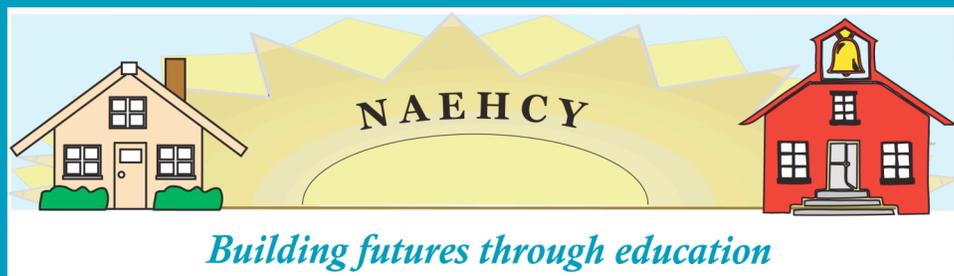# Housing + High School = Success

Schools and Communities Uniting to House Unaccompanied Youth

Patricia Julianelle
NAEHCY Legal Counsel
*November, 2009*
*www.naehcy.org*

NAEHCY

*Building futures through education*

"Without [this program] I don't know where I would be, I may have dropped out or lost my way."

*Graduate of Roadmap to Graduation*
*Adrian Public Schools/Catholic Charities host home program*

"This all started with Kathi [the McKinney-Vento liaison] and I popping up out of our chairs at every meeting, saying 'What about the youth?' From there, the Homeless Youth Initiative started, and now through our partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools we have three new housing programs that meet needs beyond shelter."

*Judith Dittman*
*Executive Director, The Alternative House*
*RHYA-funded program*

*The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth* (NAEHCY) is proud to highlight the success of McKinney-Vento liaisons who have inspired their schools and communities to provide housing to unaccompanied youth. Their innovative housing programs make creative use of minimal funding to give young people the safety and support they need to complete high school and continue into higher education. NAEHCY offers this publication for McKinney-Vento liaisons, youth service providers, Continuums of Care, youth task forces and advocates, community foundations, and others who want to help end youth homelessness in their communities by providing safe housing and school support.

We interviewed McKinney-Vento liaisons from seven communities about their innovative temporary housing programs for unaccompanied youth: Adrian Public Schools, MI; Berks County, PA; Bethel School District, WA; Fairfax County, VA; Kansas City, KS; Maplewood Richmond Heights School District, MO; and Traverse City Area Public Schools, MI. Based on the interviews, this publication suggests ten steps to consider for four different temporary housing models for unaccompanied youth: host homes; group homes; independent living; and emergency shelters. The steps are designed to give readers tools to create these programs in their communities. In addition, the interviewed liaisons have shared their forms and documents, so others seeking to replicate these programs can build on the excellent work that has been done. Look for sample youth applications, host home applications, powers of attorney, parental consent forms, confidentiality notices, job descriptions, posters, flyers, Power Point presentations, data collection tools, and other documents on NAEHCY's website, at http://www.naehcy.org/housingyouth.html.

## Acknowledgment

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## WHO ARE UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH?

Unaccompanied youth are young people experiencing homelessness and not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian. Youth may find themselves homeless and unaccompanied for several reasons.

- Some youth become homeless with their families, but end up on their own due to lack of space in temporary accommodations or shelter policies that prohibit teenage boys.
- 60% of homeless mothers live apart from at least one of their minor children; 35% live apart from all their children.[1]
- Many unaccompanied youth have fled abuse in the home: Studies have found that 20-40% of unaccompanied youth were sexually abused in their homes, while 40-60% were physically abused.[2]
- Over two-thirds of callers to the National Runaway Switchboard report that at least one of their parents abuses drugs or alcohol.[3]
- Many youth have been thrown out of their homes due to their sexual orientation: 20-40% of unaccompanied youth identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (compared to 3-5% of adults).[4]
- Many youth have been thrown out of their homes due to pregnancy.
  - ✓ 48% of street youth have been pregnant or impregnated someone.
  - ✓ 10% of currently homeless female teenagers are pregnant.[5]
- Over half of youth living in shelters report that their parents either told them to leave, or knew they were leaving and did not care.

Each year, between 1.5 and 1.6 million youth run away from home or are forced out of their homes by their parents.[6] Unaccompanied youth live in a variety of temporary situations, including shelters, sharing the homes of other people, cars, campgrounds, public parks, abandoned buildings, motels, and bus or train stations.[7] In each of the communities featured here, young people inspired the liaisons and sowed the seeds for the housing programs.

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[1] Toro, P., Dworsky, A., & Fowler, P. (2007). "Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Findings and Intervention Approaches." *Toward Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Washington DC: US Departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development.
[2] Hammer, H., Finkelhor, D., & Sedlak, A. (2002). "Runaway / Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics." *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *See also* Greene, J. (1995). "Youth with Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors." *Research Triangle Institute.* Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.
[3] National Runaway Switchboard, http://www.1800runaway.org/.
[4] The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness*. Washington DC: Authors.
[5] Toro et al. (2007).
[6] The 1,364 school districts nationally that receive McKinney-Vento subgrants are required to report data on the number of unaccompanied youth enrolled in their schools. During the 2007-2008 school year, those school districts counted 43,172 enrolled unaccompanied youth.[6] While these data are important, they grossly underestimate the number of unaccompanied youth, since they only report youth enrolled in 9% of the nation's over 15,000 school districts.
[7] The legal rights of unaccompanied youth are recognized by several laws, including the McKinney-Vento Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Higher Education Act, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

- A McKinney-Vento liaison discovered a young man maintaining a 3.84 grade point average while living in a cardboard refrigerator box, using the showers at school, and staying in the school library every afternoon; the liaison's housing program gave him a place to stay, and now he is in college.
- An honors student and extra-curricular star was living in her car and on the verge of dropping out of high school; the McKinney-Vento liaison convinced an out-of-county shelter to house her and provided transportation to keep her in school, and now she is in college.
- School counselors noticed female students forced to move in with much older "boyfriends" after being kicked out of their homes; those young women are now being connected with supervised host homes.

## FOUR TEMPORARY HOUSING MODELS FOR UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

Young people's courage, creativity, and commitment sowed the seeds for the programs outlined in this publication. Four different types of living situations grew from those seeds in seven communities:

- *Host Homes*: Long-term housing with a family with the support of a counselor/coach and additional services, sometimes including a modest stipend to offset some of the costs incurred for food and utilities. Generally, the youth has a preexisting relationship with the family.

- *Group Homes*: Long-term housing with a group of unaccompanied youth who live together in a home dedicated to that purpose, usually with an adult providing supervision and counseling/coaching.

- *Independent Living*: Long-term housing in scattered-site apartments where youth live independently, with the rent subsidized or paid by the sponsoring program, and usually with counseling/coaching.

- *Emergency Shelter*: Short-term, emergency housing in a shelter designed for youth under age 18 or in a separate, youth-oriented wing of an adult shelter.

The Program Profiles below describe in more detail how each of these housing and shelter types functions in the communities we researched. Each program type has different strengths, and communities are advised to offer a mixture of housing options so they can meet the needs of a diverse group of young people. Despite their differences, when a community seeks to create one or more of these programs, the key steps to consider are largely the same.

## TEN STEPS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING A YOUTH HOUSING PROGRAM

Based on our interviews, we suggest ten steps to consider when creating a youth housing program in your community:

I. Get started.
II. Choose a model (or preferably, a combination of models) based on needs.
III. Determine who will administer the program.
IV. Secure funding.
V. Establish eligibility criteria.
VI. Establish a referral process.
VII. Consider transportation needs.
VIII. Address issues of parental rights, liability, and risk management.
IX. Collaborate to offer supplemental services.
X. Track outcomes to report qualitative and quantitative success.

