SERVING HOMELESS YOUTH: A TIPSHEET

Providing Employment Services to Homeless and Runaway Youth

Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2015) generally describes homeless youth as individuals who lack a “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence”. This would include 1) youth who are sharing the housing of persons (doubled-up); 2) youth living in motels, camping grounds, cars, etc., emergency, or transitional shelters; and 3) abandoned youth or youth awaiting foster care placement. Migratory youth qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances that meet these definitions. Youth involved in the foster care or juvenile justice system often lack the skills necessary to live independently, placing them at heightened risk of becoming homeless as they transition to the general workforce.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 focuses on serving populations of youth who are most in need of employment and training programs, including homeless and runaway youth. Through the support offered under WIOA-funded programs, youth can develop the skills and competencies necessary to initiate and maintain self-sufficiency and decrease their personal risk of homelessness. Any youth meeting the eligibility requirements may receive services, and residency status is not required for program enrollment.

Strategies for Serving Homeless and Runaway Youth

Workforce programs face unique challenges in delivering the necessary educational, occupational, and other skills training and services that will prepare homeless and runaway youth for existing and future job opportunities. To meet these challenges, WIOA Youth programs are encouraged to consider the following:

- Collaborating with community-based and faith-based agencies and organizations serving runaway and homeless youth offers an opportunity for youth providers and workforce areas to share and enhance resources. The Family and Youth Service Bureau (FYSB), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides funding nationally to community-based organizations and agencies to deliver services to homeless and runaway youth through: a. Street Outreach Programs (street-based education, survival aid, access to emergency shelter); b. Basic Center Program (immediate needs such as shelter, food, clothing, counseling, and referrals for health care); and c. Transitional Living Program (assists older youth, including pregnant and parenting youth, in developing skills and resources to promote their independence). Youth can be placed in the Transitional Living Program for up to eighteen months and may be offered a variety of services that complement the program elements offered under WIOA funded youth programs; thus dual enrollment can substantially increase resources.

- Developing relationships with organizations serving young people exiting the juvenile justice system can help ensure that these youth experience a smooth transition into the workforce through the provision of work readiness and/or occupational training.

- Obtaining the necessary training and awareness about legal issues pertaining to homeless and runaway youth, becoming knowledgeable about available community resources, and the individual needs of homeless and runaway youth.
Collaborating with the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program liaison through their local educational agency (LEA). The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, (The McKinney-Vento Act), under the administration of the U.S. Department of Education, protects the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness. Grant funding offers legal protection and assistance in order that youth in homeless situations can enroll in, attend, and succeed in school. The liaison’s responsibility is to help youth who are on their own and be certain they can obtain an education.

Models of Collaboration

The below models of collaboration have been highlighted as examples of successful programs with longstanding models providing services to local youth in need.

- **California’s Larkin Street Youth Services’ HIRE UP** Program provides employment and educational resources designed to meet the specific needs of homeless and runaway youth. The Education and Employment Center, located in San Francisco, offers six separate but integrated components designed to meet immediate needs while utilizing strategies where youth have opportunities to obtain industry specific skills training and opportunities for career advancement.

- The **Working Zone** works with other WIOA service providers to help homeless youth ages 15-21 address barriers to housing and employment. Offered through the YWCA, the program provides job and life skills training, and paid internships at several training sites throughout Seattle, WA.

- **Outside In**, Portland, OR is an employment resource center providing homeless youth the opportunities to increase work readiness, obtain and retain employment, and build a positive work history. An education component helps youth obtain a GED and enter college or continue their occupational training. One innovative component is the “Virginia Woof Dog Daycare center”, an intensive job training program staffed by homeless youth that provides a bridge for youth between street life and employment.

Additional Resources

- **Family and Youth Services Bureau**, Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. The Bureau is dedicated to supporting young people, particularly runaway and homeless youth. Funding is awarded that enables communities to offer services to young people and their families and to test new approaches to helping youth. In addition, the Bureau has created a network of support that includes a national hotline and referral system for runaway and homeless youth, offers conferences, training, and on-site consultations; documents effective practices, and distributes information.

- **U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness** is comprised of nineteen Federal agencies seeking to develop and recommend strategies to combat homelessness providing states with recommendations as they develop their plans and highlighting innovative approaches.

- **National Alliance to End Homelessness** is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to mobilize the nonprofit, public and private sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness. The
Alliance represents a united effort to address the root causes of homelessness and offers statistical information, resource material, and legislative information.

- **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth** is a national grassroots membership association that connects educators, parents, advocates, and service providers to ensure school enrollment and attendance for youth whose lives have been disrupted by the lack of safe and adequate housing.

- The mission of **The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS)** is to help keep America’s runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. Their goal is to help youth help themselves while developing a detailed plan of action that is appropriate for the individual. They can be reached 24 hours a day at 1-800-RUNAWAY.

- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** offers help to those who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or know someone that is homeless. HUD, along with many other Federal agencies, funds programs to help persons who are homeless. Local homeless assistance agencies provide a range of services and assistance, including emergency shelter, food, housing counseling, and job training and placement assistance.

- **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Resources Services and Administration** funds local health centers for those who have no insurance. A person is only required to pay what they can afford. The centers provide check-ups, treatment for illnesses, complete care for pregnant women, immunizations for children, prescription drugs, mental health, and substance abuse treatment.