Building Best Practices to Support Homeless Youth that Access Higher Education

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Meet NAEHCY

NAEHCY is a national 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. www.naehcy.org
NAEHCY’s Higher Education Initiative

- NAEHCY’s Higher Education Initiative aims to promote college access and success for homeless youth that access higher education by:
  - Providing technical assistance via the NAEHCY Higher Education Helpline
  - Supporting and creating statewide higher education networks
  - Providing state, regional and national trainings
  - Partnering with higher education associations and organizations to address physical, emotional, and academic barriers homeless students face
Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Nationally

2013-2014SY

- 1,360,747 homeless children and youth enrolled in public schools
- 8% increase over the previous year
- 100% increase since 2006-2007 recession
- 13% of all poor school aged children and youth
- 30% of all extremely poor school aged children and youth
- Over 90,000 unaccompanied homeless youth
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
Eligibility Continued

- 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

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

- **Fixed:** Stationary, permanent, and not subject to change
- **Regular:** Used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis (*e.g.* nightly); consider the relative permanence
- **Adequate:** Sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments

*Can the student go to the SAME PLACE (fixed) EVERY NIGHT (regular) to sleep in a SAFE AND SUFFICIENT SPACE (adequate)?
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
Paths Continued

• 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
Why the Broad Definition?

- Shelters are often full and turn away youth
- No shelters in many suburban and rural areas
- Eligibility rules 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
Homeless Youth and Higher Education

2014-2015 Unaccompanied Homeless Youth  FAFSA Data

Determinations made by:

- School District Liaison 21,443
- HUD funded Emergency Shelter/Transitional Housing Program 3,953
- RHYA Basic Center/Transitional Living Program 3,731
- Financial Aid Administrators 1,548
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

• 2-step process to determine eligibility
  1) Does the student’s living arrangement meet the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless?
  2) Once homelessness is determined, is the student unaccompanied?

• Unaccompanied
  • “not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian”
Barriers to Higher Education Access

- 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
Barriers Identified Through NAEHCY’s Higher Education Helpline

• Top barriers to higher education access for homeless youth
  • Getting a determination of their homeless status
  • Community Referrals (shelter, food, clothing, and social services)
  • Obtaining ACT/SAT and admissions fee waivers
  • Access to higher education housing (on/near campus, year round, in between breaks)
  • FAFSA Completion Assistance (accompanied & unaccompanied
  • Assistance with finding scholarships
Financial Aid and FAFSA Basics

• Expected family contribution (EFC): Families are expected to contribute to higher education costs to the extent they are able

• FAFSA
  • Cannot be filed before January 1 prior to the academic year in which student seeks to enroll
  • *For dependent students*, income and asset information required for both the student and a parent; parental signature required
  • *For independent students*, no parental signature nor income and asset information is needed
### UHY and the FAFSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46. Were you born before January 1, 1993?</td>
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<tr>
<td>47. As of today, are you married? (Also answer “Yes” if you are separated but not divorced.)</td>
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<td>48. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, will you be working on a master’s or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate, etc.)?</td>
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<td>49. Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training? [See Notes page 9]</td>
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<td>50. Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces? [See Notes page 9]</td>
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<td>51. Do you now have or will you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017?</td>
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<td>52. Do you have dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30, 2017?</td>
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<td>53. At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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<td>54. As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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<tr>
<td>55. Does someone other than your parent or stepparent have legal guardianship of you, as determined by a court in your state of legal residence? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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<tr>
<td>56. At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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<tr>
<td>57. At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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<tr>
<td>58. At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? [See Notes page 10]</td>
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You indicated that you were homeless or at risk of being homeless and you answered "no" to all of the specific homeless questions.

However, your financial aid administrator could make a determination that you are a homeless youth, and do not need to provide parental information, if you meet both of the following conditions:

- You are homeless, which means you are lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing, which includes living in shelters, parks, motels or cars, or temporarily living with other people because you had nowhere else to go. Also, if you are living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent you may be considered homeless even if your parent would provide support and a place to live; and
- You are unaccompanied, which means you are not living in the physical custody of your parent or guardian.

If you believe that you meet these conditions and would like to follow up with the financial aid administrator at your college, select "I am homeless or at risk of being homeless" and click Next to get additional information.

