

Dana Scott

Dana Scott is the State Coordinator for the McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth program at the Colorado Department of Education. As State Coordinator, she administers Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This Act assures educational rights for students in homeless situations with the goal of increasing educational access, school stability and academic success. Dana works with 178 public school districts statewide to remove barriers and provide educational and support services to the 21,487 students experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in Colorado public schools.

Dana is the Vice President/President Elect of the Board of Directors for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). She is also a member of the Colorado Special Education Advisory Council, Colorado's Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Intervention and the Colorado Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth. Dana was an appointee on the Denver Mayor's Commission to End Homelessness for seven years and was principal writer for Denver's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. She also assisted in writing the Homeless Youth Action Plan for Colorado. Dana has served on Colorado's ICH for five years.

Dana's experience in private foundations, the public and non-profit sectors spans almost twenty years. She has seven years experience as a program officer at the Daniels Fund, LMC Community Foundation and El Pomar Foundation and is a graduate of El Pomar Foundation's Fellowship in Philanthropy and Community Service. Additionally, Dana has twelve years experience implementing programs, administering grants and fundraising in the public and nonprofit sectors. Her nonprofit experience includes the Washington/Greene County WIC program, Avis Arbor Homeless Shelter and The Women's Bean Project, a workforce development program in Denver that employs women experiencing homelessness.

Feedback on the *Proposed Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness*

Submitted by: Dana Scott, VP/President-Elect of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHYC) and State Coordinator for McKinney-Vento Homeless Education, Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

NAEHYC's members work directly with thousands of homeless youth every day in communities and schools nationwide. We are pleased that input from the education community was solicited as a part of the process for developing this framework. Please find below feedback and recommendations for the *Proposed Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness* presented to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness on June 12, 2012.

- We concur that school engagement is an “increased protective factor” that can lead to successful outcomes for homeless youth. Statewide data in Colorado show that homeless youth have the largest dropout rate of any other instructional program and homeless students experience school disruption (mobility) at twice the rate of their housed peers. Dropout rates and mobility rates are higher for homeless youth than for youth who are poor, but housed. In response to this data, the state's Homeless Education program was recently moved under a newly created Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement. Enhanced collaborations have been developed with other programs that work to minimize risk factors, increase school engagement, and focus on career and workforce readiness. Such programs include Colorado's Expelled and At Risk Student Services Unit, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and Individual Career and Academic Plans.
- Including education under the “Outcomes” section of the *Preliminary Intervention Model* is a promising start. From a long-term outcome perspective, successful education attainment is a major asset accumulation/ poverty reduction strategy that increases the likelihood of obtaining sustainable wages and stable housing. In addition, school is a leading prevention and intervention strategy that leads to the building of protective factors. Keeping youth stable and succeeding in school is imperative. School is an essential safety net, providing food, basic services, safety, and a sense of normalcy. School also provides the opportunity to develop or deepen positive relationships with peers, and with adults who can provide important referrals to community agencies and leverage other services.
- Aligning interagency efforts toward common goals so that all students are prepared for success in college and career is vital. Nationally, NAEHCY is actively collaborating with pre-collegiate programs and postsecondary institutions to increase access to and successful matriculation of homeless youth into higher education and address barriers to degree completion. States across the nation are appointing higher education liaisons at universities and colleges to specifically assist homeless youth in addressing financial aid, housing and other policies or procedures that limit access and hamper successful postsecondary degree completion. With the success of the homeless youth model, these higher education liaisons are expanding their work to include youth without stable support systems, such as foster and emancipated youth.

In Colorado, CDE and the CO Department of Higher Education (CDHE) formed a partnership to enhance completion rates for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Nationally, research suggests that 90% of students who complete a FAFSA during their senior year in high school enroll in college within 12 months. In light of this research, CDHE, through Colorado's College Access Challenge Grant is working with McKinney-Vento K-12 liaisons to increase FAFSA completion and access to higher education, with the goal of facilitating FAFSA completion of homeless youth by 50% within two years.

