



# Homeless Program

*By Jan Anderson, FPS Homeless Liaison*

## Homeless Services

Let's talk numbers, the law, and comments shared by graduates that were former unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.

I am asked many times a year if we have students in Fargo Public Schools who are experiencing homelessness. During the 2021-22 school year, 299 students were identified as experiencing homelessness. This number was a 20% increase over the previous year.

### McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

#### What is it?

- Primary piece of federal legislation that was initially passed in 1987 related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness
- Goal: ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness have access to the same free, appropriate public education and services as their non-homeless peers
- Mandate: every school district must appoint a local homeless liaison to carry out the duties involved and act as a liaison

#### Who are these children and youth experiencing homelessness?

"Any individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." Examples may include but are not limited to:

- Doubling up with friends or relatives due to hardship
- Staying in a shelter or motel
- Staying in a car or campground
- Living on the street/unsheltered
- Staying in an abandoned apartment, building, or trailer
- Moving from place to place

#### What are the rights of eligible children and youth?

- Right to immediate school enrollment even when records are not present
- Right to remain in the school of origin, if in the student's best interest
- Right to receive transportation to and from the school of origin
- Right to receive support for academic success



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## How do we identify these students?

- Self-referral: homeless residency questionnaire is included in the online registration process
- Self-referral: student and/or family discloses living situation to school personnel
- Staff Identification/referral
- Community referral

## What services do we provide?

- Free breakfast and lunch
- Transportation to school of origin if in student's best interest
- School supplies, hygiene products, school clothing if needed
- Referrals to community agencies for resources, medical/dental, and housing options

## Who provides these services?

McKinney-Vento Team:

- North & Ben Franklin: Mary Krueger, [kruegem1@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:kruegem1@fargo.k12.nd.us), 446-2456
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- Davies & Discovery: Alexis Rinas, [rinasa@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:rinasa@fargo.k12.nd.us), 446-5627
- Elementary Buildings: Laura Bennett, [bennetl@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:bennetl@fargo.k12.nd.us), 446-4957
- District Level: Jan Anderson, [anderja@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:anderja@fargo.k12.nd.us), 446-3187

**The following comments were shared by graduates of Fargo Public Schools.**

## How did you become an unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness? What events led to you being on your own?

“My mom ended up hurting her head two times at work and lost her job because of it. And then her boyfriend left after almost six months of just not understanding what all was going on. He just got up and left so we couldn't keep up the rent even after I got a job and was working.”

“My parents split up and got a divorce. My mom got a boyfriend and then moved out of state with him. She left us kids alone in Fargo. Then the others went to stay with my dad in the Cities. I stayed in Fargo for school.”

“My brother dying from a gunshot, my mom not being able to afford a home with enough room for me, and her not wanting me at home. My mom believes that I left my brother behind to die.”



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She blames me for the whole incident to this day. I cannot sit in the same room with my mom for more than 20 minutes without her starting to cry about how she misses her favorite son. When I got back to Fargo, I was staying with a friend and then couch hopping. I thought my mom would stay out-of-state, but she moved back to Fargo. I still can't live with her.

## **Where did you live as an unaccompanied youth in high school? What was the hardest part of staying there?**

"I stayed with any friends that were willing to let me be there and the hardest part would probably be getting around (transportation to work and school) and being able to sort out free time for myself. I didn't have any privacy."

"I was living in a Youthworks apartment with a roommate. I didn't know her at all so I was usually in my room because I felt uncomfortable. The hardest part of staying there was that my friends didn't visit me that much because I was sharing the place with someone else and also I couldn't have sleepovers."

"I lived at a family friend's house until she threw me out and then I stayed with my sister. I didn't feel welcome anywhere and I didn't feel safe. I felt as though I was just bothering people."

"I stayed with friends and the hardest part was not knowing when you were going to get kicked out and have to find another place."

## **If you could let the people at school know anything about the experience of homelessness, what would you want them to know?**

"It's hard. It's hard always wondering where you're going to sleep. Where to bring your stuff? Is it really worth going to school today or working to get cash at the end of the day for supper?"

"I'd want them to know about the domestic episodes that my mother and her boyfriend had – many of which included me and I couldn't bear it anymore. No kid should have to be raised around violence."

"I would want the school to know my situation and take it into consideration whenever it comes to academics. If grades begin to fall, then perhaps have the counselor pull the student aside and



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ask what's going on. Many students know the counselor is there to help, but don't always attempt to seek guidance. Instead have the guidance counselor seek the student in need."

"The hardest thing about being homeless is watching everybody with their family things and it makes you feel like an outcast if you don't belong. I remember every year at the last home dual, every kid would walk down to the thrusting mat with their parents and they announced all your achievements. With me it was always a coach or a good friend's mom or dad. Being homeless feels like nobody cares about you. If not for the great people I've met along my life, I would probably be in a crack house somewhere doing God knows what."

"I would want them to know that financial assistance makes a difference. Most people are homeless because they don't have money to pay for the expenses."

"I would want them to know that we don't mean to have bad attitudes and that we do care about our education. We just hate life for the moment that we're homeless."

"To save your money and work as many jobs as you can because you never know when it will pay off."

## **What are your hopes, dreams, and plans for the future?**

"I want to run my own business and live comfortably. I want to be able to do what I want, when I want."

"I want to teach special education, to get my health in order, and to never be homeless again."

"I hope that I find a man who will love me for who I am and cherish me. I dream of being successful and having a big house. My plans are to graduate from college, get married, and have more kids."

"I want to graduate from high school and get trained as a welder. I want to be able to support myself and my mom."

"I want to finish college and work somewhere in the medical field. I'd like to be a doctor, but that will take too long. Someday get married and have a family."



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“I want to finish college and maybe be a police officer someday. I want to be able to be there for my son and help other people.”

Thanks to everyone who works to assist students experiencing homelessness!

