



# The Beam

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**Submission Information:**

Contact Jodi Mincemoyer regarding submissions at: [jodim@naehcy.org](mailto:jodim@naehcy.org)

Deadline for the Spring issue is April 16, 2008.

Deadline for the Summer issue July 1, 2008.

- Share successful practices you have developed or helpful resources you have used.
- Submit a paper based on a conference presentation.
- Review a book, video, or training tool.
- Present an interesting story about the success of a student or family in your program.
- Write a feature about an issue that needs our attention!

## **Play Fair, Play Ball: Advocating with Activity & Athletic Associations**

*Edith Sims, Facilitator, HEART Program, Spokane Public Schools, Washington*

Sports and other activities are often a key to engaging youth in school. They can provide students with a sense of belonging, stability, pride, and responsibility and might even lead the way to admission and scholarships to college. The McKinney-Vento Act helps ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to athletics and other school activities.

While serving a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student, Thomas,\* who was identified as an unaccompanied youth, I had the experience of working with an athletic association that denied him eligibility to play basketball. Thomas had been declared eligible for McKinney-Vento services during the 2006-07 academic year, after being taken in by a family when he was discovered sleeping on the exterior school steps. He ended up living in at least three separate houses last year. At the end of the school year, his mother convinced him that they “could work things out” and moved with him and some of his siblings out of district. (I think it is important to note that at least two other siblings have chosen to leave the home.)

On November 1, 2008, Thomas was back at his school in Spokane. He had been thrown out, again, by his mother, had contacted friends from his old school, and made his way back to Spokane. He was now staying with yet another friend’s family; and was, once again, declared eligible for McKinney-Vento services.

Soon after enrollment this past fall, the newspaper reported that the local athletic league had denied Thomas eligibility to play sports. The article included the following statements: 1) “rules on transfers say anytime you move without the whole family unit, it is considered a transfer,” and, 2) “it is not a hardship if a move is made by choice of the student or student’s family.” Both statements are contradictory with McKinney-Vento legislation. Are activity/athletic associations required to comply with McKinney-Vento legislation?

**FAQ #69.** *Should students in homeless situations be exempt from attendance rules for participating in school sports (for example, rules requiring attending school for a semester before being eligible for sports at that school)?*

**A:** Yes. The McKinney-Vento Act requires states and school districts to eliminate barriers to school enrollment and retention for children and youth experiencing homelessness. 42 USC. §11432(g)(1)(I), (g)(7). Enrollment is defined as attending school and participating fully in school activities. 42 USC. §11434A(1). Sports and other extra-curricular activities are school activities. Courts have determined that school athletic associations are generally considered to be part of the state, due to their close relationship with the state. Therefore, athletic associations must comply with the McKinney-Vento Act’s requirement to remove barriers, by exempting homeless students from sports participation rules that students cannot meet due to their homelessness and mobility.”

*From “The 100 Most Frequently Asked Questions on the Education Rights of Children and Youth in Homeless Situations,” available at <http://www.naehcy.org/faq.html>.*

\* Not student’s real name

## Happy New Year From the Association!

We greet this YEAR OF THE RAT and the beginning of the 60-year Chinese calendar cycle with much zeal as we continue to make advances in services and funding for promoting the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness and high mobility.

The NAEHCY board and consultants kicked the year off January 11-12, 2008 with a work session and retreat at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, site of the upcoming 20th Annual Conference (see page 12). At that meeting, we welcomed new board members and eased some older board members into new roles. Board member and consultant names and roles are listed on page 12 of this newsletter, and more extensive information (such as bios – coming soon – and contact) are available on the NAEHCY web site (under the *About NAEHCY* section: <http://www.naehcy.org/who.html>).

The session served as an orientation to NAEHCY for newer members and a review of our history, mission, vision, and policies. The board updated the budget, reviewed consultant contracts and pay – incorporating guidance from the Annual Membership meeting in November 2007 – and started work on the 2008-09 budget.

This annual retreat is a time to review NAEHCY's strategic goals and organize our priorities for the year. Each area of focus produced a work plan, which is incorporated into our overall strategic plan. We have some ambitious and exciting projects in 2008 in the areas of legislation and advocacy, visibility and publicity, as well as program and fund development.

But we need your participation and input to make it all happen! The board meets by conference call on the second Tuesday of each month from 12:30 - 2 p.m. EST. Beginning in April, board meetings will be open for members to listen in, ask questions and provide guidance. Keep watching your email for more information.

Speaking of which... if you are not receiving occasional emails from NAEHCY, then you are not listed as a member. You can renew your membership by visiting <http://www.naehcy.org/member.html>.

