Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment

A research report prepared by the
Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment Task Force,
a collaboration of parents that experienced homelessness.

"Homeless children should receive the same opportunities in everything as other children."
Father, 29, 5 children

Please direct inquiries or donations for additional printings to:
Wendy Harris, King County Child Care Program: 206.205.6358
Or to **The Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment Peer Researchers**: 206.781.5711

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INTRODUCTION

In spring of 1997, King County Child Care Program, Community Service Division of the King County Department of Human Services (KCCCP), funded by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Office of Child Care Policy, recruited a group of eight parents to conduct a participatory-action research project into homeless child care issues. All applicants were either currently or recently homeless, and had personal interest in generating a reform in child care policies for homeless families.

We "Peer Researchers" were given guidelines to locate and interview homeless families and families in transition about their experiences with child care, and compile the information into a report for King County Child Care Program to apply available funds where most needed. We want not only to provide direction for King County Child Care Program and other funding organizations, but also to provide the opportunity for the voices of the families to be heard, loudly and clearly.

As a team, we selected a Lead Researcher, created an interview format, and recruited and interviewed 32 families in different stages of the homeless cycle throughout King County. To recruit interviewees, we circulated flyers, contacted homeless-specific organizations, and used our personal contacts. We made an effort to select a diverse group to interview, by language, ethnicity, age, housing status and location within King County. Interviews were conducted in the summer of 1997, before the impacts of Welfare Reform, but a number of families that we interviewed voiced concerns of future changes. We then transcribed, analyzed and coded the interviews, and created this report to present our findings.

In working on this project, we heard many people's stories: some were inspiring, some were heartbreaking, all were real-life. Included in these stories were the experiences of a few members of our group; some of the Peer Researchers were also interviewed. Unfortunately, some Peer Researchers were unable to continue with this project due to personal hardships during their own transitions, but all contributed and are appreciated. Above all, we would like to give special gratitude to the parents who shared their experiences and thoughts with us. We also hope this project will help bring the changes so many of you recommended.

The Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment Task Force Researchers would like to thank King County Child Care Program for their guidance and initiative in starting this project; the Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Child Care Policy, for giving us this opportunity; Child Care Resources for their ongoing assistance and support; the homeless assistance organizations that helped us recruit parents, and the child care facilitators that allowed us to interview them. We would also like to thank the African American, the Latino, and the Gay and Lesbian Child Care Task Forces for showing us the way.

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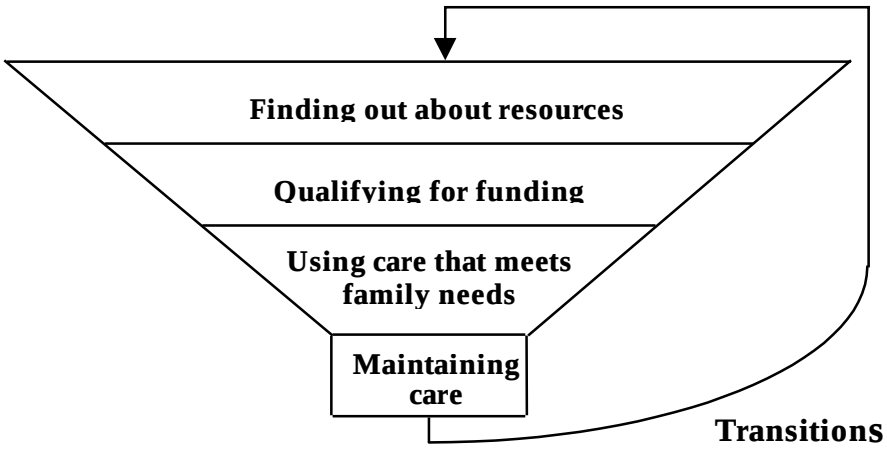
FINDINGS SYNOPOSIS

THE BOTTLENECK:

Illustrates the challenges families face in finding and maintaining quality child care for their children.



SOLUTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

Coordinate the information systems:

- Develop a one-stop resources network for homeless/low-income people with one agency overseeing that the listed services are current; e.g.; child care vouchers are available, a particular shelter has space, etc.
- Encourage more communication and possible mergers between agencies in order to better serve families and reduce individual agencies' administrative costs; would also reduce the competition between agencies for available funds.
- Perhaps create an Internet website network for all support agencies to post their available resources, and to register each family using a filter page for each family's needs to generate a USABLE referral list.
- At least, mandate that support agencies must distribute a CURRENT resource list specific to family's needs at intake.

Increase Child Care Accessibility:

- Increase availability of sliding-scale subsidies for families who are currently or recently homeless.
- Increase subsidy reimbursement rates to providers, or provide additional incentives to providers who offer homeless support services.
- Provide child care services on-site at public school or shelters.
- Expand both transportation services for families to get to and from care site, and child care providers' hours in order to allow parents additional transportation time.
- Allow families to use child care flexibly during hours care is needed, e.g., looking for housing, appointments, commuting.
- Make emergency assistance requirements easier: enable temporary assistance with minimum paperwork requirements.

Stop the Homeless Cycle:

- Focus on extending transitional support beyond families' "emergency" status. Help parents maintain or re-establish child care arrangements when their circumstances change. Include case management that does not end until the family reaches *reasonable* self-sufficiency, taking into account the family's total budget.

BACKGROUND

"There needs to be more resources because not all homeless people are drug addicts and they are not there because they want to be. If they would provide the resources for all those people to get out of that situation, it would be a lot cheaper than keeping people on welfare forever. And you can't get off welfare if you don't have child care. There's just no way."

- Mother, 26, 3 children, Host Home, E. King County

"Homeless parents are not necessarily a class thing or a drug thing. It's a matter of, hey, I'm just like you. But you know what? My husband left. Now I'm one of those people you don't want to look at. I think awareness needs to be raised to help not only people in crisis situations but prevention. It's just ridiculous that you have to hit rock bottom to be able to get the assistance to maintain." *- Mother, 25, 1 child, Seattle*

PROJECT OVERVIEW

PROJECT GOALS:

The first goal of this project was to understand the child care needs and experiences of homeless families and families in transition to permanent housing within King County. The second goal was to make recommendations for action to ensure all families can provide their children with quality child care.

