

# Homeless - Not Helpless: Coordinating a Community Response to Homeless Students

## Executive Summary

Children's homelessness is a growing crisis in Jefferson County. From 2008-9 to 2009-10, the number of students experiencing homelessness during the school year increased by 23% to 10,555 students. Homelessness has profound impacts on children's educational performance. With such a significant rise in the number of students experiencing homelessness, three major systems – the Jefferson County Public Schools, the Kentucky Cabinet for Family and Health Services Department of Community-Based Services and the Jefferson County Family Court- convened a cross-training, held on September 17, 2010 on the effects of this exponential rise in the number and percentage of youth who are homeless and touched by these systems. The focus of the training was to learn about this growing problem and together approach solutions to serving these children. Conference attendees participated in small group breakout sessions to collaboratively brainstorm ideas that identify and address the gaps and barriers that exist within and between systems to meeting the best interests of children who are homeless. The ideas from the groups were categorized into six areas: Training and Professional Development, New Resources, A Community-Wide Response, Ways to Improve Communication, Housing Ideas, and New Collaborations.

Based on the work of these groups and the results of a follow-up survey, **four recommended action steps** were identified to help our community and these systems better meet the needs of homeless children.

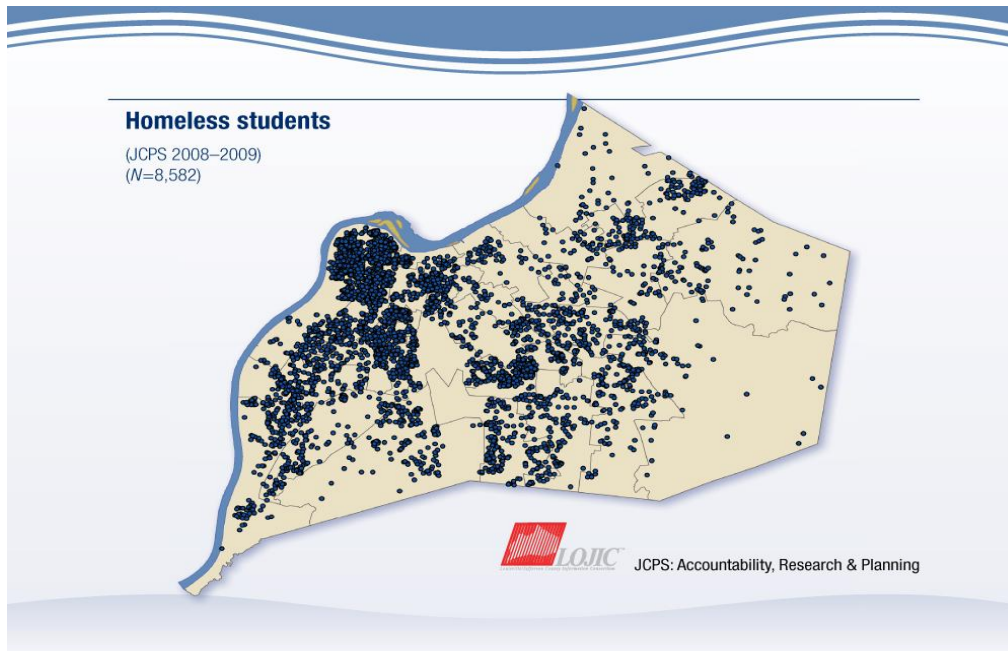
They are:

- ❖ *Create an interagency homeless youth working group, with committees to work on the next steps.*
- ❖ *Create a comprehensive resource database to serve homeless children/families and those at-risk of becoming homeless.*
- ❖ *Start "Homeless Connect" events targeted to families with children.*
- ❖ *Advocate for stronger affordable housing policies on the local, state, and federal levels.*

These are just the FIRST action steps we can take to help meet this goal. The discussions initiated at this conference must continue and should be viewed as just the first small step in coordinating a better response to children's homelessness.

