

Thousands of homeless children losing out on education

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TORONTO – A groundbreaking new report shows at least 2,000 homeless children in Toronto are needlessly at risk of slipping through the cracks of the education system every year.

Lost in the Shuffle, by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre, is the first study in Canada to document the impact of homelessness on children's education in Toronto.

The report found that the majority of homeless children aged six to 12 attend three schools in the year they lose housing, and as a result repeat material and miss curriculum. Highly transient students can attend more than 10 schools before reaching high school, and many of them face barriers due to emotional trauma.

“Neither the school system nor the shelter system is equipped to systematically help them through,” says report author Ann Decter.

“And yet we know the steps we can take to make sure homeless children stay on track with their education without massive new spending. Teachers need help to keep these kids on the right track, and the kids need the support of a trained professional – a guardian angel on their side.”

Community experts are uniting in a call to help transient students cope.

“We owe it to these kids to recognize the challenges they experience and to support them. We know we can build resiliency to help them overcome tough times,” said Paula Carrie of Aisling Discoveries, the organization that pioneered ways to smooth the path for these children.

According to a national survey, 76% of women and 88% of children in shelters were escaping situations of abuse.

“Domestic violence is the sleeping giant in children's homelessness. Many of these children are going to school afraid that their fathers are going to find them on the playground,” said Rhonda Roffey, executive director of Women's Habitat.

In any given year, since 1990, the annual population of children living in Toronto's homeless shelters has ranged from a high of nearly 7,000 to no less than 3,500. The full report, funded by the United Way of Greater Toronto, is available online at www.socialplanningtoronto.org.

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