

WHAT STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF CAN DO TO HELP HOMELESS STUDENTS

Tips for School Social Workers, Psychologists, and Counselors

Immediate Assistance

- Be familiar with the common characteristics of homeless children, so that you may recognize and assist them without delay.
- Contact your School District Homeless Liaison and the student's teacher(s) when you identify a homeless student in the school, so that other services (lunch program, tutoring, etc.) may be made available without delay.
- Ensure transportation is being provided to homeless children. Assist parents in communication with the transportation department at school.
- Communicate with the students' prior school(s) to obtain records and to ensure continuation of services. The law requires that homeless students be admitted regardless of their ability to provide prior school records.
- Ensure that homeless students are afforded **every** opportunity that non-homeless students have, including in-school programs as well as after-school activities. Assist in the waiving of fees or securing of materials necessary for activities, especially school supplies.
- With the parent's and student's (as appropriate) permission, talk to the student's teacher(s) to inform them of the current living situation and how this may affect the student's ability to perform academically. For example, the student may not have access to the necessary materials to complete assignments.
- Provide shelter guests and staff with information about school programs and opportunities. Provide updates on a regular basis.
- Be familiar with the requirements of the ***Illinois Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act*** and the ***Illinois State Board of Education Policy on the Education of Homeless Children and Youth***. Be able to explain these requirements to other school staff. (For copies of these documents, contact your district or regional homeless liaison, or contact ***Opening Doors***.)

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

Adult Learning Resource Center, 2626 S. Clearbrook Drive, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
ROE #26 – Hancock/McDonough, 130 S. Lafayette - Suite 200, Macomb, IL
<http://homelessed.net>

Continuing Care

- Visit local shelters to become familiar with guests and staff. Establish a trusting reputation with the parents, and build relationships with shelter staff.
- Emphasize that education is a vital component for a child's success and development. Remember, homeless parents are focusing on meeting immediate daily needs for food and shelter; their child's education may be a secondary concern.
- Communicate with the parents about the student's performance at school including behavior, attendance, etc.
- Educate parents about their children's educational rights.
- Build a trusting and "safe" relationship with homeless students that does not focus on their current living situation.
- Be assertive in accessing academic assistance for homeless students. Many homeless children have gaps of non-attendance and will require extra help to "catch up."

Expanding Outreach

- Work with shelter staff to collaborate services for the family. Maintain regular contact with shelter staff.
- Know the local community resources so that you may make referrals for such things as food, housing, transportation, and counseling.

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