The Year of the Rat 2008 is an auspicious time for beginnings, and we hope you will see this as an opportunity to re-NEW your commitment to NAEHCY by renewing your membership and inquiring about how you can advance our work to improve legislation and services for *all* our nation's children and youth. ■

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## Federal Income Tax Breaks For Working Caregivers

*Loren Johnson, Internal Revenue Service*

Three important tax credits can reduce the federal income taxes of working caregivers. The Child Tax Credit can shrink tax bills up to \$1,000 per child. The refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Additional Child Tax Credit can put extra money in caregivers' pockets. Even if those filing live in a shelter, they can get these credits. Some caregivers may be eligible to claim these credits for the first time, especially if there were changes in the family, such as a new child, a divorce, or a decrease in earnings during the past year.

Working caregivers with incomes from \$1- \$39,783 can often claim the EITC, a tax credit of \$1 to \$4,716 depending on the number of qualifying children and the amount of income. EITC requirements include: 1) the taxpayer must file a federal income tax return; 2) must have earnings from wages or self-employment; and 3) must provide a valid Social Security number for each qualifying child listed on Schedule EIC.

The Child Tax Credit reduces tax liability dollar for dollar. Caregivers may be able to claim a credit of up to \$1,000 for each child living in the same house who, on December 31, 2007, was under the age of 17 and was a close relative. Caregivers must provide the name and identification number (usually a Social Security number) on tax returns for each qualifying child.

The Additional Child Tax Credit can give refunds to some taxpayers with qualifying children, even if no tax is owed. Form 8812, Additional Child Tax Credit, must be completed to claim the credit.

The EITC, Child Tax Credit, and Additional Child Tax Credit can significantly reduce tax liability and, in some cases, give filers extra money back. For free tax help call the IRS at 800-829-1040 or visit its web site: <http://www.irs.gov> for more information on these credits and qualifying for them. ■

## Preserving Rights through a Persevering Mentality

*By Alexander P. Miller, NAEHCY Intern, College of William and Mary*

Cathy Henry has worked tirelessly with the homeless program for Maryland's Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) for the better part of her professional career. Her efforts, though, have attracted the attention of the entire nation. In 2005, Henry received NAEHCY's Sandra Neese Lifetime Achievement Award for her efforts to ensure the education of *all* children and youth, even those without permanent housing.

Henry's primary focus has always been direct service and education for homeless children and youth. Howard County is a relatively affluent county, where housing is difficult for families and individuals to afford and maintain. A recent PIT count (following the HUD definition of homelessness) found 333 homeless individuals in Howard County. Henry started as a tutor for homeless children living in shelters and was the sole shelter tutor for her school system's Homeless Education Assistance Program (HEAP) from 1992 until 1999. Working part-time from 1994-1998, Henry personally tutored every homeless child who was living in Grassroots, the local shelter. For the first year or two of the program, she tutored from one room to the next, wherever a family was living.

But Cathy Henry knew this was far from ideal. Grassroots was the only shelter in the area and could not accommodate the needs of all of Howard County's homeless. Oftentimes, Grassroots became overcrowded, so it would arrange for its overflow to stay in a local motel. Henry never considered neglecting the families residing there, so she persuaded a motel owner to set aside a room for tutoring. Half of the funding for this project came from Grassroots, while McKinney-Vento grant money supplied the other half, a major accomplishment for both Henry and her community.

After she began working for HCPSS as a Pupil Personnel Worker (PPW) in 1999, four teacher tutors were finally hired to do the work she had previously done all by herself. Using her personal experience and expertise in this area, she took on the role of hiring, coordinating, training, and supervising the tutors. By 2001, the program had grown to five tutors. In the 2004-2005 school year, the program expanded to eight teacher tutors.

In addition to being a full-time PPW, Henry today serves as the school system's liaison for HEAP. She is also the project manager for the McKinney-Vento grant funds. Henry has developed brochures for parents as well as a handbook for training tutors and school personnel on homeless issues.

Today, Howard County's PPWs—now totaling twenty—are more involved with the needs of homeless children than ever before. They assist in immediate enrollment by filling out a form that waives the need for student documentation like immunization records, often difficult for a homeless family to provide. The PPWs assist in the Help-A-Child Fund, which provides items like bookbags, baskets of food and gifts for holidays.

Many describe Henry as being a mentor and a kind of "surrogate parent" to the children she serves. Henry was instrumental in developing a case management service orientation to help homeless students. PPWs meet with parents, check on the children regularly to see how they are doing in school, and encourage students to participate in academic intervention programs.

The PPWs also assist with transportation. For instance, they assist with initiatives to cab parents to parent-teacher conferences or special education meetings and help to coordinate student busing. The team of PPWs uses the time available before the start of school to tutor children who arrive early due to bus schedules.

With these programs and initiatives, Henry is seeing results in her county. Recent data show that Howard County's homeless student population is performing just as well as the broader population of students who receive free or reduced lunches.

