



OUR HOME

Opening Doors: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

OUR HOME

September 2005

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“HAVE A GREAT YEAR”

Rich Dehart, Principal Consultant

*Accountability Division
Illinois State Board of Education*

NAEHCY Listserv

The NAEHCY Listserv provides colleagues across the nation with a forum for communicating about emerging issues in the field of homeless education, including the application of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and strategies for educating and protecting the rights of homeless children and their families.

The listserv is sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) and hosted by the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE (NCHE).

To subscribe to the listserv, please send an e-mail request to homeless@serve.org

Resources on the Web
National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE
<http://www.serve.org/nche/>

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
<http://www.nlchp.org>

Hotline Assistance

If you have questions or comments regarding the Opening Doors Project, or a homeless student, you may contact the ISBE Homeless Hotline at **800/215-6379** or contact

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100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
Phone 217/782-2948
Fax 217/524 - 8750

Welcome to Academic Year 05-06, Fiscal 06, August of 2005 – call it like you want! I’ve called it a long hot summer!

We begin this new “year” with higher numbers than previously of homeless children served, a revised state law regarding education for homeless children and a continued effort by the regional liaisons to assist the locals.

We closed out academic year 04-05 with approximately 14,000 homeless children and youth served. This is a greater than 10% increase from the previous reporting period. It is of concern that the numbers are increasing, but encouraging that through the efforts of the local and regional homeless liaisons they are able to identify more individuals and provide services as needed. The mechanism to collect this information was through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

ISBE Web Application Security (IWAS) System. Although a few had some problems, overall it was a smooth collection of minimal information. The intent is to use the same form for academic year 05-06, with just a few minor adjustments, hopefully for the better.

For those of you who follow the legislative process, you may have caught Senate Bill 1931, an amendment to the State Education for Homeless Children Act, revising Sections 25 and 30. Section 25 addresses the dispute resolution process. Before, some districts in the state had different procedures than others; now all are the same with the Regional Superintendents handling this function. Section 30 abolished the Homeless Children Committee and mandated meetings throughout the state. This is an oversimplification of the new act and I encourage all to access Public Act 94-0235 at

<http://www.ilga.gov/> for a complete review.

The Regional Homeless Liaisons are available, as they were last year, to assist local homeless liaisons with training of district staff on the homeless law, process and procedures. Some of the regional grantees have altered their regional delivery system to expand resources to the local liaisons. If you are a local homeless liaison and are unsure as to who your regional homeless liaison may be, please contact me for updates, rdehart@isbe.net. As always, our Opening Doors project is available to provide assistance via training, awareness, materials and other resources for your use. You may access immediate assistance online at <http://homelessed.net/partners/main.htm>

Above all, welcome back – have a great year!

Save the Date - October 22 - 25, 2005

Hyatt Regency New Orleans - New Orleans, LA

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth 17th Annual Conference

For more information go to <http://naehcy.org>

BEST PRACTICES

The Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) published A Homeless Educator's Sourcebook: Perspectives on Educating Children and Youth in Highly Mobile and Homeless Situations. (Go to www.utdanacenter.org/theo/.) Among its best practices are two meant to raise sensitivity and awareness:

Feast or Famine

In this workshop, each participant is given one of 30 or so different scenarios as he or she walks in; all have to act out their assigned scenario for the rest of the workshop. Some are homeless; some are middle-class; others are rich. Three restaurants are set up. The rich ones get to go to a fancy restaurant and be waited on. The middle-class people have a pizza place. The homeless go to a soup kitchen but are told it's closed; there's no food. Some are supposed to ask: "Can't you give me anything? We have hungry, crying kids." They're told to walk down to the next soup kitchen, where they're told they can stand in line three hours and wait for supper.

Death by Chocolate

This workshop has been conducted for secretaries. Again people are randomly assigned to be rich, middle-class or homeless poor. The rich get fancy chocolate on a silver tray. The middle-class people get Snickers bars at a convenience-store set-up. The poor people, once again, go to a soup kitchen, where they may get stale, leftover candy or nothing if the kitchen has run out. One of the rules is that the rich and middle-class people cannot give food away. People are actually crying. This is very powerful, especially for folks unfamiliar with the plight of homeless families.

