

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:  
Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response  
Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>PAGE 1</b>
<b>BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>PAGE 3</b>
<b>DATA.....</b>	<b>PAGE 5</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES.....</b>	<b>PAGE 8</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>PAGE 11</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>PAGE 12</b>
<b>ABOUT THE PRESENTERS.....</b>	<b>PAGE 13</b>

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**INTRODUCTION**

'Heal, Thrive and Grow' is no ordinary conference. This is a series and a forum for professionals to engage in interactive learning, conversation, and deliberate networking. This document summarizes the workshops and panel discussions during the April 24, 2009 conference. This conference: 'Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response' was attended by 40 individuals representing 28 different organizations.

The purpose of the conference: To bring together educators, behavioral health practitioners and community partners to share resources and identify strategies that help homeless children to succeed in school.

Learning objectives:

- Identify best practices, methods and strategies that help homeless children to succeed in school
- Identify strategies for developing family-school partnerships

The conference generated a high level of interest from a wide range of organizations, which indicates that there is a strong interest in sharing best practices and developing partnerships that will help homeless children succeed in school.

The major themes that arose out of the conference include:

- The need for better communication between educators, practitioners, and community partners about the unique needs of homeless school-age children and their families
- The need for better articulation between educators, practitioners and community partners in order to identify and share best practices for meeting the unique needs of homeless school-age children and their families
- The need to support professional development activities for educators, practitioners and community partners about the unique needs of homeless school-age children.
- The need to provide support services and to target resources that address the unique needs of homeless school-age children.

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**CONFERENCE SCHEDULE**

1. Keynote Address: '[Creating a Home for Students](#)', Reverend Dr. Gregory G. Groover Sr, Chairperson, Boston School Committee
2. Networking Exercise – Valina Jackson, MA, LMHC, Chief Operating Officer, Brookview House, Inc.
3. Panel Presentation: '[Interagency Collaborations and Partnerships](#)'
  - a. **Panelists:**
    - Mary William, Director, Boston Public Schools Homeless Student Initiative
    - Robert-Thomas Duclersaint, Director of Program Services, Brookview House, Inc.
    - Mayumi Brooks, Youth Program Director, Brookview House, Inc.
    - Sheria Morrison, MA, CMHC Concord Carlisle METCO, Inc. and former Lesley University Clinical Intern at Brookview House
4. Luncheon Address: '[Campaign to End Child Homelessness](#)',
  - a. Katie Volk, Director of Training, National Center on Family Homelessness
5. Three Workshops:
  - a. '[Developing Family-School Partnerships](#)' – Presenter: Marjorie Jones, Ed.D., Lesley University
  - b. '[Effects of Domestic Violence and Homelessness on School-Age Children](#)' – Presenter: Judith Lennett, Esq., Northnode, Inc.
  - c. '[Developing a New Paradigm: Leadership & Change in Diverse Communities](#)' – Presenter: Gary Bailey, MSW, ACSW, Simmons College Graduate School of Social Work
6. **Closing:** Wendy Williams, MSW, LICSW, School of Social Work, Wheelock College
7. **Networking Reception**

## Heal, Thrive and Grow:

### Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference

#### BACKGROUND

In 2007, Brookview House, Inc. reached out to Jackie Jenkins Scott, President of Wheelock College to develop a partnership. The objective was to develop an initiative that would respond to the academic and behavioral health needs of homeless families and their children. Staff from Brookview House, Wheelock College and the Wheelock College School of Social Work began meeting to identify disparities and gaps. Specifically, the group identified the following topics as their focus for future programming:

1. **Mental health for homeless women.**
  - Studies show high rates of depression in homeless mothers. Poverty is both a risk factor for poor mental health and can be a consequence of poor mental health.
2. **Mental health for homeless children.**
  - Homeless children are the most vulnerable of all to mental health problems. By age eight, one out of three children experiencing homelessness will have a diagnosable mental health disorder that interferes with daily activity. Even with health insurance, more than three-quarters of homeless children do not receive much needed mental health services. (National Center on Family Homelessness)
3. **Academic Achievement for homeless children.**
  - Research indicates 75% of homeless youth will or has dropped out of school. Homeless students are at considerable risk of disrupted education, widening educational achievement gaps, and lack of access to the support services they need. (*A Snapshot of Homelessness in Massachusetts Public High Schools*)

## **Heal, Thrive and Grow:**

### **Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

The strategy chosen to address the identified disparities and gaps for homeless families is a series of professional development activities with workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities. Expressly for educators, behavioral health practitioners and community partners, *'Heal, Thrive and Grow: A Series of Workshops and Panel Discussions Designed to Improve the Lives of Children and Families'* was created. The first event, *Culturally Competent Models for Urban Families*, was held October 16 and November 13, 2008 at Wheelock College.

