

***USG Positive Parenting Program for
Homeless Families***

Implementation Guide

2004

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Preface

For almost 100 years, Chicago-based USG Corporation has been a leader in producing innovative products and systems to build the environments in which we live, work, and play.

Building and rebuilding quality of life for families in communities is a top priority of USG's philanthropic efforts. Meeting that priority includes not only providing shelter and housing, but also supporting services that sustain fundamental community growth. With support from USG, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) conducted a four-year project within five communities to enhance the parenting experience of homeless families. Using the successful Prudential Positive Parenting Program as a foundation, CWLA provided seed grants to family service agencies, which in turn offered parent education sessions to homeless parents in Cleveland; Duluth, Minnesota; Houston; Chicago; and Los Angeles.

This guide intends to help other communities create the partnerships necessary to implement similar services to the increasing numbers of homeless families and children in the United States.

CWLA expresses our appreciation to USG for its ongoing commitment to improving community life and support of this important contribution toward that end. Additionally, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the gifted professionals at each of the sites who make a difference in the lives of countless children on a daily basis. We extend our thanks to the parents in each of the sites who allowed us all to learn from their wisdom and rich life experience.

The authors wish to thank the many colleagues who contributed to the production of this implementation guide: Mick Polowy, Senior Training Consultant; Carrie McVicker Seth, Research Analyst; Margie Fowler, Program Assistant; Kelly Mack, Editor; and Cara Tarantino and Kari Lefort, CWLA interns.

Introduction

*. . . now I can understand what my kids are going through, what
I'm going to experience with them.*

— USG Program Parent, DePelchin

The importance of stable housing and economic security in a child's life cannot be overstated. Although many parents in crisis provide uncompromised love and support to their children, the conditions imposed by poverty unsettle families and place children at risk of many unhealthy outcomes.

Of course, the most acute manifestation of poverty and instability is homelessness, a condition experienced by an estimated 1.35 million children and their families each year (Burt, 1999). In fact, The Urban Institute has determined that a person is most likely to become homeless before their first birthday, and many advocates say the average age of a homeless American is 9 years (Burt, 1999). The reality is that, at 40% and rising, families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2002).

When a family experiences homelessness or another serious housing crisis, a community's first response must aim at the housing problem. Equally important, however, is attention to the imminent risk to the relationship between parents and their children. Homeless parents expend tremendous emotional resources trying to meet basic human needs, often leaving little in reserve to offer support and understanding to their young children when they need it most. Providing parenting education courses in shelter settings is an effective tool to support parents as they struggle to relieve the effects of homelessness on their relationships with their children (Kelly, Buehlman, & Caldwell, 2000).

This implementation guide is another tool, one that can encourage and assist other communities in creating the necessary partnerships between family service agencies and housing providers to bring parenting education opportunities to homeless families.

How to Use This Guide

This guide includes an overview of homelessness and its effect on families, evidence documenting the buffering effects of good parenting, and research supporting parenting education for homeless parents. We also provide some insight into the lessons learned from the USG program sites, and finally, tools for implementing a parenting education initiative for homeless families.

You can use this guide simply to gain an understanding of how homelessness affects families in your care or to implement a parenting education program in your community. The worksheets can be used to guide you through the process of extending your own programming to homeless families in your community or to aid you in selecting and implementing a new parenting curriculum.

Chapter 1

The Value of Parenting Education for Homeless Families

The Urban Institute estimates that as many as 1.35 million children and their families experience homelessness each year—meaning that over a half million families are unable to secure safe, decent, affordable housing (Burt, 1999). The Urban Institute tells us that a person is most likely to become homeless before their first birthday, and many advocates say that the average age of a homeless American is 9 years (Burt, 1999). According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2002), families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population at 40% and rising.

Surprisingly, a generally accepted definition for homelessness does not exist. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2004) provides an arguably limited definition:

An individual is considered homeless when he or she “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence” and has a primary night-time residence that is,

- (a) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations,
- (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or
- (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

For the purposes of this guide, we encourage communities to use a broader definition of homelessness, recognizing that all forms of housing instability—including overcrowding and substandard housing conditions—can be disruptive to families struggling to maintain stability. Families with a housing crisis can be found in a number of accommodations.

Where Do Families Go When They Can’t Go Home?

For the past two decades, communities around the country have struggled to respond to a growing population of homeless families. The available accommodations, though varied, generally fit into one of the following forms:

- *“Doubling up.”* When families have the option, many will avoid shelters by moving in with family and friends, that is, “doubling up.” Technically, a family is doubling up when they live in a unit where the primary leaseholder is not a member of the family. Often, this situation is a temporary fix until a parent can save enough money to move their family to their own home. Some communities provide homeless prevention funds to these families so that they can expedite the move. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) defines doubling up as “sharing another person’s dwelling on a temporary basis where continued tenancy is contingent upon the primary leaseholder’s or owner’s hospitality and can be rescinded at anytime without notice” (DHHS, Treatment for Homeless, 69 Fed. Reg. 13,540 (March 23, 2004). Accessed August 2005 at <http://>

a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/pdf/04-6362.pdf).

- *Emergency shelter.* In the event that a family has exhausted all other options, they may be able to access an emergency shelter. Typically, emergency shelters provide a family with a place to stay and some supportive services for up to 90 days.
- *Runaway and homeless youth shelters.* Some communities provide shelter and services to meet the needs of homeless, unaccompanied youth. The federal government provides funding for basic centers, transitional living programs, and maternity group homes, commonly referred to as “Second Chance Homes” for youth. These programs are designed to protect youth from the dangers of life on the streets while reintegrating them into society with some level of independent living skills.
- *Domestic violence shelters.* Communities across the country have networks of shelters specifically designed to provide temporary shelter and counseling to women and children seeking refuge from an abuser. The locations (but not the telephone numbers) of these shelters often are undisclosed for obvious reasons.
- *Long-term shelter.* In communities where an affordable housing crisis or a lack of community resources prevents families from quickly leaving shelters and into permanent or more stable transitional housing programs, families are sometimes forced to linger in long-term emergency shelters. These placements typically are more chaotic than transitional housing placements and may land a family in a motel overflow setting. Unfortunately, these situations often complicate but do not preclude the provision of case management and other vital services for families and children.
- *Transitional housing.* Generally, families can remain in transitional housing for up to two years. This type of housing services programs generally take the form of scattered site apartments where the agency, rather than the family, is the leaseholder. Families are expected, and in some cases required, to participate in agency services and make some contribution toward their rent or a savings account.
- *Residential substance abuse treatment programs.* Once a parent has completed a detoxification program, he or she is eligible to enter a residential substance abuse treatment facility in communities where it is available. Normally, the length of stay ranges from 30 to 120 days. In fact, some centers provide scattered site apartments where families can remain under the case management of a counselor for longer periods of time if their addiction warrants such a level of attention and funding is available for ongoing case management. Many residential treatment facilities do not allow children, however agencies are able to facilitate visitation on a regular basis between parents and children.

