



OUR HOME

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

OUR HOME - Inside this issue:

June 2008

Identifying Homeless Students	2
Coordinator's Corner	3
Feed Them & They Will Come	3
Emmy Nomination	4
LeTendre Scholarship	5
Opening Doors	5
Best Practices	6

Building Trust & Reducing Mobility

*Faith Sanderson, Homeless Coordinator
ROE #51 - Sangamon*

In October of 2007, a single mom moved to central Illinois with her three children. They slept alternately in their car and in their grandmother's assisted living facility. I became involved when the schools were advised that the grandmother would lose her housing if her family members didn't stop sleeping in her room.

The three children were immediately enrolled and the family received assistance from the schools. However, the school staff saw no answer to the family's homelessness. The age and sex of the oldest child, a 12-year-old male, prevented them from living in a shelter together. Regardless, they may have had trouble living successfully in a shelter due to the family's mental health issues.

When school staff sought my assistance, they told me that mom planned to leave our community for a city providing more services. I met with mom and asked her to work with me for 30 days and then reevaluate her plans to move. She agreed.

Within the first month, the family's basic needs were met. Mom found a rental unit where the landlord agreed to let them live until her social security checks caught up with her. I secured money to pay past due utility bills which eliminated another barrier to renting. Clothing and food were supplemented via local community resources.

We formed a child and family team consisting of school social workers, the district homeless liaison, a guidance dean, local social service agency providers, and mom and her newly acquired significant other. Using the DCFS WRAP model, we developed a mission statement and identified unmet needs, both short-term and long-term.

The oldest child had recently been suspended for fighting. The family felt the child had been picked on and they were upset because his glasses had been broken. His "look" now included glasses held together with duct tape. We proposed getting him glasses and a mentor who would meet with him weekly for two hours. To help the two younger siblings adjust to their new school, we arranged to have dedicated foster parents meet with them at school daily.

Over the last 7 months, we have provided links and access to mental health services, employment opportunities, rental assistance, and parenting education/support. Our team continues to meet and work with this family. The family remains housed and now has reliable transportation. As our team continued to support this family, mother's trust increased and she now expresses a desire to stay in our community.

-Continued on page 2-

NAEHCY 20th Annual Conference

*Oct. 31-Nov 3, 2008
Hyatt Regency Crystal City -
Washington, DC*

NAEHCY's Annual Conference is a unique showcase of best practices and services from across the country. It is the only national conference dedicated to supporting the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The conference equips educators, service providers, and advocates from across the nation with the knowledge, skills, information, and inspiration they need to remove barriers and help ensure that every child and youth experiencing homelessness is successful academically, personally, and socially. For more information go to <http://naehcy.org>.

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE

<http://www.serve.org/nche/>

National Coalition for the Homeless

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

National Center on Family Homelessness

<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/>

Hotline Assistance

ISBE Homeless Hotline

800/215-6379

Peggy Dunn, Principal Consultant

Accountability Division

Illinois State Board of Education

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Identifying Homeless Students

Jim Moberly,
Area IV Lead Liaison

Iroquois-Kankakee (I-KAN)
Regional Office of Education

In Area IV we are already making plans for the next school year. One of the major problems we continue to address is identifying homeless students who are doubled up with relatives, friends, etc. Great strides have been made, however these students still seem to slip through the system without being identified. Working at school registration might be an ideal time to identify this sub-population of homeless youth. Several trainings have been held with district liaisons on how to identify homeless students during registration for the 2008-2009 school year. The liaisons are being asked to work closely with school personnel to help look for families who are living together to determine who falls under the McKinney-Vento guidelines. All too often these students are enrolled in school but not identified as homeless and eligible for services. Our hope for the next school year is to increase awareness and understanding of homelessness through training which will lead to more services, stability and a consistent education for homeless youth.

-Continued from page 1-

Successes we have celebrated with this family include the marriage of mom this spring to her significant other and their efforts to regain custody of his two pre-school age children. The oldest son had multiple suspensions and some weak grades at the beginning of the year. His grades have improved and his teacher states that he is now a positive influence in class. His mentor reports him planning for success in high school and attendance at a computer technician school. The elementary staff reports the younger students are no longer having behavioral issues. All family members except dad are receiving mental health services and keeping their appointments.

In addition, the children all have summer plans in place. The oldest child will attend NovaTech computer camps during the summer and is thrilled he will learn to create video games! Both he and his younger brother will also attend school basketball camps. The two younger siblings are enrolled in a church-based summer program for the four weeks preceding the 2008-2009 school year. Mom is excited they will have an academic enrichment opportunity and four weeks of structure BEFORE school starts.

I don't suggest the family has overcome all problems. Dad has lost his job. One of the children had a negative experience with a teacher; and both mom and child will need a completely different experience next year in order to reverse this negativity. But they are still here and mom promises to stay and make sure they are in the same school district.

Our neediest homeless families often require an extensive variety of services. Approaching them empathetically, helping them realize what their needs are and to prioritize them appropriately, can go a long way to establishing a trusting-mentoring relationship. Having a relationship with these parents helps anchor them and reduces their desire to flee to greener pastures. While some cases may seem overwhelming, we must continue to congratulate families on their progress and celebrate their efforts, no matter how small they might appear.

