



OUR HOME

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

OUR HOME

November 2007

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Up Close and Personal: Don't Mess With Mother Nature

Linda Delimata, Area 2 Lead Liaison and Lois Porter, Liaison - ROE #47

Natural disasters have plagued our communities in catastrophic ways. In the wake of these disasters homelessness for our children and their families, as well as the school districts who serve them, has become a reality. In Area II there have been two cities hit hard by excessive rains and flooding, both during the summer and prior to school opening.

Rockford was battered with storms during the 2006-2007 school year, and was once again flooded just before the opening of school. On August 7, 2007, the city received 1.23 inches of rain setting an all time record for Rockford's wettest month and left about 68 families homeless. Although school had not yet started there was a lot that the School District Liaisons had to accomplish to prepare for the opening of schools. The students had to have temporary living arrangements, which brought with it the need to find alternate transportation, new paperwork, assessment of needs, etc. The Rockford liaisons were prepared with clothing, hygiene items, school supplies, books, toys, etc. However, this is the second major flood in a very short time and their resources were severely tapped.

Sycamore was another one of the cities hit by a storm. In response to the flooding, rescue crews evacuated the Evergreen Village Mobile Home Park in Sycamore early Friday morning, August 24, 2007, using boats to navigate water that reached depths of a few feet. Members of the American Red Cross Disaster Response Team assisted in evacuating some of the residents from their homes and provided residents with food and cots. They also provided the residents with vouchers for the purchase of new clothing, groceries, essential medications, bedding, essential furnishings, shelter accommodations and other items to meet emergency needs. Officials from the Voluntary Action Center (VAC) provided transportation to the shelter.

Many residents of the Evergreen Village Mobile Home Park were children and youth that attended the Sycamore Public School District. Just days after the flood, school started on Tuesday, August 27, 2007. Educators needed to make special preparations to open school this year. The school district's homeless liaison, Phyllis Mobile, took full reigns with the assistance of Shanna Blair, school social worker. They coordinated efforts and kept in close contact with the Area II Lead Liaison. They vigorously communicated the needs of the students who were now identified as homeless. The "common form" was completed by the homeless liaison who had many staff working with her. They made arrangements to get the students living in shelters or staying with families/friends in or outside of the school district bussed to school. As they followed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education disaster plan, the school district served an estimated 63 students attending either the elementary, middle or high school affected by the flood as follows:

- Transportation – A list of students and their whereabouts was obtained and busses were deployed as needed to shelters. If family or school staff were transporting the students that was recorded.
- School Supplies – 70 book bags were taken to the North Elementary School (the drop off center) from our *Feed the Children* shipment.
- Free Lunch applications were immediately completed.
- Waiver of school fees was implemented.

After the flood, an immediate plea went out to the community for donations headed by Shanna Blair, social worker. She reported that North Elementary School in Sycamore held an "Open Gym" to help provide families with items they had lost during the flood. Clothing, food, household items and gift certificates were donated by generous community members.

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NCLB DATA COLLECTION FOR FY 2007 A MAJOR SUCCESS

School districts in Illinois need to be especially proud this year with an unprecedented 100% successful report of data on homeless children in Illinois. The increase is not surprising - over 22,000 children and youth identified this year in Illinois - an increase of almost 4,000 children. I want to thank every school district for submitting their reports this year and for helping to successfully provide services to homeless families, children and youth in Illinois.

Peggy Dunn

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**Did You Get the School Year Off to a Good Start?****New Staff?**

Do you have new staff members at your school? Whether you have new secretaries, social workers, teachers, custodians, food service personnel or other staff, they should all have an understanding of the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth. Did you find out if they had any training in previous positions? How about planning a short staff meeting for all new staff? You can show the *Open the Doors to All Children* video which explains homeless education rights or you could invite your homeless education district liaison to do a Q & A and include seasoned staff as well. If you would like an *Open the Doors to All Children* DVD, contact Helen Campbell of *Opening Doors* at 224-366-8623 or hcampbell@thecenterweb.org.

Posters Up?

Do you have at least one poster displayed with homeless education information? Is it somewhere that families are likely to see it? You can order posters online at www.homelessed.net or use the order form included in this newsletter. While you are at it, look over the material listed on the order form and order some tip sheets and/or brochures for school personnel, community organizations, and families.