The reality is that the effects of homelessness on these children can be swift, severe and critical should interventions not occur

The Effects of Homelessness on Children

Homeless children face many challenges posed by residential instability, disproportionate exposure to violence, and inconsistent attention from overwhelmed primary caregivers.

Although the effect of homelessness manifests differently in each child, the experience has an overall profound effect on children and is likely to leave an indelible mark. Some common expressions of homelessness in the lives of children include the following:

- Homeless children have four times the rate of developmental delays as securely housed children.
- Homeless children are in fair or poor health twice as often as other children, and four times as often as those whose parents earn \$35,000 a year.
- Almost 86% of homeless children attend school, but because of frequent absences and moves, more than 21% of homeless children repeat at least one grade.
- Many homeless children face a future as homeless adults; the childhood antecedents of adult homelessness include histories of foster care and residential instability.
- Homelessness is linked to foster care: Homelessness or inadequate housing, in addition to other factors, affected 26% of children entering foster care.
- More than 12% of homeless children are placed into foster care.
- Poverty and inadequate housing are most instrumental in placing children at risk of return to foster care. (The Better Homes Fund, 1999)

Appendix 1 summarizes some of the more noticeable effects of homelessness on children. Violence and separation from parents are common for homeless children—more than one-third of homeless families are under scrutiny by child protective services for child abuse or neglect, with one in five losing at least one child to foster care. Nearly half of all homeless children either have witnessed violence or have been subjected to violence in their home (The Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999).

Children react to traumas in a variety of ways. Some of the coping skills include anger, depression, isolation, low self-esteem, chronic anxiety (often manifested in aggressive behavior among boys and passive behavior or withdrawal among girls), inadequate social skills, insecurity about their substandard clothing and inability to practice good personal hygiene, and a tendency to develop inappropriate, overly friendly relationships with adults who show interest in them.

Adults need to be supported in their role as parents. Providing this support in the form of parenting classes is an effective way to buffer children from the effects of homelessness while enhancing family stability.

Homelessness and Family Functioning

The social capital of the family is the relationship between parent and child.

—James S. Coleman, 1999

Homelessness can disrupt the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional bonds between parents and children. It is disruptive to family roles, often forcing young children to assume adult roles too early

as they are required to care for younger siblings or even parents incapacitated by chemical dependency, mental illness, or despair. Further, constant relocation makes connections with a neighborhood, friends, or a school difficult, and often results in the loss of personal possessions.

Homeless parents expend tremendous emotional resources trying to meet basic human needs, often leaving little in reserve to offer support and understanding to their young children at a time when children need it most. Most service providers charged with helping homeless parents, however, lack the necessary training to give instructional feedback to parents regarding the quality of the parent-child relationship. Instead, services focus on bolstering their parents' ability to maneuver through the myriad public systems designed to move them out of homelessness.

Again, while the primary objective of shelter providers should be to expedite the family's move into permanent housing, experts in the field of homelessness are realizing that with protracted shelter stays, providers have a responsibility to tend to family functioning. These services are most efficiently and effectively delivered through partnerships with family service providers.

Most of these parents are very stressed and have misplaced anger due to their drug use. Their children are very stressed and angry due to the parents being absent, and neglecting their needs. Many of these children have been placed in alternative placement and have issues related to being separated from their parent. Parents who can not deal with their own anger and their children's anger will be at greater risk for abuse and neglect. — Program Director, Beech Brook, Cleveland, Ohio

Additionally, Hausman and Hammen (1993) observe that characteristics of the shelter environment may disrupt parenting processes. For example, shelters are not typically designed as developmentally appropriate environments in which children can explore and become actively involved in meaningful activities.

*...anger is a normal emotion we are all born with. There is constructive and destructive anger.
Think about it before you act.*

—Beech Brook Cleveland, OH, Parent 2003

Contextual stressors potentially interfere with the qualities of parenting associated with children's competence. Mothers are more likely to use negative disapproval with their children in the context of stressors (Patterson, 1982). Maternal stressors predict child maltreatment making it imperative to mediate interactions through parenting classes and counseling.

Parenting Education as a Buffer

She taught me how to be a mother to my kids the right way and that communication is a must with my kids . . . and to talk to them where they would listen and not make me crawl up the wall.

—Positive Parenting Program Parent, Beech Brook, Cleveland, Ohio

Ann S. Masten (2000) finds that resilient children from homeless shelters have many of the same assets as other competent children who grow up in different circumstances: "Most notably, resilient children have competent, caring adults looking out for them and supporting their competence. For example, homeless children with parents who are involved in their education, communicate high

expectations, and facilitate school attendance and homework, have far better academic achievement than children without the advantages of an effective parent.”

