



# THE BEAM

## A Solid Wall or an Open Door?

Tom Norlen

McKinney-Vento Homeless Site Coordinator  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania

We have different job titles, but share the common goal of serving homeless children and youth. We come from diverse geographical areas which affect specific homeless conditions, but possess the shared objective of representing the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. We offer unique and varied work styles based on our personalities, but has a bond which focuses on ensuring that every homeless school-age child and youth have equal access to enrollment, attendance, participation, and success in school.

There is one federal homeless law which we represent and which has been strengthened to help homeless students. There is a wide variety of materials for training and educating others on the topic of homelessness. There is now a federal directive to have a Homeless Liaison in every school district. We can turn to several advocacy groups, websites, and USDE guidance which strategies for problem solving.

With little doubt, there is a solid foundation that has been established to help those kids who are experiencing homelessness, and there are many positive components for which to be thankful that have been established over the last sixteen years since the original 1987 McKinney Act enactment.

**So, is there any potential barrier in the daily, ongoing, never-ending, ever-changing endeavor to help those children who are experiencing homelessness as relates to their education?**

The answer might most accurately be, "It depends." It depends on the human beings that make up each of our particular "helping systems" in whatever part of the country we find ourselves.

There are many levels in this "helping system"--national, state and county/local staff; school district and individual school contacts/liaisons; shelter and agency employees; and each of us--the advocates and coordinators and representatives of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

**What is this possible barrier?** I believe that it is the attitude of a person's heart, which is in sharp contrast to knowledge of one's mind. It leads me to ask some questions: **Who is a wall and who is an open door in our respective systems?** It causes me to ask myself: Which of the two am I, or could I be one or the other in different situations? For I can know and access the things previously described, have experience and head knowledge, and still fall short in meeting the true needs of a child or parent who is hurting and in need of help and compassion.

-Continued on page 2-

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Message	2
NAEHCY Conference	2
National Law Center	3
SERVE Website Publications	5
Strategies for Meeting Transportation Requirements	6
Legislative Updates	7
Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week	8
Do You Have A Good Working Knowledge of	8
You Did Good	9
Web Resources On Homelessness and Head Start	9
NAEHCY	10

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## President's Message

Dear Fellow NAEHCY Member:

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) has been working to give a voice and a face to the more than one million children and youth who experience homelessness annually. As we have grown to include a wider range of individuals and organizations committed to the well-being of our children, we have been involved in a variety of initiatives, some of which are highlighted here. We hope you will find the information in this issue of the BEAM useful and inspiring. The NAEHCY board is committed to ensuring you are well-represented. Please consider submitting an article to future issues of the BEAM or serving on a committee. A description of the full board and committee contacts is available at our website. If you have not visited [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org) recently, I encourage you to take a moment to explore the resources and information we have collected for your use, including the registration for the 2004 National Conference. Be sure to mark your calendars for October 16-19, 2004 to join us in St. Paul, MN, for our 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, "Moving Every Child Ahead."

Sincerely,  
Patricia A. Popp, Ph.D.  
NAEHCY President

-Continued from page 1-

**What might be some characteristics of the "WALL" personality?** This person can be hard. He or she can be difficult to pass through. The WALL can be a stopper of the flow of positive efforts. You cannot see past the WALL. It blocks your vision. The WALL can be a divider. The WALL might be decorated with nice pictures and a coat of paint, but underneath are dry-wall, studs, and nails. The WALL is set and solid, often rigid. You can get a headache from hitting your head against the WALL. The Wall can cast a shadow. **Have you ever met a "Wall" personality?**

**What might be some characteristics of the "OPEN DOOR" personality?** This person has hinges and can be flexible in movement. You can see through the OPEN DOOR. Light can enter through it. The DOOR moves as needed to open the way. By its very nature the DOOR is inviting you to enter. It is welcoming. The OPEN DOOR says, "Come in and let's solve this together." A breath of fresh air is able to flow through the OPEN DOOR. You often leave this DOOR with satisfaction, a smile on your face and a bounce in your step. **Have you ever met an OPEN DOOR?** You are blessed if you know a whole collection of OPEN DOORS!