Despite the roller-coaster ride inherent in grant-funded programs, Henry has always persevered to keep her program going. Through ongoing collaboration with the school system and a wide variety of local organizations, Henry has always found funding and assistance to continue supporting homeless children and their families. Her determination to help homeless children is never-ending. ■

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## Advocacy 101: Making a Difference

Barbara Duffield, Policy Director, NAEHCY

Have you ever wished you could do more to help a child or youth experiencing homelessness, but a legal or policy issue – or lack of funding – stood in your way? Have you ever wished that the McKinney-Vento Act or Title I Part A were stronger or clearer?

If so, this year provides exciting opportunities for change. Congress is considering the reauthorization of subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act (the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program) as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA is the statute that governs primary and secondary education, which was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Reauthorization offers a unique chance to shape the legislation to incorporate lessons learned from the past five years of implementation, in the larger context of the program's twenty-year history. In addition to the ESEA reauthorization, Congress will take up the reauthorization of the HUD McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act programs. Last but not least, critical funding decisions for FY2009 will be made.

Whether Congress makes helpful or harmful decisions depends on a number of factors – especially YOU. Your participation is essential to the success of NAEHCY's 2008 legislative advocacy agenda. Yet often, advocacy is perceived as the realm of national and state organizations, “professional” lobbyists, and others whose job it is to communicate with Members of Congress and federal agencies. This perception exists despite the fact that the most significant advances in many children's issues – including homeless education – have come about as the result of broad, engaged, grassroots advocacy by educators, service providers, civic organizations, and individual community members.

If you find the idea of getting involved in advocacy unnerving, you are not alone. Let's examine the reasons for taking a more active role in advocacy, the primary concerns that prevent many people from doing so, and some simple tips or strategies to keep in mind as you begin – even by taking small steps – to engage in a range of advocacy activities.

### FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

The dictionary definition of advocacy is “The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause,

idea, or policy; active support.” If you work in a program for homeless children and youth, this is something you do almost every day – it is practically a part of your job description! The difference between client or program advocacy and legislative/policy advocacy is that in client or program advocacy, one is advocating for individual children or families, or for a program that serves children and families who live in a given community and attend a given school district. Legislative and policy advocacy, on the other hand, involve attempts to create changes in systems and policies that impact many people – those who are currently impacted by homelessness and those who will be in the future. These two kinds of advocacy go hand in hand, and mutually reinforce each other. The same passion that many educators and service providers have for helping individual children can translate powerfully into a passion for helping all children in these situations and for changing the very systems that limit or challenge our ability to help.

### WHY GET INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY?

There are many different reasons to get involved in advocacy, but the primary and over-arching reason is that without advocacy, Congress is less likely to make policies that benefit homeless children and youth. Why? Because good policies are informed policies, and very few people are informed about the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Most Members of Congress and their staff – like the general public – are unaware of homelessness among families and youth, let alone the challenges in accessing education and the rights and services under the McKinney-Vento Act. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are invisible to policy makers; their voices are not heard. No one else knows what you know, and no one else is likely to communicate it to Congressional offices.

You may be saying to yourself, “But isn't that why I pay my dues to NAEHCY? Isn't that your job, Barbara?” The truth is that while NAEHCY's legislative advocacy inside the Beltway is important, it is strengthened enormously when local educators and providers become involved. *All politics is local*. Congressional offices want to know what is happening in their districts or states, and they want to hear it *from* their districts and states. National organizations can help make the connection between local programs and federal offices, and we can certainly perform

## Advocacy 101

continued

the “policy wonk” technicalities of legislative advocacy; but we need local and state help to pique the interest of offices in the first place and to help build their commitment toward proactive solutions. As a constituent, you have the most power to effect change.

### WHAT IF I'M NOT ALLOWED TO LOBBY?

Many people believe that they are prohibited from engaging in legislative advocacy because of the nature of their jobs, particularly if they work for state or local government. However, it is important to distinguish between “lobbying” and “advocacy.”

The IRS defines lobbying as “activities that ask legislators to take a specific position on a specific piece of legislation, or urge others to do the same.” Clearly, NAEHCY lobbies, as do many other state and local non-profit organizations. However, “legislative advocacy” is much broader and can be defined as “any activity that a person or organization undertakes to influence policy - including educating, providing information, and arguing a cause.”

