



**BEST PRACTICES
CLEARINGHOUSE**

- Lessons from the Field -

Supporting the Unique Needs of Students Who Have Run Away or Are Homeless

Wednesday, November 30, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET
Transcript

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our webinar supporting the unique needs of students who have run away from home or are homeless. We're pleased to have you here with us today, and on behalf of the US Department of Education, we want to welcome you to the webinar. In fact, we have nearly 1,200 people registered for this webinar. Details about who registered for the webinar are currently being posted in chat. This webinar is part of our lessons from the Field Webinar series, and this series highlights effective tools and strategies employed by everyday practitioners to address the hot topics that are on the top of educators minds. You can access recorded webinars from this series on the webpage that's now being shared in the chat. Although today is the last day of National Runaway Prevention Month, please note that the work to identify and support students impacted by leaving home or being homeless must continue year-round.

Today, we'll hear about approaches and strategies to identify and support young people impacted by leaving home or being homeless. If you have additional strategies that work for your community, please reach out to the Best Practice Clearinghouse at ed.gov to share your ideas and your approaches. Our work is stronger together, and we all can benefit from these shared strategies. Please note that the content of this presentation does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the US Department of Education. My name is Cindy Carraway-Wilson, and I'm the training specialist for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSE. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Please visit our website to learn more about NCSSE, and to access a wide range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning. To give you a sense of what our website looks like and the content it contains, here we share an image of our homepage on the right, along with some of our most

popular products on the left. We also share the latest resources and events coming out of the field via social media, so please do follow us. Please note that this webinar is being recorded. All of the materials that you see today, including the slides, reference resources, and the recorded version of this webinar, will be available on the events webpage within this website. In fact, some items are already there, including the slides and the speaker bios. Please also note that you can access previous lessons from the field webinar sessions by visiting the webinar series page, which is also listed here and will be posted in chat.

Before we begin the content, I'd like to briefly show you the agenda for today. We will begin with the introduction and logistics, which we're in now, and then we'll hear from Mr. Bryan Williams, who will provide a welcome from the Department of Education. Then we will have an overview and some context setting presentations from two presenters that will set the groundwork for our dynamic panel discussion. After the panel, we'll do a formal closing of the content section of this webinar and move right into our live Q&A. We will field the questions from you, our audience.

We have a great lineup with speakers today, and a wonderful set of panelists, as well. Our speakers, as you can see, come from a variety of different locations and organizations, and they will share information on what we could all do to support young people who might have run away or might be contemplating leaving home, or who are experiencing homelessness, and how we can help them to achieve in schools, and how we can partner with community-based organizations to support these students. Just by way of reminder, as we move into our presentations, please remember to use your Zoom webinar icons to post those questions in the share your reactions to our presentations. Now I'd like to introduce Mr. Bryan Williams. Mr. Williams is the director at the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education in the US Department of Education. He will provide us our welcome today from the department. Mr. Williams?

Bryan Williams:

Great, thanks, Cindy, and good afternoon, everyone, and thanks for joining today. In honor of National Runaway Prevention Month, I'm pleased to welcome you to today's lesson from the field webinar, supporting the unique needs of students who have run away or are homeless. So the National Runaway Safeline, or NRS, which you will hear more about in a moment, reports that approximately 4.2 million young people between the ages of 13 and 25 experience some form of homelessness each year in the United States.

In 2021, 44% of the callers to the NRS were contemplating running away, or had already left home, while 3% of them had been kicked out or asked to leave their home, resulting in more young people experiencing homelessness and the risks associated in unstable housing. Some of these young people move in with other family members or with the families of friends, and unfortunately, others struggle to find a stable place to call home, and they are forced to sleep on couches with different friends, or even live on the streets, or even make other arrangements, which can change from day to day and from night to night.

In the 2019, 2020 school year, public schools identified 1.3 million students who experienced homelessness, some of whom ran away. This number likely underestimates the number of young people experiencing crises who are living in unstable housing, either because they left home, or their families are homeless, particularly, given the challenges of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. There are opportunities for concerned adults to help, and schools play a critical role in helping students to avoid leaving home, or supporting them in partnership with community-based organizations to find safe and suitable housing. In fact, in 2021, 85% of callers to the NRS reported that they were experiencing difficult family dynamics, and 51% of callers reached out while they were actually still at home. So for these students, education can be disrupted due to their chaotic living circumstances, as well as the family dynamics that led them to leaving home in the first place.

The reasons for leaving home or living in homelessness vary, and homelessness has a direct impact, as I'm sure you know, on students' abilities to achieve in school. Low education achievement is also a risk factor for future homelessness. Success in school can help young people avoid future homelessness and provide opportunities for them to contribute to their own health and wellbeing, and also to their communities. The US Department of Education is committed to ensuring students who run away or are homeless, are provided opportunities to connect, to learn, and thrive in our schools, through healthy relationships with adults, learning supports, attention to their physical and emotional health, and effective connections with organizations that can provide assistance.

So today, you will learn more about the rates and causes of runaway behavior and homelessness, and you will also learn about services that you can help students access to ensure their living situations are safe and stable as possible. Our panel will share how they work in partnership to keep these students in school while working to support the whole student with wraparound services. So we appreciate you being here, and thanks again for joining us today. We hope that you will find these lessons from the field webinar informative to the work that you do in your communities. So now, I would like to turn it back over to Cindy, who will launch the webinar.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Thank you so much for those comments and for providing such a warm welcome, Mr. Williams. We appreciate you being here, and we obviously appreciate the department's commitment to these students. Now, it's my great pleasure to introduce Ms. Ana Cody, who is the senior advisor of human trafficking and strategic initiatives within the US Department of Health and Human Services, at the Administration on Children and Families and the Families and Youth Service Bureau. Ana?

Ana Cody: Thank you so very much, Cindy, and happy to be here. So today, we're going to share a little bit about the National Runways Safeline, what the safeline does, a little bit of the latest data that we were able to capture in 2021, and what does that mean for our work, as well as some resources that we ... we feel that there are tools that they can help you and your efforts to prevent runaway incidents, and also identify and support youth experiencing homelessness. So you may be already familiar with the runaway and homeless youth programs and youth

communities. They are the one on top of the PowerPoint slides, and the runaway and homeless youth division within the Family and Youth Services Bureau support and oversee programs for runaway and homeless youth across the country. They also support abroad, grantees to programs who actually provide and build the capacity of runaway and homeless youth programs or RHY programs, as well as provide related research and information as it relates to the youth homelessness field.

We also fund the National Runaway Safeline. The National Runaway Safeline serves as the federally-funded communication system for youth who are experiencing homelessness, youth who are on the run, youth who are contemplating running away, as well as for their parents and families. The safeline not only provide crisis services prevention and intervention, but also provides technical support to school settings and any youth serving organization working with you, who might be at risk of running away or experiencing housing instability and homelessness. The safeline also leads all the prevention efforts across the United States, and the more recent one is, of course, the National Runaway Prevention Month's campaign, which is ending this today.

So here is, in a little more detail, some of the services of the safeline. And left side, you'll see everything that you can find, and all the services that they can provide when you are calling and connected with the safeline. And here is 1800runaway.org, which is the website, which also, people and youth communicate with and connect with the safeline, but also, you can find additional resources. They can help you with all your efforts which relate to youth homelessness. And I'm going to talk a little bit more about these resources shortly.