THE RESEARCHER TEAM:

This project used a *participatory action research model*. King County Child Care Program recruited eight Peer Researchers in the Spring of 1997. The research team was designed as a "Peer Research Group" who would have a personal understanding of homeless child care issues; all of the researchers were parents in different stages of the homeless cycle in King County, with diverse ethnic and language backgrounds. The peer researchers then collaboratively hired a lead researcher that would assist the team in their end goal of creating a venue for homeless parents' experiences to be acknowledged.

SAMPLE AND METHODS:

The peer researchers developed the interview outline to understand parents' experiences, then recruited 32 interviewees to conduct these information-collecting interviews. The interviewees were all parents in different stages of the homeless cycle in King County between April and July of 1997. A concerted effort was made to recruit a diverse sample of interviewees based on race/ethnicity, age, language, housing situation, area of King County, and work/training status, as follows:

- Parents with at least one child 12 years of age or younger
- 28 women and 4 men between the ages of 19 and 53
- 44% White; 34% Black; 19% Hispanic (any race); 16% Native American; 6% Pacific Islander
- 50% in Seattle; 29% in N. and E. King County; 21% in S. King County
- Living on streets, in shelters, transitional housing, or recently housed
- Working and/or in school, in rehabilitation programs, or none of the above

The interviews focused on five main questions:

- During the times of homelessness, who did the parent use for child care?
- Which specific services did the parent use to *find* or *pay* for child care?
- Describe the parent's experiences with specific child care services/providers?
- How did the parent define "Ideal Child Care" for their family?
- What recommendations would the parent make to improve child care services for families who are homeless?

The peer researchers then transcribed, coded and analyzed the data in order to create this report.

DEMOGRAPHICS

It is difficult to know the actual demographics of homeless families living in King County. This is due in part to families' mobility, the reliance of data collection on home addresses and telephone numbers, and the possibility of double-counting individuals in "one-night counts" or shelter surveys. Nevertheless, the following information can give us some idea of the scope of the homeless child care challenge.

According to a recent report by the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) and the Department of Social and Health Services, families who are homeless tend to share some common characteristics:

- Most are single mothers with children.
- Many receive economic assistance prior to becoming homeless.
- Domestic violence is a frequent factor.
- Alcohol and drug problems occasionally contribute to their challenges.

The One Night Count of Homeless Persons in Seattle/King County on October 23, 1997, reports that 358 children in homeless families were accepted into shelters for the night. On the same evening, 402 children in homeless families were turned away. (CTED/DSHS, p. 10). The number of homeless children under the age of 12 on any given night has been estimated at 860. This means that "if all were enrolled in child care, they would fill 150 family homes or 25 typical child care centers." (KCCCP handout, 1998)

Based on available data, it is generally assumed that the number of families with children who are homeless is growing. At the state level, a year-long study of families using DSHS services found 4,344 families were identified as "newly homeless" between June 1997 and May 1998. This number included 6,756 children. At the same time, 710 homeless pregnant women were also identified (CTED/DSHS, p. 11-12). However, these numbers do not tell us the number of families who gained housing over the 12 months, making it hard to pinpoint the actual numbers.

When counting families, we lack information on those who are not using services like shelters while they are living with friends or relatives, camping, or staying in cars. We also lack reliable information on immigrant families who may not seek help due to language barriers or due to fear associated with being undocumented. Most importantly, we need to know more about the children - their age, ethnicity, primary language and special needs.

IMPORTANCE OF CHILD CARE FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES

Parents who are homeless want the best for their children. While they face some unique and serious challenges, they want and need child care for many of the same reasons that all parents do. They want a learning environment where their children can grow. They need child care while they are at work or in school. They need child care when emergencies arise at night or on the weekends. Sometimes they simply need a break from juggling the responsibilities of being a parent.

Child care is all the more essential given the challenging circumstances that families who are homeless face. Often, they are single parents who can rely only on themselves to care for their children. Yet, they are often bound by shelter rules that prohibit them from leaving their children in the care of a friend or relative for even a moment. Their lives are stressful, moving from one place to the next in the hope of finding a more permanent home. During their transitions, they seek a stable, safe and consistent place for their children to go each day.

When families do not have quality, reliable child care, their lives are all the more uncertain. Looking for, accepting or keeping a valuable job or training opportunity becomes a dream rather than reality. Children face increased emotional and physical stress as they try to make sense of the changes going on their lives. Parents worry as they must choose between leaving their children in unsafe environments or bringing them along as they look for housing, food, clothing and work.

It is true that families who are homeless need child care so that they can focus on the challenges of rebuilding their lives; but, the issues run deeper than that. In addition to needing a short-term boost, families need consistent support, for funding and for child care. Parents who are homeless fear that they will fall through the gaps of the child care system. They move from shelter to shelter, wondering if they will end up back in the shelter system in the long run no matter how hard they try. This makes them reluctant to look for, pay for and keep child care in the first place. They need the confidence of knowing their child care is not going to end when they are in the midst of rebuilding their lives.

CHILD CARE OPTIONS

In this report, "child care" refers to different child care arrangements used by parents to care for their children. In King County this includes:

- State-licensed child care centers and early childhood education programs;
- Licensed family home day care providers;
- Informal providers such as parents, friends, and neighbors;
- Part-time on-site child care at shelter; typically they operate 4 hours or less per day and are not licensed.
- Housing-Based Child Care Programs which coordinate services for adults and children at the transitional housing site (such as YWCA Family Village).
- Head Start Homeless Child Care services which uses regular licensed child care providers and provides additional services such as transportation, health, and family support.
- Specialized Homeless Child Care programs which serve only homeless families and offer lower adult: child ratios, transportation, and health and mental health services on-site (Morningsong and Our Place).

While homeless families technically have access to all of these providers, in reality they are heavily dependent on the availability of subsidies. 22,196 children were financially assisted by DSHS in 1996 to use both licensed and unlicensed care. According to DSHS, that means 74% of children in poverty received subsidies: 29% in subsidized licensed care and 71% in unlicensed care. (Mayfield, 1997). The subsidies cover a percentage of the cost; parent's monthly co-payments may range from $10 to over $200. Subsidies for unlicensed care include payments at approximately $2 per hour to families' friends/relatives who provide care.

