



OUR HOME

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

OUR HOME

April 2007

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DATA COLLECTION

Before the end of May, via the ISBE IWAS system, it is anticipated that the updated homeless data collection form will be available. Each district is federally mandated to provide the homeless student information appropriate for their district. Each local liaison will receive, via email from Peggy Dunn, 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 with complete data for the 2007 academic year.

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

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 Peggy Dunn, 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
madunn@isbe.net

Advocating for Homeless Preschool Students

*Laurene Heybach, Director
 The Law Project of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless*

Early childhood education has re-emerged in the last decade as key to successful educational experiences and outcomes for all children. Benefits identified from preschool programs, of course, are certainly no less important for those preschool-age children who experience homelessness. These include better progress in language, math and social skills, better cognitive development and better health. Indeed, homeless children are at high risk for educational failure and arguably can benefit the most from quality preschool programming. As one article points out:

“Young children who experience homelessness also are eager to learn, but their living situation can dampen their enthusiasm... [H]igh stress, limited resources and social support ... may compromise the emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children...[C]hildren experiencing homelessness are much more likely to be identified as having developmental delays.

Research on the resilience of children experiencing difficult circumstances, such as homelessness, identifies many protective influences that can make the difference in long term outcomes for children. These protective influences include the supports or support structures and opportunities that promote healthy coping, growth, and overall development. These are key principles of early intervention and homeless education.

Meyers, Popp and Reed-Victor, “Using the Best That We Know: Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness” (Project Hope Virginia, 2003) (footnotes omitted)

Application of the McKinney-Vento Act to Preschools

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §11431 *et seq.* (2001) recognizes the importance of preschool for homeless children and addresses preschool-related responsibilities at both the State and local level. Indeed, the term “preschool” is used in the Act no less than nine separate times. First and foremost, the Act’s introductory Statement of [Congressional] Policy expresses the legislative intent of the law: that each homeless child within the state be accorded “equal access to the same, free, appropriate public education, *including a public preschool* education, as provided to other children and youths.” §11431(1).

Now that Illinois is rolling out its innovative Preschool For All program (PFA), (sometimes referred to as “universal preschool”) across the state, it is vital that administrators, providers and educators understand McKinney-Vento’s preschool requirements clearly and endeavor to incorporate those mandates in every component of PF services.

Where school districts operate or contract for preschool services all the rights and options mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act that normally apply to the district schools apply to the preschools as well. Homeless preschoolers, therefore, have all the rights to choice, transportation, immediate enrollment, referral for immunizations,

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BEST PRACTICES*Using Web Resources ~
A Great Practice!*

There are many resources out there in cyber space to help you in your efforts training and informing people about the educational rights of homeless children and youth and the issues they face.

One excellent resource is the website of the **National Center for Homeless Education** (www.serve.org/nche). You may have seen some of their material at presentations or meetings. What you might not be aware of is the wealth of material they have, both to download and to order. There are a wide variety of *Homeless Education Issue Briefs* on issues ranging from very basic, general information to very specific, targeted topics. You may find a brief to download that perfectly addresses the audience you are going to be training or you may want to refer people to the web site to look for topics that interest them. Some topics of briefs are: Enrolling students without records, IDEA, Immigrant and Homelessness and Title 1 and Homelessness. Additionally, you may download the *NCHE Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* in its entirety or in parts. You may also order material to be sent to you at no charge in quantities of up to 25 per year. A great new piece that you can order is *Surviving on Your Own: Information for Youth on how Schools can Help*, a pocket size booklet for unaccompanied youth.

Another helpful website is our **Opening Doors** site at www.homelessed.net. Here you can also download and order material, much of it specific to Illinois. There is a wide variety of material including tip sheets, brochures, and posters. If you are familiar with the site but haven't visited in a while, you will find some great new material including youth brochures and a tip sheet on fee waivers.

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etc. that all homeless students possess. Illinois regulations governing the Early Childhood Block Grant make this clear, including the obligation to provide transportation services to homeless children who move. 23 Ill. Admin. Code 235.500 d.

