

SUMMIT IV: BEYOND THE CITY SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 15, 2013 – HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND



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SUMMIT IV: BEYOND THE CITY

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

NOVEMBER 15, 2013 - PITTSBURGH, PA - HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND

BACKGROUND



Kevin Lee, Tierra Moses, and Tiann Moses, 2013 HCEF's Resiliency Award winners.

Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) has worked with homeless students and families for 15 years, so its board and staff felt knowledgeable about the dimensions of homelessness. But in recent years they began to hear disturbing reports from teachers and social workers alike: Homelessness and poverty were getting much worse, particularly outside of the City of Pittsburgh.

What schools and agencies were telling HCEF was verified by the data: There has, indeed, been a sharp increase in the number of families living in poverty and those high concentrations of poverty exist not in one or two but in dozens of the county's school districts. At the same time, the number of children and youth who are homeless in the suburbs also has increased.

That is why HCEF chose to focus on suburban poverty for its annual summit held at the Rivers Club in downtown Pittsburgh on November 15, 2013. Summit IV: Beyond the City aimed to increase awareness and make a call to action about suburban poverty

and its impact on children and families as well as spark a response among the people who care about and can help them. Nearly 200 people participated, coming from school districts and community agencies across the Pittsburgh region. Grouped at tables by their region (North, South...), they heard from speakers who framed the issue, gave them the facts, suggested solutions, and inspired them to work together. Participants had the chance to do some of that work near the end of the program, when they were challenged to share their ideas and consider how they could work together to assist poor and homeless children and families in their communities.

Three young people whose lives had been changed by just such help also participated in the Summit. Kevin Jenkins, Director of Community Initiatives and Senior Program Officer at The Pittsburgh Foundation, presented Kevin Lee, Tiann Moses, and Tierra Moses with HCEF's Resiliency Award. Each had graduated from high school and is in post-secondary education, despite years of homelessness, including living in shelters and in temporary residence with their relatives and friends. Kevin Lee, who is awaiting word of acceptance into a prestigious college, said that he urges others who are homeless not to give up hope. He thanked the caring staff at a local shelter and his mother, for her strength and confidence in him and for keeping the family together.

His words about family echoed those of performers Josh and Gab, who performed the song, *Living with Grandma*, which they had written for the Summit. They sang:

"Some people living with their mom and dad
some people sleeping in a pull-out bed
some people living with a sister or two
or in another city as the rest of you.
Some people living with their Uncle Ben,
their neighbors or their cousins or their shelter friends.
Some people knock it, but I've gotta say:
wherever there's a family, you'll be okay."

FRAMING THE SUMMIT



Grant Oliphant discusses the national context.

HCEF Executive Director Bill Wolfe opened the program by saying, “It’s going to take all of us working together in the community to address the problems and the issues we’re going to hear about today.” He recognized elected officials, funders, and other partners who have been especially important in the development of HCEF.

Wolfe introduced Grant Oliphant, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Pittsburgh Foundation, who put suburban poverty and homelessness within the context of the “toxic narratives” that some people have begun to accept. These narratives include the idea that our country is polarized and there’s nothing that can be done about it; and government and individuals are no longer in a social compact to lift those in our communities who need help. Oliphant pointed out how the second narrative is evident in attitudes toward people in poverty and who are homeless, seeing them as “the other,” not as our families, our children. It is present in the shorthand that reduces homelessness to an issue that affects only a small share of communities, even as most impoverished and homeless people live in many areas, all throughout the county.

He urged the participants at the Summit to think about one particular child close to them, and to imagine that child experiencing poverty—and then to think about how children who are experiencing homelessness are real kids who are just as loved, just as in need of love. These children belong to society as a whole.



“

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Oliphant said, “Let’s agree we share a destiny.... And we’re capable of greatness,” beginning with the notion that all children deserve homes with stable environments, and the education to which all children are entitled. “We’re talking on behalf of these children about an effort to restore greatness not just to our country, but to ourselves and our souls.”

TRENDS IN STUDENT HOMELESSNESS



Peter Miller explains the impact of homelessness on school performance.

Dr. Peter Miller of the University of Wisconsin made the case that the problem of student homelessness in this region may actually be worse than reported.

He shared data on the upward trend in the number of homeless children and youth in the U.S., Pennsylvania, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. "This is a radical shift. This is not a subtle change," he said.

Using the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, which includes children in shelters and motels, families who are "doubled-up" (sharing housing with others) and children out of foster care, the data show an increase in the number of students who are homeless. Even so, the figures for the Pittsburgh Public School District are lower than expected.

