

Defining School Counselors' Roles in Working with Students Experiencing Homelessness

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School counselors play critical roles in removing the barriers faced by students experiencing homelessness. Despite having the skill set to address all students' academic, career, and emotional needs, their roles related to homelessness lack a clear definition. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to propose the five main roles of counselors in their work with students experiencing homelessness: (a) identification, (b) needs assessment, (c) advocacy, (d) coordination of programs and referrals, and (e) counseling interventions.

Keywords: homeless students, school counselors, homeless education, homelessness, at-risk issues

Students experiencing homelessness are entering schools at increasing rates (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2010). School counselors, as leaders in the school, have critical roles in providing the necessary supportive systems, programs, and interventions to ensure that they overcome the barriers these students face in their education (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2010). Although a recent national study, using a random sample, suggested that the majority of school counselors (82%, $n = 356$) have students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads, their counseling roles with these students remain largely undefined (Gaenzle, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to specify the roles, responsibilities, and knowledge necessary for school counselors to support children and youths experiencing homelessness. Developed from the documented needs of students affected by a loss of housing, as well as ASCA's (2012) suggested roles, the authors recommend that the roles and responsibilities of school counselors working with students experiencing homelessness fall into five areas: (a) identification, (b) needs assessment, (c) advocacy, (d) coordination of programs and referrals, and (e) counseling interventions. By tuning into these areas, school counselors can work more effectively to support students' needs.

Children and Youths Experiencing Homelessness

There are a variety of circumstances that may qualify a child or youth as homeless. This paper will follow the federal definition, which describes homelessness as those individuals who lack a "fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence" (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2004, sec. 725). This includes, but is not limited to, children who are staying with others due to loss of housing, have inconsistent housing, are awaiting placement into foster care, are living in motels, camps, shelters, or those who are abandoned. Section 725 of this definition also includes children who are living in other areas that are not considered as adequate housing. (USDE, 2004).

According to the National Center for Family Homelessness ([NCFH], 2014), one in every 30 children experience homelessness in the United States. This includes children who are without a physical home, as well as children who are living in temporary housing. Homelessness itself presents problems for any individual as a result of not having a stable home environment. However, children faced with homelessness are at an increased risk for experiencing direct or indirect violence, physical health concerns, delays in developmental milestones, and other associated problems (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater, & Haber, 2012; NCFH, 2014). These concerns may be due to the lack of support and resources that are typically associated with homelessness. For instance, parents experiencing homelessness face increased stress within their own lives and in their interpersonal relationships, which makes it difficult for them to

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provide the emotional and physical support needed by their children (David, Gelberg, & Suchman, 2012). Many families facing homelessness are also single parent households, which puts more stress and pressure on one parent to provide for the family (David et al., 2012). Moreover, children experiencing homelessness may also lack additional social supports (NCFH, 2014). Because homelessness is often stigmatized, children may be ignored or even criticized about their homeless status by their peers (Tompsett & Toro, 2010). Without these social supports, children experiencing homelessness may feel socially isolated and withdrawn, thus potentially leading to depressive symptoms, anxiety, and antisocial behaviors (Anooshian, 2003; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014; Tompsett & Toro, 2010).

The loss of housing may also have negative physiological impacts on children. Whereas children facing homelessness have an increased risk for depression and other mental health disorders (Anooshian, 2003; Hughes et al., 2010; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014), they are also at risk for physical health problems. For example, they are more likely to get sick than their peers with consistent housing (Hart-Shegos, 1999) and experience obesity and hunger due to the lack of nutritional value in cheaper food (Chiu, Dimarco, & Prokop, 2013). The impact of homelessness on children is clearly extensive and impacts all facets of a child's life.

Children and youths experiencing homelessness have unique challenges in the educational system. They face lower expectations and perceptions from teachers and administrators (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2011); demonstrate lower academic achievement and classroom engagement than their consistently housed peers (Cutuli et al., 2013; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012); and perform below average on math and reading tests (Cutuli et al., 2013). Data suggest that less than 50% of students experiencing homelessness across grades three through eight met or exceeded state proficiency in reading and math during the 2012-2013 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2014). Moreover, data suggest that students experiencing homelessness have lower standardized tests scores in math as they move up in the grades (National Center for Homeless Education, 2014).

