THE EDUCATOR’S ROLE IN INSTRUCTING HOMELESS STUDENTS

by

Amber R. Wakefield

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

August 2014
ABSTRACT

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Homelessness is a challenge educator’s face each year. This review of literature describes the issues that need to be addressed by all school staff in order to better serve homeless students. This review addresses laws governing the rights of homeless students and what types of obstacles homeless students face to enroll in and attend school. The research also provides ways staff and teachers can meet the unique needs of homeless students in the classroom as well as in the community.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The McKinney-Vento Act was signed into law in 1987 by President Reagan establishing guidelines for schools to follow in order to meet the needs of homeless students. This law allows homeless students to enroll in school and be able to stay in their home district. The consequences for not addressing issues surrounding homeless students can result in long term struggles such as those children remaining homeless due to inadequate education (Mawhinney-Rhoads 289). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for schools to know and understand the laws protecting homeless students.

Along with understanding the legal rights of a homeless student, educators need to recognize biases they may have towards the homeless. By taking the time to educate school staff about homelessness, preconceived ideas can be put aside and the unique needs of a homeless student can be met. Chittooran says schools need to provide an environment in which the homeless student and family feel welcome and safe. By avoiding certain terms or labeling, being conscious of the unique needs of homeless students, and being flexible in regards to some rules homeless students can remain comfortable in school (25). For example teachers can prepare the classroom ahead of time for homeless students by having extra school supplies, snacks, and resources to give to the family. School is seen as a place of stability and consistency for a homeless student. By being educated and recognizing the needs of homeless students, teachers can improve the educational outcomes of these students.

Libraries also play a crucial role in the education of homeless students. Public libraries connect with patrons by providing reading groups for all ages, offering computer help and access for job searches, and having information ready to hand out to a homeless person who may need
assistance. Libraries can also join with homeless shelters in order to teach families the importance of literacy by encouraging reading activities. Within the school setting, librarians provide school supplies and forgive late fees. By extending library hours, homeless students have access to computers, printers, and online services. Educators working together create an atmosphere of acceptance and stability for homeless students with distinctive needs.

**Statement of the Problem**

Homeless students face many struggles in education, from the beginning stages of enrollment to finding the correct resources to do homework at night. Even with legislation in place, homeless students are still falling behind their counterparts in the classroom. The problem arises when the issues homeless students face are not being dealt with or recognized in the school setting. Educators need to become aware of the struggles homeless students face and be ready to help meet educational goals of these students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to review literature focused on the educational outcomes of homeless students. With the rise of homeless students in the classroom, the focus of this study is to identify the issues facing these students and how to address challenges in school. The literature shows how legislation protects the rights of homeless students and how it is to be implemented in the school system. Finally, this study provides guidance to teachers, librarians, and educators as to how best meet the oppositions facing homeless students.

**Research Questions**

The focus of this research study was to understand the issues facing homeless students and education. The following questions were considered while researching for this topic:

1. What are the major obstacles facing homeless students enrolling in school?
2. How can educators provide for the needs of homeless students in the classroom?

3. What can the library offer to help meet the needs of the homeless?

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study are the time and requirements outlined for this course. The study was limited to the reviews utilized in this paper from peer reviewed journals, web pages, and other publications of those knowledgeable in the area of homelessness. Several other areas were found to be of importance in the topic of homeless students but the topic had to be narrowed in order to meet the criteria for this course.

**Definition of Terms**

Homelessness: In the article by Miller, the definition of homeless is defined by the McKinney-Vento Acts as:

- Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.

- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

- Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and some migratory children (“A Critical Analysis” 309).
• Migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purpose of this [subtitle] because the children are living in circumstances described in the previous clauses (“Educating (More and More) Students” 813).

Doubling up: Multiple families living together in one of the places listed in the above bullet points.

Proof of Residency: document showing you live in a single family or multiple family residence such as a house, apartment, or duplex.

Guardianship: Document that shows who is responsible for legal decision making over a minor.

Vaccinations: shots recommended for children from birth to adult.

McKinney-Vento Act: Legislation signed into law in 1987 protecting the rights of homeless students.

Differentiated instruction: methods of teaching to reach students with different learning styles and physical or neurological abilities.

American Library Association: Professional organization that supports libraries and library promotion.