The steps are not exhaustive and are designed to give readers basic tools and strategies. Specific legal requirements will vary by state, and it is advisable to seek local legal advice. Most law firms offer pro bono programs that can provide free assistance to help you navigate the legal requirements for your program.

| I. Get Started. | |
|---|---|
| Create awareness about youth homelessness in your community. | 1. Gather your statistics, stories, and "sound bytes" and present them in accessible and persuasive formats.<br>2. Empower youth to tell their stories.<br>3. Expect resistance to the reality that young people are homeless on their own.<br>4. Acknowledge the limits of the child welfare system and its failure to meet unaccompanied youth's needs. |
| Prepare your "selling points" to build support. | **Your program can:**<br><br>1. Reduce the child protection / child welfare caseload.<br>2. Be an effective prevention program, helping keep youth free of juvenile justice, child welfare, and other systems involvement.<br>3. Help existing youth-serving agencies meet unmet needs, leverage funds, and serve the most youth possible in the most appropriate ways possible, thereby improving their outcomes and making them more competitive for public and private funding.<br>4. Improve academic outcomes for schools by supporting regular attendance, completion of homework, higher test scores, higher graduation rates, and less school mobility.<br>5. Reduce transportation costs for schools and yield the increased federal and state funding that comes with greater school stability.<br>6. Help the Continuum of Care leverage funds and report results in preventing and ending youth homelessness, thereby improving their outcomes and making them more competitive for funding.<br>7. Increase overall community safety by keeping youth safe and eliminating youth's need to violate city ordinances (curfews, loitering, camping, panhandling) or engage in other illegal activities to obtain shelter or food. |

| Approach key players. | • Continuum of Care<br>• School districts (McKinney-Vento program, administrators, counselors, nurses, teachers, others)<br>• Youth shelters, drop-in centers, street outreach programs<br>• Independent and transitional living programs for youth<br>• Child protective services (CPS) and child welfare / foster care services<br>• Private child welfare agencies (Catholic Charities, etc.)<br>• City / county government<br>• Public benefits offices (food stamps, TANF, SSI, etc.)<br>• Food bank and other food programs<br>• Goodwill<br>• Businesses (for funding, job placements for youth, and pro bono support)<br>• Legal services<br>• Faith community<br>• Homeless coalitions and advocacy groups<br>• Law enforcement<br>• Transportation providers<br>• Community foundations and civic groups |
|---|---|
| Assemble the team. | 1. Establish a youth-focused task force or subcommittee through the Continuum of Care, school district, homeless coalition, or existing youth-serving agencies.<br>2. Meet monthly. |
| Get a snapshot of community resources and unmet needs. | 1. Survey providers: what do they have, what do they lack.<br>2. Compile and analyze the information to create a detailed picture of community strengths and gaps. |

## II. Choose a Model (Or Preferably, a Combination of Models) Based on Needs.

| Host Homes | 1. Relatively low-cost.<br>2. Positive, family-like setting.<br>3. Allows youth to maintain positive relationships with adults.<br>4. Most youth can identify adults willing to provide housing with support.<br>5. Support services should include regular visits from a counselor/coach to address challenges as they arise, academic support, independent living skills and transition planning, connection to needed community resources and services, and possibly a modest stipend to help the family cover costs. |
|---|---|
| Group Homes | 1. Appropriate for youth who need more support than a host home can provide.<br>2. Appropriate for youth who prefer to live with other young people rather than with a family.<br>3. Appropriate for youth who cannot identify adults to provide housing.<br>4. Support services should include academic support, counseling, independent living skills and transition planning, and connection to needed community resources and services. |
| Independent Living | 1. Appropriate for youth who are capable of living independently, but need financial support in the form of a rental subsidy to obtain and/or maintain housing.<br>2. Support services should include academic support, independent living skills, connection to needed community resources and services, and possibly additional stipends for utilities and food.<br>3. Rental subsidies can be paid directly to landlords. |

| Emergency shelter | 1. Short-term measure to keep youth safe while a host home, group home, independent living apartment, or other long-term housing option is put in place.<br>2. Youth under 18 and even older youth should be housed separately from adults.<br>3. Often, a new building is not necessary; it may be less complicated and more cost-effective to add a wing to an existing shelter, rent beds in an existing group home, or pay for motel rooms on an emergency basis. |
|---|---|

## III. Determine Who Will Administer the Program.

| Which team member is best situated to administer the program? | 1. Consider each organization's mission, licensing, liability insurance, and ability to administer funds.<br>2. Use team members' strengths, technical expertise, and experience.<br>3. An agency that already serves youth (provides public or private foster care, shelter, group homes, transitional living, independent living, counseling, support groups, family mediation, etc.) is often the most appropriate and convenient administrator. |
|---|---|

## IV. Secure Funding.

| Starting a program often costs much less than you'd expect. | In addition to support from the McKinney-Vento program, two of the host home programs interviewed operate on only $25,000 a year, and an additional host home project requires only $15 per family. |
|---|---|
| Identify and pursue public sources. | • Local Continuum of Care<br>• Federal stimulus money available through the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), especially Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing (HPRP) grants<br>• Regular HUD funding<br>• Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funding (for shelters, transitional living, and street outreach)<br>• State housing funds<br>• State youth-serving funds, including child welfare and human services<br>• School districts (McKinney-Vento and Title I funds can support academic support services, counselors, and academic mentors) |
| Identify and pursue private sources. | • Community foundations and trusts<br>• Other foundations<br>• Civic organizations (United Way, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.)<br>• Faith community<br>• Chamber of Commerce and businesses |

## V. Establish Eligibility Criteria.

| Age | • Minors (youth under 18 or the legal age of majority in your state): see liability and parental rights section below.<br>• 18 and over.<br>• A combination of minors and youth over 18. |
|---|---|
| Students | • The programs researched focus on high school students, often on juniors and seniors to ensure they are able to remain stable in one school and graduate.<br>• The programs researched require school attendance, but also provide the support |

|  | necessary for attendance. |
|---|---|
| Interviews and other criteria | • The programs researched use applications, needs assessments, and meetings with counselors/coaches to determine a youth's eligibility and to assign a youth to the appropriate housing program. <br> • Accepting a youth into program inappropriate for his/her needs does a disservice to the youth and can damage the program. |

## VI. Establish a Referral Process.

| Who initially connects youth with the program? | 1. The school district McKinney-Vento program <br> 2. Youth-serving agencies <br> 3. Law enforcement <br> 4. Youth directly |
|---|---|
| How does the referral proceed? | The programs researched employed a counselor/coach to: <br> 1. Interview the youth; <br> 2. Assess needs and goals; <br> 3. Determine the appropriate program; <br> 4. For host homes, help the youth identify a friend, mentor, or family member to provide housing, or match the youth with an appropriate volunteer family; and <br> 5. Connect the youth with additional services. |

## VII. Consider Transportation Needs.

| School-related transportation | 1. The school district McKinney-Vento program should provide or arrange transportation to keep the youth in the same school, unless that is not what the youth wishes. <br> 2. The programs researched strive to place youth in host homes and apartments close to their schools. |
|---|---|
| Other transportation | 1. Locate services on public transportation lines. <br> 2. Assist youth with transportation plans and arrangements. |