Overall, the majority of subsidies for very low-income families in King County are provided by DSHS. When families living in Seattle make too much to qualify for DSHS subsidies, they are eligible to receive financial assistance from Comprehensive Child Care Program of the City of Seattle. This program supports parents who are working or in training and earn too much for the DSHS program. The 1994 waiting list period was estimated at approximately one year (LCCTF, p. 3). King County Child Care Program (KCCCP) operates a similar subsidy program for families living outside Seattle.

Families can also try to receive support from KCCCP's Homeless Child Care Services. This program provides child care vouchers to homeless families regardless of income level. In 1998, an average of 38 full-time children per month are subsidized using funds from state, county and federal government. The vouchers typically cover one to three months of care. Parents do not pay a co-payment. Of the approximately 210 providers who accepted King County vouchers in 1996, 80 (38%) served homeless families (Wendy Harris, KCCCP, April 1997).

Homeless families looking for child care may also access Child Care Resources, a county-wide referral service whose counselors help low-income families identify child care options and in some cases make site visits with the parent. They also have a crisis database to refer families to housing, food, clothing or other resources.

FINDINGS

Approximately 26% of families interviewed did not have a reliable child care arrangement for at least one child at the time of the interview.

Many more expected to lose their child care funding in the near future.

PARENTS' DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY CHILD CARE

Parents have specific visions of ideal child care. According to the parents we interviewed, Quality Child Care means environments that:

- are safe and clean
- provide meals to the children
- are learning environments, with a age-specific curriculum and activities
- offer stability and routine to children
- effectively support children with special physical and emotional needs
- communicate regularly with parents

Interestingly, there is no clear preference for either center-based or home-based child care. Parents' preferences seem to be related to their personal experiences and to the kind of environment they prefer (i.e. size of classes, kind of furniture and materials).

SAFE AND CLEAN:

According to parents, the single most important question in choosing a child care arrangement is: Is my child going to be safe here? For most parents, this question focuses on the physical safety of their child. Are there water hazards or animals in the area? Is the building and environment clean? Are children protected from possible injury while on site?

Additionally, parents were concerned about issues of confidentiality, as many have fled situations of domestic abuse. They seek providers who follow the rules that protect their children from being taken by estranged parents without permission.

FOOD:

After safety, parents were concerned with whether a child care arrangement would provide meals. Programs like Morningsong in Seattle, which make it a priority to feed children, were praised by parents who had used their services.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

Parents want a child care environment that combines the love and nurturing of "home" with the educational aspects of "school." They are not satisfied with child care that is a "baby-sitting arrangement." Some parents want their children to benefit from an organized curriculum that covers educational basics. A few stressed the importance of social learning and appropriate disciplining.

QUALITY TEACHERS/PROVIDERS:

Parents want teachers who are trained and professional, while loving and caring toward their children. They want providers who are qualified to work with specific age groups, like infants or school age children. They are dismayed by the number of providers they witnessed who appear to be uninterested in their jobs.

STABILITY:

Parents define quality child care as one that provides stability for their children. They speak of the importance of routines at the care site, such as lunch or nap time routines. The fact that the child has his or her own cubby to keep belongings is a small but important detail to some parents.

SPECIAL NEEDS:

Parents of children with special needs raise some unique quality concerns. Many sites cannot take children because they are not equipped or trained to deal with the medical issues. Parents seek providers who have specialized personnel on staff, including speech and physical therapists, and counselors.

SITE VISITS:

Parents who had the opportunity to visit a child care site prior to using it were very grateful for that opportunity. This meeting sets the stage for an open relationship with the provider.

COMMUNICATION:

Open communication is a priority for parents, who want to know what their children are learning and how the providers are interacting with their children. Some parents would opt not to use a provider if they felt the relationship was not good. Among non-English speaking parents, communication with providers appears to be very poor since few have access to a translator.

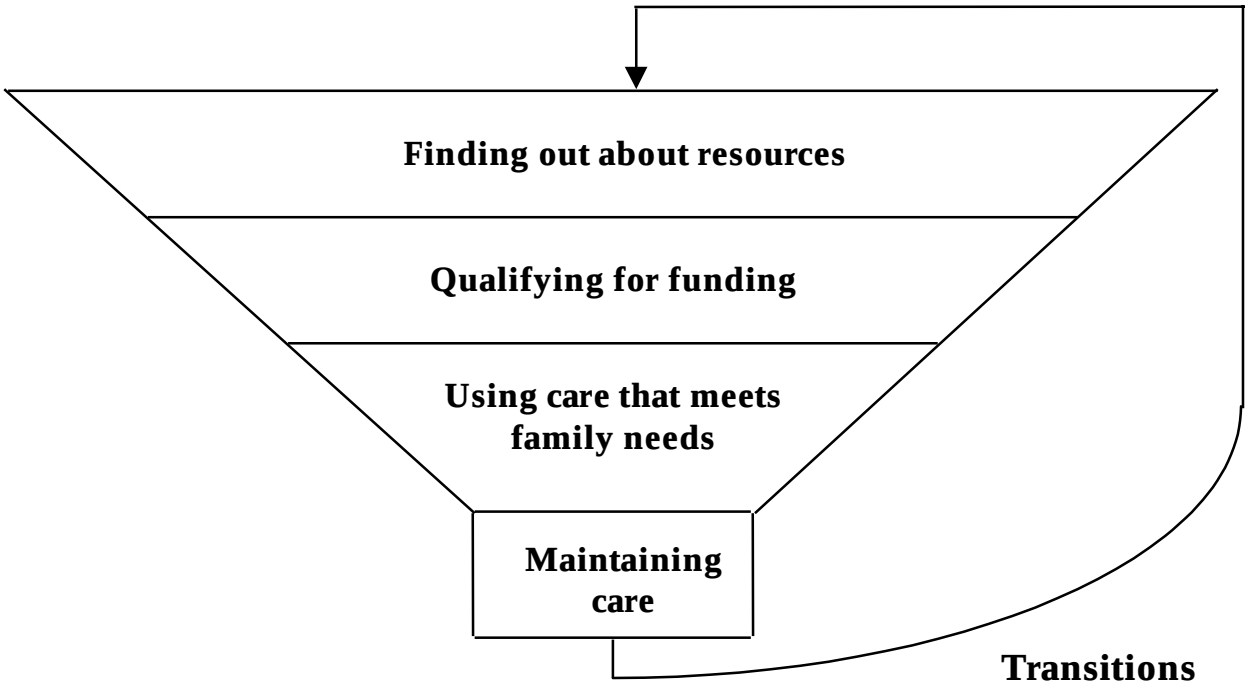
DIVERSITY:

