization working to strengthen community health through quality, compassionate, and collaborative Nurse-Led care. NNCC houses two Maternal Child Health home Visiting Programs. Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), serving under-resourced, first-time families from as early as possible in pregnancy until the child's second birthday and the Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Program (MM), a program for families with children ages five and under, utilizing the evidence-based Parents as Teachers¹⁸ home visiting model.

NNCC also directs the **Family Advocacy and Integrated Resources (FAIR) Project** an expansion of the NNCC's Family Support Fund and **Nursing-Legal Partnership**, providing free civil legal-aid services and rapid, low barrier financial assistance for concrete needs including rental assistance and moving costs. In partnership with Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC); **Health, Education and Legal Assistance Project: A Medical-Legal Partnership (HELP:MLP)**; and over a dozen evidence-based home visiting programs throughout the city affiliated with Philly Families CAN. This innovative pilot program is supported by a grant from the **William Penn Foundation**.

Families are referred to NNCC through the Philly Families CAN Centralized Intake, word of mouth and referrals from medical doctors, OB/GYN Offices, social workers and insurance companies (Keystone, Health Partners). NNCC Staff report that many families struggle with

¹⁸ Parents as Teachers is a voluntary early childhood development program offering research-based curricula that help families raise children to be healthy, safe, learning and ready for school.



housing insecurity and that the associated stress can impact maternal health and a child’s social-emotional and physical development. NNCC staff have encountered challenges in identifying landlords willing to take housing choice vouchers and other financial supports. Families also face nutritional difficulties, including barriers to successful breastfeeding and access to healthy foods. Housing conditions also present issues such as lead poisoning. NNCC Staff discussed the challenges pregnant and parenting people face in navigating the emergency housing system, hoping to see continued efforts towards improvements in accessibility and environment for young children.

Asked about why some parents elect not to participate in home visiting they acknowledged that fear based on poor past experiences with the child welfare system and fears of mandated reporting may play a role.

NNCC staff offered the following recommendations:

- Increasing access to financial support and stability for pregnant and parenting people with young children.
- Expanding access to emergency childcare and childcare assistance allowing parents to participate in employment and education as well as addressing emergencies.
- Increasing investment in home visiting, early intervention and early childhood education to increase access and continuity of care.

HopePHL’s Parents as Teachers (PAT) model is a relatively new home visiting project that works exclusively with homeless families using an evidence-based model that provides a comprehensive parent education set of services. The model provides a wide array of services to families with children from prenatal through kindergarten and offers deep insights into early childhood development. Originally started during COVID when home visiting became impossible and had to rely on Zoom, the program has been fully staffed since early 2023 and is at capacity of serving 40 families at any one time. HopePHL’s Tamara Shirer reported that since July 1, 2023, her program has served 43 families through 65 referrals. Of these referrals, 10 referrals were on November’s waitlist (space becomes available when a child ages out of the program, or a family becomes inactive). Five referrals could not be enrolled because they did not meet the housing instability criteria and were directed to other programs. The remainder of referrals did not respond when contacted.

The ages of children are:



¹⁹ Details here: [House Resolution 219](#).



Ms. Shirer cited three positive aspects of her program are (1) the time and attention paid to families in crisis, (2) meeting the developmental needs of children, and (3) addressing the overall wellness of family functioning. Families learn about PAT from other programs, social workers, the Philly Families CANS web portal, and word of mouth from families and friends. Ms. Shirer mentioned that parents are challenged by a lot of stressors, including mental health, poverty-related symptoms, relational issues like domestic violence, low hourly wage jobs, and lack of support from families and friends. The families participating in PAT continue to search for housing, employment and stable employment, or struggle to maintain employment as most if not all are working.

The PAT team works with families to apply for housing and other resources. However, Ms. Shirer cautioned that most families do not have adequate income even though most parents are working. A key challenge she identified is trying to work with families when in shelter. One reason she cited is that it is difficult to communicate with shelter staff who are over-scheduled. She also mentioned that a home visiting program like PAT that strives for program fidelity might not align with parents when they are in shelter due to the demands of living in a shelter. Ms. Shirer recommends that: Philadelphia's leadership provide funds to expand programs serving homeless families and that City-managed supports improve

their timelines for distributing support. She illustrated an issue of one family who applied for rental assistance and was told it would take several months. By comparison, she mentioned that the FAIR program provided moving expenses within three days, when the family needed the support. Ironically, this family got a call from the city three months after the application was submitted.

