Supporting Homeless College Students: Legal Obligations and Best Practices

April 4, 2018
Information to Participate

• Call-in information
  • Phone number: (213) 929-4232
  • Access code: 919-411-363

• To submit live questions, click on the “Questions” panel, type your question, and click “send”

• Presentation materials and audio will be posted at www.jbaforyouth.org under “Research & Training” / “Training Archive”
Today’s Presenters

• **Shahera Hyatt**  
  Director, *California Homeless Youth Project*

• **Jessica Smith**  
  Statewide FYSI Liaison, *Foundation for California Community Colleges*

• **Debbie Raucher**  
  Project Director, *John Burton Advocates for Youth*

• **Bianca Bisi**  
  Student Equity Coordinator, *Imperial Valley College*
Agenda

- Landscape of student homelessness
- Legal requirements and benefits
- Role of the homeless liaison
- Promising practices - IVC
There Are Homeless College Students?

- In CA, 1 in 10 State University students is experiencing homelessness
- Over 90% of community college faculty and staff see homelessness as a problem on their campus, but only 15% feel capable to respond
- 90% of homeless youth have career goals like becoming a social worker, a nurse, or a teacher, which require extensive education to achieve
Community College: Basic Needs Unmet

• Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education

• 14% of community college students are having an episode of “literal” homelessness (shelter, car, abandoned building, outside)

• 1 in 2 are housing insecure (couch-surfing, inability to pay rent, temporarily housed)

• 30% are experiencing food insecurity in the US, 40% in CA
# How do youth end up homeless?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abuse and/or neglect</th>
<th>Parents force youth out due to conflicts</th>
<th>Homelessness forces families apart</th>
<th>Exiting foster care or juvenile detention</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 40-60% of unaccompanied youth were abused physically at home</td>
<td>• Sexual orientation and gender identity</td>
<td>• Families separate due to lack of space in living situations or shelter policies</td>
<td>• Approximately 30% of foster youth will experience homelessness after exiting foster care</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 17-25% of unaccompanied youth were abused sexually at home</td>
<td>• Pregnancy</td>
<td>• 47% of youth experience homelessness both with their families and on their own</td>
<td>• Many homeless youth come directly from juvenile detention centers</td>
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<td>• Parental substance abuse a frequent precursor to youth leaving the home</td>
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<td>• Providers fail to create long-term plans</td>
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</table>
Challenges Homeless Students Face

- Lack of supportive adults
- Mental health issues and impact of trauma
- Insufficient support with educational planning and developing study skills
- Inadequate financial resources
  - Difficulty paying fees and purchasing textbooks
  - Inability to secure stable housing
  - Lack of reliable transportation
  - Food insecurity
What Do Young People Need to Be Successful in School?

• Connection to positive, supportive adults
• Stability – difficult to meet educational needs when you can't meet basic needs
• Help navigating financial aid
• Knowledge of existing campus support programs and resources (social media, word of mouth, visibility: posters, flyers)
Key Laws

• AB 801 (2016) - Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act (priority enrollment, designated liaisons)
• AB 1228 (2015) - Housing priority, housing plans during academic breaks
• AB 1747 (2016) - College Student Hunger Relief Act
• AB 214 (2017) - Clarifies work study laws so more college students can access SNAP
• AB 1995 (2016) – Access to community college shower facilities for homeless students
Key Benefits Available to Homeless Youth

• FAFSA independent status
  ➢ Governed by federal requirements

• Priority registration & Promise Grant at CCCs
  ➢ Governed by State law (AB 801)

Both rely on same homeless definition, but with certain key differences
Verifying Homeless Youth Status: FAFSA

Homeless youth need verification that states:

On or after July 1st of the year prior to the award year they were homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.
The McKinney Vento Definition of Homeless

Lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing, including:

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human being

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).
Let’s Break it Down Further:

- **Unaccompanied**
  - Not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

- **Homeless**
  - McKinney Vento definition: lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing

- **Self-supporting & at risk of being homeless**
  - When a student pays for own living expenses, including fixed, regular, & adequate housing
  - When a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, & adequate; for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing
Who is Included?

