



SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PACKET

Involving your schools in ending youth homelessness.



Youth
Count 2017

MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pride In All We Do



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Dear Colleague,

I am pleased to share with you a most worthwhile project that we did in our high schools to raise awareness about youth homelessness and to help connect our unstably housed students with needed resources. Tackling chronic absenteeism and assuring all students are present, on time, and ready to learn is a difficult challenge. Many elements outside of our school doors impact our students' attendance, engagement and school performance. One contributing factor may be the lack of a stable, safe place to live.

Our state, through the CT Opening Doors for Youth Plan, has committed to ending youth homelessness by the end of 2020. Connecticut is already a leader in the country in ending homelessness among Veterans and people experiencing chronic homelessness. Communities across the state are now beginning to intensify their efforts to commit resources, build collaborations, and utilize proven strategies to address the important issue of youth homelessness and housing instability. I encourage you, as leaders of school systems, to join me in making this a priority in your districts.

There is a simple way to do this. Partnering with the CT Coalition to End Homelessness and the Institute for Community Research, the Meriden Public Schools developed and conducted a lesson plan for use during the advisory period for all high school students. Using this lesson plan, we educated students and teachers about youth homelessness and how these young people can access help. The response from teachers and students was extremely positive. Many students and teachers reported that they had been unaware of the educational rights of students under the McKinney-Vento Act and that the advisory lesson was both engaging and informative. The lesson provided much needed guidance to students and teachers about the resources that are available and whom to contact for help. Another positive result was that more of our high school students felt comfortable reaching out to their teachers and guidance counselors, who, in turn, connected them with our district's McKinney-Vento liaison in order to provide the support that they need to stay in school and experience success.

Meriden's lesson plan is attached, and I would be happy to discuss any details around implementation. You can also view the lesson plan and additional tools for schools at www.youth-help.org. This advisory lesson can be administered anytime during the school year; however, based on the feedback received from students and teachers, early implementation is recommended. Thank you for joining this effort!

All the best,

Mark D. Benigni, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

For more information on how you can be a part of your community's effort to end youth homelessness, contact Mimi Haley at the CT Coalition to End Homelessness - mhaley@cceh.org

YOUTH RIGHTS IN SCHOOL

GRADE ALL

Time Required: 30 minutes

GOAL: Students will learn about youth rights under the McKinney-Vento Act and the resources that are available to youth who are unstably housed.

Activity Statements:

Students will watch a 3-minute video and discuss the scenario depicted in the video. They will discuss the rights and resources that are available to students, and how to promote awareness of these rights.

Materials:

1. Video - Eligibility for McKinney-Vento School Benefits (available via internet)
2. Computer & projector with audio speakers
3. Handout – *Youth Rights in School*
4. Exit Slip (one per group) – last 5 minutes of period – instructor led

Procedures:

1. Play 3-minute video - view at: <https://youtu.be/u2jUCXwRNFc>
2. Discuss questions 1-2.
3. Distribute or display handout (Youth Rights in School) and facilitate a discussion focused on questions 3-5.
4. Encourage students to stop by the guidance office to get more information.
5. Last 5 minutes of period, complete the attached Exit Slip with 3 questions to provide feedback to your school. Only one submission per Advisory group is required with multiple responses from the group. It is suggested that you open a Google Doc, enter responses, and then Share with administration. If this option is not available, you may submit on paper.

Discussion:

1. When Jasmine is thinking about where she can sleep that night, she tells the viewer that she has stayed several nights at a friend's house.
 - a. How common do you think it is for students to stay at a friend's house temporarily because something is going on at home and they can't stay at home?
 - b. Who else do you think you might turn to for help or a place to stay? Would they turn to an adult at school or in the community? Why/why not?
2. Jasmine is afraid to tell her teacher about her housing situation. In the film, she says, "But if I'm living in another town, then they might make me change schools and I don't want that. I want to stay here."
 - a. Is Jasmine right about that?
 - b. Do you feel that this is one of the fears that students might have? Why/why not?
 - c. What other fears do you think students might have that could prevent them from telling others and getting help?
3. What rights and resources does Jasmine have access to under the McKinney-Vento Act? (Encourage students to use the Handout as a resource to answer this question.)
4. Do you think if more students knew about these rights and resources that they would be more likely to ask for help? Why/why not?
5. What kinds of things do you think students and schools can do to promote awareness of youth rights under this law?