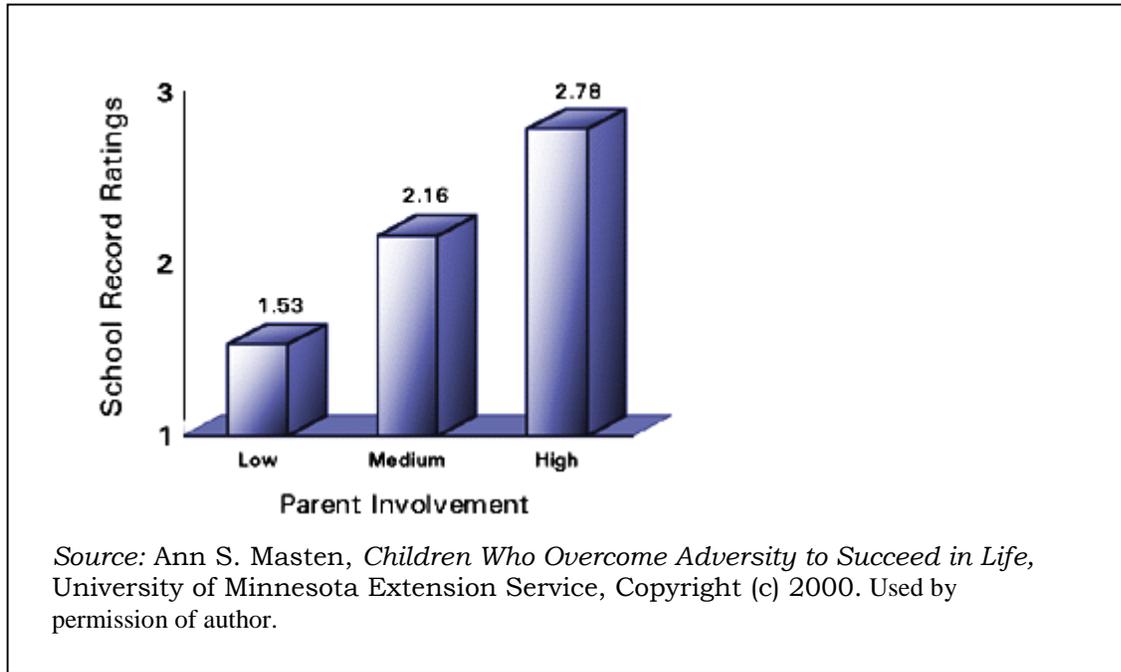


Figure 1. Academic achievement (on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 is well below average and 3 is average) of homeless children ages 6 to 11, plotted by level of parental involvement in education.

Formal and informal support is associated with more optimal parenting behavior. For example, informational, practical, and emotional support may directly influence the parent’s ability to nurture the child by providing direct assistance, positive modeling of parenting, or information about child development and parenting to facilitate the nurturing process. Social support may indirectly enhance parenting by promoting parents’ mental health and well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Parenting in Public

Mothers and frontline staff members I interviewed identified help with parenting as the most successful area of help giving provided to families while they lived in the shelters. (Friedman, 2000, pg. 90)

In discussing effective parenting help—the author stated that “Three factors emerged as being critical in determining whether a staff member’s help was perceived as effective; talking with parents in private; using a nonjudgmental approach; and being sensitive to timing (not reacting in a crisis mode, if possible).” (Friedman, 2000, pg. 90)

Reading and Resources

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- The Institute for Children and Poverty. (1999). *Homeless in America: A children's story—Part one*. New York: Author.
- Kelly, J. F., Buehlman, K., & Caldwell, K., (2000). Training personnel to promote quality parent-child interaction in families who are homeless. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 20(3), 174.
- Masten, A. S. (2000). *Children who overcome adversity to succeed in life*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service. Accessed August 2005 at www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7565_06.html.
- U.S. Conference of Mayors (2002). *A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities 2002*. Washington, DC: Authors. Accessed October 18, 2004, at www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2002/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessReport2002.pdf.

Websites

The Child Trauma Academy
www.childtrauma.org

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
www.naehcy.org

The National Center on Family Homelessness
<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/index.html>

The National Coalition for the Homeless
www.nationalhomeless.org

Parents Anonymous
www.parentsanonymous.org/paIndex10.html

Chapter 2

Lessons Learned

Enthusiasm continued throughout the 12-week course. Conversations could be heard throughout the week about things learned or relevant to the parenting class. Our women looked forward to the group.

—Residential Director, Genesis House, Chicago

The USG/CWLA implementation experience serves as a useful illustration of the continuum of partnerships that can bring parenting education and supports to homeless parents. While some sites started from scratch using seed grants from the USG Corporation to develop new partnerships, others were able to add a curriculum to longstanding partnerships and network of services. In general, the implementation produced four common lessons:

- Small seed grants can be used successfully to promote partnerships between child and family agencies that have parenting programs and agencies that serve homeless families.
- Many homeless parents are eager to participate in parenting sessions and are receptive to new learning.
- Agencies and organizations that serve homeless families are looking for ways to offer more services and resources.
- A well-designed, developmentally appropriate parent education curriculum is a basic platform that can be added to curriculum elements that meet specific needs.

We have an excellent core group who attend on a regular basis . . . this seems to be a pretty serious group, most of whom come voluntarily. We do have two young women who have lost custody of their children and who need to show to their county social worker they are serious about getting their lives in order so they can regain custody. Life House provides special services to them where they are comfortable and connected. They would be embarrassed and uncomfortable in regular sessions. The young parent coordinator at Life House works hard to recruit young parents to our parenting sessions. This is a wonderful partnership. The participants have come to trust the two of us as real, caring resources to them. I appreciate the opportunity to really make a connection.—Parent Trainer, Barnes Early Childhood Center, Duluth, MN

In addition to the structured classroom learning, the parents are also able to develop a sense of normalcy when they participate in the group parenting classes. They begin to develop awareness that they are not the only mother raising an infant with colic or dealing with a toddler who throws temper tantrums. This in turn promotes a sense of shared camaraderie for the participants in the group. Therefore, along with developing skills to better meet their child's developmental needs, the mothers are able to receive continued support from the member of the group and the presenter.—Program Director, DePelchin Children's Center, Houston, TX

In the USG implementation sites, seed grants under \$15,000 provided enough additional funding to allow family service agencies to extend their existing services to housing providers in their communities.

