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ABSTRACT

Findings of a 1990 study that identified the educational needs of Texas children who were homeless as a result of domestic violence are presented in this paper. Data were derived from: (1) interviews with three staff members of the Texas Council on Family Violence; (2) visits to four domestic violence shelters--three urban and one rural--and elementary schools serving two of the shelters; (3) interviews with shelter executive directors, elementary principals, shelter residents, and two classroom teachers; and (4) a survey sent to all domestic violence shelters in Texas, which yielded 34 responses, a 38 percent response rate. Survey statistics suggest that a significant portion of children who resided in a domestic violence shelter attended elementary school (27 percent). However, the statistics did not include children who continued to live in violent homes, those taken in by other family members, or those whose mothers had the financial resources to seek assistance elsewhere. The following recommendations are made: (1) implement practices to enroll all children in school; (2) maintain confidentiality of children's enrollment status; (3) provide comprehensive inservice training for school staff; (4) award the children immediate access to services and programs; (5) exempt the children from discipline policies involving corporal punishment; (6) improve communication between school and shelter staffs; (7) provide homebound services and transportation to those for whom safety is a concern; and (8) attempt to mainstream the children. (LMI)

Family Violence: Educational Implications and Recommendations

Francie Smith

In August 1990 the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth of the Texas Education Agency conducted a study to better understand the educational needs of one sub-population of homeless children, children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. Information from the study provided a description of children and youth in Texas who were homeless as a result of domestic violence. Statistical information was gathered on the numbers of children and youth and the difficulties they encountered in accessing appropriate educational programs and services. It is hoped that the information from this study will assist educators and legislators in recommending state and district policies or procedures as they endeavor to ensure academic success for all our children, regardless of ethnicity, color, creed, gender, or economic status.

Domestic violence shelters are scattered throughout Texas, from the Rio Grande to the Red River, across the mesas and throughout the metroplexes, assisting women and children who flee abusive relationships. Typically, domestic violence shelters provide temporary shelter, clothing, and a wide range of services. These services include counseling, employment and educational assistance and are available to all shelter residents: newborns, adolescents, and adults. In Austin, the Center for Battered Women annually serves over four hundred children and their mothers. The Austin Center indicates that 60% of these children have been physically or sexually abused and that 100% have been emotionally abused. The goal for children at the Austin Center is representative of the goals of other domestic violence shelters in Texas: Reverse the damages caused by family violence by providing an environment which enhances self-esteem and teaches non-violent ways of expressing themselves.

According to Texas law, all children between the ages of 5 and 21 on September 1st of any given year are entitled to free, appropriate public education. According to Public Law 101-645 (Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, 1990), homeless children who reside in domestic violence shelters are entitled to a free and appropriate public education comparable to the programs and services provided to other children. Frequently the emotional and physical safety needs of children from violent families interfere with their attendance and academic success in school. Thus, when meeting the educational needs of children who reside in domestic violence shelters, or who have experienced family violence, these emotional and physical safety needs must be appropriately acknowledged and addressed if the children are to experience success in school.

The Study

Information on the educational needs of children and youth in Texas who were homeless as a result of domestic violence was gathered from three primary sources:

(1) The Texas Council on Family Violence is the official network for domestic violence service providers in Texas. Three staff members for the Texas Council on Family Violence were selected by the Executive Director to be interviewed.

(2) Four domestic violence shelters representing three of the major population centers and one of the rural areas of the state of Texas were visited. The executive directors of these shelters and/or staff from these shelters were interviewed. In conjunction with these discussions, the elementary schools serving two of the shelters were visited, and the principals were interviewed These shelters and schools represented the three most common educational arrangements for children residing in Texas domestic violence shelters: mainsteamed, self-contained, or shelter schools/classrooms. Two classroom teachers were also interviewed, representing self-contained and shelter schools/classroom experiences.
(3) A survey was sent to all domestic violence shelters in Texas. This survey solicited information concerning those children and youth who had resided in domestic violence shelters in Texas during 1989.