YOUTH RIGHTS IN SCHOOL – Handout

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Do you know someone who:

- Was kicked out of their house?
- Ran away from home?
- Is staying with friends or another family because they couldn't go home or they lost their housing?
- Is staying in a shelter?
- Is staying in a temporary place in DCF care?
- Is living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or campground because they lost their housing?
- Has no place to stay?

If someone you know is experiencing one of these situations, there are laws and resources to help them. Even if they have a temporary place to stay, they may still be able to get help. The law helps youth who are alone and moving around, and those who are living with family and moving around.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?

If I've been moving around a lot, do I have to change schools every time I move?

No. You have the right to choose between the school you went to before you lost your housing, the school where you are staying now, or the school where you were last registered.

How will I get to school?

You have a right to get transportation back to your old school - if that is what you or your parent/guardian believes is best for you. The transportation might be a bus, a bus pass, or even a taxi.

Who can help me figure this out?

Every school district has a person called a "McKinney-Vento liaison." That person's job is to help you. Visit youth-help.org and click on "McKinney-Vento liaisons in Connecticut" and find the contact information of your representative in your school district. Or ask your guidance counselor.

The school won't let me register until they get records. How long do I have to wait?

If you are a student that is experiencing any of the situations described above, you have the right to be registered immediately - even if you don't have proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents. If the school disagrees with you, you still have the right to be registered immediately while the disagreement is worked out.

Can I do after-school activities? Yes. You have the right to be involved in all school activities.

How can I register in school if I am not living with my parent or guardian?

The liaison will help you register if you are by yourself. You are considered an "unaccompanied youth."

Do I have to leave my school when I find a place to live?

If you find a permanent place to live during the school year, the law allows you to stay in your school for the rest of the school year, if that is best for you.

**For specific information about the law, please call the Center for Children's Advocacy at 860-570-5327 or 203-223-8975.

EXIT SLIP

Instructions:

- 1 per Advisory group
- Submit via Google Doc or paper copy

1. Was today's lesson helpful? If so, in what way?

2. What can you, your school, or your community do to get this information to kids who need it?

3. How can this presentation/lesson be improved?

Involving your School in the CT Youth Count!

The Connecticut Youth Count is essential to getting the **data & resources** that will make it possible to end youth homelessness by 2020. Collaboration between communities, youth, & schools is essential. Schools are one of the most effective ways to engage youth.

1

Conduct the “Youth Rights in School” Lesson Plan

Plan a day that your school will conduct the “Youth Rights in School” Lesson Plan in an advisory period before January 25, 2017.

2

Call for Volunteers!

Post posters encouraging students to volunteer and participate in the 2017 CT Youth Count or “Come and Be Counted” sites.

3

Get the word out!

Make announcements and publicize the importance of the 2017 CT Youth Count!

4

Involve your local McKinney-Vento liaisons!

They should make sure all their unstably housed youth are surveyed and assist in the effort to set up a “Come and Be Counted” site.

5

Start counting!

The CT Youth Count will be conducted from January 25-31, 2017.

Youth Rights and Resources

for Connecticut youth in unstable housing situations

www.youth-help.org

What is youth-help.org?

A project of the Connecticut State Department of Education, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Institute for Community Research, Center for Children's Advocacy, and the Partnership for Strong Communities, **youth-help.org** educates youth, front-line school staff, and community partners about some of their rights under McKinney-Vento Act and provides steps to address these specific issues.

The toolkit includes a variety of online resources to raise awareness of youth housing instability, laws that protect youth rights, and the available resources for unstably housed youth in Connecticut.

Find more at www.youth-help.org/about.



Voices of Homeless Youth

Awareness & Information Video Toolkit

❖ Data ❖ Classroom Guide ❖ Stories

Connecticut Youth Count Statistics

Data snapshot

- 3000 youth identified through enhanced coordination and recruitment methods
- Over 40% indicated having no permanent place to live for over a year
- 30% of females indicated they were pregnant or parenting
- 25% of “literally homeless” youth self-designated as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or questioning

Learn more by visiting youth-help.org and clicking “Data.”