



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

*Serving Children and Youth  
Experiencing Homelessness  
Training*

*Activity Guide for Participants*

# SERVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS TRAINING

Activity Guide for Participants

**2021**

**Veronica Gallardo**  
**Assistant Superintendent of Office of System  
and School Improvement**

**Prepared by:**

**Diana Bowman**, Consultant  
[dianabowman@gmail.com](mailto:dianabowman@gmail.com)

**With questions, contact:**

**OSPI Education of Homeless Children and Youth**  
[homelessed@k12.wa.us](mailto:homelessed@k12.wa.us) | 360-725-6505



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	4
Overview of the Training and Learning Outcomes .....	4
Activities .....	5
Awareness of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness.....	5
Activity 1: In Their Shoes .....	5
Activity 2: Educational Barriers.....	5
Activity 3: Complex Trauma .....	6
Activity 4: Bouncing Back.....	6
Activity 5: What Increases or Decreases the Likelihood of Homelessness in Your Community....	7
The Education Definition of Homeless .....	8
Activity 6: Reinforcing the McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless .....	8
Activity 7: Primary Categories of Homelessness .....	8
Activity 8: Why is doubled up considered homeless?.....	9
Activity 9: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Unaccompanied Youth.....	9
Activity 10: Determining Eligibility for Unaccompanied Youth .....	10
The McKinney-Vento Act .....	11
Activity 11: Immediate Enrollment .....	11
Activity 12: School Selection Knowledge Check.....	12
Activity 13: Determining Best Interest.....	12
Activity 14: Avoiding Disputes .....	13
Title I, Part A Support for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness .....	14
Activity 15: Title I, Part A Support .....	14
Good Practices .....	15
Activity 16: Providing Equitable Services for Students Impacted by Homelessness .....	15
Activity 17: Building a Caring Culture.....	16
Activity 18: Creating a Vision.....	17
Legal Notice .....	18

# INTRODUCTION

The *Activity Guide for Participants* is designed to accompany the slide presentation entitled "Serving Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: What Schools and School Districts Need to Know." The presentation provides an overview of the challenges faced by children and youth experiencing homelessness, federal laws that guarantee their rights and services, and good practices.

As you view the slide presentation, you will see certain slides that indicate activities in red. Your facilitator may pause the presentation and select activities for you to do during the training. We encourage you to do the activities not selected on your own.

The activities are designed to be engaging and at times challenging. They will reinforce your learning and perhaps raise questions that you may wish to discuss with your local homeless liaison or State Coordinator. You will also find links to additional resources to further increase your knowledge.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The training will cover the following five topics:

- Awareness of children and youth experiencing homelessness
- The education definition of homeless
- Basic provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act
- Title I, Part A supports for children and youth experiencing homelessness
- Good practices

At the end of the training, you will be able to:

- List educational barriers that children and youth experiencing homelessness face
- Describe three ways in which data show how students experiencing homelessness have disproportionately poorer school outcomes than housed students.
- List the three overarching conditions that qualify a student as homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homeless
- Describe basic provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act related to enrollment, school selection, and academic support
- Request support for children and youth experiencing homelessness from the LEA's Title I, Part A program
- Determine ways that your school or school district can improve services for children and youth experiencing homelessness

# ACTIVITIES

## Awareness of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

### Activity 1: In Their Shoes

Imagine yourself as a child or youth experiencing homelessness.

What do you miss most?	
What are you afraid of?	
What does going to school mean to you?	
What would you like for people to understand about what you're going through?	

### Activity 2: Educational Barriers

Match the circumstances of homelessness with the educational barriers that homelessness creates. You may identify up to three circumstances for each barrier.