## VIII. Address Issues of Parental Rights, Liability, and Risk Management.

| Family mediation | Offer family mediation services to families when reunification may be appropriate. |
|---|---|
| Obtain parental consent for minors. | 1. Do not hide a minor from parents unless you have a reasonable fear for the youth's safety and contact CPS and/or police. <br> 2. Consult your state law, licensing, and/or an attorney to determine your obligations and time frame for obtaining consent. Generally, programs can house minors while they pursue consent, within time frames. <br> 3. Programs report little trouble getting parental consent. <br> 4. Obtain consent through a signed waiver, power of attorney, or other consent form. <br> 5. If needed, enlist the help of CPS to contact parents and pursue consent. <br> 6. When parents cannot be found, are not responsive, or refuse to consent, enlist the help of CPS and/or the family court to pursue parental consent or temporary guardianship. |

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| **Take reasonable precautions.** | 1. Run criminal background checks on potential host families and service providers.<br>2. Check to see if youth in the program have been reported missing via the missing children database (www.missingkids.com).<br>3. Enlist the help of a licensed child-placement or youth-services agency to visit host homes, "place" the youth in the program, and/or provide support and monitoring services.<br>4. Have a counselor/coach check in regularly with youth, host homes, and landlords to prevent and mitigate problems.<br>5. Make sure youth are enrolled in Medicaid, children's health insurance, or another health insurance program.<br>6. Obtain medical and education powers of attorneys from parents, so host homes or other adults can obtain medical care and make education decisions for minors. |
| **Consider policies to avoid the problem.** | 1. Limit eligibility for certain programs to youth who are not minors. They have the legal capacity to consent on their own.<br>2. Depending on your state law, license host homes as "24-hour mentors" rather than "housing".<br>3. Collaborate with child-placement or youth-serving agencies to administer the program, since they are likely to have necessary policies, practices, and liability insurance in place. |
| **Work with your task force to change state laws to facilitate housing for minors.** | 1. Increase the time frame programs have to contact parents to at least 72 hours, to give youth and counselors time to talk through the situation, consider alternatives, and ensure the youth's safety.<br>2. Laws could say that good faith, reasonable efforts to locate parents shield the program from liability, even if the parents cannot be found or do not respond.<br>3. Laws could establish a pseudo-child welfare process to allow programs to house minors whose parents refuse to consent and are abusive or neglectful, without committing the youth to the child welfare system.<br>4. Many states have laws that permit unaccompanied minors to consent for their own medical and dental care.<br>5. Contact NAEHCY for more information about positive state laws and advocacy strategies. |

## IX. Collaborate to Offer Supplemental Services.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Employment** | 1. Collaborate with Goodwill Industries and local businesses to place youth in jobs.<br>2. Work with the school district so youth can receive credit for employment. |
| **Food** | 1. Enroll youth in free school meal programs.<br>2. Collaborate with the food bank, food stamp office, and community groups to ensure youth receive food, can purchase food on their own, and/or can contribute financially for the food they consume in host homes. |
| **Academic support** | 1. Use Title I, Part A funds, particularly the homeless set-aside, to support mentors, counselors, tutors, and other academic support for high school students. Traverse City Area Public Schools uses their Title IA set-aside to fund academic mentors for all the youth in their housing programs. The mentors follow youth's progress on a weekly or daily basis and provide academic and other support the youth needs to attend and succeed in school, thereby reducing the negative impact of homelessness on school success.<br>2. Use McKinney-Vento funds for academic needs and to eliminate barriers to full participation in school.<br>3. Rally volunteers from universities to support youth. |

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|---|---|
| Safety and legal needs | 1. Collaborate with CPS, child welfare, and/or the family court to facilitate access to medical care, family mediation, and other services for unaccompanied minors.<br>2. Give law enforcement the training and tools they need so they can provide youth with services and referrals, rather than citations or juvenile/criminal justice involvement.<br>3. Collaborate with legal services agencies to address youth's legal needs. |
| Social and emotional support | 1. Collaborate with youth-serving agencies to offer street outreach and "drop-in" services.<br>2. Collaborate with youth-serving agencies and local university social work or counseling programs to offer support groups. |

| **X. Track Outcomes to Report Qualitative and Quantitative Success.** | |
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| Numbers | 1. Youth served in each program model<br>2. Ages of youth served<br>3. Youth not able to be served due to lack of funding<br>4. Youth not able to be served because available programs were not appropriate<br>5. Youth not able to be served due to lack of parental consent |
| Academics | 1. Attendance<br>2. Grades<br>3. Test scores<br>4. Participation in extra-curricular activities<br>5. High school graduation<br>6. School stability |
| Cost savings | 1. Savings to city/county government, Continuum of Care, and federal program funds for emergency housing<br>2. Savings to city/county and state government for emergency room visits and other health care services<br>3. Savings to child welfare and juvenile justice systems<br>4. Transportation and other savings to local school districts |
| Outcomes 6 months to 2 or more years after leaving the program | 1. How many youth remain in safe, stable housing?<br>2. How many youth remain employed or obtain stable employment?<br>3. How many youth attend and graduate from post-secondary education?<br>4. How many youth return to live in appropriate family environments? |

## FORMS AND DOCUMENTS

The McKinney-Vento liaisons who championed the programs described in the Program Profiles below have given NAEHCY permission to share many of their most important forms and documents. Thanks to their generosity, NAEHCY's website houses the following documents at http://www.naehcy.org/housingyouth.html:

*Awareness-raising materials*
Legacy House Power Point presentation (Berks County)
Students in Transition Empowerment Program Power Point presentation (Traverse City Area Public Schools)

### Program development

Students in Transition Empowerment Program, Student Housing Survey (Traverse City Area Public Schools)

Legacy House implementation plan (Berks County)

Ozanam grant application to HUD for Pathways Transitional Living Program (Kansas City)

Ozanam grant application to United Way for Pathways Transitional Living Program (Kansas City)

Legacy House Case Manager job description (Berks County)

Host Homes Coordinator job description (Fairfax County)

### Flyers and posters

Legacy House flyer for youth (Berks County)

Fairfax County Public School poster for youth, in English and Spanish

Host Homes for Homeless Youth flyer (Fairfax County)

Pathways Transitional Living Program flyer (Kansas City)

### Program implementation

Legacy House referral form, redacted (Berks County)

Homeless Youth Initiative youth application (Fairfax County)

Pathways Transitional Living Program youth application forms (Kansas City)

Pathways Transitional Living Program rules (Kansas City)

Partnership letter between Kansas City Kansas Public Schools and Ozanam

Memorandum of Understanding between Kansas City Kansas Public Schools Synergy youth services

Power Pack-Harvesters weekend food program for homeless youth description

Pathways Transitional Living Program case management forms (Kansas City)

Roadmap to Graduation student information form (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation mentor home application (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation mentor home agreement (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation student agreement (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation parent/guardian consent form (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation power of attorney form for parent/guardian (Adrian Public Schools)

Joe's Place trial period permission slip (Maplewood Richmond Heights School District)

Joe's Place placement agreement (Maplewood Richmond Heights School District)

Joe's Place power of attorney form for parent/guardian (Maplewood Richmond Heights School District)

Alternative House confidentiality and exchange of information form (Fairfax County)

Roadmap to Graduation medical history record (Adrian Public Schools)

Roadmap to Graduation house rules (Adrian Public Schools)

Joe's Place resident policies and procedures (Maplewood Richmond Heights School District)

Roadmap to Graduation life skills checklist (Adrian Public Schools)

Unaccompanied youth food pantry voucher (Berks County)

### Data collection and maintenance

Roadmap to Graduation face sheet (Adrian Public Schools)

Legacy House data collection and tracking form, with names redacted (Berks County)
Legacy House service reports (Berks County)
Roadmap to Graduation 2008-09 evaluation summary (Adrian Public Schools)

## PROGRAM PROFILES

The following brief descriptions are designed to explain how the seven McKinney-Vento liaisons interviewed conceived of and implemented their housing initiatives.