Who is the Homeless Education Liaison for Your District?

Do you know who your district liaison is? It's a good idea to have their contact information handy for you and all front-line staff members. If you don't know who the district liaison is, you can find that information at www.isbe.net/homeless.

KIDS Foundation Helping Students in Franklin & Williamson Counties

Mickey Sullivan, Area 6 Lead Liaison - ROE #21

K.I.D.S. (Kids In Difficult Situations) Foundation, a local, non-profit organization, was created in January 2002 to help at-risk children in Franklin and Williamson Counties. Each year the Franklin/Williamson Regional Office of Education has more requests for assistance for needy students than they have resources available. In order to fill these requests, members of the education community in Franklin and Williamson Counties formed the non-profit organization to provide aid to students in need. This aid includes the unusual items that are not covered by many state assistance funds such as emergency health care (including medical, dental, and eye care), educational field trips, rent, utilities, scholarships, school supplies, and clothing. As state funds for assistance decrease each year KIDS Foundation has become a critical resource for helping local students. KIDS Foundation has experienced great success and is recognized throughout the state of Illinois as a model for other counties to provide additional resources for their students.

KIDS Foundation board members include: President: Mickey Sullivan, Vice President: Debbie Wiley, Treasurer: Johna Schullian, and Board Members: Sheila Ahlgren, Mike Boyd, Cindy Robinson, Lisa Heise, Frances Zielke, Kurt Endebrock and Ex-officio member: Regional Superintendent, Matt Donkin.

The board members of KIDS Foundation refer to the foundation as the "teacher's foundation" because requests for help come from the teachers *and*, most importantly, teachers have become the main monetary contributors. The funds used to fill the requests are largely obtained by payroll deductions from school personnel of Franklin and Williamson counties. Franklin/Williamson Regional Superintendent, Matt Donkin, and the members of KIDS Foundation would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the foundation and encourage those of you who have not, to please consider helping them help the students. While this non-profit organization is not part of the Regional Office of Education, Mr. Donkin's office has agreed to cover all overhead expenses therefore, 100% of contributions go directly to our "K.I.D.S."

Anyone wishing to contribute to KIDS Foundation may do so by mailing your donation to: KIDS Foundation, Attn: Johna Schullian, 404 N Monroe, Marion IL 62959 or call 618-998-1283.



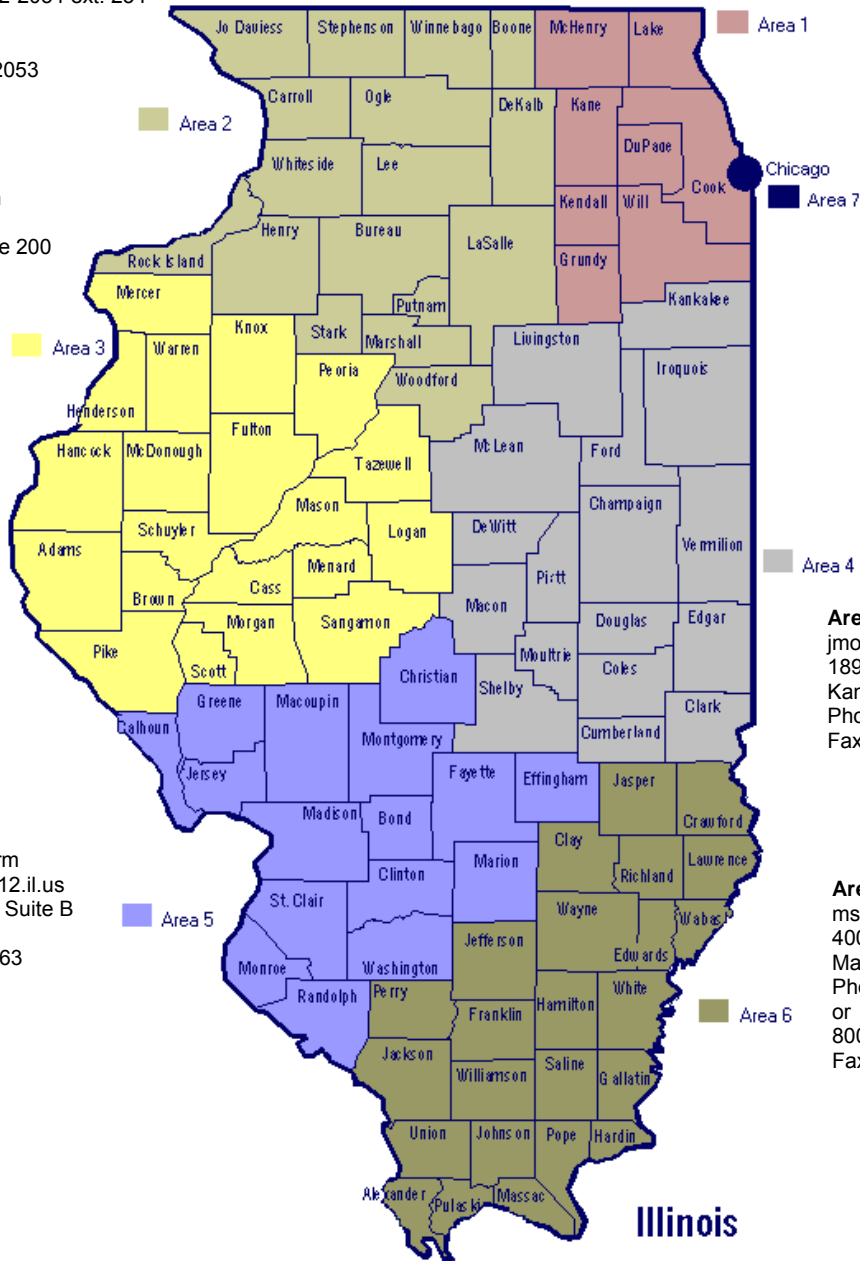
Front Row: Sheila Ahlgren, Johna Schullian, Mickey Sullivan, Cindy Robinson, Frances Zielke
Back Row: Lisa Heise, Matt Donkin, Kurt Endebrock, Mike Boyd, Debbie Wiley

