



NATIONAL CENTER FOR HOMELESS EDUCATION

Operating the U.S.
Department of Education's
technical assistance center
for the federal Education for
Homeless Children and Youth
(EHCY) Program

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SUPPORT FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: THE CARE CENTER AT KENNESSAW STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Since the signing into law of the [College Cost Reduction and Access Act](#) ([CCRAA], 20 U.S.C. § 1001) in September of 2007, the issue of college access for youth experiencing homelessness has garnered increased attention. Among other provisions, the CCRAA confers independent student status on unaccompanied homeless youth. This status allows these youths' federal financial aid packages to be calculated based on their own income and assets, and not those of their parent(s) or guardian(s), and eliminates the need for the signature of a parent or guardian on the youths' Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).¹ This CCRAA provision has advanced the work of ensuring that unaccompanied homeless youth have access to the financial support necessary to afford college.

Gaining entry to college and securing financial aid, however, are only the first steps along the path to degree completion. While college entry statistics for low-income, first-generation college students² demonstrate a modest narrowing of the gap between students in the top and bottom income quartiles (The Pell Institute, 2015,

¹ For more information, see Chapter 4 (*Paying for College: Federal Aid*) of the National Association for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth's *College Access and Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness: A Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers*, at <http://naehcy.org/educational-resources/he-toolkit>.

² At the time of the release of this publication, no national-level data sets on college entry and/or completion for homeless students are available. Because many college-bound youth experiencing homelessness are from low-income families and/or are first-generation college attenders, college entry and completion data on these populations may assist in understanding college entry and completion rates for homeless students.

This brief is part of a U.S. Department of Education series of program profiles that highlight local innovations, program improvements, and collaborations that can improve educational outcomes for homeless children and youth.

p. 13), bachelor's degree attainment statistics are less encouraging (2015, p. 33). Seeing the need, post-secondary institutions around the country are building programs aimed at providing post-matriculation support for college students experiencing homelessness. One such institution is Kennesaw State University ([KSU]; Kennesaw, GA). KSU's **Campus Awareness, Resource, and Empowerment (CARE) Center** offers a variety of supports designed to meet the unique needs of its homeless student population. This program profile provides an overview of the work of the CARE Center, with the intention of spotlighting promising practices that may be replicated at other post-secondary institutions.

A STUDENT-CENTERED PLAN

Using a case management model, CARE Center personnel meet individually with students experiencing homelessness, developing an action plan to frame the work of meeting each student's unique needs, and matching the student with campus resources designed to meet those needs. While the case management model is best known for its usage in the mental health field, the Center believes that applying similar principles in working with high-need students in the college environment yields promising results. Students are assessed holistically, paying attention not only to the student's educational needs, but also his or her basic and affective needs.

MEETING THE STUDENT'S BASIC NEEDS

Following the ideas set forth in Maslow's hierarchy of needs,³ the CARE Center first seeks to ensure that their students' most basic needs – including access to housing, food and clothing, linens and personal care items, and bathing and laundry facilities – are met. The Center is meeting these needs through a variety of strategies, including:

- **Housing:** CARE Center personnel refer students to KSU's **Housing and Residence Life**, which may assist with securing housing for the student, or dealing with issues such as where the student may stay during extended breaks when campus housing closes. Center personnel also may use privately donated funds to pay for apartment application fees or emergency housing in times of crisis, or may make referrals to local shelters or housing ministries.

³ For more information about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, visit <http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/hierarchyneeds.htm>.

CARE CENTER FUNDING AND SUPPORT

The CARE Center does not receive any kind of dedicated funding; rather, the Center pulls together existing campus resources already providing services that may be especially critical for high-need students. The Center is coordinated by Marcy Stidum, KSU's Associate Director for Counseling and Psychological Services, with assistance from a team of social workers. Given the affective and other needs of students experiencing homelessness, Marcy and her team see the work of the CARE Center as a natural extension of the broader mission of KSU's Counseling and Psychology Services. This is good news for other institutions that want to initiate similar work but lack a dedicated funding stream. For many universities engaging in this work, staff willingness to invest in pulling together existing campus resources and ensuring that homeless students have ready access to these resources forms the base of a successful program.

