

Supporting School Success for Homeless Children of Veterans and Active Duty Military Members

Introduction

This brief is designed for local staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state McKinney-Vento coordinators and school district McKinney-Vento liaisons, educators, and other providers of services to active members of the military and veterans, and their children. It provides basic information to assist homeless children of veterans or active military to enroll in school and receive education and other services available to them.

- According to VA estimates, about 107,000 veterans¹ experience homelessness on any given night. Of those, approximately 1,300 are individuals with dependent children.
- Over the course of the 2009-2010 school year, school districts across the country identified nearly one million children and youth experiencing homelessness, including some whose parents are active duty members of the military.
- Generally, homelessness entails frequent moves, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, emotional upheaval and stress, and poverty that makes meeting children's most basic needs very difficult.
- These challenges are exacerbated when parents struggle with joblessness, post traumatic stress disorder, and other emotional conditions that sometimes result from military service.

The McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act² is a federal education law that provides support for school access and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Eligibility

The law defines homeless children and youth as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence", including children and youth:

- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason (including running away from or being forced to leave home);

¹ Federal law defines veteran as "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable." 38 U.S.C. §101(2) and 38 C.F.R. §3.1(d).

² Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). 42 U.S.C. §§11431-11435.



Who is homeless?

(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act – Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act)

The term "homeless children and youth"—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
 1. 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 camping 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;
 2. 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...
 3. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 4. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

- Living in shelters and transitional housing programs;
- Staying in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, campgrounds and public spaces; or
- Living in motels.

Children of active duty military or veteran parents are eligible for McKinney-Vento rights and services:

- When the children live in one of the situations outlined in the definition;
- When the parents live in one of the situations outlined in the definition and have placed their children elsewhere due to their homelessness; and
- When parents are deployed, their children are eligible if they end up living in one of the situations outlined above. For example: the family was homeless prior to deployment; parents placed their children with a grandmother prior to deployment, and the grandmother subsequently loses her housing; the parents' chosen caregiver suddenly refuses to care for the children any longer, and the children must leave and move in temporarily with another person.

Rights and Services

The McKinney-Vento Act provides the following rights and services to eligible students:

Right or Service	Support Provided
<i>Local Homeless Education Liaison:</i> Every school district must designate a local homeless education liaison to oversee implementation of the Act in that district.	This provision ensures that there is a central contact in each school district overseeing the immediate enrollment of and provision of services to all homeless children and youth.
<i>Immediate enrollment:</i> Students have the right to enroll in school and begin participating fully immediately, even if unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, including school records, birth certificates, immunization records, proof of residency, proof of guardianship, or other documents; students may enroll immediately even if not accompanied by a parent or guardian.	This provision ensures that students who, due to homelessness, have been separated from their parents or guardians or forced to move to a new locality, do not have to miss school.
<i>School stability:</i> Students have the right to continue attending the same school ("school of origin") if this is in their best interest, even if their temporary living situation is outside that school's attendance area; transportation must be provided to the school of origin by the school district(s).	This provision provides school stability for children whose homelessness forces them to move from one attendance area or school district to another.
<i>Other services:</i> Students are categorically eligible for free school meals and the Title I, Part A program, which provides supplemental educational support and services for economically disadvantaged students.	This provision helps alleviate economic hardship by assisting with nutrition, tutoring, and other services.

Parent Tips

Helpful
Tips

The Local Liaison

If you believe your child may be eligible for McKinney-Vento services, or believe that your eligible child is not receiving the rights or services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act, contact the local liaison for your child's school district. To find out who the local liaison is, contact the school district's main office or call your State Coordinator for Homeless Education.

Dispute Resolution

If you and the school district disagree about something related to the enrollment of your child, you have the right to dispute the district's decision. If you wish to do so, inform the local liaison and he or she will provide you with the information you need to proceed.

Tips to Support Success for Homeless Military Children



1. **Get more information about the McKinney-Vento Act, how it affects homeless military children in your area, and how you can help meet their needs:**
 - From the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE); visit <http://center.serve.org/nche/>, or contact 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org
 - From the State Coordinator for Homeless Education, responsible for statewide implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act; contact information is available at http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.
 - From the local school district homeless liaison (contact information available from your local school district office or by contacting your State Coordinator).
2. **Get more information about VA services available for homeless veterans with children:**
 - From the VA's homeless services website, <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/>, or toll-free hotline, 877-424-3838.
 - From the Regional Office for Veterans Benefits, <http://www.vba.va.gov/vba/>; contact the Homeless Veterans "Outreach Coordinator", who can assist with expedited benefit claims and other financial issues.
 - From the local VA Hospital, http://www.va.gov/homeless/hmls_vet_prog_coord.asp; contact the "Homeless Coordinator", who can assist with accessing medical services and other VA benefits.
 - From the local VA office (contact information available from the VA).
3. **Provide schools and providers of services to military and veteran families with resources to support children and youth, particularly those experiencing homelessness.**
 - Operation Military Kids has many training materials and tools available to those working with military children: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/default.asp>.
4. **Establish single points of contact (POC) in agencies to facilitate service provision to veteran and active military families:**
 - A school district POC for military and veteran parents and students, who can maintain information about local VA offices and programs, as well as facilitate immediate and appropriate school enrollment and services.
 - A local VA office POC for homeless veterans with children, who can maintain information about the McKinney-Vento Act and local child care, preschool and education services and assist with school enrollment.
5. **Establish a volunteer mentor program for students experiencing homelessness, including children of veterans and active duty military members.**
 - Experience has shown that both peer and adult mentors can be a critical support system for homeless students.

Other Federal Government Services for Homeless Veterans with Children

The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

This is a new VA program that will provide supportive services to very low-income veterans and their families who are in or transitioning to permanent housing; more information is available at <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp>.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supporting Housing (HUD-VASH)

This program intends to target up to 20,000 housing vouchers to veterans with children; more information is available at <http://www1.va.gov/HOMELESS/HUD-VASH.asp>.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service

This service funds employment and training programs for veterans with families; a list of participating programs is available at <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/vets/VETS20100917.htm>.

The U.S. Department of Education's Veteran Initiatives

The U.S. Department of Education supports higher education for veterans through Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) and Centers for Excellence in Veteran Student Success (CEVSS); more information is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html> and <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/cevss/index.html>.

This brief was developed collaboratively by:

The National Center for Homeless Education
800-308-2145 (Toll-free Helpline)
<http://www.serve.org/nche>

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
800-827-1000 (VA Benefits Toll-free Number)
<http://www.va.gov/>

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NCHE's National Partners in Homeless Education:

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
<http://www.naehcy.org>

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP)
<http://www.nlchp.org>

Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.



For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE Helpline at 800-308-2145 or e-mail homeless@serve.org.



Local Contact Information: