



OUR HOME

**Opening Doors: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth
Illinois McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program**

January 2010

Collection of Homeless Data by ISBE

Beginning March 1, 2010 a more comprehensive collection effort will begin for tracking homeless students in Illinois. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) will request that school districts provide more detailed information on homeless children and unaccompanied youth through the Student Information System (SIS). This tracking system is more accurate and will give those who work with homeless children and youth a better idea of what areas of need should be addressed. Look for more information in upcoming Superintendent's Bulletins from ISBE.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference

The 22nd Annual Conference will be held Nov. 6-9, 2010, Intercontinental Hotel, Houston, TX. For more information go to: <http://naehcy.org>

Hotline Assistance

ISBE Homeless Hotline
800/215-6379
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Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
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Local Liaisons: Open the Doors to Our Most Vulnerable Pupils ~Understanding Your Role and Responsibilities~

Ann Schwarm, Area 5 Lead Liaison - ROE #3 -Bond, Fayette, Effingham

The key person, who unlocks the doors to education for students in homeless situations, is the local homeless education liaison. This individual guides both the homeless family and the school district personnel through the early stages of establishing educational opportunities for the homeless student. The local liaison works to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance and academic success for our MVPs—most vulnerable pupils.

In this series, we will re-visit the responsibilities of the local liaison, as outlined by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. For a more thorough discussion of these duties, check out the National Center for Homeless Education's Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit, chapter 3, pages 13-24, (<http://www.homelessed.net/schools/toolkit%202007.pdf>).

The duties of a homeless liaison are categorized in these four areas:

- Enrollment and access to educational services
- Outreach
- Unaccompanied youth
- Policies and procedures

Enrollment and access to educational services

Immediately! That is the answer to the question: "When should a homeless student start school?" Often times, a liaison will need to assist the family in obtaining required documentation for enrollment such as birth certificates, health records and student records from the previously attended school. While these documents are being gathered, the local liaison makes sure that the homeless student is allowed to start classes.

In addition to assisting the family with enrollment of the student, the liaison makes sure that the student receives educational services such as free lunch, tutoring and preschool programs along with referrals to health and dental services.

Facilitating transportation arrangements for the homeless student is paramount to overcoming the barrier to school attendance. The local liaison plays a vital role in bringing together the various school personnel who are involved in the decision-making regarding transportation.

Family involvement is important to the success of students. The homeless liaison makes sure that the homeless family members are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in their student's education. The homeless liaison looks for potential barriers (transportation to parent/teacher conferences) and facilitates ways to overcome these barriers.

In the next newsletter, we will take a look at the liaison's responsibilities to assist unaccompanied youth and to provide an outreach program.

BEST PRACTICES**Point of Contact***Kim Gehrke, ROE 3*

One of your key responsibilities as liaison is to train your local school staff. It is vital that secretaries and enrollment personnel be able to identify homeless students. They are the first point of contact when a family enters the school.

Hold a training exclusively for secretaries - treat them to a day of fun, food, pampering, shopping and most importantly, training. Let administrators know this is a great opportunity to show secretaries their appreciation as well as train them on the key issue of homeless education.

Provide the participants with breakfast and lunch, along with chocolate or other goodies at their tables. Between training presentations and educational videos, give them the opportunity to shop from vendors offering jewelry, purses, massages and food samples. Choose a theme: ours was Flip Flop training and everyone was encouraged to wear and decorate their flip flops. The event provided added fun and networking opportunities as the participants mingled, shared their creations, and competed for prizes.

This training was a huge success! The secretaries left feeling pampered and empowered with a working knowledge of homeless education.

Remember, your entire staff is needed to educate all students, and the secretaries are just one piece to the puzzle.

Earlier Identification of Homeless Students

*Judge Patricia Walton, Ninth Judicial Circuit/Juvenile Court
McDonough County*

Persons who are not acquainted with the educational or court systems may believe that it is an unusual event when a teenager, appearing in juvenile court system as a delinquent, resides with someone other than his or her biological parents. For those of us who routinely work with youth in schools or juvenile court, it is commonplace to find many teenagers living with grandparents, adult siblings, or even unrelated families, rather than a biological parent.