ParentChild+ works with families facing significant obstacles to school and life success including poverty, low literacy, limited education, language barriers, geographic isolation, and/or homelessness. It uses two approaches: One-on-One Model and the Home-Based Childcare Provider Model. The One-On-One model has an Early Learning Specialist (ELS) meeting with parents and their 16-48-month-olds twice a week. ELSs support parents in preparing their children for academic success, strengthening families and communities through intensive, consistent long-term home visiting.

The programs' executive director reported that the agency's strength is its focus on matching families and ELS home visitors culturally and linguistically. ParentChild+ works with Latino, African-immigrant communities who have multiple languages and dialects. Many home visitors come from the same geographical and/or cultural communities that the families live in, and many are parents who went through the



program. She reported that another strength is in connecting families to other resources and the emphasis on a “warm handoff,” i.e., making sure the family connects to the other resource.

The director reported that homeless families learn about the program by word of mouth, referrals from the Philly Families CAN project, and recruitment efforts through participation in community events. She said that families experiencing homelessness struggle with the instability of not having housing and the stress that comes from that situation. She said that stress from moving from place to place is intensified when having an infant or toddler. She explained that ParentChild+ tries to take the ‘normal’ route of helping a family find housing, i.e., referring to the Office of Homeless Services, providing phone numbers and web sites, and sometimes help with finding places to rent. She said that the FAIR project (cited above) helps to pay for temporary housing or avoid eviction, and that this service is important because several of her families are not documented and not eligible for public supports.

She reported that some families do not accept her services because they do not want someone “in their personal space.” She said Zoom connections help some families accept an ELS home visitor as having someone in person in their living space can be intimidating,

the parent sometimes feels they are being judged, or fear that the home visitor might call the child welfare system on the family. She said most homeless families are “in survival mode” and do not have the capacity to manage another relationship.

The director hopes that better collaborative efforts and system coordination between the home visiting, homeless housing, and early childhood systems would improve. She said it is easy for families “to fall through the cracks.” She added that she sees that the homeless housing system needs to show a good-faith interest in working with the population and wonders if child development is thought of as important by this system.

The list above is certainly not comprehensive. High-quality childcare providing infant care, Early Intervention and other services also support infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness but are not listed in this paper.

Opportunities For Local Leadership



OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP

To what extent are Philadelphia’s infants-toddlers and their families who experience homelessness able to participate in early childhood and early learning programs?

There are numerous positive and innovative efforts underway, as cited by the examples above. But a singular effort to bring together into one space the data necessary to understand the scale of infant-toddler homelessness and their participation rates in ECE is needed. This report introduces a discussion on the various data sets that offer guidance for local analysis. The template below – developed by the Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office - could be completed annually and used to inform the key City of Philadelphia departments and the agencies who serve families experiencing homelessness.



The key City departments could include the Office of Homeless Services, Public Health, the Office of Children and Families, Human Services, and the Office of Data Management.

TEMPLATE

| Number of children Birth – 2 Experiencing Homelessness Participating in Early Childhood Programs in Philadelphia | | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
| Estimated # of all children birth – 2 experiencing homelessness. Source: School District of Philadelphia | | | | |
| Estimated # of all children birth – 2 experiencing homelessness. Source: Phila. Office of Homeless Services | | | | |
| # Participating in Early Head Start Source: Head Start’s PIR and individual agency providers | | | | |
| # Participating in Early Intervention Source: PA OCDEL, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health, Intellectual Disabilities | | | | |
| # Participating in Childcare Works Source: PA OCDEL | | | | |
| Estimate of the # of children birth – 3 unidentified / unserved. Source: US Census American Community Reports | | | | |
| # Participating in home visiting (other than Early Head Start) Source: Philadelphia Department of Public Health Philly Families CAN | | | | |

Data Challenges:

HopePHL is aware that data collection and reporting is challenging in many ways. It is the BELL Project's experience that homeless housing agencies are under duress when striving to serve children.

Our last report estimated that 80% of staff working with children left their jobs, disrupting any continuity of services.

This affects communications by ECE and other providers to gain access to parents to offer services.

Agency staff reported²⁰ to BELL of the following needs in the shelter system:



More dedicated staff to focus on children, including education staff, support staff, trained residential staff, overnight shifts, and training in child development.



Parenting classes, life skills training, community activities, family therapy, art therapy, dance, sports, more consistent programming from outside agencies, i.e., Council of Relationships, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, JeffHOPE, and others, plus activities for children with developmental needs who benefit from specialized supports.