No one can force a WALL to become an OPEN DOOR. I do believe that little by little, through the way we treat the WALL, we can create a small opening. Maybe the WALL has never been listened to or had its story heard. Perhaps the WALL is hurting. Maybe others have hardened the WALL and you can have the opportunity to soften it. Just maybe, over a period of time, you might get a ray of light to shine through the WALL, and just maybe, that WALL might become one of your favorite DOORS. If we do not give up on anyone, that person has the potential of being a true helper to not only homeless children, but to all of us. And the world will be a little brighter and less harsh. Just think, if Humpty Dumpty had not sat on the WALL, but had used an OPEN DOOR, history would have been altered.

May your life be filled with OPEN DOORS and may you show great appreciation for every one of them. Please don't take them for granted. Although not in the McKinney-Vento Act, one of the most important things we can do for homeless children and youth is to show continual appreciation and thankfulness to our helping networks.

### "Moving Every Child Ahead"

16th Annual Conference

October 16-19, 2004

Radisson Riverfront Hotel - St. Paul, Minnesota

The 2004 NAEHCY Conference will focus on ensuring that every child and youth experiencing homelessness is successful - academically, personally, and socially.

Designed to meet the needs of state coordinators for the education of homeless children and youth, local homeless education liaisons, homeless service providers, educators, policy makers - and all who care about ensuring school academic achievement and the overall success for children and youth whose lives have been disrupted by the lack of safe, permanent, and adequate housing.

*Early Registration Deadline: SEPTEMBER 24, 2004*

*For more information, please contact Darlyne Erickson, Business Manager,*

*Toll Free: 866-862-2562, or info @naehcy.org*

*ON-LINE REGISTRATION is available at <http://naehcy.org>*

# National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

## Press Release

February 20, 2004

### Federal Class Action Suit Seeks Access to Schooling for Homeless Children -- Advocacy Group Sues NY State, Suffolk County and Local School Districts

Central Islip, NY, February 20, 2004 -- The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and the law firm Goodwin Procter LLP announced today the filing of a class action lawsuit on behalf of homeless children and their parents living in Suffolk County against various New York State and Suffolk County governmental authorities for denying homeless children access to public education in violation of federal and state laws and regulations. The lawsuit, filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, alleges that state and county agencies responsible for educating and providing social services to homeless children in Suffolk County have, by their neglect or in some instances malfeasance, added to the tragedy of homeless children by denying them appropriate access to a basic public school education.

"Despite their legal obligations, the state, county and local governments have engaged in a persistent and repeated pattern of erecting bureaucratic barriers to the education of homeless children," said Jeffrey Simes, partner at Goodwin Procter. "As a result, they have denied homeless children a free and appropriate public education. This lawsuit seeks to remove those obstacles so that these children can enjoy the benefits of a public school education, which is their right under federal and state law."

Simes pointed out that New York State receives federal funds under the McKinney-Vento Act that mandates that the state provide for the education of homeless children and youth within the state. In addition, he noted, the state is required to ensure that local agencies in the state comply with the Act.

"The denial of basic educational opportunities to homeless children in Suffolk County not only violates the law, it also threatens to deprive these children of a chance for a better future," said Maria Foscarinis, founder and executive director of NLCHP. "It is time to hold our state and local governments accountable for this injustice."

Among the practices cited in the lawsuit are:

- Failing to implement an appropriate or adequate "regional placement plan" as defined by New York State Education Law that provides a comprehensive approach to educational placements for homeless children
- Failing to adequately monitor school districts' compliance with laws relating to the educational rights of homeless children
- Failing to provide homeless children with "suitable clothing shoes, books, food, transportation and other necessities" to enable them to attend school
- Requiring proof of a "permanent address" as a prerequisite for school enrollment, a requirement that results in children being turned away at the schoolhouse door
- Requiring a "host of records and documentation that could not

reasonably be demanded of homeless children and their families," including proof of residency.

