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Impact of Homeless Youth: How Does it Affect School Development?

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Impact of Homeless Youth: How Does it Affect School Development?

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CE 695: Capstone Project

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Fall 2020

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Impact of Homeless Youth: How Does it Affect School Development?

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Rena Dornfeld

Has been approved by the faculty advisor of the CE 695 – Capstone Project

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Abstract

Studies have been conducted on the effects homelessness has on youth. According to the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE, 2020) in the state of Minnesota from 2017-2018 school year, there were 16,668 homeless youth individuals who were enrolled in public schools. If that number is not daunting, according to the National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH, 2020), 2.5 million children are now homeless each year in the United States. Family and children homelessness is a crisis, and unfortunately not getting the attention it deserves. In 2013, the rate of homelessness of youth rose 8%, and since 2015, homelessness has increased by 10% (NCHE, 2020). Journal articles have expressed barriers one can encounter during homelessness and explored unique ways counselors can assist the homeless youth population. Results are presented to portray the effects homelessness has on youth in regards to their academic and socio-emotional needs.

Contents

Abstract.....2

Introduction.....4

Review of Literature.....5

 The Problem.....5

 Socio-emotional problems.....8

 Academic Problems.....10

 Relevant Laws.....12

 School Counselor Role.....14

Discussion.....18

References.....20

Introduction

According to the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE, 2020) in the state of Minnesota from the 2017-2018 school year, 16,668 homeless youth individuals were enrolled in public schools. If that number is not daunting, according to the National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH, 2020), 2.5 million children are now homeless each year in the United States. Family and children homelessness is a crisis, and unfortunately not getting the attention it deserves. In 2013, the rate of homelessness of youth rose 8%, and since 2015, homelessness has increased by 10% (NCHE, 2020). The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) defines child poverty as children in grades preschool-12, when individuals are living in shelters or awaiting foster care, living with other family members or living unsheltered which means living in their cars, living at parks, or abandoned buildings (NCCP, 2020.). There are two kinds of homelessness a youth can encounter; accompanied homeless and unaccompanied homeless. Fisher and Kennedy (2017) define accompanied homelessness as when the student is experiencing homelessness with another individual. They may be with their parent or guardian and other family members. However, unaccompanied homeless students are experiencing homelessness alone (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). They are not under the custody of a parent or guardian, they may have run away to escape poor living conditions and may have been kicked out of their home for certain reasons (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH, 2020) describes three different pathways that could lead to being homeless as a youth. The first pathway to being homeless is when youth experience physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or dysfunctional family relationships. The youth may run away to escape the abuse. Second, youth may become an unaccompanied homeless youth after experiencing some kind of accompanied homelessness (NCH, 2020). This could be due to shelters having restrictions on

age for children or if they were removed from their families by social services. The third pathway includes youth who have been involved with foster care or other institutions (NCH, 2020). Reports have shown that children who experience homelessness experience detrimental barriers to academic success and socio-emotional success. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Improvements Act of 2001 (McK-VA; 42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq.), is the federal law that connects youth homelessness to their education. This Act declares these individuals as homeless if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (McK-VA; 42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq.). In the past, laws did not consider the education of homeless youth, which led to youth falling behind their peers, and creating devastating academic and socio-emotional gaps. Unfortunately, the youth did not have access to or receive the resources they needed academically and socio-emotionally. Homeless youth are often living in unstable and chaotic environments and are needing support from schools to help them feel safe and stable. The younger the child is, the greater the cumulative toll of negative barriers will impact the child (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY], 2018). This literature review will discuss the problem of being homeless as a youth, the barriers youth face academically and socio-emotionally, the laws in regards to homeless youth and their education, and the ways school counselors can help the homeless student population.