- Check to see if you can engage in educating and informing your legislators, and be mindful of the narrow, specific definition of lobbying.
- If you cannot, find others to “make the pitch” for you, such as a community partner or service provider, local or state coalition, or other advocacy organization. Student groups, especially those with members who have experienced homelessness, are also powerful voices to engage. Even if you must follow this route due to job restrictions, stay engaged in general advocacy activities.
- Publicize the needs of homeless children and youth in venues that will help to educate your community, especially those who can advocate with legislators.
- Act as a private individual. You do not give up your rights as a citizen just because you work for government. You can send letters and make phone calls from your home in order to get information where it is most needed, when it is most needed.
- Stay educated! Check out resources NAEHCY provides, such as policy and position papers, talking points, and sample letters.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS!

- Know who represents your community or communi-

ties and school district: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). Find out their positions on issues that matter to you and the children and youth you serve.

- Share materials and information with Congressional offices from your homeless programs. Provide statistics *and* stories – numbers are important, but “putting a face” on the issue helps make the numbers more meaningful and memorable. Policy is driven by anecdote as much or more than by data, but *both* are necessary in making the case.
- Encourage your colleagues and community partners to get involved as well. Invite your representatives to meetings as speakers or to events where they can meet children, youth, families, and the people who work with them.
- Make it part of your work plan to develop an ongoing relationship with, at minimum, one or two Congressional offices. Keep the communication open all year long, not only when there is pending legislation of interest to you.
- It’s “who you know.” Find out if someone you know knows someone (who knows someone) who can help you establish contact with your Members of Congress and help get the issue of homeless children and youth’s education on their agenda.
- Communicate with NAEHCY to let us know what you need in order to be more effective advocates.
- Remember to thank Congressional representatives and staff for their work on behalf of the community at a public event or through letters to the editor. Invite them to a celebration to speak or receive an award.

After fourteen years of federal legislative work on homeless children and youth’s issues, I can say without hesitation that the active involvement of local liaisons and state coordinators in legislative advocacy is more important now than ever. The future of hundreds of thousands of children and youth can shift with the order of words on the page of the law. Such is the power of legislation to change lives. So the next time you find yourself frustrated by the law or lack of funding, please think about joining our advocacy efforts in ways big or small. We are happy to provide the advocacy “technical assistance” to start you on this path! ■

## Advocating with Activity & Athletic Associations

continued from page 1

As this student and his pro bono attorneys prepared to appeal this decision to the state activity association, I was making phone calls to the amazing resources available to district homeless liaisons. I learned that activity associations are, indeed, expected to follow McKinney-Vento legislation. Thus began one of the most challenging journeys in my ten years as a homeless liaison! I have listed just a few suggestions for other liaisons who might find themselves in the same situation.

- Be sure to notify the homeless student of his/her legal rights: it's the law!
- You are part of a team! Recruit the help of your state coordinator.
- Keep your local supervisor and superintendent in the loop. You need their support.
- Educate yourself to become confident by learning what the law covers.
- Review your files/information about the student; make sure you have the documentation to justify your decision to consider the youth homeless.
- Get assistance from other people in the student's life who can back up your decision that he/she qualifies as homeless (i.e., school counselor, the person they lived with previously, etc.).
- Use your national team, too! The three major organizations that were instrumental in this process were NCHE, NAEHCY, and NLCHP.

*Working with attorneys.* This student already had a pro bono attorney working for him. After contacting the youth, I received a call from his attorney asking me for a letter confirming that the youth was a McKinney-Vento student. With support from the Superintendent and the district's attorney, I drafted a letter to the state and local activity association with a copy to the pro bono attorney. The letter was able to show that McKinney-Vento is a federal mandate rather than a local political issue. Since we have a legal obligation as a school district to make sure this student has a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school, the letter would be proof that we were complying with the law and advocating for the student.

*Beware of surprising conflicts of interest.* Suddenly there were principals, athletic directors, and coaches who could not even talk with me because they are all part of the athletic association, and it would have been a conflict of interests for them.

*Working with the media.* When approached by local

newspaper reporters, I chose to respond by saying that it would be unethical for me to discuss a particular student, and referred them to Barbara Duffield to discuss this as a federal McKinney-Vento issue. But be sure to alert people when you refer the press to them!

*The eligibility or appeal hearing.* Go prepared. I put together a packet that included copies of our program brochure, the McKinney-Vento Act, the 100 Most Frequently Asked Questions (with #69 marked with a sticky note), and a list of the National Partners in Homeless Education.

*The outcome.* The local decision was overturned and Thomas was allowed to play basketball!

During this process, I was yelled at, had fingers "stabbed" at my face, and faced attempts to intimidate me. One of the best pieces of advice that I received was to be sure not to get caught up in the gossip and emotions; rather, to keep remembering this was about what I KNEW about this student and the law.

The role of the liaison is a difficult position to be in: you are truly the student's advocate but at the same time, you are an employee of the district. Our activity association is made up of district employees who often have their own opinions of the definition of homeless. I was told, "he can just go home," and "he can attend school, he just can't play sports." Education and training about the law is imperative to its proper implementation.

