

# Supporting Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

## Recruitment and Retention Super Strategies INTRODUCTION

### What Does it Mean to Experience Homelessness?

**T**he McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless individuals as:

1. an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. includes -
  - a. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
  - b. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
  - c. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
  - d. migratory children (such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in (a) through (c).<sup>4</sup>

### Did You Know?

As of January 2019, Illinois had an estimated 10,199 individuals experiencing homelessness on any given day, as reported by Continuum of Care to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Of that total, 1,105 were family households, 690 were veterans, 609 were unaccompanied young adults (aged 18-24), and 1,842 were individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

## Recruitment Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

Individuals experiencing homelessness may have few, if any, people in their lives who have encouraged or prepared them to consider college as a possible path. Effective recruitment strategies can help identify and support those experiencing homelessness as they enter Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

- Designate a single point of contact to take lead on all things related to assisting students experiencing homelessness.
- Offer assistance with admission, registration, and financial aid for students who may have increased difficulty navigating the enrollment process.
- Identify and build relationships with community agencies that can help identify and assist homeless youth. This can include:
  - ✓ shelters
  - ✓ soup kitchens
  - ✓ food banks
  - ✓ transitional living programs
  - ✓ street outreach teams
  - ✓ community action agencies
  - ✓ government benefit offices
  - ✓ housing departments
  - ✓ public health departments
  - ✓ faith-based organizations
- Post marketing materials about support services available to students experiencing homelessness in common areas across campus and the community. Include information pertaining to:
  - ✓ financial aid
  - ✓ child care
  - ✓ transportation
  - ✓ meal plan offerings
- Avoid using the word “homeless” in marketing materials.
  - ✓ Use alternative wording such as “in a temporary living arrangement.”
  - ✓ Describe the different living arrangements that qualify as homeless.
- When marketing specific CTE programs, emphasize the potential earnings and timelines for completion.
- Foster partnership and collaboration with local area high schools.
  - ✓ Academic and guidance counselors can promote the benefits of CTE programs.
  - ✓ Students can be informed of support services available on campus prior to enrollment.



## Retention Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

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hen assisting students who are experiencing homelessness in overcoming the complex barriers they face, program's retention policies should address academic support as well as provide comprehensive support systems.

- Establish a student support committee with representatives from key offices on campus. This could include an individual from:
  - ✓ financial aid
  - ✓ academic affairs
  - ✓ student housing
  - ✓ admissions
  - ✓ student support services
  - ✓ student health
  - ✓ dining
  - ✓ athletics
- Establish a food bank on campus.
- Provide training for staff on federal resources available to students experiencing homelessness.
- Allow for flexibility in course scheduling as students may be balancing classes, employment, and parenting responsibilities.
- Offer academic advising services several times per semester.
  - ✓ track student performance
  - ✓ provide academic intervention
- Consider working with campus organizations, community agencies, and benefactors to establish a dedicated fund to assist homeless students with financial needs that exceed campus resources.

### Did You Know?

A national survey conducted by Voices of Youth Count found completion rates, for at least some college credits, were low (28%) among 18- to 25-year-old youth experiencing homelessness who identify as white. They were even lower for those identifying as black (22%), Native American Indian or Alaska Native (15%), or Hispanic (13%). For the same subpopulations who had not experienced homelessness, completion rates of at least some postsecondary education were more than double for most groups: 51%, 44%, 34%, and 35%, respectively. These statistics reflect the extent to which youth experiencing homelessness—especially youth of color—also face financial disadvantages in an economy that requires higher levels of education for jobs with viable incomes and benefits.<sup>4</sup>



## Retention Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase awareness of programs and develop workplace skills by establishing a resource center.
  - ✓ Allow for flexible hours.
  - ✓ Give students a chance to explore their interests and aptitudes using computerized career information software.
- Invite students to seminars or workshops on issues that are important to those experiencing homelessness and provide incentives to attend. Possible topics could include:
  - ✓ budgeting
  - ✓ time management
  - ✓ essential employability and interview skills
- Build relationships with community agencies that can provide support to students in need.
  - ✓ Provide upfront information about assistance related to childcare services, transportation, high school equivalency certification, and financial resources that would allow greater access to CTE programs.
- Create a referral system to mental health services, either on campus or within the community, for students in need of additional support.

### Did You Know?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) youth are overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness in the United States. Although exact numbers are hard to find due to uneven disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity from youth, somewhere between 20 to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ compared to 4 to 10% of the total youth population.<sup>3</sup>



### Sources:

- <sup>1</sup> Dukes, C., Lee, C., & Bowman, D. (2013). *College Access and Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness: A Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers*. The National Center for Homeless Education. Retrieved from [https://www.nccpsafety.org/assets/files/library/College\\_Access\\_and\\_Success\\_for\\_Students\\_Experiencing\\_Homelessness.pdf](https://www.nccpsafety.org/assets/files/library/College_Access_and_Success_for_Students_Experiencing_Homelessness.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> Homeless in Illinois Statistics 2018. Homeless Estimation by State | US Interagency Council on Homelessness. (n.d.). Retrieved February 10, 2020, from <https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/il/>
- <sup>3</sup> Homelessness Policy Research Institute. (2019). *LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness*. Retrieved from <https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/LGBTQ-Youth-Lit-Review-Final.pdf>.
- <sup>4</sup> Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel, S., Curry, S., & Carreon, E. (2019). *Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>5</sup> McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 US Code §§11431-11435 (2001).
- <sup>6</sup> Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2>.