**Helping Unaccompanied Homeless Students Access Higher Education**

The Inclusion, Access and Success Committee has a list of resources and best practices designed to provide assistance to school counselors and admission counselors in Illinois who work with homeless and unaccompanied youth. In 2005, the University of Illinois at Chicago, with funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services estimated that there were about 9,000 unaccompanied homeless youth in the Chicago area in 2004 and about 25,000 statewide. Updated figures from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) show that public schools across the state identified 54,892 homeless students during the 2012-2013 school year. That is up 109 percent since 2009, according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless' report, “Gaps in Educational Supports for Illinois Homeless Students.” Learn more about how to serve this growing population.

How Many Children and Youth Experience Homelessness?

* 1.2 million children/youth
* Public schools 1,168,354 homeless children/youth in 2012‐13
  + 10% increase over last year
  + 24% increase overall since the 2009‐2010 school year
  + 44 states (83%) reported increases
  + 58,158 unaccompanied homeless youth

Paths to Being “On Our Own”

* Family conflict: blended family issues, pregnancy, sexual activity or orientation, school problems, substance abuse
* Abuse and/or neglect within the home
* Parental incarceration, illness, hospitalization, or death
* Lack of space in temporary situations or shelter policies that prohibit adolescent boys
* Child welfare issues
* - Running away from a placement

- Aging out of the system

- Significant correlation between involvement with the child welfare system and experiencing homelessness as an adult

Barriers to Higher Education for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

* Lack of access to parental financial information and support
* Lack of financial means to live independently and safely
* Inability to be financially self‐sufficient once enrolled in college
* Limited housing options, especially in small towns or rural areas
* Struggling to balance school and other responsibilities
* Lack of adult guidance and support
* Lack of information about available support systems

**Meet NAEHCY**

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) is a national grassroots membership association that connects educators, parents, advocates, researchers, and service providers to ensure school enrollment, attendance and overall success for children and youth whose lives have been disrupted by the lack of safe, permanent, and adequate housing.

• Website: <http://www.naehcy.org>

**Eligibility for McKinney‐Vento\* Rights &Services**

Children or youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

* Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
* Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to the lack of adequate alternative accommodations
* Living in emergency or transitional shelters
* Awaiting foster care placement
* Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live
* Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or a similar setting
* Migratory children living in the above circumstances
* Unaccompanied youth living in the above circumstances

Can the student go to the SAME PLACE (fixed) EVERY NIGHT (regular) to sleep in a

SAFE AND SUFFICIENT SPACE (adequate)?

For more info, see NCHE’s Determining Eligibility brief at [www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php)

\*McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth. McKinney-Vento provides federal funding to states for the purpose of supporting district programs that serve homeless students. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>

See also, National Center for Homeless Education: <http://center.serve.org/nche/about.php>

Why the Broad Definitions?

* Shelters are often full and turn away youth
* No shelters in many suburban and rural areas
* Eligibility rules of often exclude unaccompanied minors
* Youth may fear adult shelters
* Shelters often have time limits
* Youth may be unaware of alternatives, fleeing in crisis, living in over‐crowded, temporary, and sometimes unsafe environments
* Shelters often are a last resort after all other possibilities are exhausted

How Can High School Counselors Identify Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

* Look for students that appear exhausted, or that sleep in class
* Look for students that arrive early, or stay late at school
* Absenteeism
* Look for students that miss lunch, or have not submitted documentation for free/reduced meals

**Helping Homeless Students Get to College**

Best Practices for High School Counselors and Educators

* Focus on FASFSA completion!
* FAFSA Week – see www.naehcy.org
* Inform unaccompanied youth of college options as soon as they are identified as homeless
* Make sure high school counselors know about the FAFSA policies for unaccompanied homeless youth
* Arrange for students to visit local colleges and universities
* Use a template for verification – www.naehcy.org
* Connect students to Gear‐Up, Upward Bound, and other TRIO Programs

What do Admission Counselors Need to Know?

* Are your recruiting unaccompanied homeless youth?
  + Do you know who the State Coordinator for Homeless Children and Youth is in your state? http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state\_resources.php#map
  + Find out who the McKinney‐Vento Liaison is from your feeder school districts
  + Contact High School Counselors from feeder districts and let them know about your admissions policy

How Can Admission Counselors work with other McKinney‐Vento Professionals?

* Identify youth serving agencies in your community that are already working with unaccompanied homeless youth for college nights
* Be familiar with FAFSA regulations for unaccompanied homeless youth
* Find out who is already working unaccompanied homeless youth at your college/university so you will know who to connect students with
* Connect students with bridge, TRIO, Upward Bound, or Gear‐UP, or EOF programs at your school
* Use discretion when students confide in you, and work with them to get waivers, and other documentation needed for their status

Understanding the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA)

Independent student status for unaccompanied homeless youth and self‐supporting youth at risk of homelessness can apply for financial aid without parental signature or consideration of parental income

For Higher Education Resources related to FAFSA and financial aid:

<http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/higher-ed>

Best Practices for Higher Education Professionals

* Establish coordination between admission’s financial aid, student support services, and housing offices
* Open a food and clothing bank on campus
* Consider housing options for homeless students when dorms close:
* Leaving one residence hall open
* Allow unaccompanied homeless youth to stay in housing for international students
* Provide a list of “host homes” in the community
* Has established Single Points of Contact (SPOCS) in colleges/universities to help eliminate barriers to higher education access

Resources Available to Assist Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

* NAEHCY Higher Education Hotline: 855‐446‐2673
* <http://www.naehcy.org>
* NAEHCY Statewide Higher Education Networks: <http://naehcy.org/legislation‐and‐policy/state‐he‐networks>
* NAEHCY LeTendre Scholarship: http://naehcy.org/letendrescholarship‐

fund/about‐the‐fund

* College Access and Success Toolkit for Students Experiencing Homelessness:
  + <http://naehcy.org/sites/default/files/dl/toolkit.pdf>
* National Center for Homeless Education: <http://center.serve.org/nche/>
* Runaway Switchboard: <http://www.1800runaway.org>
* Homeless Resource Exchange: <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewCocContacts>
* National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY): [ncfy@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ncfy@acf.hhs.gov)
* DCFS: Youth in the care of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services have access to many programs to assist with meeting educational needs and financial assistance. <https://www.illinois.gov/dcfs/brighterfutures/independence/CYE/Pages/Continuing-Your-Education.aspx>

Other Resources/Tools

* Documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/homestretch/>
* Non profit: Homeless to HigherEd is a volunteer-run, 501(c)(3) tax exempt California non-profit established in August of 2013. As they develop the infrastructure required to provide assistance on a national scale, H2H is still determined to help homeless college students on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, they hope to increase visibility of the epidemic of homelessness, and to demonstrate just how possible it is to change one’s future through education. <http://homelesstohighered.org/>