### Adrian Public Schools, MI

Adrian Public Schools is the largest school district in Lenawee County, a suburban and rural area in southern Michigan, between Detroit and Toledo, Ohio. The county's population is 101,230.[8] The median household income is $50,074, with 10.4% of the population living below the poverty level. Adrian Public Schools receives a McKinney-Vento subgrant. In the 2008-09 school year, 117 unaccompanied youth were identified in the county, 68 of whom attended Adrian Public Schools. Adrian's McKinney-Vento program had identified 21 unaccompanied youth as of October 20, 2009.

Beth McCullough is the Homeless Liaison and McKinney-Vento Grant Coordinator for Adrian Public Schools. She recalls the district superintendent telling her in 2002 that the district probably didn't have any homeless students, but the federal government was requiring them to hire a coordinator to find some. Beth got the job and did just that. She began educating schools and the community about homeless families and youth on their own. With the increased awareness came offers to help, but Beth had neither the time nor resources to take advantage of those offers.

In an effort to organize the community's response to homelessness, Beth convened a meeting. Over 100 people attended, and eventually, the Homeless Youth Committee was formed as a subcommittee of the County Continuum of Care. Beth pursued the partnership of Catholic Charities, which operates foster homes locally. As a result, Catholic Charities and Adrian Public Schools formed Roadmap to Graduation, which housed six youth last year and four so far this year.

**Roadmap to Graduation works like this:**

*Referral:* All referrals originate from Beth's McKinney-Vento program. To be eligible, a student must be attending school and on track to graduate in the current school year. Most eligible youth are 17 or 18 years old. Students who are too young to participate receive other support through the McKinney-Vento program and child protective services. Youth

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[8] The source for all demographic data in this section is the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.

who are not enrolled or are not on track to graduate also receive support through McKinney-Vento and other education programs.

*Immediate services:* Students are placed in host homes, which receive a stipend of $300/month to help cover expenses. Catholic Charities donates staff time to complete home studies on host families, to ensure the youth will be safely and appropriately housed. Beth also administers an emergency shelter fund called Promise Project, which can provide immediate housing in motel rooms for children and youth who are sleeping outside. Since there is no shelter in town, motel rooms function as emergency shelter beds. Promise Project provided emergency shelter for 60 youth or families during the last school year.

*Parental consent and liability:* Since Catholic Charities is a private foster care organization, they have policies and procedures in place to address parental consent and liability. Youth 18 and over are legal adults and consent for their own services. The program obtains parental consent for 17-year-olds. When needed, child protective services assists in locating parents and obtaining consent. The local probate court judge also has offered to assist with temporary guardianships when parents cannot be found. However to date, obtaining parental consent has not been a major challenge.

Catholic Charities maintains appropriate liability insurance which would cover any problems related to the program or homes, and the host homes themselves are not required to take out any additional insurance. Roadmap completes a child protective services registry check and criminal background check on all host families. Finally, to address licensing requirements, the program is characterized as 7-day a week, 24-hour a day mentorship, rather than housing.

*Ongoing support:* The McKinney-Vento program provides most of the Roadmap services, including academic support, referrals for additional services, and mentorship. The program tries to place youth in host homes near their high schools; yet wherever the students are placed, the school district provides transportation so they do not have to change schools. A counselor from the county runaway program provides some case management services. When needed, child protective services will provide services, and youth receive food stamps. Host families are expected to assist the youth with independent living skills, such as budgeting, financial literacy, transition planning, and college applications.

A local university has agreed to give scholarships to applicants from Roadmap to Graduation. Additionally, Goodwill Industries prioritizes unaccompanied youth for employment, which allows Beth to place youth in jobs immediately, despite a county unemployment rate of 22%. Goodwill also cooperates with the school district so youth receive school credit for their employment.

*Tracking:* The McKinney-Vento program tracks students' attendance and progress in school. All students remain in the same high school they had been attending. The program also is following youth for two years after graduation. For example, all of last year's participants graduated from high school. Four are in college, and one went to Job Corps. All remain in stable housing. Of the four students who graduated two years ago, two are sophomores in

college, one is living with a parent and attending community college, and the program is still attempting to contact the fourth student.

Catholic Charities administers Roadmap to Graduation. Total project funding is $25,000, including $10,000 from the Kiwanis Club and $15,000 through a McKinney-Vento education stimulus grant (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). All the funding is used for host home stipends, with the McKinney-Vento program providing supplemental support and services. Project Promise funding comes entirely from small private donors, with community members contributing a monthly commitment, holding fundraiser Christmas parties, and donating through church groups. Although funding has reached $30,000, Beth spends it as it comes in and as of October 20, 2009 had only $300 available.

**Beth identified the following keys to Roadmap to Graduation's success:**

1. Awareness-raising is the critical first step. Beth and her colleagues have to be story-tellers and have to empower youth to tell their stories.
2. The Homeless Youth Committee is the vehicle through which partnerships blossomed and the programs took hold.
3. Projects must focus on helping youth shed the stigma of homelessness. As Beth said, "If I'm doing my job right, you shouldn't be able to tell which kids are homeless."

## Berks County, PA

Berks County includes the city of Reading and its surrounding suburban and rural areas in southeastern Pennsylvania, with 398,155 residents. The median household income is $52,241, with 11.2% of the population living below the poverty level. The Berks County Intermediate Unit (IU) is an educational service agency that includes 18 school districts. The IU receives a McKinney-Vento subgrant. In the 2008-09 school year, the McKinney-Vento program identified 61 unaccompanied youth; for the 2009-10 school year, 16 unaccompanied youth had been identified as of October 20, 2009.

Beth Rothermel, the McKinney-Vento liaison and Coordinator for Berks County IU, also serves on the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness. For years she raised the issue of youth homelessness in Coalition meetings, using data from the IU and the National Runaway Switchboard to convince members that unaccompanied youth existed in the county and needed housing resources.[9] Beth was able to launch a subcommittee to focus specifically on youth housing. This group was the key to starting the county's youth housing initiative. Any and all youth-related agencies were invited to participate. The subcommittee's monthly meetings started by assessing needs and resources, then focused on establishing the housing programs, and currently are reviewing program successes and remaining unmet needs to determine their next steps.

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[9] For example, one piece of compelling data was that National Runaway Switchboard calls from the Berks County area code increased 120% between 2006 and 2007 (from 737 to 1699).

Initially, the youth subcommittee was focused on building a shelter in Berks County. However, they decided to take advantage of existing resources first. Driven Ministries, an existing youth-serving agency, partnered with the IU to establish Legacy House. Legacy House is a host home program, combining family mediation, counseling, and housing to support unaccompanied youth. In its six months of existence, Legacy House has provided stable, family-based housing in host homes for 39 youth, with an additional 15 youth able to return home to their parents or guardian safely through the mediation program. Based on Legacy House's success, the youth subcommittee now believes the county may not even need a dedicated youth shelter.