Miller said that Madison, Wisconsin has a school population about the size of the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and a lower percentage of children who are on free and reduced lunch, but it has 300 more children identified as experiencing homelessness than the PPS. There also are indications of the undercounting of homeless children in Pennsylvania as a whole: Nationally, the share of students whose families are living doubled-up is 72 percent. In Pennsylvania, that figure is 48 percent. "It means that some of our infrastructures aren't finding some of those kids."

Why is this worthy of attention? Because if we aren't identifying those children, and they are going without the basic needs of food and shelter, how can we expect them to study and to learn? "If you're not sleeping at night, then you're not going to learn math during the day."

Miller also explained that homelessness is associated with health problems, relationship challenges, and lower levels of education. Comparing homeless students with those students whose families are on public assistance (but not homeless), statistics show the reading levels, days out of school, and average days suspended for kids who are homeless are consistently worse.

What can we do? First, Miller said, look at multiple sources of information to understand the issue. Data are the starting point, but then get to know the neighborhoods where children experiencing homelessness live. There may be ways in which the data obscure an emerging need or don't make sense, until you talk with people in the community.

One way of finding these kids is through regular routines. We know we can find homeless children when they enroll in a district in the fall, and when they move into the district. But if they are in school and then lose their housing, how do we find them? If we have "regular conversations with them," he said, we will know.

How else can we help? By leveraging the relationships that people and agencies already have with families. Agencies may have one purpose (for example, child care or job placement), but they can realize "unanticipated gains" if they stretch beyond that focus to look for ways of connecting families with other resources. Miller said this happens with all of us, and can make a difference in our lives.

Miller shared this remark from a young mother who had been homeless:

"It was the school social worker over at Lindberg—she was the greatest person—when she found out that we needed help, she gave me all sorts of information and was really pretty discreet about it. It's not like she was going to tell the whole school. She figured out a way for my daughter to get back and forth to school. She got me a gas card, which really helped when I needed to pick her up from school."

When Miller asked families how they had learned about services, they invariably answered, "I got lucky." He said, "We need to get beyond luck." There needs to be a regular, predictable way of people learning about how to get the help they need.

Miller advised the audience to think more broadly about their relationships. This is especially important in light of the fact that federal funding for the education of homeless children and youth has decreased. (The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program at the U.S. Department of Education has declined in total and on a per person basis.)

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Miller said that the public needs to understand that “helping kids do better on tests can be accomplished by helping them have places to sleep,” and “We need to go from ‘homeless children’ to ‘our children’. These are beautiful, intelligent kids who want to do well, and deserve to do well.”

ASSESSING COMMUNITY NEED



Katy Collins of Allegheny County DHS

Katy Collins, Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation at Allegheny County Department of Human Services, presented a new way of “Assessing Community Need Outside the Central City,” applied to Allegheny County.

Collins explained that the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has developed a way of identifying communities with deep needs—communities that may have been overlooked in the more traditional way of looking at need (share of population living below the federal poverty level, by municipality).

The new DHS Community Need Index takes into account seven factors, at the census tract level:

1. Population below 100% of the federal poverty line
2. Families headed by single females
3. Youth ages 16 to 19 without a high school diploma or equivalent, and not enrolled in school
4. Civilian males ages 16-64 who are unemployed or not in the labor force
5. Population below 200% of the federal poverty line
6. Houses vacant
7. Households with no available vehicle (an especially important indicator of need, outside of an urban area)

The result is a finer mapping of relative community need. This analysis, applied to the communities outside of the City of Pittsburgh, shows pockets of need in most school districts in the county, with “high need”, “very high need”, or “distressed” designations in the following school districts:

AREAS CONTAINING DISTRESSED CENSUS TRACTS	AREAS CONTAINING VERY HIGH NEED CENSUS TRACTS	AREAS CONTAINING HIGH NEED CENSUS TRACTS
Clairton - <i>Clairton</i> McKeesport - <i>McKeesport</i> North Versailles - <i>East Allegheny</i> Duquesne - <i>Duquesne School District</i> Homestead - <i>Steel Valley</i> Braddock, East Pittsburgh, N. Braddock, Rankin - <i>Woodland Hills</i> Wilkinsburg - <i>Wilkinsburg</i> Tarentum - <i>Highlands</i> Sharpsburg - <i>Fox Chapel</i> Millvale - <i>Shaler School District</i> McKees Rocks - <i>Sto-Rox</i> Avalon - <i>Northgate</i> West Mifflin - <i>West Mifflin</i>	Coraopolis - <i>Cornell</i> West View - <i>North Hills</i> Penn Hills - <i>Penn Hills</i> Pitcairn - <i>Gateway</i> Baldwin - <i>Baldwin Whitehall</i> Brentwood - <i>Brentwood</i> Glassport - <i>South Allegheny</i>	Verona - <i>Riverview</i> Springdale Borough - <i>Allegheny Valley</i> McCandless - <i>North Allegheny</i> Kennedy - <i>Montour</i> Crafton, Carnegie - <i>Carlynton</i> Scott - <i>Chartiers Valley</i>