In order to address the educational issues faced by students experiencing homelessness, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law in 1987 (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008). In its broad definition, the act seeks to provide students experiencing homelessness with the same educational opportunities as their consistently housed peers (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008). The McKinney-Vento Act requires local educational agencies (LEA) to address barriers to students'

education, such as transportation and enrollment, and to identify a local liaison for students experiencing homelessness for each school (USDE, 2004). Local liaisons, or homeless liaisons, as they will be referred to in this paper, are responsible for communicating between the students experiencing homelessness, their families, the school, and other members of the community that may be involved in students' cases (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008). The McKinney-Vento policies provide a platform for educators and families to ensure that students experiencing homelessness have the same access to their education as their peers with consistent housing.

To ensure that the requirements under McKinney-Vento are effective in removing barriers for students, a support system is necessary. With rising numbers of students experiencing homelessness entering schools across the country, schools are challenged to provide environments where students' unique needs are addressed. Educators must be attuned to the unique social, emotional, and academic barriers faced by students experiencing homelessness and find ways to support their educational development. One critical stakeholder, who has the skills and training to serve students facing a loss of housing, is the school counselor. School counselors can work with students and families experiencing homelessness to meet their unique needs.

School Counselors and Homelessness

School counselors are leaders in schools who address the academic, personal/social, and career planning needs of all students (ASCA, 2014). They deliver direct services at the school level such as group counseling, individual counseling, or classroom lessons (ASCA, 2012). Further, they engage in indirect services for students, such as coordinating programs, providing referrals, or building collaborative partnerships with other stakeholders. School counselors offer valuable services to meet the needs of students from all backgrounds, including one of the most vulnerable; students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2012). Due to the availability of school counselors during the school day and their unique skill sets, they may be the first line of support in providing the services necessary for students experiencing homelessness. In order to do so, it is important that school counselors' roles in serving students with housing losses are clearly defined (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). ASCA (2010) provides a brief position statement suggesting how school counselors should support students experiencing homelessness. They recommend that school counselors: (a) advocate for students and collaborate with their parents/guardians to reduce barriers related to school enrollment and

academic success; (b) establish educational and preventive programs for homeless parents and children; (c) collaborate with school and community personnel and coordinate appropriate support services; (d) increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the rights of homeless students; and (e) advocate for appropriate educational placement (ASCA, 2010, p.7). In these roles, counselors can intervene with students presently facing concerns, but can also provide preventive services that address the potential issues faced by children and youths experiencing homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004).

These roles highlight the importance of school counselors engaging in systemic support for students experiencing homelessness and understanding McKinney-Vento. However, despite ASCA's position statement and the importance of their work, research still indicates that the roles of school counselors in working with children experiencing homelessness lack specification (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). In order to help counselors understand how they can more effectively support students experiencing homelessness and to clarify and expand on ASCA's position statement, the authors recommend that counselors have five roles related to their work on homelessness: (a) identification, (b) needs assessment, (c) advocacy, (d) coordination of programs and referrals, and (e) counseling interventions.

Identification

The United States Department of Education (2004) requires that schools record the number of students experiencing homelessness and have a plan to identify them. However, because of the various definitions of homelessness (USDE, 2004) and students' frequent moves between schools (Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010), determining which students are experiencing homelessness is a daunting task. Although the primary responsibility of identifying students experiencing homelessness may ultimately fall upon the homeless liaison (USDE, 2004), it could be possible that school counselors, as confidants and points of contact in the school, are the first educators with whom the student or family shares their housing status. Therefore, it is imperative that they are part of this process.

Identifying students and families experiencing homelessness requires that school counselors understand the various definitions of homelessness described under McKinney-Vento, as well as impart this knowledge to others who may help in identifying students. Families and students may be reluctant to identify themselves to the school due to the stigma that surrounds homelessness (Kidd, 2003). Families may

also be unaware that they qualify for services under McKinney-Vento. For example, families who are "doubled-up" or those forced to move into another's home due to their lack of their own housing, may not know that they could qualify as homeless by the federal definition and receive support through the legislation. These reasons may help explain why the identification of students experiencing homelessness is one of the most commonly cited challenges in meeting the students' needs (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY], 2010).

To help with identifying students, school counselors must approach families and students in a non-judgmental way. NAEHCY (2011) recommends avoiding using the term "homeless" initially, as the stigma behind it may lead families or children to avoid asking for help or identifying as such. Further, they suggest that counselors widely disseminate information about the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as homelessness, to school staff and communities. This way, stakeholders can be made aware whether or not they qualify to receive support. Counselors are also encouraged to build a relationship with their school's homeless liaison so that whenever they suspect a student is experiencing homelessness, they can contact them immediately and begin determining what services are necessary. The homeless liaison can then determine whether students are facing any specific barriers that can be addressed by the McKinney-Vento policies (USDE, 2004). School counselors could also encourage teachers to share when they suspect a student may be experiencing homelessness. Early identification is critical in ensuring that students receive the necessary services to be successful in school.