**The Legacy House host home programs works like this:**

*Referral:* The McKinney-Vento program identifies unaccompanied youth in need of housing who are enrolling in or already attending school. The program refers youth ages 12 through 17 to Legacy House, while youth 18 and older receive nearly identical services through the IU's McKinney-Vento grant. Youth can also contact Legacy House or the McKinney-Vento program directly, as Beth posts flyers about the program in libraries, bus stations, and other places. Local police also are aware of Legacy House and provide youth with information about the program. To connect youth to the program immediately, Legacy House has contracted with a taxi service so youth who want to participate will be picked up anywhere, any time and taken to the program.

*Immediate services:* The Legacy House case manager meets with youth within 24 hours of their referral to assess their needs and goals and brainstorm about appropriate housing resources, such as relatives, friends, and mentors. Some youth have developed their own temporary host home arrangements that can be maintained with additional support from Legacy House. For those youth, the case manager will meet with the host family and the young person and develop a service plan to stabilize the living situation. Other youth are placed immediately in an emergency shelter bed, while the case manager and the youth pursue a host home. Legacy House purchases beds in a separate, non-detention wing of the juvenile justice center and in a child welfare group home called Bethany Children's Home. Typically, shelter placements are for one or two nights, as the youth and case manager are able to identify more appropriate, longer-term options quickly. Legacy House has developed relationships with local churches to provide host families if a youth cannot identify appropriate housing resources among friends or family. However, so far that has not been necessary, as every student has been able to move in with a known adult.

*Parental consent and liability:* Initially, the case manager contacts parents within 24 hours of the referral to inform them of the youth's involvement in the program. If necessary for the youth's safety, she also contacts child protective services. The case manager then either offers family mediation (if it may be appropriate for a youth to return home) or obtains parental consent for youth to reside in host homes. Thus far, no parents have opposed their child's participation in Legacy House. The case manager also visits all host homes and

interviews host families. Finally, the county child welfare agency collaborates with Legacy House, assisting with issues of consent and liability.

*Ongoing support:* Legacy House's goal is to turn unstable doubled-up situations into comfortable, long-term host homes. To that end, they provide financial support to meet youth's basic needs, including Walmart gift cards, clothing, and food bank vouchers. They also provide emotional support, as the case manager meets regularly with youth and families to address challenges as they arise and make referrals for needed services. The McKinney-Vento program provides school supplies, academic support, access to school counselors, and transportation to and from the youth's school. Legacy House students are never forced to change schools, regardless of the location of the host home. These services stabilize the host home and turn it into a viable long-term housing option for youth.

*Tracking:* Legacy House has a spreadsheet and data log to track youth's school attendance, services provided, and housing outcomes after leaving the program. They plan to track additional outcomes in the coming year.

Driven Ministries administers Legacy House programs, bringing their youth-serving experience to bear on issues like liability, service provision, and parental consent. Legacy House youth also have access to Driven's other youth programs, including support groups, family mediation, and parenting classes. Legacy House operates on a $25,000 grant from the United Way, plus $2,500 of IU McKinney-Vento funding to support the case manager. Beth will continue supporting the case manager through McKinney-Vento education stimulus funds.

**Beth identified the following keys to Legacy House's success:**

1. They work very closely with the local child welfare agency, which benefits Legacy House by helping mitigate liability and conflict with parents, and benefits the child welfare agency by lightening its caseload.
2. The role of the case manager is essential to maintain long-term stability in the host home; the case manager is problem-solver, coach, mentor, service provider, and crisis manager.
3. An organized committee that meets regularly, involving everyone who might serve or come into contact with youth and with each member contributing their strengths and expertise, is the key to starting an initiative and keeping it going.

## *Bethel School District, WA*

Bethel School District is a primarily urban and suburban area south of Tacoma, Washington and adjacent to a large military base. Bethel is located in Pierce County, which has a population of 774,144, a median household income of $57,761, and 11.3% of the population living below the poverty level. Bethel School District is not a McKinney-Vento grant recipient; however, they recently received $24,000 in McKinney-Vento education

stimulus funds via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The district identified 295 children and youth experiencing homelessness in the 2007-2008 school year. In stark contrast, they had already identified 82 for the 2009-2010 school year as of September 12, 2009.

Steve Brown was the McKinney-Vento liaison for Bethel School District when the district first committed to housing unaccompanied youth. Steve was helping a young man get a doctor's appointment when he discovered the youth was living in a cardboard refrigerator box and maintaining a 3.84 grade point average and perfect attendance. The youth showered at school, ate free breakfast and lunch there, and stayed in the school library studying until late in the day. According to Steve, his "heart broke open" as he worked with more and more courageous young people in his schools.

Inspired by their students, Steve and the school district devised a plan to create a group home for homeless high school students. The district owned a house near the high school and agreed to lease it at no cost to Youth Resources, a local non-profit. Steve and Youth Resources pursued donations to repair, clean, and furnish the house, and the Graham Youth House was born. Since then, Steve has moved on to new challenges, but Jay Brower, the new McKinney-Vento liaison, continues to work hand-in-hand with Youth Resources Executive Director Deborah Cozzetti. In fact, they are currently preparing to open a new group home and youth drop-in center called Spanaway Youth House.

**The Graham Youth House (and soon Spanaway Youth House) works like this:**

*Referral:* All referrals come from the school district McKinney-Vento program. To be eligible for admittance to Graham Youth House, youth must be Bethel School District students between the ages of 18 and 21. Jay explained that if a youth who is not enrolled in school would like to reside in the house, he will talk to the youth about his educational goals and needs and get him enrolled in an appropriate education program immediately. Graham House residents must be able to adapt to group living, work toward self-sufficiency, work part-time, and refrain from alcohol and drug use. Spanaway residents will have to meet the same criteria. Graham House is for young men, while Spanaway will serve young women.

*Immediate services:* Graham Youth House accommodates five young men, with one emergency and four transitional beds. Spanaway House will serve eight young women in two emergency and six transitional beds. By combining emergency and transitional housing, the program offers limited emergency shelter, while allowing youth to remain in the same home as they move into the transitional housing program. Students can remain in the emergency shelter program up to 90 days, and the transitional housing can last up to two years. A residential coordinator lives on-site, and staff is available 24 hours a day.

*Parental consent and liability:* Youth must be 18 to 21 years old to reside at Graham Youth House. Since they are legal adults, they are able to participate without parental consent.

Deborah hopes to open Spanaway Youth House to women under 18 who have parental consent.

*Ongoing support:* Deborah explained that she and the school district share a simple philosophy: "The bottom line is to remove barriers so youth can be successful." Graham Youth House is like a family. After two months in the house, every youth completes a comprehensive, five-year plan, based on his goals and interests. Staff then help the youth break the plan into 30-day units, with tangible activities and goals. In this way the students can mark their progress toward their own goals. At the same time, the young people are saving money to help meet those goals, as they are required to save 30% of whatever they earn in their part-time jobs.

To support academic success, Deborah and Jay work closely with the students and their teachers and counselors. Youth Resources also plans to assign a long-term mentor for each resident. All Graham House residents graduate high school, and Youth Resources works to secure grants and scholarships for higher education. Young people can remain in the house after high school graduation, as long as they are working and pursuing post-secondary education. The new Spanaway House youth drop-in center will provide a weekly meal for any youth in the community who wish to attend, with activities and guest speakers.

*Tracking:* Deborah tracks outcomes in two areas: life skills and financial resources. Life skills focus on the youth's ability to interact positively with other people and progress toward the life goals he has identified in his five-year plan. Financial resources include budgeting and a savings plan. Every 60 days, staff evaluate each youth's progress on his 30-day and five year plans. Those evaluations determine the program's "outcomes." Deborah reported that 75% of the youth have met their goals by the time they leave Graham Youth House.