Homeless youth can arrive in these alternate living arrangements in a variety of ways. Some have parents who no longer can economically provide for them. Some have parents who have thrown them out because of family conflict. Others leave home because of child abuse and/or neglect. The reality is that the majority of these youth have grown up in single-parent households.

Homeless youth often have a history of both academic and behavior problems when attending school. Many have had to repeat a grade. Often, many have been suspended or expelled. These characteristics may be red flags to educators that a youth may be experiencing problems with his or her living situation. Unfortunately, homeless youth will not be seen within the court system unless they are chronic truants, engage in delinquent behavior, or are reported as victims of abuse or neglect.

The school district homeless liaison is integral to assisting those students in homeless situations. When the district liaison is able to identify these homeless or at-risk youth earlier, then a corresponding decrease of academic problems and/or court-related issues is possible.

There are many negative stereotypes associated with homeless persons in general. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of these students are reluctant to share their living situation with teachers or school staff. They may have friends who are aware, but are sworn to secrecy. In many instances, their particular homeless situation may only be brought to light as a result of some other traumatic event or occurrence.

I have spoken with professionals in the court system looking for input in addressing this issue. Two main ideas have developed from these discussions. First, the creation of a school-based educational program about homelessness is recommended. The student body could be addressed on an annual basis. If possible, the speaker should be someone who has personally experienced homelessness. This programming could be reinforced throughout the year, reminding students of the availability of meeting with the district homeless liaison.

The second idea is to create a committee within each county. This committee would consist of school staff and administrators, law enforcement and court personnel. The issue of confidentiality would need to be formalized before proceeding. This committee could work toward the identification of homeless youth through a collaborative effort. Individual needs of homeless youth might also be addressed.

I am interested in hearing your ideas, comments or suggestions in regard to this issue from an educational perspective. I can be contacted at pwalton@9thjudicial.org or 309/837-4891.

Judge Patricia A. Walton, Associate Judge

NCLB Conference Homeless Education Strand

This year's NCLB Conference planners have arranged a wide variety of activities that will allow you many choices, from traditional presentations and break-out sessions, to panels of successful school leaders, workshops, social and networking opportunities, and the chance to examine the latest in educational publications and materials.

In response to the issues that schools districts are experiencing with the increase in homeless families, the No Child Left Behind Conference will provide a homeless education strand to include:

- ▶ McKinney-Vento Responding to Homelessness in the Real World: A Panel Discussion
- ▶ McKinney-Vento and Title I: Working Together
- ▶ Working with Families Living in Poverty
- ▶ Building Shelter and School Relationships
- ▶ Life in a Shelter and Implications for the Classroom Unaccompanied Youth
- ▶ School Residency and McKinney-Vento: Registration, Enrollment and Residency Provisions
- ▶ Local Liaison Basics

** Individual sessions may be found at:*

<http://www.homelessed.net/Calendar/calendar.htm>

NCLB: No Child Left Behind Annual Statewide Conference will be held Feb. 9-11, 2010, Sheraton Chicago Hotel & Towers, Chicago, IL. For more information go to: <http://thecenterweb.org>

Creating A Community For Children

Mary Kay Bonness, Executive Director, Good Samaritan House, Granite City

We have all heard that "it takes a village to raise a child." One can also say it takes a village to educate a homeless child. The Granite City School District and the Good Samaritan House, a homeless shelter, have created such a community for the children living at the shelter. These two agencies collaborate in a number of ways to ensure the educational success of homeless children.

At the beginning of the year, personnel from the Granite City Board of Education come to the shelter to register children who will be attending Granite City schools. The school district also provides vouchers for school uniforms. If a child enters the shelter during the year, parents are explained the children's educational rights and if they decide to change schools, the shelter notifies the school and assists in the registration. If a parent decides to keep the children in the school of origin, the shelter works with the Granite City Board of Education and the school of origin on transportation. The Granite City School District with funds from the McKinney Vento Homeless Children and Youth Program Grant is able to provide tutors who come to the shelter to work with children who desire assistance.

These are just a few of the ways the two agencies collaborate in their efforts to ensure the academic success of children who have been displaced. The best interest of the child is at the heart of this collaborative effort. The goal is to help children become productive members of the community and to end the cycle of homelessness.

NCLB Homeless Education Strand Schedule

Tues., Feb 9, 2010

10-10:45 a.m.