Illinois McKinney – Vento Homeless Programs

Area 2 – Linda Delimata
 ldelimata@leeogle.org
 7772 Clinton St
 Dixon, IL 61021
 Phone: (815) 652-2054 ext. 234
 or
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 Fax: (815) 652-2053

Area 1 – Dave Levek
 dlevek@willcountyillinois.com
 702 West Maple St
 New Lenox, IL 60451
 Phone: (815) 740-8360
 Fax: (815) 740-4788

Area 3 - Eileen Worthington
 mworthing@roe26.k12.il.us
 130 South Lafayette St-Suite 200
 Macomb, IL 61455
 Phone: (309) 837-4821
 Fax: (309) 837-2887



Area 7 – Patricia Rivera
 privera@cps.k12.il.us
 125 S. Clark
 Chicago, IL 60603
 Phone: (773) 553-2242
 Fax: (773) 553-2182

Area 4 – Jim Moberly
 jmoberly@i-kan.org
 189 East Court St - Suite 600
 Kankakee, IL 60901
 Phone: (815) 937-2950
 Fax: (815) 937-2921

Area 5 – Ann Schwarm
 aschwarm@fayette.k12.il.us
 1805 W. Fletcher St - Suite B
 Vandalia IL 62471
 Phone: (618) 283-1763
 Fax: (618) 283-9833

Area 6 – Mickey Sullivan
 msullivan@roe21.k12.il.us
 4004 N Monroe St
 Marion, IL 62959
 Phone: (618) 998-1283
 or
 800-455-5843
 Fax: (618) 998-9226

Illinois State Board of Education
 Peggy Dunn, Principal Consultant
 madunn@isbe.net
 100 North First St - E230
 Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
 Phone: (217) 782-2948
 Fax: (217) 524-8750
 Web Site: isbe.net

Opening Doors
 Adult Learning Resource Center
 Helen Campbell, Coordinator
 hcampbell@thecenterweb.org
 2626 S. Clearbrook Dr
 Arlington Heights, IL 60005
 Phone: (224) 366-8623
 Fax: (847) 378-6225
 Web Site: <http://homelessed.net>

NO BARRIERS



No Barriers DVD Available

Ann Schwarm, Area 5 Lead Liaison, ROE #3

It started as a summer project for a teacher and a student and ended up as a series of “teachable moments” for an entire class of students and the 2007 Illinois Teacher of the Year.