- Includes students 22 and 23 year olds (24+ are automatically independent)

- A student living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live.

- A student living in the school dormitory may still be considered an UHY if the student would be homeless otherwise

- Must re-verify each year
Who can provide a homeless youth determination?

There are three individuals/entities who have the authority to make a homeless youth determination (other than a financial aid administrator):

- A local homeless education liaison (K-12)
- A Runaway & Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)-funded shelter or transitional living program
- A U.S. Dept of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)-funded shelter or transitional housing program

School district liaisons, RHYA program directors or designees, and HUD homeless assistance program directors or designees now are permitted to continue to make FAFSA determinations in subsequent years as long as the liaison has access to the information necessary to make such a determination for a particular youth.
The Person Providing the Determination Should be the Person Indicated on the FAFSA
I am providing this letter to convey my determination that after July 1, 2017, [STUDENT] was

- an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the College Cost Reduction and Access Act and the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act and the U.S. Department of Education’s July 29, 2015, Dear Colleague Letter.

- an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness.

*Make sure to the letter indicates the correct year*
More on Homeless Youth Determinations

If a student receives a determination from a local liaison, or RHYA-funded / HUD-funded shelter / transitional living program, FAA must accept the determination.

FAAs are not required to verify the answers to the FAFSA homeless youth questions unless they have conflicting information.

- Documented phone call or written statement from one of the authorized authorities is sufficient, when needed
More on Homeless Youth Determinations

It is not conflicting information if an FAA disagrees with an authority’s determination that a student is homeless.

If an FAA has no conflicting information, FAA should not request add’l documentation; doing so may appear as if the FAA is asking student to explain/justify their circumstances.
What if an unaccompanied homeless youth does not have a qualified individual to make a determination?

If the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth but does not have contact with a qualified individual to make a determination for them, the Financial Aid Administrator (FAA) must make the determination.

FAAs can get assistance with making case-by-case homelessness determinations by contacting, among others:

- College access programs
- Health Care Providers
- Social workers
- Mental health professionals
More on Homeless Youth Determinations Made by FAAs

Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs) should determine if the student is unaccompanied and homeless or at risk of being so without regard for why the student is homeless.

If the FAA is making the determination & there is no written documentation available, the determination may be based on a documented interview with the student.
Assembly Bill 801

Effective January 1, 2017

Defines homeless youth as:

• “Homeless youth” means a student under 25 years of age,
• who has been verified at any time during the 24 months immediately preceding the receipt of his or her application for admission by a postsecondary educational institution as a homeless child or youth, as defined in subsection (2) of Section 725 of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a(2))
Assembly Bill 801 - Benefits

Priority enrollment given to verified homeless youth (sunset date of January 1, 2020)

California College Promise Grant automatically given to verified homeless youth (as long as they meet minimum academic and progress standards)
AB 801 – Verification Requirements

• Once a student is verified as homeless, they retain that status for a period of 6 years or until they reach age 25, whichever comes first.

• Students do not need to be re-verified every year, as long as they are consistently enrolled in the college where they were verified.

• If a student enrolls in a different college, they will need to be re-verified at the new college.
Per AB 801, to be eligible for priority registration and BOG fee waiver, homeless status may be verified by:

- A homeless services provider*
- Federal TRIO program or GEAR-UP program
- A financial aid administrator for an institution of higher education.

*Includes government or nonprofit agency receiving government funding to serve homeless persons, an attorney, local education liaison, or a State funded provider of health services, mental or behavioral health services, substance use disorder services, or public assistance or employment services.
Tips for the verification conversation

Start by saying: “I need to ask you a few questions to determine if you meet the criteria for ‘independent’ or ‘homeless’ student status, which could help you gain access to special benefits. This conversation is completely confidential, and I won’t share your information with anyone else unless I get your permission.”