*Each school district (*italics*) is listed in the category of the community with highest need within the district. This category does not apply to the entire school district. School districts may contain communities that fall into multiple need areas.

Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2013

Collins said that, of the 42 Allegheny County districts, “26 (62%) contain a distressed, very high need or high need community.”

DHS also has looked at the share of school-aged youth who live in areas where the need has deepened or increased—a total of 22 school districts, including East Allegheny, where over half of its students are living in areas of the district where need has deepened; and North Hills, where half of its students live in areas where the need has increased.

Collins said that planners and educators can use this method to overlay the location of programs with the geography of need, determining the best locations for services. DHS looked at how the need matches with its service locations and realized that it is serving communities whose needs are “stabilizing” at higher rates than other communities.

The discussion that followed Miller’s and Collin’s presentations focused on transportation. One participant in the summit wanted to know if DHS was doing anything to get the bus system running in suburban areas, explaining that it can take two or three transfers for a family to get to work and services. Collins said that DHS has been working with Port Authority Transit (PAT); for example it is working with them to identify senior center locations on the bus routes, so that they not cut stops or routes in areas of need. Another participant asked about whether DHS was looking into the “eradication of low-income housing” and Collins said that the vast majority of low-income housing is in the City, which presents a challenge for suburban families.

ADDRESSING SUBURBAN POVERTY



Elizabeth Kneebone of the Brookings Institution

Elizabeth Kneebone of the Brookings Institution gave the national and regional perspective on suburban poverty, using the research that she and her colleague Alan Berube conducted in writing their new book, *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America*. They traveled to the communities featured in the book to understand more about the causes and consequences of poverty outside of our cities.

“

WE HAVE PASSED THE TIPPING POINT. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR MAJOR METRO AREAS, THERE ARE MORE POOR RESIDENTS IN THE SUBURBS THAN IN THE CITIES ACROSS THE NATION.

”

Kneebone said that, at the national level, “We have passed the tipping point. For the first time in our major metro areas, there are more poor residents in the suburbs than in the cities across the nation.” This is not just a post-recession phenomenon—the recession only exacerbated a growing trend.

In many ways, the Pittsburgh region has been ahead of this trend. While the concentrated rates of poverty are in the City of Pittsburgh, there are more poor living outside of the city. And an even higher share of poor people in the suburbs are children and youth.

The federal definition of poverty is \$23,500 for a family of four. There are a significant number of people living in “deep” poverty, which is half of that income level.

Why are there more poor people in the suburbs? People moved to the suburbs with housing choice vouchers, where they could find older housing that has become more affordable. Jobs also have continued to move to the suburbs; in 2010, 45 percent of jobs were located more than 10 minutes outside of downtown. But the quest for affordable housing in the suburbs has brought with it new challenges. “Within a 90-minute commute, a resident in a low-income suburb who has access to transit can only reach about 13 percent of the jobs in the region,” said Kneebone. Adding to the difficulty in helping poor families is that non-profit providers in the suburbs are smaller and the continuum of services that they can offer is “patchier” than in the city. Philanthropic dollars, focused on the urban core, have lagged behind the growing need.

Kneebone said that the War on Poverty was built with a different geography in mind. “We have \$82 billion a year that we calculate goes to programs that address poverty in place.... Over 80 of those programs are spread across 10 different agencies... Many of them have proven inflexible in terms of adapting to the suburban landscape of poverty, because they were built with distressed inner-city neighborhoods in mind.”

The Kneebone and Berube book includes case studies, including one that looks at Penn Hills. She said that they found several principles that mark success: that efforts are scaled; are collaborative and integrated (most of the regions have a leader or collaborator who plays the role of “quarterback”); and they are funded strategically and based on the data. She described the effort in Texas, led by Neighborhood Centers, an organization that has funding from 35 different federal programs and runs 40 distinct data systems—required for 300 reports to these various agencies. They have worked on smart consolidation and “leveraging high-performing organizations.” In Ohio, a local government innovation fund has supported municipalities that have figured out ways of sharing their resources. In Chicago, several municipalities in an area applied for Neighborhood Stabilization Funds. (They were rejected at first, because the funding agency had never considered a joint application.) In South Seattle, Road Map has worked with seven school districts and providers across the districts to close the achievement gap. They have set metrics and are targeting funding to plans that will advance those improvements.