The interview questions and survey questionnaire were designed to yield both statistical and descriptive information concerning children and youth who reside in domestic violence shelters. The statistical information involved gathering data relative to the number of children served, attendance rates, age, and length of stay. Descriptive information concerning reason for non-attendance and the types of services schools might provide was also collected. The interviews, because they took place in shelters and schools, provided emotional and sensory overlays as underlying fears and frustrations surfaced.

Texas Council on Family Violence

The Council staff representatives emphasized the importance of school for children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence by providing a sense of stability and continuity for children at a time when everything feels chaotic and disconnected. Schools were seen as places where positive peer relationships, individual recognition, and healthy adult-child relationships supported a child's self-esteem needs. Additionally, schools, as a natural center in the world of the child, could act as the center of a network with other community groups and agencies to provide critically needed services and resources, such as health care and school supplies.

Council staff stressed that schools be accountable for providing access to the same educational opportunities as other children in school as well as counseling services. Educational programs would include, but not be limited to, special education, bilingual education, athletics, and enrichment opportunities. School counselors should work with children from domestic violence shelters in the development of positive self-esteem, cooperative classroom behavior, and supportive relationship patterns. Similarly, school counselors must work with the school staff to develop attitudes which reflect sensitivity and awareness of the needs of the abused child as such attitudes provide the foundation for developing appropriate classroom management/discipline strategies. Appropriate discipline strategies would focus on developing a child's self-esteem and emphasize that people are not for hitting rather than rewarding or punishing certain behaviors. In addition to creating and maintaining better programs and services based on more realistic appraisals of the children's needs, better communication between schools and shelters would provide a safe linkage for the mothers and shelter personnel with the school.

Council staff members indicated that there have been concerns specific to rural settings which included the need for school supplies and a visiting teacher or homebound teacher program when it was not safe for a child to attend school. In urban areas, schools and businesses have formed liaisons to provide school supplies and clothing for children in need; this was not a resource readily available for many rural schools and shelters. More importantly, the safety of the child has been more difficult to ensure in rural areas, as a child usually attends the same school after moving to the shelter. When this has been the case, there has been greater potential danger for the child and mother in being followed, abused, or abducted from school or on the way to and from school. Therefore, schools in rural areas need to adapt the programs and services they extend to children residing in domestic violence shelters based on an assessment of the emotional, physical safety, and educational needs of a child. In demonstrating educational accountability, the attitude of the local district must be supportive if such adaptive measures are to be effective in

providing for the educational needs of every child.

Shelter Visitations

Shelter visitations were glimpses into the lives of others which left lasting visual and emotional impressions and insights. These snapshot impressions afforded the option of personalizing the impersonal and humanizing the statistical. Domestic violence shelters were experienced as oases of quiet, interspersed with sounds of chores being done, children crying and giggling, and telephones ringing. Physical environments of shelters were visual representations of the emotional climate, both crucial for personal change. Shelters were decorated in soft tones, with art and craft work displayed, and comfortable, attractive furniture. Children's areas were filled with books and toys, posters and drawings, games and aquariums. Offices were professional, yet welcoming. Voices of staff and residents alike were quietly positive, gentle but firm, non-violently assertive.

While shelters provided the refuge, staffs provided new ways of perceiving and living life: options, alternatives, and new beginnings for women and children who have lost their belief in tomorrows, the power of self, the goodness of self, and the rightness of self. Outsiders may sense the pain only vicariously. In several shelters there were display panels of children's art work. These drawings, produced in art therapy sessions, were messages of trauma, fear, and pain. A brief analyses described what you did not want to know. Quietly, tenaciously, the staff and residents worked together for personal change.

