



# OUR HOME

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

OUR HOME

May 2005

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**“SUCCESS COMES IN CANS”**  
*Perspectives of a New Liaison*

Ann Schwarm  
Area V Lead Liaison - ROE #3 Bond, Effingham, Fayette

**DATA COLLECTION**

In April, via the ISBE IWAS system, the homeless data collection form became available. Each district has been asked to provide the information appropriate for their district. Each local liaison has received, 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

**“Success Comes in Cans”**  
*Perspectives of a New Liaison*

**by Ann M. Schwarm, Area V Lead Liaison, ROE #3**

In January, I somewhat reluctantly began my responsibilities as the Lead Local Liaison for Area V after our staff member, Bob Bowen, resigned to take a position as a major with the Illinois Department of Corrections. Educators in southwestern Illinois’ Area V, along with friends and co-workers at ROE #3, hated to see Bob leave, but we wished him well as he returned to a position in his chosen career field of law enforcement.

In May, I reflect upon the change in my own career path and am thankful for this most recent turn my winding road has taken. Here is why: The people! All the people! Clients and consultants, experienced experts (whom I rely upon) and needy novices (just like me), educators and social workers, state staffers and local stakeholders.

They all have one thing in common - a “can-do” attitude. Joel Weldon, a popu-

lar motivational speaker in the 1980s, had an unusual business card. It was a small can with this saying on a label wrapped around it: “Success comes in cans, not in cannots.” The people I have met through McKinney-Vento possess this same spirit of optimism and drive.

It had been a long time since I’d walked into a room where I didn’t know anyone, not one soul. In February, I did just that when I attended a Continuum of Care meeting in Centralia. The members welcomed me and enlightened me with their discussions. I began to capture a vision of the needs our rural homeless families have and the difficulties they face. Sitting quietly and simply absorbing the official discussions and casual conversations helped me fill in some of the gaps in my education on the issues. What’s more, the spirit of service possessed by the continuum members was something I could almost feel. It was in their words and in their actions. I was hooked. I asked to join this group again a week later at their first gathering for a

“Dialogue on Poverty,” an episode of an event I learned was taking place throughout the state.

At the Dialogue, I met even more stakeholders in solving the problems faced by the neediest of our rural citizens. U of I Extension staff, health department nurses, state legislative staffers, educators, as well as case managers for the housing authority filled the room, thinking hard and creatively about the problems and, more importantly, about the solutions. This time when I entered the room, I did know a few names and they seemed to consider me one of their own.

In Chicago at the state liaison meeting, it was the same. I may be the “new kid,” but the problems faced by homeless families are too grave to be slow on the uptake and there are expectations to learn fast. I was overwhelmed with the offers of help. Just listening to the good work being accomplished by my colleagues inspired me and helped me capture a vision for my own work. I’d written the original grant proposal for our ROE

### Best Practices

The school year is drawing to a close. Time to thank those who have made our work easier during the past months, relax a moment...and then look ahead to next year!

Several school districts have a spring tradition of thanking the transportation department for its help in getting children back to their school of origin or to their new neighborhood school in a friendly, helpful way. The liaison throws a party for bus drivers and staff, complete with a large sheet cake in the shape of a yellow school bus. Typically, certain people are honored for going above and beyond at these events.

A shelter staff member who works closely with her district's liaison shared this at a recent meeting: the two of them have arranged routes with the bus scheduler so that children staying at the shelter are picked up first in the morning and dropped off "home" last in the afternoon. That way, no other students need to know their current living situation. This kind of sensitivity is a great example of "going above and beyond"

During the summer, try to find out whether your district's secretaries will attend a training at which you could speak and share tip sheets and other materials. You could give them a gift pack such as the one Opening Doors created two years ago, or hand-deliver packs to them when you are near the schools early in the fall. (Contact Opening Doors for gift-pack materials.) Face-to-face moments make such a difference!

Find out about back-to-school fairs in your area and ask to be included in them. Hopefully, you could put up a display, speak with families, and hand out materials. This might be a chance to pick up on clues about families who could use your assistance, especially doubled-up ones.

so I was familiar, in an academic way, with the services and potential for services through the program, but Bob had been the person who had carried out the mission and actually embraced the responsibilities. I simply oversaw his activities. Now I needed to establish my own relationship to this work, and the pieces were finally coming together. I came home with new enthusiasm and a long list of to do's.

In late April, I attended another Continuum of Care meeting in Effingham. I had a chance to interact with people whom I'd met over the phone as we worked through school-related homeless issues. The program focused on shelters. It was as if the shelter directors, as they spoke with passion and purpose, were opening the doors to their day-to-day world to the rest of us there. We had a chance to peek inside and glimpse their frustrations and celebrate with them their successes. We heard from two young women who had benefited from the services made available to them through the agencies present and who were back on the road to financial security, including a safe and sound home for themselves and their children.

