



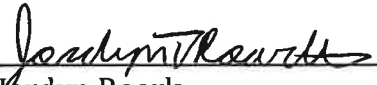
Homelessness in Higher Education:
Providing Basic Necessities to Students as a Foundation for Educational Success

Senior Project

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By

Jordyn Roark
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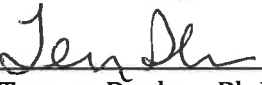
Jordyn Roark
Honors College Scholar

05-03-2018
Date



Tamara Savage, Ph.D.
Faculty Mentor

05-03-2018
Date



Teagan Decker, Ph.D.
Senior Project Coordinator

5-4-18
Date

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Abstract

The foundation for this senior project developed as a result of personal experience and professional interests into the needs of students experiencing homelessness during college. This paper begins with a literature review that looks at children and youth experiencing homelessness, the negative effects of homelessness on a child's education, and the transition from high school to higher education while experiencing homelessness. This paper then describes the service project that was completed to meet the one of the identified needs of this population. This service project involved learning how to apply for a grant, providing dorm supplies to students experiencing homelessness, and learning grant reporting requirements. This paper will close with a professional reflection on this process.

Keywords: Homelessness, McKinney-Vento, Direct Service

Homelessness in Higher Education:

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For my honors college senior project, I decided to complete a service project centered on basic necessity provision for students experiencing homelessness during their transition from high school to higher education. The framework of this service project developed as a result of my personal experience as a student experiencing homelessness and developed alongside my research on the needs of students experiencing homelessness in a higher education setting. This paper will cover the research on the needs of students experiencing homelessness during their transition into a postsecondary education setting, project development and sustainability, and it will close with a reflection.

Research

According to Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, and Berman (2014), one in thirty children in the United States experience homelessness each year (as cited in Wilkins et al., 2016). An experience of homelessness is defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as “. . . individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the K-12 school system, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act works to remove barriers for this population with the goal being that students experiencing homelessness receive an education that is comparable to that of their housed peers (Wilkins et al., 2016).

Homelessness can be pervasive in regards to the negative effects it has on the lives of children and youth. According to Buckner (2008), Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Brumley, and Perlman (2013), Miller (2011) and Obradovic et al. (2009), students experiencing homelessness have lower academic scores, are absent more often, and receive more suspensions than housed students living in poverty (as cited in Uretsky & Stone, 2016). The McKinney-Vento Act works to provide supplemental supports and remove barriers to address these statistics and best serve this population.

Some of the provisions provided by the McKinney-Vento Act include immediate enrollment, transportation to school of origin, and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) verification letters for unaccompanied homeless youth status (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Immediate enrollment allows a child or youth experiencing homelessness to enroll in school without documentation such as a birth certificate or immunization records (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Transportation to school of origin allows students experiencing homelessness to continue to attend and receive transportation to their school of origin if they move out of the district because of homelessness if it is in their best interest (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Lastly, the McKinney-Vento Act encourages liaisons to write a letter verifying a student's experience of unaccompanied (without parent or guardian) homelessness so that that child can be listed as independent on their FAFSA application (Ausikaitis et al., 2015).

According to the National Center on Homeless Education (2017), during the 2015-2016 academic year, 31,948 students in the United States identified as

experiencing homelessness on their FAFSA (as cited in Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Crutchfield, Chambers, and Duffield (2016) and SchoolHouse Connection (2017) state that the true number is likely higher and that there are often difficulties in being verified as experiencing homelessness through FAFSA (as cited in Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Through the McKinney-Vento Act, students experiencing homelessness in K-12 receive support educationally. As of now, there has not been as much attention placed on higher education and homelessness, which has resulted in less supports (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). The goal of this senior project is to support students in the K-12 public school system that are identified as McKinney-Vento during their transition to higher education through basic needs provision.