Homeless Youth Population Review of Literature

The Problem

The impact of being homeless may begin before the child is born. Mothers often face many obstacles, such as chemical abuse, health problems, lack of prenatal care, lack of food, and lack of proper health care (Hart-Shegos, 1999). During their nine months of pregnancy, if the mother is not receiving the proper health care, their child is already lacking the nutrition they

need for healthy brain development (Hart-Shegos, 1999). During infancy, homelessness can have a significant negative impact on infants. With this, children may experience a low birth rate which could lead to a higher risk of death (Hart-Shegos, 1999). With limited access to health care, infants may lack immunizations, which could lead to sickness. Homelessness can also disrupt the bonding process during infancy, which could lead to trust issues in the future (David et al., 2012). Disrupting the bonding process can happen when children are taken away from their mothers and or family, being placed into a short-term living situation, or starting the process of foster care (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). If the bonding process is severed at an early age, this could affect the child's functioning, and result in elevated stress (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). They could also be experiencing the process of going back and forth from seeing their family and being taken out multiple times. Many families move up to three times or more, before entering shelters (Bassuk, 2010). Experiencing unstable living conditions can disrupt the child's routine and provide inconsistencies in their life (Bassuk, 2010). This may lead to abandonment issues, anger, and other mental health barriers (Bassuk, 2010). If this is not taken care of in the beginning, homeless youth could experience difficulties in the future (National Network for Youth [NN4Y], 2020). Homeless children may be exposed to environmental hazards such as rodents and experience mental delays as well (NN4Y, 2018). The children may experience language and cognitive delays and develop poor social interactions (Bassuk, 2010). Experiencing these challenges at the beginning of life may lead to greater challenges when the children reach school age (NN4Y, 2018).

As mentioned before, homelessness in the U.S continues to grow. Rahman et al. (2015), argue that the drastic surge of homelessness among families is due to the recession, lack of affordable housing, job market, and low wages. Between the 1980s and early 2000s, people

started to realize the problem of youth homelessness, but it was thought to be a temporary concern, and only located in urban areas (Rahman et al., 2015). However, this crisis became a persistent problem that all states were finally experiencing (Rahman et al., 2015). Due to this surge, research was conducted to see the impact of family and youth homelessness on their education (Slesnick et al., 2009). In 2013, almost two and a half million children had experienced homelessness in the U.S. This means, one in every thirty children in the U.S. experienced being homeless (Bassuk et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Education (2020) reported 1.2 million children, who were attending public school, experienced being homeless, which was an all-time high for our nation. The Minnesota Homeless Study, which is conducted every three years by Wilder Research, gathered reports from homeless parents regarding their children (Pittman et al., 2020). This survey asked parents specific questions about issues they were experiencing related to their children. Some issues reported were as follows: unable to get regular childcare (32%), a child had emotional or behavior problem (29%, a 4% increase from 2015-2018), chronic or severe physical health issue (15%, a 3% increase), and had to skip meals (11%, a 2% increase) (Pittman et al., 2020). Data from the Minnesota Homeless Study indicates homelessness is increasing each year, and their needs must be addressed.

Buckner (2008) described two waves of research regarding homeless youth. The first wave of research looked at why families became homeless. Within the study, researchers found that families who were experiencing homelessness were single mothers with at least two children. These families moved often and tended to live in substandard housing and dangerous neighborhoods (Buckner, 2008). Due to moving frequently, mothers were unable to keep a stable job, could not find transportation or adequate childcare (Buckner, 2008). These barriers negatively impacted the children. The students may have lacked food, became sick but could not

go to the doctor, and worried about where they would move to next (Buckner, 2008). The second wave of research focused on the mental health aspects of homeless youth (Buckner, 2008).

