

MEMORANDUM

TO: Regional Steering Committee on Housing and Homelessness

FROM: HomeBase

RE: Family Homelessness: Highlights from the 2011 NAEH National Conference on Ending Family Homelessness with a Focus on Homeless Youth and Education

DATE: February 18, 2011

Background

The RSC has presented research and updates on the specific issues relevant to family homelessness several times in past years. At the recent NAEH National Conference on Ending Family Homelessness in Oakland, which drew more than 600 people to discuss new ideas for tackling this problem, panelists and audience members portrayed the encouraging message that even in the face of brutal economic conditions, people working on family homelessness have made serious progress. The NAEH Conference highlighted how individual communities, against all odds, have reduced homelessness among families; many others have put new approaches in place that are minimizing the number of families becoming homeless, and helping those that do move quickly back into stable housing. The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) created resources and opportunities for families across the country. Communities built their capacity to implement these key strategies. The federal government, with the announcement of its strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness for children, youth and families in ten years, has formally joined a partnership with local plans to end homelessness.

For example, while family homelessness nationwide went up 4 percent between 2007 and 2009, it decreased 13 percent in Alameda County.¹ In Oakland, family homelessness dropped 43 percent in the same time frame. At the Conference, Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, explained that Alameda County has seen success cutting that number largely through strong communication between different agencies and local government. Oakland Mayor Jean Quan also spoke, and like several presenters, she emphasized a need to collaborate across agency, city and county lines.

Focus on Homeless Youth and Education

Among the various sessions were discussions about the various implications of the HEARTH Amendment on family homelessness, and specifically on youth and education. In the 2010 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the first time announced that it would be anticipating the educational requirements of the HEARTH Amendment in the 2010 Continuum of Care

¹ Maher, Sean. "Alameda County family homelessness dropped 13 percent between 2007 and 2009." *Oakland Tribune*, February 20, 2011. Accessed February 15, 2011. http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_17355764.

(CoC) grant competition. Specifically, HUD required CoCs to demonstrate that (1) they are collaborating with local education agencies to identify homeless families; (2) they are considering the educational needs of children in transitional or emergency shelter and, to the extent practicable, placing families with children as close as possible to their school of origin; (3) they are establishing policies that are consistent with the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act; and (4) programs that provide housing and services to families are designating a staff person to ensure that children are enrolled in school and connected to appropriate services. As such, it is important for CoC's and providers to be informed and prepared to take the initiative in reaching out to their school districts to influence the development of this new collaboration and better support the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Successful Strategies²

Strategies for collaborating with schools, generally:

- Under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency (school district) is required to designate a liaison for homeless children and youth. Contact local school district homeless liaisons to learn more about what they do, and to discuss ways to collaborate. Contact information for school liaisons is available from the state homeless education coordinator or the local school district administration office.
- Invite local school liaisons and/or the state homeless education coordinator to attend Continuum of Care meetings, to join the Continuum of Care as members, and to conduct trainings for the Continuum on eligibility and the educational rights of homeless children and youth.
- Explain the Continuum strategic planning process to school liaisons, as well the importance of active school participation in the strategic planning process, so that education issues can be part of community needs assessments.
- Form a child/youth subcommittee of the Continuum, where education and early care issues may be discussed in more depth.
- Offer to conduct trainings for school district liaisons, so that they are informed of HUD homeless services in the area, the local Continuum of Care structure and operation, and Ten-Year Plans to End Homelessness.

Strategies for identifying homeless families:

- Develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between the Continuum of Care and area school districts on protocols for identification and school enrollment, including procedures for information-sharing. For example, develop joint “release of information” forms for parents, so shelters and schools can share appropriate information, such as the shelter informing the school district when a family enters the shelter, and providing forwarding address information to the district when a family leaves the shelter.
- Develop protocols for liaisons to refer families and youth to HUD programs.

² National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. “HUD CoC Homeless Assistance – 2010 NOFA Education and Early Care Assurances.” <http://center.serve.org/nche/index.php>. Posted on 10/20/10. Accessed on 2/15/11. http://center.serve.org/nche/nche_web/hud_nofa_2010.php.

