Topic: HomeRoom Network Community of Practice
Session 5 – Providing Culturally Responsive Care and Resources; a Focus on Unaccompanied Youth
Date: 10/11/2022
Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm EST

Materials
Presentation Slides: https://cohhio.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Homeroom-Network-session-5-final-1.pdf
Recording: https://youtu.be/oVOqRN7NV64

1. Welcome Activity
    a. Sign in and give your pronouns and your district
2. Introductions and Updates
    a. COHHIO Team:
        i. Ami Diallo, Youth Housing Initiative Specialist
        ii. Evelyn Garon, Youth Housing Initiative Specialist
    b. Updates:
        i. Lisa Brooks has accepted a new position at Abt Associates and will be taking her energy and expertise on youth homelessness to the national level
3. Unaccompanied Youth Overview
    a. Defining Unaccompanied Youth
        i. The McKinney-Vento Act defines "unaccompanied youth" as a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
            1. The youth must be experiencing homelessness AND not be in the custody of a parent/guardian to be considered an unaccompanied youth
            2. There are no program-specific age requirements to be considered an unaccompanied youth. Students of any age can be an unaccompanied homeless youth as long as they are eligible for K-12 public education.
    b. Comparing Definitions
        i. Unaccompanied homeless youth: a youth without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence AND not under the care of a parent or guardian
        ii. Undocumented youth: youth and children living in the United States without legal documentation
        iii. Unaccompanied alien minors: youth under the age of 18 who come to the United States without an accompanying parent or guardian
            1. The term unaccompanied in this context refers to their immigration status, not their McKinney-Vento status
            2. While unaccompanied alien minors are not under the physical custody of their parent or guardian, they are not considered an unaccompanied youth under the McKinney-

Vento Act unless their living situation meets the definition of homelessness

    a. Some unaccompanied alien minors might also meet the meet the definition of unaccompanied youth, as they arrive without a parent/guardian and are often put into unstable living situations

   3. When working with an undocumented student to determine if they meet the McKinney Vento definitions of homelessness or unaccompanied youth, it is important to let students know that:

    a. Immigration status does not affect their services under McKinney-Vento

    b. McKinney-Vento eligibility is not a threat to their privacy/identification

c. Paths to Being on Their Own

  i. The primary reason is family dysfunction

   1. Includes issues related to blended families, substance abuse, pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation

    a. 1/3 of unaccompanied youth identity as LGBTQ+

    b. Unmarried, parenting youth have a 200% higher risk of experiencing homelessness than youth without children

  ii. Parental neglect and abuse, incarceration, illness, deportation, or death can also lead to youth experiencing homelessness on their own

   1. 40-60% of unaccompanied youth were abused physically at home

   2. 17-25% of unaccompanied youth were abused sexually at home

  iii. Youth additionally experience homelessness on their own after running away from home, running away from a foster care placement, or aging out of the foster care system

  iv. **Unaccompanied youth are eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act regardless of the circumstances that led to their separation from family**

d. The Educational Rights of Unaccompanied Youth

  i. Unaccompanied youths have all the same rights as any student experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as some additional ones:

   1. The right to immediate enrollment without proof of guardianship

   2. Assistance from their local homeless education liaison to:

    a. Select a school of attendance, whether the local school or the school or origin

        b. Receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested

        c. Get connected with community partners to meet the needs of the student that they district may not be able to

        d. Ensure the prompt and fair resolution of any disputes in accordance with the Act

4. Identification Best Practices
   a. The identification of unaccompanied youth can be challenging as they often avoid disclosing their circumstances for a variety of reasons
      i. Youth may not understand the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness
      ii. Youth may want to avoid the stigma associated with homelessness
      iii. Youth may be uncomfortable discussing the circumstances that led to their experiencing homelessness on their own
      iv. Youth may be worried about being reported to child welfare or law enforcement agencies
   b. Schools and ESCs may need to conduct target outreach efforts to ensure that these youth are identified. Possible strategies include:
      i. Posting outreach materials in places youth are likely to congregate
      ii. Build trusting relationships with youth across school personnel
         1. Conduct conversations in places that allow for confidentiality
         2. Consider a culturally responsive and sensitive lens when having identification conversations
            a. Instead of asking "are you homeless?" consider asking:
               i. "How would you describe your living situation?"
               ii. "Who are you staying with right now?"
         3. Inform youth up-front about the circumstances that might require a report to child welfare and/or law enforcement
         4. Listen to youth's concerns and wishes in a non-judgmental way
      iii. Enlist other students to help spread the word about services offered to students experiencing homelessness
   c. Discussion
      i. *What is your biggest barrier to the identification of unaccompanied youth?*
      ii. *How does your current enrollment process support the identification of unaccompanied youth?*
      iii. *How do you ask students and families about their living situations?*
      iv. *How might you be able to raise awareness of the services offered to students experiencing homelessness in your district?*
5. Outreach and Engagement
   a. Enrollment

      i. Unaccompanied youth are entitled to enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment or having missed application or enrollment deadlines

      ii. Common methods school districts use to enroll unaccompanied youth include:

            1. The student enrolling themselves using a self-enrollment form

            2. An adult caregiver enrolls the student

            3. The local liaison enrolls the student

      iii. Districts must develop policies not only related to enrolling unaccompanied youth, but also related to determining who can sign for issues and activities as part of a student's ongoing school participation

b. FASFA

      i. Independent accompanied homeless youth do not need to include parental information on the FAFSA. District liaisons can assist youth by:

            1. Notifying them that they can start the application process when it becomes available as early as possible

            2. Writing a determination letter for the unaccompanied youth

            3. Giving the determination letter to the youth

                a. Even if youth aren't sure whether they want to go to college, make sure they have the determination letter in case they decide to apply

                b. Keep a copy so you have it in case you are asked by institutions and/or in case youth lose it

                c. If students know what school they will attend, help them send it to the college via email

c. Best Practices

      i. Use a trauma-informed approach

            1. Keep in mind the challenges that youth experiencing homelessness on their own are facing

      ii. Collaborate across programs to provide wrap-around services

            1. Know where in the community there are resources for families

      iii. Accommodate unique circumstances

            1. Unaccompanied homeless youth may have dual roles (student and employee, etc.), schools should work with students to find solutions that meet the student's needs

      iv. Conduct a need assessment

            1. The needs of an unaccompanied youth may be unclear, and schools and districts can ensure that they meet those needs by conducting a needs assessment with the student

d. Discussion

        i. *What flexibilities does your district offer to support the unique circumstances of unaccompanied youth? What potential flexibilities could your district offer that it currently is not?*

        ii. *Who are your biggest collaborators? Where might there be missed opportunities for collaboration?*

6. Professional Development
   a. Key topics to train district and school personnel on:
      i. The McKinney-Vento Act and the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth
      ii. The effects of trauma on students experiencing homelessness
         1. The unique challenges of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness on their own
         2. The effects of trauma on service providers
      iii. Cultural humility
         1. Ensure staff honor the beliefs, customs, and values of all students
   b. Discussion
      i. *How do you train your staff on the unique needs and rights of unaccompanied youth?*
      ii. *What has been effective in building staff awareness?*
      iii. *Where are there gaps in staff knowledge and capacity to support unaccompanied youth?*
      iv. *How does your district practice and encourage cultural sensitivity?*

7. Closing
   a. Upcoming Sessions
      i. Session Six: Developing, Maintaining, and Sustaining Transportation for Vulnerable Youth Experiencing Homelessness on 12/6/22
      ii. Session Seven: Establishing and Sustaining Nutrition efforts for Students Experiencing Homelessness on 2/14/23