**Research Design**

The research was a combination of an interest in literacy, students who are overlooked in a school environment, and library services. The terms used in the search criteria were “homeless students,” “homeless children,” “literacy and homeless,” “McKinney-Vento,” “libraries and homeless children,” and “homeless children and education.” These beginning terms led me to articles found in the following databases: *ProQuest Central, Education Search Complete, Academic Search Elite, Teacher Reference Center, Library Literature & Information Science Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Education Research Complete, MasterFILE Premier, Sage Journals,*
and Library Literature & Information Sciences Full Text, These databases were accessed through the John C. Kirkpatrick Library at the University of Central Missouri.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is a means students utilize to move forward with life’s ambitions. For a portion of the population, education is not a luxury but an area of confusion and difficulty. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 1,166,436 homeless students enrolled in the 2011-2012 school year. Because of the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless students are protected by law to gain an education just like their counterparts. Literacy rates of homeless students are lower than the national average and those numbers need to be improved. The entire staff of a school has a responsibility to improve the literacy of homeless students. The staff includes administrators, teachers, counselors, and librarians. Therefore, this paper will discuss the school’s role in the education of homeless students. The first section of this literature review will give the definition of homelessness and describe what the McKinney-Vento Act entails. The second section presents the special needs of the homeless student. The final section explains how school librarians can improve the literacy rates of homeless students.

Definition of Homelessness and McKinney-Vento Act

In the article by Miller, the definition of homeless is defined by the McKinney-Vento Acts as:

- Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency of transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.
- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
• Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and some migratory children ("A Critical Analysis" 309).

• Migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purpose of this [subtitle] because the children are living in circumstances described in the previous clauses ("Educating (More and More) Students" 813).

Another term a reader may come across in research on homeless students is “doubling up.” This is where multiple families live together in one of the places listed in the above bullet points. The National Center on Family Homelessness indicates housing issues caused by a lack of affordable housing for low-income households are to blame for families “doubling up” or living in shelters. Until this gap is decreased, homeless families will be limited on the choice of living arrangements. This type of living arrangement can impede homeless students’ literacy opportunities due to lack of privacy or quiet place to do homework or other school related functions. People who are doubled up tend to not think of themselves as homeless but are in a temporary situation because of a lost job or eviction from a home ("The Characteristics and Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness").

**Obstacles Created by Homelessness**

The barriers to getting an appropriate education that homeless students have to overcome because of their housing situation can be overwhelming as well as frustrating. The first barrier to be conquered is proving residency. All families show proof of residency by supplying an electric or gas bill or a rental contract. Because of a family’s lack of stable housing, this can become exasperating and keep a family from registering their child at a local school. Mawhinney-Rhoads explains, “What occurs is that the issue of residency can block some students from attending
certain schools or maintaining their status in their current school” (29). When a child has to switch schools, it can lead to delayed entry and cause the student to fall further behind their classmates.

A second issue for homeless students to overcome is guardianship. Not all students live with their immediate families, but a homeless family may send their child to live with a family member such as a grandparent, an aunt, or a friend of their parents. The problem here is the lack of paperwork stating that someone else has guardianship; this can become another reason these students are not admitted to a school. In the case of a runaway or a child who has been emancipated from parents, legalities will keep the student from being enrolled and, again, impede the learning process.

A third issue for homeless families and their lack of stable housing is the ability to provide proof of vaccinations. Because of the transient lifestyle of homeless families, medical records are often lost or just not kept. Doroshenko explained, “Making necessary vaccines both available and accessible to highly vulnerable homeless youth is a critical public health issue” (2). Unfortunately, due to the living situations of homeless students, their health can become harmful to other students, and this may keep them from being enrolled in school as well.

A fourth barrier for homeless families is transportation. Because of a transient lifestyle, many students do not have a permanent address because they are constantly moving from one location to another. This continuous moving creates issues for schools to keep up with an address for homeless families. Also, the lack of a family automobile can hinder attendance. Mawhinney-Rhoads says, “Inconsistent attendance or missing large amounts of instruction usually affect the student’s grades and may prevent him or her from being promoted to the next grade” (292).
Issues with transportation may also cause students to be tardy. When late to school daily, it can cause homework to be turned in late and in turn, lower a student’s grade.

The above barriers are the first items homeless students and their families have to overcome in order to enroll in school. This process can be frustrating, time consuming, and full of dead ends. According to the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, “When these barriers are not addressed, homeless children and youth often are unable to attend, or even enroll in, school, which prevents them from obtaining the education that is both their legal right and their best hope of escaping poverty as adults” (“Homeless Education 101”).

