

When Families Need Stability Most, Community Matters

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Down East Partnership for Children

Across eastern North Carolina, many families are working hard every day just to keep their children safe. For some, that effort includes navigating the realities of homelessness, a challenge that is often hidden, misunderstood, and deeply impactful for young children.

Down East Partnership for Children recently hosted a presentation and discussion through a partnership supported by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. Community and regional partners were brought together to focus on an urgent issue: the needs of young children experiencing homelessness right now.

The Young Child Homelessness Project, led by Partners for Impact, is working to better understand the experiences of families and connect them with the resources that can make a lasting difference. Since its founding in 2016 by Beth Bordeaux, Partners for Impact, has focused on addressing homelessness in ways that promote stability and positive childhood experiences — especially during the earliest and most critical years of development.

The need is significant. Across North Carolina, more than 39,000 children from Pre-K through 12th grade are experiencing homelessness. Some families are living in shelters or temporary housing, while others are unsheltered — staying in places not meant for habitation. Many more are part of what experts call “hidden homelessness,” doubling up with relatives or moving frequently between unstable living situations.

For families in crisis, priorities are immediate and urgent: food, safety, and shelter. Child care, while essential for long-term stability, often becomes a back-burner issue when survival is the focus. Yet access to high-quality early childhood care is one of the strongest protective factors for young children experiencing trauma and instability.

Local service providers are seeing firsthand how today’s challenges, from housing shortages to transportation barriers and post-pandemic economic strain, are stretching families and support systems alike. Many parents are navigating fear, stigma, and complex documentation requirements that can make accessing help feel overwhelming. At the same time, child care providers themselves are operating in a system that is under-resourced and strained. At the average rate of \$14 per hour, many early education teachers struggle to afford stable housing.

That’s why collaboration is more important than ever.

DEPC recently convened partners including Nash County Child Protective Services, United Way, Edgecombe Community College, the Salvation Army, CFHC, the JMF Foundation, and others to begin identifying real solutions. These conversations are centered on breaking down fragmented systems and creating stronger, easier to navigate pathways for families to access support.

Ideas emerging from this event include:

- Strengthening coordination between agencies
- Creating more integrated, “one-stop” access points for services
- Meeting families where they are through community outreach
- Expanding safe, trusted locations, such as churches, where families can connect to help
- Promoting awareness of existing resources like United Way’s 211

There were also innovative approaches such as mobile resource outreach and cross-agency case conferencing to ensure families receive the full bundle of support they need.

At its core, this work recognizes a simple truth: families in crisis often cannot think beyond the immediate safety of their children. The first step is connection. From there, stability becomes possible.

Through enhanced child care referrals and community-based outreach, our community is focused on ensuring that families experiencing homelessness are not navigating these challenges alone. By working together across sectors, our community is building a stronger safety net — one that supports not just survival, but the opportunity for young children to thrive.

Because, when we invest in stability for our youngest neighbors, we invest in the future of our entire community.