- “Could your friend/relative that you are currently staying with ask you to leave if they wanted to? Where would you go if they asked you to leave?”
- “Tell me about where you are living. Is this arrangement permanent or temporary?”
- “Do you stay in the same place every night? Do you move around a lot?”
- “Do you relate to any of these arrangements described (in the McKinney Vento definition)?”
AB 801 Requirements

• Requires a Financial Aid staff member, or staff in another appropriate office or department, to function as a Homeless Youth Liaison

• The liaison shall be responsible for:
  • understanding financial aid eligibility for homeless youth
  • identifying services available and appropriate for these students
  • assisting these students in applying for and receiving federal and state financial aid and available services

• Colleges must inform current and prospective homeless youth students about financial aid and other assistance available
Role of the Homeless Liaison

• Understand the legal obligations and resources available to homeless students
• Conduct outreach to identify students experiencing homelessness and link to services
• Serve as the point of contact for students experiencing homelessness and refer to on and off campus resources as needed
• Assist students with financial aid applications and serve as resource regarding requirements for independent status.
Role of the Homeless Liaison

• Act as a liaison between various departments on campus to coordinate services
• Act as a liaison between the campus and community resources (shelters, food pantries, etc.)
• Make determinations regarding eligibility for priority registration and Promise Grant eligibility
Overview

- IVC’s Resilient Students
- Our Supportive Services
- First Steps for Liaisons on Your Campus
Resilient Students

- Homeless
- Foster Youth
- Formerly Incarcerated
Basic Needs Initiative

- Housing Insecurity
- Food Insecurity
- Shower Access/Hygiene
- Transportation
- Textbooks
Supportive Services: Housing Insecurity

• Homeless Liaison
• Housing Referrals
• Shower Access/Kits
• Priority Registration
Supportive Services: Lending Library

- Textbook Grants
- Help-Seeking Barrier
- Empowering Students
- Pay it Forward
Supportive Services: Food Insecurity

• The IVC Kitchen
• Hybrid Solution
• 100 Students/Day
• 50 Families/Month
Supportive Services: Food Insecurity

• On-Site Meals
• Take-Home Groceries
• USDA Commodities
• CalFresh
Supportive Services: Food Insecurity
First Steps at Your Campus: Liaison Role

- You can do this with a low-to-no-cost approach & creative use of volunteers.
- ID the basic needs of your students (housing, food, clothing, etc.)
- Take an assets-based approach
  - conduct an inventory of internal resources such as existing funding, employees, donors, etc.
  - ID champions on campus for social causes (coworkers who like community service, food drives, student government/clubs, and faculty who offer students extra credit or have a community service component).
First Steps at Your Campus: Liaison Role

- ID campus staff, faculty, or students who have academic or work experience serving homeless, foster, or formerly incarcerated populations.

- Keep copies of public housing applications on hand.

- ID community partners who are experts in basic needs AND mutually serve your students.
  - Key is to utilize existing external resources at low-to-no cost to you, to benefit the local agency and your students.
  - Ex. Local CalFresh Outreach Grant recipient, AmeriCorps site, Health Department, USDA TEFAP distribution site, etc.
$60 Million funding for Grants to Non-Profits and Homeless Continuum of Care entities to serve homeless youth

$1 Million funding for the creation of the Office of Homeless Youth
How can you help make SB 918 a reality?

- Send in a support letter
  [sample letter SB 918]

- Attend and testify at Committee hearings

- Meet with legislators in the district

- Encourage homeless youth and homeless youth providers to get involved

- Stay tuned for more work over the spring and summer
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<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Deadline Date</th>
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<td>Senate Human Services</td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>1:30pm</td>
<td>3191</td>
<td>March 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senate Transportation and Housing</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>1:30pm</td>
<td>4203</td>
<td>April 18</td>
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<td>Senate Appropriations</td>
<td>Date TBD</td>
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CCC Basic Needs Summit

Sacramento, California
April 26-27, 2018

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Question and Answer