Socio-emotional problems

Homeless youth may experience multiple events in their life that could be very traumatic to them and affect their development of social-emotional needs (McManus & Thompson, 2008). They could be exposed to physical or sexual abuse, exposed to violence, or impaired caregivers. According to Bassuk (2010) “The realities of homeless youth can result in poor mental health outcomes that could include behavioral problems, delayed developmental milestones, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, attachment disorders, and depression” (p. 498). Bassuk (2010) also discussed how one’s environment can affect their future. For example, if an individual grows up and has a nice house and no money problems, they can receive the proper care they need, to continue their brain development. If one grows up homeless or exposed to violence, they may not have the access to health care, medications, etc. to help them develop in a healthy way. The trauma that homeless youth experience, even if it is short term, can have a major effect on their future development (NN4Y, 2018). These individuals tended to struggle with emotional and behavioral problems, along with tackling low self-esteem issues (Bassuk, 2010). O’Brien et al. (2020), conducted a secondary data analysis study with ninth through eleventh graders in 2016 in Minnesota. They grouped the youths into four subgroups based on their housing status (O’Brien et al., 2020). The housing categories included; unaccompanied homeless youth (0.5%) runaway youth (4%) youth who had run away and who had been homeless (0.6%) and stable homed youth (95%) (O’Brien et al., 2020). The results of this study indicated youth who had unstable housing had poorer mental health outcomes compared to their stable homed peers. Along with having an unstable home, the results also indicated that 11% of homeless youth, 20% of runways, and 33%

of youth who experienced both homelessness and ran away, previously attempted suicide the previous year (O'Brien et al., 2020). Results indicate psychiatric disorders, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD), and substance use disorders are higher among homeless youth compared to their housed peers (O'Brien et al., 2020). A study was also conducted by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCH) in 2014. Within this study 66 homeless youth revealed having at least one psychiatric disorder (NHCH, 2020). Bassuk (2010) explored how homeless specific trauma could impact mental health outcomes for homeless youth. Results indicated poor mental health outcomes include high rates of behavioral problems, delayed developmental milestones, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depression (Bassuk, 2010). Results also found that about twenty percent of preschoolers who experienced homelessness were said to have emotional problems that required treatment (Bassuk, 2010). By the age of eight, at least one-third of homeless children were screened and showed they had one major mental health disorder (Bassuk, 2010). This study is relevant and indicates the detrimental effects of being homeless as a youth, which could negatively impact their mental health. Bassuk et al. (2014), conducted a systemic and meta-analysis review based on the mental health needs of homeless children. Researchers found that 10% of homeless youth have learning disabilities compared to 6.6% of non-homeless students (Bassuk et al., 2014). Regarding depression and anxiety, individuals who experienced homelessness reported rates of depression 16%-54% compared to 10% of their housed peers (Bassuk et al., 2014). These findings from different studies have concluded that being a homeless youth may have major deficits in the youth's brain. The numbers show how concerning mental health is regarding homeless youth, not only for their social-emotional problems but if left untreated, could impact their educational performance (Pittman et al., 2020).

Academic Problems

There are limited research articles examining the educational well-being of children with a history of homelessness. Children with a history of homelessness are at an increased risk for poor academic achievement compared to their non-homeless peers (Rahman et al., 2015). They are more likely to have evidence of learning disabilities, have below-average intelligence, and perform poorly on standardized assessments of reading and math (Herbers et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, experiencing homelessness earlier increases student's potential to acquire negative effects when entering schools (SAMSHA, 2019). Youth who are school-aged may experience difficulty concentrating in schools due to lack of food and sleep (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). They may also have poor health, increased exposure to diseases, and experience difficulty making friends (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Fisher and Kennedy (2017) have found that academic achievement is negatively impacted by homelessness.