To quote Carol Adams, Director of DHS, "Sometimes the day to day struggle to meet increasing needs with shrinking resources takes a toll on our spirits. That is when it is time to review our successes, refresh our commitment, and lift up our hearts."

I hope your summer is sunny and you return for the '08 - '09 academic year refreshed and committed to helping homeless families succeed!

LeTendre Education Fund Scholarships *

Children and youth in homeless situations face numerous barriers to educational success. Deep poverty, high mobility, and school requirements often make attending and succeeding in school a challenge. Despite these challenges, many students who experience homelessness not only graduate from high school, but wish to pursue a college education.

Established in 1998 in memory of André E. LeTendre, husband of Mary Jean LeTendre, former Director of Compensatory Education for the U.S. Department of Education, the LeTendre Education Fund for Homeless Children provides scholarship assistance to students who are homeless or have experienced homelessness.

Applications are accepted from November 1, 2007 - September 12, 2008!

* To find out more go to <http://naehcy.org/>



Homeless Education State Coordinator Corner

Peggy Dunn, Principal Consultant, Accountability Division, ISBE

PACE Suburban Cook Buses Sport A New Look

The 631 Suburban Cook PACE buses now hold the three new posters with homeless education information and the hotline number. In the agreement with PACE, the posters will be in the buses for the next year with an option to extend the agreement for an additional year. The Homeless Education hotline has received about 53 calls in the last three weeks with families asking for information on preschool for homeless children, high school students trying to get back into school, college students who are homeless looking for help, and several grandmothers who didn't realize their grandchildren living with them were eligible for services. We want to thank the PACE Suburban Bus Service for their partnership and support in this effort.

NCLB Homeless Data Collection for 2007-2008

The annual mandated collection of data on homeless students in Illinois will open May 26 – October 1, 2008. Each school district in Illinois is required to provide information on their homeless student population as part of the Federal NCLB Title X, Part C McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. Even if a school has only one homeless student or has identified no homeless students in the 2007-2008 school year, reporting is required. The data collection in IWAS System Listings can be found in the section: Reporting – Annual – NCLB Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.



Most school superintendents have this report on their system listing; but if assistance is needed to add this report or to complete the information within the report, contact Peggy Dunn at 217-782-2948. Written directions on reporting data in IWAS, for the NCLB Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, are linked on the ISBE Homeless Education webpage at <http://www.isbe.net/homeless>.

2007-2008 Illinois Homeless Liaison Flooding Response



Illinois has experienced a year of high waters impacting families in all parts of the state. In Area 2, families experiencing crisis as a result of the early fall floods, found assistance from Linda Delimata and Lois Porter. These ladies worked with school personnel and community agencies to resolve individual family issues and stabilize school attendance for affected students. WalMart, through their community assistance program, was one of the many entities that stepped forward to help, providing underwear and socks for the children who were homeless due to the flooding.

No sooner than the flood related issues in Area 2 were resolved, Area 4 families and schools were subjected to the same natural disaster. Impacted by flooding in Iroquois and Livingston Counties, coordinated efforts to provide school supplies and assistance to families and schools were headed up by Area 4 Lead Liaison, Jim Moberly. Just as Area 4 was regaining their footing, they succumbed to a second flood in late winter. School supplies were provided to children who lost their backpacks and supplies in the flood through Kitz for Kidz.

In the spring nine Southern Illinois counties also experienced extensive flooding. Rivers bordering Illinois overflowed the waterways throughout the region following a 12 inch rain. Area 6 Lead Liaison, Mickey Sullivan, and her staff worked with homeless liaisons in the schools to identify the areas hardest hit and connect families to appropriate services and assistance. Brought together as a result of the floods, partnerships between northern and southern districts were forged. Northern districts collected school supplies, office supplies, and clothing gift cards, in an effort to help several of the most severely impacted southern school districts – *school children helping school children!*

-Continued on page 4-

-Continued from page 3-

Overall, the flooding in 2007 – 2008 accounted for over 1500 new homeless children identified in Illinois. There are most likely more, but families that moved from the area during the floods that were not identified did not return when the waters subsided. Throughout these difficult months the ISBE Homeless Education Program was able to provide some assistance. In addition the National Center for Homeless Education resource: **A McKinney-Vento Toolbox: Constructing a Robust and Rigorous Homeless Education Program, In Case of Disaster and Every Day** provided information and assistance to the programs in delivering services to the families, schools, and communities involved in the floods (http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/toolbox.pdf).



Welcome Families and Their Children Back to School
Plastic Family Document Bags and Parent Information Checklists
will be available in late July, 2008

Families surveyed in the late fall and early spring, about their use of the Parent Packs revealed that the folders held useful information but were too bulky and too large to easily keep and transport. The surveyed family members indicated that a heavy plastic zipper lock bag with a label and information inside would be the most useful replacement. In order to meet the needs of homeless families, 4 mil 6 x 9" ziplock bags, labels stating in red "Important Family Documents" with the Illinois Homeless Education hotline number, and cards entitled "Family Important Papers Checklist and Information for School" will be developed. The Homeless Education Coordinator will provide the bags, labels, and cards for the FY 09 back to school year with information on how to produce these items after the initial supply has been distributed. In late July or early August quantities will be distributed to each Area Lead Liaison in Areas 1 – 6 based on homeless student numbers.



