

Understanding and Mitigating the Impact of Homelessness on Young Children



Youth homelessness is a growing epidemic in Canada. It is estimated that of the 150,000 homeless individuals in Canada, roughly 65,000 are young people. Interestingly youth homelessness appears to be an intergenerational phenomenon where a large majority of youth experiencing homelessness report growing up in families who had difficulties maintaining housing. Evidently, the heightened risk for homelessness in youth may be exacerbated by early life experiences, such as parental homelessness.

Of particular concern for street-involved youth is educational underachievement. An alarming majority of street-involved youth report that they were unable to finish school. Particularly since academic achievement has been found to relate to a wide range of positive outcomes in later adulthood, providing street-involved youth with supports to help them do well in school is imperative in addressing the intergenerational effects of homelessness. More importantly, it is critical for interventions to occur early, given the documented benefits of early intervention for children under five years of age.

Goals and Objectives of the Project

To help break the cycle of homelessness, there are two goals to the current project:

- Understand the pathways to homeless and its impact on young children
- Build a sustainable, portable approach to support parent-child relationships that will foster young children's ability to learn.

There are three main objectives to the current initiative:

- To understand the different pathways leading to homelessness and gain insights into how these experiences can affect parent-child relationships
- To understand the effects of homelessness on the development of critical cognitive skills that help children learn
- To build a sustainable, portable approach to promote school-readiness by supporting children's language acquisition through interpersonal engagement with parents and shelter staff. The intervention is designed to teach parents experiencing homelessness and shelter staff oral material (e.g., rhymes and oral stories) to build their capacity to increase opportunities to engage children in language learning throughout the day in naturally occurring daily events.

Project Team

Project Funder:

- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), Homelessness Partnering Strategy

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