Not only do homeless youth experience mental and emotional barriers but they encounter educational barriers as well (NN4Y, 2018). Homeless youth arrive at school already one step behind their peers due to their basic needs being unmet (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). They may not have a place to bathe, have access to clean clothes, have regular meals, get decent sleep, and have materials needed to finish their homework outside of school (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Homeless youth also experience uncertainty and do not have a grounded routine (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). These youths do not know when their next meal will be or where they will sleep that night (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Due to this unstructured life, this increases absences in schools, which means the student will fall further behind their peers (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). They also experience a lot of unnecessary stress and loss (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). With these barriers, it is no surprise that research shows homeless students often underperform

academically, compared to their non-homeless peers (Herbers et al., 2012). According to the National Children Family Homeless Center (NCFHC, 2020), less than 25% of homeless youth graduate high school, 45% repeat at least one grade, 25% fail a class and 42% are at risk of failing a class. These results indicate that homelessness negatively impacts their academic success. Longitudinal research results conducted by Herbers et al. (2012), have shown over the years that homelessness is greatly associated with low achievement in reading and math. Data was collected from the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) with participants in third through seventh grade, beginning in 2005 and ending in 2009 (Herbers et al., 2012). A group of 18,011 students participated in this study, and ten percent of the participants were identified as homeless or highly mobile (HMM) (Herbers et al., 2012). Results showed HMM students had lower averages in math and reading and high rates of missed attendance (Cutuli et al., 2013). These results indicate the importance of increasing attendance rates and decreasing the achievement gaps with homeless youth (Herbers et al., 2012). Although all children living in poverty are at risk for poor academic achievement, the risk is even greater among children who experience homelessness (Herbers et al., 2012). Obradovic et al. (2009), reported severe vocabulary and reading delays in a sample of 169 homeless youth ages 6-12 years old. Among those children, 47% scored at or below the 10th percentile on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test (Obradovic et al., 2009). The results of this study showed that homeless youth are four times more likely to score at or below the 10th percentile compared to their non-homeless peers (Obradovic et al., 2009). Children from families with lower socioeconomic status (SES) and or homelessness, begin school with poor readiness skills and low achievement skills (Obradovic et al., 2009). Even though these statistics show homeless youth fall behind academically from their non-

homeless peers, there have been laws put into place to help homeless youth stay on track academically.

Relevant laws

In 1974, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) was signed into law and in 2018, this act was reauthorized and updated after 16 years (H.R. Rep. No. 6964-38, 2018). This Act encouraged states to improve treatment for at-risk youth and provide financial assistance to states that improved treatment for at-risk youth (Family & Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], 2016). Prior to this Act, runaway and homeless youth were being put into jail. With the JJDPA, states had to agree to release runaway and homeless youth, and provide them with shelter, food, counseling, and other necessities, in order to get the funding from the state (FYSB, 2016). In 1974, the Runaway Youth Act (RYA) was passed. This Act was created to assist youth who ran away from home, and in 1977 revisions to the Act were made, to include homeless youth (FYSB, 2016), and then this Act was renamed The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) (FYSB, 2016). To this day, RHYA grants are provided to public and private schools to create services for runaway and homeless youth and their families (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). The purpose of this Act was to create a community-based alternative intervention for runaway and homeless youth. There are different programs RHYA created which aim to prevent youth homelessness, house homeless youth, prevent sexual exploitation, decrease juvenile detention rates, decrease child welfare involvement and assist families to resolve conflicts (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). There are three programs within this Act that are relevant to this review of literature (FYSB, 2016).

The first program is the Street Outreach Program (SOP). This program provides homeless youth with a three-year grant (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). The purpose of

the program is to prevent sexual abuse of street youth. The grant helps fund outreach or drop-in centers, which provide education, treatment, counseling, and referrals to services (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). The next program is called the Basic Center Program (BCP). Again, this is a three-year grant, and the purpose is to provide temporary housing with supportive services for homeless youth (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). The BCP provides temporary housing, therapeutic family intervention, connection to education and workforce, aftercare services, and counseling is provided (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). Lastly, the Transitional Living Program (TLP) and Maternity Group Homes (MGH) was created. This is a program with a 5-year grant, and the purpose is to support effective strategies for successful transitions to sustainable living for homeless youth between the ages of 16-23 years old (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). The grant funds longer-term housing with services that provide basic life skills, connection to education and workforce, aftercare services, and counseling. The RHYA benefits runaway and homeless youth by providing different programs to support them with their unstable living situations, emotional needs, and educational needs (FYSSB, 2016).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title X, Part C on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was passed to ensure that all homeless youth are provided with a free and appropriate public education (NCHE, 2020). In 1987, McKinney-Vento was signed into law, which required states to review and revise policies to ensure immediate school enrollment for homeless youth (NCHE, 2020). In 1990, McKinney-Vento was amended, which required states to eliminate barriers regarding enrollment and provide support for academic success to students who were experiencing homelessness, and in 1994 McKinney-Vento was revised and added preschool services for homeless youth (NCHE, 2020). In 2002, the education section was revised

