MINNLINK
Minnesota-Linking Information for Kids

Center for Advanced Studies
in Child Welfare

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR Minn-LInK Brief #35

Educational Disengagement of Homeless and Unstably Housed Youth

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we sought out to examine whether differential patterns of child welfare involvement and educational engagement existed for unstably housed youth as compared to their peers. We used attendance and graduation as markers of educational engagement. Overall, findings indicate that unstably housed youth were demographically dissimilar from and had much higher rates of child welfare service receipt than their peers. Unstably housed youth disengaged from school at higher rates and at an earlier age than their peers. Unstably housed youth also graduated at much lower rates than their peers – a trend that remained consistent across racial categories.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that homeless and unstably housed youth had higher levels of school disengagement than their peers – both in terms of school attendance and graduation. What factors do you think lead to school disengagement for unstably housed youth? Where and at what age have you seen them in your work with youth?

2. Unfortunately, maintaining school engagement is a widespread problem for schools. What practices do you use in your jurisdiction to help foster school engagement for youth? Are these practices used for all youth or are some practices used specifically to support homeless and unstably housed youth? How might practice and supports need to be changed to meet the needs of homeless and unstably housed youth?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Identifying homeless and unstably housed youth can be challenging and requires strong partnership and communication across agencies. Yet, identification is the first step in providing effective services and supports to homeless and unstably housed youth. What practices do you use to identify homeless and unstably housed youth in your jurisdiction? What barriers currently exist? What resources, policies, or shifts in practice might help you overcome these barriers?

2. Communication and collaboration are key in addressing the variety of needs that homeless and unstably housed youth possess. How are these types of activities handled in your jurisdiction? Are adequate services and supports available? What additional services or supports do you need to more effectively support homeless and unstably housed youth? What would collaborative action look like in an ideal situation?