Needs Assessment

After identifying students who are experiencing homelessness, school counselors can determine specific needs through a needs assessment (Strawser, Markos, Yamaguchi, & Higgins, 2000). The purpose of the needs assessment is to ensure that individual needs are met, as well as to record needs to provide continuity of services if a student transfers. Havlik, Brady, & Gavin (2014) described four areas of need for students experiencing homelessness as reported by school counselors: (a) survival and healthy development (i.e., basic needs), (b) systems and services for emotional connection, (c) academic services and supports, and (d) access to and knowledge of services. Through assessing needs in these four areas, school counselors can determine how to provide the best support possible.

Using the first area to determine which basic needs are being met is an important starting point. Since students experiencing homelessness may lack food, clothing, and shelter (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004;

Buckner, 2008) counselors could privately ask students (and/or parents) about the safety of their housing and whether they have enough food and clean clothing available. Second, school counselors might ask students what specific services, such as counseling interventions, they are receiving (if any) for emotional support. Knowing this information is important, because Bassuk, Volk, and Olivet (2010) suggested that approximately 80% of families experiencing homelessness need supportive services such as mental health supports. However, children and youths experiencing homelessness may not receive the mental health services they need because of a lack of: health care, transportation to therapy sessions, and knowledge about available resources (Hudson et al., 2010). School counselors could assess the use and availability of these resources, as well as determine students' supportive parental and peer relationships through observations at the school between students and friends, as well as through interactions with family members.

Along with emotional supports, students experiencing homelessness may need additional services to achieve academic success (Cutuli et al., 2013; Fantuzzo et al., 2012). Counselors could determine academic needs (e.g. appropriate class placement, availability of internet at home, access to a computer and school supplies) and whether students would benefit from programs such as tutoring or mentoring. Lastly, counselors can determine what services students can access, such as tutoring or academic support, and whether or not they have transportation to and from school. Since transportation may hinder students' attendance in school, school counselors can determine whether students have reliable and safe transportation.

Using the four central areas of need as a guide, counselors can sit down with any student who is identified as homeless and, in a nonjudgmental and supportive fashion, explore each area to determine where their needs fall. Creating a checklist that is unique to the school may also be helpful to ensure that each area is assessed. For instance, one school may need to determine whether students have transportation vouchers to take public transportation. Another school may have to determine if students can afford school uniforms. Counselors may also have to go beyond the student, and contact local shelters to determine other specific student needs and the outside services they are already receiving (Strawser et al., 2000). Based on the needs assessment, counselors can direct students and parents to services, discuss how to meet needs with the homeless liaison, or provide specific interventions.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a critical role for school counselors serving students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2010). Advocating for students experiencing homelessness requires that counselors understand the McKinney-Vento Act and its implications. Through clearly understanding the policies, counselors are a voice for its effective implementation. For example, school counselors must understand the enrollment and transportation requirements under the McKinney-Vento Act to help students enroll in school quickly and get to and from school and after-school programs (Havlik et al., 2014). For schools where enrollment procedures hinder students from starting, such as those schools that require certain paperwork (e.g., a lease or deed) that a family may not have, school counselors can be the voice to ensure that if they are identified as homeless and may have these requirements waived. Counselors can also advocate to help students experiencing homelessness remain at their schools of origin or transition smoothly to a new school if it is in their best interest.

School counselors can further advocate by ensuring that others are educated on the unique circumstances and issues surrounding homelessness so that students are identified faster and services are provided more efficiently (Kidd, 2003). They can also provide professional development for teachers and administrators to work with students experiencing homelessness. This may include training teachers to analyze their classroom policies to determine if any hinder the growth of students, such as attendance and homework policies (Maribel, 2014; Murphy & Tobin, 2012; Strawser et al., 2000). For example, if there is no flexibility in a late policy for homework, it may hurt a student experiencing homelessness whose reason for a late submission is due to a transportation issue. The teacher may need to work with students to support them by making the standards more equitable for all students.

