
A Study of a Way to Combat Homelessness

Homelessness alone is a very rampant and unfortunate problem in the United States, as of right now 564,708 people in the United States are homeless and of that 206,286 thousand are families (Snapshot of Homelessness, 2016). At first glimpse this may not seem that bad except that you have to factor in those living below the poverty line and the heavy burden many in the poor bracket face paying for housing. Now that a baseline is established the real issue comes to light of the fact that the amount of children that have experienced homelessness even if temporary has gone up to 1 out of every 30 from 1 out of every 50 over the last 10 years which is a staggeringly large increase (Child Homelessness, 2014). The reason this increase is so bad is because children in poverty and those facing homelessness take a large hit to their education and the effect of that may not be felt now but, with 21% of all children living in households that are below the federal poverty line the future of the United States is in great peril (Child Poverty, 2016).

To understand how to help solve this issue it must be understood how homelessness and poverty affect children and their ability to learn and succeed in life. The most obvious detriment that children face when they go through homelessness, even if for a temporary time, is that having no home children and their families aren't focused on if the child or children are going to school or keeping consistent with their education, but instead that their basic physiological needs are met. These needs can be best demonstrated through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that show that physiological needs are at the base of all needs and are the most important over anything (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2016). These needs include food, water, warmth and rest and until they are met one cannot achieve higher needs such as esteem and self-actualization needs (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2016). These needs include the feeling of accomplishment and achieving one's full potential which are directly correlated with learning as an educated person can feel accomplishment and gain the knowledge to reach one's fullest potential (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2016). Understanding these needs provides background as to one part of why poor or homeless children struggle with education as they or more accurately their parents are focused on the base needs of survival beyond everything else. To further drive home the struggle that homeless children face it has been found that seventy five percent of these children under the age of five have at least one major delay in impulsivity or speech (Homelessness and Academic Achievement, 2014). These delays do nothing to help these children to adapt and learn and further stunts their educational growth as they fall behind and also struggle to with their academic development. To drive the point home of the detrimental effects of homelessness on children they have twice the rate of learning disabilities, are four times more likely to show a developmental delay than middle income children, and have three times the rate of emotional-behavioral disorders than children who are housed (Homelessness and Academic Achievement, 2014).

As it can be seen homelessness by itself hurts children and their ability to learn so greatly and the more unfortunate reality is that even if they are to get out of homelessness they will still most likely be living in poverty below the national poverty line. This poverty will in turn carry other unfortunate burdens that these children will have to carry and will weigh them down from achieving further academic success or even keeping up with their classmates from more stable and middle class homes. Just to give an idea of the kind of weight that being poor or homeless

carries one has to take into account that a child's behavior is theorized to be made up of two factors which are environment and genetics, leaving out genetics it is estimated that 50-70% of the behaviors a person has stem from the environments they were raised in (Teaching with Poverty In Mind, 2009). Knowing this creates a greater urgency on allowing for stable homes for these children so that they are not plagued down by other worries, but are allowed to focus on schoolwork and have the chance to strive academically. It should also be known that an acronym has been created to highlight the most significant factors these children face in their daily lives. The acronym is EACH which stands for emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. These four factors are what the average poor kid has to deal with and in a world that has always placed great value on emotional intelligence and social skills, poor kids fall short. When they are able to attend school they fall victim to the school socialization process which on average pushes them to be as similar as possible to their peers instead of standing out and trying to achieve a way out through academics (Teaching with Poverty in Mind, 2009). Knowing this creates a further understanding of the weight these children feel from being in a situation they more than likely had no control over.

Although the negative effects of homelessness and poverty have been brought to light one must understand just how important academics and education can be to these children and the opportunities that come from it. First of all it must be established that getting out of poverty and being successful in life is a possibility if these children are nurtured right. To back this claim up are a few examples of people who came from almost nothing to now having amassed great wealth and respected success. The first is Howard Schultz the CEO of Starbucks who as a kid grew up in housing complex for the poor, and then there is the luxury goods mogul Francois Pinault who quit high school because of the bullying he face from being poor and he has gone on to create a company that owns high-end fashion houses such as Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, finally to dive this point home Oprah Winfrey came from a poor home and who she is today speaks for itself (Billionaires who came from Nothing, 2014). After highlighting various billionaires who came from poverty it must also be looked at the positives of education itself. To begin with educating the children that face poverty and homelessness now has the potential to cut down these issues in the future as greater education across a nation has positive relation to economic development and growth. In addition each year of education increases an individual's earning potential (Benefits of Education, 2016) as well as instilling in them the want to learn when it is presented correctly (Key Benefits of Early Childhood Education, 2015). Overall those that are educated are allowed many opportunities that they would not have otherwise and the more one pushes themselves academically to succeed the greater and the more valuable these opportunities become.

Now that everything is laid out there now has to be ways to combat these issues and allow for children that face homelessness and poverty to have the chance to integrate better, receive a solid education, learn to develop a positive mindset, and also develop greater social skills and be able to go beyond any disabilities they might have to succeed. Although there already exist certain programs and organizations that work to fight this problem what they are doing may not target the problem enough and instead skirts around it. One such solution to this would be to create a non for profit after school program that works with homeless and impoverished children to help them develop positive mindsets so that they want to learn and are not discouraged by this when attending school, this program would also give a safe and calm space to do homework and those that volunteer would work with experts in the various learning disabilities that can be found among these children to create learning programs that would help them

overcome these disabilities as much as possible. In addition the afterschool program would help with social skills as they would have the children work on small projects that would help them learn, but also promote teamwork and create strong bonds, this is important because people are said to be the sum of their friends so by stimulating friendship among all these children and instilling positive mindsets within them they could support and push each other to become better and succeed together. One other solution also involves volunteers, but at an in school level where these volunteers would specifically work with these poor and homeless kids to push them to want to stay in school and do just as well as their more affluent peers. These volunteers would also work outside of school with the parents to help them understand the importance of their child or children being educated and work with them to ensure that their offspring have a chance at something better than what they are currently going through. Out of these two the first solution although more difficult in some ways to come to fruition would be better because it focuses on making these children into the best versions of themselves and greatly promotes their ability to succeed, find success, and create valuable opportunities such as seeing academic success all the way through to the end of high school where scholarships would be abundant enough to help see them through to college and a better life.

To implement this it would require great cooperation with donors, but the key to this would be to target the type of wealthy mentioned earlier that have come from poverty who understand the need for education and the opportunity to succeed and help change the world. By working with these individuals they would be more likely to put forth enough funds to get the first of these programs off the ground and from there move in to various cities across the United States. The second important pillar of this is finding experts in the field of learning disabilities to work with and help those that wish to volunteer understand the best way to help these children learn. The other big thing is finding available space to set up as they would have to be located close to the impoverished areas and easy enough to get to for those that have no homes. Once these issues can be resolved the ball will really start to roll and eventually it would be smart to put in beds so as to function as a shelter/ school so the homeless children have somewhere to sleep and so that their physiological needs can be met and they are allowed to focus on their education and learning for the sake of salvation.