A Historical Look at the Role of Social Work in Ending Youth Homelessness: Moving Forward

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A Historical Look at the Role of Social Work in Ending Youth Homelessness: Moving Forward

by

Cheryl Pooler

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

University of Saint Thomas
School of Social Work
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Abstract

This banded dissertation is composed of three products that identify common experiences of and contributing factors to youth homelessness in the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras. The first product is a conceptual paper that uses a historical lens to examine the administration of services for homeless youth during the two eras. Focusing on best practices implemented during these periods and their merits and shortcomings, this dissertation approached the eras using a Social-Ecological model, which helped to inform the proposed Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness. The second product is a Narrative Review using a qualitative (content analysis) approach to analyze research and literature pertaining to social workers and the grand challenge of ending youth homelessness. Four themes emerged from the inquiry: services related to meeting the needs of homeless youth, relationships between homeless youth and the community at large, policy in support of ensuring rights and guiding program development for homeless youth requiring data collection, and promising practices that are evidenced based and include the voice of homeless youth. The themes contribute to knowledge that may be central to the social work profession and research that provides a framework for understanding what may be essential to ending youth homelessness. The third product is a summary of an oral presentation entitled “Historical Lessons Learned with Homeless Youth: Moving Forward,” given on October 27th at the 30th Annual National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference in Anaheim, California. This presentation provided historical context for issues related to homeless youth while discussing the implementation of promising practices in the McKinney-Vento Era.
Keywords: homeless youth, unaccompanied youth, ending youth homelessness, promising practices, McKinney-Vento, Progressive Era, Social-Ecological Framework, Grand Challenge to Ending Youth Homelessness
To David, your encouragement and support of my dream to earn a DSW have exceeded my expectations in every way. To my daughters, Josie and Emilie, you are the reason that I never gave up. I pray that my example of dreaming big, hanging tough, and finishing strong inspires you to do the same. You are the best cheerleaders a mom could ever hope to have in this life. I’m forever grateful to my tribe of friends and family who have offered unconditional love and support from day one of this program. I love you all. Words are woefully inadequate to express my love for Cohort 3. I am forever changed because of our time together, and I am honored to call you friends and colleagues. My advisor, Dr. Kingsley Chigbu, has championed this research and challenged me to do my best work at all times. You are a gift to the profession of social work. Finally, I want to acknowledge the homeless youth at the Cove. Your strength, courage, and resiliency in the face of adversity have inspired me to do this work.
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A Historical Look at the Role of Social Work in Ending Youth Homelessness: Moving Forward

The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare has identified "Ending Homelessness" as one of its Twelve Grand Challenges (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015). The focus on homelessness is not new in the field of social work; social workers have been at the forefront of addressing homelessness for over a hundred years, from the inception of the field during the Progressive Era (1890-1920) to the current McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present). This banded dissertation examines the role of social work in the care and treatment of homeless youth during both the Progressive Era (1890-1920) and the McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present), the latter of which saw the passage of federal legislation relating specifically to school-aged children who have been declared homeless by their district appointed homeless liaison.

Today, the number of students experiencing homelessness in the United States is the highest on record, according to data from the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): 1,355,821 children in public schools during the 2016-2017 school year (Schoolhouse Connection, 2019). Nationally, this reflects a 70% increase in the number of students experiencing homelessness over the past 10 years, causing some communities in Washington, Oregon, and Hawaii to declare a state of emergency (SOE) for homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016).

It is particularly difficult for school districts to serve unaccompanied/homeless youth in their teenage years. The identification of homeless students presents a challenge to school officials because of their highly mobile lifestyle, and their needs far exceed what can be provided by public school systems. Homeless students become vulnerable to dropping out, truancy, human trafficking, untreated mental health problems, and entanglement in the criminal justice system (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015).
Homeless youth lacking full access to needed resources dates back to the Progressive Era (Abrams & Curran, 2000). Instability in society in general and in families in particular during this period led to greater youth homelessness. Culturally and politically, this instability manifested in the widespread belief that the poor were causing a breakdown in the moral fabric, and measures were taken to prevent the poor from what was described as breeding and contaminating society (Kennedy, 2008). In this societal context, homelessness festered, and social reform was especially necessary but struggled to gain momentum. A primary resource for homeless youth at the time was the Traveler’s Aid Society, which was the first line of defense for aiding homeless youth found to be in danger and without resources (Stadum, 1997). Traveler’s Aid Society’s care and attention in meeting the needs of this vulnerable population led to greater awareness of the issue and the creation of resources and development of charitable organizations specifically to support homeless youth.

Since the Progressive Era, there has been a continued federal focus on issues relating to youth homelessness, and historically, the problem of youth homelessness was viewed through a lens of juvenile delinquency, in keeping with the mores of the Progressive Era, rather than homelessness alone. This precedent began with the formation of the Juvenile Justice system during the Progressive Era (Abrams and Curan, 2000). However, in 1987, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act was passed and there was a shift toward preventing homelessness and the provision of services to school age youth experiencing homelessness. Social workers and school counselors have led the charge against homelessness since, but are overwhelmed with the challenge of accessing resources that are scarce or non-existent to meet the needs of this vulnerable population. Youth homelessness remains a festering problem in American society as a result. To rise to the The Grand Challenge of Ending Homelessness, then, social workers in
particular must allow the past to inform the present as they seek innovative solutions to youth homelessness.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guides this banded dissertation is the social-ecological model. This framework emphasizes a multi-layer system approach and assumes that the individual is part of a larger system, and gradually integrates layers into the system that build upon one another much like ripples in water.