This money allowed agencies to cover a portion of an existing staff person's time (a family resource advocate or parent trainer, for example) to develop strong relationships with local homeless service providers. These key staff members attended meetings of homeless advocates and training sessions on housing while also networking and sharing the availability of parenting resources with other professionals. Additionally, these relationships provided some exposure to the homeless services system for the family service agency staff, giving them a good opportunity to learn more about homelessness. Of course, the money also subsidized the staff person's salary as well as their benefits and travel time once they began teaching the courses.

Seed grants also allow agencies to purchase additional materials and provide incentives for parents to attend the sessions, including gift certificates to local grocery stores and books for their children.

In essence, small seed grants seemed to be ample to cover the additional costs of expanding existing services to homeless families borne by family service agencies. (In Chapter 3, we provide some potential funding sources.)

Parent Participation

I'm just a lot calmer, I know how to deal with my eight year old.
—DePelchin, Houston, TX, Parent, 2003

Sites found that many homeless parents were eager to participate in parenting sessions and were receptive to new learning. Generally, parents welcomed the opportunity to learn techniques to manage stress and their children's behavior. Equally important to the parents was an opportunity to hear from others dealing with similar parenting issues and to establish a connection to the trainer.

Sites indicated that many parents were not resistant to the training despite the fact that they were being mandated to participate. At Beech Brook in Cleveland, Ohio, for example, parents mandated to attend by court order found greater success in their program. Their success was partly a function of the parents' interest in obtaining documentation demonstrating completion of the coursework to provide to their judge to promote family reunification. Nonetheless, it leads to gains in learning for the parents involved.

I've noticed that one of the ladies here when she's talking to her children, her tone of voice has changed. And the words that she uses are a lot more calm, and the children listen to her better.
—DePelchin, Houston, TX, Parent, 2003

Programs that provide proof of completion (e.g., a certificate) allow for a greater likelihood for children being returned to the parents. A certificate is an uncomplicated incentive and persuasion tool for parents to complete the class. Proving to a judge or the court system that the agency's program and the curriculum is a success is a useful way to establish rapport with the courts and gain respect for the program.

Of course, shelters can also run successful programs on a voluntary basis for parents. Sites running voluntary programs find that participation is enhanced usually by a welcoming, inviting

environment; an interesting curriculum; and, to a large degree, a likable, engaging trainer. Incentives such as gift certificates to local grocery stores and books for children also are a good way to entice parents to attend sessions.

Welcoming Service Enhancement for Families in Emergency and Transitional Housing Settings

Although the numbers of homeless families with children is increasing, the federal funding available to provide services is decreasing. A number of reasons cause this discrepancy, including a push by the government to steer communities to target funding to create permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless adults. Increasingly, that comes at the expense of programs and services for homeless families and children. To compensate, homeless shelters and housing providers need to reach beyond the housing system to family service providers.

Providers working with the homeless and precariously housed families (including families in transitional housing settings) are in need of partners, such as family service agencies that can supplement their services or replace services they lost in recent changes to federal funding priorities. That was certainly the case in the USG sites. The housing and shelter providers approached in the USG cities were open to partnerships that would enhance their ability to serve families.

I always need to mean what I say and consistency is the key to discipline.
—Beech Brook, Cleveland, OH, Parent, 2003

Though the length of stay and accommodations vary, the housing and homeless service agencies were looking for help and partners in the process of expanding and improving services to their constituents. That was very much the case in the five USG communities. The family service agencies encountered encouragement and even an expression of relief from their partners. Other than asking for help in coordination of attendance, the family service agencies made no demands of the housing and homeless services staff. Although most courses were held on-site, some agencies even made available their own space and transportation arrangements.

The Jewish Children's Bureau in Chicago, for example, provided space and childcare in addition to training. The staff held a session to train the Night Ministries Youth Empowerment Services staff on a hybrid curriculum for homeless teen parents, called *Caring Moms/Capable Kids*. They then conducted the parent education series at a childcare center, called Baby-Toddler Nursery, where the program was centered around parents at risk of homelessness because of income fluctuations. The participants attended three Saturday play group sessions.

Developmentally Appropriate Parent Education Curriculum as a Basic Platform

The success of this program is, to a large degree, dependent on how well the selected model and the site fit together. The type and length of stay of the homelessness and housing services program, the personality of the trainers, and the target population must be considered before the training is selected and implemented. Before beginning, a thorough understanding is needed of the parameters posed by your agency and target population.

A traditional curriculum needed to be modified for a nontraditional audience. A 'blended curriculum'—one which integrated the Positive Parenting curriculum with a Nurturing Curriculum and other relevant parenting materials—proved to be the most appropriate and effective for the participating parents. —Parent Trainer, Beech Brook, Cleveland, OH

One series offered by Beech Brook was delivered to women who were seeking to reunify with their children, who were in child welfare placements. This curriculum specifically addressed the concerns expressed by the program participants. The topics of this series included: *Separation and Grief, Positive Discipline, Natural and Logical Consequence, Focus on Feeling, Stress Management, and Building Self-Esteem*. The participants were pleased with the information provided, especially concerning being a “better person” as well as a “better parent.” The series in general seemed to be a success, according to the evaluations completed by the participants.

Avoiding Potential Pitfalls

- *Plan for an adequate meeting place.* The importance of adequate group meeting space is particularly important. The parents involved must feel comfortable enough to share their feelings in a private setting. Parents usually are able to communicate their personal stories and problems when they are in a close, secure and comfortable setting. The New Life Shelter in Chicago was an old auto body shop transformed into a homeless shelter. Unfortunately, this left participants feeling uncomfortable sharing their personal stories and feelings. When situations such as this arise, putting up a physical barrier is a way to deter this kind of situation. It is important that participants of the class have the feeling of seclusion, even if the barrier does not block out sound completely. The ability to improvise will increase the success of the program.
- *Plan for mandated versus voluntary participants.* Parents mandated to attend the parenting class should be made aware of the ability to earn a certificate of achievement for finishing the class. Some transitional programs require attendance or a case plan. A strong relationship with the courts can allow for the certificate to have greater meaning, but that is dependent on the agency as well as the judges. If the agency has participants not mandated by the court, using an incentive for regular attendance is possible. For example, for every three consecutive meetings attended, a participant could receive a local grocery store gift certificate.
- *Childcare.* The availability of childcare is beneficial to the parents to increase consistency of participation. The program at the New Life Shelter found that their inconsistency of

childcare led to a decrease in attendance. Adults participating in the parenting class must be free from any unnecessary obstacles, especially childcare. The two most efficient ways of addressing this issue include (1) providing a supervised childcare area or facility for the children and (2) having the class while the children are in school (if applicable).