To facilitate accomplishing their goals, domestic violence shelters create safe, structured, pleasant environments. Physical safety has been achieved by keeping the locations of many shelters secret with crisis hot lines for telephone contact. Entrances to the shelters were kept locked and continually monitored. Within the shelters, access to the residential areas was controlled to further ensure the safety of residents. Ensuring the physical safety of residents and staff instilled a sense of emotional safety. To support and maintain this climate of physical and emotional safety, the residents and the staff abided by predetermined rules and guidelines which covered a variety of situations from housekeeping to attending school. Residents kept both their rooms and the public areas of the shelter clean and neat (this is never the responsibility of shelter staff); children attended school unless sick or at risk of endangerment.

In planning for adult change, case workers focused on methods to enhance self-esteem, develop job skills, improve parenting skills, and deal with addictive behaviors. According to Joyce Coleman, the Executive Director of the Battered Women's Shelter of Bexar County, 85 percent of the domestic violence victims had alcohol or drug (both prescription and illegal) related problems. Batterers frequently involve the women in drugs and then threaten exposure in order to keep the women dependent. When children were involved, batterers would threatened the women by suggesting they would turn them in as unfit mothers so their children will be taken away from them. For the women who were using/abusing drugs or alcohol, a primary reason for not seeking rehabilitation was that they did not accommodate children. However, within a structured living program these women can be rehabilitated, both in terms of their addictions and their relationship patterns. This type of program is critical for the victims of domestic violence if the cycle is to be broken.

Activities for the children concentrated on self-esteem, positive peer and family relationships, and academic skills. The development of effective interpersonal skills (such as communication skills) and acknowledging emotional needs were emphasized as many children in domestic violence shelters were insecure, had poor social skills resulting in difficulties handling anger, and only talked about what they should or could do. When women and children have left a domestic violence shelter, they may continue with the counseling programs. This commitment has made the significant difference in the lives of these women and children.

Shelter directors, case workers, and volunteers believed that people are not for hitting. They lived, taught, and modeled this belief daily. They were firm in their resolve to show others how they may live their lives so they will neither hit nor be hit by others. However, women and children, who have left their families because violence was a typical occurrence, frequently expressed themselves in physically and verbally abusive ways, abuse that included self-abuse and

abuse of another. For these women and children to break with the patterns of the past, they must see, talk about, and practice non-violence to learn to live in non-violent ways. Mothers learned to interact with their children in a positive, nurturing manner o enhance their relationship.

Domestic violence shelters were havens of protection for battered women and children. The real world laid beyond their doors. Inside were incredibly caring, dedicated directors, coordinators, case workers, cooks, hot line volunteers, counselors, and teachers. Inside were images of comfort: pleasantly decorated rooms, shelves of books, flowers, children's toys, soft music; the scents of perfume and laundry soap and pancakes; and the sounds of babies waking from their naps, toddlers on the playground, and mothers talking about this and that. Deep inside all their eyes was incredible pain. It was within these havens women and children began to rebuild themselves and their lives. As a part of that rebuilding, they have sought help from our nation's schools.

Domestic Violence Shelters and Schools: A Critical Relationship

Schools have responded to children who reside in domestic violence shelters, however, their response has not always been positive. Children's case workers enumerated their concerns with the schools serving their shelters. Enrollment in school frequently has been traumatic for both the child and the parent: school secretaries have been abrupt to the parent or school personnel have implemented narrow interpretations of state law and district policy. (For example, a child was told that he must have a TB skin test to be enrolled, yet, a TB skin test is not required by Texas law for enrollment.) Being approved for free/reduced lunch, being admitted to early childhood programs for four-year-olds, and being admitted into a school with a bilingual program have been cited as obstacles to the enrollment of children from domestic violence shelters. When shelters have called to discuss such situations with principals and other district officials, calls have not always been returned. As a consequence, children suffer intentional educational neglect.