## **Introduction**

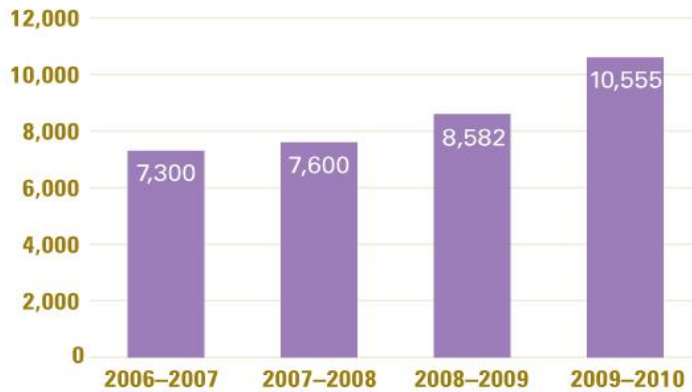
During the 2009-2010 school year, 10,555 students in the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) system were homeless at some point during that school year- almost 11% of all students. And these are the children whose situation became known to a school official. This figure is an increase of nearly 2,000 from the previous school year, or an increase of 23% in just one year. Since the 2006-2007 school year, JCPS has seen a 44.6% increase in students who experience homelessness during the school year. Homeless students came from every Metro Council District and attended nearly every school in JCPS.



This stress situation for children has severe impacts on their ability to achieve. Low reading levels in the early grades are a key predictor for students who eventually drop out. Children who have been homeless during the school year have a reading proficiency that is almost half that of all students: 37% of homeless third grade students were proficient compared to the 67% rate of all third grade students. By the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, only 30% of homeless students were reading proficient compared with the 62% rate for all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Other equally important indicators are affected by a child experiencing homelessness.

With such a significant rise in the number of students experiencing homelessness, three major systems – the Jefferson County Public Schools, the Kentucky Cabinet for Family and Health Services Department of Community-Based Services and the Jefferson County Family Court- convened a cross-training on the effects of this exponential rise in the number and percentage of youth who are homeless and touched by these systems.

### Homeless Students Attending JCPS (pre-K – 12)



Source: Jefferson County Public Schools

Over 200 people from these systems met on September 17, 2010 for a day-long session. Also invited to this session were providers of services targeted for homeless persons and social service providers.

People experiencing homelessness were invited through agencies serving them but were not in attendance except as presenters. The attendees heard from youth who had been homeless and who had succeeded as a way to understand what can help make a youth succeed. The conference was all day and the inability of people engaged in school or work to attend was noted. Follow-up activities should include different times of the day and be of shorter duration to allow for the attendance of people who are homeless.

Attendees included: DCBS social workers and administrators; Louisville Education and Employment Partnership staff; administrators, principals and teachers from JCPS elementary middle, and high schools; JCPS Family Resource and Youth Service Centers coordinators; JCPS Homeless and Migrant Education Programs staff; JCPS Department of Pupil Personnel staff (responsible for enrollment, attendance and student records, among other responsibilities); attorneys; judges; Family Court Case Specialists and support staff; Spalding University School of Social Work faculty and students; Louisville Metro Department of Housing & Family Services staff; Louisville Metro Youth Detention Services staff; Neighborhood Place staff; representatives of non-profit agencies providing services and shelter to the homeless; supportive housing providers; and homeless education staff from 13 other school districts.

Each agency has a point of intervention and decision-making in a child and family's life and is key to fixing this system. The staggering increase and its impacts need to be highlighted for these workers.

The focus of the training for the Family Court system, Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts, Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children and JCPS was to learn about this growing problem and together approach solutions to serving these children. For example, children are taught not to say they

are homeless because the family fears the children will be taken away, so there needs to be training on how to ask questions or notice signs that a child is homeless. Homeless children also miss school because they are sick more often than children with stable housing. With so many families homeless, a better and more coordinated response is necessary.