So here is a snapshot of the website. We work really closely with youth the last three years to make sure this website was youth friendly, it was easy to navigate, you feel safe when they are talking to crisis services in the safeline. It's accessible to phones, laptop, any devices. So we were really happy to release the website, I believe, three years ago, to make sure ... and we have seen a little bit of increase of the visits of youth since we launched this youth friendly website. What I really wanted to share today is about the data and crisis report. This month, the safeline released the latest crisis services that really provides a snapshot or highlights some of the situations, behaviors, services that those who contact the safeline, that specifically use the safeline, receive over 100,000 contacts every year.

So for this specific report, we separate the data to concentrate just on youth, and we feel that it was important to separate that type of data for this report, because we want this report to be useful for you for the field, provide really helpful information for services and outreach efforts with working with youth, who are really reaching out for crisis situation and contemplating runaway youth who are on the run, and youth experiencing homelessness. I think the more important piece here of the data, for me is, the data always tells a story, and this is the story of the youth who have the courage to go to the safeline and reach out when they need support. We also feel that it's important to really

reinforce the seeking help behavior of the youth, when they are aware of where our resources are located, they will find a way to reach out.

So that is the more important piece. When you are reading the report, you will see this is a story of all the youth who reach out in a year period to the safeline, and we wanted to tell that story. Here is a little bit ... now we're going to go into a little bit into the data. I wanted to encourage to download the report. It provides more details about this data and how you can utilize this information in your outreach efforts, and also, any type of prevention activities in your schools and programs. So as you see, we also met the youth where they are. So youth are reaching out through online services, we have seen the change in probably the last seven or six years, but more I think more high levels of online services in the last three years. Probably, it's an impact of COVID-19.

You feel more comfortable sharing their situation or their crisis, and looking for options through the online services that are being offered by the safeline. Here, when we ask the youth how they learn about the safeline, they also say that they learn through social media platforms. So in the last three years, we have put in a lot of effort doing the safeline to be more intentional about reaching the youth where they are, not only in the emotional piece, and in the trauma piece of reaching out to youth, but also, where there are communicators, how they're communicating, and how we are changing the way that the language that we use to ... sometimes, they understand that what they're experiencing, it's not ... what is runaway mean, what do homelessness mean?

So we have changed a lot of the work, and we have seen an increased result in a positive result. The youth are actually learning about the safeline and remember what they learn about it online, and reaching out when they need it. Here is really quickly about the age, gender, and age of the youth who reach out. I want to point out here that, in the age group, you will see a large number of youth between the ages of 12 and 14 that I really wanted to highlight. There's also a little bit of the challenge that we say, we have seen an increase of youth under the age of 12, reaching out to the safeline and being overwhelmed with situations at home.

This is the first time, I think in the last two years, we have seen this trend. So that means for us and for the field, how the way that we train our capacity building to have discussion with the youth, what services are available for the youth, and also for the field. We reaching out to all these youth from 12 to 17 now, but we also have to think about prevention when it comes to younger youth or students, as well.

Very quickly, here is a top issue. So when the youth call the safeline, they go through all these options, and they ask why the reason that they are thinking of running away, while they feel overwhelmed, and they feel there are no more options. And here the four top issues that they raise, family dynamics, family violence, emotional or verbal abuse, as well, mental health. Within the last 10 years, we never heard about mental health being on the top priority, but we have seen an increase probably since COVID-19, and the four peer and social issues, cyber bullying, bullying, peer pressure, as well.

The good news, and .. for that is it allows for us is, a lot of the youth are reaching out to the safeline at home, and that gives us a little hope for prevention. So these are the youth who are still overwhelmed, thinking about running away. They are experiencing some form of housing instability or homelessness. They are not living on the street yet, but they are in that kind of gray area. The good thing here, there's an opportunity for prevention. These youth are the one in our communities, they are the one going to a school, or maybe missing a school, and that is an opportunity for all of us to coordinate, collaborate, and support these youth who are actually reaching out and looking for options and support.

Here, a little bit of the trends, when we compare this year report to the last previous two reports, in 2020 and 2019, we have seen, as we talked early, an increase of youth reaching out under the age of 15. Here, for the first time, we had changed a little bit, the way of the crisis services, is the how, the message, and we can see an increase of youth who identifies as transgender youth, or LGBTQ youth, as well, reaching out to the safeline. And for the first time, we have seen ... we always know that a lot of youth who are experiencing high numbers of experiencing homelessness identify LGBTQ, and we didn't see those youths reaching out to the safeline. Now we're seeing how the way that we are being more inclusive, how the youth are reaching out more to the safeline for support.

Also, for the first time, we have seen youth from underserved population. Here, we see African American youth reaching out in more numbers to the safeline. And that is really, I think, the result of some of the efforts, the outreach that we had changed in the safeline, to intentionally reach out to youth with messages that they understand. So we have seen, this is our result, and we hope to reach out to more youth from underserved populations, as well. Here, mental health, we talk about it going into increase in 2019. When you go into the report, you will see more details about what that means, mental health, what kind of mental health issues that are raising, and what numbers and percentage to each of those situations related to mental health. So here is some of the resources the safeline has available for schools to coordinate and support youth, and also to reach out and increase the stability of the safeline.

The Let's Talk Prevention Curriculum is a 14-module evidence-based curriculum, who really is looking into teaching youth about critical thinking, life skills, ways to present to look for solutions before running away, recognizing who they are in their support system, increasing the knowledge about resources, what to do, what is runaway reality, and what does that mean to experiencing homelessness. So really, it's a 14 module. You don't have to implement the whole 14 module, each module has a specific theme so you can actually download ... it's available in English and in Spanish. Safeline is also available to provide support, how to implement this curriculum, and you can download it through this link, as well. Here, education and outreach materials, they're all for free. We have schools displaying these materials in bathrooms, and sharing with the parents, as well as with students and to the classrooms.

You can either download these materials, but also, you can fill out the form here, and the safeline will send materials for free to your school, and provide some technical support to see if you need additional information, presentations, any materials and resources that they can help you to increase the visibility of the safeline as a resource, but also to have discussions about where to find resources for parents and students. Here, if you need data to talk about issues for running away in your communities, in your states, in your county, in your city, you can reach out to the safeline.

This is a free tool that the safeline has started to share, I think, two years ago, where they create this type of infographic that you see. If you are from Illinois, here is a snapshot from the 2021, a letter of schools you serve, and organizations feel that this is very helpful when they are trying to do presentations or looking for support when it comes to youth homelessness and runaway incidents in their own community. In 2020, the safeline released a list of podcasts. It really was an idea to elevate the voices of youth, youth who are experiencing homelessness, and know the intersectional challenges that they face through that period. So you will hear, if you visit the website about discussions with the youth about mental health and youth homelessness, mental health. In school settings and youth homelessness and mental health.

They also want to talk about their accessing healthcare, how they're experiencing homelessness and the different areas of the country. But also when we were actually working this podcast, we also saw an opportunity to use as a tool to elevate the voices of the field. So we also are inviting, or state line invite professionals working with youth, mental health professionals, those who are working with runaway homeless youth in school setting to share practices through the list of, so I do invite you to visit the website. They also in the last couple months, we were able to also integrate this podcast into different platforms, so at least Google and Apple as well. So you have a lot of platforms that you can choose from and listen when you have times about the experiences of the youth and also practices that can be helpful as well.