- *Custody and visitation.* The current relationship with the children is another factor. Each family is facing different circumstances therefore, the facilitator must remember that not all parents have regular contact with their children. The facilitator needs to direct a portion of the learning to these parents' situations. For example, Beech Brook frequently ran into situations where parents were not in constant contact with their children.
- *Shelter environment and demands on parents' time.* Make sure that the environment in which you provide the training is conducive to good parenting! Like all social service providers or, for that matter, any home, the environment varies. While some are organized and prepared, others are more haphazardly arranged. In developing your relationship and the parenting program you intend to offer, get to know the culture of the homeless service provider that you will work with. The environment may be chaotic and parents will need to learn how to manage their parent-child relationship while maintaining some sense of normalcy within the shelter. Shelter life may disrupt the family's routines, such as mealtime, bedtime, or the family's morning routine.

On the other hand, homeless service agencies may impose a structure to which families are unaccustomed, presenting an opportunity for parent educators to stress the importance of families adopting some of this structure and establishing routines. Some shelters, for instance, facilitate family time by providing meals at arranged times and providing private spaces for families to be alone together. Many transitional housing providers offer this arrangement in their scattered site apartments.

At a minimum, avoid conflicts with other required meetings such as house and case management meetings. Be sure that the partner agency helps parents to arrange parenting class schedules to avoid any such conflicts.

Reading and Resources

Harms, T. (1998). *Preserving childhood for children in shelters.* Washington, DC: CWLA Press.

Fraser, M. (1997) *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective.* Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Chapter 3

Implementing a Program in Your Community

Listen to your kids, love them, when they are good or bad.
—Beech Brook, Cleveland, OH, Parent, 2003

To mitigate the deleterious effects of homelessness on children's development, researchers and program planners are increasingly endorsing parenting programs that offer homeless parents and their children opportunities for positive interactions. Offering some form of attention to parent-child bonds for families in your shelter, therefore, is important. Optimally, you can select and implement a parenting education program.

Once you have determined that homeless families in your community will benefit from the development or expansion of a program, you can determine your agency's capacity to do it. Appendix 2 contains a needs assessment and checklist to help you gauge your agency's communities readiness to move forward.

Getting the Partners on Board

DePelchin Children's Services in Houston, Texas, leveraged existing partnerships to bring much needed parenting courses to families and youth in a large homeless shelter system. Staff capitalized on their rich history of collaborative relationships with the county crisis intervention and emergency family shelter provider and the county homeless youth network of seven provider agencies.

If you are aware of the homeless shelters in your area, you may wish to call and schedule a visit to tour the shelter and meet with the director to learn about their work and discuss what you have to offer.

A strategic way to meet several people involved in the housing and homeless service community is to call your local coalition for the homeless and attend a meeting. Just about every state and county has some form of coalition for the homeless that stays connected through regular meetings. You can determine who your local coalition is by visiting the websites of the National Coalition for the Homeless (www.nationalhomeless.org) or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (www.hud.gov). When you have identified the contact person at the coalition, you can request to make a presentation of your proposal at one of their meetings.

Selecting the Most Appropriate Curriculum

*She makes is to where I can understand what my kids are going through,
what I'm going to experience with them.*
—DePelchin, Houston, TX, Parent, 2003

When selecting a curriculum or developing your own curriculum, you must first determine the needs of the parents and the structure of their involvement in your program. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do the parents you plan to serve have special concerns?
- Is your program designed for teen parents, a parent with custody or without custody, a parent in a domestic violence shelter or alcohol and drug treatment program, or a grandparent?
- Will a generalized curriculum designed for a broad group of parents or even parents with similar aged children be best for the parents in your program?
- Will you need to think about combining one or more curricula to make them more effective to the parents attending your sessions?
- When will parents be available to attend - everyday, once a week, in the mornings or in the evenings?
- How long will the parents be available to attend and participate in parenting education sessions?
- Are parents in a 30-day emergency shelter or in a year-long transitional housing program?
- Do you have several clients that speak other languages – do you need a separate session to meet their language needs?

Asking these questions and more will help determine the length of the curriculum you can choose. For instance, it makes no sense to select a curriculum that requires many sessions if parents will not be available to participate in all the sessions. You should consider a curriculum that is most appropriate for the clients your agency serves.

The curriculum design should address the general principles of how adults learn. Some guidelines that should be used when evaluating any curriculum model follow:

- The curriculum should incorporate the parents' experiences into the learning environment. The curriculum design should provide opportunities to make connections between the content and their own experiences by using brainstorming activities and group discussions that solicit their input. Be careful to keep the sharing organized and structured so that everyone has a chance to talk!

Too much cross-talking.

—Beech Brook, Cleveland, OH, Parent, 2003

- The curriculum design should include activities where the parents work in small groups and are encouraged to draw their own conclusions. This fosters and supports a sense of independence on the part of the parents.

- The curriculum approach should be problem-centered and not subject-centered. A theoretical presentation should follow with practical information, exercises, and case studies that convey the concepts and skills related to the subject.
- The curriculum design promotes learning by doing. Again, theory is followed with application by using exercises, role plays, case or situational discussions.
- The curriculum design promotes a safe and comfortable learning environment. The parents do not feel threatened or intimidated by any of the activities. Expectations and learning agreements are clarified at the beginning with an understanding that participation is accepted and encouraged.

Parenting principles are very personal. Each parenting education curriculum is developed based on a set of core principles. When selecting a parenting education curriculum, facilitators must know, understand, and believe in its core principles. If your agency generally supports the principles of a curriculum but question one or two sessions, some curricula can be modified or adjusted. In some cases, a curriculum is designed to be completed step by step without adjustments or changes. You will need to evaluate this when selecting an appropriate curriculum for your program.