The tasks of the day were to answer several questions:

❖ **Why is each of the systems participating?** This question was addressed by leaders of each system and of local government:

- Mary Gwen Wheeler, Mayor's Senior Advisor for Education and Youth for Louisville Metro
- Superintendent Sheldon Berman, Jefferson County Public Schools
- Judge Joan Byer, Jefferson County Family Court
- Jackie Stamps, Jefferson County Service Region Administrator, Kentucky Cabinet of Health and Family Services

❖ **What is the scope of the problem?** Information was presented on the numbers of children who experience homelessness and how homelessness affects children and their families. The federal law governing education for the homeless, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence<sup>1</sup>, including:

- Children and youth 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;
- Children and youth who have a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.

The root cause of the exponential increase in the number and percentage of students who experience homelessness is decreasing incomes. Between 2000 and 2007, adjusted for inflation, the median household income in Louisville Metro declined by 2%, while the cost of a modest two bedroom rental unit, adjusted for inflation, increased 8%. Current unemployment numbers of 10% paint a current economic crisis for families.

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<sup>1</sup> McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Title VII, Subtitle B, Section 725. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html#sec725>

Homeless children are confronted with stressful and traumatic events that they often are too young to understand, leading to severe emotional distress. Homeless children experience stress through constant changes, which accumulate with time. These stressful changes result in a higher incidence of mental disorders, which become manifested in homeless children's behavior. Despite significantly more incidences of mental illness, less than one-third of these children receive professional help. Homeless children face multiple, profound risks to their health. In general, homeless children consistently exhibit more health problems even than poor children who have housing. Half of homeless children experience two or more illnesses per month.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ **What resources are available?** In addition to learning about local referrals for housing, food, utility assistance and other social services, the laws governing the right of a homeless child to an education were explained. The Rights and Services of a Homeless Child to an Education is attached as Appendix A.

A complete agenda for the September 17, 2010 conference can be reviewed in Appendix B.

### **Summary of Small Group Recommendations**

Conference attendees divided into nine small groups, each with representatives from each system, to collaboratively brainstorm ideas that identify and address the gaps and barriers to meeting the best interests of children who are homeless. Participants were asked to approach ways to make the link between systems stronger. Each of the nine break-out sessions was asked to evaluate the following scenario:

*Eric is an 11 year old boy who regularly misses school. Eric's family had fallen behind on rent payments and was evicted. When they were first evicted, Eric's family stayed at a local homeless shelter. Eric's father has been physically and verbally abusive to Eric's mother, although not physically abusive to Eric. Eric's mother secured a "No Contact Order" against Eric's father. At that time, Eric and his mom moved to a safe house at an undisclosed location. Eric's father often shows up at school to try to contact Eric. Eric has changed schools twice in the last two years. Her is currently living at the safe house and sharing a room with another family.*

The participants were asked to use the scenario and their own experiences with children who are homeless to answer the following questions:

- In your work role, what is your response to Eric's situation or that of other homeless children? What do you do?
- What does your agency/system do really well in cases like Eric's or for children who are homeless?

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<sup>2</sup>Hart-Shegos, Ellen (1999), *Homelessness and its Effects on Children* (Minneapolis: Family Housing Fund). Downloaded at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED453321.pdf>

- What gets in the way of meeting Eric’s best interests or the best interests of other homeless children?
- What gaps do you see in meeting Eric’s best interests or the best interests of other homeless children?
- Are the gaps you notice in your agency/system being addressed by another agency or system?
- What would be different for children and for families if these gaps and barriers were being addressed?

The responses were categorized into six areas: Training and Professional Development, New Resources, A Community-Wide Response, Ways to Improve Communication, Housing Ideas, and New Collaborations. The full list of suggestions is in Appendix C, but the common themes are as follows:

- ❖ **Training and Professional Development:** This centered on training for increased awareness of the issue and how to communicate well with children and families to be able to get information and give information. Sharing information on resources available within and between the systems was considered important.
- ❖ **New Resources:** This focused on resources to help the child and family. How to get information to the family was identified as a key need, with suggestions ranging from a liaison/representative to work on behalf of an individual child/family to a video to show to all students.
- ❖ **A Community-Wide Response:** This divided into three themes: getting information to the general public on the magnitude and need for action on the issue of children being homeless; providing information to the families on the array of services they might need or access; and changing attitudes so that the public does not condemn the homeless and the family can be more open about their situation.
- ❖ **Ways to Improve Communication:** This engendered the most specific suggestions with several recommendations for a database of services and resources. Many groups also proposed creating a database that allows a family to enter information once and to be used by multiple providers of services, with an emphasis on confidentiality and trust. General themes about getting the systems to talk to each other ran through this area. After the conference, written comments included ensuring that people who are homeless can participate.
- ❖ **Housing Ideas:** The focus was on how to better use the housing we have, with recommendations to: provide incentives to not evict or foreclose on homes; to triage resources that we have; and to have collaborative support of a child/family. Of course, the need for more housing resources was clearly identified.

- ❖ **New Collaborations:** A specific suggestion was to do a Homeless Connect (a day long event that brings together services for homeless people in one place) that focuses on children.

### **Conference Participant Feedback**

A follow-up survey was sent to 159 conference participants for whom email addresses were available to get feedback on the conference and their thoughts on next steps in this work. 45 participants completed the survey. Below are summaries of participant reactions to the conference.

<b>Participant Ratings on How Useful/Informative They Found Each Portion of the Conference</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents Reporting Very or Moderately Useful/Informative</b>
<i>Video on Homelessness</i>	95.6%
<i>The Scope of the Problem- Presentation on homelessness by Tara Grieshop (KY Youth Alliance), Cathy Hinko (MHC), &amp; Mary Marshall (KY Dept. of Ed.)</i>	95.6%
<i>Through the Eyes of a Child- testimony from 2 formerly homeless students.</i>	95.6%
<i>Breakout session to identify and address barriers to meeting the needs of homeless children</i>	93.3%
<i>Keynote Presentation by Barbara Duffield, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children &amp; Youth</i>	97.8%
<i>Resources and Assessment- presented by Kristie Adams (Family Scholar House), LeAnn Magre (Family &amp; Children's Place), Ann Malone (JCPS), &amp; Janice Spicer (JCPS)</i>	91.1%

<b>Participant Opinions About the Conference</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents Strongly or Somewhat Agreeing</b>
<i>I found the conference to be a valuable use of my time.</i>	97.8%
<i>I will use information I learned at the conference in my work.</i>	93.3%
<i>The conference was in an accessible location and the facilities were appropriate for the event.</i>	97.8%
<i>I believe that there will be more collaboration between agencies as a result of this conference.</i>	97.8%
<i>I made new professional connections at the conference.</i>	75.6%
<i>The conference empowered attendees and respected their experience.</i>	86.7%
<i>I have a much better understanding of homelessness and how it affects children.</i>	86.7%
<i>I am more aware of homeless children's rights.</i>	93.3%

Participants were also asked if and how they would be willing to continue work on this issue.

Activities Respondents Would Participate in to Better Serve Homeless Children	Percentage of Respondents Willing to Participate
1) <i>Advocate for system changes suggested by breakout groups at the training</i>	44.4%
2) <i>Work in a task force</i>	53.3%
3) <i>Speak about working with homeless children</i>	33.3%
4) <i>Join and use a listserv</i>	33.3%

Survey respondents also identified the following other activities they thought were important ways people could contribute:

- Create a website of resources.
- Develop a convenient resource guide.
- Host more trainings like the conference.
- Design community awareness activities - such as a 5k run or a community-wide holiday dinner for the homeless.
- Offer safe spaces to help homeless families build coping skills to weather their current situation.
- Encourage legislators/council members to pass legislation providing livable wages and increased affordable housing.
- Volunteer at the shelters to better understand homeless families and what needs to be done to assist them in becoming self-sufficient again.
- Create a public education campaign around homelessness.