Updated list of community resources.

These observations were also found by the research of Dr. Janette Herbers of Villanova and others in a national survey and explained in their publication "Family homeless shelters as contexts for early childhood development: Shelter resources and staff capacity."²¹

Results indicated that:

MOST SHELTERS offered some type of **Parenting programing (65.5%)**

and had some developmentally appropriate space for

Families with young children (87.5%)



However, the nature of these spaces and programs varied considerably, with very few respondents describing use of evidence-based practices. Findings on knowledge of early child development among shelter staff indicated substantial need for trainings on a range of topics, including typical child development, parent-child relationships, and impacts of trauma on families with young children.

²⁰ HopePHL: Promising Practices for Serving Young Children Experiencing Homelessness, to be published in 2024; information was gathered via a focus group on September 15, 2023.

²¹ Halverson, M. M., Wallace, L. E., Tebepah, T. C., Riccelli, V., Bajada, A., & Herbers, J. E. (2023). Family homeless shelters as contexts for early childhood development: Shelter resources and staff capacity. *Child & Family Social Work*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13082>



Notable Local Planning Resources:

The following are samples of positive efforts supporting all infants and toddlers; it is not meant to be a comprehensive list.

- **The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning and CHOP PolicyLab** created the 2020 Family Support Needs Assessment to describe a range of social, environmental, and health factors impacting the well-being of children, families and communities in Pennsylvania. The research team utilized numerous data collection methods, such as community surveys and stakeholder interviews, to categorize the state's 67 counties as having low, moderate or elevated need across six domains: maternal and child health, socioeconomic status, substance use, child safety and maltreatment, community environment and childcare. Additionally, the report spotlighted local service providers who are making a difference in addressing their communities' elevated needs. The needs assessment is a tool for program administrators, service providers, and local policymakers to acquire a nuanced understanding of their community to inform tailored programmatic and policy responses. The report shows Philadelphia's needs in maternal health, socioeconomic status indicators, child safety and maltreatment need, and much more. In addition to the needs assessment, CHOP Policy Lab has initiatives designed to improve maternal health.
- **Childhood Begins at Home:** CBH is a statewide campaign to help policymakers and the public understand the value of evidence-based home visiting and support public investments in the programs.²²
- **Early Learning Resource Center:** The Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) is a single point-of-contact for families, early learning providers and communities to gain information and access a variety of services that support high quality childcare and early learning programs.²³
- **Philly Joy Bank:** The Philly Joy Bank is a guaranteed income pilot that will provide pregnant Philadelphians with no strings attached cash with the goal of improving birth outcomes. According to its website, the Bank is a "collective impact stakeholder group that aims to reduce racial disparities in infant mortality. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health anticipates launching the Philly Joy Bank program in early 2024."²⁴

²² Learn more at Childhood Begins at Home and www.childhoodbeginsathome.org.

²³ Learn more at www.philadelphiaelrc18.org.

²⁴ Learn more at www.philacityfund.org.

Call to Action



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A CALL TO ACTION

This report's purpose is to offer a baseline for Philadelphia's homeless housing system to intentionally consider how it supports infants and toddlers, and suggests that other systems – public health, early childhood education, to name two – cooperate in helping the housing system understand who it is serving. To that end, we call upon Philadelphia to expand home visiting, continue the BELL Project, improve data collection and reporting, and provide training and resources to the homeless housing system.

One, support expanding home visiting programs. Expanding home visiting is dependent on funding from state, federal, and private philanthropy sources, and on the capacity of providers to apply and manage growth. We encourage funders to add resources, and for providers to expand their management and delivery systems.

Two, financially support HopePHL's BELL Project, whose funding expires in 2024. The BELL Project is critical to maintaining relationships among housing agencies and early childhood education providers, and keeping the need for high quality early childhood education for infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness top of mind for policymakers, agency leadership and funders.

Three, we echo the call by the PA Head Start State Collaboration Office on encouraging Philadelphia County to produce a data report annually on the prevalence of homeless infants and toddlers. The data would support planning and decision-making efforts. Since the number of homeless families not served by the homeless housing system is growing,²⁵ community providers can better prepare to serve these growing numbers. Coupled with Philly CAN's new data collection on the number of homeless families its system will serve, leaders in various systems (homeless housing, ECE, etc.) can better support families and the agencies providing the service, especially on the role played by the homeless housing system.