This is the approach the program manager took at Jewish Children’s Bureau of Chicago: “YES is a program for homeless teen parents. I trained them on the Prudential curriculum and added more information from the teen parent curriculum that I developed, “Caring Moms, Capable Kids.””

Selected Parenting Programs for Homeless Families

The following are examples of programs and curriculum used for families who are homeless or are experiencing housing instability:

- CWLA’s *Teaching Parents of Young Children* is a curriculum for people on a very wide range of education and intellectual levels. It is a compilation of core information that all parents need to know. Using a developmental approach, it is organized into 12 sessions to help parents understand and relate appropriately to child behavior at different ages and stages. The “Train the Trainers” seminar is designed to enable the participants to explain why parent education is an important component of a child care program, list key principles of adult learning, identify ways to adapt *Teaching Parents of Young Children* to meet the specific needs of families served by the programs, describe ways to create and maintain a favorable group learning climate and to describe how the *Teaching Parents of Young Children* is organized. Lastly, it is also designed to explain how to conduct the curriculum's 12 sessions, how the *Parent Power Pages* are used to help parents transfer their learning to at-home parent–child experiences, and how to use the program's evaluation results to enhance their ability to assist parents in rearing their children. The Prudential Positive Parenting Curriculum is available for free at www.cwla.org/corporate/prudentialpositiveparenting.htm.
- *The Art of Positive Parenting Today* program (TAPP Today) focuses on helping parents create a healthy, mutually respectful family environment. Founded in 1978, TAPP Today has helped tens of thousands of parents learn how to use positive communication skills with their children, resulting in a strong foundation for building children’s self esteem and parent-child

relationships that grow stronger through the years. Children with high self esteem do better in all facets of life. Families who practice positive communication skills find greater enjoyment and more successful ways of navigating the difficult times. It's never too late to learn more about The Art of Positive Parenting. For more information about this curriculum, go to www.actionforchildren.org/page5130.cfm.

- Parent–child literacy programs like the *Together In Learning* model (piloted by Homes for the Homeless in several shelters in New York as well as 15 other cities nationwide) enable parents to further their own literacy level while engaging in games, stories, and literacy projects with their children. These sessions teach young homeless parents the skills to become their children's first teachers, and later, advocates in their classrooms. With nearly half of the nation's population lacking the basic reading skills necessary to function in society, shelters can become important frontline vehicles for supporting literacy efforts.

Many studies demonstrate the contribution of domestic violence to homelessness, particularly among families with children. A 1990 Ford Foundation study finds that 50% of homeless women and children were fleeing abuse (Zorza, 1991). More recently, in a study of 777 homeless parents (the majority of whom were mothers) in 10 U.S. cities, 22% said they had left their last place of residence because of domestic violence (Homes for the Homeless, 1998). In addition, 46% of cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (1998) identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.

Knowing that so many homeless children and their caregivers have suffered as witnesses and victims of violence, facilitators may be wise to seek out a curriculum that helps build parents' abilities to respond to a childhood history of violence.

- The curriculum *Helping Children Who Witness Domestic Violence: A Guide for Parents* was funded by the King County Women's Program and written by Meg Crager and Lily Anderson in 1997. The purpose of the curriculum is to help parents who have experienced domestic violence understand its effect on their children and themselves, teach parents to talk and listen to their children about their experience of the violence, encourage children's resiliency, and support parents in strengthening their relationships with their children. The authors note that it "is not a curriculum for a comprehensive parent skills program." The Instructor's Manual for parents is available at the following website: www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/materials/instructor.doc
- The foundation of Family Development Resources' *Building Nurturing Parenting Skills in Teenage Parents*, by Stephen J. Bavolek and Juliana Dellinger-Bavolek, is that parenting is learned. The programs are based on the following six assumptions:
 1. *The family is a system.* Involvement of all family members is essential to change the system. Parents and children in the programs participate together in group- or home-based interventions.
 2. *Empathy is the single most desirable quality in nurturing parenting.* Empathy is the ability to be aware of the needs of others and value those needs. When empathy is high among family members, abuse is low. The two are essentially incompatible. The programs seek to develop empathy in all family members.

3. *Parenting exists on a continuum.* To some degree, all families experience healthy and unhealthy interactions. Building positive, healthy interactions between family members is an important key to reducing family violence.
4. *Learning is both cognitive and affective.* To be effective, education or intervention must engage the learner on both the cognitive (knowledge) level and the affective (feeling) level.
5. *Children who feel good about themselves are more likely to become nurturing parents.* Children who feel good about themselves are more capable of being nurturing sons and daughters and of becoming nurturing parents than children with low self-worth. A major goal of the Programs is to help both parents and children increase their self-esteem and develop positive self-concepts.
6. *No one truly prefers abusive interactions.* Given a choice, all families would rather engage in happy, healthy interactions than abusive, problematic ones such as belittling, hitting, and shaming.

An evaluation of this program found the following improvements in the parenting skills of teen mothers:

- Significant increases in age-appropriate parental expectations of children.
- Significant overall increase in the ability of teen parents to be empathically aware of the needs of their children.
- Significant decrease in the belief of corporal punishment as a means of disciplining children.
- Significant decrease in reversing parent-child family roles.

This training material can be ordered at www.nurturingparenting.com.

Funding Your Program

Finding the right amount of funding for your program depends on how much you plan to do and what you already have on hand.

Free

You can do a program for free, but keep in mind that the planning will involve staff time. CWLA's *Teaching Parents of Young Children* is available on the Internet for free. You can download an order form, complete it, and send it to CWLA. Other materials can be rented from the local library system, such as children's books and parenting videos. You may be able to enlist a competent volunteer to provide the training to your parents. Additionally, if you don't have adequate space to host a program, one of your community partners may be able to provide space at no cost (e.g., a local library, school, church, or community center).