In order to help these families maneuver through this sea of rules and regulations, the government passed the McKinney-Vento Act to help homeless families gain access to schools and for their student to have a quality education.

**McKinney-Vento Act**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was originally adopted in 1987 by the United States Congress. It has been amended several times over the years with the last time being in 2002 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. Even with these changes, “its core purposes in the realm of schooling have remained relatively constant: to ensure that children who are experiencing homelessness have equal access to public education and that state and district-level policies and practices remove all barriers to student enrollment, attendance, participation, and achievement” (Miller “Educating (More and More) Students” 809). Therefore, all educational departments from the state to the local settings are required to ensure homeless students have the capability to enroll in school without obstructions and difficulties.

With the established definition of homelessness presented in the McKinney-Vento Act, it also protects the homeless students’ rights by allowing them to stay enrolled in their school of
origin. This helps students find stability and consistency in their education, thus promoting autonomy with classmates and teachers. School is seen as a means of structure that homeless students look forward to. It may be the only source of stability in their lives. If students do need to move out of their preferred district, the McKinney-Vento Act protects their choice. A new school is to accept their enrollment immediately. Even without the documents required upon enrollment, the homeless student’s best interest is to get ready for school without issue.

In a brief by the National Center for Homeless Education, it requires the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as for State Coordinators for Homeless Education and local homeless education liaisons, who operate under the guidance of the U.S. Department of Education, base the services offered to homeless families on the McKinney-Vento Act (“Housing and Education Collaboration…”). These government agencies fall into other legislative categories, but they all strive to meet the needs of homeless students and their families by providing housing and education. Even though their definition of homelessness may look different, all agencies work together for the good of those in need.

Also in the brief by the National Center for Homeless Education outlines the requirement that every school district must employ a person, a liaison, who will work closely with the families and the homeless students as well as keeping current with any new laws passed within the state or national government (“Housing and Education Collaboration…”). This liaison is an instrumental person in the lives of the homeless family and the student’s education. He or she can help provide the resources needed to make sure the student is receiving a fair and appropriate education. According to Adams and Borris, needs are being met with more than 16,000 liaisons across the schools in the nation. When these liaisons do their jobs well, homeless students can feel comfortable going to school and fitting in with their peers. Not only can the liaison make
sure homeless families receive the education needed to succeed in life academically, the liaison can contact community groups to provide clothing for homeless students. It is important for the liaison to engage in the lives of homeless families so they can help guide the family out of the homeless situation with the proper intervention and resources.

**Understanding the Needs of Homeless Students**

The school plays a vital role by providing stability to the homeless student as well as an appropriate education. Along with education, educators are required to understand the McKinney-Vento Act and its relation to their subject area. People tend to have a bias or a preconceived notion about homeless people, which can inhibit classroom structure. These thoughts can come from unfounded assumptions about homelessness in general, but mostly, they come from the lack of education on this sensitive matter. This section of the literature review addresses how teachers can check their predetermined thoughts about homeless students. It will also give ideas for how better to meet the needs of students that are displaced and how better to prepare their classroom for a homeless student. Masten describes how students who are highly mobile need to feel they have stability in a classroom. By attempting to achieve this, teachers can determine any interventions needed to promote education and literacy (363).

Teachers are not exempt from learning about how to handle their thoughts about having a homeless student in the classroom. Differentiated instruction is nothing new to a teacher and should not be forgotten in the case of homeless students. Kim conducted research on the preconceived attitudes of teacher candidates. He required students who took his class to work in homeless shelters. The candidates noted their feelings, both prior to the experiment and after the experiment. Prior to visiting the shelter, many felt that homeless children were not able to pay attention, lacked discipline, and would dress poorly. These candidates also expressed fear about
going to a homeless shelter because of safety issues and how the families living in the shelter would perceive them. While they were at the shelter, the teacher candidates realized that the moms of these students wanted their children to succeed and were concerned when their child fell behind in class. Overall, this experiment raised their awareness of homeless students, and their biases were changed.

Another study was constructed to see if it would change teaching strategies and preconceived ideas of a group of teachers. Powers-Costello outlined three studies, each of which offered teachers different opportunities to work with homeless families. In the first study, two inner-city kindergarten teachers worked in a local food bank to enhance their awareness of how some of their students received meals. The second study sent a third grade teacher to work in a homeless shelter with kindergarten students. He assigned collaborative work for his third grade students who wrote stories for the kindergarteners. He then turned these stories into a lesson about storytelling. The third study lasted a year and included four teachers who wanted to better understand children and family dynamics. These teachers participated in various activities and participated in a critical reflective study group with each other.