After producing the training film, *Making Deposits*, the story of a “day in the life” of the Good Samaritan House Shelter in Granite City, Illinois, the Area V McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Team, knew it wanted another film to use at trainings. This one needed to be shorter in length (*Making Deposits* is about 15 minutes long). So, Ann Schwarm contacted the media class at Effingham High School which is co-taught by Joe Fatheree. When asked to coordinate the project, Fatheree was quick to respond that he’d need a student to work with him. Thus, Aaron Golden, a rising senior at Effingham High School during the summer of 2006 and Fatheree combined efforts to research, write, direct, edit and produce the new training video, *No Barriers*.

The five-minute training video deals very generally with the details of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Education Act and includes interviews with educators and others to help personalize the statistics revealed in the film. Special effects and original music enhance the message carried by this training tool.

While making the film, Fatheree and Golden discovered there was more to “say” about homelessness and poverty than could be conveyed during the original project. Therefore, when the 2006-2007 school year started, Fatheree involved other members of his class in the production of another film, *Voices of Poverty*. This film was shown during Fatheree’s 2007 Illinois Teacher of the Year keynote during the **No Child Left Behind Conference** in Chicago, February 2007.

DVDs, including both films--*No Barriers* and *Voices of Poverty*-- are available while supplies last. A limited number of the *Making Deposits* DVD are also available. To receive either DVD, send \$5 to cover the cost of mailing and a note with the DVD title(s) and the shipping address, to The Educational Services Division, ROE #3, 1805 W. Fletcher St., Suite B, Vandalia, IL 62471. To receive both DVDs please send \$7.50 to cover mailing costs.

Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program VISTA Volunteers

Adam Ballard, VISTA Member

The Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program received a grant from the Corporation for National Service in February 2006 to provide services to homeless students through the Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) program. The VISTA members volunteer for one year of service and receive a nominal stipend from the Corporation for National Service. Currently, there 6 VISTA members working to set up after-school programs in shelters where many homeless CPS students reside. The program is called Chicago HOPES (Heightening Opportunity and Potential for Educational Success). It is an initiative that empowers homeless students to succeed academically and was created to fill the void of academic assistance for homeless Chicago Public School students residing in shelters. With the goal of sustainability, the VISTA members collaborate with schools, shelters, and communities to establish shelter-based, after-school tutoring and cultural enrichment opportunities. This educational support, provided by committed and caring volunteers, helps students to break the cycle of homelessness that threatens their futures and communities.

The geographic areas served by Chicago HOPES include Uptown, Ashburn, Englewood, and Brighton Park, all disadvantaged and underserved communities in Chicago. HOPES was begun by the initial group of AmeriCorps* VISTA volunteers in Fall 2006, and continues to be developed and overseen solely by VISTAs as the project enters its second year. In addition to work developing, maintaining, and expanding HOPES, the VISTA members have also actively sought out funding for what was originally a project with no budget. As of the end of the past fiscal year, they have raised \$23,000 in grants and other financial support.

Program Impact - This past school year, over 85 volunteer tutors spent 1020 hours tutoring 75 Chicago HOPES participants. In addition to these numbers, VISTA members have received additional feedback that demonstrates the potential of the program to continue to effect positive impact on students’ lives. This past semester, they heard from a shelter director that Chicago HOPES has changed the chaotic atmosphere of the shelter; children who once had nothing to do after school are now enthusiastic about tutoring and look forward to the attention and assistance they receive from volunteers. For example, Robert, a particularly withdrawn third-grader, had a great time interacting with peers and tutors during a clay workshop facilitated by an instructor from Lillstreet Art Center. Another student, Marquis, earned the only A in his class for a solar system model he and a tutor creatively fashioned out of tape and string. Kendra, a student whose negative attitude once disrupted other students, spent the entire spring semester reading as many books as she could while challenging any negative thinking exhibited by her peers.

These stories are just the beginning. With the program already operating at our current capacity, and greater expansion planned in the future, there will be many more young lives to benefit through the hard work of everyone involved with Chicago HOPES.



ORDER FORM – Free Materials

Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: () _____ Fax: () _____ E-mail: _____

Indicate quantity of each item on the blank line to the left. UP TO TEN COPIES OF ANY ITEM MAY BE ORDERED. If you wish more than ten, we will send a camera-ready master for additional copies. Many of these documents may be downloaded directed from the Opening Doors web at www.homelessed.net.