If you would like to create incentives for participation, you can ask a local grocery store or restaurant to donate small gift certificates for, say, \$5 or \$10 to be given to participants after completing their course work or each session.

Government Grants

Several federal departments, including the Department of Education, DHHS, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, offer grant money that can be used to provide parenting education programs for families in shelter or other stressful settings. For example, DHHS offers Early *Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA)* discretionary grants each year. These grants intend to

develop, operate, or enhance voluntary early learning programs that are likely to produce sustained gains in early learning. To be considered for funding, applications must include activities for “enhancing early childhood literacy” *and* two or more of the other allowable activities: promoting effective parenting; helping parents, caregivers, childcare providers, and educators increase their capacity to facilitate child development and promote learning readiness; developing linkages among and between early learning programs and healthcare services for young children; increasing access to early learning opportunities for young children with special needs; increasing access to existing early learning programs by expanding the days or times that young children are served, by expanding the number served, or by improving the affordability of the programs for low-income families; improving the quality of early learning programs through professional development and training activities, increased compensation, and recruitment and retention incentives for providers; and removing ancillary barriers to early learning, including transportation difficulties and absence of programs during nontraditional work times. (DHHS, 2004).

The best way to learn about available federal grants to fund your work is to visit www.grants.gov.

Local Funding

Some communities have established children’s trust funds. These dollars can be tapped by local agencies wishing to improve the quality of life for local children. Agencies can contact their local government (mayor’s office, department of development, etc.) to learn whether their community has such a trust fund or a similar stream of funding.

Another great source of funding and other types of support are local service clubs, such as the Junior League, Kiwanis Club, and the Lions Club. These clubs may be interested in contributing not only seed grants but also space, volunteers, and materials to help you develop a program in a local shelter. The Junior League, for example, has set up funding for parenting classes and supplied books to create libraries and materials for children play areas in family shelters.

Service clubs are organizations providing individuals with meaningful opportunities to perform community services, enjoy fellowship, and participate in programs that help their communities. Generally, members also are given opportunities to learn and exercise leadership skills, expand business through professional networking, and gain a sense of worthwhile accomplishment. A wide variety of service clubs exist with different focus, goals, programs, and memberships. Often, these clubs make donations to local community agencies. A list of local service clubs around the country can be accessed at the following Web address: http://directory.google.com/Top/Society/Organizations/Service_Clubs.

Foundation Grants

The most comprehensive source to learn about potential foundation grants is the Foundation Center. Agencies can learn more about foundation funding and do a search for grants on the Foundation Center website (www.fdncenter.org). Based in New York City, with field offices in

Atlanta, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, the foundation center is designed to provide information and instruction for grant-seekers.

Implementing Your Program

Based on the number of families you serve, the size of your budget, and the format of your selected curriculum, you undoubtedly have several parameters within which to work (Appendix 3). Working within these parameters, there are several factors to consider:

- Mandatory or voluntary participation.
- Length of shelter stay.
- Ecology of shelter, or resources and obstacles parents encounter as they construct and engage in meaningful family activity. The rules of the shelter often were identified as deterrents to engaging in family occupations.
- Temporal demands, or the time constraints parents experience while living in a shelter. Parents acknowledged how time demands influenced family occupations but positioned this constraint within the context of the geographical area.
- History of self, or how parents assert their sense of self beyond the limits of their current experience of being homeless.
- Selection of a trainer.
- Space.
- Materials.
- Childcare.
- Reliable schedule.
- Court involvement.
- Maximum size of participants (generally no more than 15 adults).
- Language barriers.

Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement

Simple evaluation sheets can be used to measure participants' satisfaction with the training. Agencies are encouraged to develop evaluation sheets to measure satisfaction and to help in improve future services.

Focus Groups

Focus groups of participants allow for a guided dialogue about the success and needed improvements to a parenting curriculum. DePelchin Children's Center chose this format to perform quarterly evaluations of their work with homeless parents. These discussions were held after the fifth and sixth sessions of an eight-week course. The participants were guided through the dialogue with the following questions:

1. What did you like about the class? Were you satisfied?
2. What new information did you learn? How will you apply what you learned?
3. Have the sessions affected your parenting ability or your child's behavior?

The focus group questions are similar to those that a trainer might present on an evaluation form, however a focus group allows for more informal discussion among group members.

Private Researchers

As an integral part of the parenting education classes, women are encouraged to participate in discussion about the course content and other pressing child rearing concerns. Each class session begins with the opportunity of the class to discuss and share experiences that they may have had over the past week. —Program Director, DePelchin Children's Center, Houston, TX

Shelters sometimes work with local universities to conduct research on the efficacy of their programming. In fact, many doctoral candidates will conduct this research for free. If your agency is interested in having formal research conducted to determine the effects of your work, you may wish to contact the graduate office at a local university.

Reading and Resources

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U.S. Conference of Mayors (1998). *A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities*. Washington, DC: US Conference of Mayors. Accessed August 2005 at: <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/homeless/hunger98.pdf>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) Discretionary Grants. *ACF Grant Opportunities*. Accessed August 2005 at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2004-ACF-ACYF-LO-0024.html>.

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Appendix 1

Bio-Psycho-Social Aspects of Homeless Children **FACT SHEET**

Biological

- ◆ Homeless children are in fair or poor health two times as often as other children, and four times as often as children whose families earn more than \$35,000 per year.
- ◆ Homeless children have higher rates of low birth weight and special care right after birth four times as often as other children.
- ◆ From infancy through childhood, homeless children have substantially higher levels of acute and chronic illness. (acute illness includes: fever 37%, ear infection 23%, cough 17%, stomach problems 15%, asthma 14%).
- ◆ Children in 40% of homeless families have an average of two or more chronic illnesses within a single year.
- ◆ Homeless children have twice as many ear infections, five times more diarrhea problems.
- ◆ Very high rates of asthma among homeless children are connected to old, dilapidated housing, exposure to smoke or other environment allergens, and crowded shelters that facilitate the spread of viral infections.
- ◆ Subsequent exposure to the communal conditions of shelter life—including overcrowding and shared food preparation—increases the risk of disease and infection.
 - * 10% of homeless infants and toddlers fail to receive proper preventive care during the first two months of life.
 - * 1/3 of homeless children lack essential immunizations.