- Requiring that the entire family, including school age children, repeatedly appear at screening centers to have their eligibility determined, thus causing children to miss school
- Failing to set up bus transportation for school age children of families placed in emergency housing
- Failing to provide an adequate process for selecting a school that is in the best interest of homeless children
- Failing to provide an opportunity for the parent of a homeless child to state the best interest of the child in school selection
- Denying homeless children the opportunity to remain in their schools of origin and forcing them to transfer to the school which serves the attendance area in which they stay while homeless

"Homeless children by definition endure an uncertain home life," said Simes. "In many instances, the school environment can be the only stable one in the lives of these children. This is why the federal and state laws were written to give homeless children the right to stay in their school of origin and receive transportation to that school. State and local officials are essentially further victimizing homeless children and compounding their plight by denying them their educational rights under these federal and state laws." The national law firm Goodwin Procter LLP is providing pro bono services to the plaintiffs.

National Center for Homeless  
Education at SERVE  
<http://www.serve.org/nche/>

- NAEHCY Partners -

National Law Center  
on  
Homeless and Poverty  
<http://www.nlchp.org>



## National Center for Homeless Education Website Publications Available

Jan Moore  
NCHE Assistant Program Specialist

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) website provides information and links to help educators, service providers, and families ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness have access to educational opportunities and success in the classroom. Included among the publications available for downloading from its website ([www.serve.org/mche](http://www.serve.org/mche)) are:

### ***Introduction to the Issues (2004)***

This is the most recent NCHE publication. It's a four-page brief intended to enhance basic awareness of homelessness but particularly concentrating on educational issues. The attractive format includes a final page designed to allow each organization to add its own logo and contact information. There's also space provided to include state and local contact information for individuals who can assist with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act.

### ***Local Homeless Education Agency Liaison Toolkit (2004, Revised)***

Developed to orient local homeless education liaisons to their responsibilities and the McKinney-Vento Act, this comprehensive tool will assist both the novice and veteran. It contains over 250 pages of the best and most current information on increasing access to and achieving success in educational opportunities for students experiencing homelessness. The 2004 revision of the *Toolkit* includes text from the McKinney-Vento legislation, 13 McKinney-Vento briefs, and the new July 2004 Guidance. It may be downloaded in its entirety or by chapters and appendices.

### ***Migrant Children and Youths Experiencing Homelessness: Rights and Services Through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act***

This brief provides information about two important legislative supports that benefit migrant students experiencing homelessness. These supports address educational challenges such as moving from one school to another several times during the year, facing difficulties in enrollment or being placed in inappropriate classes due to missing school records, losing instructional and curricular continuity, poor attendance or non-attendance, language barriers, and social isolation. It includes a migrant eligibility flowchart created to help determine whether a child qualifies for the Migrant Education Program.

### ***State Coordinators Handbook for Supporting Local Homeless Education Liaisons (2003)***

This is a useful tool to assist state coordinators in implementing the provision of the McKinney-Vento legislation that requires the designation of a local liaison for homeless education in every school district. Intended to be a companion document to the Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit, it provides information and strategies compiled from state coordinators across the country for identifying liaisons, training them in their role, and maintaining ongoing communication. In addition, the handbook includes sample forms and a PowerPoint presentation introducing the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. It was originally offered to state coordinators in 2003, so new coordinators are especially encouraged to download this valuable resource.

### ***Students on the Move: Reaching and Teaching Highly Mobile Children and Youth (2003)***

This handbook synthesizes the research and presents a comprehensive array of resources valuable for a diverse audience including educators, administrators, policymakers, and other service providers. Among the resources are a checklist of strategies and interventions to support highly mobile students, a presentation of the issues for staff development and training, children's literature and activities, and suggested references and resources.



## **SERVING HOMELESS STUDENTS**

### **Six Strategies for Meeting Transportation Requirements**

For many homeless students, the most important service your district will provide is transportation to and from the student's "school of origin," as required under NCLB's amendments to the McKinney-Vento homeless education program. At first blush, complying may look simple: Just get the students from wherever they're currently living—in a shelter, doubled up with relatives, in transitional housing, or the like—to the school they last attended, or which they attended when they were last permanently housed. But it can be expensive—and you can't use your Title I, Part A funds to pay for it. Plus the logistics can be a huge challenge, especially for districts that are large or spread out.