General Information

- _____ (A1) **What This Project is About**, the goals of and partners in *Opening Doors*
- _____ (A2) **Fact Sheet: Homeless Children – Who Are They?**
- _____ (A3) **Best Practices Tip Sheet**
- _____ (A4) **Lunch Box News**, vol. 2, a booklet about schools' responsibilities to identify and assist homeless children
- _____ (A5) **Homeless Education: An Introduction to the Issues**, from the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)

Law and Policy

- _____ (B1) **Department of Education School Enrollment Guidelines: Federal Register**, 3-8-02
- _____ (B2) **The Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act**
- _____ (B3) **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**
- _____ (B4) **The Policy of the Illinois State Board of Education on the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**
- _____ (B5-a) **The Educational Rights of Illinois' Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**, a tri-fold brochure
- _____ (B5-b) **Educational Rights** brochure in low-level-reader format
- _____ (B5-c) **Educational Rights** brochure in low-level-reader format *Spanish*
- _____ (B5-d) **Educational Rights** brochure in low-level-reader format *Polish*
- _____ (B5-e) **Educational Rights** brochure in low-level-reader format *Arabic*
- _____ (B5-f) **Educational Rights** brochure in low-level-reader format *French*
- _____ (B6) **Dispute Resolution Guidelines**

Information for School Personnel

- _____ (C1) **Tips for Identifying/Recognizing Homeless Children & Youth: Common Characteristics**
- _____ (C2) **Tip Sheet for Principals**, helpful hints for working with homeless children
- _____ (C3) **Tip Sheet for Teachers**, helpful hints
- _____ (C4) **Tip Sheet for Secretaries and Enrolling Staff**, helpful hints

Continued on back

- _____ (C5) **Do You Have Homeless Children in Your Classroom?** a guide to help teachers recognize behaviors of homeless students and assist homeless students in class
- _____ (C6) **What a School Nurse Can Do to Help Homeless Children**, hints for nurses
- _____ (C7) **What Student Support Services Staff Can Do to Help Homeless Students**
- _____ (C8) **Suggested Activities for Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week**
- _____ (C9) **Locating Community Resources for Homeless Students**
- _____ (C10) **Problems and Solutions in Educating Homeless Children and Youth**
- _____ (C11) **Categorical Eligibility of Homeless Students for Free Meal Benefits**
- _____ (C12) **Youth Brochure**, tri-fold brochure for school and shelter staff
- _____ (C13) **Youth Brochure**, tri-fold brochure for unaccompanied youth
- _____ (C14) **Tip Sheet – School Fee Waivers**, helpful hints

Information for Shelter Staff

- _____ (D1) **How to Help Homeless Children in School: Information for Shelter Staff**
- _____ (D2) **School Notification Form**, an enrollment form that shelters may fax to schools

Posters

- _____ (E1-a) **Getting Your Child in School**, 8 ½” x 11” poster for homeless families and agencies which advocate for homeless families
- _____ (E1-b) **Getting Your Child in School**, 11” x 17” poster, as above
- _____ (E1-c) **Inscribiendo a Su Hijo(a) en la Escuela**, 8 ½” x 11” poster, as above *Spanish*
- _____ (E1-d) **Getting Your Child in School**, 8 ½” x 11” poster, as above *Polish*
- _____ (E1-e) **Getting Your Child in School**, 8 ½” x 11” poster, as above *Arabic*
- _____ (E1-f) **Getting Your Child in School**, 8 ½” x 11” poster, as above *French*
- _____ (E2-a) **Homeless Children Have The Right**, poster for school personnel, outlining the legal responsibilities of schools. 8 ½”x 11” *English*
- _____ (E2-b) **Niños Desamparados Tienen el Derecho a Una Educación Pública Gratis y Adecuada**, poster, as above, 8 ½” x 11” *Spanish*
- _____ (E3-a) **For Unaccompanied Youth: get UP & go to school**, 11”x17” *English with tear-off information*
- _____ (E3-b) **For Unaccompanied Youth: Levantate y VE a la escuela**, 11”x17” *Spanish* “ “

Other

- _____ (F1) **Opening Doors Videotape Order Form** (DVD version may also be borrowed from your Regional Offices of Education for copying.)
- _____ (F2-a) **Should My Child Change Schools if We Become Homeless?** tri-fold brochure *English*.
- _____ (F2-b) **¿Deberé cambiar a mi hijo de escuela si nos quedamos sin vivienda?** tri-fold brochure, as above *Spanish*.
- _____ (F2-c) **Should My Child Change Schools...?** tri-fold brochure, as above *Polish*
- _____ (F2-d) **Should My Child Change Schools...?** tri-fold brochure, as above *Arabic*
- _____ (F2-e) **Should My Child Change Schools...?** tri-fold brochure, as above *French*
- _____ (F3) **Magnet: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth** has *Opening Doors* contact information such as phone and fax numbers and web address.