The overall findings of Powers-Costello illustrated that homelessness looked different and took on many more facets than originally understood. Another awareness factor showed that poverty is not the only element contributing to homelessness. Other factors include violence in the home, illiteracy, and abuse of alcohol and drugs. The most important aspect learned was how life in a shelter can affect a homeless student’s education.

Teachers have many types of students in their classroom, but homeless students have unique circumstances hindering their education. Pop sorts the necessities of homeless students into three categories: affective, academic, and technical. Even though these categories are listed
individually, they are all intertwined. For affective needs, Pop recommends teachers look to the student’s arrival as a new student and understand his or her needs. Upon arrival, meet the student in the office and introduce the student to the class. If the student leaves, try to provide a note or letter to let him or her know you care. For academic needs, Pop recommends that teachers focus on literacy in order to build the knowledge of the student at an appropriate level. Chittooran states, “Homeless children score about 16% lower on measures of reading and math than those who are not homeless, and fewer than 25% of homeless children graduate from high school” (24). Learn about the student and figure out the learning style to best meet his or her needs. Employ tutoring if needed and if at all possible, keep a portfolio of the student’s progress and work. If the student should happen to move, it can be sent on to the next school, or the student can take it if he or she leaves the school. The last category is technical. Basically, help meet the homeless student’s needs by providing snacks, supplies, and direction to community-based services. Murphy explains, “Because basic needs must be met before children can learn successfully, schools can work proactively to ensure that all students have the basics of food, clothing, school supplies, hygiene items, and health services” (35).

For the school and teachers, it is hard to identify homeless students in the classroom because homeless families may not want to be recognized as homeless, a runaway may not want to be found by his or her parents, or an abuse situation has occurred and a spouse may not want to be found. Dill talks about other ways teachers and educators can identify homeless students if they are not indicated by the school system. Depression can occur because a homeless student is fearful of tomorrow, he or she may not know when the next meal may come, or possessions had to be suddenly left behind. The appearance of a student that has become homeless could change. If a student who used to dress nicely or had clean clothing is suddenly wearing the same clothes,
a teacher should note these changes. The homeless student may resort to stockpiling food from others or the cafeteria. The last area to be aware of is chronic stress. Dill says, “Chronic stress affects the executive function of the brain, so students may be unable to plan projects, keep materials organized, pay attention, negotiate unexpected events in the classroom, or control their emotions” (46). By being aware of changes in a student’s behavior, a teacher can help provide direction to a homeless student and family.

Schools play an important part in the homeless student’s life. When teachers take the time to education themselves, understanding what homelessness is and is not, biases and preconceived mindsets will disappear. Holgersson-Shorter says, “Providing an atmosphere where the child feels safe and nurtured is the most critical thing teachers can do. Effective teachers establish relationships and trust with homeless students whose belief in themselves and the future may be stunted or badly shaken” (33). It is recommended from the research that all staff of a school understand what laws dictate how a homeless student should be treated in the school setting. It is up to the district to make sure this happens, and time should be spent educating the entire school, not just the teachers. The classroom may be the only place a homeless student will feel a sense of continuity and structure.

Libraries Serving Homeless Students

Librarians in both the school and the public system can promote literacy through rich literature in the library as well as in the classroom and home. Libraries meet the needs of their patrons by providing tools and technology for the homeless population. By meeting the educational needs of homeless students and their families, literacy will improve in the lives of these families.
Librarians adhere to the policies of the American Library Association (ALA) as well as the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. ALA guides librarians in schools as well as those in the public sector in how to provide services for the unique needs of homeless students and homeless people in general. This section of the literature review will show how librarians can be of assistance to teachers by providing books about homelessness and other social issues these students might encounter inside and outside of school.

The American Library Association (ALA) has policies set in place for services to the poor (“B.8.10 Library Services to the Poor”). As part of their commitment to all people, ALA recognizes that not everyone comes from the same background or has the same home situations. Therefore, it is imperative that a library provides equal access to all people, including those who are homeless. The library staff is trained to recognize and be sensitive to the needs of these patrons in both the public library and school library settings. Willett suggests that barriers should be removed, including the fees or charges incurred because of lost books or overdue fines. Many families found in these situations may not have had an opportunity to retrieve books from their home before they were forced out or had to leave because of unforeseen circumstances. Libraries also should be able to direct a homeless person to agencies or governmental services. These agencies can further help place them into a shelter or other options. The library has an opportunity to help those in need and become a place of refuge during operating hours.