Feed Them and They Will Come!
Eileen Worthington, Area 3 Lead Liaison - ROE #26

Have you ever been in the position of needing help to survive? Would you know where to go, who to call? How do you apply for food stamps? Where is the closest shelter - would there be a bed there for you if you needed it? Unless you have been in the position of needing services or have been trained to locate and access those services, most of us would not have a clue! Would it surprise you to know that many of our families are in exactly the same position? Through the year it has become obvious that not only are the families we serve at a loss but so are school personnel and agency staff. The families don't know where to go or what rights their children have . . . The schools are not familiar with local agencies and the services they provide . . . The agencies are not aware that these families are homeless and that their children are afforded specific educational rights.

In April we reached out to the schools and agencies in Hancock and McDonough Counties. Offering conversation, and pizza, our goal was to clarify and demystify - to eliminate some of the confusion and misinformation 'out there'. Liaisons, district staff, representatives from community agencies and fraternal organizations came to the table to eat, share information and ideas, be educated, ask questions, and find out just how extensive the problem of homelessness was in our area. What they discovered was that there are homeless students in district schools. Students and families do need services and to a great degree they either don't know what services are available or how to access them. It also became apparent that there were more local services available than previously thought.

The lesson here? Talk to your community. Bring them to the table and provide them with pizza, or hot dogs, or just coffee, but do be sure to provide them with the opportunity to get to know each other and what each of them has to offer. By establishing school and community collaborations you will all be better equipped to provide necessary services to homeless children and youth.

Emmy Nomination for Feed the Children Video, America's Invisible Children

Linda Delimata, ROE #47 - Lee/Ogle

Last year, the *Feed the Children* organization delivered backpacks filled with school supplies, hygiene items and food to various communities around the country. In Illinois they provided these backpacks to the Hancock/McDonough ROE and to the Lee/Ogle ROE in April of 2007. Volunteers from the community helped move the boxes of 1600 backpacks into the cars of school district liaisons who then brought them back to their schools.

A reporter from a national TV network interviewed some of the participants during this event, and returned later to participate in the graduation ceremony in Rockford where 26 seniors experiencing homelessness graduated. The reporter also visited other parts of the country interviewing students experiencing homelessness and the school district liaisons who helped remove barriers to academic success. The result of the reporter's efforts is a video hosted by Joan Lunden called *America's Invisible Children* which aired on national television in October of 2007. The video is very well done and clearly defines many of the aspects of the McKinney/Vento Homeless Education Act.

The exciting news is that this documentary has been nominated for a daytime Emmy award! This film candidly shows viewers what homeless students face in their daily lives and clearly demonstrates the need for the Homeless Education programs. It is an honor that this valuable and moving documentary about homeless education issues in our country is being identified as worthy of this award.



Volunteers from ROE #47-Lee/Ogle and community unload shipment from Feed the Children.

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

ISBE

**Illinois
McKinney-Vento
Homeless Education
Program**
Peggy Dunn,
State Coordinator



Opening Doors

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 the 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

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Arlington Heights, IL 60005
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Fax 847/378-6225
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Visit us on the world wide web at
<http://homelessed.net>
to receive **FREE**
materials!

Our Home

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Opening Doors

Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

Illinois McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program

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

OUR HOME was supported 100% through a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education funded by the United States Department of Education under the McKinney-Vento Education for the Homeless Children & Youth Program for an approximate cost of \$350,000.

BEST PRACTICES

Into the Summer Months

Helen Campbell - ALRC

As district homeless education liaisons or others who assist homeless students, there is much you can do as we head into the summer months both to help homeless students during the summer and to prepare for the upcoming school year.

Summer Programming

Are there community centers, park districts, or other organizations that offer summer camps, art classes, music programs, sports lessons or other enrichment activities over the summer in your area? You could approach them about getting scholarships or discounts for homeless students. Perhaps you could offer to publicize their generosity in a local newspaper or in some other way!

Summer Events, Back-to-School Fairs, and Meet-the-Teacher

The key to enrolling and assisting homeless students is first and foremost identifying homeless families in the community. As you know, often times parents do not realize that their precarious living situations, such as staying with relatives temporarily or residing in a low cost motel because they can't afford rent, are considered homeless for educational purposes and qualifies their children for school-related assistance. Help parents find out about this by passing out or prominently displaying flyers and/or brochures at community summer events as well as meet-the-teacher days, back-to-school fairs and events.

Gearing Up

Now is the perfect time to start getting ready for the beginning of the year mayhem by contacting possible sources for free school supplies, school uniforms and other items required by your district. Aside from requesting and getting these much needed items, spending some time now thinking about how they will be distributed and getting them organized will pay off big come fall!