As we move forward, we are also working very closely with the department of education. We feel that you can see through these webinar that youth homelessness and addressing youth homelessness and run away prevention is an important topic and priority for Department of Education as well as for the Family and Youth Services Bureau.

So we are planning for different activities in 2023. Here as you will see in the bullets is a lot of the activities that we're planning. So they tailor training for school settings about, with the state line about practice services. Also, as well as for the Let's Talk curriculum as well. We are going to be working on designing resources specifically for the schools and messages for youth. Also bringing youth into the voices, youth voices into schools through the youth ambassador program that we have in the state line and how youth can also share their experiences with other youth and encouragement there to seek support. Also, we're going to be working on national webinars to highlight the coordination practices and coordination of runaway and homeless providers. The same line in the school of nation guide. So that is all for me. Thank you so much for the time.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Ana, thank you so much for all that valuable information. I'm sure that the graphics and the statistics that you gave would be helpful for folks who are trying to bring up this issue in their districts. We appreciate all that you've shared. And now it's my pleasure to welcome Ms. Megan Johnson. Megan is the program specialist with the National Center for Homeless Education. And she's going to give us some more information on things that we can do to help ensure that young people in unstable housing can still achieve at school. Ana, excuse me, Megan.

Megan Johnson: Thanks Cindy. And so happy to be here today. Thank you so much and welcome to this session. Oh, is it going to work? Oh, there we go. So it's a little slow. Welcome to this session, first part of the session titled Supporting the Education of Runaway and Homeless Youth. And a little bit of information about the National Center for Homeless Education. You may also see us referred to as NCHE. We are the technical assistance Center for the US Department of Education. On behalf of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, which includes the McKinney-Vento program. We provide technical assistance, opportunities and resources to grantees. We do in-person and virtual training sessions, peer-to-peer learning communities, on demand, virtual training courses, tip sheets and research briefs. We also provide direct supports to education for homeless children and youth grantees. We work with schools, service providers, parents and other stakeholders to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can enroll and succeed in school.

A couple of our staff members also provide technical assistance support to grantees of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program. We have a comprehensive website and I believe that our lovely moderators are dropping some links in the chat. And that is ncg.ed.gov. We also have a helpline that provides technical assistance to inquiries on the federal statutes regarding the education of homeless children and youth. Our products serve educators who work with students experiencing homelessness in early childhood education, K through 12 and post-secondary and are can be especially useful to local liaisons, state coordinators, school social workers and school counselors, as well as other school staff who interact with students experiencing homelessness.

We also have partnership resources that can be helpful for housing and community service providers. We offer webinars on many different topical areas, including such as determining the McKinney-Veto eligibility, understanding doubled up, paving the way to college, drop out prevention, et cetera. To access these training webinars as well as additional ones, you can go ahead and click on our webinars group training link. We utilize a list serve to broadcast newly released products as well as updates from our national state and local partners. And you can also find us on social media at Twitter and Facebook where we also post information on trainings, upcoming webinars and feature communities, work on cross system partnerships as well as updates from our national, state and local partners.

So where we're headed today, for this specific session, is I'm going to cover some national data on homeless children and youth. I'm also going to speak a little bit more to identifying students experiencing homelessness, including a

runaway homeless youth, the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, the role of the local liaison and benchmarks for identifying students. As well as provide an overview of available supports for students who are experiencing homelessness and how to locate your state's department of education state coordinator, and your local liaison in your community. We'll move into leveraging partnerships to support students experiencing homelessness and then end with some resources for further information.

To get us started, I just want to provide a little bit quick data. I'm going to do it real quick and dirty because we don't have a lot of time, but if you want further information or have further questions, you can always email me. And also our moderators will be dropping links in the chat to where you can access this data. I'm going to cover some information on the number of children and youth who are enrolled in pre-K to 12th grade across the country, rates of chronic absenteeism and graduation rates.

On this chart right here, you see that this shows us the number of homeless children and youth who are enrolled in public school by year from pre-K through 12th grade nationally. So what we see is that in the school year 2018 to 2019, there was 1.3 million homeless children and youth were enrolled in public school. In the school year 2019 to 2020, we see 1.2 million and it dropped at school year 2020 to 2021 to just over 1 million.

I do want to note to use this data set with caution as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, you do see that decline in the number of students enrolled and that is a result of the impacts of identification of eligible students. This data is provided by local school districts, as in is reported to their individual departments of education, which is then reported to the US Department of Education. And there is going to be a link dropped in the chat where you can access this data set. You'll see on the right side of this screen as a screenshot of a new publication the NCG just released actually today. You can find it on our website and there is a link on that final resources slide where you can access this and it is titled Student Homelessness in America for School Years 2018 to 19, to 2020 to 2021.

The publication presents state and national data on the diverse populations of students who have experienced homelessness, their primary nighttime residence and race and ethnicity. The publication is really intended for state coordinators of departments of education and local liaisons, but may really also be of interest to policy makers, advocates, educators, service providers, and parents guardians for caregivers. I also do want to note that the American Rescue Plan, homeless Children and Youth Funds allocated 800 million dollars in 2021 to enable children and youth who are homeless to attend school and participate fully in school activities by improving services and outcomes. For more information, there's another link that's going to be dropped in the chat to oese.ed.gov.

Looking at chronic absenteeism among homeless children and youth, there is another link that will be dropped in the chat where you can access further data from eddataexpress.ed.gov. And this chart includes four years of data. So you

see school years 2017 through the end of school year 2021. You'll notice that the number of homeless children and youth who are chronically absent has actually gone down by 12% when compared to the school year 2018-2019 to our most recent year. When we look at this percentage change for the two most recent years for chronically absent students, both homeless students and students overall did see a pretty big increase in chronic absenteeism. But the increase in homeless students who were chronically absent was less than half the increase for students overall. So when we look at a three year comparison for all students, there is still a significant increase in the number of students who are chronically absent versus homeless students who saw a 12% decrease.

So what we can glean from this is that we are reducing chronic absenteeism even in the face of a pandemic. If you would like, we also just had a new publication that just was posted to our website today as well. And it is the release of an NCHE report on chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness. That link will also be at the last slide on the resources slide. Looking at adjusted cohort graduation rates, this means that grad students graduate within four years of starting high school. And the shading of the map really indicates how big that gap can be between economically disadvantaged youth and homeless and children and youth when we're looking at graduation rates. And the first thing I want you to notice is that there is a gap in every state. In every state except Nevada, the economically disadvantaged students had higher graduation rates. So that can prompt us to ask a series of questions about why. And based on those answers to those questions, what supports can we put into place to really help students who are experiencing homelessness or are runaway homeless youth to get to graduation. And we will also be, NCHE two also be releasing a report on the adjusted cohort graduation rate here soon as well.

Thinking about identification of students experiencing homelessness, that is really the first step to be able to provide those supports that we can give them and that they need to be able to be successful and stay in school and get to graduation. When we think about identification, we want to consider the use of the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and really focusing on those students who have a lack, a fixed, regular, and nighttime residence. This includes students who are sharing housing, also considered doubled up. Students who are living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, campgrounds due to an alternative, adequate, due to lack of alternative, adequate accommodation. Are living in emergency and transitional shelters, are abandoned in hospitals, are living in public or private places, not designated or nearly used for regular sleeping accommodations for human beings. Are living in cars, parks, public places, abandoned buildings or bus or train stations or similar situations. And migratory children living in the situation above. There is a link being dropped in the chat where you can access more information on the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness.