PANEL DISCUSSION



Kyoko Henson discusses the needs of children and families in her school district.

Moderated by Dr. Miller

Panelists: Judy Eakin, Executive Director, HEARTH; Jim Guffey, Executive Director, South Hills Interfaith Ministries; Kyoko Henson, Home and School Visitor, Penn Hills School District; Wendy Kinnear, Region V Coordinator, Pennsylvania Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program; and Dr. Wesley Shipley, Superintendent, Shaler Area School District

Judy Eakin observed that student homelessness in the suburbs has always existed, but it is increasing and people are experiencing multiple problems. The scarcity of transportation only magnifies the hardship people are facing. For example, one homeless woman with whom she worked had a steady job, but then her employer changed the schedule to require her to work on Saturdays—while no bus runs on the weekend. She also finds that “families will buy a really bad car, and then it falls apart.”

Jim Guffey spoke about families who once had two incomes. But then one of the adults lost a job during the recession, leaving these families one crisis away from homelessness.

Wendy Kinnear said that, because of the training they’re doing with school districts, community agencies, and families, her office is identifying more people who meet the definition. “If they don’t know that being ‘doubled up’ is homeless, how do they know to tell anyone?”

Kinnear said that people will call her, “sitting in a car in a parking lot,” without a place to stay, not sure what to do. They are like “deer in the headlights.”

Dr. Shipley said that the percentage of poor people has increased in his school district and this is due in part to the floods of recent years (particularly in Millvale). Families who had been living in the town for many years finally had enough of the flooding and moved out, and the families who moved in are generally more transient.

He also said that the public often does not know that school districts are required to educate their district's children who are living in shelters, motels, or doubled-up in places outside of the district, tending to think that these children are breaking the rules by catching a bus to school from outside of the area.

Kyoko Henson said that she sees the impact of homelessness upon families who hold low hourly wage jobs and are unable to leave work to come to school for teacher conferences and activities. They also live in areas that are distant from both school and a public transit stop, so if their children miss the school bus, they cannot get to school.

When Dr. Miller asked about how the panelists are collaborating, Eakin said that HEARTH was formed through partnerships and that collaboration continues to this day. "We all know each other and can call to say, 'This woman really needs to talk with you.'" An example: North Hills Community Outreach learned that families have difficulty in getting to the food pantry, so a volunteer brings the food to HEARTH. "I'm amazed at the generosity of people in the North Hills. They feel they're helping their neighbors."

Not every educator or service provider thinks collaboration is worthwhile, however. Dr. Shipley said that one educator told him that the only reward for working closely with shelters is that his district will get more homeless students attending—without the dollars needed to address the increased needs of these children.

Kinnear said that Erie's Bar Association has been mentoring homeless high school students, and Mercer has started a walk to raise awareness about homelessness there. She also has found faith-based groups to be a good resource; they have organized host homes for youth who are unaccompanied, allowed homeless people to sleep in the sanctuary, and purchased uniforms and shoes.

When Dr. Miller asked about the increase in the number of homeless students, Henson said she has more children and youth to work with now than in the past. "We are spread thin," she said, but tries to spend the time people need. "Spending 15 minutes more with a family could change their lives."

AWARD AND A REQUEST



Kevin Jenkins presents award to Kevin Lee.

Kevin Jenkins, Director of Community Initiatives and Senior Program Officer at The Pittsburgh Foundation, presented the HCEF Resiliency Awards to Kevin Lee, Tiann Moses, and Tierra Moses, saying that they are leaders among their peers, despite having experienced homelessness.