When the response has been positive, the schools were characterized as supportive by providing an emotionally and physically secure setting for the children. Educators and shelter personnel stipulated that educational programs must be comprehensive, structured, and enriched as well as providing opportunities for the children from the domestic violence shelter to interact with other children their own age. These programs were developed with considerable communication between the shelter staff, the building principal, and the classroom teachers. The key element in the integrity of an instructional program was the classroom teacher who must be empathic and knowledgeable regarding children's lives, while providing an educational program which developed the skills and competencies needed for personal change. Without the support of the principal and the professional integrity of the classroom teacher, educational programs will not work. (Unfortunately, evidence for this stemmed from documented experiences with teachers and principals who have allowed children to suffer from educational neglect.)

The two principals interviewed believed school provides stability and normalcy in the life of children who experienced domestic violence. These supportive principals emphasized that the stability which school offers allowed children to continue their life, and that schools, therefore, had the responsibility to provide this stability. To generate a safe and stable environment, schools must provide appropriate training to school personnel. In working with homeless children from domestic violence shelters, issues concerning trust and abandonment, must be effectively and empathetically managed. Teachers must be encouraged to emphasize self-achievement through cooperative learning. Each principal also suggested that the curriculum be adaptable, the student-teacher ratio reduced, and the instructional approach be experiential and realistic. To facilitate the appropriate placement of students, development of an state/national electronic data base, similar to the data base used with migrant students, was suggested. In addition to providing for the educational needs of the child, schools must also attend to their social, emotional, and nutritional needs.

Typically, children's program coordinators in shelters have been successful in building a close rapport with elementary schools and have attempted to encourage this same type of relationship with junior and senior high schools. In working with schools, one explicitly expressed area of concern was school discipline. At shelters children were taught that people are

not for hitting. In Texas, where corporal punishment was still practiced in schools, shelters and schools have developed agreements to exclude children from the shelter from corporal punishment. Instead, these schools have utilized behavior management techniques such as time-outs. There was, however, confusion that occurred when some children were exempted from corporal punishment while their peers continued to be subjected to corporal punishment.

At the four shelters visited, most of the children attended the school closest to the shelter. For some children, the school closest to the shelter was the same school they attended before they moved to the shelter, either because it was in the same neighborhood as their previous home or because it was the only school in their town for their grade level. However, for most children, the school closest to the shelter was a new school. In a limited number of situations, classroom was located in the shelter.

Each school visited provided for the educational needs of children from the domestic violence shelter in a distinctly different way. One elementary school mainstreamed the children from the domestic violence shelter throughout regular classes. Another elementary school self-contained the children from the domestic violence shelter throughout most of the day. The third school self-contained all children, K-12, in a classroom located in the domestic violence shelter. This classroom was staffed and funded by the local district. The model each school adopted was intended to address multiple concerns in providing for the educational needs of the children they served. These overriding concerns tended to fall into one or more of several categories: safety and security; social and emotional; counseling; interagency coordination and communication; academic programs; and school staff development.

According to school and shelter administrators, there were advantages and disadvantages to each model. The most frequent arrangement was mainstreaming the children from the domestic violence shelter into the regular classrooms. When a child was mainstreamed, physical safety of the child became a primary issue if the batterer attempted to abduct the child. Because a child may have been in a school for a relatively short period of time, it was critical that this time was used to provide the appropriate educational services and programs to meet each child's needs. As this period was one of severe emotional stress for the child, appropriate counseling services and discipline strategies must be provided. Further, health and nutritional needs of the child must be fulfilled. In addition to meeting the needs of the child, the support and professional development needs of the staff must be adequately provided.

Less frequently, children from the domestic violence shelters were placed in self-contained classrooms. When the child was placed in a self-contained classroom, other concerns surface. While a self-contained classroom more easily accommodated for physical safety concerns, it also restricted opportunities for the development of social skills. This concern may be somewhat alleviated if the child has opportunities during the day to socialize with peers. The teacher assigned to such a classroom must be familiar with a wide variety of materials to develop a program which provides for all the educational needs of every child, regardless of their age or level of ability. Frequently, children in a self-contained classroom were labeled by other children in school. This may then result in name-calling and physical confrontations. Thus, restricting children from domestic violence shelters to a single classroom could discourage development of personal growth for students and their families, staff, and community.