Advocacy also includes ensuring that schools secure funding for supportive programs. School counselors can request funding from the school or district for field trips or other school activities so that students experiencing homelessness are not inhibited in their school engagement (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004). Counselors can apply for sub-grants under the McKinney-Vento Act to support funding for additional programs at their schools (USDE, 2004). When funding is not available, counselors could work with administration to host a clothing, food, or school supply drive within the community to address basic needs (Yamaguchi, Strawser, & Higgins, 1997). Advocacy is a critical role in ensuring that students experiencing homelessness are on an equal playing field as their peers.

Coordination of Programs and Referrals

After counselors understand the specific needs of the students experiencing homelessness in their schools, they can then begin to determine the types of specific programs or interventions that may be deemed necessary to support students' academic, career, and personal/social development. Because counselors work across different systems to support students (McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014), they rely on collaborating with other stakeholders such as school social workers, homeless liaisons, community members (Havlik et al., 2014), and other outside agencies (Murphy & Tobin, 2012) in providing support.

While they may not personally implement all of the interventions, school counselors may help to develop programs, check on progress, and ensure that the programs are effectively supporting students. Examples of programs may include tutoring programs, which have been shown to positively influence failing grades (Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, & Knight, 2011), or mentoring programs (Gaenzle, 2012; Grothaus et al., 2011). School counselors may coordinate the logistics of the tutoring or mentoring sessions and evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. Furthermore, finding ways to get students involved in community programs may instill hope and improve students' mental health status (Lynn et al., 2014).

To successfully coordinate services, school counselors must understand the resources in their communities and build relationships with them prior to engaging in collaborations or providing referrals. School counselors could conduct visits to community resources so that they know how each resource supports student needs. Coordinating partnerships with other resources should also include ensuring that resources are lasting for students and are not just temporary (Miller, 2011). Since school counselors have many other responsibilities, the role of coordinating of services is essential to ensuring that all stakeholders can help provide support.

Emotional, Academic, and Career Counseling Interventions

Essential to the role of the school counselor in serving students experiencing homelessness is providing counseling services. Students experiencing homelessness may face emotional issues such as anxiety and depression (Hughes et al., 2010; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014). Depending on their living circumstances, they may not be able to access mental health counselors to support their needs. Fortunately, school counselors are trained to provide personal/social counseling to support the emotional development of all children and youths (ASCA, 2012). School counselors

can address many of the emotional needs that children and youths experiencing homelessness face through supportive counseling interventions.

Underlying the counseling relationship is the importance of building trust (Hill, 2005). For students experiencing homelessness, trust building is the first step in helping them feel that they can share and express their concerns and needs (Daniels, 1995). Individual counseling interventions should include strength-based approaches that enhance students' self-esteem and foster resilience (Grothaus et al., 2011). Approaches should focus on helping students to develop self-worth and to identify their strengths (Kidd, 2003; Walsh & Buckley, 1994). Areas to emphasize during sessions may include developing social skills and providing general emotional support (Walsh & Buckley, 1994; Yamaguchi et al., 1997). One potentially effective approach for counseling students experiencing homelessness is through play therapy, which allows students to process experiences and emotions in a safe and supportive environment, thus positively impacting their educational development (Baggerly & Jenkins, 2009; Baggerly, 2004).

Counseling activities for students experiencing homelessness should not be limited to individual sessions, but may also include small groups and classroom lessons on topics such as self-esteem, social skills, and stress management (Strawser et al., 2000). Teaching problem solving skills may also help students to become more resilient when faced with adversity related to their experience of homelessness (Grothaus et al., 2011). Further, school-wide behavioral management systems may encourage positive behaviors in students experiencing homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). Such school-wide interventions may impact how other students treat students experiencing homelessness and make the school feel safer. It is critical for school counselors to ensure that the school environment is emotionally supportive for all students (Murphy & Tobin, 2012).

With all of the strains that accompany homelessness, the emotional and basic needs of students experiencing homelessness often overshadow their academic needs (Havlik et al., 2014). Mentioned less frequently in the literature is the academic and career counseling that is necessary for students experiencing homelessness. School counselors providing academic counseling to students experiencing homelessness can first ensure that students are appropriately placed in courses that challenge them, while allowing them to be successful (ASCA, 2010). They may need to provide additional supports such as homework help (Yamaguchi et al., 1997), individual student planning (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004), teacher consultation, or other preventative programs (Grothaus et al., 2011). Since many children and youths

experiencing homelessness may not consider college as an option due to finances or academic difficulties, school counselors can have regular conversations with students and families to provide information about admissions, financial aid, and housing (NAEHCY, 2011). Students attending four-year institutions may need information on summer and break housing, because they may not have a stable home to come back to when school is not in session.