Project Development

The only reason that I, personally, had specialized twin extra-large dorm bedding, a laundry basket, towels, toiletries, etc. my freshman year of college was because my teachers threw me a surprise graduation party and provided these items. Prior to this graduation party, I remember stressing about dorm supplies after being accepted to the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and I worried that I would “stick out” and that other students would find out my situation. This stress compounded on the various other difficult intersections that I was experiencing and it made focusing on school and other pertinent things difficult.

As I developed through school, the thought of other students in a similar situation not having basic necessities like bedding and towels weighed heavy on my mind. I decided my junior year that I wanted to look into any programs in the country that provide dorm supplies to this population. Surprisingly, I found no

programs or funding for these items. I decided then that I wanted to one day pilot a program that provided these items, but I did not know that I would accomplish such a task before graduation.

For my Esther G. Maynor Honors College senior project, I began by applying for a grant from Kiwanis of Robeson-Lumberton. I received this grant in the amount of \$750 to serve the six students in Robeson County who have been identified by the McKinney-Vento Liaison as experiencing homelessness and who are graduating and going to college. The first step in this process was to discuss the potential of such a program with the McKinney-Vento Liaison.

Working with a public school system can be difficult, because of confidentiality. For this project, I designed a non-identifying reporting form that would help us avoid any duplication of students without releasing confidential information. I asked the liaison to fill out a reporting form for each student that would be served prior to the purchasing of the items and had her verify that the information requested would be able to be provided. I then applied for the grant. The Kiwanis of Robeson-Lumberton grant application is short, but the funding selection is competitive. Once I was notified that I had received funding, I began to work on the layout of the program.

This program is simple in nature and easily duplicable with a funding resource and a non-profit that will house the program. For the pilot year, this program is housed under United Way of Robeson County. Having a reputable non-profit to house your program is a strength in regards to grant applications, because there is a history of good stewardship of funds and often a record of similar impact

reporting. Another strength that I identified in the grant application process is being able to define projected impact.

For this program, the projected impact that \$750 would provide was laid out in a line item budget. This budget was based on the six students that were already identified in Public Schools of Robeson County. Included in the budget was a breakdown of cost for the following items: twin extra-large comforter, twin extra-large sheet set, pillow, two towel sets, laundry basket, and a full toiletry set (shampoo, conditioner, body wash, sponge, toothpaste, toothbrush, lotion, shower caddy). For the grant reporting, I plan to provide receipts for all items purchased and an impact story from a student that receives the items.

The logistics of this project were more difficult to plan out. I could not take the students shopping with me, so I needed to purchase the items for them. This created an issue for me, because I wanted the students to have the ability to choose their own items like a housed student would get the opportunity to do. I had to settle on getting the students to describe their style and their color choice. Once this program expands, I plan to have bedding and sheet sets donated/available for wholesale and let students go onto the program's website under a password protected page and select the items that they would like. I believe that this change would increase the dignity that is provided to the recipients of the services. Having a web based design would also allow for a more streamlined process, which would increase the capacity of the program.

My plan for sustainability is to apply for the Kiwanis grant again next year with an increased asking amount. Once the program has been functioning for two

years at the county level, I would like to apply for a state grant with some admin allowance and expand to the state level with referrals coming from all McKinney-Vento Liaisons in North Carolina. I believe that this progress is fully attainable with the backing of United Way of Robeson County.

Reflection

Completing this service-learning project was engaging and I believe that it helped me to advance in the field of social work. I have noted that grant writing skills can be highly sought after in the non-profit world, so having a grant listed on my resume will help me to progress as a social worker. I also had the opportunity to collaborate across agencies when I worked with United Way and the Public Schools of Robeson County. The skills developed through this interagency collaboration will be helpful as I begin my career.

Most importantly, I have piloted a program that has the ability to be sustainable and the capacity to continue to grow. My hope is to work with homelessness on a variety of levels during my career, so having a program such as this under my belt that I can continue to grow, sets me on a path of success. I am grateful to have reached the point in my life where I have the skill set to complete a project of this magnitude and the resources to bring it to life.

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