Infrequently, children attend school at the shelter itself. For one shelter, this resulted from continued expressions of dissatisfaction regarding the neighborhood school to district officials. This dissatisfaction resulted when the neighborhood school had made it difficult for the children from the shelter to enroll and, once enrolled, failed to adequately address student academic, nutritional, social, or emotional needs. Furthermore, since children in the domestic violence shelter lived within two miles of the school, transportation was not provided by the district, and so safety was a concern. Referrals to social workers and psychologists or special education programs were difficult, if not impossible to initiate. Often peer relationship and socialization skills were not addressed and frequent discipline problems resulted. When shelter administrators expressed their concerns to the local school district, they were told that district personnel were "the experts" and were advised to stay out of district affairs. However, after the school received a new principal, a compromise was reached: the children were technically enrolled at the neighborhood

school but attended "school" in the shelter.

Since the school has been located at the shelter, there has been significant improvement in the educational services and programs provided for the children and youth. The shelter teacher was required to have K-12 certification. Although the program has an elementary orientation, the curriculum was balanced academically. Importantly, the teacher was sensitive to the academic, social, and emotional needs of this population. Other advantages included: a greater awareness by the teacher of the home situations, frequent reassurances of safety, inclusion of counseling sessions throughout the school day, lack of victimization (labeling by school staff and students), greater individual attention, empathic peer support, and easy access to parents during the day. Having the school at the shelter means the teacher and the shelter's program coordinator for children can work together to better provide for the developmental needs of the children and youth who resided at the shelter. They have found that these children tend to be insecure, have poor social skills and difficulty handling anger, and to be able to only talk about what was the right thing to do. Residents and shelter staff felt the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Children no longer received discriminatory treatment: they were not physically separated from other children in the classroom, were given textbooks, and were not called "homeless" by teachers and other students. Of course, the shelter and its residents would have preferred the school system provided a better response to the needs of the children living at the shelter, but in lieu of that, this option has proven beneficial to the children.

There were, however, some disadvantages to locating "school" at the shelter. While the children did receive individualized instruction based on individual assessments, frequently, they did not have the opportunity to keep up with regular school work and often did not receive credit for the work they accomplished while at the shelter. Also, an elementary orientation was not always considered developmentally appropriate for adolescents, as it did not allow adolescents any opportunity to explore the wider variety of courses and activities typically offered in middle, junior, or high schools. While attending school at the shelter, children were away from their peers, which affected development of socialization skills. Lastly, having contact with their mothers during the day also meant they did not have opportunities to get away from the emotional issues of the mothers. These problems at times were more acute for older students who risked delayed graduation, loss of credit, loss of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, and who had a higher likelihood of dropping out of school.

Domestic Violence Survey

The survey of all the domestic violence shelters in Texas conducted in the fall of 1990 yielded invaluable information regarding children in shelters and the responses of the local schools in providing appropriate services. Thirty-four, or 37.8%, of the shelters responded to the survey. The survey results indicated that during any given month 864 children and youth resided in the 34 responding domestic violence shelters. Projecting from this figure of 864 children per month, it may be estimated that if all 90 shelters had returned the survey, the total number of children reported residing in a domestic violence shelter would have been 2,287. For one shelter, the average was two children per month; for another, the monthly average was 55 children. The greatest number of children reported in any one month by a single domestic violence shelter was 120. (The average monthly population in each of those 34 shelters was 25 children.)

The average length of stay for these children and youth was 22 days, but each stay could be as short as a single day or as long as 45 days. Domestic violence shelters may set a limit on the number of days a woman may remain at the shelter at any one time, i.e., 30 days, however shelters do not set a limit on the number of times a woman may live at the shelter during the course of a year. Therefore, while 22 days was the average length of time a child resided at a domestic violence shelter for any given stay; this figure does not tell us how many times during a year a child may actually reside in a domestic violence shelter. If a child resided in a domestic violence shelter three times during the 1989-90 school year, the actual length of shelter residency might have been from three to 90 days. (Data regarding recidivism in this highly mobile population was not collected by shelter personnel.)