Several parents mentioned that they value a diverse environment for their children and lament the lack of ethnic diversity among teachers. Those who seek providers of their race or language background acknowledged that it may be unreasonable to expect to find one, though they would be happy if they could.

While parents have visions of quality care, most are not able to select child care based on those criteria. Instead they are forced to accept the best available child care within their reach - which may not be very far. In addition to trying to understand parents' definitions of ideal child care, our interviews focused on understanding parents' needs and experiences in trying to obtain those ideals for their children.

THE BOTTLENECK:

This diagram represents parents' experiences as they look for and try to keep quality child care that meets their families' needs. Each level presents significant challenges for families. Some families find themselves "bottlenecked" in different stages of the process and never make it to the bottom of the funnel. Many families make it through the funnel once, only to spiral back to the beginning when they experience a move, income change or loss of child care funding.



The following sections summarize parents' experiences in each stage of the process looking for and maintaining child care for their families.

FINDING OUT ABOUT RESOURCES *"CALLING IN CIRCLES"*

FINDINGS:

- Parents ***lack clear, reliable and up-to-date information*** about child care providers, funding sources and support agencies; this is especially true of parents who speak languages other than English.

- Parents report spending ***hours "calling in circles"*** to find child care that meets their needs. An overwhelming number of our interviewees shared stories of calling several resource phone numbers only to find themselves referred back to the first organization they had called.

- Most parents had not used available resources to find child care:

Homeless Children's Network	82% never used; 50% never heard of [1]
Child Care Resources	82% never used; 35% never heard of
King County Child Care Program	86% never used; 21% never heard of
Case Manager	53% never used; 25% never heard of

PARENTS' VOICES:

"A lot of times you'll get lists from three different organizations and they're all the same numbers. You thought you were getting three different lists and you weren't." *- Mother, 36, 1 child, living in motel, Bothell*

"When I got into the shelters, I got information from shelters. They give you a piece of paper, say here's a phone, and you do it yourself. You can call the Salvation Army, you can call other organizations, very few will help you. None of them helped me, but they do have that information." *- Father, 38, 2 children, transitional housing, Kent*

"DDD will give you a list of respite care providers, and then you go out and get your respite care...And actually they gave me a list of 12, which was double what they normally give out and only one was doing respite care. Some of the numbers weren't even valid. Which they told me ahead of time because their system is really behind."
- Mother, 25, special needs child, transitional housing, N. Seattle

GOAL:

- Create a ***coordinated, comprehensive child care support system*** that helps more families move successfully from emergency status to complete and reasonable self-sufficiency.

- **Coordinate the information systems**: Develop a comprehensive information network among resources (shelters, transitional housing, funding agencies, food banks, hot-lines) to eliminate "circular referrals" for child care, housing, and job search assistance. Provide more parents with hands-on support in finding and qualifying for child care.

[1] These estimates may be low in that some parents who did not use the service were not asked whether or not they had heard of it.

QUALIFYING FOR FUNDING

FINDINGS:

- Parents mentioned ***lack of funding*** as a significant barrier to their using child care.
- Many parents had not used available resources to pay for child care:

Dept. of Social and Health Services	45% never used; 8% never heard of [2]
City of Seattle Child Care Program	97% never used; 31% never heard of
King County Child Care Program	85% never used; 22% never heard of

- Funding for care that was ***tied to other activities*** like work, training or rehabilitation made eligibility difficult for parents who had previous commitments or did not agree with program objectives.
- Parents expressed frustration at child care funding that ***did not last long*** enough to make a complete transition to stable housing or ended when the family was ***no longer considered homeless***.

PARENTS' VOICES:

"When I first went into the shelter, they didn't have funds available. They had cut the funds. They told us there was no funds available for day care, so you're on your own. Either trade baby-sitting with someone or take her with you."
- Mother, 30, 1 child, transitional housing, S. King County

"I had to call everywhere to find funding because [training] program would not do anything for me right now because of the welfare reform that's going on. I called [funding agency] and they were willing to help me but they did not have an orientation until May something and I was trying to get into [transitional shelter] by May 1st. And so I ended up not being able to get in because I did not have child care." *- Mother, 26, 3 children, host home, Bellevue*

"Right now it's a catch 22 that you have to have day care to get a job, but you have to have a job to get daycare."
- Mother, 39, 1 child, living in a motel

GOALS:

- **Make child care affordable for more families**: Increase the accessibility and availability of child care subsidies to families who are homeless. Increase subsidy reimbursement rates to providers so that more spaces will be available to homeless children.

[2] These estimates may be low in that some parents who did not use the service were not asked whether or not they had heard of it.

ACCESSING CHILD CARE THAT MEETS FAMILIES' NEEDS

FINDINGS:

- ***Lack of reliable transportation*** presents an overwhelming barrier. Parents whose children attend ***care on-site at their housing or were bused*** *to and from* are extremely satisfied with the arrangement.
- Parents report ***lack of available spaces*** in suitable child care, especially when the family has two or more children. Most difficult to find are providers who:
  - serve ***infants*** or ***school-age children,***
  - are trained/equipped for ***special needs children,***
  - has staff fluent in ***languages other than English***;
  - are open ***non-traditional work hours and offer drop-in or respite care*** .
- Parents feel child care funding rules are inflexible and prevent them from using care when and how they needed it (i.e., housing search, attending appointments or interviews). Many funding organizations specify that funding covers only parent's school hours, or up to 4 hours a day for job search, etc., which effectively prevents the parent from conducting any other business during the hours their children are cared for. Parents that have varying schedules are obligated to bring their child to day care during the specified hours in order to guarantee that the space will not be taken away.
- Parents living in shelters typically can not rely on informal arrangements like other parents, relatives or siblings to provide care on-site due to ***shelter rules***, which prohibit parents from leaving any child under the age of 18 with any other person.
- Parents who did not speak English express resignation at ***not being able to communicate*** with their child care provider.
- Some parents strongly feel that they need to ***meet a provider before*** enrolling their child. Parents who received help doing so expressed satisfaction with that support.