Know that people feel strongly about what they "think" they know. You will have information regarding students that will contain highly confidential pieces that you cannot share. Even after a decision is made, people will be

### Advocate for State-level Policies

A powerful strategy to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can participate in sports is to work with the state athletic association to adopt formal policies related to McKinney-Vento students. NAEHCY is happy to support liaisons and state coordinators in advocating for such policies! Two examples of states that have adopted formal policies are Delaware [see sections 2.2.1.6 (pages 24 and 53), 2.4.2.6 (page 27), and 2.2.1.8 (page 51) of the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association Manual ([http://www.doe.state.de.us/programs/diaa/files/diaa\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.doe.state.de.us/programs/diaa/files/diaa_handbook.pdf))] and Virginia [see section 28-6-2(15) (page 63) of the Virginia High School League policy (<http://www.vhsl.org/Handbook.pdf>)].

## Athletic Associations...

continued

angry; this truly is not a popularity contest! We are still working through how to prevent this from happening again in our district.

We must recognize that activity/athletic associations have a difficult job; one of their major concerns is that we not create a "homeless loophole." I understand that concern. In building relationships with athletic associations, it may help to explain the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and how you apply it in your district, to note that youth who are homeless still need to meet skill-level requirements for sports. Provide the context of high mobility to explain how transfer and attendance rules that make sense for stable students can create unfair barriers for homeless students. ■

**How can we work together to address the concerns of activity/athletic associations but also ensure participation for truly homeless students?**

**NAEHCY invites you to share your responses to Edith's question. Have you had experience with this issue? Do you have strategies, advice or policies to share? Please send your responses to [jodim@naehcy.org](mailto:jodim@naehcy.org), and NAEHCY will report them through the web site or *The Beam*. Please indicate if we can publish your name, title, school district and/or state.**

## Legislative Updates on the Web

Legislation and congressional action move rapidly at times and very slowly at others. This newsletter has a somewhat regular cycle of appearing every 3 months, a schedule that is not conducive to immediate action. Instead, Policy Director Barbara Duffield fills our needs for up-to-the-minute information through the NAEHCY web site and the Legislative Update/Action emails. Beginning with this issue, we have discontinued the practice of reprinting legislative updates from the web in these pages. Rather, the newsletter will focus on implementation outlook, more in-depth policy analysis, strategies, best practices, success stories - all the better to arm the homeless education liaison and partners with more power tools for action.

Contact information for Members of Congress may be found at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). Comprehensive, regular legislative updates are available on the NAEHCY web site: [www.naehcy.org/update.html](http://www.naehcy.org/update.html) or via an email action list. Contact Barbara Duffield directly at [bduffield@naehcy.org](mailto:bduffield@naehcy.org) to be added to this list.

We look forward to hearing from you about your challenges and successes in overcoming legislative and policy-related barriers. Be sure to let us know what you would like to read about! See information about submissions to *The Beam* on the front page of the newsletter. ■



## Food Stamp Challenge

The Food Stamp Challenge is an effort promoted by advocates to demonstrate the challenges faced by those who receive - and require - food stamps to provide meals for their families. According to the US Department of Agriculture, the agency that administers the Food Stamp Program, the nationwide average monthly benefit in FY 2005 was \$94.05, approximately \$3 a day or \$1 a meal.

Throughout 2007, members of Congress, community leaders, and others participated in the Food Stamp Challenge, designed by the Food Research and Action Council (FRAC) and the Hatcher Group, to see what life must be like for those who depend on food stamps to survive. Participants were not allowed to spend more than a total of \$21 on *all* food and beverages during the Challenge week, including fast food and dining out. The rules also

required that no free food could be consumed (receptions, meals purchased by colleagues, friends, or family) and that all food eaten had to be purchased with the \$21 budget, (no steaks from the deep freeze). Members who participated were invited to post comments about their experiences on an event blog.

The event and associated publicity points to the fact that Food Stamps were meant as a supplement in the budget of families in need, but most often, they are sustenance. During fiscal year 2007, the Food Stamp Program served 26 million people in an average month.

Models and materials for developing a challenge in your own community can be found online through the FRAC web site: <http://www.frac.org/Legislative/fspchallenge.html>. ■

## Home Visiting for Young Homeless Children

*Sarah Benjamin, Mobile Outreach Parent-Child Home Program, East Suffolk BOCES, New York*

Most children living with homeless parents are very young; almost half are under the age of six. Long before school begins, a capacity for learning is developed. It is enhanced or hindered by what happens at home. Home visiting is an exceptional method of meeting the educational, social-emotional and therapeutic needs of humans. Programs such as the Parent-Child Home Program have decades of research declaring their success in meeting the needs of early childhood education, early emergent literacy, parent support and school readiness and success in finishing school. Begun as a pilot program in 2001, Mobile Outreach Parent-Child Home Program (MOP-CHP) reaches out to homeless families in New York and has brought positive results in educational achievement and social-emotional development to hundreds of homeless children and their families.

