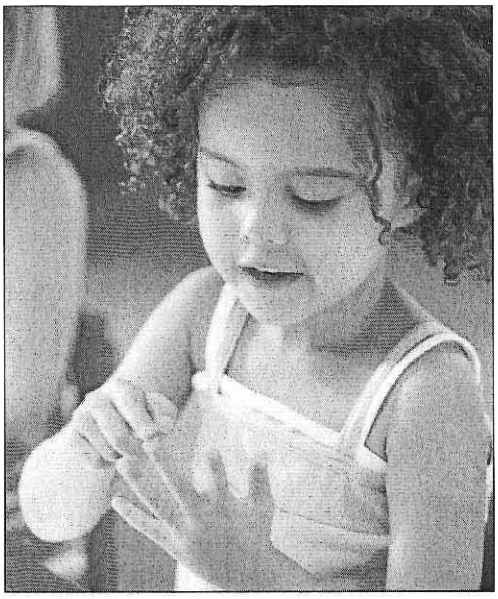
Homeless Education: An Introduction to the Issues



Who is homeless?

(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Sec 725)

The term "homeless children and youth"—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
(B) includes —
(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...
(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus train stations, or similar settings; and
(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

How many people in the United States are homeless?

People experiencing homelessness are not a static group; homelessness is a "revolving-door phenomenon". It is estimated that, over the course of a year, between 2.3 and 3.5 million people will experience homelessness, of which between 900,000 and 1.4 million will be children.[i]

What are the main causes of homelessness?

The main cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. While this lack alone is often enough to cause homelessness, when combined with other factors such as low wages, unemployment, domestic violence, illness, mental health issues, and addiction, the risk of experiencing homelessness increases dramatically.

Unaccompanied youth are youth not in the physical custody of a parent of guardian. The primary causes of homelessness among unaccompanied youth are physical or sexual abuse by a parent or guardian, neglect, parental substance abuse, and family conflict.

Homelessness: A fringe issue?

Many people view homelessness as a fringe issue, affecting only "certain kinds of people" on the edges of society. This view does not reflect the changing demographics of homelessness in the United States, including a steady rise in homelessness among families with children. Consider the following questions:

- *Could you ever experience a flood, fire, tornado, or other natural disaster?*
- *Do you work in an area of the economy where your job might become obsolete?*
- *Could you ever suffer from a long-term illness or accident without proper health benefits or other compensations?*
- *Do you live in a household with only one full-time wage earner?*
- *Are you behind on any monthly bills?*
- *Are housing costs in your area increasing faster than wages?*
- *Does anyone in your family struggle with addiction or mental illness?*
- *Could you ever face extreme financial difficulty without family or close friends available to come to your aid?*

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you are not immune to homelessness. These questions are not meant to create alarm, but rather to spread awareness that people experiencing homelessness are people just like us. They desire financial stability and a secure home, but have confronted difficult circumstances without sufficient resources to overcome the situation and remain housed.

continued on the next page

www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/introduction.pdf

Homeless with homework: Challenges faced by homeless students

Children experiencing homelessness face great challenges. High mobility, precarious living conditions, and poverty combine to present significant educational, health and emotional difficulties. Consider this:

- *At least 20% of homeless children do not attend school.*[ii]
- *Within a year, 41% of homeless children will attend two different schools; 28% of homeless children will attend three or more different schools.*[iii]
- *With each change in schools, a student is set back academically by an average of four to six months.*[iv]
- *Children experiencing homelessness often feel like outsiders and have difficulty maintaining friendships due to frequent moves. Their lives feel out of control, and they often experience anxiety and depression as a result.*
- *Many homeless children lack basic school supplies and a reasonable environment in which to do homework.*
- *Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness confront these and other challenges associated with homelessness without the support and guidance of a caring adult.*

Homeless children are truly among our nation's neediest and most at risk.

McKinney-Vento: Federal homeless education legislation

During the 1980s, the federal government recognized the magnitude of the problem of homelessness within our country and, more specifically, the increasing incidences of homelessness among families with children and unaccompanied youth. To address this issue, Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Act, reauthorized most recently as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This act guarantees homeless children and youth the following:

- *The right to immediate enrollment in school, even if lacking paperwork normally required for enrollment.*
- *The right to attend school in his/her school of origin (if this is requested by the parent and is feasible) or in the school in the attendance area where the family or youth is currently residing.*
- *The right to receive transportation to his/her school of origin, if this is requested by the parent.*
- *The right to services comparable to those received by housed schoolmates, including transportation and supplemental educational services.*
- *The right to attend school along with children not experiencing homelessness. Segregation based on a student's status as homeless is strictly prohibited.*
- *The posting of homeless students' rights in all schools and other places around the community.*

While having the opportunity to enroll and succeed in school may seem like a given to many of us, the McKinney-Vento Act was enacted due to the numerous barriers homeless children faced in obtaining a free, appropriate public education. It is the mission of the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) and its partners to create public awareness of the rights of homeless children and youth and to ensure compliance with the law at the state and local levels.

continued on the next page

The role of education

The role of education in the life of a homeless child is crucial. In a life that is filled with uncertainty, school is a place of safety. Something as simple as a desk to call her own can provide a homeless child with a sense of routine and ownership. A free, appropriate public education is also a right to which homeless children and youth are legally entitled. This right put into practice has the potential to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness that may otherwise continue. For a homeless child, the importance of a stable, quality education is immeasurable.

How can I help?