Every school district has, underneath the McKinney-Vento Act, every school district has a local liaison whose role is to identify students experiencing homelessness and determine eligibility under the McKinney-Vento program to receive supports to students to support eliminating those barriers so that they

can continue to go to school navigating homelessness. I do want to note that this is a condensed list of those statutory duties and you can find more information in the link that will be dropped in the chat to our NCHE Homeless Liaison Toolkit as well as NCHE's topical webpage on identifying. Some of these main roles as they pertain to our students experiencing homelessness include identification of homeless children and youth, really in coordination with other individuals such as a building point of contact, which can be a school social worker or a school counselor or another individual who is named as that building point of contact.

Also ensuring that immediate enrollment in school and access to services despite not having records to be able to present it from their previous school. Also providing referrals to services in the community. This is really part of a local liaison's role to really ensure that students experiencing homelessness are being referred to those wraparound supports such as housing, behavioral health, healthcare and academic supports, and coordinating collaborating services. This also includes with your state coordinators at your State Department of Education, including as well as community and school personnel. And this also includes collecting and reporting data. And providing training and other support to school personnel. Think about including student support staff such as transportation for an office staff, nurses, janitorial, food service and school security staff. And thinking about what other school staff really interact with your students experiencing homelessness. Runaway homeless youth grantees can also be included in McKinney-Vento trainings to really support that awareness of the education supports that are available to runaway and homeless youth and who to contact in your school district to refer a runaway and homeless youth client.

Local liaisons, as I mentioned, are tasked with identifying and providing supports to students experiencing homelessness. This is a list of some of those supports that students who are eligible for McKinney-Vento are entitled to under that act. And they include transportation, connections with extracurricular activities, access to free school meals, which include breakfast and lunch, academic assistance, school supplies, connections to community service providers and fee waivers for AP tests, ACT and SAT tests, as well as fee waivers for college applications.

When we think about identifying youth experiencing homelessness, we also want to think about what are the possible signs of a student experiencing homelessness. I do want to note that this is not a comprehensive list. There is going to be a link dropped in the chat to one of our publications on potential warning signs of homelessness. These signs can provide an opportunity to really break down assumptions that we may hold, such as maybe there's a student who is behind on classwork and has erratic attendance. Instead of assuming that they don't care about their education, there may be something else that is going on. So this is an opportunity to check in with that student. And I also recommend looping in the school social worker, the school counselor or the local liaison, to really follow up with that student and make sure that they have the support that they need if there's other things going on.

And identification of services. Using benchmarks can really be a tool to help evaluate if your schools are under identifying students experiencing homelessness. And identification being that first step to providing those supports. So you'll see the number 2.5% of the overall student population and 6.5% of students eligible for free lunch. These are national rates that can give local schools a starting point to determine if they need to improve their identification efforts. If the overall McKinney-Vento numbers are below 2.5% of their total student population or 6.5% of their free lunch students, it is a sign they might need to engage in more outreach. Thinking about when you need to maybe strengthen your services using an equity lens, focusing on those student outcomes, what is beneficial for the students? Also thinking about including your youth with lived experience and their allies in those planning processes. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the term, "Nothing about us without us."

And if you do find that you may be under identifying your student population, some questions to consider for improving that outreach and identification can include: How is the McKinney-Vento Program information being shared? Where is that information posted, either in your school building and out in the community? Do the images on those documents represent all the students? What languages are you putting on your outreach materials and information materials? And what populations do the service providers that you partner and coordinate with serve? And next I'm going to walk you a little bit through, I won't be able to screen share, but I can just talk to you about it, about how to locate your state coordinator at your State Department of Education and your local liaison. So you'll see at the top of bullet of this slide, there is a link here that's locate your state coordinator here.

So I've given an example on the right hand side of this slide. And so when you click on that, locate your state coordinator, it'll bring up a map of the United States. And so the example I'm giving you is for Washington State because that's where I live. And so if you clicked on Washington State, it would take you to a two page document where on the left hand side you will see information on who the state coordinator for the Department of Education is in Washington State is. So for this case it's Melinda Dyer. And you'll see at the bottom on the right hand side of the slide that there is a red oval and that is circling a link to click on locating the, for accessing the Washington liaison directory. So that brings up an Excel spreadsheet that shows all the different local liaisons all around the state that I live in and their contact information.

I would like to note that state coordinators and local liaisons are really encouraged to reach out to runaway homeless youth grantees at least once per year to really coordinate supports for using young adults, provide data and exchange contact information. And leveraging partnerships to improve identification and supports. So experiencing homelessness, this is where we would really make sure that we can work together as a team and to really improve referrals to students who are experiencing homelessness and are runaway homeless youth. Schools are really a natural partner in this work and education is a pathway to making those sustainable exits from homelessness. Some thoughts about how you can think about doing this include potential partnership opportunities to really improve those outcomes. Could be training,

as I mentioned earlier, inviting all of the staff who may interact with students experiencing homelessness to your McKinney-Vento training.

Those can include transportation, all your front office staff, your food service staff, janitorial and some of those other folks that may have interactions with your students experiencing homelessness. Thinking about your referral systems, collaborate with your community-based organizations such as domestic violence shelters, dropout prevention programs, and faith-based organizations. And thinking about where you're getting your information to improve those outcomes. Using surveys or focus groups, empowering parents, guardians, caregivers and community members to give feedback. And really supporting your students experiencing homelessness with those transitions by leveraging your school counselors, your school social workers, and your systems navigators to help them transition out of K through 12 and into those next steps.

And lastly, I'm going to just drop this slide for you. I believe that this will be, I believe that the slide decks have been archives. So you can access all these resources. You'll also have access to my email. So if these aren't quite fitting what you need, please feel free to email me and I can help point you in the right direction. Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate it. And here is my contact information as well as information for our help line.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Megan, thank you so very much for all that information. There have been a lot of questions in there about how to make contact with some of the local liaisons and things like that, so I'm sure people will be in contact with you. Thank you so very much.

At this point, I would love to welcome in our panelists. We have Ms. Chandra Martin, Michael Ferguson, Suzanne Brown Koroshetz, and Sparky Harlan all will come on their webcams. And we are going to engage in a conversation about what this work looks like happening in real districts, in real communities and real schools. Thank you all for being here today. I greatly appreciate you participating with us.

So I'd like to begin our conversation by having each of you respond to the question about why it's important to recognize that young people who have left home or are experiencing homeless, really can exist anywhere in any district or community. And for this, I'd like to begin with you Chandra.

Chandra Martin: Okay. Good afternoon everybody. Just want to say, some people, I think it's just like a natural disaster or a mass shooting. You think, "Oh, it'd never happened in my town. Or we've never had a tornado." Life just happens and it could happen anywhere. And especially when you're dealing with our middle school population, they kind of want to be a kid. They kind of want to be grown, so they decide, I'm just going to leave home. That happens everywhere, in every community. And I think I heard a statistic the other day, and it said that families that earn less than \$50,000 a year, 72% of those families are living paycheck to paycheck. So becoming homeless can happen to anybody at any time, whether it's from a fire or you lose a job, or it's one parent in the family and they get sick and can't pay bills and can't pay the rent. It can just happen to anybody.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Right. Absolutely. And that's a really good thing to emphasize, especially since COVID. It feels like more and more people are living on that edge. Thank you so much for those points. Michael, would you like to join the conversation? Oh, you're on mute.