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Educational Barrier</i>
a. Leaving friends behind	_____ Educational disruption
b. Experiencing the trauma of homelessness	_____ Poor school performance
c. Changing schools	_____ High rates of absenteeism or dropping out
d. Lacking clothing	_____ Undiagnosed learning or special education needs
e. Hunger	_____ Lost credits
f. Moving frequently to temporary locations	_____ Feeling embarrassment or shame
g. Parental stress	_____ Behavior problems
h. Children's fear of not knowing where they will be staying each night	_____ Inability to trust or make friends
i. Stigma of homelessness	_____ Inability to concentrate
j. No place to do homework or study	
k. Insufficient medical care	

### Activity 3: Complex Trauma

The more times a child experiences homelessness or other types of trauma, the more severe the impacts become. Chronic exposure to traumatic events is called *complex trauma*. Complex trauma can reduce the ability to focus, organize, and process information; interfere with problem solving and planning; and result in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety.

Why do you think the effects of repeated homelessness or trauma are cumulative?

For more information on child trauma, review the following resources:

- [NCHE's Trauma Resource Web Page](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [Understanding Traumatic Stress in Children](#)

### Activity 4: Bouncing Back

How easy or difficult would it be for you to bounce back financially from a catastrophic event?

- Easy
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult
- Nearly impossible

Why is it easier for some people to recover from catastrophes than others?

Notes

## Activity 5: What Increases or Decreases the Likelihood of Homelessness in Your Community?

Consider each of the circumstances below relative to your community. Indicate with +1 (increased likelihood of homelessness), 0 (no impact on homelessness), or -1 (decreased likelihood of homelessness).

(Example: "In my community, there is hardly any affordable housing available, so I will write +1 to indicate that this would likely contribute to increased homelessness.")

- \_\_\_ Poverty (high or low)
- \_\_\_ Unemployment (high or low)
- \_\_\_ Wages (high-wage jobs or low-wage jobs)
- \_\_\_ Jobs (new jobs coming to the community, jobs leaving)
- \_\_\_ Support services (well-funded or poorly funded)
- \_\_\_ Affordable housing (lack of affordable housing or sufficient)
- \_\_\_ A natural or human-caused disaster
- \_\_\_ Pandemic or epidemic
- \_\_\_ Childcare (lack of childcare or sufficient)
- \_\_\_ Graduation rate (high or low)
- \_\_\_ Families with post-secondary education (high or low)
- \_\_\_ Civic engagement (high or low)
- \_\_\_ Non-profits and churches active in social issues (sufficient or few)
- \_\_\_ Awareness of poverty and homelessness (high or low)

What is your community's score? \_\_\_ out of 14

Explain what your community's score indicates about homelessness in your community.

# The Education Definition of Homeless

## Activity 6: Reinforcing the McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless

Insert the correct word in the parentheses in the following sentence: adequate, fixed, regular

Can the student go to the SAME PLACE (\_\_\_\_\_) EVERY NIGHT (\_\_\_\_\_) to sleep in a SAFE and SUFFICIENT SPACE (\_\_\_\_\_)?

## Activity 7: Primary Categories of Homelessness

Can you think of two more examples for each of the primary categories of homelessness in the McKinney-Vento definition?

Fixed	Not fixed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apartment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tent</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Regular	Not regular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living in a place with a lease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying with a relative on a temporary basis (you could be asked to leave at any time)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Adequate	Not adequate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House in good repair with heat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-working utilities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

For more information on the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless, read the NCHIE brief [Determining Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights and Services](#).

Notes



## Activity 8: Why is doubled up considered homeless?

**Consider the following scenario:** Tony, his two brothers, and his parents have been living with his uncle since their house was damaged in a flood last month. They were glad that relatives were willing to take them in, but their living situation is tense because the house is not large enough for both families to live comfortably. Tony and his brothers are sleeping in sleeping bags on the living room floor, and they don't have anywhere to do their homework.

Is Tony's living situation <input type="checkbox"/> fixed, <input type="checkbox"/> regular, and <input type="checkbox"/> adequate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Can Tony and his family go to the SAME PLACE (fixed) EVERY NIGHT (regular) to sleep in a SAFE and SUFFICIENT SPACE (adequate)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Why is living in a doubled-up situation like Tony hard on children?	

## Activity 9: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Unaccompanied Youth

"Physical custody" means living with a parent or guardian, so a youth might have a *legal* parent or guardian but would meet the definition of an unaccompanied youth if they were not living with their legal parent or guardian.

**Not all unaccompanied youth are homeless.** To be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth and eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act, a youth would have to be living apart from their parents or guardians *and* live in a situation that is not fixed, regular and adequate.

Knowledge check:

- A. A youth who is couch surfing because he said his parents hassled him for being gay
  - Unaccompanied
  - Unaccompanied and homeless
  
- B. A youth whose parents arranged with some friends to let their son stay at their house to finish the school year after the family moved to a new city
  - Unaccompanied
  - Unaccompanied and homeless

Some good questions to consider:

1. Is the youth living in a situation that is not fixed, regular, and adequate? Then homeless.
2. Is the youth living in a situation that is stable and part of a plan that all parties agree to? Then not homeless.

Note that it doesn't matter why the youth left home; you should focus on the living situation to determine whether an unaccompanied youth is homeless.

Activity 5 Answers: *unaccompanied and homeless :g :B :unaccompanied*

## Activity 10: Determining Eligibility for Unaccompanied Youth

Consider the following scenario: Laura is sixteen years old. She left home and is staying at her girlfriend's house in a different school district from where she was attending school. She said that she can't stand her new stepdad because he is always yelling at her. She wants to enroll in the same school as her girlfriend. The front office staff is trying to determine if Laura is an unaccompanied homeless youth under the McKinney-Vento definition. What do you think?

1. Is Laura living in a situation that is not fixed, regular, and adequate?  
 Yes  
 No
2. Is Laura not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian?  
 Yes  
 No

If the answer to both questions is "yes," then Laura is an unaccompanied homeless youth and is eligible for enrollment and services under the McKinney-Vento Act. Enrolling Laura would enable the school social worker and school counselor to follow up to make sure that Laura is in a safe place and that she receives the services that she needs.

Notes

# The McKinney-Vento Act

## Activity 11: Immediate Enrollment

Put a check by the activities that would foster immediate enrollment; put an x by activities that would create a delay in enrollment and be noncompliant with the McKinney-Vento Act.

- 1. Contacting the local liaison to determine eligibility under the definition of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- 2. Requesting that the parent bring the child back the next day once the school determines which class would be most appropriate.
- 3. Contacting the former school for records.
- 4. Contacting the local liaison for help with obtaining immunization records or immunizations.
- 5. Requesting that the parent wait until the school district can arrange transportation.
- 6. Talking to the parent or child about what the child was studying in his or her former school.
- 7. Providing some quick assessments to determine approximate grade level.
- 8. Asking the parent if the child has an IEP and contacting the special education coordinator immediately.
- 9. Requiring the parent to provide proof of where the family is staying temporarily before enrolling the child.\*

Activity Answers:    x ✓ 9 ✓ 8 ✓ 7 ✓ 6 ✓ 5 x 4 ✓ 3 ✓ 2 x 1 ✓

\*Number 9 poses a challenge to many schools and school districts. Most parents will disclose their living circumstances if they feel they are in a safe and welcoming environment. Many parents will be unable to provide any proof of where they are staying. Some parents will refuse to provide any information regarding their living situation. Here are some strategies to make the enrollment process go smoothly:

1. Provide a safe and welcoming environment where parents will feel comfortable sharing information.
2. Explain the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and discuss with the parent whether the family meets the definition. Most LEAs use a housing questionnaire upon enrollment that includes a check box for parents to denote living circumstances that would indicate homelessness.
3. Request guidance from the local liaison.
4. If the parent's living situation is not clear-cut, enroll the child and seek more information. If necessary, the LEA can initiate a dispute process that will facilitate a more in-depth review of the family's circumstances. Contact your local liaison and follow all procedures for a formal McKinney-Vento dispute.

