


National Center for Homeless Education


Operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

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Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Living with Caregivers: Tips for Local Liaisons and School Personnel


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Session Objectives

- Understand the risks of children living apart from parents and guardians
- Gain strategies to determine McKinney-Vento eligibility of students living with caregivers
- Learn to distinguish unaccompanied youth from unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY)
- Acquire strategies to support UHY with disabilities
- Get tips for dealing with discipline issues
- Begin to develop a protocol for UHY
- Learn how to help UHY transition to higher education



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Risk Factors of Living Apart from Parents & Guardians

- Separation from family, school, & community
- High mobility
 - Multiple & sudden changes in caregivers, household makeup, & expectations compound stress
 - Ongoing negative effects escalate over time
- Parental inconsistency, abuse, or neglect prior to living with a caregiver
- Negative health & behavioral outcomes
 - Affects how students view themselves, e.g., low self-esteem, depression, anger, & anxiety
- Reduced school engagement & decreased educational attainment



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McKinney-Vento (MV) Eligibility

- Students can be eligible for MV services regardless of whether they were asked to leave the home or chose to leave
- Consider:
 - What prompted the move
 - Length of time the student is expected to stay with the caregiver
 - Nature of student-caregiver bond, including type, quality, & length of the relationship
 - Where student would be if not staying with this caregiver



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MV Eligibility (cont.)

- Probably eligible if due to
 - abandonment
 - leaving unsafe/unstable situation
- Probably not eligible if
 - Parent & caregiver agreed in advance that caregiver would house & care for child for specified period
 - Parent continues to provide support & remains involved in student's care
 - Example: Parent allows student to stay with someone else to finish school year in the same school after the family makes a planned move




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Scenario

Two siblings were involved in a car accident in which their mother was killed and grandmother injured. They are staying with an aunt while the grandmother recuperates. Both students have ongoing medical issues. Three family members are applying for guardianship.

- Are these students UHY?
- What additional information would you like to have?



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Unaccompanied Youth vs. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY)

- To be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth:
 1. The student's living arrangement must meet the definition of homeless, **AND**
 2. The student must be considered *unaccompanied*, defined as "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian"


Homeless

+

Not in
Physical
Custody

=

UHY




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Unaccompanied Youth vs. UHY

- No age limit for MV eligibility
- Parent/guardian/student may be unwilling to reveal details of what brought about separation
- If caregiver is legal guardian, student is not unaccompanied, but could still be homeless
- Parent/guardian can be permanently housed while the student is homeless & vice versa
- State & district laws/policies govern when unaccompanied youth
 - > Must be reported to authorities
 - > May consent for medical treatment




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Enrollment Requirements

- Immediate enrollment, even if lacking paperwork normally required – including proof of guardianship
- Continued enrollment cannot be conditional on youth providing proof of guardianship later
- Obtaining guardianship is a legal process
 - Schools do not have the authority to require caretakers to get legal guardianship

NCHE Brief: *When Legal Guardians Are Not Present: Enrolling Students on Their Own*
<http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/guardianship.pdf>




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Caregiver Form Information

- Where & with whom the student is staying
- Who can enroll student (caregiver, liaison, or student) & under what circumstances
- Who can make placement decisions & schedule changes
- Who has signing authority for absences, field trips, extracurricular activities, etc.

Sample caregiver form at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_d.pdf




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Referring Students to Community Services

- Become familiar with local organizations, populations they serve, & services they provide
- Use common intake forms
 - Eliminates need for caregivers to complete multiple forms
 - Facilitates information sharing



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Scenario

Two high school siblings have been identified as UHY. Their mom is deceased & dad is not involved. The students are staying with a family friend where they have stayed off & on their entire lives. The caregiver has no legal rights & is not listed as an emergency contact, so district administrators are not sure what, if any, information to share.

- Does the caregiver have the right to access the students' education records? Why or why not?
- How would you address this with the administrators?



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Local Liaison Duties

- Determine extent to which the caregiver wants to be involved in educational decisions
- Find out how much the student wants the caregiver to participate
- Determine key contact – caregiver, student, or parent – with whom to address truancy & other behavioral issues
- Ensure that school staff know the definition of parent provided in FERPA and Florida statutes



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Supporting UHY with Disabilities under IDEA

- Surrogate Parents
 - LEA "must make reasonable efforts" to appoint within 30 days
 - Are considered the UHY's parent for special education purposes
 - Cannot be an employee of the SEA, LEA, or any other agency involved in the education or care of the student
 - Must have no conflict of interest
 - Must have the necessary knowledge and skills



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Supporting UHY with Disabilities under IDEA (cont.)

- Temporary Surrogate Parents
 - Can be appointed immediately
 - Can be involved in the education or care of youth
 - Must have no conflict of interest
 - Must have the necessary knowledge and skills
 - Rights transfer to the student at age of majority



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Discipline Issues

- Students without parental advocates receive much harsher school discipline
 - Work with caregivers to resolve behavior issues before they disrupt students' education
 - Refer to community agencies for mentoring & support
 - Refer parenting classes focused on blended families
 - Students cannot be disciplined
 - For issues related to their living situation
 - In a way that stigmatizes them due to their living situations
 - May be especially relevant with absences and tardies



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Discipline Issues (cont.)

- Ensure that discipline is fair & effective
 - Assign advocate for student
 - Consult caregiver & student about the choice
 - Train staff on how trauma impacts student behavior & how to utilize trauma-informed care principles (see *Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit for Homeless Services* at www.familyhomelessness.org/media/90.pdf)
 - Review each school's discipline records to identify patterns that might indicate a bias against students without parental advocates
 - Assign discipline that corresponds to behavior & is likely to result in proper behavior in the future




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Transition to Higher Education

- UHY identified in their senior year of high school are considered independent students on FAFSA
 - Liaisons can verify UHY status for colleges (*Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Documentation of Independent Student Status for the FAFSA* http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/faa_det_tool.pdf)
 - Some schools provide verification form for all UHY who are high school seniors
- Ensure dropout prevention & graduation plans consider UHY living with caregivers & include support for transitioning to post-secondary education




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Transition to Higher Education (cont.)

- Help students and caregivers create a plan for housing and meals during school breaks
- Include caregivers in parent nights that focus on helping students prepare for life after high school graduation
 - Address student expectations of caregivers




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Activity: Developing a District Protocol

- Work in groups to discuss
 - What procedures your district currently uses
 - Issues that could be addressed
 - Enrollment
 - Academic & activity fees
 - Safety of living situation
 - Discipline & attendance
 - Community referrals
 - Credit accrual
 - Permissions
 - Reporting requirements
 - Who should be involved in revising procedures
 - Whose authorization/support is needed




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Additional NCHE Resources

- *Students Living with Caregivers: Tips for Local Liaisons and School Personnel*
<http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/caregivers.pdf>
- *Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*
http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/liaison_toolkit.php



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Final Questions?



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