In general, attending to the counseling needs of children and youths experiencing homelessness is important to ensuring their academic and social success. As such, since the emotional health of students experiencing homelessness may be profoundly impacted by their living circumstances, school counselors must recognize when referrals are necessary. When students' counseling needs are beyond their expertise, or when students need more in-depth psychotherapy, school counselors must have community agencies that are accessible and affordable to which they can refer. Overall, school counselors' roles in serving students experiencing homelessness can help provide the support necessary for them to overcome the many barriers they face in the school system. Through being intentional with their approaches and having a support system available, school counselors can be available when help is needed.

Discussion and Application

In addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness, school counselors are key leaders in the school who provide important services (ASCA, 2010; Gaenzle, 2012). Using the five roles described above, they can facilitate a system of support to help to ensure that the needs of students experiencing homelessness are being effectively addressed in their schools. Through identification, needs assessment, coordination of programs, advocacy, and counseling interventions, school counselors can clearly define their roles in their work with students experiencing homelessness and provide consistency in the services and referrals that students receive. In this section, we discuss how school counselors can apply these roles, as well as recommendations for counselors to overcome challenges such as identification, and how they can further their training. We conclude by recommending future research on this topic, and provide a case example of the role of a school counselor working with students experiencing homelessness.

Since every school is unique and homeless circumstances vary based on the specific school location and populations (NCFH, 2014), school counselors can use the roles described as a flexible template to tailor based on the specific needs of their

homeless populations. The programs they coordinate and implement in their community and schools will vary depending on what is available and who is willing to help. Since school counselors tend to have large caseloads (College Board, 2012), with a lot of students facing various challenges, they rely on working with other stakeholders to provide collaborative services. In the beginning of every school year, school counselors should meet with the homeless liaison assigned to their school, as well as other key stakeholders, such as social workers, school psychologists, lead teachers, and administrators to clearly define each individual's roles in serving students experiencing homelessness and meeting the McKinney-Vento requirements.

When students identify as homeless, there should be a system already in place with individuals aware of their roles. For example, a school social worker may be valuable in advocating for access to housing, determining preschool placement, or helping students experiencing homelessness connect with programs in the community (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Isreal, 2006). Whereas, the homeless liaison may have the full responsibility for keeping track of the identity and records of students experiencing homelessness at the school and coordinating transportation (USDE, 2004). Further, administrators could assist in ensuring the McKinney-Vento policies are met, help to build partnerships with community agencies, and raise funds to support basic needs. School counselors can take the lead in helping to coordinate the various roles of all stakeholders.

Due to the stigmatization surrounding homelessness, identifying students experiencing homelessness may present a barrier to providing support. Youths experiencing homelessness have reported feeling embarrassment or shame related to their lack of consistent housing (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005). If they feel embarrassed, they may avoid school completely. School counselors may need to be persistent in building relationships and trust with students so that they understand the counselor and other stakeholders are there to help. This may be an opportunity for school counselors to provide professional development for teachers and school staff on how to build trusting relationships with students and help to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness in the classroom while upholding their confidentiality. Furthermore, students may be more forthcoming with their homeless status if they are in a school that provides a trusting environment with limited bullying or peer scrutiny.

To further support students experiencing homelessness through providing services and counseling interventions, school counselors must utilize their needs assessments to determine specific programming and plan approaches that are need and

evidence based. For instance, recent research indicated that interventions focusing on developing executive functioning skills (i.e., organizational and planning skills) (Piehler et al., 2014), as well as cognitive behavioral approaches, have been shown to be effective with youths experiencing homelessness (Altena, Brillleslijper-Kater, & Wolf, 2010). Further, developing preventative programming is also important so parents and children are supported (Nabors, Proescher, & DeSilva, 2001).

In order to work most effectively in the recommended roles, school counselors must first increase their own knowledge and training on homelessness. Fulfilling these complex roles and responsibilities requires that school counselors educate themselves, and that counselor educators ensure that counseling students have this knowledge prior to going into the field (Gaenzle, 2012). Resources on homelessness are readily available for those who would like to be better prepared. For example, school counselors can consult with organizations such as the NAEHCY, the National Center on Family Homelessness, or the United States Department of Education for more specific information on students experiencing homelessness. They can also visit the Facebook or Twitter pages of organizations such as NAEHCY or the National Center for Homeless Education for up-to-date information on policies and programs available for students experiencing homelessness. Further, organizations such as NAEHCY hold conferences each year on issues specifically related to homelessness and education. States also often offer conferences at a low cost for those working with children and youths experiencing homelessness. Through being informed and having knowledge, school counselors can provide better services and be more prepared to meet the unique needs of students.