Michael Ferguson: Sorry. Thank you. I greatly appreciate being here and being able to contribute to this important conversation. I feel like I'm speaking from the ground. Kids in Crisis provides crisis intervention and emergency shelter. We're a basic center. We're on the front lines, and I'm the data person. And quite frankly, I know the data is not always correct. This is a population that is under counted. I can tell just from the cases that come to us, there may be a presenting problem, but there's homelessness behind it. Some of these kids, especially the adolescents, are hiding in plain sight. Some of them don't want to be found, the system, their family or whatever has failed them, and they think they're better off on their own. And it's incumbent upon the adults in order to be paying attention, to be watching and to be listening. And this is one of those instances, and it's very cliché to say that it takes a village, but it does.

It requires everyone in that school community to have their eyes and their ears open because it's just not visual. You're going to hear about it, you're going to hear about the difference in behavior of a child. Well, what is causing that behavior? The fact of the matter is, as Chandra says, it happens in every community. Some of them are more receptive to accepting that and asking for the help. And there are those that worry about what it says about them. We've got to get beyond that. We've got to get beyond that because these kids are there. And as I said, it's my belief and I'm sorry, that they've been failed. Somewhere along the line they've been failed. And now it's up to the adults to try and correct that on their behalf.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Excellent, excellent. And you're right, you had mentioned that we need adult eyes and ears on these young people and a school population, a school community is the perfect place for that to happen, if we can keep the young people in the school communities. For sure. Thank you so much for that. Suzanne, would you like to add to the conversation?

Suzanne Koroshetz: Yes. Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure to be here talking about this really important topic. And as we're talking about how do you recognize or make sure they're counted, I think that we have to remember that unfortunate circumstances happen everywhere. There's no zip code that's safe from sad things or bad things happening. And I think that we as educators and people who care about children have to be sure that we're speaking out, to be sure that everyone is being recognized and being watched for.

We don't want to ... If you're in a community that, oh, it doesn't happen here, what are you telling those young people? They're already hurt and embarrassed and stressed out. Now you're saying, and we don't want to see you. We don't care about you. I think that's malpractice. I think the idea is that you have to watch out for kids who may be slipping through this huge homeless crack. As the moratorium on evictions is now over, who else is going to fall down that crack that was saved through that awful thing of COVID. And I think that we as

... I was in a building and now work with kids in crisis. Also, I think that we have to be mindful that we are maybe their safe line, their place where they're going to find a place to get help, and people to help them, and resources to help them. So I think the idea that tragedy and bad things happen everywhere, we have to all remember that.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Thank you, Suzanne. For sure. And that emphasis on the fact that, again, it crosses zip codes and neighborhoods for sure. And Sparky, what would you like to add?

Sparky Harlan: Sparky Harland, CEO, Bill Wilson Center. We house a thousand homeless youth, minors and families a night in Silicon Valley. And we're in five unified school districts working with McKinney-Vento liaisons. First thing I would say is we did a survey, couches don't count, about five years ago. And we actually asked young people in various schools, "Do you know somebody who's couch surfing, unhousted?" First of all, youth don't call themselves homeless or runaways. So when you ask that you're going to get a no, even when they are.

We found out it didn't matter the income level of school districts. We started with a private Catholic school college prep where they did the survey just to do it to say social justice, but they found 12% of their population qualified as McKinney-Vento homeless. We also did the research in one of the top 10 income levels, zip codes in the United States. That school also did not think they had any homeless population. It was still 12%. So what I'm saying here is the numbers that the homeless center for the education, homeless education is incorrect. I will say it's usually 10% is the minimum, up to high of 30% are doubled, tripled up and unhousted. So look at your population more closely.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Absolutely. So students can identify fellow peers and fellow students who might be couch surfing, who might not be otherwise reported in. They're not sharing it with adults perhaps or what have you. And again, you're emphasizing that you're in pretty high income areas, still seeing this as an issue. So I'd like to just hear a little bit more. Each of you had said, see them, see these young people, notice these young people, hear them. And part of that to me is about identifying these young folks. And we heard a little bit about how to do that, what to look for from Megan and Ana. And I'd like to hear a little more from each of you if you have anything to add, about how you can identify young people who are not living with caregivers or are otherwise homeless. And this is another quick round, and I'll start with you, Michael.

Michael Ferguson: Well, it's so individual. I mean, the title of this is right. It's unique, the unique needs of these kids. Each one of them is unique and how their homelessness manifests in their behavior in their school environment is going to be different. And again, it comes back to that village. If I'm in the school or Suzanne is a former principal, she's not going to know all of the students. Suzanne probably did in her school, but I mean, no one person can. So we need to be open to the voice of the bus driver and the janitor and whoever else may know, the coach, to listen to these. What change in behavior? It's going to be different in each case. And what really requires is an awareness, is again, the community being aware that this is something that they should be looking at. I mean, for the

statistics that Sparky just quoted, it's amazing that in a private school, that it could be so under reported.

Now, come on that with stats like that, I'm not saying that people aren't paying attention, but there are signs that are being missed. And I think it almost requires an individual in each school to somehow be at least the coordinator, the collector of these. Someone that ... If I'm a teacher and I'm Johnny's acting a little differently, who do I go to and talk to about that? Who's going to take little Johnny? Who's going to take the responsibility of following that kid through if it's true that he is indeed homeless? As I said, and I don't want to go on, I can go on because this subject obviously means a great deal to me, but it's very individual. And that's why I think kids are slipping through the cracks, is because we're missing the little signs.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Absolutely. Right, we're not seeing all the little pieces that feed into the larger picture.

Michael Ferguson: And we're not coordinated. Everyone's got to be coordinated. And everyone's got to be focused on this.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Right. And so if we...

Michael Ferguson: And schools are expected to do a lot. I get that.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Absolutely.

Michael Ferguson: They really are. I think they're expected to do a lot more than humanly possible sometimes. But this is where the kids are. This is where we're going to see them. This is where we have the opportunity to lay our eyes on them. And now I'm going to shut up.

Sparky Harlan: I think you went over your 60 seconds.

Michael Ferguson: Thank you.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: And your passion is admirable, Michael. We appreciate that. And you're getting some applause there for sure. And I think part of it is educating everybody in the school about what that pathway is, about the McKinney-Vento liaisons and other folks who are there to be the collectors, I think is the word that you used, the collectors of the signs, and being able to make sure that all school personnel can understand that. You're getting lots of hearts on that. And Suzanne, would you like to add to the conversation something that hasn't been brought up yet maybe?

Suzanne Koroshetz: I think that one of the things that's really critical is for a staff to look at how they build relationships with kids. Right?

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Mm-hmm.

Suzanne Koroshetz: Because that's one of the places where you're going to hear things, you're going to find out things. You're going to find out directly from the child who may be experiencing homelessness. Or you're going to find out from a friend. That I think that we have to look at how we build those. I think on this specific piece, one of the things that I found was important, adding to what Michael said, is teachers have a lot on their plate. So that idea about reminding your teachers on what they can do and what they should be looking for and where they can go if they have a suspicion or a better word, a worry, that a young person is experiencing homelessness.