But you can be creative in your approach to this problem, says Linda Cook, categorical programs director for California's North Sacramento School District. With her help, we'll tell you what the law requires, and give you six different strategies your district can use for complying. That way, you can choose the alternative that's easiest or most economical for a particular student, Cook explains.

### **What the Law Requires**

Section 722(g)(1)(J) of McKinney-Vento, as amended by NCLB Title X, generally requires districts to provide or arrange transportation for homeless students to and from their school of origin at the request of each student's parent. But there's a key limitation. Section 722(g)(3)(A) says that placing the student at the school of origin must be in the student's "best interest." And in determining the student's best interest, Section 722(g)(3)(B) says that to the extent "feasible," your district must keep the student in the school of origin—unless the parent decides otherwise.

In some cases, the parent may prefer to have the student enroll in the school closest to where they're staying, rather than in the school of origin. But if the parent opts for the school of origin, your district will usually have to transport the student there. Unless your district determines that enrolling the student in the school of origin isn't feasible, or otherwise isn't in the student's best interest, the parent's decision will prevail.

### **What's Feasible?**

The law doesn't define "feasible"; instead, Section G-4 of the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) draft homeless education guidance says that districts must make placement decisions on an individual basis, and lists a number of factors districts can consider. These include the student's age and need for special services; the commuting distance to the school of origin and the impact it may have on the student's education; the length of time the family expects to stay in transitional housing; and the time remaining in the school year.

But none of the listed factors address what's often a major concern for districts: cost. Guidance Section H-3 bars districts from using Title I, Part A (or Title V, Part A) funds to pay for this transportation. That means coming up with the money from other sources, which is a big challenge. With so many competing needs to fill, your district may be tempted to include cost as a factor in your feasibility analysis. But doing so could be risky, Cook warns, since there's no express authority to let your district decide what's too expensive for a particular homeless student. That's why it's helpful to have several different transportation strategies, giving your district options that may be more cost-effective.

**Insider Says:** When homeless students enroll in their school of origin, be sure to let them stay there for the rest of the school year, even if they get permanent housing within another school's attendance area. That's required under Section 722(g)(3), Cook says. But in these cases the law doesn't require a district to pay for this transportation. Your district may want to continue doing so anyway, to avoid students' having to transfer midyear—which can harm student performance.

### **Strategy #1: Help Families Get Housing Near Schools of Origin**

By helping families find temporary or permanent housing near the school of origin, your district can minimize or even eliminate the need to provide transportation. Many homeless families would prefer to live near their children's schools of origin because it's less disruptive for both the parents and the students. And there may be housing options that would keep the students in their school of origin's attendance area, but finding these options may not be easy.

Under Section 722(g)(6), one of the duties of district homeless liaisons is to identify homeless youth by coordinating with other entities. That means your liaisons should already be in contact with shelters, charities, and other public or private

bodies that can help families find affordable temporary or permanent housing. Once the family is living in the school of origin's attendance area, the student would get transportation on the same basis as other students.

### **Strategy #2: Reroute School Buses**

This option is the one that's most familiar: Regular school buses may be able to stop at local shelters or other transitional housing locations, such as motels or campgrounds, and pick up homeless students. But districts often don't have the flexibility to move transportation routes around at will, particularly if the rerouting will add significant length to the routes. On a per-student basis, this option can be very expensive if you end up using a large bus to transport just a few students over long distances.

### **Strategy #3: Offer Transit Passes**

If you have public transit available in your district, your district can pay for transit passes for homeless students. Some transit agencies may have reduced-price cards available for students, or for people who meet income requirements (for example, parents of homeless students), which can make this an even more economical alternative.

If you obtain passes for young students, be sure to include passes for the parents as well, because it may not be safe to have small children negotiate public buses or trains by themselves. And it may violate your state's law, too, Cook says.

### **Strategy #4: Use Public Assistance Transportation**

Contact providers of public assistance transportation to see if they can serve your homeless students. For example, many communities operate van routes to help workfare recipients get to their jobs, or "paratransit" services for the elderly and people with disabilities. These services are often available even in areas with little or no mass transit—and they may have under-used capacity that could enable them to transport homeless students to school.