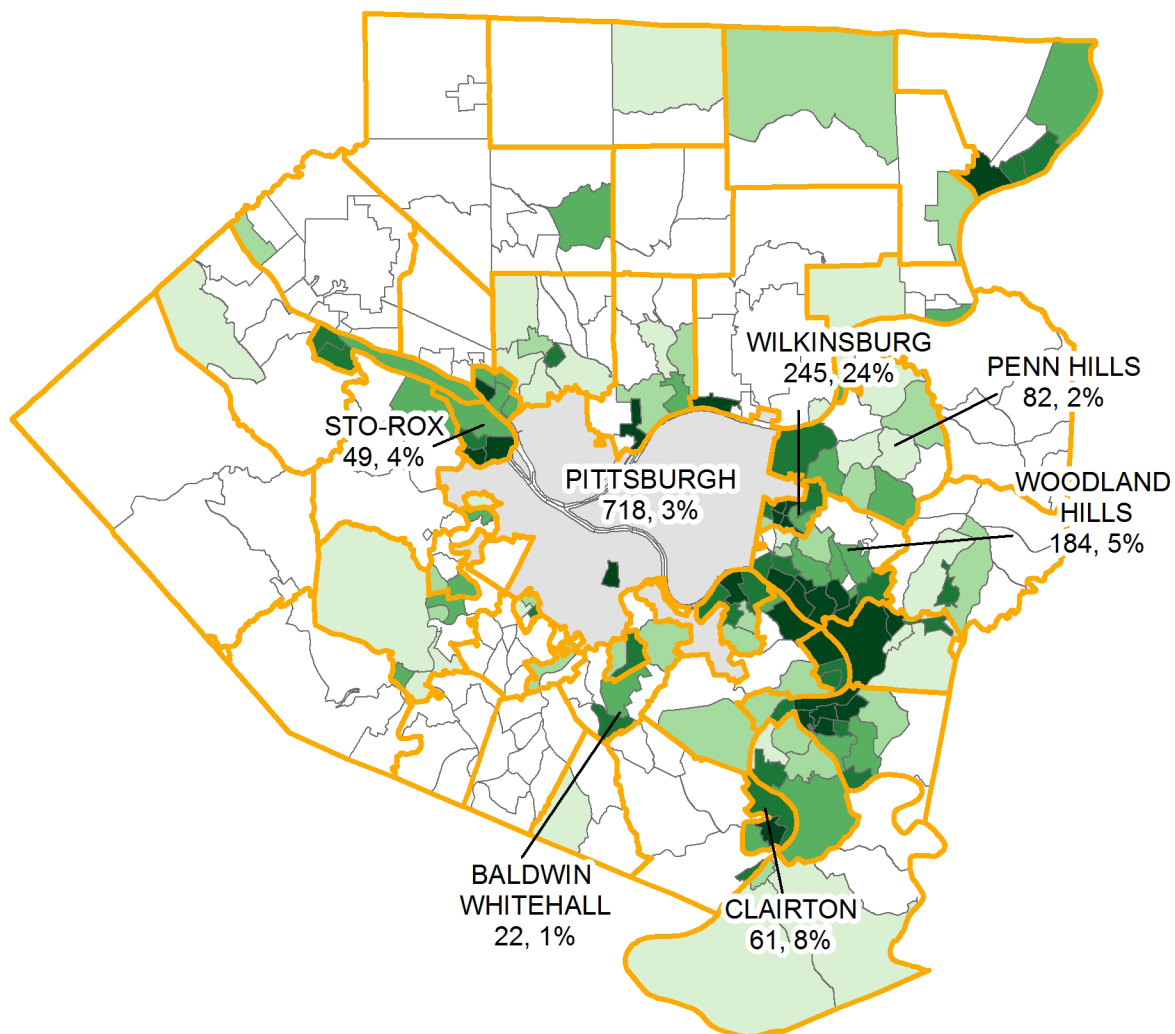
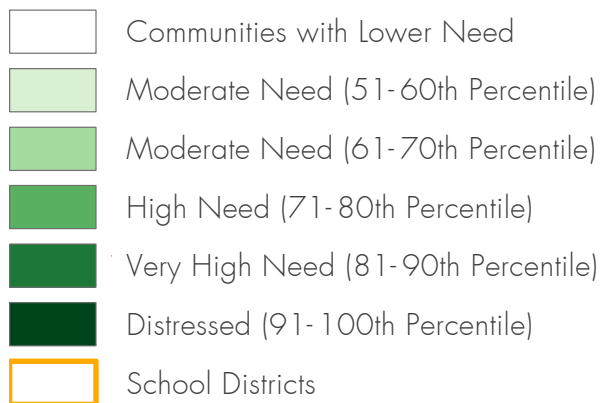
The text of the HCEF Resiliency award they received reads:

“Resiliency is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, skillful execution and the courage to overcome life’s barriers to achieve a vision.”

HCEF Executive Director Bill Wolfe applauded the award winners and turned to the Summit participants to request that they continue working on the issue of homelessness and keep the conversation going, together.

Wolfe said that HCEF’s work is far from done and it will continue working to advance the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

COMMUNITY NEED INDEX



Source: Dr. Kathryn Collins, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2013



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