And what we started was we called it a care group. We had two key social workers, we had a couple of coaches. We had the one or two teachers that knows every kid. And literally they would meet. And teachers could comment at a time. It was posted different periods during the month so that they could talk to their staff to say, "You know what, Suzanne is just off. There's something going on here." But this way you had all the people in the room who could get Suzanne resources, could talk to other teachers, could get to their guidance counselor.

So it was kind of like a care squad, that once it would ... That you kind of had these concerns, but people, sometimes teachers don't know where to go. They're so busy doing all these other things, or the bus driver doesn't know who to walk in and talk to. Or you don't ... You certainly open up anything to talk to any guidance counselor or any social worker. But then when we had this kind of care squad together, it gave that support after the fact, both the teachers that have followed up with this young person, but then the young person and the family, which is really what this is all about. Right? And it helped, letting them know they were heard and a relationship was formed within this bigger group to really get this person help. That it wasn't just one person leading the charge. You had a lot of people helping this young person.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Right, so it's an intentional act of pulling a team together whose role is to do this and to pay attention to these signs. Thank you. All right, and Sparky, what would you like to add?

Sparky Harlan: I'm just going to focus on the parents. I know we're talking school, but what we started doing in the community when we did our research that couches are not a home, is we basically said, "If you know of a kid who's staying with your child all those extra nights during the week, they're there a week, you just think you're the cool house and you don't want to question that teenager, because you think it's private, it's not your business, we say ask them. Basically if you see a teenager hanging out all the time, staying overnight, sit down and start having a conversation, because young people want somebody to ask them how they're doing."

So we teach the parents how to talk to other teenagers, not just their own, and ask them, "Gee, I know you love staying here, but is something else going on? So I would say to ask questions when a kid is hanging out at your house all the time and overnight, because they could need your help and they want your

support. So that's what we teach in our community is get parents, get people to talk to teenagers.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Excellent. Thank you. And that's a super important point, not only to engage the families and the parents. But how many people in the schools, educators, principals, superintendents, bus drivers, are also those parents, right? So that's wonderful. And Chandra, how about you?

Chandra Martin: I think I might have two seconds of information, but one thing I really want to mention, because I heard Michael say it, he mentioned bus drivers, cafeteria workers, everybody has to play a role. And who would know better if a kid is asking for an extra meal or an extra milk or, "Can I take that home with me?" Or a custodial worker that finds a kid in the closet at five o'clock in the morning, they slept there all night, they're going to be able to recognize our kids quicker than anybody else in the district. But also let's reach out to the community. Talk to our police officers. They're going to probably encounter our unaccompanied youth, because they're trying to find somewhere to go. If they're not staying with a friend, they're trying to sleep in the laundry mat or somewhere warm. So we keep saying village, we keep saying relationships. They're both important. Everybody has to play a role.

I guess the relationship part eases us into our next question, but if we have a relationship with the kids, they're more likely to share with us what's going on with them, and we can find help for them. We call our kids, families and kids that are in transition or in crisis. That way you don't have that homeless stigma and that "I'm not homeless." So we understand that. Change the terminology as well.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Right. Yeah right, because labels and words definitely have power. And you said one other thing there that I saw come into the Q and A and it came in through our registration questions. The question is about what does unaccompanied youth mean. Can you just say briefly what that means for our listeners?

Chandra Martin: Just basically in a nutshell, it's when you have a kid or a youth that's not accompanied by their guardian or their parent. So if you have a kid that's living with a cousin or with a friend, they're not accompanied by a guardian or a parent. So that's it in a nutshell.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you. All right, moving into our next question. This is the question about relationships. We know they're the key to... a key protective factor for almost every area of development for human beings and young people particularly. So what are some approaches that one might use to engage and begin to develop relationships with these students who are already in some level of crisis? Suzanne, I'd like to begin with you, asking you specifically to think back to your role as a principal. I mean, you were a principal at two high schools there in Connecticut. And what were those relationship development approaches you used?

Suzanne Koroshetz: So I think one of the things that we did that was the most powerful was we set up an advisory system where students were assigned in it as a team of kids. Kids helped us design the advisory. And they were with the same teacher. They met daily as well as every day to kind of do a check-in check-out, as well as have a lesson at least once a week. The teachers and kids wrote the lessons, but it really formed, we called it House, because it really was a time for them to come together and be a school family. So you got to ... Freshmen, were a little quiet at first, but then as you had those same students and the same teacher throughout the school year, and then through all four years, it's amazing the information you can find out in this informal setting, as well as the faculty and kids would write lessons, understanding that we had different themes. Right?

And a lot of them were about having difficult conversations, and getting to know each other, and really understanding that it was really kind of brave to ask for help. To give them a forum where they were like, "I don't even know where to go. I don't know who to ask. Well, you know what? We are going to have a check-in. We have check-ins every day. I'm going to ask my house advisor. Who should I talk to?" And you became so close with those kids that they probably, hopefully, had relationships with other adults in the building, but they had such a one-on-one relationship with that advisor that I would go by social worker's office, guidance counselor's office, and there'd be a teacher in there that was not on the kid's schedule. And I go, "Oh, that must be their advisor."

And sure enough, that relationship, kind of having a parent, a caring parent, a caring adult in the building, was something that we found helped the relationship piece in a place that the halo effect was incredible. That just watching out for each other, that kindness in the hallway, that kindness in the cafeteria, that the number of referrals that students had for a fellow student that was kind of all taught to them and it became who we were. Like that's what we did for each other. So I would encourage people, there's lots of ways to set up advisories. I would encourage people in school buildings to do that, because it was something I wished I had done earlier. It was a real asset for my kids.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Absolutely. So I heard a few things there. One, it takes a little bit of time, so it's not going to be happening in that first week of school. But also that consistency piece, that consistent checking in, that development of a group or a cohort that can create that family like environment. And finally, that ripple effect that it had into the classrooms and into the hallway, so that's wonderful information. Thank you. Sparky, how about you? You've been making relationships with kids forever.

Sparky Harlan: Yeah. Well, and I'm trying to look at school personnel. We've done a few things. We've been in schools since 1973. That's how we started. And a lot of the work we did was lending to youth voice. We went in and taught young people to be peer counselors, the students. But peer counsel didn't mean they were going to sit down and deal with suicide issues and all this. But all their job was, was to identify other young people who might need a support. Sort of sit down, "How are you doing?" And if they did find there was an issue, they could make a referral.

So we really were establishing and developing how to be a good friend, instead of just appear. And we started doing that among the students and expanded to the teachers and the principal and the rest, where it was just sit down at times and ask somebody how they are. It's just that thing of you don't need to necessarily know them, you just ... What we find out from young people, they say about what they ask for is people don't see them. They just walk by them. They don't say hello. Adults don't engage. So the idea is just connecting with a student you don't know. Go up and just say hello. So that's a lot of what we try to do, is just make sure we are seeing all the students and we're stopping and checking in with them.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Yeah, absolutely. And especially, I think it was Michael who said, one of you said that this population really can be quite invisible, hence the difficulty with counts and things like that. So that feeling of being seen and being heard is so key to our... it's a key basic human need. So that's a nice way to keep that in consideration and pull in that youth voice piece. Thank you. Chandra? You're on mute.

