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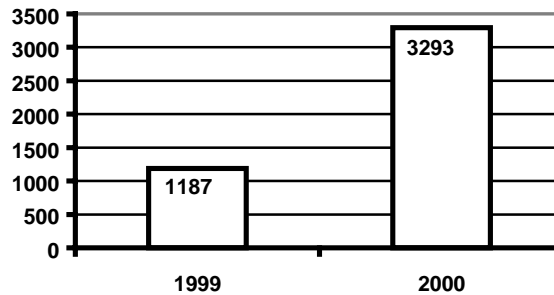


Review of Educational Services Available to Homeless Children in Santa Cruz County Schools

Background

Problems concerning homeless individuals and families continue to have the attention of public schools, city governments, county government, health service agencies, religious groups, social agencies and others in Santa Cruz County. As the number of homeless increases so do the intensity and extensiveness of their problems.

According to the United Way survey, *Santa Cruz County Homeless 2000*, published in July 2000 it was estimated that over 8,558 persons experience homelessness in Santa Cruz in a given year. In 1990, the average number of homeless at any given time was 1,187; in 2000, the number had increased to 3,293. This figure is an increase of almost 200% in Santa Cruz County over the last decade. More than one half of the homeless adults interviewed in the United Way survey have children. Of those who have children, nearly two-thirds (63%) have more than one child, and nearly one-third (31%) have more than two children. It is also believed that due to privacy issues and the elusiveness of homeless individuals, the number of homeless youth in the County is undercounted.¹



Average Number of Homeless in Santa Cruz County

In a survey conducted by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education it was found that 1,907 children, 4.75% of the number of students enrolled in Santa Cruz County public schools, are homeless. Homeless children are living in shelters, doubled up with other families, in motels, on the beach, in transitional housing, in cars, tents or campers or are on their own.²

By law, they are entitled to have access to the same free appropriate public education provided to other children and youths. They are to be mainstreamed in the school environment and are to have an opportunity to meet the same performance standards as other students.

Scope

It was the task of the Grand Jury to review the public schools in Santa Cruz County to see if they were following laws pertaining to educating homeless children.

The investigation included the following:

- The publication entitled *Santa Cruz County Homeless 2000, Census and Needs Assessment Comprehensive Report* provided by the United Way of Santa Cruz was reviewed with a special emphasis on the needs of homeless children.
- Also reviewed was the publication entitled *Enrolling Students Living in Homeless Situations* published by the California Department of Education in 1999. It provided an overview of what can be done to help the children of homeless achieve the academic standards all children in California are expected to meet.
- The publication entitled *Homeless Education Program* which focused on homeless children in school and what teachers can do to help alleviate the problems they experience was reviewed.
- Interviews with the Coordinator of Student Support Services for the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, and the School Community Liaison and Secondary School Social Worker for Santa Cruz City School District.
- The City of Santa Cruz Homeless Issues Task Force Final Report was reviewed.
- The Santa Cruz County Office of Education's *School Survey About Homeless Children* was reviewed.

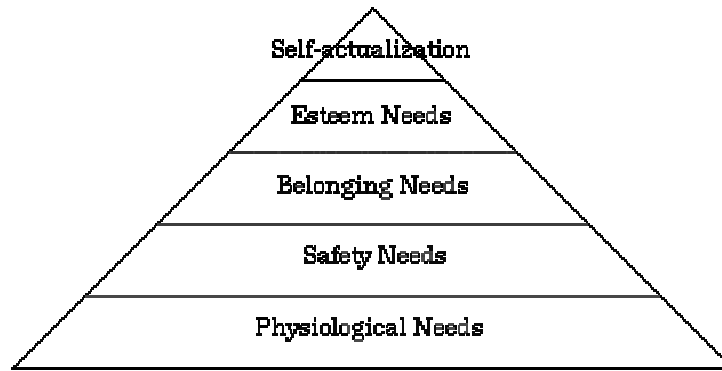
Findings

1. Federal and State laws pertain directly to educating homeless children.

The California Education Code Section 48200 requires persons six to eighteen years of age to attend school. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Public Law 100-77, subtitle VIIB, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, Section 721) sets forth the following policy:

- Each state educational agency shall ensure that homeless children have access to the same free, appropriate public education provided to other children and youths.
 - States shall review and revise laws, practices, regulations, and policies such as compulsory residency requirements, which act as barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youths in schools.
 - Homelessness alone should not be a sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment.
 - Homeless children and youths should have access to education and other services that are needed to ensure they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging performance standards as other students.³
2. There is no distinction made in the county schools between students from residences and those who are homeless. All students are “mainstreamed” in schools in Santa Cruz County. They are not identified as “homeless” to their peer group.⁴

3. Two schools in the County serve homeless youth. One is privately funded and the other is a community school operated by the County Office of Education, serving primarily homeless youth.
4. Homeless children have access to public schools in Santa Cruz County.
5. Homeless children receive a free public education in Santa Cruz County.
6. Homeless children have the opportunity and are expected to meet the same performance standards as other students.
7. When possible, the County Office of Education makes an in-take assessment of homeless children. They get background information on the family and the children. They find out what school they are attending and make contact with the teachers. Using Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* they determine which needs are being met and which are unfulfilled. This assessment is shared with the family while confidentiality is protected.⁴



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

8. Contact between the County Office of Education, Santa Cruz City School District and homeless children is made from direct referrals from various County agencies, counselors, teachers, and other school personnel. The liaison will go to where the homeless child is staying to make the initial contact.⁴
9. "Bridge to Success" is the name of the County Office of Education Homeless Program. Its policy is not to identify, stigmatize, segregate or otherwise alienate these children. The County Office of Education wants the children to remain anonymous; therefore, confidentiality is protected. Every effort is made not to single out homeless children.⁴

10. The following services are offered to homeless children in Santa Cruz County^{4,5}:
- **One-on-one tutoring:** 16 UCSC students, recruited and trained by the County Office of Education, work as tutors.
 - **In-class academic support:** Tutors assist teachers as classroom aids up to three days a week at elementary schools. They assist the homeless children as well as other students in the class.
 - **Outreach and coordination of services:** They work with an extended network of child protective services, shelters, churches and other outreach agencies. There are over 150 agencies working with the homeless.
 - **Case management:** They keep rather extensive reports of the young people receiving direct services. They include outcomes, how they are doing in school, anecdotal notes, report cards and reports from tutors.
 - **Outreach to homeless runaway youth:** The County Office of Education coordinates a multi-disciplinary team to support youths living on the street. The team consists of a number of County agencies that provide services such as shelters, meals, substance abuse, counseling, and mental and medical care services.
 - **Counseling services:** They provide one-on-one, family, drug and alcohol and life skills counseling.
 - **Transportation:** The County Office of Education provides bus passes and linkages to other transportation services.
 - **Parent support:** The liaison person meets with parents initially and then in follow-up sessions.
 - **Staff development and heightening awareness presentations:** Seminars and workshops are presented to teachers, administrators and others outlining special needs of homeless children.
 - **Skills training:** Adolescent life skills coaching and peer support groups for homeless teens.
 - **Supplies:** The County Office of Education provides backpacks, shoes, school supplies and other materials necessary for success in school.
 - **Enrollment assistance:** Schools assist children with “Declarations of Residency” forms and permanent record retrieval.
 - **Medical and dental referral:** Children with health problems are referred by a school nurse for available medical services.
 - **Job placement:** Schools refer teenagers who are seeking work experience.
 - **Transferring schools:** Students transferring to different schools receive assistance.
11. Both the County Office of Education and the Santa Cruz City School District have solicited additional funds and materials from the community to augment the McKinney Grant.
12. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education was commended for running a “model” program by the National Coalition for Education for Homeless Children and Youth. They have also received commendation from the Federal Document of Promising Practices for Educating Homeless Youth.