Homelessness creates isolation for a family. With high mobility, temporary and inadequate housing, and a lack of transportation, homeless parents are cut off from family, friends, neighbors, and a known community. There are no familiar schools, libraries, parent centers, community groups, or even places of worship to find needed support. Parents are left alone as they raise their young children.

Education can break the cycle of homelessness, yet young homeless children are not being prepared to succeed in school. They often miss out on preschool education, as there are not even enough affordable preschool slots and often no transportation. The fight that advocates, educators, and service providers have faced to improve educational access and success of school-aged homeless children is only the beginning. Each year, larger numbers of students start school with little or no preparation cognitively, social-emotionally, or academically.

Pioneers of early childhood development, T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan stated that early childhood is the most critical and vulnerable time in any child's development where ingredients for intellectual, emotional and moral growth are accumulated.

What happens early affects everything later in life. Brain development is optimal within a secure and stress free environment between an infant and primary caregiver. Women and children in homeless situations often deal with chronic stress and violence on a regular basis. To build and strengthen resilience, it only takes one meaningful relationship. Parents need an interested person to listen to, support, and communicate with them during

these difficult times in their lives. A relationship can mean a very simple interaction, but it might also prove profoundly meaningful and even therapeutic. Home visits to households with young children result in a 40% reduction in episodes of abuse and neglect.

Home visiting programs are a cost-effective means to improve the outlook for children and families. Such programs offer long term relationships to families. A home visitor can traverse the miles that isolate young parents and their developing children and can stay with them wherever they move – shelters, motels, campgrounds, basements, and other homeless or unstable environments. Within the warmth of human relationship, people can find the courage to be the parents they need and want to be, to be the first and most important teacher of their own child. Programs like Parent-Child Home Program give struggling parents the tools they need to help their children succeed in life.

As one young homeless mom said to her home visitor from MOPCHP, "I know you have affected my family in a great way. The fact that you gave two seconds of your time to listen to us meant a lot. I know for me I was able to learn through my daughters. The books and toys that you brought were not just books and toys. They were outlets for us to believe that for one hour of the day we could escape our sadness and focus on learning. We were learning to believe in ourselves, just the same as you came to teach our children to believe in a whole new world of reading and exploring. Your program shows us how to show our children something we forgot we had ourselves-believing in the joy of hope!"

The Parent-Child Home Program offers mobile outreach to meet families where they are, consistency through a long-term commitment to families, and the means to use very few supplies and materials to make a difference in the lives of parents and children. For more information about mobile outreach to parents of young children experiencing homelessness, visit [www.parent-child.org](http://www.parent-child.org). ■

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Brazelton, T. B. and Greenspan, S. (2000). *The Irreducible needs of children*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Middlebrooks, J. S., and Audage, N. C. (2007). *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

## Making the Most of the Point-In-Time Count

*Alexander P. Miller, NAEHCY Intern, College of William and Mary*

With the frigid temperatures of winter come the bitter chills of paperwork. I'm referring to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) (now) biennial custom of having communities count people experiencing homelessness in one night: the Point-In-Time (PIT) Count. To HUD, this practice serves as a way to paint a picture of American homelessness today. Others, however, find this painting to be abstract; its image lacks definition because it lacks the faces of doubled-up families and youth and others who do not have permanent residence.

For many people working with families and youth, the PIT Count is a PIT-iful practice, one riddled with the PIT-falls of under-estimation. It's an exercise that, in its inherent frustrations, PIT-s friends against friends. So, is it time for HUD to take a permanent PIT-stop? Perhaps not.

The PIT Count is essential for communities. In attempting to describe the size and scope of homelessness at the local level, the PIT Count can help in planning appropriate services and programs to address local needs. Second, the data can be a tool in measuring performance, whether related to individual projects or programs, or to the broad, overall goal of reducing the number of people who are in shelters or on the streets. In addition, by tabulating street-level data, organizations and service providers can get a sense of national trends.

One of the major criticisms of the HUD PIT count is the use of the HUD definition of homelessness. This definition excludes people who are doubled-up and in motels. By employing the narrow HUD definition, the PIT count is not, and could never be, an accurate "measure" of homelessness. The fact that more people experience homelessness over time than at any one point in time, and that those who are "chronically" homeless are over-represented in PIT counts, are among other flaws.

However, even though HUD does not include homeless families and youth who are living in doubled up or other precarious situations, some homeless education liaisons have been making the most of the PIT Count. Beth McCullough, liaison from Adrian Public Schools, Michigan, has been very involved in her Continuum of Care (CoC), realized that the PIT Count forms are not turned into HUD, only the accumulated results. She saw this as an opportunity to include those who were doubled up in

the Count by adding questions to the survey.

