

10 Things YOU Can Do to Help Children in Homeless Situations . . .

Off to school in Texas!

...get in school, stay in school, and succeed in school!

Children across Texas prepare to go to school every day -- to see their friends, learn from their teachers, and join in school activities. For many children and youth, getting ready for school is a time of excitement and anticipation. However, lack of housing creates difficulties for many

youngsters as they prepare for school. Children in homeless situations may need help to enroll in school and to receive the support they need to succeed in school. Changes in federal law, the McKinney-Vento Act, that went into effect in 2002, provide stronger rights and more resources for these vulnerable children than ever before. As homelessness continues to increase, so, too, do the needs of our children. Everyone -- students, teachers, community members, churches, civic groups -- has an important role to play.

Here's how YOU can help:

1 Let your schools know about homelessness. Schools may be unaware of the extent of homelessness among children, as well as the educational rights of children who are homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. Offer information to your school administrators, principals, PTA, and others who work with students. A short fact sheet is available at www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdffiles/Administrators.pdf. Posters, which all schools are required to disseminate, are available at www.serve.org/nche/Products.htm. Visit the Texas Homeless Education Office website at www.utdanacenter.org/theo for information about Texas enrollment requirements.

2 Inform your community about homelessness and the educational rights of children who are homeless, including shelter providers, soup kitchens, public housing authorities,

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low-cost motels, faith-based organizations, community action agencies, libraries, and welfare departments. You can provide these agencies with posters (*see item #1 above*) that help the families they serve know their educational rights and who to contact for help. A fact sheet for providers is also available at

www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/files/ServiceProviders.pdf.

3 Ask local businesses if they will post materials on the educational rights of children who are homeless. Laundromats, convenience stores, libraries, video arcades, and other businesses may be ideal places for families who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing to learn about their educational rights and who to contact for help. (*See item #1 for information on obtaining posters.*)

4 Conduct a school supply drive. Families who are homeless may not be able to afford basic supplies such as pencils, paper, backpacks, folders, crayons, or calculators. Work with local service agencies, as well as your school district's homeless liaison, to make sure that children in need receive the supplies. To find out the name of your school district's homeless liaison, contact the Texas Homeless Education Office at 1-800-446-3142 or visit the website at www.utdanacenter.org/theo.

5 Conduct a drive for school clothing or uniforms. Families who are homeless may not be able to afford new clothing for their children, including shoes and items such as eyeglasses. Again, work with your local service agencies, as well as your school district's homeless liaison, to make sure that you collect the appropriate kinds of clothing.

6 Help volunteer at a before- or after-school program. Check with local service providers as well as your school district's liaison to see what programs already exist, and find out if children who are homeless need help at these programs with materials or tutors. If the school district doesn't offer any after-school programs,

work with local shelters or service providers to provide tutoring or homework help at the shelter or motel.

7 Offer to volunteer at a local school. Many schools are in need of volunteers for such activities as doing background research for lessons and activities; decorating and/or painting classrooms and public areas; providing clerical assistance; assisting school counselors, nurses and other staff with their duties. Let your school know that you have an interest in helping children who are disadvantaged.

8 Contact local pre-school and early childhood programs and talk to them about homelessness. Check with local service providers as well as your school district's liaison to see what pre-school or early childhood programs already exist, and find out if children who are homeless are able to access these programs. Offer to volunteer or contribute money or other resources to help homeless children benefit from early childhood programs.

9 Contact local drop-in centers or other programs for youth who are homeless on their own. Provide information on the educational rights of these young people. If appropriate, offer to mentor homeless youth at your place of business.

10 Contribute financially to your school district's homeless education program. To find out what kind of program your school district offers, call the Texas Homeless Education Office at 1-800-446-3142.

Our thanks to the National Coalition for the Homeless for preparing the draft version of this document. For additional information on the educational needs and rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness, visit:

www.nationalhomeless.org

www.serve.org/nche

www.nlchp.org

www.naehcy.org