Where non-public school entities not normally subject to the McKinney-Vento requirements operate preschool programs using State funding, however, they, too "in so much as possible, [must] ensure that homeless children enrolled in their programs receive the support necessary for successful and continued participation, including, without limitation, arranging for appropriate transportation, when necessary in cases where such children move out of the area served by the program during the grant period." *Note that all applicants for State Preschool For All funding must describe specifically how the program will allow for the continued participation of homeless preschoolers who move.*

McKinney-Vento emphasizes that "each child" experiencing homelessness be given access to the education and services needed. Many homeless parents who desire preschool have been told that the preschool is full or that they are too late, i.e. they missed the registration period. Others are simply never referred to preschool sites. Obviously, *all* barriers to the enrollment of Illinois homeless preschoolers must be identified and removed including registration processes that discourage and diminish the chances for enrollment, lack of outreach to homeless families, the failure to identify preschool programs, lack of awareness of the need and lack of available slots.

As Preschool For All moves forward with its promise to open doors for all families who need preschool services, now is the time to work to fulfill the McKinney-Vento requirement that "each child" –including each homeless preschool child here in Illinois be served.

Going Home

*Matthew Hanafie, Executive Director
Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness*

Last week, I was back in my old neighborhood and I stopped by the public library. I remembered my first visit. I was in second grade and my teacher, Ms. Barnes, took us to the library to check out a book to get us excited about reading. I think it is a common experience that many of us share. I will always remember the librarian's excitement as she explained how we could get access to all of the wonders that books have to offer.

As I walked up to the reference desk, I wondered if this is one tradition from childhood that will have to stop. You see, the reason I was visiting the library was to ask about their policy concerning homeless children and adults accessing library services. At a suburban Chicago shelter last year, parents informed us that they had a hard time getting library cards. The library did not issue cards to people that used a shelter address. Also, families that were doubled-up with others could not get cards because they did not have the required documents.

In the last year, members of our local Continuum of Care have contacted dozens of local libraries and found these restrictive policies are not uncommon. When we meet with library officials, we explain that most homeless families, while being residents of the community, could not fulfill their requirements for a library card. Though McKinney-Vento applies only to schools, these local policies go against the sample policies of the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA encourages local libraries to review policies and make sure they do not act as undue barriers to homeless children and adults. I was proud to find out that my old library had updated their policies. They decided that the benefit of ensuring reasonable access for all far outweighed any concerns of lost materials.

Homeless Education State Coordinator Corner

Peggy Dunn, Principal Consultant, Accountability Division, ISBE

There are some 'old favorites' in the categories of books on homeless issues for children's reading and for use in the classroom when teachers want to encourage exploration of social issues as part of integrated literature and social studies curriculum development. Those old standbys now require an updated list of reading materials that will assist youth from K – 12 with both fiction and non-fiction opportunities to understand and gain compassion for the situation of homelessness. If you find new books being published, please share those as this list will most certainly be updated as we find new authors willing to tackle this difficult issue.

- McDonald, Janet. 2006. **Chill Wind** – story about a high school dropout and her two children try to support themselves on the welfare check stops by becoming a plus size model. 134 pages
- Booth, Coe. 2006. **Tyrell**. 320 pages. 15 yr old Tyrell lives in a Bronx homeless shelter with his mother and brother – will he make different choices than his father who went to prison?
- Standford, Chelsea. 2006. **Runaway Hotel**. Jade runs away from home after a fight with her mother and soon finds that being on her own is not as simple as she first thought. Hungry and alone she befriends a girl who mother runs a hotel. Their friendship marks a change in their lives.
- Harris, Mark Jonathon and Marris Roth. 2005. **Come the Morning**. Ben and his family find themselves among the poor and homeless when they look for Ben's father. 191 pages.
- Griessman, Annette and Leonid Gore. 2005. **The Fire**. House is lost except for the stuffed bear and a picture – about possessions. 32 pages
- Koja, Kathe. 2004. **The Blue Mirror**. 139 pages. While living with her alcoholic mother a teen finds refuge in art.
- Carey, Janet Lee. 2004. **The Double Life of Zoe Flynn**. 233 pages. Zoe's family has to live in a van for months so father can find work while Zoe keeps her middle school classmates from discovering she is homeless.
- Hubbard, Suzanna. 2004. **The Lady Who Lived in A Car**. 32 pages. K – 4.
- Laird, Elizabeth. 2003. **The Garbage King**. 336 pages. Novel about homeless street children in the slums in Ethiopia.
- Mackall, Dandi. 2003. **Silent Dreams**. 32 pages. Homeless in the early 20th C. Camilla and her aunt sneak into the Saturday silent movies. K – 3.
- McPhail, David. **The Teddy Bear**. 2002 Ages 4 – 8. A sweet, if romanticized tale of a homeless man who adopts a lost teddy bear and the young owner who lets him keep it. The bear, left behind at a diner, is accidentally thrown out and rescued from the trash by a homeless man. The child learns to adjust to the loss and the bear is left on a park bench briefly one day, where he is spotted by the young boy who owned him. He is excited to have found his bear but notices the homeless man's despair and gives him the bear. This is a bit of a stretch in relinquishment of a beloved toy but provides a story of compassion.
- Ayer, Eleanor. **Homeless Children** (Overview Series). "This book is certainly up-to-date, and presents in unbiased, well-reasoned discussion of the subject. There are copious notes and an equally list of books and other sources consulted, as well as contact information on organizations mentioned in the text." *School Library Journal* (October 2001)
- Hertensten, Jane. 1995. **Home is Where We Live: Life at a Shelter Through a Young Girl's Eyes**. Chicago: Cornerstone Press. K – 5. Presented through the Cornerstone Shelter in Chicago that humanizes and individualizes the aspects of a child's life and their fears in experiencing life in the shelter as part of their homeless situation. Part of the profits of the book go to the Cornerstone Shelter.
- Rosen, Michael. **Home** 1992. K – 4. This is a collection in which the theme of home is broadly interpreted and is said to have been created to benefit the cause of homelessness. Generally the work of authors and illustrators is complementary, making the variety of visual styles and typefaces interesting rather than jarring. Some selections are somewhat above the intended age range for this brief, lavishly illustrated format. The subject is of interest to all ages, and while children will not clamor for this book, adults will be able to use it effectively with them.