Even as there are opportunities within the proposed framework, some of the information presented merits re-consideration moving forward. Recommended changes include the following:

1. Planned strategies and interventions should be based on individual youth needs and built around their experiences. While it is understood that the typologies used in the *Preliminary Intervention Model* are meant to be temporary until additional data collection informs the framework, it is important to reinforce the need to focus on assessment based on individual youth needs. There is not a consensus regarding current typologies defining youth homelessness, or even the utility of typologies in general. Many youth have had a combination of runaway, throwaway, doubled-up, street and system experiences and often move in and out of homelessness and typology categories depending on their current circumstances. What we find from our students are myriad complexities shaped by a fluidity of experience that does not fit neatly into predefined boxes such as how long youth are homeless, or where they lay their head at night. For example, a youth who has experienced a lifetime of abuse and neglect, followed by an initial experience of homelessness, may have more risk factors than youth who have been homeless longer. Youth programs must assess the individuality of each youth and acknowledge that every youth has his/her unique needs, challenges, goals, interests and strengths. One example of individualized youth assessment can be seen in Fairfax County Public Schools, VA. The school is working with other public and community agencies to serve homeless youth through successfully identifying the unique needs of the individual youth and creating programs to meet those needs holistically. Similarly, the state of MI is developing legislation to support a "host homes" model statewide that would provide funding to public schools to work with community agencies to meet the housing needs of homeless youth identified in public schools.
2. Data collected and verified by the U.S. Department of Education should be fully incorporated and utilized as the framework moves forward. Education is the only homeless youth service provider that spans all communities nationwide. School districts provide a net of data that is more geographically comprehensive than other service provision agencies. Data collected annually by public school district liaisons require mandated verifications by states. Ironically, the "resource limitations on the (education liaison) staffing and infrastructure" language found in the Framework document explaining why Education's data has not been fully utilized will also be encountered by HUD and RHYA service providers and volunteers administering the proposed youth Point-in-Time (PIT) count. Both methodologies are based on self-reports and based on a moment in time with a homeless youth. Furthermore, relying primarily on the youth PIT and excluding education data will, in essence,

mean that the HUD definition of homelessness is used to estimate youth homelessness. More than 75% of all homeless youth identified by public schools do not meet these guidelines. Instead, a youth PIT count can provide supplemental data including homeless youth not enrolled in school.

3. Prevention models and recommendations should be further defined, with an emphasis on addressing barriers for homeless youth accessing child welfare, health and public benefits services. Public school liaisons continually report that youth who are homeless for the first time could be stabilized at a much faster rate, preventing repeated homelessness, if barriers related to homelessness and lack of parent/guardian were addressed in accessing public benefits, child welfare, health, mental health services, dental care, employment, postsecondary and adult education. In addition to these services, federally-funded shelters and housing programs should not limit services to only youth on the street or other restrictions such as age, gender and guardianship requirements. Most homeless youth who have not received child welfare services should have received them, either because they fled their homes to escape abuse, or have been kicked out of their homes by neglectful parents. Restricting services provided through the child welfare system only to those who have been formally involved in the system is an artificial distinction that denies appropriate services to young people who need them. Homeless youth should have the opportunity to access the support system provided to youth in foster care and those emancipating from foster care, including housing and education services.
4. Lack of education, bullying, and school push-out strategies are important considerations that should be included in the risk factor category. Rigid discipline, zero tolerance and suspension policies, lack of credit accrual options for youth with high mobility and even on-line education (without proper engagement strategies) are being reported as primary push out strategies by school districts and students. Incorporating the realities of homeless youth in overall high school education reform is needed to ensure youth are able to access innovative programs.
5. Youth who are homeless should be engaged as full partners in federal, state, and local efforts. We must listen to and heed youth input on which programs and policies are most helpful or harmful to them, and where opportunities exist for improvements.