



**DEIDRA C. THOMAS-MURRAY, MSW, LMSW
HOMELESS COORDINATOR AND FOSTER CARE
LIAISON**

**KELVIN R. ADAMS, PH.D.
SUPERINTENDENT**

**ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENTS-IN-TRANSITION OFFICE
801 N. 11TH STREET.
ST. LOUIS, MO 63101
(314) 345-4501
DEIDRA.THOMAS-MURRAY@SLPS.ORG**



HOMELESS RESOURCE SPECIALIST AND CO PRESENTER:

**DERICA A. GRANGER
801 N. 11TH STREET
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63101
(314) 345-4404
DERICA.GRANGER@SLPS.ORG**



ALTHOUGH I'M HOMELESS, I'M NOT ALONE

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Missouri Institute of Mental Health
Lake of the Ozarks,
Missouri 65065



I AM NOT ALONE





BACKGROUND

ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Discussion about SLPS' program; how the program evolved through identification of homeless students, routinely conducting needs assessments, planning & development, creating an operational manual and program description
- Growth and progress of SLPS' program.





NEW GENERATION

COMPOSED BY: LAWRENCE SMITH

When He looks into our eyes, what will he see?
Love that glows unselfishly?
Will we truly love each other brotherly?
Can you see your brother in me?
One for all, and all for one
Oh can it be?
Is it just a mystery?

New Generation
Magic Imagination
We are the ones to be free
New Generation
No Hesitation
We are the ones be free

If we truly love one another just one whole year
Love can cast away all fears.
We can have a world my friend that's full of cheer
If we only lend an ear.
One for all, and all for one
Oh can it be?
Is it just a mystery?





OVERVIEW

- **Communication**
- **Ride or Die**
- **McKinney-Vento**
- **School Challenges...
Environmental,
Psychosocial & Emotional**
- **Investigation**
- **Needs Assessment**
- **Vignette**
- **Hands On**
- **Educate, Collaborate and Engage**



USE A NON-JUDGMENTAL EYE; CAN YOU TELL THAT I AM HOMELESS?





IS YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS/FAMILIES INFLUENCED BY...

- Assumptions?
- Perceptions?
- Investigation?





THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN COMMUNICATING:

- Body language
- Voice tone
- Eye contact
- Stance (physical)
- Facial expression
- Positioning
- Movement
- Bias
- Gestures
- Space
- Culture





DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR STUDENTS COMMUNICATE? LET ME HELP...

- Colloquialism
- Slang
- Ebonics
- Street Sayings
- The King's Language
- Cajun
- English
- Spanish
- French...no cussing
- Sign Language



ALTHOUGH I'M HOMELESS, I AM NOT ALONE

- How do students know they are not alone in the educational arena
- Who is their' mouthpiece
- How often do you advocate on behalf of students or parents that do not effectively communicate
- Are you familiar with the challenges of students
- Do you that some are preoccupied with whether they will eat or have a place to sleep once they leave school...ANXIETY
- Is there a secret to students knowing who is in their corner
- Are you considered a “ride or die” person





RIDE OR DIE





HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF RIDE OR DIE? DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS?

- You fly, I buy
- You start, I finish
- I got your back and your front
- Lean on me
- You can count on me
- No matter what happens, I am here
- My Road Dog
- My “Potna”
- Ace Boon Coon
- Lil Wohtie





WHAT EXACTLY DOES “RIDE OR DIE” MEAN TO STUDENTS?

- Term of endearment
- Friend
- Confidant
- Someone trustworthy
- Their with you until the very end
- A person that sticks closer than a brother
- Dependable person
- Their through good and bad times





WHAT DOES YOUR PROGRAM COMMUNICATE? IS YOUR OFFICE VIEWED AS A “RIDE OR DIE” BY STUDENTS? DO...

- students know that you will go to bat for them?
- they know that they are not alone in your school district?
- you create an environment that is welcoming?
- students feel they can confide in you?
- you keep your word?
- you keep the student's best interest at heart?
- you focus more on what is best for school personnel?
- you visualize your program as child centered/child's best interest?





COMMUNICATION SHOULD...

- ALWAYS be guided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Take place in a non-threatening environment (no hallways...PLEASE!)
- Be child centered and best interest
- Respect environmental and/or psychosocial factors that impact homeless students and their families
- Avoid assuming
- Avoid condescending treatment
- Know that unaccompanied youth (specifically seniors) need your assistance immediately





LAW VERSUS PRACTICE

- What practices does your district have in place to ensure that homeless services matches the McKinney-Vento Law?
- Immediate enrollment
- Transportation
- Free lunch
- Tutoring
- Uniforms
- School activities





WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

For the purposes of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, homelessness is described as...

“Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”

<http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/fedprog/discretionarygrants>




McKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ACT REAUTHORIZED 2002 BY THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

- Main themes:
 - Support for academic success
 - Child-centered and best interest of the student
 - School stability
 - School access





SCHOOL CHALLENGES

- Enrollment requirements – they may not have:
 - School or immunization records
 - Proof of residence or guardianship
 - Other records needed for enrollment
 - They have high mobility.
 - Creates a lack of school stability and educational continuity
 - Lack of transportation, school supplies, clothing, etc.
 - They may experience poor health, fatigue, and hunger.
 - They often face prejudice and misunderstanding.
- 



ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

- Unsheltered
- Lack necessary utilities
- Secured employment
- Family violence/safety (shelters and/or home)
- Unable to secure or maintain supplies, uniforms
- Limited to no access to internet or a place to study, complete homework assignments...
- Family's value of education
- Inadequate housing
- Poor diet





PSYCHOSOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

- Cognitive/learning disability
- Mental health status of parent and/or student
- Anxiety/ worry
- Abuse (emotional, sexual, physical and/or verbal)
- Angry (disruptive)
- Role (within family)
- Development (gestation chemicals), appearance and/or birth defects
- Foster care
- Self worth
- Family secrets





HOW DO YOU GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS?

INVESTIGATE

- As your guide, always use:

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- How?
- Why?





INVESTIGATION CONTINUED

- **Who?**
 - Your intended population, the students
- **What?**
 - Identify their needs based on data collected from the students and/or family
- **Where?**
 - At your office, their school, community or home
- **When?**
 - As needed and as often as services are needed
- **How?**
 - Interpret your data; Listen to your students when they tell you how to best serve them
- **Why?**
 - Federal policy states equal access to the same free, appropriate education as provided to other children and youth



MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU KNOW...



- "Everyone smiles the same language."
- Never underestimate the positive power a smile can make to someone. Make someone smile when they enter your program!





WHEN CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT. BE SURE . . .

- The instrument answers questions that are relevant to the needs of your students so that your office can maximize the level of assistance.
- It is in the student's best interest and child- centered.
- It is in compliance with the guidelines of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- It is respectful of the students and their families.
- Your resources are relative to the student's needs.
- The outcomes are workable.





VIGNETTE #1

- Yesterday, you were contacted by an attorney with a request to enroll a 17 year old 10th grade SPED student that was coming from a highly structured environment due to cognitive challenges and violent behavior. The student had never been in a “regular” education setting. As per the attorney, the student is an “unaccompanied youth” and no longer wishes to have an IEP because he wants to play football. You contact the student’s mom to verify this information; the student answers the telephone and mom discloses that she represents her son.





VIGNETTE #2

- A 15 ½ year old student appears at your office with an adult male, Mr. Booker seeking enrollment. The student has not attended school in 2 years. The last grade attended was 7th grade. Mr. Booker is not a relative but reports, the family moved out and left the student behind. He reports going back and forth to the empty house to feed the student for over a month. The student now resides in his home but requires assistance with enrollment





VIGNETTE #3

- Your office is notified by a shelter staff and attorney that an Intake form had been completed and faxed to your office for a request of transportation. The student is Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K). Reportedly, the student was initially enrolled in your district as a kindergartner but was moved to Pre-K because his birthday did not meet state requirement for Kindergarten. They moved out of your district and now resides in a neighboring district. How do you proceed?



WHAT SHOULD YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEMBLE?

- It should resemble four major themes:
 - School Access
 - School Stability
 - Support for Academic Success
 - Child Centered and Child's Best Interest
- Let's collaborate





HANDS ON...

- At your table, please share what you have done to create an environment that says...although I'm homeless, I'm not alone.
- What does staff, co-workers and families say about your program?
- What can you change?
- Will you change anything?
- Has your role increased during your years of service?
- How do you measure success?





STUDENTS AND PARENTS FEEL WELCOMED WHEN THEY ENTER MY OFFICE BECAUSE...

- I respect their privacy
- I express interest and ask questions when they speak
- I invite them into my office
- I do shirk at their physical appearance or body odor
- I offer academic support (school and/or hygienic supplies, tutoring, uniforms, coats, shoes...)
- I advocate on their behalf when barriers are created and/or challenging behaviors are exhibited in the classroom.
- I ask questions when I am unfamiliar with their language
- I offer praise and encouragement



EDUCATE, COLLABORATE AND ENGAGE BY . . .

- Conducting workshops with staff, district employees, parents/guardians, students, community agencies, shelter staff, deputy juvenile officers (DJO), division of family services (DFS) workers about federal policies as it relates to homelessness.
- Utilizing school secretaries, custodians counselors and principals as a resource to identify and refer students to your office.
- Involving the students' support network in their educational plan.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE TODAY





MAKES A DIFFERENCE TOMORROW

- THE ONLY THING CONSTANT IS CHANGE! Change your way of thinking and delivering services to students.





AN ACT OF KINDNESS

A single act of kindness,
Like a stone thrown in a pond,
Sends rings of ripples outward
That travel far beyond;
And joining other ripples
Flow outward to the sea;
A single act of kindness
Affects eternity.

Author unknown





APPENDIX A 1-8 ARE SAMPLE FORMS

- A1 – Brochures
- A2 – Intake Form
- A3 – SIT Face Sheet
- A4 – School Social Worker
- A5 – What the SIT Office Does
- A6 – District Survey
- A7 – Daily Contact Log
- A8 – Transportation Agreement