Future research is needed on how school counselors can best serve children and youths experiencing homelessness. This may include conducting a national study on homelessness and school counseling interventions to determine what types of counseling programs and interventions are most effective in meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Student voices should be included in the research to uncover what services are most beneficial for them and how the school counselor can best support them. More research is also needed on the challenges that school counselors face in addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness across the country in different settings. Finally, investigating the training that school counselors receive on homelessness in their graduate programs would provide insight on how to better prepare counselors to work with this population of students.

Case Example

Here is a case example of how a school counselor may address the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Charlotte is a middle school counselor. Although she has been working at the same school for over ten years, only recently she has noticed an increase in the number of students experiencing homelessness enrolling in the school. She observes that the students experiencing homelessness on her caseload are often late to school or absent, and have trouble keeping up with their work and making friends. In order to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness on her caseload, Charlotte learns more about the McKinney-Vento act, identifies partners in the school and community who can help, and enhances the interventions and services she provides for these students.

Identification

Charlotte first partners with the homeless liaison (assigned to the school social worker), at her school to identify students experiencing homelessness. Together they post flyers in the main office and in local shelters and apartment complexes, and send information through email to school staff with the definitions of homelessness and individual rights under McKinney-Vento. They also hold a professional development workshop for teachers and staff on the signs of homelessness so that they can help identify students. Lastly, she posts links about McKinney-Vento and the rights of students experiencing homelessness on the school's website.

Needs Assessments

When students are identified as homeless, Charlotte meets with them individually (and confidentially) to build a trusting relationship. When she first meets with a child facing a loss of housing, she refrains from using the term "homeless" and instead has a gentle conversation with the child about where they are living and their safety. She ensures that the school counseling office is a safe place they can come if they need help or want to talk. She also checks into students' academic progress and attendance to determine if they are enrolled in appropriate courses and if they have any educational needs that are not being addressed. She continues to follow-up with identified students throughout the school year. As with any at-risk children, she informally observes them in the hallway, lunchroom, and classroom to see how they are faring socially and if they need additional personal/social support.

Advocacy

After learning that McKinney-Vento policies allow students experiencing homelessness to start in school without all of the necessary paperwork, Charlotte talks to the school registrar to learn more about the enrollment process at the school and determines if there are procedures hindering the timely enrollment of students experiencing homelessness. She also encourages teachers to examine their late assignment and exam policies and consults with them to determine how they can allow for some flexibility for students in unique housing situations. To help provide additional academic support for students experiencing homelessness, she decides to apply for a sub-grant through the state to get transportation for students who do not have it for after school programming.

Coordination of Programs and Counseling Interventions

Charlotte already facilitates an array of programs and interventions to meet the needs of students across her caseload. For example, she runs counseling groups at her school for students who are behind academically, as well as for those who would like to enhance their social skills. She ensures that those students identified as homeless, who need additional support, have access to these groups. She also works collaboratively with homeless liaisons, social workers, school psychologists, and mental health services to provide a system of support for the emotional and behavior needs of students experiencing homelessness within the school. Outside of the school, Charlotte partners with the local church to run a school supply and clothing drive, the nearby community resource center to get students involved with an afterschool program they run, and the local college to bring in tutors and mentors for a study hall program run during school hours. Although all students are able to be part of these programs, when students are identified as homeless, she ensures that they are promptly connected to appropriate programming.

Preparation

Lastly, in order to enhance her preparation to serve students experiencing homelessness, Charlotte contacted her homeless liaison for training opportunities and plans to attend the state conference on homelessness and education in the near future. Each year, before the school starts, she also refreshes herself on the McKinney-Vento requirements and determines how the school can better serve students experiencing homelessness. Through all of the above actions, she is

better prepared and the students she serves feel more supported.

Conclusion

School counselors are key stakeholders who are positioned to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness. By being intentional in specifying their roles and responsibilities, they can provide a supportive system for students and advocate to help remove the barriers they face. Their specific roles when working with students experiencing homelessness include assisting with identification of students and families experiencing homelessness, assessing students' needs, advocating for the effective provision of services, coordinating programs and referrals, and providing counseling interventions. Through facilitating counseling interventions that address academic and emotional needs, as well as coordinating programs, school counselors can have a clear impact on students experiencing homelessness.

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