



OUR HOME

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

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April 2008

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Domestic Violence and Homelessness and Housing

Peggy Dunn, Illinois Homeless Education Coordinator

Violence of any kind is hurtful for those involved, those listening, those watching; but we may not always put together the seriousness of domestic violence and its ties to homelessness for families in all strata of the community.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Public Law 109-162 was reauthorized in 2005 adding important housing provisions and Congress made some critical findings in the links between domestic violence and housing. VAWA provides protection for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The protections for housing cover only Public Housing and Section 8 for the discriminatory evictions and denial of housing based on domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. No private housing is covered.

VAWA 2005 does the following:

1. prohibits evictions based on real or perceived domestic or dating violence and stalking
2. explicitly creates an exception to the federal "One Strike Rule" which states that any drug-related and certain other criminal activity by any household member is grounds for eviction.
3. prohibited causes of eviction = assault by a family member, assault by a significant other not living in the household, damage to housing during an incident of domestic violence and noise from domestic violence.
4. may be evicted for other violations of the lease but may not be held to a higher standard than any other tenant (which is discrimination)
5. authorizes new funding for housing for survivors of abuse

Significance of domestic violence and homelessness:

- ACLU 2004 survey of 100 homeless mothers found that 25% had been abused in the past year
- U.S. Conference of Mayors 2005 – 50% of the 24 cities surveyed identified domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness for women
- National Network to End Domestic Violence 2007 – reports that on any given day 1,740 people were unable to find emergency shelter
- Reporting is most likely under estimated as victims are reluctant to report and the feelings of shame limit the ability to report and take action

Top Unmet Needs

- Domestic violence shelter beds
- Employment Assistance
- Legal Aid/Advocacy
- Child Care
- Transitional Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing

Student safety is the primary consideration of schools when working with homeless children and youth in domestic violence and should avoid actions, taken on behalf of the student, that might further disempower the parent living with domestic violence. Federal and state non-disclosure laws prohibit domestic violence agencies from providing personal client information to other agencies but... we can ask a parent to sign a release allowing information about their child(ren) be shared with the school district. Without the release, information sharing is most likely not going to occur.

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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 2008 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

BEST PRACTICES***A Community of Support***
Helen Campbell - ALRC

The article in this OUR HOME about the partnerships forged by Decatur's Project Success serves as the inspiration for this **Best Practices**. In these times of increased needs and shrinking resources, finding new and unique sources of support is critical.

Key to getting support from the community is spreading the word about family homelessness and how it effects children. Seek out opportunities to speak about it to civic organizations, churches, women's groups, agencies, and governmental groups. Often just becoming aware of the problem in the community will inspire groups to contribute money, start a drive, or initiate a new project.

How about local businesses? Perhaps the local grocery store would contribute gift cards for food and incidentals for homeless families or an office supply store would help out with school supplies. Maybe a local company would initiate a workplace campaign for funds or goods to benefit homeless families.

Have you approached local colleges or universities? You might get a volunteer intern or even needed services like dental care, eye exams, or counseling. Student organizations from colleges or high schools might help organize and run a drive.

The YMCA, park district, or other community organization might give scholarships for summer camp or enrichment classes to homeless children.

Possible sources of support:

- Colleges & universities
- Local businesses & corporations
- Civic, non-profit, & community organizations
- Church & women's groups
- Museums, zoos, cultural arts associations
- Alumni associations
- City council members or elected officials
- Student organizations
- County & city government human services departments

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Homeless Liaisons should contact their local domestic violence shelters to establish the beginnings or the addition of a good working relationship to assist families and their children in gaining access to education and other homeless education services.

**Partnerships Enhance Services for Homeless Students**

Linda Rowden

Decatur's Project Success Homeless Initiative has continually developed new community partnerships since the program's inception in 2004. These partnerships bring many extra services and resources to Decatur's homeless youth and their families.

Following a presentation to Junior Welfare Association (a local women's organization) about the number of homeless children residing in shelters, cars, motels, etc. in Decatur, Illinois, the organization members were extremely moved. They voted to make these children a priority. Planning began, meetings with Project Success were held, and the results have been phenomenal. Those discussions resulted in a backpack project providing a fully outfitted backpack, complete with school supplies, hygiene items, story books, and more, for each homeless child identified and referred to Project Success.

Junior Welfare Association members took their support a step further upon hearing about a 6-year old homeless child who received a new pair of shoes from Project Success. They were moved to tears when the child was heard to say, "this is the best day of my life...I got brand new shoes, and I got to wear the socks today." The child explained that he and his little brother shared one pair of socks, and this was his day to wear them. This story was the catalyst for Junior Welfare to establish a coupon program that provides each homeless child who needs them with shoes, socks, underwear, and sports bras (\$40 limit each) from a local store.

When Junior Welfare learned that Project Success also works with Pre-K aged homeless children, they immediately put together bags geared to younger children containing hygiene products, books, toys, etc. so the little children wouldn't feel left out. They also had a fundraiser specifically to purchase large dressed teddy bears that were distributed to pre-school aged homeless children.

Another partnership between Project Success and Caterpillar, Inc. (CAT) resulted in employees donating \$7,500+ from their recycling efforts each of the last two years. This went to purchase new hats, gloves, and coats for homeless and other needy children at Christmas time. Newspaper employees were so moved by an article on the CAT Coat Project, that they donated proceeds from their recent fundraising efforts to Project Success for use with the homeless children.

