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But What About the Children in Shelter?

Margaret Lovejoy

Executive Director and Founder



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Introduction

- Children in shelter are invisible
- Today we will talk about their plight and how we can make them visible



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Introduction

- Every one of us in this room today are doing what we do as a matter of trying to make right some of the injustices we encounter as we work in our communities.
- There are many people in this country that do not see homelessness as cruel, unfair and without justice – they do not see it at all as long as it does not affect them!



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Introduction

- Homelessness is devastating with profound and lasting effects on the family. It is yet to be determined the psychological damage it has on children.
- At The Family Place we witnessed disconnection between parent and child at a vulnerable time in the life of a child.



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Introduction

- To offset the disconnection in a family we have redesigned the layout of the family room to incorporate children's work (play) and the parent's attention to the child.
 - -We changed the staff position title from Children's Coordinator to Children and Family Program Coordinator



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Introduction

- We now think of children's activity as work instead of play - and toys as tools of learning
- The Family Place has created spaces and programs to help parents connect to the child as we integrate play and learning



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Let's introduce ourselves

Name, organization

Share with us three ways you've
been involved with children



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Sharing of information is building community.

- Children need community
- Community needs children



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Greetings

The Maasai are a semi-nomadic indigenous East African tribe. When entering a village their greeting is in the form of this question:

...and how are the children?

For if the children are well the village is well.



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**But what about the children in our
community? How are they doing?**

What detrimental issues do you see?



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And what about the children in shelter?

In 2007 The Family Place completed intake for 750 children ranging in ages of 2 day-old infants to teenagers up to 18



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Today we will talk about:

- What does it mean for a child in shelter?
- What does it mean for the entire family in shelter
- How important are the spaces in shelter?
- What does space mean in our world?
- Effects of shelter on children
- How can we prepare children and their families in shelter for the next steps?



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Background information

Poverty in America by John Iceland

“There are several reasons why poverty continues to be a critical issue in the United States.

Background information

- First, the hardship that often accompanies poverty plainly has adverse effects on individuals' physical and psychological well-being.
- A number of studies have shown that children raised in poor families are less healthy and worse off in terms of their cognitive development, school achievement, and emotional well-being.

Background information

- Poor adolescents, for example, are more likely to have low self-esteem. Act out anti-social behaviors, and become delinquent.
- Poor individuals are also more likely to have health problems and die at younger ages.

Background information

- Some of the harmful effects of poverty are due to low income, while some results from other family conditions that often accompany poverty, such as family instability and low levels of education.
- Poverty often begets more poverty, as those who grow up in poor families are more likely to be poor themselves as adults



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Background Information

- Many if not most people would probably agree that the continued suffering of some Americans in the midst of plenty is morally troubling.”



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Definitions for today

- Poverty and homelessness as one issue
- Shelter will pertain to the Ramsey County system - a temporary place of safety and services
- Families will always include children



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**Poverty is especially troubling when
children are involved**



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Effects of poverty and homelessness on children

- Health
- Education
- Safety
- Long term goals
- Living situations



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Report Back

What are your findings?

What does shelter mean?

It is a temporary place of safety.

What is a positive role of shelter in a child's life?

- Regular meals
- Scheduled activities
- No truancy – school aged children are in school
- Clean and organized surroundings
- Games and toys
- New friends

Negative role of shelter?

- Time scheduling and organized activities
- Lost of friends and home
- Food is not cooked by Mom or Dad
- Loss of personal items
- Fear of a new place
- Embarrassment
- Less junk food
- Lack of privacy

Families in shelter

- There can be an emotional disconnect between parent and child
 - Staff has to be aware of too much or not enough staff involvement concerning parent and child relationships



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The psychological impact of either losing housing or residing in shelter or living in poverty cannot be minimized. It has lasting effects on both the children and the adults. Children and adults need and want to know that there is someone in their lives who will listen to them and care what happens to them.