## Activity 12: School Selection Knowledge Check

True or False

- 1. Parents can select any school near where the family is temporarily staying for their child to attend.
- 2. Children and youth experiencing homelessness should remain in their school of origin when they move.
- 3. Schools and school districts should presume that remaining in the school of origin is in the child's or youth's best interest unless contrary to the request of the parent or youth.
- 4. School of origin applies to public preschools as well as K–12 schools.
- 5. Where a child or youth experiencing homelessness attends school is based on what is in the best interest of the child and what is most cost effective.

Activity Answers: 1. F, 2. F, 3. T, 4. T, 5. F

## Activity 13: Determining Best Interest

**Consider the following Scenario:** Tara is 16 years old and is in 11th grade. At her school, Swanson High School, she had been making poor grades and was skipping school a lot, but early in the school year, she got involved in the school's drama club. Soon after, her grades and attendance improved a lot.

In March, her family was evicted, and they moved in with Tara's grandmother who lives 25 miles from Swanson High School in the neighboring school district. Before the family moved in with her grandmother, Tara was practicing for the lead role in the school's annual musical production. If Tara remained in her school of origin, she would have to get up at five o'clock each day to catch one school bus and transfer to another bus to get to school on time. She is not an early riser. There would be some challenges in arranging for her to get home after play practice.

What school would be in Tara's best interest to attend? Why?

To help think through this scenario, read the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)'s [Guiding the Discussion on School Selection](#), which also includes a checklist of questions to help make the best decision. Hint: It is always good to get more information.

What additional information would be helpful to make the best decision for where Tara should attend school?

## Activity 14: Avoiding Disputes

In some instances, when parents want to initiate a dispute, there may be ways to diffuse their anger and avoid a formal dispute. In the following chart, read the reasons why a parent might be angry and develop some strategies for diffusing their anger.

Why the Parent is Angry	Strategies to Diffuse
The parent feels disrespected and unheard.	
Homelessness makes the parent feel embarrassed and defensive because he can't provide for his child.	
The parent wants the best for her child and does not believe that another school will meet her child's needs.	
The parent does not understand the McKinney-Vento Act and thinks his child should receive services for which he is not eligible.	
The parent feels like the school or the school district is choosing what is most convenient for them rather than what is in the best interest of her child.	
The parent has experienced trauma and is acting out a trauma response.	
The parent has been inconvenienced in pursuing the dispute; for example, she had to take off work and pay for a taxi to come to school to meet with the principal.	
The parent has been treated like "a client" in her efforts to get services, and the school seems like just one more bureaucracy to fight.	

# Title I, Part A Support for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

## Activity 15: Title I, Part A Support

List the name and contact information for the Title I, Part A Coordinator in your school district.

--

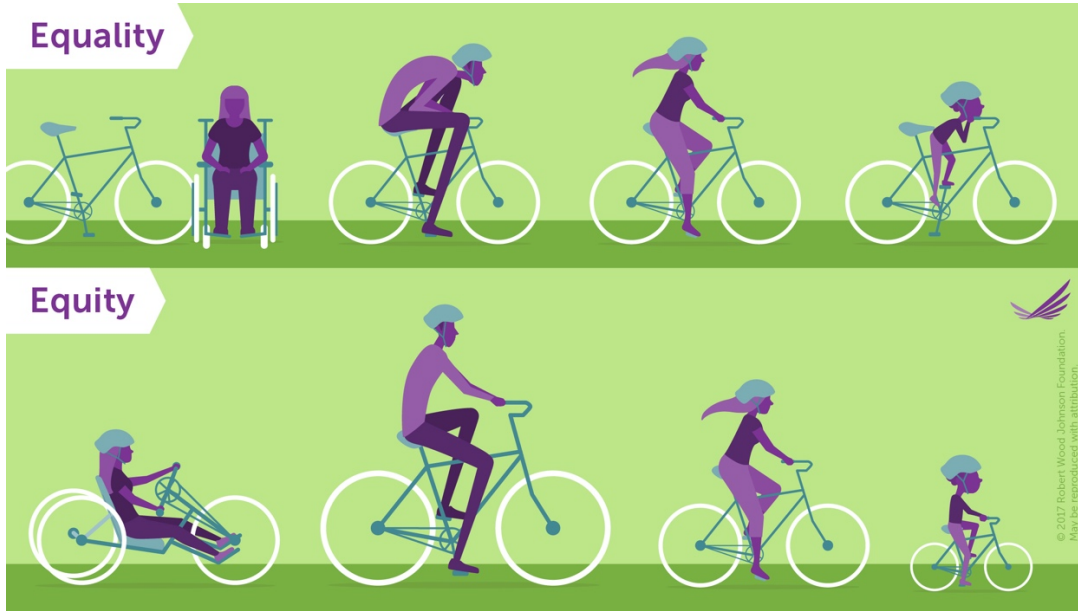
List three ways that Title I, Part A set-aside funds could be used to support children and youth experiencing homelessness in your school or school district.