to strengthen the legal requirements and mandate all schools to appoint a local liaison to individuals who were homeless (NCHE, 2020). McKinney-Vento is beneficial to homeless youth because it allows them to stay at their current school by providing transportation, even if they are living in another school district. As previously mentioned, these individuals do not always have a stable place to live, and due to moving around, the student is absent, loses friends, and falls behind academically. Another key point is due to the 2002 revision, these individuals are appointed a school liaison (NCHE, 2020). This liaison works with the homeless youth by assisting them with enrollment and attendance efforts, helps access school and community services, and reduce any additional educational barriers (NCHE, 2020). The McKinney-Vento Act authorized the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program. The ESG program helps fund quick rehousing placements, provides homeless prevention programs, emergency shelters, supportive services, and street outreach programs (NCHE, 2020). Another program is known as the Continuum of Care (CoC) program, which funds rapid rehousing, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing. These programs were created to assure the educational rights of children and families who are homeless (NCHE, 2020).

School Counselor Role

Calculating an accurate number regarding how many homeless children there are, is very difficult (Slesnick et al., 2009). The research reviewed portrays alarming numbers and argues this is a population school counselors should be aware of. Zlotnick et al. (2012), found that early studies focused on case management interventions and did not focus on social-emotional and or educational success. School counselors need to find research and counseling approaches that take into account the unique features of this population (Zlotnick et al. 2012).

When working with homeless youth, counselors have found it difficult to counsel this population effectively (Slesnick et al., 2009). The first issue is in regards to consent and mandated reporting (NCHE, 2020). The McKinney-Vento Act strives to remove barriers to academic success for homeless youth but does not address how counselors should proceed regarding consent from parents when needed (NCHE, 2020). For this issue, counselors can consult with the liaison that is provided to the school under the McKinney-Vento- Act and allow them to guide the counselor through this process (NCHE, 2020). The next issue the counselor may face is not being familiar with this population in general (SAMHSA, 2020). The counselor should be prepared to work with the homeless youth, as the numbers are on the rise (SAMHSA, 2020). They can research numbers in their community and seek out research-based interventions that could benefit the student. It is important counselors have appropriate knowledge, skills, and beliefs before working with this population (Rafferty et al., 2004). Another way counselors can help this population is to focus on the social issue (Rafferty et al., 2004). Counselors may help the student obtain basic needs such as food, housing, and water first, then move onto other issues (Rafferty et al., 2004). Next, a counselor can help these students by being prepared to deal with multiple issues, know about developmental delays that could occur, know resources within the community and be an advocate (Rafferty et al., 2004). Neukrug (2016), explained the importance of being prepared to deal with multiple issues. Homeless youth have added stress, and experience trauma which could lead to mental illness, chemical dependence, and other unique problems. Neukrug (2016) stated that 50% of homeless youth are struggling with these problems. Due to high percentage of mental health issues, it is important to have potential referral sources available in the community and make referrals when appropriate (Neukrug, 2016). Lastly, counselors should be an advocate for the homeless student population (Neukrug, 2016). These

individuals often deal with multiple issues, have mental health illnesses, and have unstable living conditions (Neukrug, 2016). Advocating for homeless students' unique concerns and being committed to them is important and gives them a message that the counselor is truly there for them.