Again, the spirit of "can do, will do" permeated the room. People do this work not because they *have to* but because they *want to*. One of my Area V school district's local liaisons was seated at my table during the meeting. He called the next day and told me how his passion for a responsibility which had once been just an assignment he hadn't sought--or wanted--had developed as he listened to the professionals on the front line and the individuals who benefited from their care and concern. I thought, I am not alone here. He could feel it, too. He is anxious to learn more and has signed up for our next training, an Illinois' Administrators Academy, although he doesn't officially need it. He is coming because he wants to know more—the best reason for engaging in staff development.

The professionals who work with the McKinney-Vento Program have embraced me, the newcomer to this initiative, and supported me with ideas, advice, information, help with trainings, and more. They were willing to do this for me, a relatively self-sufficient individual. How much more they must reach out to the children and families they serve on a day-to-day basis. I am truly humbled and inspired.

So many of the "problems" I have had the opportunity to help "solve" in the years gone by in my professional life have seemed somewhat trivial. The problems we try to solve through this initiative are profound. However, over the past six months I have met a host of committed individuals dedicated to solving them. I believe that together, with all of us working hard and smart, doing our parts, we CAN make a difference in the lives of children and their families. I have heard a lot in my information and inspiration-gathering quest, but I don't believe I have heard the word *cannot*. I don't think I will be hearing it anytime soon.

Thank you for your help over these past few months. I am honored to now be working alongside you in this important endeavor.

### 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](mailto:homeless@serve.org)

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP?

*Matt Hanafee, Executive Director  
Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness*

Do you have trouble finding resources to help homeless families and youth? One of the first places to look is your local Continuum of Care (CoC). This is a network of local governments, community organizations and non-profit agencies that are geographically linked together to cover the service needs of the entire state. The area can be a single city or county or a group of counties.

CoCs were formed in the mid-1990's to distribute funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The idea was for local communities to attempt to tackle the problems of homelessness through a comprehensive system of housing and services, from emergency shelter to permanent housing. The goal: to help communities develop seamless systems which assist individuals and families in achieving independent living.

Four main functions of CoCs are outreach and assessment, emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive services, and permanent housing. Many of them have comprehensive directories of local community resources to help homeless and at-risk individuals and families. Participants in CoCs include local governments, non-profit service providers, housing developers, businesses, faith communities and educators. For a list of contacts for the CoC in your area, you can go to <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/cont/coc/il/index.cfm>.

Your local CoC has brought essential resources into your local community. Last year, over 65 million dollars was awarded to the 21 CoCs in Illinois. This ranged from the more than 36 million awarded to the City of Chicago to just under \$200,000 granted to the City and County of De Kalb. In addition to providing these vital funds for services and shelter, CoCs are working to raise awareness of problems and solutions to homelessness. Many have taken an active role in training the local homeless liaisons that are required in every school district.

In addition to federal dollars, your local CoC has access to state funds under the Homeless Prevention Program. Since 2000, ten of millions of dollars have been distributed to needy families and individuals to keep them in their homes. Nearly 4,000 households are assisted every year. Homeless Prevention dollars can be used to overcome a temporary economic crisis by paying back rent or utilities. In some cases, monies can be used for security deposits to secure a new home.



## 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 Dhart, 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!



## Save the Date

### National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

*17th Annual Conference  
October 22 - 25, 2005  
Hyatt Regency New Orleans  
New Orleans, LA*

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:mworthin@roe26.k12.il.us)

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

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## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

The National Alliance to End Homelessness  
**Family Homelessness in Our Nation and Community:  
A Problem with a Solution**

*<http://www.hoopsforthehomeless.org/pressroom/PDF/HoopsPaperFinal.pdf>*

**Reading on the Go!**  
**Students Who Are Highly Mobile and Reading Instruction**  
*[http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/reading\\_on\\_the\\_go.pdf](http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/reading_on_the_go.pdf)*

This NCHE manuscript is the outcome of the first year of a two-year project designed to explore what works in reading instruction for students who are highly mobile. It summarizes the finds of a review of literature on teaching reading to highly mobile students.

**Students on the Move:**  
**Reaching and Teaching Highly Mobile Children and Youth**  
*[http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/highly\\_mobile.pdf](http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/highly_mobile.pdf)*

This handbook synthesizes research on the education of various subpopulations of students who tend to be highly mobile and explores common characteristics and significant differences. Subpopulations explored include migratory children and youth, children and youth experiencing homelessness, children of military families, and students experiencing mobility on a global scale.