



## *McKinney-Vento Fall 2014 Newsletter*

Welcome back to a school! I hope this newsletter finds you all with your feet firmly planted on the ground and headed toward a successful new year. This time of year can create a lot of anxiety for all of us, particularly families and students who are experiencing homelessness. The start of the school year brings long lists of needed school supplies, including shoes and clothes that meet school requirements and dress codes. With winter approaching more rapidly than any of us would like, there is also the need for jackets, gloves, snowpants, and snowboots.

How can we help all of our students feel welcomed and prepared for the school year, and how can we make sure that every student has what they need to succeed? The Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program has a large number of resources and links to help you work with those students who are most in need of support.

For many of you who are new to working with homeless families, or are simply unfamiliar with all the ins and outs of the law, there are a few basic things you need to get started.

- Familiarize yourself with the many resources available on the OPI's [Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program](#) page. There are four small tabs at the bottom of the page which contain helpful links to federal and state guidance, brochures, scholarship information, and video links that can be used for training your fellow staff members.
- The OPI's Title I Office also hosts a yearly [State Title I Conference](#) which offers trainings and opportunities for Homeless Liaisons to meet and share information.
- Check out the [National Center for Homeless Education's](#) website. NCHE offers monthly FREE [webinars](#) on a variety of topics ranging from basic access to college and financial aid. You can also like [NCHE on Facebook](#) to access timely information on new materials, legislation, and news in the media about homeless children and youth.
- The [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#) also offers a number of helpful resources for school and teachers. NAEHCY hosts a yearly national conference for Homeless Liaisons. This year the conference will be [October 25-28 in Kansas City, MO](#). NAEHCY is also on [Facebook](#), and they post information about advocacy and policy efforts throughout the country.

## **Congratulations**

OPI would like to congratulate Sue Runkle, the homeless liaison for the Billings Public School District, for being selected as the Outstanding Advocate of 2014 by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. She will receive her award at the NAEHCY National Conference in October. Sue is beginning her fourteenth year as the Billings homeless liaison and continues to expand her program to meet the needs of nearly 600 homeless students each year. Sue was nominated by Heather Denny, the State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and her letters of support were signed by the administrators of each school in Billings and by every member of the Billings Mayor's Council on Homelessness.



## **Questions and Confusion**

One of the biggest challenges faced by educators is often understanding which children and families qualify as homeless under the law. A number of school districts have called for technical assistance regarding unaccompanied youth. One of the biggest factors to consider when determining homelessness is whether or not there has been a formal arrangement between the biological parent and the current caretaker prior to the student moving in. If the caretaker holds a power of attorney or any type of notarized document from the legal parent/guardian, then the student cannot be considered homeless.

One scenario this year involved a student who had come to Montana to visit his older brother for the summer, and he decided to stay. The parents agreed to allow the younger son to stay. Even though this arrangement is informal, the family allows the student to stay with his brother. The reason for staying is preference, and it was not due to financial difficulties within the family. The older brother intends to care for his sibling for the remainder of the school year. This placement is permanent and adequate. Therefore the student cannot be identified as



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Every year we have cases where Child and Family Services has removed children from the home due to a crisis situation and temporarily placed them with another family member. These children are often placed without a court order or formal paperwork from CFS. Family members may be asked to care for children for a few days or even weeks while the parents work through issues affecting their ability to properly care for the children. In these cases the children should be considered homeless and allowed to immediately enroll in the school district where the temporary caretaker resides. Children may also be allowed to stay in the school in which they were enrolled while living with their parents if that school is a reasonable distance from their current living situation.

The OPI has written guidance to help school enrollment clerks and other officials determine if a student qualifies as homeless. [Guidance for Coding Montana Children as Homeless](#) provides basic definitions that can be used to determine homeless status. However, homelessness is rarely a black and white, easily defined situation. Remember that there can be many factors which affect a family or student's ability to find stable housing. When in doubt call the OPI to discuss the unique factors that may be affecting the student or family with whom you are working.

## **Sex Trafficking in Montana**

Homeless students, along with children in foster care, children living in group homes, and other children living in challenging conditions are extremely vulnerable to sex trafficking. Conditions in the Bakken Oil Field both in Montana and North Dakota have created the type of atmosphere where women and children of both genders are being taken from across the state and moved into the Bakken area. NCHC has released a [brief](#) on sex trafficking. School counselors, classroom teachers, and others who have daily contact with students are encouraged to read the information and be aware of the signs of students who may be victims.

## Homelessness in the News



Homelessness and trauma often go hand in hand. Classroom teachers and others working with homeless students should be aware that trauma often manifests itself in less than desirable behaviors in the classroom.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/07/09/comment-how-childhood-trauma-could-be-mistaken-adhd>

How can classroom teachers support homeless students?

<http://www.theedadvocate.org/ask-an-expert-working-with-homeless-students/>

Communities and schools often want to help homeless students, but aren't sure how to meet their needs. This is one community's attempt to fill the gaps.

<http://myedmondsnews.com/2014/07/commentary-thanks-support-homeless-families-heres-can-help/>

Working with homeless students can be one of the greatest challenges, and one of the most rewarding aspects of our work as educators. The OPI urges you to seek technical assistance and training any time you have questions or concerns about how to assist these students in achieving the same level of success their classmates. Contact the OPI's State Coordinator for Homeless Education, Heather Denny, at (406) 444-2036 or [hdenny@mt.gov](mailto:hdenny@mt.gov), or the Homeless Program Assistant, Shawna Pieske, at (406) 444-5660 or [spieske@mt.gov](mailto:spieske@mt.gov), for more information.