The presence of a caring adult in the lives of homeless students has been viewed as beneficial (Kurtz et al., 2017). Kurtz et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative research design study to view how homeless youth experience obstacles in their lives and made a successful developmental transition into young adulthood. Data was collected from 12 participants who had run away or were homeless when they were young. Interviews were in-depth and went into detail about their experience (Kurtz et al., 2017). Participants discussed one way they were able to transition was being cared for by others (Kurtz et al., 2017). Caring did not involve trying to cure them but entailed individualized attention, unconditional acceptance, non-judgmental listening, and emotional support (Kurtz et al., 2017). Along these lines, counselors need to meet the student where they are (Kurtz et al., 2017). Counselors should not push the students to talk about being homeless in the first session (Kurtz et al., 2017). It is important for counselors to build that rapport first, then allow the students to tell the counselor what they want to talk about (Kurtz et al., 2017). Masten (2011) discussed how counselors can provide a general framework for resilience by promoting interventions that they could use with homeless individuals. The counselor and student should create positive goals that focus on what the student has already done (Masten, 2011). For example, praise the student for coming to school today (Bowman & Popp, 2013). Coming to school could be a difficult task for them, but if they hear that praise, it could boost their motivation to continue to come (Masten, 2011). The idea of creating positive goals is that as students achieve growth in one goal, this growth will then transfer into other areas

(Masten, 2011). One intervention that could work is strength-based, brief therapy (Masten, 2011).

Strength-based, brief therapy allows homeless youth to imagine a different life and find the motivation to make changes and find the skills needed to take the next steps (Masten, 2011). Aviles and Helfrich (2004) stated that these individuals need assistance in prioritizing their needs which leads to increase self-confidence. Bender et al. (2007) also discuss the importance of showing these individuals that they have autonomy and self-efficacy and control of their own life. Another intervention could be solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) which research shows is beneficial for students experiencing academic and behavioral problems (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). SFBT focuses on the student as the expert which allows the student to remain in control of their life (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). SFBT is also beneficial by goal setting and introducing the miracle question to the students (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). The miracle question leads students to understand what steps they have to take to achieve their goals. Along with setting goals, the counselor is guiding the students to recognize the strengths they already have, but they might not be able to see right at this moment (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Lastly, collaboration is the final component to benefit the homeless student population. Counselors can work with a multidisciplinary team to discuss what would be the most innovative and effective intervention to best serve the need of the student (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Counselors may collaborate with the school liaison to address the student's basic needs, implement a positive school climate for students, help create a safe and supportive classroom, recognize and support academic gaps and promote positive peer relationships (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017).

Discussion

Numerous research studies have been done to determine the effects homelessness has on the youth population. Results have indicated low academic rates and achievement gaps, and potential mental health issues one could encounter. Laws have been put into place to increase equality in their academic success. School counselors can address academic, social, and career planning for all students, and are able to deliver direct services at the school level, such as individual counseling (Havlik & Brown, 2016). They are also able to build relationships within the community to access different resources that can benefit the student population. Due to their availability, school counselors may be the first adult that can help support homeless youth individuals and provide them with the necessary resources.

Even though the evidence shows the homeless youth population is on the rise, it is important to remember that the actual number of homeless youths is impossible to figure out. Students continue to move and may not participate in the research that is being conducted. More research is needed to understand the true needs of homeless youth. There are federal programs in place to help homeless youth, but at times they fail to effectively address the needs of this population. Rahman et al. (2015), mentions 75% of homeless youth drop out of high school before graduating. This number shows that regardless of federal laws in place, some youth do fall through the cracks. In addition to federal laws, there are barriers that still exist within the schools (Rahman et al., 2015). Two barriers include providing homeless students with transportation services to their schools and meeting the basic needs of homeless students. Further research is needed to understand the impact homelessness has on social interaction, academic achievement, and transitioning into adulthood. Furthering this research will help individuals

create interventions to increase social interactions, closing the achievement gaps, and finding resources that will help the transition to adulthood go smoothly.

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