### **Strategy #5: Reimburse for Gas**

Another option Cook's district has used is reimbursing homeless families for gas if they have access to a vehicle. Her district reimburses using the same per-mile rate as for district employees traveling on official business. She has homeless families sign the same forms, too, so she has a record of what the district spends.

But sometimes homeless families may have so little cash that they can't afford to wait for the reimbursement. In those cases, her district has issued a prepaid gas card in a low amount, and then deducted further reimbursements from the initial card value.

### **Strategy #6: Use Taxi, Van Services**

A final option is to use taxi or van services. This can also be an expensive option, but in some cases it may be the only one available. If you choose this strategy, make sure you comply with state or local laws, Cook cautions. Only certain companies may be approved for government agency use.

### **Insider Source**

**Linda Cook:** Director, Categorical Programs, N. Sacramento Sch. Dist., 670 Dixieanne Ave., Sacramento, CA 95815; (916) 263-8348; lcook@nssd.k12.ca.us.

### **What If School of Origin Is in Another District?**

The obligation to provide transportation can cross district boundaries, notes Linda Cook, a California categorical programs director. Section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(II) says that if a homeless student lives in one district, but the school of origin is in a second district, the two districts must agree on a way to apportion the responsibility and costs for the student's transportation. For example, the first district could take the student by bus to the district line, where the student would then transfer to a bus operated by the second district. Or if the same public transit system serves both districts, the districts could split the costs of a single transit pass.

If you're in an area where districts have overlapping boundaries—for example, you're in a secondary school district that encompasses several elementary school districts—you may discover that more than one district is serving students from the same family. That can be wasteful and can duplicate services, and may not help the students effectively. So keep communication lines open with homeless coordinators in "feeder" districts. That way, you'll find out about opportunities to coordinate services together and save money.

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## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

June 2004

Barbara Duffield, NAEHCY Policy Director

### INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA) REAUTHORIZATION

On Wednesday, May 12, the U.S. Senate approved the Murray/DeWine amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by a voice vote.

The amendment:

- Ensures that homeless children and youth with disabilities, foster children and youth with disabilities, children with disabilities in military families, and children with disabilities who change school districts in an academic year, receive assessments for services within established time limits
- Helps to ensure continuity of services when children and youth with disabilities, including homeless, foster, and military children, transfer school districts in an academic year
- Increases access to special education for homeless unaccompanied youth
- Increases access to early intervention services for infants and toddlers
- Ensures educational stability by clarifying that special educational placements must comply with the McKinney-Vento Act
- Increases collaboration between special education personnel and McKinney-Vento Act personnel

Our advocacy efforts must now move on to the House-Senate conference committee, which will meet to reconcile differences between the House and Senate bills. NAEHCY urges its members to please write letters to U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and U.S. Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) for their efforts. These two Senators deserve our heartfelt thanks for their leadership on behalf of children and youth with disabilities who

are experiencing homelessness. Both Senators can be reached at the U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, or you can find their fax and email addresses <http://www.senate.gov>.

A position paper on IDEA reauthorization authored jointly by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty may be downloaded in Microsoft Word format at <http://www.naehcy.org/IDEAposition.doc>.

### FY2005 FUNDING FOR THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT'S EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM

Congress has begun consideration of the FY2005 budget. This is a critical opportunity to increase funding for the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. The authorized funding level for the EHCY program is \$70 million. Last year Congress appropriated \$60 million for the program. Increased funding is desperately needed to reach more children and to provide more direct services for school enrollment, attendance, and success.

Please write and fax your Members of Congress and urge them to support an appropriation of \$70 million for the EHCY program in the FY2005 budget. An action alert and sample letter may be found at <http://www.naehcy.org/fy2005alert.html>

### REAUTHORIZATION OF THE HEAD START ACT

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee passed S. 1940, legislation to reauthorize the Head Start Act, in October 2003. S. 1940 is expected to reach the Senate floor for a vote

prior to Congressional recess in August. The U.S. House of Representatives passed its legislation to reauthorize the Head Start Act, H.R. 2210, in July 2003.