Respondents also identified several issues/topics they would like to learn more about

- What resources are available and who are the appropriate people to contact when one becomes aware of a child or family that is homeless.
- The experiences of the homeless in shelters and transitional housing.
- Strategies for working with the families to move them back toward self-sufficiency.
- The experiences of those transitioning from/aging out of foster care.
- How experiencing homelessness as a child affects a person's decisions and choices as an adult.
- Success stories from adults who are formerly homeless children.
- How to help homeless families/children access healthcare.
- Barriers to affordable housing.
- More Information on how/if homeless students can access college education.
- Services offered by state government to homeless children/families statewide.



Survey respondents thought that the training was important and should be offered again and/or expanded upon in regular sessions to be held annually, if not more frequently. They believed the information provided at the training should be shared with other agencies, service providers, and/or faith-based organizations so they can better understand the needs of homeless children. They also felt it important that action be taken on the recommendations that came from the conference. As one participant wrote, “Smaller representative groups [are needed] to work on suggestions [made] in break out groups so there is forward movement/action on the homeless situation and not just great ideas not being acted on by the many agencies.”

### **Recommended Action Steps**

Based, upon strategies identified in small groups and feedback from conference participants, four steps have been identified as priorities to enable our community and the agencies that serve it to better meet the needs of children who are homeless. These are just the FIRST action steps we can take to help meet this goal. The discussions initiated at this conference must continue and should be viewed as just the first small step in coordinating a better response to children’s homelessness.

#### **❖ *Create an Interagency Homeless Youth Working Group***

The most persistent feedback was the necessity to continue this work on inter-agency cooperation and shared information. Participants supported the continuation of the collaborative efforts begun at this conference. It is recommended that an interagency working group be created that will use staff from these agencies, as well as other service providers, to continue this important discussion of how to better serve homeless children. The working group will form committees to carry out specific tasks- such as the other recommended first steps. The committees should include both front-line and administrative staff from each system, as well as representatives from other public and non-profit service providers. This could help lead to creating comprehensive, well-integrated cross-system homeless services and policies and allow agencies to discuss responses to new challenges they face in serving homeless children.

#### **❖ *Create a Comprehensive Resource Database***

Conference participants prioritized the creation a centralized, accessible, regularly-updated database of services and resources available to assist families that are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless. This database should be made available to front-line staff serving children and families in all agencies, and describe services/assistance available in all sectors including: housing assistance; physical and mental health; Medicare/Social Security; legal services; public assistance; child welfare; homeless shelters and transitional housing; etc. It should identify both public and private sector resources available locally and state-wide and should also provide appropriate contact information for agencies offering those services. Participants regularly cited having easy access to a comprehensive resource list as an important first step in better serving homeless children.

❖ ***Start “Homeless Connect” Events Targeted to Families with Children***

Because families with children often access homeless services as a last resort at times of their greatest need, it is recommended that informational fairs be held regularly targeted to families using the Project Homeless Connect/Stand Down model. This community outreach effort includes representatives from multiple community service organizations and public agencies who come together in one location to address the collective needs of families who are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless during a single visit. Resources available at the events could include food, clothing, medical evaluations, employment services, educational services, social services, and a wide variety of other areas of assistance. In addition to educating families about available programs and assistance, the events would also provide educational opportunities for faith-based organizations, non-profit agencies, and others working with homeless families and those at risk of being homeless, about services available to families and children they encounter. They could also be a resource for employees of the three systems participating in the conference. Due to transportation constraints and the fear of stigmatization that homeless families and children face, these events should be held regularly in different locations across Louisville Metro, perhaps at Neighborhood Places.

❖ ***Advocate for Stronger Affordable Housing Policies on the Local, State, and Federal Levels***

Conference participants know that homelessness is primarily a *housing* problem, and making more affordable housing available to families is essential to confronting our great increase in the number of homeless children. Advocacy to support increasing affordable housing resources, including shelters, transitional housing, supportive housing, and “housing first” programs, will be more powerful with the support of the dedicated people working with children in these systems. The proposed interagency working group and/or its committees could develop housing advocacy plans as part of their work.

**Homeless - Not Helpless:  
Coordinating a Community Response to Homeless Students  
Sponsors**



**MAKING  
CONNECTIONS  
NETWORK**  
A COMMUNITY MOVEMENT  
POWERED BY THE PEOPLE



## **Appendix A: Rights and Services of a Homeless Child to an Education**

Below are the rights of a homeless children and required services specified by the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Title VII, Subtitle B- Education of Homeless Children and Youth*, which can be viewed at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>.