Of the children reported to have lived in a domestic violence shelter, 30.6% were under three years of age; 28.6% were between the ages of 3 and 5; 27.0% were between 5 and 11; 10.0% were between the ages of 11 and 15; and 3.7% were over 15 years of age. Therefore, 28.6% may have been eligible for early childhood programs; 27% were eligible for elementary programs; 10% were eligible for middle school/junior high programs; 3.7% were eligible for high school programs; 100% were eligible for all programs and services which best met their physical, social, psychological, or educational needs.

In the 1989-90 school year, approximately 208, or 24% of the children and youth, were eligible for school, but did not attend while they were living at the shelter. While most shelters reported that all of the children attended school, one shelter did report that 44 school age children during the 1989-90 school year did not attend school. Of the 208 children who did not attend school, the average number of days a child was out of school was 2.5 days. The reasons given for not attending school included mothers deciding not to enroll their children in Pre-K programs if they had no prior school attendance, dropping out, the need to get prior school records or pay fees owed in a previous school before allowing enrollment in a new school. However, the major reason given for student non-attendance was directly related to safety concerns.

Of the 208 children who did not attend school, 136, or 65.4%, did not attend because it was not considered safe for them to do so. The primary reason it was considered dangerous for a child to enroll in or attend school while residing in a domestic violence was batterers had attempted to pick up children or follow children to their mothers. In smaller, rural communities where the batterer knew the child's schedule, this was a particularly dangerous situation. However, frequently the child's new location was traced through the transfer of school records or the lack of confidentiality on the part of the school staff. In situations where a spouse retained legal custody and a court order had not restricted the spouse's access to the children, the school felt obligated to provide the battering spouse information about the transfer of records. If the shelter was within the two mile radius of the school, the walk from the shelter to the school was potentially dangerous because of the risk of abduction.

Of the reported homeless children and youth who resided in domestic violence shelters in the 1989-90 school year, 32.55% of them attended their previous school, 64.55% attended the school where the shelter was located, and 2.91% attended school at the shelter. Of the 32.55% who attended their previous school, the most frequently given reasons were that the previous school and the school which served the shelter were the same or that the children did not want to change schools. Also mentioned was a situation where the sending school did not want the child to change schools because the school officials were concerned about the additional stress for the child if both home and school connections were lost.

When asked what services school districts might provide to best meet the needs of children who were homeless as a result of domestic violence, the most frequently expressed concerns addressed confidentiality, empathy, counseling, and transportation. The need for security, communication and coordination with the shelter staff, inservice training for school staff, school supplies, immediate enrollment, and homebound services (for rural and short term shelters) were also identified as important considerations. An immunization master file, free lunch, mainstreaming children, continuation of social-psychological-nutritional services/programs after the child has left the shelter, after-school programs, and on-site schools were also suggested.

Implications

These statistics have suggested that a significant portion of the children who resided in a domestic violence shelter attended school. These statistics did not include those children who continued to live in families where violence was practiced, nor did they include those children who were taken in by other family members or whose mothers had the financial resources to seek assistance elsewhere. In lieu of this, the impact on schools is perhaps greater than previously realized. This impact demands the need for greater sensitivity and awareness on the part of school personnel, development of appropriate counseling and academic programs, and access to services to ensure that the needs of the children are being met.

These statistics confirmed the belief that a significant percentage (27.0%) of students who

resided in domestic violence shelters attended elementary school. It is critical that the schools that serve these children be staffed with professionals and support personnel who will ensure that all the needs of these children are met. Further, it is critical that school districts be able to provide for the special education needs of those children who have handicapping conditions which entitle children to services from the age of three (from birth for visually or auditorially handicapped children). It must not be assumed that because there are fewer older children residing in domestic violence shelters that these children do not or have not experienced family violence. Frequently these children have sought refuge in the homes of family or friends, were placed in foster homes, or have run away. Frequently, too, they are at great risk of dropping out of school. It is critical that schools reach out to these children and provide them with those services and programs which will ensure their success.