Musical Chairs

Bridge Communities in DuPage County, a non-profit group offering transitional housing and supportive services, has a curriculum with activities for school-age children. Musical Chairs is similar to the approach of Death by Chocolate. Each time the music stops, the participant who doesn't have a chair reads a homelessness scenario to the others, until the game is over and all have been read. The students then share how they felt and what could be done to help. This could be used with adults as well, perhaps as an energizing activity during a half-day or longer workshop. (Go to www.bridgecommunities.org.)

A Solid Wall or an Open Door?

Tom Norlen

*McKinney-Vento Homeless Site Coordinator
Bucks County, Pennsylvania*

We have different job titles, but share the common goal of serving homeless children and youth. We come from diverse geographical areas which affect specific homeless conditions, but possess the shared objective of representing the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. We offer unique and varied work styles based on our personalities, but have a bond which focuses on ensuring that every homeless school-age-child and youth has equal access to enrollment, attendance, participation, and success in school.

There is one federal homeless law which we represent and which has been strengthened to help homeless students. There are a wide variety of materials for training and educating others on the topic of homelessness. There is now a federal directive to have a Homeless Liaison in every school district. We can turn to several advocacy groups, websites, and US Department of Education guidance which offer strategies for problem solving.

With little doubt, there is a solid foundation that has been established to help those kids who are experiencing homelessness, and there are many positive components for which to be thankful that have been established over the last eighteen years since the original 1987 McKinney Act enactment.

So, is there any potential barrier in the daily, ongoing, never-ending, ever-changing endeavor to help those children who are experiencing homelessness as relates to their education?

The answer might most accurately be, "It depends." It depends on the human beings that make up each of our particular "helping systems" in whatever part of the country we find ourselves.

There are many levels in this "helping system"--national, state and county/local staff; school district and individual school contacts/liaisons; shelter and agency employees; and each of us--the advocates and coordinators and representatives of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

What is this possible barrier? I believe that it is the attitude of a person's heart, which is in sharp contrast to knowledge of one's mind. It leads me to ask some questions: **Who is a wall and who is an open door in our respective systems?** It causes me to ask myself: Which of the two am I, or could I be one or the other in different situations? For I can know and access the things previously described, have experience and head knowledge, and still fall short in meeting the true needs of a child or parent who is hurting and in need of help and compassion.

What might be some characteristics of the "WALL" personality? This person can be hard. He or she can be difficult to pass through. The WALL can be a stopper of the flow of positive efforts. You cannot see past the WALL. It blocks your vision. The WALL can be a divider. The WALL might be decorated with nice pictures and a coat of paint, but underneath are drywall, studs, and nails. The WALL is set and solid, often rigid. You can get a headache from hitting your head against the WALL. The Wall can cast a shadow. **Have you ever met a "Wall" personality?**

What might be some characteristics of the "OPEN DOOR" personality? This person has hinges and can be flexible in movement. You can see through the OPEN DOOR. Light can enter through it. The DOOR moves as needed to open the way. By its very

nature the DOOR is inviting you to enter. It is welcoming. The OPEN DOOR says, "Come in and let's solve this together." A breath of fresh air is able to flow through the OPEN DOOR. You often leave this DOOR with satisfaction, a smile on your face and a bounce in your step. **Have you ever met an OPEN DOOR?** You are blessed if you know a whole collection of OPEN DOORS!

No one can force a WALL to become an OPEN DOOR. I do believe that little by little, through the way we treat the WALL, we can create a small opening. Maybe the WALL has never been listened to or had its story heard. Perhaps the WALL is hurting. Maybe others have hardened the WALL and you can have the opportunity to soften it. Just maybe, over a period of time, you might get a ray of light to shine through the WALL, and just maybe, that WALL might become one of your favorite DOORS. If we do not give up on anyone, that person has the potential of being a true helper to not only homeless children, but to all of us. And the world will be a little brighter and less harsh. Just think, if Humpty Dumpty had not sat on the WALL, but had used an OPEN DOOR, history would have been altered.

