

Community Program Information

Issue: In recent years, homelessness has taken on a new face. Now a large amount of our homeless population is comprised of children. It is no question that confronted with an unstable housing situation, homeless students can be unfairly subject to challenges to their education, including difficulties enrolling in school, lack of school stability, lack of transportation and hunger.

What We Do: As the homeless education program for Polk County, our primary goal is to address any problems that prevent homeless students from having the same educational opportunities as housed students. First and foremost this includes assisting with enrollment and transportation challenges as well access to free meals at school. The PCPS HEARTH Project can also (while supplies last):

- Give students and their families school shirts, backpacks with school supplies, shoe vouchers, hygiene kits and donated grocery gift cards
- Offer families gas cards and bus passes to help students get to school before transportation is set up and to help families attend school activities
- Provide access to clothing through the local clothing closets
- Help fund school trips as well as other school activities
- Provide tutoring to students residing in partnering shelter facilities and a few school sites
- Provide training to schools, in regards to ensuring rights and access to services for qualifying students

We would not be able to provide certain forms of assistance to families such as grocery gift cards, gas cards and hygiene products without the help of generous community donors.

Statistics:

- **In Florida, 25% of children are living in poverty.**
- **Of the 1.6 million homeless children in the U.S., 40% are under six years old.**
- **During the 2013-2014 school year, PCPS identified 3,793 homeless students. Out of those students:**
 - **287 were in a shelter**
 - **2,778 were living doubled up**
 - **53 were in cars/parks**
 - **494 were in hotels**
 - **9 were awaiting foster care**
 - **172 were living in sub-standard housing**
 - **488 out of 3,793 were unaccompanied youth (youth not in the care of a parent of guardian)**

The McKinney-Vento Act is the foundation of our program. The goals of this federal law are school stability and equal access to services for students experiencing homelessness.

Rights of students in housing transition:

- Immediate Enrollment
- School Selection (School of Origin or Zoned School)
- Transportation
- Free School Meals
- Equal access to all education programs and services
- Prompt resolution of placement disputes



Statements from LeTendre Scholarship recipients:

(The LeTendre Education Fund for Homeless Children awards scholarships to students who have experienced homelessness.)

“When you have strangers invest in you, it’s hard to deny your self-worth.”

-A student from Milwaukee, WI

“I may be homeless, but I’m not hopeless.”

-A student from Denver, CO

“My experiences won’t define me.”

-A student from Sorrento, FL

Statements from students on tutoring provided at a local shelter:

“She’s a great person that helps me learn what I need to learn.”

-A fourth grade student

“They teach us different ways of multiplication, dividing, adding, and subtracting. If we are confused or don’t know something, they take their time to explain to make sure we get it.”

-A fourth grade student

“I learn more math, writing, reading and science. First we do our homework, then we read and then we go play.”

-A first grade student

“I love the tutors because they help me learn math, give me homework and let me read books.”

-A third grade student

PCPS HEARTH Project
1915 South Floral Avenue
Bartow, FL 33830
(863) 534-0801

<http://www.polk-fl.net/districtinfo/departments/learning/title1/hearth.htm>