By doing this, McCullough wasn't subverting federal PIT Count regulations; she was using the resources available on the night of the PIT Count to perform a comprehensive PIT Count based on the McKinney-Vento Education definition of homelessness. She helped her CoC colleagues to count those doubled-up and others in non-permanent housing. Not limiting herself to school records, she found more of the "hidden homeless" population by collaborating with other local homeless advocates and community members.

At the end of the night, she had two sets of data. The first, going to HUD, only included those defined "homeless" by HUD (not those doubled up). The second set of data included everyone covered by the broader McKinney-Vento Education definition of homelessness. This additional PIT Count based on the McKinney-Vento education definition painted a more detailed and life-like picture of the homelessness problem, and the results were astonishing. The local newspaper did an article on the results that used the McKinney-Vento Education data. The article specifically made the point that the community had more homeless than originally thought.

More comprehensive data are useful when it comes to writing grants as well. The entire community of homeless and housing service providers was able to use the data when seeking funding: local shelters expanded grants and programs for children; food banks and soup kitchens had a better picture of their clientele; housing advocacy groups sought additional rental assistance vouchers. The liaison notes that in the second year of the revised PIT, her community's housing voucher director was able to put ten new vouchers in the county by basing their data on the new count.

The story of this liaison and others like her are evidence that Continua of Care do not have to be limited by HUD's more narrow PIT Count and definition. These liaisons demonstrate that the PIT Count is also an opportunity to count all people who are experiencing homelessness by thinking creatively and working collaboratively. Your Continuum of Care can do the same!

If you have PIT Count practices that work for your community, please share them with NAEHCY. We want to hear from you! ■

**Post-NCLB...****Day in the Life of the Homeless Student Liaison, 2007**

*Contributed by Beth Winterbottom, Regional Coordinator,  
2006 - present (and daughter of Eileen Sandell),  
Berks County Intermediate Unit Homeless  
Student Program, Pennsylvania*

Day starts at 7:30 a.m. in the registration office of the senior high school assisting a 9<sup>th</sup> grader enroll in a new school. Family arrived at the local women in crisis shelter yesterday from another city in Pennsylvania. Due to the severity of the abuse, family needed to move to a completely different area to avoid any possible detection by abuser. Family does not have any birth certificates, immunization records, or IEP from previous school since they left in the middle of the night. This Coordinator will review the McKinney-Vento law with administrators and remind them that student is protected under McKinney-Vento and able to enroll without this required paperwork.

After enrolling the student in school, off to local discount department store to purchase the required school uniform for student and others at the emergency shelter. Money used to purchase these supplies is from funds raised by local United Way chapter and area business. Money from No Child Left Behind does not provide extra money to purchase these necessary supplies.

Stop by the local shelters to obtain the list of other homeless students who do not have uniforms or school supplies. Grab coffee at convenience store and proceed to discount department store and Goodwill to obtain the 30+ uniforms requested.

Stop by office to retrieve donated bookbags, listen to voicemails and read emails. There are approximately 15 voice mails and 22 emails concerning various scenarios of "doubled-up" students and unaccompanied youth. Few voice mails requesting this Coordinator be a presenter at state convention, local meetings, and classrooms.

First voice mail is from a woman stating that she has taken in her seventeen year old daughter's boyfriend and needs assistance with registering him for football. We had worked together the day before enrolling him in school as an unaccompanied youth, but her message states that since his parents have abandoned him and moved to another state, they are unable to obtain the required parental signature for Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) standards to play football and he is unable to compete. McKinney-Vento is very clear in stating that unaccompanied youth be given the same access to school

and activities as housed youth, but how do we deal with PIAA standards? Get lunch at cafeteria, go back to desk to start returning phone calls and begin work on breaking down barriers to student playing sport he has been playing his whole life. Student is gifted athlete, so there is a possibility of scholarship money to attend college.

Contact school district solicitor, program solicitor, PIAA official, and NAEHCY policy director Barbara Duffield. Ms. Duffield composes a memo directed towards PIAA and refers to a Tennessee court ruling that school athletic associations serve as state actors and must adhere to McKinney-Vento standards, the same standards that schools must follow. Phone conference between the school solicitor and program solicitor discussing school liability. It is reviewed with district officials that their liability for not reducing barriers to the students overall education, including participation in extracurricular activities, is much greater than the risk of injury on the football field. School and PIAA agree to let student play football. Remind them of their Title I set aside funds for homeless students and suggest that use of these funds for purchasing a football uniform and gear for student would be appropriate. Contact guardian and student and inform them of the news.