Public libraries have answered the call in many areas across the United States with ideas and strategies to include the growing homeless population in their libraries. Lilienthal shares programs that have been placed into practice to include all areas of homelessness. In San Francisco, the librarian employs former homeless men and women to walk through the library several times a day. They stop to meet with families and people that are homeless and inquire to
see if they need any assistance. She and her co-workers do this every day the library is open. For young adults, a New York Queens Library coordinates with the Department of Education liaisons in shelters. At the shelter, the liaison talks to parents about the types of programs the local library has to offer families. The library provides technology training as well as guidance for the parents to find jobs. Other libraries engage the homeless through book clubs and reading times for children. Di Santo indicates living in a shelter may cause children’s literacy development to be hindered. By providing shelter programs, parents and children can learn how to develop literacy. Many of the programs libraries promote for their homeless population are funded by governmental organizations as well as private donations. This way the public library recognizes the needs of all patrons in their community.

Both the public library system and the school library can offer family literacy nights. Chance relates how librarians can promote interactive reading between parents or guardians and their children. In turn, this allows adults to feel comfortable reading with their children. In a school setting, this can help parents become more comfortable with the school setting in which their children are attending each day. This program can also help parents or guardians gain knowledge to impart to their children to become better readers, which will help students thrive in school. By the school connecting family literacy night to a homeless student’s family, it could foster a sense of belonging and increase literacy within the family.

In a school setting, librarians are able to identify students who are homeless through the school district liaison for homeless students. Adams (“Part 1”) talks about the worries homeless students have with not being able to return books on time or ever. Because of the transitional nature of homeless families, they may have to leave a home due to poor conditions,
overcrowding, or the inability to pay a bill. By being sensitive to the homeless student’s needs, the librarian can foster a relationship with the student and provide a place of stability.

Adams (“Part 2”) explains more about what a librarian can do to help foster a sense of literacy in a homeless student. By keeping longer hours for all students, the homeless student is able to complete homework in a quiet, less distracting space. Homeless shelters can be loud or students may not have access to materials needed, like desks, book shelves, or a paper supply. Not only would the homeless student have access to books in the library, but also online computers with databases as well. When the librarian stocks the library with paper, pens, and pencils, students do not have to be concerned with acquiring the correct supplies.

MacGillivray studied how school libraries have an impact for those living in shelters. When their children brought books home from school, this provided parents of homeless students with an opportunity to read a story to their child. By providing these tools, a homeless student can increase his or her chances at succeeding in school.

Another way a librarian can help implement critical literacy is by providing a wide array of books that include stories about social situations such as homelessness. Norris explains, “Critical literacy encourages readers to question, explore, or challenge the power relationships that exist between authors and readers. It examines issues of power and promotes reflection, transformative change, and action” (59). This can foster a sense of relief for homeless students when they discover books about their particular situation. Teachers can include these books in their classroom curriculum. This can further introduce all students to issues of diversity and the social concerns surrounding the homeless every day.

Chafel recommends that all students have the prospect of learning about themselves through rich literature practices. Librarians can add this material to the curriculum in any
subject. Chafel recommends literature and literacy should be presented frequently to the entire student body of a school. Literature can create meaningful conversations in classrooms which in turn can foster a sense of empathy towards other people’s situations. It can open students’ eyes to a world they might normally ignore.

Another example of connecting homelessness to all students is through poetry. A school in Overland Park, Kansas, has reached out to its community by inspiration received by poet Bonnie Lynn Tolson and the work she did with an inner city shelter. Librarian Ronda Hassig describes how through collaboration with 7th grade English teachers and poet Tolson, students went from mediocre writing to outstanding papers. Students were able to place faces to their words and feel connections through technology. By bringing homelessness to the forefront of students’ minds, the connection made can raise awareness for students who are not homeless but comfort those who are in a homeless situation.