Opening Doors is an Illinois State Board of Education 100% grant-funded project under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Program. The goal of this project is to disseminate information about the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth. *Please feel free to copy and distribute these materials as needed.*

Return this form to:

Helen Campbell
Opening Doors
2626 S. Clearbrook Dr.
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

Phone: (224) 366-8623
Fax: (847) 378-6225
E-mail: hcampbell@thecenterweb.org
Web Address: <http://homelessed.net>

7/07

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We know first hand the kind of responses there are to the natural disasters of the past few years, such as Katrina and Rita. Disasters can occur with little or no warning. McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Programs throughout the nation *scream* that public school districts must be prepared to respond efficiently to the possibility of large numbers of homeless families and youth. Well! That was the case for the Lee/Ogle Regional Office of Education and the liaisons in Rockford and Sycamore.

Peggy Dunn, State Homeless Education Coordinator, has been following the floods in Illinois and has been communicating with the Area Homeless Liaisons along with the school districts' liaisons. In Sycamore they requested more hygiene products for children and youth. Area II provided assistance with these products that included soap, shampoo, pocket tissue, body lotion, etc. The items were put in individual plastic bags and taken to Sycamore's North Elementary School, where Principal Kathy Speiwak included them in supplies given to students in bookbags. As Peggy Dunn said, "It's still not over – it will take time for the families to regain housing and other things lost in the flood."

Many lessons were learned during these disasters. The outreach and assistance from the communities was phenomenal, and provided much needed shelter and supplies. School districts responded with dedicated staff to ensure the needs of the children and families were addressed, and that students were able to attend school while dealing with the flooding without missing days. Knowing where everyone ended up, and completing the paperwork was a huge task, but so essential in the smooth operation of the beginning of the school year. Understanding of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act was tantamount to the actions taken during the catastrophe.

Although these two natural disasters are over, the children will continue to need services of the school districts' liaisons to ensure stability in their educational services for the rest of the year at minimum.

Back to School Fairs

Jim Moberly, Area IV Lead Liaison, ROE #32

With the start of a new school year and the need for school supplies, the Iroquois-Kankakee Regional Office of Education along with Catholic Charities, Center of Hope, and several other private donors sponsored two Back to School Fairs. For the 12th year, these fairs have provided free school supplies to students who reside in our local shelters, transitional housing programs, doubled-up situations, or motels. In addition, families were referred from our local service agencies.

The first fair was held on Thursday, August 9, 2007 at the Lisieux Pastoral Center in Kankakee County. 575 families were in attendance; 1325 students received school supplies. The second fair was held on Thursday, August 16, 2007 at Watseka High School in Iroquois County. 179 families attended; 418 students received school supplies.

In addition to providing free school supplies, both fairs featured booths from approximately 25 agencies. These agencies provided information about local activities and services available to the families.

We would like to extend a big thank you to the following people who made these Back to School Fairs possible: Dr. Kay Pangle, Regional Superintendent, I-KAN Regional Office of Education; Greg Harris, Director of Community Services, Catholic Charities; and Renita Williams, Director, Center of Hope.

Ensuring Success

Dave Levek, Area 1 Lead Liaison, ROE #56

We all know that homeless children need access to school in order to have a chance at a quality education. So, of course, a big part of our efforts are focused on raising awareness of school personnel about the educational rights of homeless children. We conduct trainings, disseminate materials, and help school officials make sure that all homeless children receive the services they are entitled to.

But we feel that we must go beyond ensuring that children are correctly identified and receive transportation and are provided with all "mandatory" services and supplies. It has always been our goal to "level the playing field" for homeless children. All educators know that students who are involved in activities after the school day is done do better in school. At all of our trainings we encourage participants to discuss ways to identify a passion that a homeless child might have so that we can find a way to get that homeless student excited about education.

These passions are quite diverse. For a fifth grader at Union District #81, it was flute lessons. In Joliet District #86, a third grader's favorite activity was the Young Rembrandts Art Program. In Valley View District 365U, a sophomore basketball player needed a brace to help her knee recover from injury. We partnered with the local park district to ensure that a sixth grader in Plainfield District #202 was able to live out her dream to be a dancer. In each of these instances, the expense involved was not something that the family could afford. Since the school is not required to pay for these extras, our program was able to cover the cost.

The list goes on and on. However, all of these cases show that when we can support the passion of a student who is experiencing homelessness by providing the little extras, we help ensure that homeless students not only attend school, they thrive.

Homeless Education State Coordinator Corner

Peggy Dunn, Principal Consultant, Accountability Division, ISBE

The wave of back-to-school phone calls is beginning to subside as most families have finally been able to get their children into school, sometimes weeks after classes have started because of an apparent lack of understanding about the extent of services in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act. I believe I intellectually understood that there are barriers to education for homeless children; but have now come face-to-face with them through over 180 phone calls from families asking for assistance in the last 22 days of work.

Each call has taken a minimum of three subsequent calls to resolve and, in some instances, homeless dispute hearings, and calls to school attorneys. I have found this more than frustrating when I know how hard the homeless school liaisons work to educate school personnel. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the people registering and enrolling children in Illinois has hit me like a tidal wave. Most of you have experienced this before and expect it – I didn't. With more than twenty years behind the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, we still have the job of training and guiding new school personnel in Illinois. This is an effort that must be repeated annually in order to ensure that families are able to enroll their homeless children without prejudice and discrimination.

Several incidents left me so angry that I found it difficult to speak and this weekend after one such incident, I finally understood that my heart was broken for the families struggling to get their children into school. The job of educating the schools in Illinois about enrolling homeless children immediately is one of those challenges that doesn't end, just because a school had training last year. This is an annual ritual as employees change and the situations they must make decisions about continue to become more difficult and entangled with the increase in the number of homeless families.

So, this has been the trial by fire!!! I haven't run away; but have most certainly thought about it as the long dark nights of lying in bed wondering what else I can do to try to help fix this problem in Illinois seem to glide by in the dark without sufficient answers. To the sudden ache in my chest turning into tears that I just can't stop because I don't know what else to do after so many difficult phone calls. From listening to mothers crying on the phone; to grandmothers begging me to help them; to a father experiencing the school calling DCFS because they didn't believe he 'legally' had his kids after his wife abandoned the family; to a stepfather who found his child on the front lawn with two changes of clothing and he didn't recognize her because he hadn't seen her since she was two and she is now seven – with a note and her birth certificate the only clue that she is his child. Tears can be the only response because anger cannot fix this problem.

I will continue to work as diligently as I can with the area lead homeless liaisons in Illinois to find a way to counter this wave of schools needing guidance to provide services for homeless children. This is also an acknowledgement that I now know how hard you have to work to do your jobs each fall. If we added up the number of calls that all of us received as school started it would be more than a tidal wave of homeless children reaching out for the education that their parents desire for them and for their futures. Thanks to each of you, these children will reach for this goal and find it attainable.

Building A Community

Eileen Worthington, Area 3 Lead Liaison - ROE #26

It has been said that 'it takes a village to raise a child' but for that village to be effective you must build a foundation that will serve the needs of that village. On November 2, the Area 3 Homeless Liaison Project hosted the 4th Annual Homeless Symposium in partnership with the Western Illinois University Department of Social Work. The goal of the symposium was to bring together not only LEA Liaisons and educators but also to provide an opportunity for them to meet with service providers and social service organizations to develop a working environment for serving homeless children and youth. Under McKinney-Vento we are directed to provide for the educational rights and needs of homeless children but if their basic human needs are not met, they cannot succeed in school. By working within the community we can build collaborations to provide for those unmet needs. Look within your village and seek out service providers who can assist in serving these very at-risk children and youth. Bring them to the table and explore the possibilities - build your own community!

HUNGER HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS WEEK - November 11-17, 2007

Co-sponsored annually by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness. To become involved download the *2007 Awareness Week Manual* at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/calendar.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
Suite 200*

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

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:

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