After learning more about the issue of homeless education, you may be wondering how you can help. Consider the following suggestions:

- *Educate staff at your organization that come into contact with homeless children and families about the educational rights of homeless children.*
- *Collaborate with your local school district to help identify and support homeless students in your area. Every school district in the country has a Local Homeless Education Liaison, responsible for ensuring that homeless students' educational rights are observed. To find out the contact information for the liaison in your district, contact NCHE at 1-800-308-2145.*
- *Take advantage of the products and services available to you through NCHE and its partners.*
- *For other suggestions on supporting the rights of students experiencing homelessness, contact NCHE.*

National Partners in Homeless Education

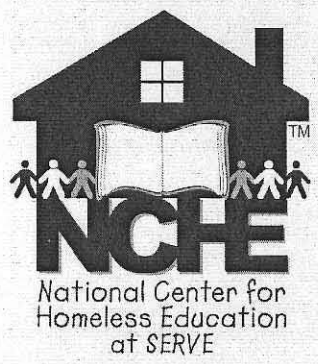
The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
Contact: Diana Bowman, Director, 800-755-3277, dbowman@serve.org
Web Address: www.serve.org/nche
NCHE, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a national resource center, providing valuable information, training, and materials to educators and community members seeking to address the educational needs of homeless children and their families. These materials are made available to the public at no charge and include such items as educational rights posters, parent packs, training resources, and "law into practice" briefs.

U.S. Department of Education, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program
Contact: Gary Rutkin, Coordinator, 202-260-4412, gary.rutkin@ed.gov
Web Address: www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html
The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program oversees the education of homeless children and youth in our nation's public schools, including the granting of McKinney-Vento funds and the monitoring of their usage. Program Coordinator Gary Rutkin, working with other Department officials and national partners, provides official guidance to states and school districts on implementing the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

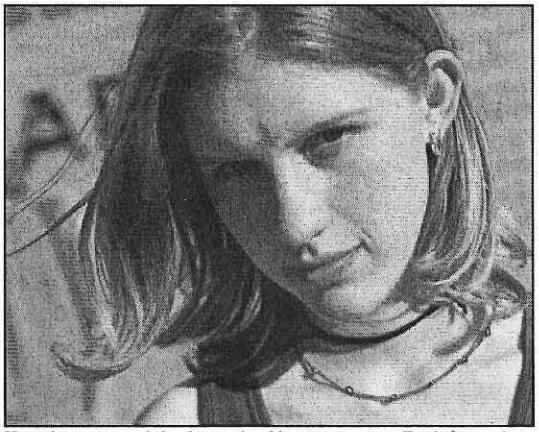
The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
Contact: Patricia Popp, President, 757-221-7776, ppopp@naehcy.org
Web Address: www.naehcy.org
NAEHCY, a national grassroots membership association, serves as the voice and the social conscience for the education of children and youth in homeless situations. NAEHCY brings together educators, parents, advocates, researchers and service providers to ensure school enrollment and attendance, and overall success for children and youth experiencing homelessness. NAEHCY accomplishes this through advocacy, partnerships and education. NAEHCY also hosts an annual national conference on homeless education, which brings together educators and service providers to learn about new developments within the field.

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP)
Contact: Joy Moses, Education Staff Attorney, 202-638-2535, jmoses@nlchp.org
Web Address: www.nlchp.org
The mission of NLCHP is to prevent and end homelessness by serving as the legal arm of the nationwide movement to end homelessness. To achieve its mission, the Law Center pursues three main strategies: impact litigation, policy advocacy, and public education. The Law Center strives to place homelessness in the larger context of poverty. By taking this approach, the Law Center aims to address homelessness as a very visible manifestation of deeper causes: the shortage of affordable housing, insufficient income, and inadequate social services. NLCHP provides guidance and produces high-quality publications on legal issues pertaining to homelessness and poverty.

The National Network for Youth (NNY)
Contact: Mishaela Duran, Director of Public Policy and Public Affairs, 202-783-7949 x3109, mduran@nn4youth.org
Web Address: www.nn4youth.org
The National Network for Youth is the leading advocacy organization for runaway and homeless youth. NNY seeks to promote opportunities for growth and development for youth who face greater odds due to abuse, neglect, family conflicts and disconnection from family, lack of resources, discrimination, differing abilities, or other life challenges. NNY achieves this through advocacy on national policy related to at-risk youth and the provision of training, technical assistance, consultation services, and publications on the issue of supporting and protecting at-risk youth.



P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Toll-free helpline: 1-800-308-2145
www.serve.org/nche



Homelessness can't be determined by appearance. For information on recognizing the warning signs of homelessness among students, visit www.serve.org/nche/nche_web/warning.php.

References

[i] *Burt, Martha R., What Will It Take to End Homelessness? (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001). Available online at www.urban.org.*

[ii] *Author, Homeless Children: America's New Outcasts (Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999). Available for order online at www.familyhomelessness.org/.*

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] *Dr. Joy Rogers of the Loyola University Department of Education, Education Report of Rule 706 Expert Panel presented in B.H. v. Johnson, 715 F. Supp. 1387 (N.D. Ill. 1989), 1991.*

Accession No. **16538**
Title: Homeless Education: An Introduction to the Issues

Author(s): National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
Year: Unknown
Format: Fact Sheet
Language English
Organization: National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
Source: National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
Abstract: The authors of this three-page Fact Sheet examine the issue of homeless students. They begin by providing statistics on the number of homeless in the United States, and identify the main causes of homelessness, particularly for children and youth. The authors also describe the many academic challenges faced by homeless students, including frequent school change, isolation at school, lack of basic school supplies, and the lack of adult support. The Fact Sheet includes information on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which protects the educational rights of homeless children and youth. It also includes information about several national organizations working to promote the cause of education for homeless children and youth.
Availability: National Center for Homeless Education, 915 Northridge Street, Second Floor Greensboro, NC 27403; Telephone: (800) 755-3277, Fax: (336) 315-7457, E-mail: homeless@serve.org, Web site: www.serve.org/nche
Notes: Publication downloaded from the Internet