



OUR HOME

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

OUR HOME

April 2006

Inside this issue:

BEST PRACTICES	2
HOW TO WORK WITH A CONTINUUM OF CARE	2
WHEN LEGAL GUARDIANS ARE NOT PRESENT: ENROLLING STUDENTS ON THEIR OWN	3
OPENING DOORS	3
FAREWELL AND WELCOME	4

“ART IS A HAMMER”

Deb Dempsey, Area 1 Lead Liaison, Kane Count ROE #31



Drama students from the Visual and Performing Arts Academy at Larkin High School in Elgin

Bottom row (left to right): Meredith Koch, Cassie Henwood
 Middle row (left to right): Amy Estanislao, Melanie Caban, Christina Bailey, Natalie Monaco, Nancy Kim, Brittney Smith, Claire Small
 Top row (left to right): Holly McNeill-teacher, Tyler York, Karli Cooper, Rachel Tyrrel, Danielle Hoske, Crystal Drake, Jessica Ortiz, Courtney Lodge, Dylan Urban

DATA COLLECTION

By mid May, via the ISBE IWAS system, it is anticipated that a homeless data collection form will be available. Each district will be asked to provide the information appropriate for their district. Each local liaison will receive, via email from Rich Dehart, a copy of the data collection form. The local liaisons are encouraged to work with their Superintendent, or appropriate district individual, on timely completion of the form.

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 Rich Dehart, Principal Consultant
 Accountability Division
 Illinois State Board of Education
 100 North First Street
 Springfield, IL 62777-0001
 Phone 217/782-2948
 Fax 217/524 - 8750

As homelessness liaisons or program coordinators, we are constantly in search of ways to reach and inspire our (training/workshop) audience to want to “buy into” and join our team. If we succeed, our hope is that they become more aware of families/youth that may be homeless and connect them to the resources needed for our students to stay in and succeed in school.

Recently, drama students from the Visual and Performing Arts Academy at Larkin High School in Elgin did just that at the NCLB conference in Chicago. At the Oscars, Paul Haggis quoted Bertolt Brecht in his speech: “Art is not a mirror, but it is a hammer, not a mirror to hold up to society, (Continued on page 3)

BEST PRACTICES

YOUTH RESOURCE FAIR

With studies recently completed on numbers of—and issues facing—homeless youth across Illinois, we are all aware that youth are an underserved and hard-to-reach part of the homeless population. Opening Doors staff recently attended a Homeless Youth Resource Fair on Chicago's near west side and brought back ideas to share:

The first is, simply, to *hold* a resource fair. At the Chicago fair, approximately 20 agencies and programs, including Opening Doors, displayed materials on tables around the room. We then gathered for a round-table discussion, and perhaps 50 people took part in that, briefly describing their youth services along with upcoming events.

Even though a less urban area will no doubt have fewer agencies focused on youth, the other side of the coin is that youth in small towns and rural areas are perhaps even less aware of any such resources or how they could access them. It may require more telephone calls and footwork on your part in order to "round up" enough agencies to create such a resource fair, but it would be well worth the effort. For example, find out which agency is considered your community's CCBYS resource. Perhaps lack of awareness about what various agencies can offer is resulting in duplication of services.

Another best practice observed at the fair was a pocket-sized (2.5" x 4") card listing youth resources with their phone numbers. It was on durable card stock and listed toll-free numbers for most of the agencies. SGA Youth & Family Services created it. A staff member from SGA explained that they first considered a fact sheet listing the 23 agencies offering services but decided that a small card a youth could keep in a pocket or purse would be a better choice.

HOW TO WORK WITH A CONTINUUM OF CARE

Jeanne Rowe, Adult Learning Resource Center

The partnership between the Will County Regional Office of Education (ROE) and the Will County Continuum of Care has been exceptional. In addition to many joint ventures, the ROE depends on the Continuum of Care as a clearinghouse of information for most things not directly school-related.

David Levek and Melissa Brown, co-chairs of the Continuum's Education committee, reported to the Continuum on the committee's activities. Quoting from that report: "The Education Committee of the Will County Continuum of Care strives to ensure that the educational network for the homeless, from basic literacy to specialized trades to college, is available and flexible for maximum access." This opening statement sets an expectation for good results that is met by the array of activities listed in the remainder of the report. For example, each fall the committee holds an education symposium for school administrators to raise their awareness of the educational rights of children in homeless situations and to share strategies for removing barriers to successful enrollment and attendance at school.

Beginning this school year, the Will County ROE was elated to launch their latest initiative. They now have a new part-time staff member, Mr. Ron O'Connor, who serves as the Will County ROE Homeless Liaison. Among other responsibilities in serving homeless families, Mr. O'Connor monitors the ROE's new homeless grant program. This program provides funds to homeless children, allowing them to participate in various enrichment activities, and meets other needs that might otherwise go unmet.

In January 2004 a pilot program called Passport to Your Child's Success was initiated at MorningStar Mission. Thirty people attended, and among them were a small group of neighborhood children who came hoping that the program would help them in school. MorningStar provided refreshments and door prizes for the parents who came to learn about the program and acquire tools to encourage their child's academic success while the parents worked on their housing needs. With community help, the committee was able to give away donated books as an integral part of this program.