If you do not meet the above conditions and will be providing parental information, select "I will provide parental information" and click Next to continue.
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

- Must be determined by:
  - Local homeless liaison
  - RHYA-funded shelter director or designee
  - HUD-funded shelter director or designee
  - College financial aid administrator
Verification of Status Form

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Documentation of Independent Student Status for the FAFSA:

- Can be used by any of the four verifiers.
- Copy should be on file with the school, one with student, and one sent to college/university.
- Valid for only one academic year from the district homeless liaison.
• Updated Application and Verification Guide released in 2015
• Borrows language from NCHE’s brief Determining Eligibility located at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf
• Homeless youth status determination is not considered a case of professional judgement
• It is not conflicting information if the FAA disagrees with an authorities determination
• Institutions are not required to verify answers to homeless youth status questions unless there is conflicting information
• Student can use mailing address of friend or relative where they can receive reliable mail, or they may use an address on campus if they receive permission
2015-16 Application and Verification Guide

FAA verification:

- Not required unless there is conflicting information.
- Documented interview (even via phone) is acceptable.
- Should be done with discretion and sensitivity.
  - Some information may be confidential.
  - Child welfare reports are not necessary.
- Guidance recommends consulting with local homeless liaisons, State Coordinators, NAEHCY, school counselors, clergy, etc.
U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter

• Issued July 29, 2015
• Clarifies institutional and applicants roles and responsibilities related to Title IV dependency determinations for unaccompanied homeless youth
• Brings awareness that institutions are unnecessarily restricting applications aid
  • Should not focus on “why” student is homeless, instead should focus on the evidence that student is a UHY or self-supporting student facing the risk of being homeless
• Indicates that applicants under the age of 24 who are UHY, or self-supporting and at risk of becoming homeless qualify for a homeless youth determination
Community Support Services

- DHS
- ETV
- Public Assistance
- CMH
- Shelter
- Medicaid
  
- College Student UHY
Navigating Multiple Systems

College Student

- Academic Support
- Public Assistance
- Residence Life
- CMH
- Police & Public Safety
- Counseling Services
- Health Services
- Registrar
- Admissions
- YIT
- ETV
- DHS Financial Aid
- Foster Care
- DHS
- DHS
- Medicaid
- CMH
- Public Assistance
- College Student

From Foster Care

Financial Aid

Counseling Services

Academic Support

Public Assistance

Residence Life

CMH

Police & Public Safety

Health Services

Registrar

Admissions

ETV

YIT
How Can Admissions Counselor’s work with other McKinney-Vento Professionals?

• Are your recruiting UHY?
  • 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](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 Counselor’s from feeder districts and let them know about your admissions policy
How Can Admissions Counselor’s work with other McKinney-Vento Professionals?

- Identify youth serving agencies in your community that are already working with UHY for college nights
- Be familiar with FAFSA regulations for UHY
- Find out who is already working UHY 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
Best Practices in High Schools

• Focus on FAFSA completion!
• 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 UHY
• Arrange for students to visit local colleges and universities
• Connect UHY to Gear-Up, Upward Bound, other TRIO programs
• Use a template for verification located at: www.naehcy.org
Best Practices Continued

Connect students with federal and community resources that they may be eligible for:

• Medicaid
• Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
• Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)
• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
• Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Funded Shelters (RHYA)
• Administration for Children and Families
Best Practices on Campus

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

A supportive college administrator on each campus who is committed to helping homeless youth (and often foster youth) successfully navigate the college-going process on campuses.

• Kennesaw State University CARE Program
  • http://www.kennesaw.edu/studentsuccessservices/care/
SPOC Role in Assisting Students

- **Admissions**
  - Connect students to a counselor that can assist with applications and fee waivers.

- **Financial aid**
  - Assist students with obtaining determinations of their unaccompanied homeless youth status, general award and scholarship opportunities.

- **Academic advising**
  - Connect students with an advisor to develop work plans to increase retention and graduation in college.

- **Housing**
  - Help students with on and off campus assistance and year round housing options.

- **Community resources**
  - Connect students to needed resources available on campus and in the community.
Statewide Networks

• Convene a meeting with local stakeholders from the McKinney-Vento K-12, Higher Education, and RHYA/HUD shelter communities as well as other local service providers and advocates.
• Allow each to share knowledge about their area of expertise:
  • UHY and independent student definitions
  • Financial aid
  • Campus and community resources
• Build an action plan for serving UHY that makes sense for your community.
Statewide Networks

NETWORK LOCATIONS

[Map showing states with networks and states under development]
NAEHCY Scholarship

How to apply:

http://naehcy.org/letendre-scholarship-fund/about-the-fund

Applicants must submit:

• A completed application form,
• An essay about the impact of homelessness on their lives and desire to attend college,
• An official school transcript, and
• A minimum of one letter of recommendation from a teacher, counselor, or other adult who has knowledge of the applicant's qualifications and experiences.
Resources Available to Assist Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

NAEHCY Higher Education Hotline:
855-446-2673
http://www.naehcy.org

• NAEHCY Statewide Higher Education Networks
• NAEHCY LeTendre Scholarship http://naehcy.org/letendre-scholarship-fund/about-the-fund
• College Access and Success Toolkit for Students Experiencing Homelessness
  – http://naehcy.org/educational-resources/he-toolkit
Resources Available to Assist Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

- National Center for Homeless Education
  [http://center.serve.org/nche/](http://center.serve.org/nche/)
- Runaway Switchboard
  [http://www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org)
- Homeless Resource Exchange
- National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY)
  ncfy@acf.hhs.gov
Questions

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