Youth Resources is a private, non-profit youth-serving agency, which administers the group homes, handles insurance and liability, and tracks outcomes. Graham Youth House operates on $75,000 per year, which includes staffing, insurance, meals, maintenance, and all other house expenses. The school district provides the house for a nominal cost, saving the program roughly $24,000 per year. This donation also helps Deborah raise funds, as she can use it as matching funds for other grants. A consistent, major funding source has been the Pierce County Youth Violence Prevention grant. Additional public funding comes from a Community Development Block Grant through HUD. Private funders include the United Way, Kiwanis, Sequoia Foundation, Moyer Foundation, and local banks and businesses. The school community provides ongoing support, as school staff contribute money, goods, time, and good will. A school administrator personally pays the high-speed internet bill for the house.

**Jay and Deborah identified the following keys to Graham Youth House's success:**

1. A strong partnership is critical. Jay emphasized the district couldn't have launched the program with Youth Resources there to administer it, and Deborah is sure Graham House couldn't have started if Bethel School District hadn't stepped forward to partner with her.
2. The superintendent, school board, school counselors, teachers, and many other staff members have backed the group home wholeheartedly from the very beginning.
3. Jay explained that increasing awareness and understanding of homelessness in the community (particularly among Graham House neighbors) and the school has helped build support for the program.

Bethel School District is proceeding with plans to house more youth. The district owns several homes as investment properties. The superintendent feels so strongly about housing youth so they can finish high school that he is facilitating the use of four additional district houses to provide youth housing. Jay, Deborah, and the district are also looking at locations for additional youth services.

## Fairfax County, VA

Fairfax County is a large, populous county outside Washington, DC, with 1,006,576 residents. The county is primarily urban, but also includes suburban and rural areas. The median household income is $102,460, with 5.2% of the population living below the poverty level. Fairfax County Public Schools is the nation's 12th largest school system. It receives a McKinney-Vento subgrant. In the 2008-09 school year, the McKinney-Vento program identified 108 unaccompanied youth; for the 2009-10 school year, 68 unaccompanied youth had been identified as of October 20, 2009.

Kathi Sheffel, the McKinney-Vento liaison for Fairfax County Public Schools, has been a strong voice for children and youth experiencing homelessness for years. Her quest to increase housing options for unaccompanied youth began with creating awareness of youth homelessness in the county. It was hard for community members to accept that youth were homeless and on their own and that the child welfare system did not provide services. Once the local child welfare agency admitted it couldn't serve older unaccompanied youth, the community accepted the service gaps and began to confront the problem.

Kathi convened a homeless youth task force, which met at the school district. A wide variety of youth-serving agencies started meeting monthly. Kathi led an exercise in which the group listed weaknesses and strengths in the county, unmet needs, and available services. Several agencies offered their expertise in youth housing, services, family mediation, education, and other services. The Alternative House, a local Runaway and Homeless Youth Act emergency shelter and transitional living program, became the school district's lead partner. Simultaneously, stimulus funds became available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and county government named unaccompanied youth as their top funding priority. This combination of awareness, relationships, and funding resulted in the Homeless Youth Initiative, which provides three

separate housing programs for youth: a host home program, a group home for young women, and a rental subsidy program.

**The Homeless Youth Initiative works like this:**

*Referral:* The school district McKinney-Vento program comes into contact with more unaccompanied youth than any other agency, so McKinney-Vento staff do an initial screening and refer youth to one of the three housing programs, depending on their needs. Additional youth enter the program through Alternative House's 24-hour crisis hotline.

*Immediate services:* A therapist conducts a needs assessment for all youth to determine the most appropriate program and the services needed to promote the youth's safety and success. Based on the youth's needs and goals, he or she will enter one of three programs.

The host home program focuses on students who want to live with a family or are not financially or otherwise able to live independently. The program places youth with individuals or families in the community willing to provide housing while the student is enrolled in school. The host home coordinator finds and screens homes and matches youth with appropriate homes, placing students in homes close to their schools whenever possible. Families and individuals providing housing must undergo a background check. There is no money available to the host homes, and the arrangement can be cancelled at any time. Together, the student and family decide the extent of the host's involvement in the student's life and agree on house rules. After only seven weeks in operation, the host home program had already placed six youth in housing.

The young women's group home houses four, 18-year old women who are enrolled in Fairfax County Public Schools. 24-hour supervision is provided. The students will be housed for remainder of their education, at no cost, with transition services provided to ensure their continued housing and education once they graduate from high school. The house opened in September of 2009, and as of October 20, three women were living there, with the fourth on the way.

Lastly, the Homeless Youth Initiative offers a rental subsidy to help students who are renting a room on their own to maintain that housing, and to obtain rental housing for youth who are homeless. The youth must attend school, secure employment, and be able to live independently. The host home coordinator visits the rental properties and meets each landlord personally. The rent is paid directly to the landlord. The McKinney-Vento program is referring roughly one youth a day to the rental subsidy program.

In addition to the three Homeless Youth Initiative programs, Alternative House runs an emergency shelter and a transitional living program through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

*Parental consent and liability:* The Alternative House has provided emergency shelter and transitional living services to youth for many years and has developed policies and practices to address parental consent and liability. Young people 18 and over are legally adults, with the authority to consent for themselves and sign their own rental agreements. For youth under 18, the host home coordinator obtains parental consent. To date, the coordinator

has not had difficulty locating parents and obtaining consent. However, anticipating problems in that area, Alternative House is planning to work with the state legislature and county government to establish policies that would allow the program to serve youth under 18 without parental consent if staff have made a good faith, reasonable effort to contact parents. In addition, Alternative House carries various liability insurance policies as a youth-serving organization.

*Ongoing support:* The host home coordinator meets monthly with every youth in a host home and the rental subsidy program. These monthly meetings are designed to address problems as they arise and provide needed services to maintain the stability of the host home or rental housing. The school district McKinney-Vento program also provides supplemental services to all the youth, including school supplies, free school meals, counseling, academic support, and transportation. The faith community is a critical partner for meeting the youth's basic needs, donating items such as furniture and clothes. Students also are connected with programs such as food stamps where appropriate.

*Tracking:* The Homeless Youth Initiative tracks: numbers of youth served; school stability, attendance, grades, test scores, and all academic outcomes; cost savings to the school district in decreased transportation costs; and cost savings to the county, considering emergency housing, medical, and other services that would be incurred if youth were not safely housed.

The Alternative House administers all three Homeless Youth Initiative programs. The Initiative received $200,000 in stimulus money through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, thanks to the county housing office making youth housing its top priority. This funding supports the young women's group home and rental subsidy programs; the rental subsidy is budgeted for $70,000, with a rough per-student cost of $400/month. The host home program costs only $15 per family for the criminal background check, with the in-kind support services of the school district McKinney-Vento program, the faith community, and Alternative House.

**Kathi identified the following keys to the Homeless Youth Initiative's success:**

1. Plans were stifled until county government and other agencies recognized that homeless adult shelters are not the appropriate place for students, even if they are 18.
2. From there, the partnership of the Alternative House and ongoing meetings of the homeless youth task force have been critical to get the programs started, solve problems as they arise, and improve the initiative over time.
3. The Homeless Youth Initiative thrives on the community's willingness to be creative, tackle issues case-by-case, and work together as active problem-solvers.

