

Back to School!

10 Things YOU Can Do to Help Children in Homeless Situations Go Back to School

It's the time of year when children across the nation prepare to go back to school -- to see their friends, meet new teachers, and join in school activities. For many children and youth, the end of summer and beginning of the school year is a time of excitement and anticipation. However, lack of housing creates difficulties for many youngsters as the school year begins. Children in homeless situations may be in need of help in enrolling in school and receiving the support they need to succeed in school. New changes in federal law, the McKinney-Vento Act, go in effect this year for the first time, providing stronger rights and more resources for these vulnerable children. But as homelessness increases, so too do the needs of our children. Everyone -- students, teachers, community members, churches, civic groups -- has an important role to play. Here's how YOU can help!

1. Let your schools know about homelessness. Schools may be unaware of the extent of homelessness among children, as well as the educational rights of children who are homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. Offer information to your school administrators, principals, PTA, and others who work with students. A short fact sheet is available at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/EdRightsforLEAs.pdf>. Posters, which all schools are required to disseminate, are available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/Products.htm>
2. Inform your community about homelessness and the educational rights of children who are homeless, including shelter providers, soup kitchens, public housing authorities, low-cost motels, faith-based organizations, community action agencies, libraries, and welfare departments. You can provide these agencies with posters, available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/Products.htm>, that help the families they serve know their educational rights and who to contact for help. A short fact sheet for providers is also available at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/EdRightsService.pdf>
3. Ask local businesses if they will post materials on the educational rights of children who are homeless. Laundromats, convenience stores, libraries, and other businesses may be ideal places for families who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing to learn about their educational rights and who to contact for help. Posters are available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/Products.htm>
4. Conduct a school supply drive. Families who are homeless may not be able to afford basic supplies such as pencils, paper, back packs, folders, crayons, or calculators. Work with local service agencies, as well as your school district's homeless liaison, to make sure those children in need receive the supplies. To find out who your school district's homeless liaison is, call your State Coordinator. A list of state coordinators may be found at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/EHCY.html>.

5. Conduct a drive for school clothing or uniforms. Families who are homeless may not be able to afford new clothing for their children, including shoes and items such as eyeglasses. Again, work with your local service agencies, as well as your school district's homeless liaison, to make sure that you collect the appropriate kinds of clothing.
6. Help volunteer at a before or after-school program. Check with local service providers as well as your school district's liaison to see what programs already exist, and find out if children who are homeless need help at these programs with materials or tutors. If the school district doesn't offer any after-school programs, work with local shelters or service providers to provide tutoring or homework help at the shelter or motel.
7. Offer to volunteer at a local school. Many schools are in need of volunteers for such activities as doing background research for lessons and activities; decorating and/or painting classrooms and public areas; providing clerical assistance; assisting school counselors, nurses and other staff with their duties. Let your school know that you have an interest in helping children who are disadvantaged.
8. Contact local pre-school and early childhood programs and talk to them about homelessness. Check with local service providers as well as your school district's liaison to see what pre-school or early childhood programs already exist, and find out if children who are homeless are able to access these programs. Offer to volunteer or contribute money or other resources to help homeless children benefit from early childhood programs.
9. Contact local drop-in centers or other programs for youth who are homeless on their own. Provide information on the educational rights of these young people. If appropriate, offer to mentor homeless youth at your place of business.
10. Contribute financially to your school district's homeless education program. To find out what kind of program your school district offers, call your State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

For more information on the educational needs and rights of children who are homeless, please see:

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/reauthorization.html>

<http://www.serve.org/nche>

<http://www.nlchp.org>

<http://www.naehcy.org>