The responses of shelter personnel implied that not only getting into school, but also accessing necessary and appropriate programs and services was more difficult for the children residing in domestic violence shelters. Schools must put into place those practices and procedures which encourage all children to enroll and remain in school. This minimally includes establishing receptive enrollment practices. Further, schools must positively assist all children in their efforts to learn, relate to others, feel good about themselves, and be successful.

Additional responses suggested that school personnel have been not only insensitive to the children from domestic violence shelters, but have in some cases endangered them with their lack of empathy and confidentiality. For the majority of the children who will experience the trauma of enrolling in a new school, school personnel must facilitate the enrollment and placement process so this trauma is not aggravated. Minimally, this means that district personnel receive information concerning the stipulations regarding the education of homeless children and youth defined in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act and act responsibly in complying with the provisions of federal law. To be optimum, this means that the attitude of school personnel must become one that encourages all children to enroll in and experience success in school.

Children, and their mothers, who reside in domestic violence shelters, fear abduction and continued abuse. This fear for their personal safety is based on their personal experiences, it is their reality. Schools must exercise extreme confidentiality when they enroll children from domestic violence shelters in school. School personnel must exercise good judgment when discussing children from the shelter. Further, schools must be accountable for the safety of the child from the time the child leaves the shelter in the morning until the child enters the shelter in the afternoon.

The most severe indictment was that school personnel had not welcomed children from domestic violence shelters. Their reasons were many and varied: women who allowed themselves and their children to be abused were not understood; women and children who have fled abusive homes were not understood; children who had probable behavioral problems were neither welcomed nor understood; gossip was condoned and personal safety jeopardized; appropriate services were expensive; the needs of the children placed incredible stress upon the system and its personnel, but no school received the resources or support to provide for the special child; schools did not like to bother with children who might leave soon after enrollment; children under stress did not test well and so brought test scores down for the school and the district; children from the domestic violence shelter were a "bad influence" on our children; and their parents did not contribute to the tax base.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented on the behalf of children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. These recommendations were generated from the information gathered from the survey and from over 30 hours of interviews with shelter personnel, shelter residents, elementary principals, teachers, and classroom aides. It is believed that these recommendations will improve the lives and therefore the academic achievement of children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. Many of the recommendations carry no financial burden. Others do. However, the costs of implementing these recommendations are either minimal or there are alternate funds available.

1. **Schools must implement practices and procedures which facilitate the enrollment of children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence.** Frequently, district policies and practices act as barriers to the child who is homeless as a result of domestic violence. Practices or policies which are a violation of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act must cease immediately. Such violations include requiring students to have withdrawal records from their previous school, requiring homeless students (only) to have a TB immunization, and requiring proof of legal guardianship. In the case of lost or inadequate immunization records, school districts are encouraged to grant a 30-day grace period to the children for the purpose of obtaining or updating their immunization records and to enroll immediately. Ideally, schools should become proactive in identifying and enrolling children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. In doing so, the school should become interactive with other agencies and provide assistance in obtaining immunizations, advertising enrollment availability and programs, and facilitate the enrollment of students at the shelter to reduce the trauma of the enrollment process for the battered mother and child.

2. **Schools must maintain confidentiality regarding the child's enrollment status, including the transfer of records to new schools.** In many cases the batterer has been able to trace the location of the child through the school. This endangers the child and the child's mother. If the batterer is the father of the child, and there are no protective orders, the school cannot legally prevent the father from contacting his child. However, the school should also notify the shelter staff and the mother should this contact be attempted. In cases where a batterer seeks records (and there is no protective order), some schools provide the records only after a 72 hour delay.