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Issues

- The underlying issues of situational homelessness are closely tied to the economic conditions families face in the community.
- Over the last six years rental costs have increased.
- Families with limited incomes feel the pressure to expend 80-85% of their income for housing.



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Issues

- There is a significant need in the community for low-income housing.
- The shortage of low income housing puts more pressure on transitional housing programs, which are not keeping pace with the number of families in need of housing with services and programs which will ultimately enhance their life-skills.



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Issues

Poverty is definitely an issue of homelessness so it is important for us to think of poverty as more than the lack of financial support.



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Issues

- In the U.S. poverty does not always mean being without material possessions.
- Poverty may be understood as a condition in which a person or community is deprived of, and or lacks the essentials for a minimum standard of well-being and life.



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Issues

- These essentials may be material resources such as food, shelter, or they may be social resources such as access to information, education, health care, social status, political power or the opportunity to develop meaningful connections with other people in society.



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Issues

- Poverty can be described as lacking social relationships and need, including social exclusion, dependency, and the ability to participate in society.
- Many of the families who seek shelter feel they have been excluded from society because of poverty and their lack of education or inability to get their healthcare needs met or being unable to connect with information about community resources.



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How can we prepare children and their families in shelter for the next steps

Fist, Stick Knife, Gun: A Personal History of
Violence in America - Geoffrey Canada



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Preparing children

“There are children all over this country who are hiding weapons in their closets, in sneaker boxes under their beds, under their sweaters in their dresser drawers.”

They are certain that they need their guns or knives for their own safety, sure that their very lives depend on having those weapons.

Preparing children

We will never convince them to give up their weapons with fancy television jingles or with marches alone.

What these children need is a sense of safety, a certainty of surviving as they go to school or to the store." (p. 75)



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How can children feel excluded?

Ways in which children are included in shelter.

- Programs from children
 - Summer program
 - Fall and winter activities
 - Extra events for children and parents
- Space designed to meet the needs of children



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Two minute stretch



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Space for children

- 2008 - family room space was redesigned
- Space prior to redesign separated family members
- New space is organized and functional
- Goal is to help children understand order and how to keep order

Room Design

- With the help of the Montessori Training Center we were able to utilize the same with better efficiency
- We replaced toys with the idea that toys are tools for the children's learning experience
- Some tools are only brought out for use by the child



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Room Design

- Spaces are age appropriate -- infants space, toddler space, preschool space etc.
- The toys tools and equipment is interspersed with the adult furniture, this positioning helps to keep parents and child from separation



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The importance of space in child development

The Heritage Industry, R. Hewison

The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self.



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Space, continued

- Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going.
- The past is the foundation of individual and collective identity, objects from the past are the source of significance as cultural symbols.

Space, continued

- Continuity between past and present creates a sense of sequence out of aleatory (bad luck) chaos and since change is inevitable, a stable system of ordered meaning enables us to cope with both innovation and decay.
- The nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened."

Space, continued

- It is difficult to set goals for the future without a sturdy foundation or a history of the past
- We do not want to glorify the shelter experience but we want the children to remember shelter as a place of safety, a learning place and a positive place to be launched from
- Children in shelter or living in poverty often have not experienced having their own space



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Voice

- All children have voices
- All too often it is the expectation for homeless children to be quiet

How can we be the hope to foster their voices?



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Summary

- Today we have talked about children and their parents who are living in poverty and staying in a shelter.
- I hope you will incorporate some of the things we have discussed as you work with children
- Children need your help in finding their voice, defining their spaces
- Help to understand the need for healthy relationships



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For more information

If you would my bibliography of books dealing with homelessness send an email to mlovejoy@famplace.org and I will email it to you.



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Thank you for your interactive input today.

It is my hope in my lifetime we will end this social ill of homelessness. So when we enter the community we can say that all the children are more than well they are wonderful, thriving and successful



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...and how are the children?