Understanding Homelessness

2,000 Iowa children experience homelessness each year.

15% of Iowa children live below the poverty line.

Many homeless people are working, but don’t earn enough to pay for housing.

A significant number are mothers with young children.

Watch Your Words

A family may meet the definition of being homeless, but may not view themselves as being homeless. Most often families will talk about “staying with a friend or a family member” or living in a “temporary” location. It may be best to use these same words in your conversations with families as many individuals may view the word “homeless” as disrespectful and shameful.

Did You Know Homeless Children are Eligible for Immediate Enrollment in Child Care?

Sometimes child care programs are faced with a dilemma. They want to enroll a child who may be homeless, but the family no longer has access to existing health records or may need to update immunizations. Normally, this means that the child could not be enrolled. But federal legislation through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act does allow for the immediate enrollment of homeless children. Health record requirements such as a health physical and Certificate of Immunization may be delayed up to 60 days. And homeless children are automatically eligible for Head Start services – it’s not based on income eligibility. This legislation applies to children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

SOME CAUSES FOR HOMELESSNESS INCLUDE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Evicted, unable to pay rent, unemployment, reduced income, or loss of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Physical, mental, or substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>Divorce, separated, break-up, domestic violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may look a little different than what you imagine . . .
WAYS TO HELP

Children Experiencing Homelessness Face many Challenges

Short Term Consequences

- Hunger
- Illness
- Worry about where they will sleep.
- Worry about what will happen to their family.

Long Term Consequences

- Developed more slowly
- Struggled in school
- Missed school
- Repeated grades
- Dropped out of school more often.

Children are resilient. They can recover from the trauma brought on by homelessness if they have people in their lives who can support them and help provide a buffer to the challenging life hardships they are experiencing.

Being Supportive of Homeless Children and Families

- Build a relationship with the child and family so they are comfortable sharing information with you.
- Be consistent; follow a predictable, stable routine for children.
- Help children feel welcome and develop friendship skills.
- Pay attention to basic needs such as an increased need for food or sleep.
- Be sensitive to a child’s appearance. Families may have limited access to bathing facilities, clothing, or laundry equipment. Provide aprons and big shirts for messy activities.
- Inform families of local clothing resources and conduct a clothing drive or swap.
- Some children may be frequently ill. Offer families support and link them to health care resources.
- Link families to Child Care Assistance support.

Homelessness and Hunger

- Offer more filling, nutritious meals on Fridays and Mondays, to help children get through the weekend.
- Make enough food available and give children time to eat.
- Build cooking activities into your curriculum. Teach children how to prepare simple meals.
- Hold food drives and encourage families to share new foods or garden produce.
- Avoid using food for arts and crafts as it may appear wasteful to hungry children and families.
- NEVER use food as a punishment or reward.

Essentials Child Care Preservice Program is a multi-agency collaborative effort and is funded by Iowa Department of Human Services.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach does not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or status as a U.S. veteran. Direct inquiries to Ross Wilburn, 515-294-1482, wilburn@iastate.edu.

HS 77K | May 2017