Responding to Homelessness in the Real World

11-11:45 a.m.

Guidelines for Identifying and Providing Services to Students Who are Homeless

2-2:45 p.m.

Building District Collaborations: McKinney-Vento & Title I

3-3:45 p.m.

Collaborative Efforts Between Homeless Shelters and Schools

Wed., Feb 10, 2010

10-10:45 a.m.

Challenges Facing Children Living in a Homeless Shelter

11-11:45 a.m.

Homeless Education Local Liaison Basics

2-2:45 p.m.

Homeless Education: Unaccompanied Youth in Illinois

3-3:45 p.m.

Homeless Education Conversation with the Illinois State Board of Education

Thurs. - Feb 11, 2010

10-10:45 a.m.

Homelessness and Learning: Whose Lens?

11-11:45 a.m.

Every Child in School, Every Day: Community Outreach to Improve School Access for Unstably Housed Children



Opening Doors

Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth — <http://homelessed.net>

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Sharon Neely, Principal Consultant, Curriculum & Instruction, ISBE

Year One: Finding my way through Homeless Education

As one of the contacts for the Homeless Education State Coordinator, let me just say this last year has been a wild ride and an education of mammoth proportions. Had it not been for my colleague and co-contact Vicki Hodges, I probably would have gone mad. No really. Mad. So, after 10 months in the job, I am learning something new every day. I pay attention more to those homeless people I speak with or encounter on a daily basis. I have more compassion for their situation. The homeless have made me a better person.

I have dedicated and hard-working lead liaisons in seven areas in the state that along with their staff do outstanding work to help homeless children receive an education. Special thanks go out to Dave Levek, Lois Porter, Eileen Worthington, Jim Moberly, Ann Schwarm, Mickey Sullivan and Pat Rivera. You have helped this past year as I fumbled through to find my way. I know it has been frustrating at times. It has been equally frustrating for me. But we do make a difference.

I was fortunate to meet some outstanding people from around the country at the National convention in Denver. I also got to meet and talk with staff from the federal government who always answer my cries for help. I have read a million words this past year and all of it was on homeless issues. I would be lost without the "homeless bible" I had to create. And then they threw the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) at us and all heck broke loose. Look out year two, I think I almost know what I am doing.

RESOURCES

Grandparents Raising Grandkids

In Illinois, over 200,000 children under the age of 18 are living in a grandparent-headed home. More than 100,000 grandparents are caring for their grandchildren. The Illinois Department on Aging, in cooperation with the Illinois Task Force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, works to locate, assist and promote the awareness of caregivers who are currently raising their family's children. Services include: establishing support groups; providing financial and technical assistance; information and referral assistance; and training professionals and facilitators to meet relatives' needs.

Many relatives provide care for children without legal custody or guardianship. Litigation is costly and many legal assistance agencies do not litigate family law cases. Many relatives do not pursue custody or guardianship for financial reasons or out of fear of angering the parent(s) and losing their relationship with the child(ren). Without legal custody or guardianship, the relative caregiver may have difficulty enrolling the child in school, obtaining medical information or treatment, or accessing benefits for the child.

School policies may pose obstacles for relative-headed families. Some of these obstacles include: inability to enroll children without proof of legal guardianship; charge of additional fees for out-of-district enrollment; and lack of access to progress reports, education plans and school records due to "informal custodial" arrangements.



For information on Grandparents & Other Relatives Raising Children Program, contact the Senior HelpLine: Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. CST
Toll-free within Illinois: 1-800-252-8966, 1-888-206-1327 (TTY)
or go to <http://www.state.il.us/aging/1intergen/grg.htm>

Opening Doors is an I.S.B.E. grant-funded project provided through the McKinney - Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001.

Under the direction of the Curriculum and Instruction Division, the goal of this initiative is to disseminate information and provide technical assistance to Illinois schools and shelters as to the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth. The Opening Doors project partners include:

Adult Learning Resource Center, 2626 Clearbrook Dr., Arlington Heights, IL 60005. Phone 224/366-8620 / Fax 847/378-6225

Regional Office of Education #26 Hancock/McDonough, 130 S. Lafayette St.-Suite 200, Macomb, IL 61455. Phone 309/837-4821 / Fax 309/837-2887

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