

Session #55

Supporting Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Accessing Higher Education

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Today's Topics

- Unaccompanied homeless youth
- Overview of the McKinney-Vento Act
- Definitions
- Unaccompanied homeless youth and the FAFSA
- College support practices
- Q&A and discussion

Why Are Youth Homeless on Their Own?

- Family conflict
- Abuse and/or neglect in the home
- Parental incarceration, substance abuse, illness, deportation, or death
- Foster care problems
- Can't stay with family in shelter

Barriers to Education

- Lack of financial means
- Limited housing options
- Struggle to balance school and other responsibilities
- Lack of adult or other support
- Lack of access to parental financial information

The McKinney-Vento Act

- Title X, Part C of ESEA
- Applies to K-12 public schools
- Key themes
 - Support for school access and success
 - School stability
 - Child centered, best interest

Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Services

- Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

Examples Included in the Definition

- Sharing housing-doubled up due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (doubled up)
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations

Examples Included in the Definition (cont.)

- Living in shelters
- Awaiting foster care placement
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, etc.

Examples Included in the Definition (cont.)

- Migratory children in conditions above
- Unaccompanied in conditions above

Why the Broad Definition?

- Shelters are often full
- No shelters in many suburban and rural areas
- Restrictive shelter rules – eligibility and time limits
- Youth may be afraid of or unaware of shelters; live in unsafe or inadequate circumstances

McKinney-Vento Program Structure

- Federal: U.S. Department of Ed. Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program
- State: State Coordinator for Homeless Education usually in SEAs (Contact info: www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php)

McKinney-Vento Program Structure (cont.)

- School districts – Local Homeless Education Liaison
 - Identification
 - Awareness
 - Removal of educational barriers
 - Linking with education support and other services

Student Rights under MV

- Immediate enrollment
- School choice and stability
 - School of origin, if in best interest (transportation)
 - Local attendance area school
- Academic support
- Comparable services

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

- Two criteria
 - Living arrangement meets MV definition of homeless
 - Unaccompanied
 - Not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (youth does not live with the parent or guardian)

What if a Youth chooses to Leave Home?

- Youth can be eligible regardless of whether he/she was asked to leave the home or chose to leave
- Often there is “more than meets the eye” for a youth’s home life situation

Educator's Perspective

- Role of educational agencies is to enroll and educate in accordance with federal law
- No need to understand and/or agree with all aspects of a student's home life

Let's look at Sarah

Sarah was kicked out of her house after graduating from high school. She couldn't get along with her stepdad and said the level of conflict had gotten out of control. She's been living with a friend whose mom said she had to leave at the end of the summer. She has no contact with her parents.

Independent Status for UHY

- College Cost Reduction and Access Act
 - Independent student status on the FAFSA for UHY and self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness
 - Can apply for aid without parental signature or parental income

Independent Status (cont.)

- CCRAA uses the MV definition of homelessness; also includes student living in the dorms if he/she would otherwise be homeless
- At risk of homelessness: “When a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate”

Independent Status (cont.)

- Includes a homeless student fleeing an abusive parent, even if the parent would provide housing and support

Determination of UHY Status

- Must be determined by
 - Local homeless liaison
 - RHYA-funded shelter or director or designee
 - HUD-funded shelter director of designee
 - College FAA

HUD

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
 - Provides funding to local communities for supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness

RHYA

- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
- Provides funding to local agencies for providing housing specifically for UHY

2011-12 AVG: FAA Role

- If a student cannot get documentation from a local liaison, RHYA provider, or HUD provider an FAA must make a determination of UHY status
- Not an “exercise of professional judgment” or “dependency override” for youth 21 and under

AVG: Determination

- UHY may be 21 or younger or still enrolled in high school on the date he/she signs the FAFSA
- 22-23 = dependency override for independent status
- 24 or older = automatic independent status

AVG: Guidance on Determination

- Verification is not required unless there is conflicting information
- Permits FAA to verify status with a documented interview
- Encourages discretion
 - Some information is confidential

AVG: Guidance on Determination (cont.)

- Recommends consulting with local liaisons, State Coordinators, NCHE, school counselors, clergy, etc.
- Eligibility determinations may be appealed to the U.S. Department of Education

Let's look at Samuel

Samuel's mother died the summer before his senior year in high school. He has no contact with his father. He's been staying with different relatives and friends. No one has been willing to assume legal guardianship or provide financial support.

Determining Samuel's Eligibility for IS Status

Q. Could the local liaison determine Samuel's Independent Student (IS) status?

A. Yes, if Samuel was identified as an unaccompanied homeless youth while attending high school

Determining Samuel's Eligibility for IS Status

Q. What if the local liaison did not identify Samuel as an UHY while he was in high school?

A. The FAA must determine Samuel's eligibility

Supporting UHY Access to Financial Aid

- Develop an agreed upon template to facilitate verification
 - See www.naehcy.org for sample
- Ask local school district liaisons and state coordinators for help in eligibility determinations
- Participate in cross-trainings with liaisons and service providers

Supporting UHY at Your School

- Create awareness
 - Post information for students throughout campus
 - Create awareness among faculty and staff
- Refer UHY to campus and community support services
- Establish a mentoring program

Supporting UHY at Your School (cont.)

- Establish coordination among financial aid offices, student support services, and campus housing
- Establish a food and clothing bank on campus
- Plan housing when dorms are closed

Supporting UHY at Your School: Networking

- Convene a meeting of stakeholders from K-12 education and higher education and service providers
- Develop an action plan based on your community's and youth's needs