PARENTS' VOICES:

"Transportation is a really big problem. How am I going to get to this office which is offering this excellent job, and how am I going to get from this office to the day care when the buses are not connected? Or this bus only runs once an hour and is getting off schedule with another bus. Transportation is not taken into consideration because buses can take all day."

- Mother, 35, 1 child, shelter, Seattle

"A lot of people don't want to take DSHS vouchers. They pay once a month and the rate of pay is a lot lower. And there's a lot of paperwork. And a lot of times you have to get on a waiting list to get your kid into a daycare center if you have DSHS pay for it." *- Mother, 30, 1 child, transitional housing, S. King County*

"I work eight hours a day. From school they come out at 3:30 p.m. So they were staying outside for a long time outside after school. I looked for this program in the same school that is until 4:30 p.m. and they were going there. But now it is terminated. It has terminated and now they have to wait outside of the fence for a little more than two hours."

- Mother, 31, 3 children, transitional housing, Kent

GOALS:

- **Increase child care accessibility**: Provide child care on-site at shelters, transitional housing, and public schools or provide reliable transportation to and from child care sites. Let families use child care more flexibly during the hours the care is needed, e.g., while looking for housing, attending appointments, commuting to and from child care site.

MAINTAINING CARE DURING TRANSITIONS

FINDINGS:

- ***Changes in location or income, or loss of child care funding***, forced many families to start the child care search all over again.
- Moves to a new part of the county meant that parents often could ***no longer access*** their child care arrangement due to funding loss or transportation problems.
- Transitions into permanent housing often brought ***increased financial pressures,*** making child care payments too high for some parents.

PARENTS' VOICES:

"When I move out of here I wish I knew where my kids were going to go. My daughter's going to go to kindergarten. But my boys. Everything's so up in the air. Am I going to be able to continue school when I'm out of here or what's going to happen? As of right now I can't afford child care. I wish I was more certain about what's going to happen when I leave here. Because I think you get a month flat [of funding] after you leave here. But then what?"
- Mother, 3 children, transitional shelter, Seattle

"I haven't had much of a problem (with child care). The only problem is going to come when I'm out of here. Then they're not eligible any more (for the specialized homeless child care program). And that's another one of my issues that when you're not considered homeless and you're not considered technically homeless - where do your kids go? They're no longer eligible." *- Mother, 27, three children, long-term shelter, Seattle*

"Once we left [transitional housing], she continued [with same provider]. I wanted to maintain that stability for her. We moved twice since then and I managed to get into affordable housing in Issaquah. Then the daycare costs just started building up and [I was] working as a temp. I had lost my permanent job due to downsizing and it all started falling apart as soon as the transitional daycare benefits stopped. It was that extra $200 a month that killed me. We had to go back to a shelter to get the help we needed." *- Mother, 25, 1 child, living with friends in W. Seattle*

GOALS:

- **Stop the cycle**: Focus on extending transitional support beyond families' "emergency" status. Provide long-term child care funding that phases out only as families regain financial security. Help parents maintain or re-establish child care arrangements when their circumstances change.

FAMILIES' COMPLETE EXPERIENCES

It's important to also understand not only homeless statistics, but a family's complete experiences:

"Josie" is a 26-year-old mother of 3 girls. Josie and her daughters were living in a 3-month host home at the time of the interview. Josie had received funding for a one-year training program and for 6 months of child care. The main child care assistance program would approve funding for employment only, not for education or training that Josie felt would ensure long-term stability. She was in the interview process to be accepted into a long-term transition housing program, but because she had only been successful finding child care spaces for 2 of her girls and did not have arrangements for the 3rd, she was not accepted into the housing program. Josie was unable to find a child care provider with spaces for 3 children. She was reluctant to enroll her children in two separate child care centers for two reasons: she feared the impossibility of finding two funding sources once her 6-month funding was over, plus she could not get to her school by 7:30 a.m. when both options of child care centers did not open until 7:00. Josie lost the opportunity to start school that quarter, was forced to continue bouncing through the shelter system, and used the limited child care funding for her 2 girls to secure child care for the 3rd. It cost Josie an additional 3 months of instability before she secured child care funding for all 3 of her daughters, found a single provider for all 3 children, and was re-approved for school; therefore was accepted into the transitional housing program.

GOAL:

- Allow for flexibility between transitional housing admissions and child care funding rules. Families are more likely to find child care solutions with housing stability, and would not have continued dependency.

"Kay" is a 25-year-old mother with one 5-year-old girl. She is a single mother who became homeless due in part to domestic violence. She successfully completed a training program while living in a transitional housing program, and met the program's requirements of gaining employment and "permanent housing". One year after Kay started working, her DSHS transitional child care benefits expired, which meant that her child care payments doubled. Kay was told that any other child care assistance programs had a waiting list of almost 2 years. Due to Kay's inability to pay the complete amount of child care, she was forced withdraw her daughter from the child care program. This caused a domino effect: without child care, she was unable to work and pay bills, and lost her apartment. She moved into a friend's house until a short-term homeless transitional housing space came available. Once technically homeless, Kay then qualified for partially-subsidized child care benefits, and was able to find another child care facility for her daughter, start working and find another apartment. Kay and her daughter were forced to once again relive the instability of homelessness due to *transitional child care benefits ending*.

GOAL:

- Prevent recurring homelessness by continuing child care family case management beyond obtaining permanent housing and employment, including individual budget assistance upon which child care subsidy amounts would be based until the family reaches **reasonable** self-sufficiency.

PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

In order to present an additional perspective on homeless child care issues, the Peer Researchers created an interview format directed towards agencies that provide child care and other support services to homeless families. The questions focused on:

- What kind of provider is this?
- Who do they serve? What percentage is homeless? How many families are they able to serve?
- What services is this provider able to provide families?
- What are the challenges that prevent this provider from meeting the needs of families?

Of the three direct child care providers and one agent of a child care funding/referral agency interviewed, each stated a different mission and available services:

- 1 provides child care referral and advocacy, and links funding services for between 206 and 375 homeless children per year, which is "only 10% of eligible families". This agent felt the most helpful service their agency provides is "Flexible Funding" to assist families in a variety of individual needs.
- 1 provides child care for developmentally disabled children; of 110 clients, only 1 is homeless.
- 1 provides "spiritual guidance" and resource referral services to a total of 80 clients, all homeless families.
- 1 provides child care on-site at a transitional shelter for 16 children per day, with continuing transitional services for up to 6 months. Specialized services include a resident pediatric nurse, a van to assist parents with transportation needs, and an outreach worker, all fully-subsidized directly to the center so services are free to parents. Child care hours are from 8 to 4 due to lack of funding, so the interviewee felt the facility could not effectively serve working parents or parents attending training without extended hours.

Interestingly, although each provider had different focuses and services, the most significant issues that ALL four interviewees mentioned were:

- Lack of funding, staff, spaces, or extended hours to help all families that request or need assistance and support, in particular those with school-aged children.
- Concern for the significant transportation barriers of the homeless families they serve.
- Concern that homeless numbers and issues will increase as Welfare Reform impacts more families.
- All voiced stress at only being able to serve homeless families for a short time, until the families experience change and must transfer to another child care funding agency or facility.

Other issues mentioned were: Lack of awareness among parents that services exist or are available to them, additional training needed for the providers and staff, the need for counseling services for homeless families and families in transition, and suggestions to increase subsidy reimbursement rates to providers.

SOLUTION SUGGESTIONS

"People who are in transition, people who are homeless, they have so many other things on their mind. They can't focus on [child care]. They need to, but they're focusing on the basics in life: 'Where am I going to live, where am I going to wake up tomorrow, what are we going to feed my kids, is their meal going to be hot, are their clothes going to be clean?' If they're so busy worrying about where their kids are staying while they're trying to get their business done, they won't be able to do that.

People in transition are really in transition, and they have needs that most people don't have or understand. I think if we're really going to help people who are in transition, we really need to help them. Not just take care of one thing and say, 'OK, you're done.' That's not helping them, that's putting a Band-Aid on it. It's not going to go away then. They're not going to learn to relax and look at things and work them out so they don't get in that situation again. You need to help them get through what they're going through, so next time they can function, they can deal with it."

- Mother, 1 child, transitional housing, S. King County

SOLUTION SUGGESTIONS

Create a ***coordinated, comprehensive child care support system*** that helps more families move successfully from emergency status to complete and reasonable self-sufficiency.

COORDINATE THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS:

- Develop a one-stop resources network for homeless/low-income people with one agency overseeing that the listed services are current; e.g. child care vouchers are available, a particular shelter has space, etc.
- Encourage more communication and possible mergers between support service agencies in order to better serve families and reduce individual agencies' administrative costs; would also reduce the competition between agencies for available funds.
- Mandate that all assistance agencies (shelters, food banks, DSHS, child care referrals and assistance centers) MUST distribute a resource list specific to family's needs at intake.
- Create an all-inclusive Internet website network for all homeless-specific and family-oriented community resources to access at every stage of assisting a family. Mandate for all new non-profit agencies that are geared towards family issues to register on such website. Create a filter page for each family's needs and statistics, resources currently using, income, housing status, number of children, needs. Use that filter page to generate list of associated agencies that family will fit the qualifying criteria, and the system will automatically fill out application for the family, and send it automatically into an automated mail drop box for individual agency to process.

  This will enable agencies to post between themselves, ensuring awareness between agencies of amount of resources available, improving and coordinating county-wide funding tracking verification, plus saving the family numerous trips or phone calls to access resource agencies that they may not qualify for. This website can also be used to chart individual families' progress and chart the percentage of success of each agency.

INCREASE CHILD CARE ACCESSIBILITY:

- Provide child care on-site at shelters, transitional housing, and public schools or provide reliable transportation to and from child care sites.
- Allow families to use child care more flexibly during the hours the care is needed, e.g., while looking for housing, attending appointments, commuting to and from child care site.
- Expand services through emergency service centers—enable admission on a temporary basis with minimum paperwork requirements
- Expand transportation services for homeless families to get their children to the provider. Provide bus tokens and gas vouchers as Catholic Community Services, or direct service as Head Start Bus.
- Expand providers' care hours (i.e., 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) to allow parents additional transportation time.

MAKE CHILD CARE AFFORDABLE FOR MORE FAMILIES:

- Increase the availability of child care subsidies for families who are currently or recently homeless.
- Increase subsidy reimbursement rates to providers so more spaces will be available to homeless children.
- Provide additional subsidies, tax or insurance discount incentives to providers that ensure a percentage of their population is homeless, or to providers that offer additional homeless support services (i.e., referral services, on-site nurse, food or clothing bank donations, extended hours, or a coordinator to pool/find/organize/refer child care funding for each parent according to that family's need.)

STOP THE CYCLE:

- Focus on extending transitional support beyond families' "emergency" status. Help parents maintain or re-establish child care arrangements when their circumstances change. Include case management that follows a family through transitions and different living situations that does not end until the family reaches reasonable self-sufficiency. The King County Child Care Program's Homeless Specialists have been setting a standard of this. A specialist is assigned to a family, then assists that family with securing child care funding, escorts the family to providers for visits, and provides follow-up support. The specialist may also make referrals to case management, housing, or other services the family may need. Once the family is no longer homeless, the specialist then transfers the file to a continuing child care assistance program by defining family's specific needs.
- Provide long-term child care funding that phases out only as families regain financial security.
- Once a family is registered as Homeless with any resource agency, consider that family/person as homeless, unquestioned, once they re-enter the mainstream and obtain stable housing, with all benefits to continue unaffected by income for a total of 1 complete year, with a 2 year re-instatement period before repeated eligibility to combat pattern homelessness.

