HELPING HOMELESS YOUTH SUCCEED IN COLLEGE: STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING HOMELESS COLLEGE STUDENTS

Identifying students who are homeless is difficult for many reasons. Students might be unaware of the definition of homelessness and not realize that they are experiencing homelessness. Others may feel ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid of the consequences of disclosing their situation. Yet if youth experiencing homelessness are not identified, they may lose out on potential supports they need to stay in school and graduate.

Being able to identify and track students experiencing homelessness provides institutions with a more accurate understanding of the prevalence of homelessness among the student body and the kinds of supports that these students may need. As a result, institutions will be better able to generate and allocate resources and services for academic retention and life-long success.

Below are some strategies that colleges and university systems have implemented to identify and provide outreach to students experiencing homelessness. These strategies can be integrated into existing outreach efforts for vulnerable students.

Identification Strategies

- Include a question about homelessness on college applications so that students can self-identify voluntarily. The California Community College and California State University systems use their Common App, [CCCApply](#) and CalState Apply respectively, to allow students to self-disclose homelessness. With this information, schools can inform students of available resources, services, and supports. At Skyline College in San Bruno, California, the homeless higher education liaison and financial aid administrator send an introductory email offering support to all students who disclose that they are homeless. By 2019, the Georgia Common App will provide an opportunity for students to voluntarily disclose whether they have received benefits or services through McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons or foster care.
- Partner with financial aid to identify students who identify as independent. While it is important to be mindful of and comply with privacy and HEA laws, higher education personnel can work with the financial aid office to obtain aggregate data of students who indicated homelessness on the FAFSA, and send them information on support programs or resources, like at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
- Collaborate with admissions personnel to find students who have written about their homeless experience in college essays. If eligible, they might qualify for specific programs and scholarships.
- Create clear referral systems like at [George Washington University](#), where students, faculty, and staff can express a concern for a student. Empower students themselves to come forward through a self-referral system that does not stigmatize homelessness.
- Host trainings and workshops about potential signs of homelessness to librarians, campus police, and other faculty/staff members. Provide training for higher education personnel who are the most likely to

have direct contact with students experiencing homelessness, such as counselors, case managers, foster youth liaisons, and veteran services, as done at Sacramento State.
● Train deans, advisors, and faculty to spot the potential warning signs of student homelessness in the classroom.
● Train Resident Assistants and Residential Living/Housing offices so that they can support students experiencing homelessness.
● Develop relationships with school district McKinney-Vento liaisons and local homeless youth service providers to identify students who are homeless or have histories of homelessness as they transition to higher education.

Outreach Strategies
● Throughout students' college exploration process, market resources that are available to students experiencing homelessness or who struggle with meeting basic needs. These marketing "touchpoints" can include the college or university website, application and admissions materials, college tours, and orientation programming.
● Encourage faculty members to include a [note on their syllabus](#) directing students to the appropriate contact if they are experiencing food and housing challenges.
● Host programs during breaks where students might still be on campus. Leverage Resident Assistants, alumni, and other personnel and allies to provide meals and build community.
● Raise awareness and conduct intentional outreach initiatives, such as SNAP or FAFSA application assistance, during [homelessness and hunger awareness week](#).
● Create safe, open, and comfortable spaces were students feel welcome and can easily access tools and resources. For example, [the University of Washington's Doorway Project](#) offers a pilot community cafe hub where the campus community and services providers collaborate together to serve Seattle's homeless youth population.

Current and Pending Laws & Policies
[Washington SB 2674](#) - Institutions of higher education shall include on their applications for admission or on their registration materials a question asking whether the applicant has experienced unaccompanied homelessness or been in foster care, with an explanation that financial and support services may be available. Institutions also shall devise and implement other procedures for efficiently, promptly, and accurately identifying students and applicants who are eligible for services.

[Higher Education Access and Success For Foster and Homeless Youth Act (HEASHFY)](#) - This bipartisan federal bill (S.1795/H.R. 3740) would require colleges and universities to improve outreach and resources for homeless and foster youth. It also requires the U.S. Department of Education to help resolve questions about a student's independence, publish more transparent data on the number of homeless and foster youth served, and ensure that college access programs identify, recruit, and prepare homeless and foster students for college. Please support HEASHFY by urging Members of Congress to sign on as co-sponsors of both bills. If you represent a local, state, or national organization, sign your organization on as a supporter of the bill by using this [form](#).

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