3. **School staff who work with children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence must have comprehensive inservice training.** By school staff, it is meant all school staff: office personnel, principals, teachers, nurses, monitors, volunteers, counselors, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers. This training must include awareness of the causes and issues regarding domestic violence, concerns regarding the victims of domestic violence, behavior management techniques, nutritional and other health concerns, strategies to enhance self-esteem, management of peer relationships, innovative instructional methodologies, development of positive parent-child-school relationships, and counseling strategies that incorporate the child's perceptions.

4. **Children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence must be given immediate approval for such services as the federal meal program.** While many children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence may reside in shelters, many do not. Whether they reside in a domestic violence shelter or not, they are entitled to all programs and services available to any other child served by the district. School personnel can grant emergency approval to any child they believe would be entitled to participate in the federally subsidized meal program. All homeless children and youth should be able to access this program immediately upon enrollment.

5. **Children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence must be given immediate approval for such programs as bilingual education, special education, and programs for three- and four-year-olds, especially if they have been enrolled in such a program prior to becoming homeless.**
Enrollment in such a program is easily verified with a phone call to the previous school. It is cautioned, however, that such a phone call may endanger the child if personnel release any information that results in the child being traced. It is critical that procedures can be devised to prevent this from occurring while ensuring that the child is enrolled in the appropriate program.

6. **Children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence, or children who have been homeless as a result of domestic violence, must be exempt from discipline policies involving corporal punishment.**
In experiencing the trauma of domestic violence, some children have developed behaviors which may be harmful to them or to others. As a part of their emotional recovery, children in domestic violence shelters receive counseling on appropriate ways to manage their emotions, such as anger. They are taught that people are not for hitting. The schools they attend should reinforce this belief. Discipline policies for children who have lived through the turmoil of domestic violence should incorporate behavior management strategies and alternatives rather than corporal punishment.

7. **Schools must create open, effective, responsive, and responsible lines of communication with shelter personnel, especially those who work with the children.**
In order to better meet the needs of children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence, it is essential that school personnel and shelter personnel communicate. This communication should take place before children from the shelter enroll in the schools. The schools and the shelters need a thorough understanding of the programs and services each offers. If there are conflicts, for instance in the use of corporal punishment, resolution needs to occur so the child is not caught in the middle. As shelter staff frequently act for the parents, school staff member need to know shelter staff: who they are, what they do, and how to make contact. If shelter staff can facilitate the enrollment process by having the parent complete the forms at the shelter, this frequently would reduce the stress for the parent. (Mothers who have been recently beaten or who have left abruptly without getting suitable clothing find it difficult to appear in public.) It is through communication that understanding and cooperation develop. Without these avenues of communication, it is the children and youth who suffer the most, and the cycle of abuse continues.

8. **In situations where safety of the child is at risk, the provision of homebound services would allow the child or youth who is homeless as a result of domestic violence to continue their education without fear of abduction.**
When there is cause to believe that the child could be abducted, particularly before temporary protection orders have been obtained, it is in the best interest of the child not to leave the shelter. This may be especially relevant in rural areas or communities where the child would be attending the same school after moving to the shelter. In such cases, the provision of homebound services would help reduce that possibility.

9. **In that the safety needs of children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence are greater than other children, it is recommended that transportation be provided by the district even when the shelter is within two miles of the school.**
For a child or youth fleeing from domestic violence, the most dangerous place for them to be is away from the shelter. The school is safer than other public areas for such children, if only because school personnel are aware of strangers and monitor all children while they are at school. The school bus is an extension of the school, and as such it is a safer place for children and youth who are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

10. **Every attempt must be made to mainstream children temporarily residing in a domestic violence shelter throughout the regular educational program.**
While it is admirable that schools desire to ensure the protection of children who have fled from violent family situations, the child has other concerns, interests, and needs which must be equally ensured. These, minimally, include equal access to the programs and services available to all other residents of the state. If a child is self-contained in a separate classroom or in a separate facility as a result of their residence, then the child is not being provided equal access.