1.
2.
3.

Notes

# Good Practices

## Activity 16: Providing Equitable Services for Students Impacted by Homelessness



1. Describe the difference between equality and equity depicted in this image.\*

--

2. Name three concrete ways schools should ensure that students experiencing homelessness, particularly those in racial and ethnic groups disproportionately impacted by homelessness, can receive equitable services.

1.
2.
3.

\*This image is from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](https://www.rwjf.org/), which encourages visitors to the website to download and share the image "to help create a shared vision of better health for all."

## Activity 17: Building a Caring Culture

There is a saying among teachers that “students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Students who experienced homelessness in school and who have been interviewed later in their lives will almost always say that they made it through school because of one or two caring teachers or other adults.

List five things a teacher or other school personnel could do to show a student, particularly an at-risk student, that they care. List them in the priority of importance, from most important to least important.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Notes



## Activity 18: Creating a Vision

Imagine that your school has been commended for meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. These students have grades, test scores, and attendance rates (and graduation rates, if a high school) at or above those of other students.

Educators from around the state have been coming to your school to observe. What might they see when walking through the school?

What would they see ...	Write a few things they might see.
In the front office	
In the classroom	
In the principal's office	
In the school counselor's or school social worker's office	
In the cafeteria	
After school	

Review your list and write three changes you would like to see in your school or school district to make this vision a reality:

Change 1:
Change 2:
Change 3:

# LEGAL NOTICE



Except where otherwise noted, this work by the [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution License](#).

Alternate material licenses with different levels of user permission are clearly indicated next to the specific content in the materials.

This resource may contain links to websites operated by third parties. These links are provided for your convenience only and do not constitute or imply any endorsement or monitoring by OSPI.

If this work is adapted, note the substantive changes and re-title, removing any Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction logos. Provide the following attribution:

*"This resource was adapted from original materials provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Original materials may be accessed at [Resources for Homeless Children and Youth | OSPI \(www.k12.wa.us\)](#).*

*Please make sure that permission has been received to use all elements of this publication (images, charts, text, etc.) that are not created by OSPI staff, grantees, or contractors. This permission should be displayed as an attribution statement in the manner specified by the copyright holder. It should be made clear that the element is one of the "except where otherwise noted" exceptions to the OSPI open license.*

*For additional information, please visit the [OSPI Interactive Copyright and Licensing Guide](#).*

*OSPI provides equal access to all programs and services without discrimination based on sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Questions and complaints of alleged discrimination should be directed to the Equity and Civil Rights Director at 360-725-6162 or P.O. Box 47200 Olympia, WA 98504-7200.*

*Download this material in PDF at [Resources for Homeless Children and Youth | OSPI \(www.k12.wa.us\)](#) (<http://www.k12.wa.us/>). This material is available in alternative format upon request. Contact the Resource Center at 888-595-3276, TTY 360-664-3631. Please refer to this document number for quicker service: 22-0001.*



**ESTD  
1889**

---

*All students prepared for post-secondary pathways,  
careers, and civic engagement.*



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

**Chris Reykdal** | State Superintendent  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Old Capitol Building | P.O. Box 47200  
Olympia, WA 98504-7200