Strategies for informing families and youth of their eligibility for education services:

- As part of intake, talk to parents and youth about their education rights, including the right to continue to attend the school they had been attending prior to moving into the shelter, with transportation provided by the school district, or to enroll in the school in the local attendance area where the shelter is located.
- Ensure that school-aged children are referred to the local liaison immediately so that as little time as possible lapses in their school attendance, either in their school of origin or the local attendance area school.
- Inform unaccompanied youth of their rights to enroll in school without a parent or legal guardian, link them with the school district homeless liaison, and assist them with school enrollment.
- When a family or youth exits a HUD homeless program, ensure that the family or youth knows that they continue to have educational rights for at least the remainder of the school year.
- Provide parents and youth with brochures and other information that summarizes their educational rights, as well as contact information for the school liaison and/or state homeless education coordinator.
- Place posters about educational rights in places where parents and youth can see them

Strategies for establishing policies and practices that are consistent with the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act:

- Ensure that children and youth are not required to enroll in a new school in the attendance area, or change schools, as a condition of receiving services or a shelter bed. Allow parents or youth to make decisions regarding their school placement, as is their federal right.
- Ensure that HUD programs do not automatically refer parents or youth to a particular school. Let homeless families and youth know that they have the right to continue to attend where they had been attending, or enroll in any school in the attendance area that other children who are not homeless are eligible to attend.
- Ensure that children will not be required to attend an after-school program at the shelter that would prohibit them from staying enrolled in their original school (for example, if remaining in the school of origin will result in them returning to the shelter too late for the after-school program).
- Under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, the segregation of homeless students in separate schools is expressly prohibited. Therefore, clarify that HUD agencies will not operate educational programs for school-age homeless children and youth that replace the regular school day. Educational programming at shelters should be supplemental, and expand on the regular educational services offered by the school district.

Strategies for ensuring that programs that provide housing or services to families are designating a staff person to ensure that children are enrolled in school and connected to the appropriate services within the community:

- Consider who is the most appropriate person in the agency to be the “education and early care” consultant. Is there someone with a strong interest in children, youth, or educational issues, or who has a background in education?
- Contact the local school district homeless liaisons or the state homeless education coordinator to convene a meeting of the newly designated HUD education/early care contacts, local school district liaisons, Head Start staff, and preschool staff, so that they may discuss ways to expedite enrollment and services.
- Ensure that newly designated HUD education/early care contacts have the opportunity to attend homeless education workshops offered by the school district or state, or to participate in webinars offered by the National Center on Homeless Education or the state education agency.
- Offer newly designated HUD education/early care contacts the opportunity to be trained in assessment programs (Ages and Stages, Early Intervention programs, and Special Education Child Find) that provide indicators of potential developmental delays
- Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood and family support program serving families with children ages 3-5. Early Head Start serves families with children ages 0-2 and pregnant women. Homeless children are categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start, and must be prioritized for enrollment. Contact local Head Start programs to learn more about services that they offer, and the best way to make referrals for homeless families with young children.

Effective Strategies from Our Communities

Many Bay Area communities are currently employing successful strategies that are furthering this collaboration between CoC’s and local education agencies in order to better support the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Today, we are fortunate to have **Jennifer Tam, the McKinney-Vento Program Liaison and Transitional Students & Families Specialist from the Oakland Unified School District** to tell us about this successful program and how to coordinate more effectively with McKinney-Vento school district liaisons in your community. The OUSD’s Transitional Students & Families Unit provides supplemental services and support to the following populations in the District:

- Foster Youth
- Families with Uncertain or Unstable Housing (McKinney Vento)
- Migrant Students
- Refugee/Asylee Students

The Transitional Students & Families Unit’s services include enrollment assistance and school orientations, help accessing social services and educational resources, parent/guardian workshops, academic counseling, and resources for school staff.