May your life be filled with OPEN DOORS and may you show great appreciation for every one of them. Please do not take them for granted. Although not in the McKinney-Vento Act, one of the most important things we can do for homeless children and youth is to show continual appreciation and thankfulness to our helping networks.

SAVE THE DATE

Illinois McKinney-Vento Statewide Conference

Homeless Strand at NCLB - Conference within a Conference
February 15-17, 2006

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

Barbara J. Duffield

Barbara Duffield is Policy Director for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. NAEHCY, a national grassroots membership association, serves as the voice and the social conscience for the education of children and youth in homeless situations.

Ms. Duffield's involvement in homeless issues began in 1990 as a tutor for homeless children in Washington, D.C. She served as Director of Education for the National Coalition for the Homeless from 1994-2003, working closely with educators, service providers, federal agencies and Congressional offices to strengthen policy and practice on children's issues. At NCH, Barbara helped lead successful grassroots efforts to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program and to increase federal funding for the program from \$35 million in FY2001 to \$62.5 million in FY2005. Ms. Duffield has conducted hundreds of trainings for local, state, and national groups to assist in the implementation of the Act. She has appeared on *60 Minutes*, ABC National News, NPR, and numerous other news media, and has published several academic articles.

In addition to her work with NAEHCY and NCH, Barbara was a founding Advisory Committee member for the LeTendre Education Fund for Homeless Children, and continues to serve in this capacity. Barbara also serves on the Board of the National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness.

Ms. Duffield received her Bachelor's degree summa cum laude in Political Science from the University of Michigan.



Opening Doors

Who are we?

Opening Doors is an Illinois State Board of Education grant-funded project provided through the McKinney - Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001.

Under the direction of Rich Dehart, Principal Consultant, Accountability 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

1855 Mt. Prospect Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018
Phone 847/803-3535 Fax 847/803-3231

Regional Office of Education #26

Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette Street
Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone 309/837-4821
Fax 309/837-2887

Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness

P.O. Box 3956
Oak Park, IL 60303
Phone 708/263-3590
Fax 708/401-0105

Visit us on the world wide web at <http://homelessed.net> to receive FREE materials!

Our Home

To submit an article for OUR HOME please send to:
Eileen Worthington
ROE #26 - Hancock/McDonough
130 South Lafayette
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Opening Doors

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We're on the Web! <http://homelessed.net>

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YOUTH POSTER CONTEST

Opening Doors, with the assistance of the Area Lead Liaisons, is sponsoring a contest to create a youth poster. A winning poster will be chosen from each of the seven areas of the state (see the McKinney-Vento map of these areas at <http://homelessed.net>.) The seven winning entries will go on to the contest's state finals on November 1st. A panel of judges, including State Coordinator Rich Dehart and *Opening Doors* staff, will select the final winning entry, and the artist will be honored during Hunger and Homelessness Week, Nov. 13-19. The winning poster will be printed and distributed across the state.

Runaway and "throwaway" youth are very difficult to identify and assist with getting back into school or other services they need. Many of them "couch-surf" at a friend's or even find themselves on the streets. Who would be more likely to come up with creative ideas for a poster that will catch their attention than other teens? For that reason, the contest is open to 12 to 19-year-olds, in middle or high school and/or at youth shelters. The contest details are as follows:

Goal: Creation of a poster for outreach to homeless youth
Grades/ages: Middle school/high school, ages 12-19
Deadlines: Entries received by Area Lead Liaisons by October 14th
Area winning entries received by *Opening Doors* by Nov. 1st
Prizes: State winner will receive a \$100 gift certificate and be honored during Hunger and Homelessness Week, Nov. 13-19.

The winning poster will be professionally printed and displayed throughout the state.

Poster Specifics:

- Artwork must be original
- Size: 11" x 17"
- Color or black & white, using ink, paint, pencils, crayons, or markers
- Name of the artist, address and phone number, age and/or grade on the back of the artwork
- Signed release for use of the artwork by *Opening Doors*

Send to your Area Lead Liaison. For further information, see the McKinney-Vento map on the *Opening Doors* website, <http://homelessed.net>, or contact Jeanne Rowe, *Opening Doors*, at 847/803-3535 or jrowe@thecenterweb.org.