INCREASE AWARENESS OF HOMELESS ISSUES:

- The realities of who is homeless;
- And those Families' experiences and needs
- To increase support for assistance programs ,
- until all children have the opportunity to be nurtured in high-quality child care environments.

RECENT CHANGES

Our research was conducted during the Spring and Summer of 1997, before the November 1997 inception of "welfare reform". Several statewide policy changes have affected the ability of homeless families to access child care subsidies from DSHS:

- At the time our research was conducted, families receiving welfare could get DSHS child care subsidies while they were enrolled in school programs. Since November 1997, families are sanctioned if they do not participate in the WorkFirst Program.
- Most parents are not authorized to enter training programs unless they've failed at getting work. Then DSHS only authorizes a short-term 4-10 week job readiness training; or vocational training for less than a year.
- Families may have childcare subsidized during vocational training if they are also working at least 20 hours per week and the training is related to the job they are working. This presents a major challenge for parents who need schooling to to get livable wage jobs so they can sustain permanent housing.
- Teen parents are especially vulnerable to sanctions of their TANF grant if they attend higher education programs, even if they can get other child care funding.
- If both parents are working (at least 20-25 hours per week, overlapping schedules, on or off TANF) it is easier to get DSHS child care subsidies than it was before. In early 1997, there were long waiting lists.
- The income range for DSHS child care subsidies expanded up to the 175th percentile of Federal Poverty Level initially and recently up to 225% FPL. Many more families are eligible than previously.
- The DSHS required parent co-payments to the child care provider are often higher than they were before. Homeless families are not exempted from high co-payments to facilitate access to housing.

In response to our research findings, King County Child Care Program (KCCCP) changed how services are provided to homeless families with help from a 3-year HUD McKinney grant. Prior to 1997, KCCCP's limited state child care funds were allocated to 25 shelters, transitional housing and other agencies serving homeless families based on bed nights served. At that time, an agency case manager or advocate had KCCCP vouchers and could write them for parents to use at child care providers on the KCCCP list. The level of services was uneven throughout the county. In mid 1997, KCCCP was able to:

- More than double the funding of child care vouchers for homeless families;
- Hire 3 child care specialists to meet with families about their children's needs--wherever they were homeless—to help find quality child care, link with other subsidy programs, and write vouchers;
- Fund some transportation to child care, including van service for more isolated shelter locations;
- Fund translation, interpretation, and special needs resources to remove families' barriers to child care.

Still, the number of homeless children and families KCCCP has been able to serve is far less than the need. State funds for this program have not increased significantly since 1991. Even worse, the Federal grant was not renewed in 2000.

In the year 2000, these and many other King County homeless support services are at risk of being completely eliminated.

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The KCCCP Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment Task Force

Sara Taggart
Jacqueline Bradley
Mohamed Moalim Aden
Naivasha Daniel
Kara Netelenbos
Karen Zammit
Francesca Lopez
Deborah Hair
Cheryl Husa

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And the Homeless Child Care Needs Assessment Task Force Members
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Please direct inquiries or donations to:
Wendy Harris, King County Child Care Program, (206) 205-6358
or to The Homeless Child Care Peer Researchers, (206) 781-5711

PHONE NUMBERS AND AVAILABLE SERVICES CHANGE FREQUENTLY.

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

King County Child Care Program—700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3700, Seattle, WA 98104-5037—(206) 296-1362
Homeless families throughout King County may call (206) 205-6560 or Spanish speaking families (206) 205-6345 for links to child care providers, subsidies, transportation, special needs support. Program also serves income-eligible families who are not homeless but working or in training and live outside Seattle.

City of Seattle Comprehensive Child Care Program: 618 2nd Ave., 4th Floor, Seattle 98104--(206) 386-1001
Child care cost assistance for eligible low-income Seattle parents who are employed or in a work training program. Must be ineligible for DSHS child care subsidies. Also provides ECEAP/child care services.

DSHS Working Connections Child Care—Contact the nearest Community Service Office

Seattle Area:	Ballard Office	907 NW Ballard Way, Seattle, 98107	(206) 789-5200
	Belltown	2106 2nd Ave, Seattle, 98121	(206) 956-3353
	Capitol Hill	1700 East Cherry, Seattle, 98122	(206) 568-5500
	Lake City	11536 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, 98125	(206) 368-7200
	Rainier	3600 South Graham, Seattle, 98118	(206) 760-2000
	West Seattle	4045 Delridge Way SW #300, Seattle, 98106	(206) 933-3300
	East King, Bellevue	14360 SE Eastgate Way, Bellevue, 98007	(425) 649-4000
	South King, Burien	15811 Ambaum Blvd. SW, Burien, 98166	(206) 439-5300
	Federal Way	1617 S. 324th St., Federal Way, 98003	(253) 661-4900
	Kent	25316 74th Ave. S., Kent, 98032-6006	(253) 872-2145
	Renton	1737 Airport Way S. N80-1, Seattle, 98134	(206) 626-5900

Child care subsidies for working families with incomes lower than 175% of Federal Poverty Level. Parent co-payments start at $10 per month and increase with family income. Families may use any licensed provider who accepts DSHS payments. Eligible in-home or relative care providers may also be used.

Child Care Resources—Seattle (206) 461-3207 South King (253)852-3080 East King (425) 865-9920
Provides referrals to licensed day care homes and centers, preschools and summer care information.

Head Start—King County, Puget Sound Educational Service District (206) 439-6910 or 1 (800) 664-4549
Full-day Head Start program, some transportation for homeless children 0-5 years old, mostly in South King County. Also free part-day preschool programs for 4-year olds from low-income families at 22 sites outside Seattle.

Seattle Public Schools Head Start—3100 S. Alaska, Seattle, 98108 (206) 760-4630
Free part-day preschool program for 4-year-old children at sites throughout Seattle. Services include education, health, nutrition, parent involvement and family support. Also serves children with special needs.

PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES

Morningsong Homeless Family Support Center—1025 E. Fir Street, Seattle, WA 98122—(206) 461-6940
Provides quality child care for 1-3 year olds in a safe developmentally appropriate environment for children who are living in emergency, transitional or low income housing in Seattle. Some transportation provided.

Our Place Day Care Center—(206)328-5724
Provides quality child care for infants through 5 year olds. Transportation provided in several areas.

Neighborhood House, Homeless ECEAP Program: 905 Spruce Street, Seattle 98104—(206) 461-8467 x241
Free educational program for 3-5 year olds located at Yesler Terrace. Transportation not provided.

First Place--PO Box 22536, Seattle, 98122—(206) 323-0642
Provides educational programs/social services for homeless children, ages 5-13. Coordinates with Seattle Public Schools.

Atlantic Street Center—2103 Atlantic St., Seattle, 98144—(206) 329-2050
Case management and counseling for homeless youth and their families is offered at five Seattle area schools.

EMERGENCY SHELTER: WOMEN & FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN (NOT CONFIDENTIAL)

Community Information Line (provides information for all of King County)	206-461-3200
Multi Service Centers of North and East King County	206-292-8037, 1-800-777-7379
Shelter the Homeless Project (Eastside)	425-562-6861
Noel House	206-441-3210
Sacred Heart Shelter	206-720-6947
Seattle Emergency Housing Service	206-461-3660
Union Gospel Mission: Women and Family Shelter	206-628-2008
YWCA - Young Adults in transition (ages 18-22)	206-461-4882
East Cherry Branch	206-461-8480
South King County Multi-Service Center	253-854-3437
YWCA - South King County Branch	425-255-1201

CONFIDENTIAL SHELTERS

Eastside Domestic Violence Program	425-746-1940 (V/TDD)
East King County or (24 hr. crisis line)	1-800-827-8840 (V/TDD)
New Beginnings	206-522-9472
Catherine Booth House	206-324-4943
Domestic Abuse Women's Network (DAWN)	425-656-7867 (V/TDD)
Advocates	425-656-8423

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCES

WA State Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-562-6052 (25) (V/TDD)
Domestic Violence Information Line	206-205-5555
Crisis Line	206-461-3222 or 1-800-244-5767
Protection Order Advocacy Program	206-296-9547
Special Assault Unit, Domestic Violence Section	206-296-9470
Seattle City Attorney – Domestic Violence Unit	206-684-7770

SERVICE CENTERS

Community Information Line: **Daytime only (206) 461-3200, TTY: (206) 461-3160**
Crisis Clinic: **(206) 461-3222; TTY: (206) 461-3219** 24-hour crisis counseling, problem solving and referral to community resources.
Community Service Offices Contact for AFDC, medical assistance, drug and alcohol treatment, limited emergency assistance, JOBS program, food stamps, general assistance and Medicaid. Serve by zip code. See phone book under Washington State Government listing of Community Service Offices for address/number of nearest office.
Church of Mary Magdalene: P.O. Box 359, Seattle, WA 98111 **(206) 621-8474** Advocacy for homeless women.
First Avenue Service Center: 2015 3rd Ave., Seattle, WA 98121 **(206) 441-8405** Basic needs, food, clothing, referrals. Drop-in center; ex-offender assistance.
New Connections: 909 8th Ave. (Box #2), Seattle, WA 98104 **(206) 625-1499** Resource center for people recently out of detention.
Refugee Women's Alliance: **(206) 721-0243** Bilingual, bicultural advocacy and educational services for refugee and immigrant women and their families.
Seattle Indian Center: 611 12th Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98144 **(206) 329-8700** Vocational training, job search, placement support. Emergency services, food bank, meals. Latchkey, childcare, adoption services. Proof of tribal membership required.
Angeline's Day Refuge: 2025 3rd Ave., Seattle, WA 98121 **(206) 461-4561** Drop-in center; laundry, shower, phone on sign-up basis.
Central Area Motivation Program: 722 18th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122 **(206) 329-4114 Ext. 305** Food, clothing, other emergency assistance; ex-offender re-entry assistance program.
Community Service Officers: Seattle Police Department 105 14th Ave., Suite #300, Seattle, WA 98122 Help with transportation; referrals to food and shelter. **(206) 684-4790 / 684-4791**
North End Emergency Fund: **(206) 789-7800** Limited funds for utilities, emergencies; north end; food bank.
North Helpline: **(206) 365-8043** Limited funds for utilities, other emergencies; north end; 10:00 am - 2:00 pm, Tuesday-Thursday only.
Queen Anne Help Line: Clothing bank only. **(206) 282-1540**
Salvation Army: 1101 Pike St., Seattle, WA 98101 **(206) 447-9944** **Greenwood Branch: (206) 783-1226;** **White Center/Burien: (206) 767-3150** Limited vouchers for clothing/hygiene items; food bank; move-in/rent assistance. Call for appointment.
St. Vincent de Paul: 5950 4th Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98101, 909 8th Ave. **(206) 767-6449** Limited help for utility and emergency needs. Up to 3-day wait for answer. Walk-ins before 3:00 pm.
Street Outreach Services: 1503 2nd Ave., Seattle, WA 98104 **(206) 625-0854** Women's support groups, meals, clothing, vouchers for emergencies. Drop-in 8:00 – 5:00, Monday-Friday.
Travelers Aid Program: Possible help to relocate to definite resource out of town. **(206) 461-3888**
Volunteers of America: Some help for utilities and other emergencies. Call for appointment. **(206) 784-1595**
Women & Family Center, Millionaire Club: 113 1st Ave. North, Seattle, WA 98109 **(206) 301-0833**

SPECIALIZED VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services (ADWAS) 24-Hour Crisis Line:	206-236-3134 (TDD only)
Advocates for Abused and Battered Lesbians (AABL)	206-547-8191 (Voice/TDD)
Consejo Counseling and Referral Service	206-461-4880
East Cherry YWCA African American Family Network	206-461-8480
Refugee Women's Alliance (REWA)	206-721-0243