## Kansas City, KS

Kansas City is a large urban area divided between the states of Kansas and Missouri. Kansas City, Kansas is the smaller of the two sides, with a population of 141,791.[10] The median household income is $36,609, with 21% of the population living below the poverty level. In the 2008-09 school year, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools directly served 26 completely unaccompanied youth and an additional 105 homeless youth in precarious family situations.

Staci Pratt is an attorney, community organizer, and the homeless liaison for Kansas City Public Schools. When she started working with unaccompanied youth, she realized that while the Missouri side of her community had over 1,000 shelter beds, the Kansas side had only 30, with none at all for youth. Thus began her quest to develop housing options for unaccompanied youth in Kansas. Staci took charge of the county's "State of Our Homeless" report, making sure children and youth figured prominently. That awareness has been critical in her efforts to build capacity for youth housing.

Staci approached youth shelters and programs in all the neighboring counties for help. She invited Ozanam, a Missouri youth-serving agency, to apply for a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide transitional housing for four youth in Kansas. Staci's long-time participation in her County Continuum of Care and homeless coalition paved the way for the collaboration, and Ozanam got the grant for the Pathways Transitional Living Program.

**The Pathways Transitional Living Program works like this:**

*Referral:* Youth enter the program via the school district's McKinney-Vento program. They must attend school but are not required to work. Given limited funding, the program currently focuses on juniors and seniors who are on track to graduate.

*Immediate services:* Youth are placed in scattered-site apartments. Ozanam pays the rent, utilities, and a food allowance.[11]

*Parental consent and liability:* As a pre-existing youth-serving organization, Ozanam has policies and procedures in place to address parental consent and liability. The transitional living program case manager works with youth and parents and obtains parental permission to serve youth under 18.

*Ongoing support:* Social work interns from Kansas University provide case management and counseling on site at the apartments. An additional HUD-funded case manager also works

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[10] Kansas City, Missouri has a population of 436,562, median household income of $42,548, and 17.5% of the population below the poverty level.
[11] Staci also partnered with a local foster care provider to apply for a Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) grant for an emergency shelter. They identified an appropriate house, and the city/county coordinated government agreed to purchase the house with CDBG stimulus funds if they received the RHYA grant to implement and maintain the program. Unfortunately, they were not awarded the grant, and Kansas City, KS still has no emergency housing for unaccompanied youth.

with the youth on site. The school district provides academic support, free school meals, and transportation to school. Although the housing program only has the capacity for four youth, Staci's McKinney-Vento program provides many more homeless youth with transportation, school supplies, food, and other services. Synergy, the largest youth shelter in the community, provides street outreach services to help Staci identify unaccompanied youth. She also collaborates with Harvesters Community Food Network to provide homeless high school students with backpacks full of food to take home over the weekends. The food helps youth in doubled-up living situations maintain this arrangement, by allowing them to contribute to the household. For youth who are living on the street, the food provided through school may be their only source of meals over the weekend.

*Tracking:* Since the program is so new, it is just starting to track outcomes data. Staci plans to track participation in case management, attendance, grades, graduation, standardized test scores, college admissions and long-term housing stability.

Ozanam administers the transitional living program. The initial HUD funding was a two-year grant for $107,000, to fund four apartments. A separate, $22,000 HUD grant funds the case manager. HUD requires a 20% match for the case management grant, which Staci meets with school district Title I, Part A homeless set-aside funds.

**Staci identified the following keys to Pathways Transitional Living Program's success:**

1. Staci's participation in the Continuum of Care and homeless coalition laid the foundation for her to bring people to the table and pursue funding.
2. The ability to tell compelling stories and present clear, persuasive data is critical to raise awareness and obtain funding.
3. The program uses the strengths, technical expertise, and experience of existing institutions, including the school district McKinney-Vento program, Ozanam, Synergy, Harvesters, and Kansas University.

## Maplewood Richmond Heights School District, MO

Maplewood is a small, urban and suburban community just outside St. Louis. St. Louis County is home to 998,368 people. The median household income is $56,280, with 8.9% of the population living below the poverty level. Maplewood Richmond Heights School District is one of 23 districts serving St. Louis County, with roughly 1,000 total students. Although the district does not receive a McKinney-Vento subgrant, it did receive McKinney-Vento stimulus funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Since it does not receive a subgrant, Maplewood is not required to track unaccompanied youth specifically. However, roughly 30 homeless students attend the district each year, with a notable increase so far this year.

Vince Estrada is Maplewood Richmond Heights' McKinney-Vento liaison. As in many small school districts, Vince is also the Director of Student Services, in charge of several federal programs. About four years ago, he was having what he characterized as a typical conversation among educators; he and colleagues were lamenting the dire circumstances of some high school students who were experiencing homelessness, imagining how much more successful the students could be with safe, stable housing. After the conversation the district superintendent called Vince into her office, and Joe's House was born.

Vince and his team did a needs assessment and pitched the idea for a small group home to the school board. The school board supported the idea and purchased a four-bedroom home close to the high school to house the program. Within a year, Joe's House was incorporated as an independent non-profit organization, and it now houses four high school boys.

**Joe's Place works like this:**

*Referral:* All Joe's Place residents must be Maplewood Richmond Heights School District students. The program focuses on high school students, but recently admitted a junior high student whose older brother also wanted to enter the program, so the siblings could stay together. Referrals come from school staff. After noticing a boy in need of housing and support, a teacher, counselor, or other educator will talk to the youth about his situation and ask if he's interested in Joe's Place. If the youth is interested, the referral proceeds to a program committee, which reviews the youth's needs to determine if Joe's Place is appropriate. The program committee consists of the house parents, school counselors, a school psychologist, the Program Director, and Vince.

*Immediate services:* Youth who want to stay at Joe's Place start with a two-week trial period. Although the program has never rejected a youth during the trial period, some students have decided not to stay. Once they enter the program, youth live there from Sunday evening through Friday afternoon. The boys spend the weekends with family members, friends, or mentors. If the youth has nowhere to go, Joe's Place will arrange a host home for the weekend. However, that is rarely necessary. Joe's Place is supervised by a married couple with a young child, who live in the home and support the youth. The father is a teacher with the school district.

*Parental consent and liability:* All the students at Joe's Place stay there with the consent of a parent or guardian. Parents also sign a power of attorney, giving the house parents the authority to consent for medical care and participate in the students' education. Prior to opening the house, Vince and his team sought to limit liability and prevent future problems by meeting with neighbors, researching licensing requirements, and getting the city council to grant an exception to a city ordinance banning group homes of non-related people.

*Ongoing support:* Academics are an important part of Joe's Place, and the house parents support youth in completing their homework each day. School counselors meet with the boys regularly, and Vince follows their academic progress. The program committee meets monthly to review each student's needs and progress, solving problems as they arise, and setting up tutoring or other needed services. Youth can remain in the house until high school graduation. Once they leave Joe's Place, a local business or organization will "adopt" the youth, providing clothing, books, school supplies, and other ongoing support. Joe's Place house parents also remain in contact with the young men.

*Tracking:* Joe's Place tracks each youth's grades, attendance, discipline, and high school graduation. Last year was their first year with graduates; three boys graduated, all of whom are now in college.

Although Joe's Place has the full support of the Maplewood Richmond Heights superintendent and school board, it is incorporated as an independent non-profit, which limits the district's exposure to liability. A local benefactor and former educator donated $10,000 to jumpstart the planning for Joe's House. The school board bought the house and pays the mortgage, utilities, and maintenance. Joe's Place itself funds the house parents and Program Director, operating on a meager budget of donations and an annual fundraiser. Vince hopes the program can raise additional funds to purchase the house in the near future.