### **Students experiencing homelessness have the right to:**

- Go to school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there.
- Get help enrolling and succeeding in school from the local homeless education liaison. Every school district must have a local liaison; the school district's central office can put families and youth in contact with this person. Local liaisons have a special responsibility to help youth who are living on their own (unaccompanied youth).
- Attend one of two schools: the *school of origin* or the *local school*.

The **school of origin**: Students experiencing homelessness can continue attending the school they went to before becoming homeless or the school in which they were last enrolled. This school is called the *school of origin*. Students move outside of the school's residential zone, if this is feasible. Students can continue attending their school of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year during which they find permanent housing.

The **local school**: Children and youth experiencing homelessness can attend any public school that housed students living in the same attendance area as the homeless student are eligible to attend.

- Be enrolled in school immediately, even if lacking paperwork normally required for enrollment, such as proof of residency, proof of guardianship, immunization or other medical records, previous school records, or birth certificate. Unaccompanied youth (youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they do not have a parent or guardian to enroll them. Once immediate enrollment has occurred, the enrolling school must contact the student's previous school for records. The local liaison must help students get needed immunizations or immunization and medical records. The McKinney-Vento Act defines *enroll* and *enrollment* as "attending classes and participating fully in school activities".
- Receive transportation to and from their school of origin. If the student's school of origin and temporary residence are in the same school district, this transportation is to be provided or arranged by the school district of origin. If the student is residing in one district and attending the school of origin in another, this transportation is to be provided or arranged as a joint effort between school districts.

- Receive a written explanation from the school district if the district disputes that it is in the student's best interest to attend the school that the student has requested. In this instance, the local liaison must help to settle such disagreements using the district's dispute resolution policy.
- Have disputes settled quickly. Homeless students can attend the requested school and receive all services for which they are eligible while disagreements are settled.
- Receive preschool services, free school meals, services for English language learners, special education, Title I services, vocational/technical education, gifted and talented services, and before- and after-school care, as needed.
- Go to school with children who are not homeless. Students cannot be separated from the regular school program because they are homeless.
- Get information and referrals from local liaisons, including information about all available educational programs; information for parents on how they can support their children's education; and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other services.
- Have the opportunity to meet the same high academic achievement standards as all students.

If a state or local school district has laws or policies that conflict with the McKinney-Vento Act, the Act overrules those laws or policies because it is a federal law. If a school does not follow the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements, you should:

- Call your local homeless education liaison or State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. Contact information is available at [http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state\\_resources.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php).
- Contact the U.S. Department of Education. Contact information is available at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/contacts.html>.

**Appendix B: Agenda from Homeless-Not Helpless: Coordinating Community Response to Homeless Students Conference- September 17, 2010**

- 8:45-9:05 *Opening Remarks- Why is each system is participating?*
- Mary Gwen Wheeler, Mayor's Senior Advisor for Education and Youth for Louisville Metro
  - Superintendent Sheldon Berman, Jefferson County Public Schools
  - Judge Joan Byer, Jefferson County Family Court
  - Jackie Stamps, Jefferson County Service Region Administrator, Kentucky Cabinet of Health and Family Services
- 9:05-9:15 *Documentary on the experiences of homeless children and families*
- Filmed and Directed by Lavel White
- 9:15-10:00 *What is the scope of the problem?*  
Data on homelessness and issues facing the homeless presented by:
- Tara Grieshop, Kentucky Youth Advocates
  - Cathy Hinko, Metropolitan Housing Coalition
  - Mary Marshall, Kentucky Department of Education
- 10:00-10:20 *Through the Eyes of a Child- the Experiences of Homeless Students*  
Two young women who experienced homelessness at students presented their personal stories to attendees.
- Session introduced and moderated by Dana Jackson, Making Connections Network
- 10:20 -10:30 *The Break-Out Sessions: What is our charge?*
- Ron Jackson, Spaulding University School of Social Work, explained the discussion format and topic for the breakout session.
- 10:30-12:00 *Breakout Session*  
Conference attendees divided into nine small groups, each with representatives from each system, to collaboratively brainstorm ideas that identify and address the gaps and barriers to meeting the best interests of children who are homeless. Participants were asked to approach ways to make the link between systems stronger.