The following are examples of effective strategies from other Bay Area communities:

<p>San Francisco</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Homeless Coordinating Board (LHCB) requires CoC-funded family and youth providers to establish a form policy including the following: (1) post notice of students’ rights; (2) designate staff responsible for school enrollment who will join the SF Families and Youth in Transition Council; (3) ensure that all children are enrolled in school and connected to services; (4) work with Liaison and parents to advocate for children to overcome barriers and access resources; (5) coordinate with school staff to reduce truancy and improve grades; (6) consistently coordinate with the Liaison. • Homeless Education Liaison attends LHCB meetings • All children enrolling in San Francisco schools complete a form including questions about their living situation; Liaison receives information for those designated homeless. • Liaison works to provide tutoring and other services onsite to children in interim housing. • Liaison provides bus passes to all homeless children who need them.
<p>Santa Clara</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies directed toward programs serving families describe information that must be provided to homeless families, staff responsible for ensuring school enrollment, and intake procedures and communication protocols with school districts. • Santa Clara maintains two McKinney Liaisons. • One Liaison attends Steering Committee meetings and was central to drafting CoC policies about identifying and ensuring the rights of homeless students. • Office of Education works with the CoC to ensure that homeless youth are included in the biannual PIT count. • Family providers inform parents of their children’s educational rights upon intake, and if necessary, assist with school enrollment, help parents obtain documentation, and inform the Liaison of the students’ homeless status. • Office of Education collaborates with family providers to monitor enrollment, link students to programs like Head Start and after-school programs, connect students to resources like meals, backpacks, uniforms, and supplies.

Solano	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An active CoC Committee member, the Solano County Office of Education's (SCOE) Homeless Youth liaison works closely with the CoC Committee to connect service providers that offer housing/service to homeless youth and families to connect them to the various Unified School District staff and School District Homeless liaisons from all over Solano County. • The Solano CoC and SCOE recently coordinated a training and networking session for school district homeless liaisons, Head Start staff, and youth and family service providers in which the education-related staff were trained on homelessness and housing issues, and the housing/services providers were trained on the rights of homeless youth under McKinney-Vento. • SCOE is also coordinating "HEART", a monthly collaborative that is focused on improving the lives of homeless youth and supporting their success in schools.
Napa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family providers explain students' rights upon intake, keep track of enrollment and attendance of students in their care, and are encouraged to gather student report cards and truancy and suspension notices from school staff. • CoC collaborates closely with the Department of Education, Family Resource Centers, and Child Protective Services to identify at-risk and homeless families. • Education Liaison meets regularly with family shelter staff and domestic violence providers to ensure that students are appropriately referred to housing and education services. • Case managers assist parents to meet with teachers to address the special needs of precariously-housed children. • Napa County uses transition-in-place and rapid rehousing to serve its homeless families, allowing providers to place families in their community of origin, which in turn ensures that students are not required to change schools. • Family emergency shelter is co-located with the City of Napa school that most children attend. • Rural families in need of emergency shelter receive hotel vouchers in order to avoid commuting to and from work and school.
Marin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family providers explain education rights to families up intake, keep track of enrollment/attendance, and gather report cards and truancy records. • Agencies remind families when class starts to prevent chronic lateness, and refer students to after-school and summer. • CoC provides training programs for providers and education staff addressing educational rights, enrollment procedures, and providing student support services, including onsite workshops, seminars, and other meetings. • The county maintains an online resource list providing education staff and homeless service providers with best practice information for identifying homeless families and students.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional housing providers use real-time HMIS data concerning bed capacity and availability to identify openings for families as close to schools of origin as possible.
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Example from Another Community

Denver, CO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaisons are asked to attend CoC meetings • CoC members were instructed to make the continued school participation of homeless children a major focus of case management plans. • CoC works with local schools to get the most accurate PIT count numbers possible. • If it is not possible to keep children in their school of origin, providers work to provide the family with permanent housing within that school’s boundaries if the family desires it. • CoC provides transportation to and from school via bus tokens, cab vouchers, and gas for family vehicles.
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<p>Questions for Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your community’s response compare to the above examples? • What are some successful strategies and barriers in your community in trying to collaborate with the local educational system? 	
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