**Vince identified the following keys to Joe's Place's success:**

1. Maplewood Richmond Heights is a small school district. The superintendent and other administrators have personal contact with families and were able to build the trust necessary within the school and community to allow Joe's Place to take root and thrive.
2. Joe's Place operates as a family; rather than complex "level" systems or behavior plans, the boys and house parents eat, study, do chores, and share a family life together.
3. Although the system of having the youth stay with family or friends on the weekends started as a budgetary issue, it has become a very positive program feature. It helps the boys get used to the house, helps them maintain contact with important adults in their lives, and alleviates their guilt at "abandoning" their family.

### Traverse City Area Public Schools, MI

Grand Traverse County is a rural county in northern Michigan, with a population of 84,493. The median household income is $49,066, with 8.5% of the population living below the poverty level. Traverse City Area Public Schools is the largest school district in Grand Traverse County and the recipient of a McKinney-Vento subgrant. During the 2008-09 school year, the McKinney-Vento program identified 250 unaccompanied youth; for the 2009-10 school year, 125 unaccompanied youth had been identified as of October 20, 2009.

Joan Abbott is the McKinney-Vento liaison for Traverse City Area Public Schools. She also serves on the County Continuum of Care. Joan recounted how a school counselor and social worker began to learn of high school girls who had been kicked out of their homes and were forced to choose between living on the street or with older "boyfriends." These educators were determined to give the girls another choice, so they wrote a grant to establish a host home program. The United Way awarded an initial $40,000 to start the program that today functions as the Host Homes for Homeless Youth program under the auspices of Catholic Human Services. The program houses from 20 to 25 students each year.

**Host Homes for Homeless Youth works like this:**

*Referral:* Joan's McKinney-Vento program does all the referrals. Youth must be 14 years old or older and must attend school. Most of the youth who participate are under 18. Joan's program has an initial conversation with youth to determine if they have a host home in mind or if they will need to be placed in a volunteer home.

*Immediate services:* The program provides host homes with a $10/day stipend to offset some of the cost of housing the student. Most often, the student has a host home in mind, such as a relative, friend, or mentor who wants to provide housing, or already is providing housing but needs additional support to make the arrangement sustainable. If the student cannot identify a housing resource, the program's advisory board will review the youth's needs and goals and match the youth with a volunteer host home. In such cases, a local youth-serving agency called Pete's Place provides emergency shelter to the youth while a host home is put in place. Pete's Place is a nine-room youth shelter, built as a separate wing on the Goodwill adult/family shelter.

*Parental consent and liability:* A former school district employee who went to work with Catholic Human Services (CHS) learned of the school district program and arranged for CHS to take over the grant. CHS is a nonprofit counseling agency, with appropriate systems in place to address issues of parental consent and liability. For students under 18, parents sign a waiver granting power of attorney for medical and educational decisions to the host parent(s). Each host parent has to go through an application process with the program coordinator, including criminal background checks and an advisory board review. The program coordinator does monthly home visits to ensure the housing remains safe and appropriate and enrolls all students in Medicaid or other health insurance. Host Homes for Homeless Youth is licensed by the state as an independent living program.

*Ongoing support:* Host Homes for Homeless Youth conducts a comprehensive needs assessment for every student who enters the program. Joan's program, the host home program coordinator, and the host parents then work together to ensure all the youth's needs are met. The program coordinator's monthly home visits include meetings with the students and the host parents, separately and together, to maintain open communication

and solve problems as they arise. Often other mentors or service providers also participate in these meetings, so the youth's success can be addressed holistically.

Since school attendance is required for program participation, both the youth and the host family commit to school. In fact, if the student does not attend school, the host family loses its stipend. To facilitate transportation to school, Pete's Place is on public transit routes; Joan provides youth with bus passes and also makes sure school buses stop at the shelter. Joan also arranges transportation to school for every youth in a host home. To support school success, Traverse City Area Public Schools uses its $135,000 Title I, Part A homeless set-aside to fund a full-time, certified academic mentor for homeless youth in each high school, with similar support in the middle schools. The mentors' role is threefold: follow youth's academic progress and provide needed support immediately; reduce the negative impact of homelessness on their academic success and social-emotional well-being; and help students develop lifelong learning and independence skills.

*Tracking*: Joan's program tracks the students' attendance, completion of homework, grades, and high school graduation. In its first year, 80% of program participants graduated, with the remaining 20% on track for graduation. Last year, every student graduated.

Catholic Human Services (CHS) administers the Host Homes for Homeless Youth program as part of their Prevention initiative, since safe, stable housing is a critical strategy to prevent young people's involvement in the juvenile justice system. CHS has enhanced the initial $40,000 United Way grant that started the program with a variety of private funding from organizations such as the Rotary, Campbell Foundation, and a local community foundation. The program also is planning to launch a sponsorship initiative, whereby businesses and individuals can sponsor a student's participation, based on a cost of $4,000 per year, per student. Joan's goal is to raise $90,000 for host homes.

Host Homes for Homeless Youth also receives $48,000 in HUD funding, through an innovative collaboration with Pete's Place. Joan explained the many youth are unwilling to enter Pete's Place, because they do not want to live in a shelter environment or do not agree with the shelter's rules. If Joan can convince a youth to stay at Pete's Place for a few days while she locates a host home, Pete's Place will fund the student's host home for the year. In turn, Pete's Place will serve more youth and be more competitive for funding. The HUD grant will provide funding for 12 students to enter host homes through this process.

The host homes program is just the beginning of Joan's plans for Grand Traverse County. Last year, university interns working with her McKinney-Vento program conducted a survey of high school students experiencing homelessness. The survey asked about the kinds of services the youth most needed and wanted. The County Continuum of Care established a subcommittee called the Homeless Youth Initiative, which is now analyzing the survey data to develop service and funding proposals for the Continuum.

## CONCLUSION

The seven school districts included in this publication provide a snapshot of the success of schools and McKinney-Vento programs around the country working to keep youth safe and support their long-term independence and success. The inspiration of youth, creativity of educators and service providers, and support of the community is all that's needed to start a similar initiative in your town or county. For more information, contact NAEHCY at http://www.naehcy.org/ or pjulianelle@naehcy.org.

## THANKS!

NAEHCY wishes to express our gratitude to the following McKinney-Vento liaisons and youth service providers for their amazing efforts to ensure safety and success for unaccompanied youth in your communities and for taking the time to share their stories with us.

**Joan Abbott**, District Liaison/Coordinator, Students In Transition Empowerment Program
*Traverse City Area Public Schools*

**Jay Brower**, Director of Community Connections/Community Schools
*Bethel Public Schools*

**Steve Brown**, former Director of Community Connections
*Bethel School District*

**Deborah Cozzetti**, Executive Director
*Youth Resources*

**Judith Dittman**, Executive Director
*The Alternative House*

**Vince Estrada**, Director of Student Services
*Maplewood Richmond Heights School District*

**Meghan Huebner**, Director, Residential Services
*The Alternative House*

**Beth McCullough**, Homeless Liaison and McKinney-Vento Grant Coordinator
*Adrian Public Schools*

**Staci Pratt**, Homeless Liaison
*Kansas City, KS Public Schools*

**Beth W. Rothermel**, Region 2 Coordinator, PA's Homeless Children's Initiative
*Berks County Intermediate Unit*

**Kathi Sheffel**, McKinney-Vento Liaison
*Fairfax County Public Schools*

**Hannah Wood**, Program Director
*Joe's Place*