Listen to and return voice messages and emails that have accrued in mailbox during conference call. Just enough time to resolve some transportation conflicts before 3:00 p.m. workshop at the local Women in Crisis Shelter. This workshop is conducted every thirty days and involves reviewing McKinney-Vento Law and Services with the new mothers that have entered the shelter. This workshop also involves passing on information regarding Head Start, Early Intervention, and Special Education Programs. The workshop is conducted by this Regional Coordinator every third Monday of the month.

After workshop at the Women's Shelter, Coordinator returns to office to finish reviewing Powerpoint presentation and organizing handouts for a 5:30 p.m. presentation at a local university's nursing program. On the way to the presentation, uniform and bookbags are dropped off at the emergency shelter so students are prepared for their school day tomorrow. While there, check in with the tutor that is hired with McKinney-Vento monies and review the numbers of students worked with the previous week. One tutor has a caseload of 35 students. Discuss the possibility of hiring another tutor. Make note to self to work on a mini-grant to fund this position and some summer programs as well.

**Before NCLB....**

**Day In The Life of the Homeless Student Liaison, 2000**

*Contributed by Eileen Sandell, liaison 1994 - 2006,  
(and mother of Beth Winterbottom)  
Berks County Intermediate Unit Homeless  
Student Program, Pennsylvania*

I start the day by picking up three children and taking them to their school of origin. They have moved to a different district with mom, but she has lost her job, has no money, and knows she will be evicted very shortly. Upon intervention by me, their original school has agreed to keep them enrolled, since they will not be in their current district for more than a week or two. This will avoid them having to switch schools three times. Also, I got a bus pass for mom so she could get around to find another apartment and not end up on the street. (There is no other agency that could have provided this for mom.)

Next, I go to a rural area of the county on a request from a guidance counselor. Mom was in the office crying the day before because she and her two young children are to be evicted in one week. She has about \$350 and no transportation. I arrange an appointment with our local Community Action Program and drive her there (about 20 miles). She is told she qualified and they will give her either a security deposit or first month's rent as soon as she finds a new apartment. She will now be able to afford another apartment and this has kept her and her two children from being homeless. (Neither mom nor the school knew about this possibility.)

Upon return to the office there were three calls. One shelter had a child who had no shoes to go to school. Could I provide some sneakers? The second call was from a shelter that had run out of bus tokens for a mom to take her child to preschool. The third was from a school district that needed more information about the McKinney Law in order to find out what they needed to do regard-

ing a student they "thought was homeless." I responded to each request that day.

Later there was a request from a local college to be a panelist for their observance of "Homeless and Hunger Awareness Week." They asked if I could talk about the effects of homelessness on children and what they could do about it. I will attend.

A request comes in from a guidance counselor at one of our rural high schools regarding a 17-year-old young man who is homeless, moving around from friend to friend. Was there any place I could recommend for him to live? I went through the options with her and told her I would meet with the young man to explain these and see what other help I could give.

I received a call from another shelter saying they had a new family from Philadelphia who was not familiar with the Reading, PA area and had three children who needed to be enrolled in school (with no records). I took enrollment information to be filled out to mom and told her I would pick her and the children up first thing in the morning, take them to the three different schools, and get them enrolled. (Eventually this family would have gotten the enrollment accomplished, but it would have taken much longer and been much more stressful for the entire family. With a liaison to assist the family can be enrolled in one day.)

At the end of the day, I pick up a mom at a shelter and take her to school where we pick up her children and go to a free clinic so she can get the immunizations she needs for her children to continue in school. (She has come from another state and the requirements were different there. The school has only allowed the children to stay in school because I have committed to taking them to this immunization appointment.) ■



**Day in the Life...2007, continued**

Finish presentation at university, go home take a bath and reflect on how fortunate I am to have a home and tub to go to. Reflect on the day's work and realize how fortunate I am to be able to provide these critical, life altering services to homeless students and families. Silently thank Stewart B. McKinney for making it his passion to help these homeless students break their cycle of poverty through education. Look forward to waking tomorrow morning and touching a whole new set of lives and making Stewart B. McKinney proud. ■

**Share your Day in the Life (DitL)  
Experiences with NAEHCY!**

Send DitL ruminations to Jodi Mincemoyer at [jodim@naehcy.org](mailto:jodim@naehcy.org) (and help us come up with a better acronym!). We will use these narratives as we develop documents and materials about EHCY services and programs through the reauthorization process. Your name and school district will be withheld if you prefer.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
EDUCATION OF HOMELESS  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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**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 academic achievement 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.

Everyone with an interest in supporting children and youth in homeless situations is encouraged to become a member of the Association by visiting our web site.

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- ◆ Up-to-the-minute conference details are available at [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org). Currently you can find the tentative agenda and hotel information.