The goal is to bring educators, behavioral health practitioners and community agencies together to build professional and organizational capacity through professional development activities, networking activities, and sharing of best practices. Specifically, to

- Provide opportunities to discuss and disseminate best practice methods and strategies.
- Create opportunities for continual learning and professional development for behavioral health practitioners, educators and community partners.
- Develop networks and partnerships that further the goal of helping homeless children and their families to succeed.

**'Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response'** held **April 24, 2009** was the second conference in the Heal, Thrive and Grow series.

## Heal, Thrive and Grow:

### Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference

#### DATA

Research shows homeless students move frequently, attend multiple schools, and are often out of school for extended periods – resulting in wide educational gaps. Academically, homeless students are less likely to earn good grades than housed students.

According to a report released in July 2007 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in cooperation with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control entitled "A Snapshot of Homelessness in Massachusetts Public High Schools," there are an estimated 48,000 homeless students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools. The report indicates that for every one homeless student a district identifies, it is estimated that there are approximately six or seven homeless students who are not being identified.

**There are an estimated 48,000 homeless students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools.**

The report is based on data from the 2005 MA Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and MA Annual Homeless Enrollment Data. In the 2005 YRBS, a bi-annual survey, included a housing question for the first time. The data collected suggests that, despite significant efforts to identify homeless students, a great majority of homeless students are going unidentified by their school systems.

The Massachusetts YRBS not only provides an estimate of how many homeless students schools can expect to educate but also sheds some light on the life experiences of those students. The report indicates that homeless students participate in high risk behaviors more frequently than housed students and are less likely to benefit from the so-called "protective factors" schools provide to ensure their students' successful development.

10th Grade 2005 MCAS Results Statewide showed:

- 62% of homeless students passed English Language Arts, compared to 90% of all students.
- 45% of homeless students passed Mathematics, compared to 85% of all students.

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

Additional data from *A Snapshot of Homelessness in Massachusetts Public High Schools* indicates:

- In Massachusetts, 66% of homeless students reported earning good grades (A, B, or C) compared to 86% of their housed peers.
- About 20% of homeless students currently receive special education services, compared to 11% of their housed peers who have an Individual Education Plan.
- 39% of homeless students do not have an adult family member they feel they can talk to about things that are important to them, compared to 18% of their housed peers.
- 58% of homeless students, compared to 81% of housed students, felt there was a teacher or other school adult they could talk to if they had a problem.
- Only 30% of homeless students participate in an organized activity outside of school, while 50% of their housed peers do.
- 48% of homeless students started drinking before the age of 13, compared to 21% for housed students.
- 29% of homeless youth were gang members, compared to 9% of housed students.
- 28% of homeless students carried a weapon to school compared to 5% of their peers.
- 28% of homeless students compared to 12% of their housed peers had considered suicide in the past year.
- 31% of homeless students, compared to 9% of housed students, have been hurt by a date.

**75% of homeless youth will or has  
dropped out of school.**

## **Heal, Thrive and Grow:**

### **Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**The following organizations were represented at the April 24<sup>th</sup> Conference:**

- Boston After School and Beyond
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
- Boston Day and Evening Academy
- Boston Public Health Commission Adolescent Wellness Program
- Boston Public Schools (BPS)
- BPS Family Engagement Leadership Development Unit- FCE Title 1 Training Ctr
- Boston Public Schools Homeless Student Initiative
- Brookview House, Inc.
- Catholic Charities Genesis II
- Center for Collaborative Education
- Children's Hospital
- Clinigen
- Crittenton Women's Union
- Department of Children and Families
- Department of Public Health Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition
- Department of Public Health Home Visitor Program
- Department of Transitional Assistance Domestic Violence Unit
- Lesley University
- METCO
- Neighborhood House Charter School
- Northnode, Inc.
- Phoenix Houses of New England
- School and Community Associates
- Simmons College
- The Barr Foundation
- The National Center on Family Homelessness
- Travelers Aid Family Services
- Wheelock College