After reading newspaper articles featuring Project Success' efforts to serve homeless children and families, numerous other community organizations and individuals have enthusiastically offered their support—both financial and material—to help those in need. A Decatur Leadership Institute group embraced the homeless project and developed "nap-sacks" that contained everything needed for sweet dreams—size-appropriate new pajamas, tooth brush, toothpaste, stuffed animal, and a small blanket/throw. The "nap-sacks" were distributed to homeless youth in Pre-K through high school.

Getting the word out in our communities and beyond about the living conditions of many homeless children is a great first step in building excellent partnerships. Additional advocates and resources allow Project Success to better serve Decatur's homeless population and give the children a better chance to succeed in school and become contributing members of society.

Senioritis?

Sue Kanthak, Rockford Public Schools

As the school year winds down, most seniors are beginning to plan for their last summer of freedom. Their transcripts have been sent in to colleges and for the most part they know where they will be next year. They begin to relax and let loose. This is not the case for seniors that have no housing. Senior year is a time for homeless seniors to take stock in their lives and decide which direction they want to take. The safety net of family is not there for homeless kids. They don't have the freedom to experiment with which direction they want to take their lives.

The last two years the Rockford Public Schools Homeless Services program tried something different! We assigned one person to just follow the seniors and make sure they were staying on course for graduation. What happened was a surprise to all of us. Where **our** goal was to help get students graduated, **their** goals were much loftier. During that time 24 seniors experiencing homelessness walked across stage to receive their diplomas in June! Eighteen of these students went on to college. Our kids have been accepted to Loyola, SIU, NIU, South Dakota University, Columbia (Chicago), Cordon Bleu, Clarke College and Rock Valley Community College.

Our kids also have been working hard to receive scholarships and awards. *George* has won a Rockford Area Minority Management scholarship as well as a wonderful financial aid package that will enable him to attend SIU. He is not sure what he wants to become, but he knows he wants to go to college and break out of the poverty cycle. *Luis* is hoping to become a radiologist and is waiting to hear from a college in Chicago. *Cassandra* is entering NIU and won a Kiwanis Scholarship as well as an award for her work in the community and her church. She hopes to become a Neo-Natal nurse. *Teresa* has been accepted at Loyola and has her eyes set on pre-med. *Alexandria* will be going to NIU. *Renee* completed volunteer hours needed for a community scholarship by helping with our clothes closet. Complete with a Learning Disability, she has gone on to the Cordon Blue culinary school and specializes in seafood! Our students are studying to become nurses, police officers, computer programmers, pharmacists, theater producers, and beauticians.

The end of the year is always taxing for our "Senior Tutor". She has fought with counselors, principals, college financial aid people, athletic directors, attendance officers, and social workers to make sure seniors were on track to graduate. She assisted with ACT testing and FAFSA applications as well as college application essays and referral letters. Fortunately, after July 1, 2009, our tutor will not have to work as hard trying to get the FAFSA filled out. After that day, unaccompanied youth can file as independent students with a letter from a shelter, homeless liaison, or other suitable person. This removes the need to contact estranged parents or to contact individual colleges to have the student declared independent. The Senior Tutor makes sure all our seniors are prepared to walk across the stage in a cap and gown and own a yearbook for their senior year. They say it only takes one person to believe in a kid and that will make all the difference in that child's future. Our Senior Tutor program was built on that philosophy and it **works!** Kudos to our seniors and many thanks to our Senior Tutor.

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/>

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**
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
Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone 309/837-4821
Fax 309/837-2887
mworthin@roe26.net

*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:
Eileen Worthington
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Suite 200
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We're on the Web! <http://homelessed.net>

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January 2008 Flooding

Jim Moberly, Area IV Lead Liaison, ROE #32 - Iroquois / Kankakee

One never knows when nature will unleash its fury. On Wednesday, January 9, 2008, Central Illinois received approximately six inches of rainfall. During the previous week, the same area had been blanketed with approximately ten inches of snow. With the ground still frozen, all of this precipitation runoff had nowhere to go except into ditches, storm sewers, streams, and rivers.

In the Watseka area, all of this runoff resulted in major flooding – the worst since the mid 1950s. As the river rose, approximately 350 homes were flooded, displacing some 500 people, of which 270 were school-age children. All schools in the Iroquois County CUSD #9 were closed for several days. However, the K-2 school building in Watseka was so severely damaged by water that at first school officials did not think that the school would reopen until next school year. Due to the huge support of the community and surrounding area, the school was able to open within a couple of weeks.

In the Pontiac area, approximately 700 homes were flooded. 400 of these homes were severely damaged. In Pontiac CCSD #429, one school received water damage and approximately 75 students were displaced. In Pontiac HSD #90 approximately 27 students were displaced. School was only disrupted for a couple of days.

Overwhelming support from community agencies, surrounding school districts, and anonymous donors helped provide clothing, school supplies, and money. A big thank you to Peggy Dunn, ISBE State Homeless Coordinator, for providing 200 backpacks, toiletry packs, and school supplies to these school districts. The supplies were delivered on Friday, February 22, 2008. The school districts were extremely grateful.

NAEHYC 20th Annual Conference

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

NAEHYC'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. NAEHCY's 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>.