- 12:20-1:00 *Keynote Address*  
Barbara Duffield, Policy Director, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, discussed students' rights under the McKinney-Vento Act, policy strategies for meeting students' needs, and some best practices from states and districts nationwide.
- 1:00-2:15 *Resources and Assessment*  
Presentations and discussion on how to assess if children are homeless and the impacts of homelessness on children and their physical and mental health, stress levels, and educational outcomes. Featuring:
- LeAnn Magre, Family and Children's Place,
  - Kristie Adams, Family Scholar House
  - Anne Malone and Janice Spicer, Jefferson County Public Schools, Homeless Student Education Program
  - moderated by Natalie Harris, Coalition for the Homeless
- 2:15- 2:45  
Summary report on recommendations from the breakout session and discussion of next steps
- Presented by Dana Jackson, Making Connections Network, and Judge Joan Byer of Family Court.

## **Appendix C: Small Group Responses by Category**

### **Training & Professional Development**

- How to ask questions in a non-threatening manner to elicit good information, training/education of “all staff.”
- Difference between Families in Crisis and those struggling with generational patterns.
- Develop cross-agency professional development, i.e. on laws and legal requirements. Hold agencies/schools accountable to laws.
- Train, model and practice opportunities for adults to listen to young people. (Seems like they often don't need help “fixing” something, just a safe adult to hear their concerns.)
- Training for teachers to be more aware of children who are homeless, so they can contact Family Resource Centers or counselors.
- Local webinars to present a case and participants can share resources and solutions.
- Blogs, Wiki, Twitter where people can share knowledge and resources.
- Agency fair to share information and learn about best practices.
- JCPS need to have more staff to support Homeless Education (Coordinator roles).

### **New Resources**

- Each child should have a strong representative to receive an equal education and other opportunities.
- Schools should provide a safe haven for children.
- Increased McKinney-Vento Funding to support homeless children.
- Provide a Shelter Liaison to work with schools and courts on behalf of individual kids and families.
- Create a mandatory video to show all youth, especially middle & high school students, to break the isolation of children who are homeless and provide next steps and comfort for them so they can disclose their situation.
- Providing healthcare without legal guardian should be a requirement for all homeless children.
- JCPS will provide all students with informational resources available to them.
- Other systems should be trained to understand state and federal laws on truancy and Child Protective Services reporting and criteria.
- JCPS should implement Fostering Connections guidelines, a program for children in foster care so they can stay in the same school.
- All staff in local community agencies need to be informed about state and federal laws which lay out the rights of children who are homeless to an education.
- Increase support of the program CARE for kids, for “better caring communities”, which addresses behavior issues that are brought to the classroom to achieve an increase feelings of acceptance in the school environment.
- Community organizing around homeless issues: lobby for funding, using resources like Making Connections Network Nite and grass roots organizations like Women in Transition.

### **A Community-Wide Response**

- Provide more advocacy for homeless children.
- Develop strategies to address “fear of government agencies.”
- Market target areas of homeless children—downtown parks, TARC stops, libraries, Neighborhood Places and target neighborhoods – to give information which allows people to seek help.
- Establish and maintain a culture of support, acceptance and tolerance—maintain a belief system and norms that do not judge, but continuously “work” to find solutions.
- We Care—one way to communicate availability of services to public without humiliation.
- Pursue corporate support of services.
- Assist small agencies/faith communities to overcome legal and regulatory barriers to providing services.
- Engage the faith community
- Create a public education campaign about Homelessness
- Provide better information to families about emergency financial assistance.
- Ensure that there is sufficient, safe, affordable, and adequate housing available.
- Provide services that allow/support children in crises to continue in their development.
- Seek national awareness and involvement and support from corporations and communities
- Focus on homeless prevention (living wages and education) that acknowledges root causes of homelessness and involves all stakeholders.
- Expand and improve transportation services.
- Family team meetings.
- Provide counseling for families and kids in all areas: financial, mental, drug, alcohol.
- Educate the public at large about children and homelessness- it is not just adults.
- Foster supportive communities—communities creating their own solutions.