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES FROM APRIL 24, 2009 WORKSHOPS AND PANEL PRESENTATION**

Educators, behavioral health practitioners and community partners must come together to share best practices, network and to:

- Understand resilience of children
- Understand the impact and effects of homelessness on children
- Identify effective behavior management models for homeless children
- Identify and understand behavioral health needs of homeless children
- Recognize and identify signs of trauma
- Help families to deal with shame and loss
- Understand interconnections between homelessness, domestic violence, and substance abuse and the impact of these interconnections on school-age children
  
- Address professional development needs of educators regarding homeless children
- Highlight educational challenges for homeless children.
- Identify the role of schools and teachers in the education of homeless children
- Identify teachers' perceptions of homeless children and their families.
  
- Identify socio-cultural issues related to developing Home-School partnerships
- Share best practices for developing and implementing home-school partnerships
- Understand the intersection of environments
- Help families managing change and managing transitions
- Identify strategies to support families
- Understand the impact of language we use (e.g., Deconstructing term 'homeless', home/school vs. family/school)

## Heal, Thrive and Grow:

### Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference

- Understand the stigma associated with homelessness
- Recognize ways parents are hindered
- Develop methodologies and share best practices for engaging parents
- Help parents deal with school transition during homelessness
  
- Identify practice implications for working with racially different clients and/or expressions of racism in our daily lives
- Understand the dynamics and functions of racism and oppression in institutional, cultural, and individual levels, as well as implications of confronting it or of not acting.
- Develop self-awareness about biases and distortions that are influenced by racism/oppression and their effects on children's/families' lives.
  
- Acknowledge importance of networks and networking opportunities
- Understand importance and effectiveness of partnerships and collaborations in working with homeless families

#### **Community collaboration –**

**A process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.**

**Judith Lennett**

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**Luncheon Address**

On March 10, 2009, the National Center on Family Homelessness released *America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report on Child Homelessness* and kicked off the Campaign to End Child Homelessness. The Report Card offers a comprehensive snapshot of child homelessness in the US, describing extent, child well-being, structural risk factors, and policy and planning efforts in every state.

**More than 1.5 million of our nation's children go to sleep without a home each year.**

This presentation shared the findings and their implications nationally and in Massachusetts. The presenter also discussed the activities of the Campaign to End Child Homelessness.

For more information visit: [www.homelesschildrenamerica.org](http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org)

**At the end of high school, few homeless students are proficient in reading and math – and their estimated graduation rate is below 25%.**

## **Heal, Thrive and Grow:**

### **Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

#### **CONCLUSION**

The stigma of homelessness creates barriers to requesting services, and resources for students are often not easy to locate and at times unavailable. Unidentified homeless students may be overlooked for important support services within schools and for referrals to services in the community. As a result, they frequently are more vulnerable to high-risk behaviors.

Given this dichotomy, it becomes imperative for teachers to join the conversation, for schools to help connect students who have become homeless with support services, and to target resources that address their unique needs.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS:**

- Share best practices for working with homeless children and their families
- Expand this conversation to teachers
- Add teacher training/professional development
- Enhance clinical or macro social work/mental health training
- Develop more opportunities to discuss leadership and change in diverse communities
- Develop more opportunities for learning practical/tangible strategies to create home-school/family-school partnerships
- Change policy to address needs of homeless school-age children
- Expand policy advocacy on behalf of homeless school-age children and their families
- Increase awareness of service needs and challenges for homeless school-age children

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:  
Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response  
Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We extend a special thank you to Jackie Jenkins Scott, President of Wheelock College for her support and her willingness to bring academia and community partners together to improve the lives of children and families.

Brookview House Inc., Wheelock College, Wheelock College School of Social Work, and the Greater Boston Association of Black Social Workers sponsored Heal, Thrive and Grow on April 24, 2009. Wheelock College generously provided the space for the conference.