Attention is focused on job training for adults through the WILCO Area Career Center. Classes have been offered in food preparation, welding, and computers. Providing transportation to the classes has been a key to this program's success. Past participants who have been contacted had overwhelmingly positive comments about the program.

The committee is currently working on a library initiative to ensure access to the use of local libraries, including getting a library card, for people who have no acceptable home address they can list. Many of them are either doubled-up with friends or family, or they are staying at a shelter. After hearing stories of people being turned away on this basis, the committee decided that action needed to be taken.

(David Levek is the Assistant Superintendent of the Will County Regional Office of Education. By serving as chair of this active committee, he offers a very worthwhile model for collaboration between an ROE and its Continuum of Care. Ron O'Connor is Will County's Homeless Liaison)



Save the Date - November 11 - 14, 2006

The Peabody Little Rock - Little Rock, AR

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth 18th Annual Conference

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

(Continued from page 1)

but a hammer with which to shape it.” As their instructor Holly McNeill told her students, “This opportunity is the chance to use theatre to change minds.” The feedback from the audience tells us that the students did just that.

For the purpose of the students creating and producing vignettes that would give some insight into the barriers that homeless families/youth encounter, they were given a “mini” workshop on *Identifying and Assisting Homeless Students*. Some of them even discovered that at some time in their life they could have been considered homeless. The students were engaged and enthusiastic about pursuing this project. Under the direction of Nancy Kim and Courtney Lodge, the students met on their own time to organize, write and create “**I Didn’t Know I Was Homeless.**”

One of the vignettes portrayed a family trying to enroll and being denied because of no documentation. The flip side portrayed a successful enrollment because of informed staff. No one heard a pin drop as another student performed a riveting monologue portraying a homeless youth which starts out “I hate the first day of school.” The audience comes to find out that this beautiful, articulate student has had many “first days” of school and feels invisible because of her homelessness. On that same note, the program ended with an original acoustic piece performed and sung beautifully that left many in tears and landed a standing ovation.

Thank you to Larkin VPA students and their instructor Holly McNeill for swinging that hammer and making a difference in all of our lives!

WHEN LEGAL GUARDIANS ARE NOT PRESENT: ENROLLING STUDENTS ON THEIR OWN

The National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE creates and distributes a number of valuable and informative resources dealing with the issue of education of homeless children and youth. This series of briefs discusses selected issues pertaining to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and offers strategies for implementation. The most recent addition to these briefs is “When Legal Guardians Are Not Present: Enrolling Students on Their Own”. This brief speaks to the growing number of unaccompanied youth in this country and how you can address their educational needs.

“In a number of instances, . . . children and youth who are enrolling in a school may not be living with their parents or legal guardians. Frequently, children in families experiencing homelessness are sent to live temporarily with friends or relatives. This type of living arrangement has been especially prevalent in families displaced by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes. In other situations, youth have been forced to leave home due to abusive environments or are on their own for other reasons. These children and youth, in most cases, fit the definition of homeless, unaccompanied youth in the McKinney-Vento Act: a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian [42 U.S.C. §11434A(6)] and eligible for immediate school enrollment.”

This brief and additional materials from the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE can be obtained by accessing the web at <http://www.serve.org/nche> or calling 800/308-2145.

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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
Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone 309 / 837-4821
Fax 309 / 837-2887
mworthin@roe26.k12.il.us



Opening Doors

Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

ROE #26 Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette - Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone: (309) 837-4821
Fax: (309) 837-2887
Email: mworthin@roe26.k12.il.us

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

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FAREWELL AND WELCOME

Nothing in life stays the same and the older I get the harder it seems to accept those changes, especially when they entail a shake-up of the norm. For the past four and a half years I have been privileged to work with Jeanne Rowe as coordinator of the *Opening Doors* project on homelessness and educational rights. Her M.A. from the University of Iowa laid the foundation for teaching English and French before moving to the adult education field and coordinating the Basic Reading Program of the Literacy Connection in Elgin for six years. At the ALRC, in addition to coordinating *Opening Doors*, Jeanne served as an ABE/GED consultant and assisted in planning two RCSIG (Refugee Children School Impact Grant) conferences. Volunteering as a CASA, a Court Appointed Special Advocate in child abuse cases, has given her valuable insights for the *Opening Doors* project.

Although she is finding it hard to leave the dedicated group of colleagues with whom she has worked in McKinney-Vento programs across the state, Jeanne is looking forward to more reading, gardening, major house remodeling, and traveling with her husband. Coronado and La Jolla, California, are on tap soon, followed by San Francisco in early summer and an Alaskan cruise come August. She also hopes to fit in a week of writers' workshop at the University of Iowa...and then, there are her grandsons...

On a positive note, Jeanne's position will now be held by Helen Campbell, a pleasant and capable individual who will add much to the program. Helen had worked in the family literacy field for 15 years in different roles, including parent educator, child development specialist, program coordinator, grant monitor, and independent evaluator, before joining the Adult Learning Resource Center. At the ALRC Helen has helped coordinate the Even Start statewide technical assistance program and facilitated the Family Literacy Provider Group. Helen has learned a great deal about homeless children's educational rights from Jeanne and looks forward to broadening her knowledge as *Opening Doors*' new coordinator. Helen has a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Development from Erikson Institute. Helen can be reached at 847-803-3535 or by sending mail to hcampbell@thecenterweb.org.

Jeanne, you will be missed and Helen, I look forward to the opportunities ahead! *Eileen*