Book Review

Haskett, M. E., Perlman, S., Cowan, B. A. (Eds.) (2014). *Supporting Families Experiencing Homelessness*. New York: Springer.

Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens, Ph.D.
Bradley University

Mary E. Haskett, Ph.D. is a professor of psychology at North Carolina State University. She has done research in the areas of parenting and children's social adjustment. She has published in the area of children who have experienced harsh parenting. Staci M. Perlman, Ph.D. is an assistant professor at the University of Delaware. She has done research and published in the area of parenting while homeless. Beryl Ann Cowan, Ph.D., J.D. is a therapist in Needham, MA. She works with children and families.

Chapter One, "The why and the who of family homelessness," by John C. Buckner, uses "musical chairs" as a metaphor to explain why there is homelessness and why people become homeless. The author points out that homelessness is created by a lack of affordable housing in a geographic area. He argues that being a single mother, race and ethnicity factors, lack of financial resources, lack of education and marketable skills, weak social networks and supports, partner violence, mental health issues and substance abuse involvement are all factors that increase the likelihood of a family becoming homeless. He indicates that subsidies can help individual families, as can other interventions, but only the creation of more housing stock can reduce the incidence of homelessness.

Chapter Two, "The developmental trajectories of infants and young children experiencing homelessness," by Katherine T. Volk, reviews the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development impacts that homelessness can have on children at several developmental stages. It reviews the evidence that exists that supports the harm homelessness does to children. It acknowledges that some homeless children, given the right support, show resilience. The chapter closes with a list of proposals to improve outcomes for children. These are developed in later chapters.

Chapter Three, "Trauma exposures and mental health outcomes among sheltered children and youth ages 6-18," by Beryl Ann Cowan, reviews the literature on mental health issues related children and youth who have experienced homelessness. It establishes that homelessness is an important risk factor for mental health issues in this population. It closes with a list of nine brief suggestions for policy and practice.

Chapter Four, "Parenting in the face of homelessness," by Staci Perlman, Sandy Sheller, Karen M. Hudson, & C. Leigh Wilson, reviews several issues that families confront in dealing with homelessness. These include separations because shelters do not accept some family members; shelters are often not sensitive to children's issues and cultural issues. Families face many stressors, which may lead to mental health issues. The chapter proposes that shelters adopt a trauma-informed approach. This would address helping families deal with the traumas of homelessness and supporting positive parenting. As policy proposals, it recommends rapid re-housing, ensuring basic needs are

met, helping families maintain relationships, using the shelter as an opportunity to help families grow, and ensuring that families have access to health and mental health services.

Chapter Five, "Needs of special populations of families without homes," by Carmela J. DeCandia, Christina M. Murphy & Natalie Coupe, argues that although providing permanent shelter is crucial, additional services are needed for families, and they need to be tailored to particular family situations. It explores the needs of military families, LGBT families and immigrant and refugee families. The challenges faced by each type of family are reviewed, along with the opportunities to strengthen each type of family. The authors encourage policies and research focused on these unique family situations.

Chapter Six, "Collaborations across and within systems that provide services to families without homes," by James H. Bray and Andrea Link, argues that families facing homelessness are frequently in need of multiple services. Ten evidence-based principles to guide collaboration are discussed: 1) develop a common mission, 2) have all stakeholders represented, 3) use evidence-based and solution-driven approaches, 4) use agreed-upon outcomes and have ways to measure outcomes, 5) develop common language and definitions, 6) establish clear policies and procedures, 7) keep lines of communication open, 8) ensure strong consistent leadership, 9) understand and respect different agencies' cultures and systems, and 10) create relationships across agencies. The strategies are explained using case examples.

Chapter Seven, "Trauma-informed care for families experiencing homelessness," is written by Kathleen M. Guarino. The chapter discusses the traumas associated with becoming and experiencing homelessness. It argues that the services homeless families need should understand and respond to the traumas associated with homelessness. It is very important to understand trauma and to establish services that create a safe environment in

which families can work through trauma.

Chapter Eight, "Cultural competence and individualized care in service provision," by Bra Vada Garrett-Akinsanya, demonstrates that historically marginalized families are overrepresented in the homeless population. It addresses the personal and systemic barriers faced by these families. It reviews some programs that may show the way to more successful services for the homeless. The author argues that services should be "…*family-directed, family-centered, culturally affirming* and *trauma-informed* (p.145 italics in original).

Chapter Nine, "Research on programs designed to support positive parenting," by Abigail Gerwirtz, Kimberly Burkhart, Jessica Loehman, and Beth Haukebo, acknowledges that parenting is particularly difficult for homeless families. This chapter reviews the research evidence that indicates the importance of providing supportive services. It stresses the importance of cooperation between agencies and services to provide a continuum of services.

Chapter Ten, "Programs for homeless children and youth: A critical review of evidence," by Janette E. Herbers and J. J. Cutuli, reviews the evaluation studies of interventions and programs to assist homeless youth and children. Very few rigorous studies have been published that meet standards for rigorous evaluation studies. Although there have been several published articles that attempt to evaluate services, there is a need for more rigorous studies.

Chapter Eleven, "Primary stakeholders' perspectives on services for families without homes," by Ralph da Costa Nunez and Matthew Adams, summarizes interviews with two policy makers, three advocates, three shelter providers and one formerly homeless person. The challenges that parents face are addressed, along with the positive and negative effects of some policies and service strategies.

This book should be an excellent resource for

programs providing services to homeless families, to policy makers and to those advocating for improved services to homeless families. It provides solid, factual information about the nature and extent of homelessness. It makes clear the struggles of families facing homelessness, and the special problems of minorities, veterans and special needs families. The services it promotes and the policies it proposes are well documented. The book makes clear what evidence we have and what research is needed. It dramatizes the many issues involved in homelessness in our society.