We wish to thank Valina Jackson, Mercedes Tompkins, Angela Veale, Wendy Williams, and Ceronne Daly for their extraordinary work in organizing and coordinating the conference. We thank the members of the Greater Boston Association of Black Social Workers for their support. We especially thank the presenters and conference participants for sharing their time, wisdom and expertise.

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**ABOUT THE PRESENTERS**

**Gary Bailey, MSW, ACSW** is currently an Associate Professor at Simmons College Graduate School of Social Work. He also holds an appointment as an adjunct Assistant Professor at the Boston University School of Public Health. He is Chairperson, National Social Work Public Education Campaign and Chair of the Policy, Advocacy and Representation Commission International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Berne, Switzerland

**Mayumi Brooks** is the Director of Youth Programs at Brookview House, Inc. Her professional expertise includes more than 15 years training staff, developing curricula and working with children in urban settings. Her accomplishments include development of a comprehensive program for homeless school-age children with a focus on improving behavioral health and academic skills.

**Robert-Thomas Duclersaint** is Director of Programs and Services at Brookview House, Inc. He has an extensive background directing non-profit youth oriented organizations. He has more than ten years experience in facilitation, mediation, and conflict resolution. He is a member of Full Service Schools Roundtable, MA Educational Opportunity Association, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National Afterschool Alliance, and Project R.I.G.H.T.

**Reverend Dr. Gregory G. Groover Sr** is Chairperson of the Boston School Committee. From 1987 to 1994 Gregory served as pastor of Bright Temple A.M.E. Church in the South Bronx. In June 1994 he was appointed pastor of the Historic Charles Street A.M.E. Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. He currently serves as chairman of the Education Committee of the Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA). Dr. Groover has been instrumental in bringing together public school officials, teachers, community leaders, parents and the clergy in planning and developing the BMA After-School Program.

**Marjorie Jones, Ed.D.** is an Associate Professor at Lesley University teaching in the Adult Learning and Social Science Divisions. In her professional career as an educator Dr. Jones has served at the secondary level as a high school teacher and principal of Highland Park Free School, Boston, MA. She has been involved in the training of both teachers and principals and her research has focused on building school climates that promote students' optimal development.

**Judith Lennett, J.D.** Executive Director, Northnode, Inc. Northnode provides training and program support to Massachusetts Department of Children and Families funded domestic violence agencies/organizations. Her accomplishments include development of a comprehensive training curriculum for new staff and volunteers; development and delivery of training on the multiple and complex effects of domestic violence on adults and children; and development and evaluation of therapeutic group intervention services for children affected by adult domestic violence.

**Heal, Thrive and Grow:**  
**Educating Homeless School-Age Children: A Community & Clinical Response**  
**Summary of April 24, 2009 Conference**

**Sheria Morrison, M.A., CMHC** is a guidance counselor for the Concord Public Schools. Prior to her role in the public schools, her previous experiences gave her opportunities to work not only with students, but also their families. Despite her training and expertise in working with children in an urban setting, she was able to take her resources to better the experience of children in suburban schools. Through METCO she provides guidance and counseling to students at the middle school level and consultation for students at elementary and high school levels. She is an active member of the Concord Teacher's Association, the local chapter of Massachusetts Teacher's Association, and a member of the Massachusetts Association of Mental Health Counselors.

**Katie Volk, M.A.** is Director of Training at the National Center on Family Homelessness. She manages training efforts on homelessness, traumatic stress, trauma-informed service provision, self-care, and other related topics. Ms. Volk has been involved in numerous National Center projects, including the OrganWise Guys Pilot Program, the federally funded Chronic Homelessness Initiative, and the Katrina Project. In partnership with organizations around the country, she developed the PEACH Initiative, a physical and emotional awareness program for children living in transitional settings.

**Mary William, MSW** is Program Director for the Boston Public Schools Homeless Student Initiative. Mary has spent most of her career serving families; as a social worker with Department of Social Services, Cambridge Youth Guidance Center, and New England Medical Center. For the past 18 years she has been employed with Boston Schools as Director of the Homeless Student Initiative. Mary is responsible for managing funds and coordinating services for over 3000 students attending 130 Boston Public Schools. In this capacity, she works closely with administrators of family shelters throughout Massachusetts. She also collaborates with many other human services and community-based agencies.