Psychological

- ◆ Homeless babies show significantly slower development than other children do.
- ◆ More than 1/5 of homeless children between 3 and 6 years of age are extremely distressed and have emotional problems that are serious enough to require professional care.
- ◆ Homeless children cry more easily, react intensely when upset, tend to fuss about small things, and are easily distressed compared to children with homes.
 - * 12% have clinical problems such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal.
 - * 16% have behavior problems manifested by severe aggression and hostility.
- ◆ Homeless children between 6 and 17 years old struggle with very high rates of mental health problems.
 - * Nearly 1/3 has at least one major mental disorder that interferes with their daily activity, compared to 19% of other school-age children.
 - * 47% have problems such as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, compared to 18% of other school-age children.

- * 36% manifest delinquent or aggressive behavior compared to 17% of other school-age children.
- ◆ The likelihood of treatment drops for homeless children as the severity of their mental illness increases.

Social

- ◆ Homeless children have a difficult time in school due to a lack of, transportation, improvised living arrangements are too short to make enrolling in a new school worthwhile, a lack of academic and medical records, and daily demands of finding food and shelter push children's educational needs aside.
- ◆ four times the rate of developmental delays. A child's development is measured by mastery of essential skills, such as walking, talking, and coordinating movement.
- ◆ Dyslexia or speech/language impediments can cripple classroom learning. There are 14% of homeless children with learning disabilities.
- ◆ 6% of all children have trouble learning because they are too active.
- ◆ 14% of homeless children are suspended from school.
- ◆ Homeless children are two times more likely to repeat a grade.
- ◆ One out of five homeless children do not attend school.

Source: Adapted from The Better Homes Fund. *America's Homeless Children: New Outcasts.* Newton, MA: The Better Homes Fund, 1999.

Appendix 2

Community Needs Assessment on Parenting Education for Homeless Families

How many homeless families live in your community?
Where to get this information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From your partner agencies• From local shelters• From the mayor's office• From the local community continuum of care planning board (usually the local coalition for the homeless)
Answer:
If you have existing relationships/connections with homeless populations, do they see a need for parent education for the families they serve?
Answer:
If you don't have relationships with homeless populations and related service providers – can you make these connections? If you are able, inquire about their level of interest in a parenting curriculum for their families. What is that level of interest?
Answer:
What were their reactions to you proposing to offer parenting education sessions for families in their housing programs.
Answer:
Is this service already being offered? If it is, can your agency do something to help expand it? In essence, is there an unmet need?
Answer:
If there is an unmet need, what is the level of need (how many families will be served)?
Answer



Determining Your Readiness to Offer a Parenting Education Program—Checklist

It is helpful to gain an understanding of your agency and community resources before you set out to implement a parenting education program. Answering some of these questions will help you develop a clear picture of where your agency stands.

Agency Considerations	Assessment
1. A staff person or consultant has been selected to take the lead on development and implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Board and staff are informed and in favor of implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Families have been consulted about the coursework – the need for the curriculum, the format, other considerations	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Adding a parenting curriculum fits into agency mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Resource Considerations	
1. Facility has on site or has access to adequate, private space for classes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Agency has the capacity to provide reliable, consistent, and quality childcare during parent training sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Agency has an engaging, competent trainer on staff or the resources to contract with one.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Agency has funding for training materials for participants	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Agency has funding for incentives to keep parents involved – gift certificates, food vouchers, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

6. Agency staff has the ability to identify the need for and make necessary referrals to mental health or other appropriate agencies in the event that serious issues are identified during the course of the training.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
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<p>Partnerships</p> <p>1. Partners have been sought out and expressed interest – Resident homeless families, court system, local public child welfare agency, local homeless services providers, local parenting education providers, schools, etc.</p>	<p>___ Yes ___ No</p>
<p>2. Potential funders are informed and supportive including local businesses, foundations, private donors, volunteers.</p>	<p>___ Yes ___ No</p>

Appendix 3

Program Implementation and Networking: Issues, Questions, and Ideas

1. Start a discussion on how you begin to offer the parenting education sessions.
2. Remember, there are no magic answers to get parents to attend parenting education sessions. What works one time might be a failure the next.
3. Use your examples of getting parents interested in attending sessions if you have offered the sessions to parents.
4. Parents respond if the times are convenient, if the content is interesting, and if you make it easy for them to attend, for example many programs have been successful by offering the sessions in the evenings, others during lunch, or in the morning. Most will provide food/snacks and child care for the children.
5. Another successful tool is having door prizes or giveaways. Tell the parent educators to contact their local movie theater, a supermarket, or a toy store to get coupons to give out.
6. Remind the parent educators that they need to develop a marketing plan and an outreach strategy to encourage parents to attend.
7. Indicate that some parent educators have developed posters or handouts from the *Simple Secrets of Parenting* on the topic to create interest in the session.
8. Lead the discussion. Ask for examples about what has worked in the past and what has not worked. Solicit comments from the group.
9. Be honest. Getting busy parents to attend is hard work but very rewarding.
10. Thank everyone for attending the training seminar and encourage them to offer the parenting education sessions. Remind them that they can call CWLA to get more materials or if they have any questions.

Contact Information

Beech Brook

3737 Lander Road
Pepper Pike, Ohio 44124
Phone: 216-831-2255
www.beechbrook.org

Depelchin Children's Center

4950 Memorial Drive
Houston, Texas 77007
713-730-2335
www.depelchin.org/display.php

Homes for the Homeless

(Together in Learning model)
Institute for Children and Poverty
36 Cooper Square, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10003
phone: 212/529-5252
fax: 212/529-7698
e-mail: info@homesforthehomeless.com

Jewish Children's Bureau, Chicago Central Office

216 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60606
312.444.2090
www.jcbchicago.org/index.html

For more information, contact:

The Child Welfare League of America

440 First St., NW, Third Floor

Washington, DC 20001

202-638-2952

www.cwla.org