### **Ways to Improve Communication**

- Create a centralized, accessible, regularly-updated database of services and resources available, both within and between agencies.
- Develop a common client database for involved agencies—JCPS, DCBS, Shelters, Family Court. At minimum take a team approach with family meetings. This would allow us to identify gaps in service and not duplicate efforts.
- Network needs to be strong enough so that work gets done in most efficient manner. Due to lack of communication, steps are repeated which impedes progress.
- Provide clients access to information about all available services, and find creative ways to empower clients to determine how they will use/access the services that best meet their needs.
- Better communication between agencies/providers to connect supportive services for homeless families.
- Improve communication between all agencies that serve the homeless statewide.
- Include front-line providers in “higher level” meetings.
- Understanding of agency missions, understand we need each other.
- Remove inter-agency barriers and hostility.
- Figure out the “technical” problems within and among the systems, and FIX THEM.
- Develop a statewide database for homeless families and youths.
- Link communication systems among and within our agencies.



- Somehow...more transparency while protecting confidentiality, i.e. interagency sharing of information, data accessible to all agencies.
- Take advantage of technology to streamline communication, e.g., who is providing what services for a family – while maintaining client privacy.
- Promote positive communication and awareness (homeless and the resources available).
- Better communication between agencies at the Neighborhood Places— State>Local>Schools>Agencies---and less red tape.
- Streamline documentation requirements and follow-up between systems, including forms that do not have to be repeatedly completed which follow the child.
- Have an “All Agencies Fair” twice a year to make each other aware of all agency services.
- Increase communication between agencies about families
- Increase public awareness: Seminars such as this one, Public advertisements, Schools promoting in newsletter/PTA
- Create a confidential effective, quick and safe way to inform school staff about child’s issues
- Improve communication methods and technologies ( e.g. web, phone trees, thorough manuals)
- More open communication between agencies

### **Housing Ideas**

- Housing subsidies and affordable market rent
- Create more affordable housing providing economic development for city, and that addresses abandoned buildings.
- More family shelters.
- Implement a Housing First model, and then deal with support services.
- Provide services directed only at residential instability: no illness or age requirements, no other barriers.
- More services available in all parts of city (geographical diversity).
- (HUD) Housing grants programs to speed up process of rental assistance checks.
- Identify foreclosures of homes where children reside and notify schools of pending foreclosures.
- Form coalition/alliance with Louisville Metro Housing Authority and other housing programs or developers to provide incentives not to evict clients and/or provide reasonable housing with government incentives
- Utilize Neighborhood Place and hold family support team meetings for families experiencing homelessness.
- Create an interagency group dealing solely with issues surrounding homeless and migrant children.
- Replicate services and methods provided to Hurricane Katrina victims.
- Create a sense of urgency among supporting agencies for this group of children.
- Include front-line staff at collaborative tables.
- Develop a system for cross-agency communication to achieve holistic services. Avoid “Silos of Information” and use confidentiality agreements between agencies.
- Provide time to meet across departments and agencies.
- Expand Truancy Diversion Program in schools, and include more players at the table (especially healthcare representatives)
- Follow up/track formerly homeless children after they have completed programs.

### **New Collaborations**

- Need a Community Liaison between the JCPS Homeless and Migrant Education Programs office, the schools, the courts, etc. regarding homeless children.
- Create a tracking system that can be used by all agencies.
- Host a Homeless Connect event that is focused on children.
- Provide a continuum of Support: when a case is closed, a family moves, leaves a shelter. Involve family mentors, faith-based community.
- Make collaboration easier between agencies. Make it easier to share resources.