Chandra Martin: I think it was Suzanne that I heard say something about advisory groups, but even advisory groups, committees, whatever it is, make sure we have a youth represented and not just a youth, maybe a youth that's in a homeless situation or has been in a homeless situation. I think they're going to be the best to know what they need. Sometimes we think, oh, they need X, Y, and Z. But sometimes we just need to hear from them, give them a voice about what they need. What do you need to be successful? Just ask them that question. I'm coming from the standpoint of a school district. So we make sure, once we've identified that our families are in transition or we have a student that's in transition, we make sure we do a needs assessment with them. Not just with the student, but with their family to make sure that we're getting them everything they need or referring them to things that they need. Because sometimes we can't use our funds to pay for things that they need. So that's one way we can engage the students.

Another thing is just tapping into their interests. Once we find out that a student is considered a student in transition, find out what their interests are and what they're interested in and what they want to do. That'll engage them. If they love music or if they love art or they may love math, I don't know, sometimes they do. Just connecting them to those resources, not just in the school, but in the community. Maybe there's a art club that they can join at the school and in the community and maybe showcase their work, but just engaging them that way based on their interests and having them focus on their future, not on their past or what their current situation is, but have them focus on their future and that'll engage the students as well.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Right. So again, some of the highlights that I heard you say were that hopefulness, that future orientation is so important because we can get stuck in the negativity of the every day. I mean, our brains are really good at seeing the negatives. And need to work harder to find that hope sometimes and that positive stuff. I also heard you,

Chandra Martin: Relationship.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Talk about, so go ahead.

Chandra Martin: Relationship.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Relationship is key. I've used this quote in the past webinar, but a very famous person in the child youth services field is quoted as saying, "The relationship is the intervention." Right. But you can provide all kinds of stuff, but you're doing it outside of the context of a healthy relationship, it's going to be less meaningful. So I heard that from you as well, and that strength based piece and finding their interests. All right. Michael, what would you like to add to this conversation?

Michael Ferguson: Well, as a community based organization who collaborates with many, many schools, we are very fortunate to have what we call our TeenTalk counselors in 16 different schools throughout Fairfield County. And I will try to represent them well and speak from what they've shared with me. And the fact of the matter is access. These kids need immediate access. You can't put up a barrier in front of them. You need to be able to listen to them and respond to maybe what they need in the moment may indicate a further need down the road. It really is all about that relationship. It is listening to these kids, as others have said, they feel unheard, they feel dismissed, they feel invisible. So it's really listening to them.

We just came through Thanksgiving and for instance, and all of our TeenTalk counselors have the ability to provide food baskets to kids. So that could be an indication. If a child is requesting a food basket, we need to look a little bit further into that. What else is going on in that child's home? So there's many, many avenues to really working with these kids and building their trust and confidence. And again, I think it's having the access. We like to say our counselors are available to the kids all the time, and when they're not available, they have our help line to access if they need it. So these kids, it's really wrapping around them and making them feel safe in a very unsafe world, especially if you're a runaway and homeless. So you've got to be creative, you've got to be imaginative, you've got to be sensitive, and you've got to listen.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Thank you. And I love the fact that you brought up the access piece because anything can be a barrier, whether it's a door or whether it's can you hold for five minutes or whatever. Any of those things can shut the door. So you're talking about really making sure access is present as much as possible and that there's backup person if that individual's not available. Excellent. I'm going to go ahead and move us back to our slides for a moment for a formal closed content. For those of you who are on with us, we still have live questions and we have a couple more pieces for our panel conversation. We hope you can stay with us. But for those of you who do need to log off at the quarter past the hour, we do want to thank you for being with us today. And we want to encourage you to feel free to visit some of the websites that you have.

All of the resources that were mentioned today during this webinar and the recordings for this webinar will be posted on our website, which has just gone into the chat. And you can also access more information on the NCSSE website

at safesupportivelearning.ed.gov. And at the Best Practices Clearinghouse. We also want to let you folks know who do need to log off that we have two more lessons from the field webinars scheduled, one on December 14th on the topic of preventing and intervening in student vaping and one on January 18th, 2023 that will focus in on fentanyl use in students. So what we can do in our schools to help prevent and intervene when fentanyl is becoming a issue for our students.

Finally, you could see in the chat that will be going in a moment, we have a link for you to complete a survey for this webinar. All of the information we collect for these surveys go to the Department of Ed and they also help us to create additional content for you. So these lessons in the field webinars are coming from the field to the field. So we encourage you to provide that feedback. We'd also like to invite you to stay on with us. We will finish our panel and our live Q&A by 4:30. So we hope you can stay for the additional 14 minutes. Now we'll go back to our panel discussion.

And we were just talking about relationships and how important they are for working with the students and the families. So we heard both sides of that. And one of the relationships that is really clear in this panel is the connections between schools and community based organizations. All of you have said that no school person, no school district can do it alone, neither can any community based organization. There has to be that partnership that happens. So I'd like to hear from each of you. I'd like to have you speak a little bit about how schools and community based organizations work in partnerships. What are some first steps maybe that they've taken or how did you make it work? And for this one Sparky, I'd love to begin this conversation with you.

Sparky Harlan:

Yes, and this was one that we established when we were seeing more and more homeless youth coming from homeless families because it's pretty hard to reunite a homeless kid with the family if the family's homeless. So we started out by going to the major school district in Santa Clara County with 20,000 students and said, we want to work in your school district and we want to prove that by helping homeless families get housing and resources, we can improve your daily attendance, classes, truancy will be reduced, behavior problems will be reduced. So it's to your benefit to make sure homeless youth and homeless families get services and we'll do that for you. So we were able to assess this by getting direct access to student databases. If anybody knows how protective we all are on our student databases and our own resources at Bill Wilson Center, it took us a year to hammer out these agreements and we have PDFs.

So both those agreements you can look at. We have one that's 13 pages long. This school district wants us to be responsible for everything, having bonds and the rest. So if you want a difficult one, that's the one to go for. If you have another school district who said, we already work with you, it's one page. But I will tell you this is necessary because it gives us, as the case managers, we can track these kids daily. So my staff who are all bilingual, Spanish speaking by the way, because that's our population a lot of these schools, we check in every day, is the student attending? Did they cut classes? How they doing on their grades? We do all that and we track them down. If they're not in school, we're finding

them. We're going to the parents. At the same time we're working with the family, trying to get the parents housed, trying to get them employment.

So we're doing both. We're not dealing with the young person or a child separately, we're doing with the family. And by proving the success based on how they're doing in schools, schools like us. Right. Because a lot of this is fluffy to them. Oh yeah, well it's great that you can help counsel them and they feel better, but I need that ADA. I need to see the intended approved. And so after doing that for two years, the school's district started paying us to do the services because we brought in more money for them. So I would be glad to share this with anybody who wants to take this on. We won't even go into a school district now with services unless they do this MOU where we have access to this database. And all of them are doing that because all the McKinney-Vento liaisons love us. The school boards love us. So I would just encourage people to get in deep for these services for this population.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Sparky, so you had mentioned that the process took a year, I think you had mentioned. For the beginning phase, what would you recommend for our listeners as a first step of just the opening up the door of a community partnership?