Along with reading rich literature texts, Noll recommends that students be allowed to talk about their findings within discussion groups. Noll recognized that homeless students displayed more mature insight than expected during these discussions. Due to the unique experiences in the lives of homeless students, what they lack on a literary skill marked on a test, they make up for in analytical thinking skills developed through experience. “Even if their reading skills lag behind hind those of their peers, they can still become immersed in the collaborative meaning making of their group. Opportunities to make connections between stories and their own lives are a means of extending and deepening their understandings” (Noll 364). Involving all students in literature discussions develops a sense of leadership and excitement about the materials reviewed.
A librarian’s duty is to incorporate as many different materials into the library collection as the types of students in the school. Literature is meant to enrich a person’s life and create a sense of belonging in the world in which that person lives. This pertains to all people regardless of the socioeconomic background or where they reside. Understanding the demographics of the library community will guide the librarian through the process of choosing the appropriate material.
CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSION

All educators need to understand their role in the education of the homeless student. Homeless students are surrounded with unique needs which can be met by teachers, librarians, and staff, if time is taken to understand the homeless students’ circumstances. This chapter will address three questions found in the literature review. What are the major obstacles facing homeless students enrolling in school? How can educators provide for the needs of homeless students in the classroom? What can the library offer to help meet the needs of the homeless?

**Obstacles Homeless Students Face for School Enrollment**

The first obstacle a homeless student has to overcome is school enrollment which requires families to show proof of residency. Homeless families can live in a variety of living situations including a motel, a shelter, or even a car. A school district needs to be prepared to handle this issue by understanding the laws which protect the homeless family. The McKinney-Vento Act is one such law that ensures a homeless student will receive the proper education he or she deserves. This law also makes it easier to navigate all the hindrances encountered along the way to enrolling in school.

The second obstacle is legal guardianship of the homeless student. Families often get separated because a family member or friend may only be able to take in one or two people but not the complete family. Therefore, the inability to show guardianship can impede the process of enrollment. If the homeless student misses school because of this, he or she can fall behind classmates. In the event that a child is a runaway or has become emancipated from parents, showing the proper paper work is time consuming, particularly if it is not completed.
The third obstacle is providing evidence of current vaccinations for the homeless student. Due to the transient lifestyle of homeless families, to keep current on immunizations becomes difficult. The paper showing proof of immunization can get lost in moves, or it is forgotten. Unfortunately, students who are found in a homeless situation, who are not properly vaccinated, can cause illness to spread amongst the other students. Health issues such as immunization records can keep a homeless child from receiving the proper education.

The last obstacle to conquer is transportation. A school has a bus system, but knowing the proper address can often be a predicament for the driver of the bus. Again, due to the continuous moving of homeless families, schools have a hard time keeping up with the residence of the homeless student. Also, many homeless families do not have access to a car. If homeless students are depending on a parent or guardian to drive them to school, they may not make it to school at all or are continuously tardy. All of these transportation issues can encumber the homeless student’s education.

**Needs of a Homeless Student in the Classroom**

For a homeless student, physical needs are often unmet because of the transient nature of the family. A teacher can help with this situation by having supplies such as pens, pencils, paper, and erasers readily available for the homeless student. By connecting the homeless student to the liaison for the school district, clothing can be obtained in order for the student to feel more included with his or her peers. Also homeless students often do not have access to adequate food, so a teacher can provide snacks or guide the family to community resources. By having these needs met, a homeless student can have a sense of belonging in the classroom setting.

School staff can hold preconceived ideas towards homelessness, and this can be brought into the classroom. In order to combat these biases, teachers need to be educated on
homelessness and laws that protect these students. By being involved in the community, a
teacher can understand the unique issues surrounding the homeless student and how better to
relate to the challenges these students face. Also, a teacher can be attentive to emotional or
physical changes in his or her students that may indicate a student has been thrown into a
homeless situation. If a teacher can recognize the signs early, a plan can be put into place to help
meet the concerns of the homeless student.

How Libraries can Help the Homeless

Librarians can accommodate homeless students by providing materials for homework. Because of the difficult living situations, a homeless student may not have access to a computer
or the Internet or to basic school supplies. The library can combat this problem by keeping
school doors open longer and allowing access to materials beyond the normal school hours. The
librarian can also help by allowing homeless students to check out books and not collecting fines
if a book is overdue or not returned.

Librarians raise awareness of homelessness by buying books about homeless families. By
having this type of critical literature in the library and in the classroom, a homeless student can
recognize his or her situation in literature which fosters a sense of belonging. Also by including
books about homelessness in the curriculum, social issues are addressed and make students
aware of the world around them.

By providing programs for homeless families, the library can relay the importance of
literacy. Family literacy nights can bring families together by teaching the importance of reading
and how to read together. By implementing this type of outreach to the community, parents and
guardians begin to form a relationship with the school. For homeless students, the ability to
belong and feel secure is of utmost importance, and including the whole family in this process promotes success for the student.
WORKS CITED