- **Food Pantry:** CARE Center personnel support the work of the campus food pantry, which serves any KSU student in need. According to CARE Center Coordinator, Marcy Stidum, many students experiencing homelessness visit the pantry to “test the waters” in terms of how they will be received. Once students receive assistance with no questions asked, they begin to trust pantry personnel and often open up about their other needs.
- **Linens and Personal Care Items:** When CARE Center students go from being homeless to housed, they receive a “care box” filled with household necessities, including linens, cleaning supplies, and toiletries. This service also is offered to Care Center students on an as-needed basis to help them save their funds for other needed items.
- **Bathing and Laundry Facilities:** Care Center personnel work to connect students without regular access to bathing and laundry facilities to related facilities on campus and, if needed, to ensure that the students have the necessary funds to pay for said services.

PERSONAL AND GROUP COUNSELING

Many homeless students have experienced acute stress and trauma as a part of their homeless experience and may benefit from talking with someone about their past and present struggles. Through KSU's [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), students receive assistance in dealing with issues such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, relationship difficulties, eating disorders, grief, and suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

ACADEMIC AND CAREER SUPPORT

If identified as a need in the student's action plan, CARE Center personnel connect students with academic and career services. Through KSU's [Office of Student Development](#) and [Career Services Center](#), students receive a variety of services in both individual and group settings, including tutoring, time management and study skills workshops, and career advising. Additionally KSU's [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) offers support to students to help with issues such as performance or test anxiety, time management, the pressure to succeed, fear of failure, and low academic motivation.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Through private fundraising, the CARE Center is able to assist students in paying for housing and meal plans, gas and grocery cards, apartment application fees, and first month's rent, according to each student's need. Depending on funding availability, the CARE Center also provides scholarships specifically for KSU students experiencing homelessness.

COLLABORATION WITH K-12 EDUCATORS

A student's first year in college oftentimes is viewed as the most critical for all students, but particularly for low-income and/or first-generation students. These students are nearly four times more likely – 26% versus seven percent – to leave higher education after their first year than students who have neither of these risk factors (Engle & Tinto,

2008, p. 11). Because of this, the CARE Center makes special efforts to connect with K-12 educators, including Georgia's State Coordinator for Homeless Education⁴ and local homeless education liaisons,⁵ to smooth students' transition between K-12 and post-secondary education. One of the ways the CARE Center works to smooth this transition is by collaborating with local liaisons to ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth have received a determination of independent student status for purposes of federal financial aid.⁶ This facilitates the timely and smooth processing of the student's FAFSA by the KSU [Office of Student Financial Aid](#). CARE Center also personnel have presented at K-12 education conferences throughout the state to spread the word about the Center's work. As part of the [Embark Georgia Statewide Network](#), a state-level initiative to provide foster and homeless youth with needed supports for post-secondary degree completion,⁷ KSU appointed a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to oversee its efforts to support these vulnerable students. Institutions participating in the Embark Network, including KSU, work to circulate SPOC contact information to K-12 educators to ensure that both the educators and the students with whom they are working know whom to contact for assistance with transitioning to higher education.

REFERENCES

College Cost Reduction and Access Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1001 (2012).

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute. Retrieved from http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Moving_Beyond_Access_2008.pdf

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4 Under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, all State Departments of Education must designate a State Coordinator for Homeless Education to carry out the duties of the position as outlined in the law [42 U.S.C. § 11432 (d)(3)].

5 Under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, all school districts must designate a local homeless education liaison to carry out the duties of the position as outlined in the law [42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(1)(J)(ii)].

6 For more information about determinations of independent student status for unaccompanied homeless youth by a local liaison, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development- or Runaway and Homeless Youth Act-funded shelter director or designee, or college financial aid advisor, see Chapter 4 (*Paying for College: Federal Aid*) of the National Association for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth's *College Access and Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness: A Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers*, at <http://naehcy.org/educational-resources/he-toolkit>.

7 Over the past few years, with support from the National Association for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY), states are beginning to form state higher education networks to identify and address barriers to higher education access, retention, and success for youth experiencing homelessness. For more information about NAEHCY state higher education networks, visit <http://www.naehcy.org/legislation-and-policy/state-he-networks>.

This brief was developed by:

National Center for Homeless Education
800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org
www.serve.org/nche

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