Peggy's Book Highlights

Gunning, Monica and Elaine Pedlar. 2004. **A Shelter in Our Car**. 32 pages. This is the story of a family from Jamaica who live in their car; the mother cannot find work and the book describes how the family meets the challenges. Children's Book Press has developed a Teacher's Guide to use with this book. The guide provides information about the book, which thematic units are covered by the guide, information about the author and artist. The guide continues with the detailed lesson plans that get the classroom ready, getting ready for reading, exploring the book, vocabulary development, reading comprehension with worksheets for the story map, literary response and analysis with a character analysis worksheet. The guide provides cross – curricular activities that cover Social Studies, Language Arts, Art, Math, and Science. A list of other related books is included, as well as the links to organizations providing both information and services related to homeless situations. http://www.childrensbookpress.org/guides/shelter/all_about.html



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 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
2626 Clearbrook Dr.
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
Phone 224/366-8623
Fax 847/378-6225
hcampbell@thecenterweb.org

Regional Office of Education #26 Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette Street
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Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness
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Visit us on the world wide web at <http://homeless.net> to receive FREE materials!

Our Home

To submit an article for OUR HOME please send to:
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Opening Doors

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

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Sad Story, Happy Ending

Thousands of readers, turning pages of the children's book, "Where Can I Build My Volcano?," wipe tears from their eyes. Author Pat Van Doren, retired photojournalist from Naperville, IL, portrays the heartbreaking realities of over 1.5 million homeless kids in this country. The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth recognized her stalwart efforts by bestowing upon her the 2006 NAEHCY Media award at their annual conference in Little Rock, AR, in November.

Over 5,000 copies have been sold of Van Doren's self-published book about the life of a homeless girl and her mom, with fans from Florida to Alaska. Additionally, Pat's photo of a young homeless boy, "Charlie," has become a recognized symbol of the country's 1.5 million homeless children and youth.

"Pat's been a steadfast advocate for homeless kids, putting aside her personal challenges to give from her heart and soul. Few people use their every fiber of self on behalf of others. Pat does that and so much more!" extols Diane Nilan, founder and president of HEAR US, a Naperville-based national nonprofit organization devoted to raising awareness about homelessness. Nilan, who has worked alongside Pat for 15 years on multitudes of homelessness advocacy projects, nominated her colleague and friend.

Retired State Representative Mary Lou Cowlshaw of Naperville describes Pat as "an extraordinary photojournalist with compassion, courage, conviction, imagination, stamina, charm and artistic liveliness." Cowlshaw was principal sponsor of "Charlie's Bill," a.k.a. the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act of 1994, the first legislation in the nation to guarantee rights of homeless children to attend school. She later shepherded the legislation to the capable hands of a national champion, Congresswoman Judy Biggert, R-13, who successfully led the process to implement the Illinois law on a national level.

Information about Pat and how to order her book can be found on the HEAR US website, www.hearus.us. Pat is one of the founding members of this national homelessness advocacy organization. HEAR US is producing **Big Losses**, a series of awareness videos for use in classrooms and communities featuring homeless kids talking about their homelessness. The first video is now available on the HEAR US web site.