Both the Senate Committee bill and the House-passed bill contain significant provisions to remove barriers to homeless children's participation in Head Start programs. Both bills require that Head Start grantees identify and prioritize homeless children for Head Start enrollment; homeless families be allowed to apply to and enroll in Head Start programs while required paperwork is being obtained; and Head Start grantees coordinate with McKinney-Vento liaisons. Summaries of these and other homelessness-related provisions in the House and Senate Head Start bills may be found at [http://www.naehcy.org/legislative\\_update.html](http://www.naehcy.org/legislative_update.html)

### THE BRINGING AMERICA HOME ACT

H.R. 2897, the Bringing America Home Act, is a comprehensive bill designed to end homelessness in the United States. It includes housing, health, income and civil rights components.

Key provisions of H.R. 2897 include:

- A National Housing Trust Fund that would create 1.5 million units of housing affordable to the households with the lowest incomes
- New rental assistance to the poorest families
- Increased funding for emergency and transitional shelter
- Increased access to employment and benefits for working and disabled people

These are just a few of the Bringing America Home Act provisions aimed squarely at the causes of homelessness. There are other

provisions, too, in the Act, more specific to education. H.R. 2897 would:

- Align the HUD definition of homelessness with the McKinney-Vento education definition. Not only would this address the confusion that results when agencies are forced to contend with different definitions for program eligibility, but it would open the door for many people -- especially families with children and unaccompanied youth -- who have been excluded from shelter and services because they do not fit HUD's narrow definition of homelessness.
- Require that HUD community planning boards include the participation of the school district liaison. Require that HUD-funded agencies consider the school stability of children when shelter placements are made in order to limit educational disruption.

The enactment of the Bringing America Home Act is a critical strategy to increase the school success of America's most vulnerable children, and thus to ensure their brighter futures. Please urge your U.S. Representatives to sign on to H.R. 2897! Phone and fax information for U.S. Representatives may be found at <http://www.house.gov>

If you would like to receive regular legislative updates via email, please contact Barbara Duffield, NAEHCY Legislative & Advocacy Chair, at email [bduffield@naehcy.org](mailto:bduffield@naehcy.org) or 202/364-7392.

**National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week**

*Nov. 14 - 20, 2004*

Co-sponsored annually, one week before Thanksgiving, by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger. During this week, schools, communities, and cities take part in a nationwide effort to bring greater awareness to the problems of hunger and homelessness.

*NEW 2004 Awareness Week Manual is available at:*  
<http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

**Do You Have A Good Working Knowledge of McKinney-Vento?**

*Rob Houchin, Regional Superintendent  
ROE #53 - Tazewell, Pekin, Illinois*

As a high school principal, I had paid little attention to the term "homeless" because I didn't think that we had any in our small high school of 300 students. The awakening to the true meaning of the term came for me early in September. My ignorance of the McKinney-Vento Act nearly cost a girl her senior year of high school. That experience has led to my commitment to make sure that I am properly prepared to handle the education of homeless children.

Lisa's\* mother moved to New York during Lisa's freshman year of high school, leaving her to live with her sister and brother-in-law. She was a seventeen-year-old senior honor student and a cheerleader in her third day of the school year when her brother-in-law put her on a bus, against her will, and sent her to New York. Lisa promptly returned and moved in with a friend. When she attempted to return to school, she was told that she was no longer a resident in that district and could not attend school.

After nearly three weeks of unsuccessful attempts to return to school, she was directed to my office for assistance. My intervention received a negative response as I tried to reason with the district. Not only would they not allow her in school, they would not allow her to attend our county alternative education program, as well. Another week of Lisa's senior year slipped away.

It was only through contact with my Truants' Alternative & Optional Education Coordinator that I discovered that he was also the Homeless Liaison for our county. His input led to phone calls to Eileen Worthington (an Illinois lead liaison) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), both contacts giving me the information and support that I needed to confidently and aggressively approach the school again. By this time, Lisa had moved two more times, bouncing around from friend to friend, and eventually ended up living in an adjacent district.

After much discussion, but no agreement that she was a homeless or an "unaccompanied youth," the school agreed to allow her to return to school. It was either that, or an ISBE attorney knocking on their door. I also informed the school that she was to receive free lunches, tutoring to catch up, and be returned to the cheerleading squad. She didn't need transportation, but I was prepared to order the district to provide it, if needed.