And four, the homeless housing system needs staffing, training, and resources to improve its support of child development. This recommendation is not new. Dr. Herbers and her team, plus the BELL



Project community reports, have identified the need and advocated for resources over the past few years. Recently, BELL has published a set of recommendations²⁶ in previous reports and in focus groups with shelter staff.²⁷

Those recommendations include:

- Shelters and local high-quality early childhood programs should communicate regularly to help families access early childhood programs, as there is limited capacity of quality early childhood programs due to pandemic-related reasons (e.g., staffing shortages; program closures) and a general inequitable availability of funding for ECE resources.
- BELL and the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Early Childhood Education have recently piloted a new practice intervention. They have identified the two early childhood preschool programs closest to each shelter and SDP has encouraged these programs to both reserve space for children in shelter and to proactively outreach to these families. The results from this pilot will be available in a future report.
- Shelter agencies and early childhood programs should continue to prioritize the varied developmental needs of young children experiencing homelessness despite competing demands and add staffing members with child development expertise.

²⁵ School District of Philadelphia: Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in the School District of Philadelphia, Analysis of 2021-22 Data, February 2023.

²⁶ Cutuli, J.J. & Baye, O. Op. cit.

²⁷ HopePHL: Promising Practices for Serving Young Children Experiencing Homelessness, to be published in 2024; information was gathered via a focus group on September 15, 2023.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Interviews

Ellen Davis of Philly Families CAN,
December 28, 2023.

Tamara Shirer of HopePHL,
December 14, 2023.

Joy Ahn, Erin Blair of Nurse-Family Partnership,
December 19, 2023.

Malkia Singleton of Parent Child +,
January 3, 2024.

Jessica Yambo, Acelero,
January 10, 2024

Samia Bristow, Maternity Care Coalition,
January 16, 2024

Email Correspondences

Health Federation Early Head Start's Khadijah Muhammad to Joe Willard,
December 12, 2023.

Acelero's Victoria Ankrah to Joe Willard,
December 19, 2023.

PA Head Start State Collaboration Office's Tracy Duarte's email to Joe Willard,
January 17, 2024.

Data

The Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services provided data on the number of young children experiencing homelessness reporting period for the 7/1/22 – 6/30/23.

- For enrollments starting prior to 7/1/22 that were still open on or after 7/1/22 the age of the client on 7/1/22 was calculated as the age of the client on 7/1/22.
- For enrollments starting on or after 7/1/22 age is calculated as the age on the start date of the enrollment.
- Enrollments in each distinct program type are counted, so a distinct client could be counted in multiple program types.
- A client was counted in only one distinct age category under each program type.
- A client could be counted in more than one age category if the client has multiple enrollments in different program types. For example: a two-year-old is enrolled in Emergency Shelter at the start of the reporting period. Later in the reporting period the child turns three and has a subsequent enrollment in Permanent Housing. This client would be counted once as a two-year-old under Emergency Shelter and once as a three-year-old under Permanent Housing. If the subsequent enrollment had been in the Emergency Shelter, the client would have only Emergency Shelter enrollments in the reporting period and would only be counted under the initial enrollment age of two.
- HopePHL requested data from the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health & Intellectual disAbility Services on November 28, 2023, but did not receive it.
- Additional data is from the Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office.



APPENDIX B: INFANT-TODDLER EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS IN PHILADELPHIA

The early childhood/early learning field offers all families information and services designed to improve child development and ensure children's health and school readiness while supporting young families. Key programs are childcare, Early Head Start, Early Intervention, and home visiting.

Childcare

A variety of programs exist to provide care and early childhood education to children and can be either publicly or privately funded. There are more than 3,000 childcare providers in Philadelphia.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start (EHS) programs serve infants and toddlers under the age of three, and pregnant women. EHS programs provide intensive comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families, and to pregnant women and their families. There are 63 Early Head Start programs in Philadelphia managed by more than a dozen community-based organizations and can serve more than 1,300 children.

Early Intervention

This is the term used to describe the services and supports that are available to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. Services may include speech therapy, physical therapy, and other types of services based on the needs of the child

and family. The Philadelphia Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program is an entitlement program for infants and toddlers between the ages of birth to 3 years of age who have or are at risk of having a developmental delay. Philadelphia County manages the program and reports to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning who also provides the funding for this program. A special unit outreaches and services families experiencing homelessness.

Home Visiting

Early childhood home visiting is a service delivery strategy that matches expectant parents and caregivers of young children with a designated support person—typically a trained nurse, social worker, or early childhood specialist—who guides them through the early stages of raising a family.

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