13. The greatest challenge is “finding the children,” was stated by Jo Ann Allen. If the parents do not enroll the children in school or if they are not referred by local homeless agencies, the children may never attend school. Children who need counseling often find it difficult to attend sessions. Further training is required for educators, administrators and staff to identify homeless children.
14. Funding for this homeless program has come in the form of a yearly grant from the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. It is a federal program that provides “seed” money for lead agencies around the country to set up homeless education programs. As with other “seed” money grants, it is designed to get successful programs started that will eventually develop other sources of funding. Although the County Office of Education has received this grant for 12 years, it was uncertain the grant would continue. To ensure the flow of funds to Santa Cruz County, the County Office of Education recommended that the Santa Cruz City School District apply for the grant as the lead agency.
15. The McKinney Grant of \$150,000 per year was awarded in late October to the Santa Cruz City School District for a period of three years.

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education will continue to be involved in the program as a contractor. The expertise they have developed will still be available to all the public school districts in the County. The grant provides funds to employ an Educational Resource Coordinator.
16. The goal is to have all school districts in the County set up their own programs. The increasing numbers of homeless children have been a factor in this decentralization of leadership.
17. The Santa Cruz City School District is now the lead agency with the County Office of Education serving as a contractor. Santa Cruz City School District has hired a new program administrator who works closely with the homeless liaison from the County Office of Education.
18. The County Office of Education is still working with all schools districts in the county in improving enrollment procedures, providing bus passes, maintaining a donation account, conducting their yearly homeless children survey and providing tutors.
19. Other School Districts are encouraged to set up their homeless education program to meet special needs of their own students.

Conclusions

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education has demonstrated leadership for developing a model Homeless K-12 Education Program in California. They have done an outstanding job of assisting homeless children in Santa Cruz County.

The Grand Jury applauds Jo Anne Allen for her work in developing this model program. After 12 years in the program, Ms. Allen has become the leading authority and local and national spokesperson on educating homeless children. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and leadership have played a paramount role in the success of this program.

Community agencies helping homeless families in Santa Cruz County deserve credit for their financial and human services support for the County Office of Education and homeless children these last 12 years.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that each school district within the county maintain the same level and quality of support for homeless children as has been provided by the County Office of Education. It is further recommended that the spirit by which that office helped homeless children be carried over in the decentralization process.
2. Each school district should develop programs that will meet the challenges of identifying homeless children within their designated boundaries.
3. Each school district should develop a plan to meet the special counseling needs of homeless children.
4. Each school district should develop a training program that trains its component groups to identify homeless children and understand the special needs of these children.
5. Each school district should continue to protect the confidentiality of homeless children.
6. The County Office of Education should support the school districts within the county by training staff members and administrators in establishing their district homeless programs and making them successful.

Response Required

Entity	Recommendations	Respond Within
Bonny Doon Union Elementary	2 - 5	60 Days
Happy Valley Elementary	2 - 5	60 Days
Live Oak School District	2 - 5	60 Days
Mountain Elementary	2 - 5	60 Days
Pacific Elementary	2 - 5	60 Days
Pajaro Valley Unified School District	2 - 5	60 Days
San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District	2 - 5	60 Days
Santa Cruz City School District	2 - 5	60 Days
Scotts Valley Unified School District	2 - 5	60 Days
Soquel Union Elementary School District	2 - 5	60 Days
County Office of Education	6	60 Days

Sources:

- ¹ *Santa Cruz County Homeless 2000*, Census and Needs Assessment Comprehensive Report, United Way sponsor, Survey conducted by Applied Survey Research, July 2000.
- ² *School Survey about Homeless Children* prepared by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and distributed to schools within Santa Cruz County, March 2000.
- ³ *Enrolling Students Living in Homeless Situations*, California Department of Education, Sacramento, CA, 1999.
- ⁴ Interview with Jo Ann Allen, Coordinator of Student Support Services, Santa Cruz County Office of Education, October 18, 2000.
- ⁵ Interview with Vicki Downing, School Community Liaison for the Santa Cruz City School District and Patricia Schroeder, Secondary School Social Worker, April 3, 2001.

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