I am pleased to report that Lisa is doing well and will graduate with her class this spring.

Since that incident, I have taken numerous calls from other school officials regarding the McKinney-Vento Act. I discovered that I was not the only one ignorant about the requirements of this act. Most superintendents in my county are now eager to make sure that they do not make a mistake in this area.

It is critical that Regional Superintendents have a good working knowledge of the law, and that this knowledge be communicated to the liaisons, schools, and community to help ensure that homeless children are not left behind. There are too many resources available for us to be ignorant of this law.

*\* Name has been changed.*

*Reprinted with Permission From April 2004 OUR HOME*

## **You Did Good!**

*I recently received a letter from a formerly homeless mother who wanted to commend the Hubble School in Wheaton, Illinois, for their efforts and compassion in providing necessary services for her son and herself. Homeless as a result of domestic violence, Victoria and her son Dante\* had no place to go but up, and with the help of two very compassionate women, along with staff at Hubble School, they are headed up. Hubble . . . You Did Good!*

By the grace of God, my son Dante and I have been able to come out of homelessness--with the help of Donna Kozica, social worker, along with Sheila Thorse, guidance counselor, at Hubble School in Wheaton. This has not been a one-person effort. Mrs. Kozica coordinated with area social services, agencies and referral resources to make this all happen. They helped keep my son in school when I was literally living out of our car and my son was staying with various families. My only other option would have been the foster care system. I knew this lifestyle meant Dante would again be facing the recurrence of asthma attacks, coupled with pneumonia.

I was holding on desperately to a 2nd-shift job which required me to arrange transportation for my child outside of the school district he attended. My efforts trying to coordinate this through the Office of Education at the county building proved fruitless. Needless to say, I ended up losing my job. Without knowledge of this, Donna Kozica asked me about transportation. She said she believed she could help arrange it. And she did! Just in time for me to start a job in my field. Housing came through immediately after that. Somehow the entire staff, as far as I know, coordinated by these two women, furnished our entire apartment. This school helped take us off the streets, then helped take us off the floor.

They supported this family which is so far removed from any lifestyle that any of them could relate to. Even more important than that is having a team of teachers who will sit down with me and discuss my son's progress, status, and needs. I have a supportive school staff who not only have broken the social mores surrounding the Chicago area's reputation for being THE most segregated city in the United States--and the mind-set of racism that upholds it--but who are revolutionary in destroying some of the very causes that keep half of the African American boys enrolled in Chicagoland schools from graduating. It is a dilemma and horrible truth that every mother of a black boy in this area must face.

Also, so over-abundant has been the help that I received from the school, that I have been able to help families in two other area school districts. I don't take lightly the help and support that I have received. I've watched my son's grades improve from Ds and Fs to As, Bs and Cs. This is remarkable. That's why before I'm finished, they will hear my story from the Governor's office to the White House.

Thank you for this opportunity to commend these people at this school office. They have gone above and beyond the call of duty in many ways which I haven't even related in this writing.

*\* Names have been changed.*

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### **New Web Resources on Homelessness and Head Start**

In April, NAEHCY organized a Town Hall Meeting, "Helping Homeless Head Start Children," at the National Head Start Conference 31st Annual Training Conference in Anaheim, California.

Two model state programs and two local school district programs presented on their efforts to increase homeless children's access to Head Start programs, and an overview of the issues was presented by NAEHCY policy director Barbara Duffield.

All five presentations are currently on the NAEHCY web site for download at <http://www.naehcy.org/nhsamaterials.html>



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## The Beam

Visit NAEHCY on the web at:  
<http://naehcy.org>

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### National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

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 connects educators, parents, advocates, researchers and service providers to ensure school enrollment and attendance, and overall success for children and youth whose lives have been disrupted by the lack of safe, permanent and adequate housing. NAEHCY accomplishes these goals through advocacy, partnerships and education.

Membership is open to everyone with an interest in homeless education. Annual dues are \$40.00, which includes a discount on the annual conference and a subscription to *The BEAM*, the organization's newsletter. Dues also help support the website, printing, advocacy events, and the annual conference.

Membership is good for one full year from date received in NAEHCY office.

*To become a NAEHCY member please send annual dues to:*

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