Sparky Harlan: Well, you look at the current provider, the homeless youth, your FYSB provider or who you're already working with in your schools, that they have those links to housing. Clearly we have extensive services. We do behavior health, we do it all. So we have a lot of backup to it. But you can really start with that CBO and start working on more of those relationships. What can they do that's going to help them with attendance? Everybody's trying to track down these kids in the name of COVID, right? Your run away and homeless youth providers can help you do that. So you can really see them as a partner to help you do the things you're trying to do. You're trying to find these kids. I mean, we've lost 25% of our students. Where the heck are they? They change schools, districts, they disappear. And it's hard for schools to do that. A lot of these nonprofits can help partner with you to do that or other homeless providers, so.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Excellent, excellent. So it's that again, we come back to relationships. So developing the relationships with the entities, the organizations and the people within them and discovering which pieces each side can do. What can the school do? What can the CBO, what can the community based organization do? And also for our listeners, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Sparky Harlan: Yeah. I just wanted to add, and this doesn't always cost the schools, because the nonprofits can go to their public entities and apply for the money that will be done at the school sites. So it's another way to bring in outside resources to the schools too.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Absolutely. And one of our other panelists or two of them may be speaking to that as well. Thank you so much, Sparky. And moving over to you Chandra.

Chandra Martin: I need a copy of that 13 page...

Sparky Harlan:

It's brutal. Let me tell you.

Chandra Martin:

I'm sure. I understand because I know we're trying to protect the privacy of our kids. Again, I'm coming from the district standpoint. We're just trying to protect our kids and their families. So I understand what you're going through because I'm sure our people cause that headache for you. So yeah, I agree. Yeah, I need a copy of that. But seriously. Right now, the district, we have an awesome amount of money available to us because of the US Department of Education and grants and things like that. But before we got that money, and that money's going to run out in a couple years, but before we got that, we had to get relationships with our partners because even with the small amount of money we had, a lot of that money, we're not able to purchase things that families really need, blow up air mattresses and things like that.

We can not purchase that with grant money. So we had to create partnerships. Another thing we really needed that families asked a lot about was, I'm trying to get in this rental, but I just need three days of emergency hotel stay. They're kicking us out or something. We were able to form partnerships with hotels where they would provide three days of stay, one per year, maybe. If you have 20 hotels that are able to do that, then you're able to meet some needs of your family. I would just encourage everybody to kind of focus on in kind donations, not necessarily monetary donations for the things that you really need that you can't pay for with your grant money or just those partnerships. That's just how critical they are sometimes. Sometimes our restaurants will have leftovers or they will have food that's about to expire that they can donate to shelters.

There's so many ways that we've been helped through our partnership with groups. But I would just say focus more on non monetary donations to meet the needs of your kids and their families. Of course, churches, they're amazing. Through COVID and everything, they've just been amazing to us. Another thing I wanted to mention that came to me about identifying families that need help and kids. We have kids that age out every day in foster care due to their age. If somehow, and then that's why I wanted to see the MOU as well, because if we can form a better relationship with our foster care entities, we can be there for our kids that are aging out of foster care. Because we know that's coming. We know it's going to happen. We just need to be there and prepare to provide services for those kids. But because of privacy issues and those kind of things, we've got to work through all of that. As long as we keep our kids first, everybody, every entity, every organization. This is all about our kids. We can get what we need for our kids and their families.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson:

So that's a wonderful idea of being proactive because we do know that many young people aging out of foster care do become homeless, especially if they didn't have a network of support outside of the provider. So that's an important one to keep in mind. I like that as an idea. I also appreciate that you pulled in the concept of in kind donations. That hotel donation, that hotel space donation could be a lifesaver for a family, especially as we're coming into winter. Thank you.

Chandra Martin:

You're welcome.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: All right. Now I'd like to hear a bit from Michael.

Michael Ferguson: Well, there's,

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: What are some partnering ideas?

Michael Ferguson: Well, we do partners, as you well know. In fact, on one level we have a 24 hour helpline. So we're very well known throughout the community. We're already working with these schools. They know to pick up our helpline if they have a child in crisis, whether homeless or not. So to some degree we are familiar with these schools, but when we talk about bringing a service into the school, that's a different relationship. That's a more formal relationship. And at Kids In Crisis, and I hesitate to speak for the organization, but I mean we think of ourselves as a guest in that school. We recognize that the school, that's a very important piece of the community and they have their function and their responsibilities and their responsibilities to their students. So we go in there wanting to provide help, wanting to assist. And we've had various receptions over the years when we brought TeenTalk, which is a full-time counselor in a school.

We've had some schools like Suzanne who said, well of course, why would I not want this extra help? And then we've had other schools that would say to us, why do you think we need this? So it's overcoming, in some instances it's just overcoming, not wanting to offend them in any way and really want to say, Hey, listen, we know you got issues in this school. You may not want to recognize it, but there's enough data out there that tells us you do. You can't say that. Unfortunately, it's politics, it's politics and it is relationships. And we're a smaller organization. We've got a lot of MOUs and our lawyer tears them apart, their lawyer tears them apart. Contracts are hard, but we have to respect where the schools are coming from. We want to be an assist to the schools. We want to be a support to the schools. Not a problem.

And so there again is another relationship that's incredibly important. There has to be trust between the two agencies. In fact, one of the ways we build that trust is we don't pick the counselor. We bring candidates and allow the school to pick who they want in their building for those eight hour, eight hours a day. Suzanne is one of those principals that we walked in and presented the TeenTalk program to. So I'm going to throw the ball to Suzanne.

Suzanne Koroshetz: So I,

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Suzanne, what would you add?

Suzanne Koroshetz: Everyone else is very wonderful and they give services out. I just take them all in. And so for me, the relationship piece was when a great organization like Kids In Crisis came and I had a relationship with that organization from my prior school I was in. I was like, yes, I need help here. Right. I think that the idea, it's humbling to be in charge of so many young people. They have so many needs. And so when a great organization's asked for help, I always said yes. And I was lucky in the case of Kids In Crisis, they came to me. I think the other piece that's

important for school based people is to look for who else is out there. I got to know all the church based organizations. They were wonderful to me and my kids, like how they helped.

I got to know a local restaurant owners and you'd watch who supported the kids' basketball teams and the kids' soccer teams and was like, gee, maybe if I go to them, I could get some food at Thanksgiving, donate to my kids. So that kind of idea to always be looking for kindness in someone else and give them an avenue to share that kindness. I found people were very receptive and the kindness in an in kind gift was really happens often and people were proud to say that they helped a high school kid in their town.

The other place that I found was a great resource as a community partner was your after school providers. So if you have your community centers, a Boys & Girls Club. Is there a way that you can have an easy partnership with them so that maybe you figure out how to get your kids to a bus they might need to get there after school. Or maybe your kids don't know that there's such a thing or that there's ways to fill up their hours so they have warm place to go and good things to do after school. I think you just always have to be looking for kindhearted folks that are willing to support kids in your building.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Wonderful. Thank you so much Suzanne. And I can't believe that we're already at 4:30, so we have to end the conversation. We do know that there were some, I know right? There are some questions that we didn't get to, but please, please continue to post your questions to Q&A. We will be addressing them or sending them to the Department of ED. We will be using them, I should say, as a way of developing further resources for you and to guide future webinars as well.

I'd like to thank all of our presenters and our panelists for all of the broad information you gave out today. And for all of you attendees who stayed with us for 90 minutes. We got lots of icons coming up for our speakers and lots of hearts and claps. So thank you all and we hope everybody can continue to work to keep our school environments safe, healthy learning spaces for our young people. Thank you all and have a great rest of the day. Oh, and please do remember, if you haven't already done so, to go ahead and click the link to give us some feedback on this webinar. Have a wonderful rest of the day.