In the context of this framework, the social worker must begin evaluating issues that are present in four domains connected to a homeless youth. First, the social worker would examine issues that are affecting the homeless youth at an individual level. A homeless youth is more likely to experience more frequent and severe episodes of mental health problems and have experienced a higher rate of physical and/or sexual abuse as a child, and to report higher exposure to family violence than a non-homeless youth (Fernandes-Alcantara, A., 2015). The next logical and necessary step for the social worker is to examine the relationships of the homeless youth or lack thereof, and the impact of relational acceptance and/or rejection in the experience of the homeless youth. Third, the social worker would study of the community surrounding the homeless youth to identify patterns and common themes found among homeless youth, including poverty, unemployment, addiction, and truancy and dropping out. Finally, it is important to examine the ways in which society is responding to the needs of homeless youth. Resource development, advocacy, and education of the public regarding the impact homelessness has on young people are all crucial components of adequately addressing the needs of perhaps the most vulnerable citizens in society.
Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

This banded dissertation is composed of three products that identify common experiences of and contributing factors to youth homelessness in the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras. The first product, “Social Work Care and Treatment of Homeless Youth During the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras,” is a conceptual paper that uses a historical lens to examine the administration of services for homeless youth during the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras. A Social-Ecological lens was used to create the Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness which demonstrates the value of incorporating the voices of homeless youth in efforts to end youth homelessness.

The second product, “A Narrative Review of Effective Strategies to Ending Youth Homelessness,” is a narrative review using a qualitative approach (content analysis). Four themes emerged from the inquiry: services related to meeting the needs of homeless youth, relationships between homeless youth and the community at large, policy in support of ensuring rights and guiding program development for homeless youth which requires data collection, and promising practices that are evidenced based and include the voice of homeless youth. The themes contribute to knowledge that may be central to the social work profession and research that provides a framework for understanding what may be essential to ending youth homelessness.

Product three is an in-depth summary of an oral presentation presented on October 27th at the 30th Annual National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference in Anaheim, California. This author presented a breakout session titled “Historical Lessons Learned with Homeless Youth: Moving Forward” under the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth track.
**Discussion**

This banded dissertation identifies ways that social workers are engaging issues that affect homeless youth and promising practices that, if correctly implemented, will begin to reverse the growing trend of youth homelessness. The dominant themes of product two, “A Narrative Review of Effective Strategies for Ending Youth Homelessness,” provide a foundation for the evaluation of existing services and a framework for resource development that leads us down the path of ending youth homelessness. The first theme, centered on services, calls for a robust array of services to be available in the community. The theme of relationships places emphasis on communication, empathy, acceptance, and human connection. This implies a need for connection at a level that exceeds superficial assistance. The theme of policy and data collection arose out of the literature that identifies traits and current trends in services to homeless youth, and offers great promise in evaluating outcomes and the identification of promising practices. The fourth theme of promising practices is focused on providing communities and agencies a framework for resource development that is effective in meeting the goal of ending youth homelessness.

The author’s decision to use the Social-Ecological Model as the theoretical framework acknowledges the complex needs of homeless youth and demonstrates the depth of strategic planning that is required within each level of the framework. On the individual level, the physical, mental, emotional and academic needs of homeless youth are paramount. The second level identifies the need for relationships and the impact of relational acceptance rather than rejection, which has been highlighted as a factor that contributes to homelessness. Level three extends to the community surrounding homeless youth. This includes considering the impact of
demographic information such as poverty, unemployment, addiction, drop-out rates, and crime rates.

The framework based on the Social-Ecological Model (SEM) is both common and effective in social research, and the author saw a benefit to incorporating a reverse direct feedback loop with which to view the issues that impact homeless youth. Called the Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness, this model of a reverse direct feedback loop requires the additional step of reversing the social-ecological model to provide an opportunity for the voices of homeless youth to inform and drive the development of programming and creating policy. As with SEM, this Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness maintains the person in the environment from a strengths-based perspective and incorporates the levels of intervention needed to end youth homelessness as stated in the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare’s Grand Challenges for Social Work (Henwood, B., et al., 2015). Solving the problem of youth homelessness requires viewing the issue through the lens of the individual and also connecting the individuals’ experiences with a deeper understanding of the impact of youth homelessness on society, thereby allowing for information for a bi-directional flow of information.

**Implications for Social Work Practice and Education**

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) definition of social work practice includes skills such as diagnosis, prevention, assessment, and intervention (NASW, 2018). Mastery of these skills plays a vital role in equipping social workers to do the work required to end youth homelessness, and social workers are arguably the best-equipped profession to navigate the layers of social-ecological issues that must be addressed with this population. The
unique ability of social workers to work in micro, mezzo, and macro settings makes them suited to lead the charge of ending youth homelessness.

Because the needs of homeless youth are multifarious, it is incumbent on the social work profession to reach across the academic aisle to collaborate with other disciplines and engage the diverse wealth of resource development that is found in the academic setting. Inter-professional Education (IPE) courses could be developed that integrate the curricular themes that impact issues related to homelessness. In addition to social work, the collaboration could easily include departments such as education, criminal justice, psychology, medical, business, and law.

Courses must be developed with a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding problems, such as youth homelessness, that impact society.

At the same time, policy and advocacy must continue to play a vital role in ending youth homelessness. Social work educators must make space in the curriculum to focus on skill building to equip social workers to function in practice areas where advocacy and policy are needed. The profession of social work has a long and passionate history of serving homeless youth by various means, and this research seeks to examine and assess the growth and change needed to meet the Grand Challenge of Ending Youth Homelessness.

Implications for Future Research

The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASW) has included ending homelessness as one of the Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW). The numbers of homeless youth are increasing and so are the unique vulnerabilities they face, which places this issue at the forefront of effecting legislative change and seeking additional funding for existing and new efforts to combat the issue. Alongside a collective political will to make an impact on
youth homelessness, greater research is needed to inform the policy that will ameliorate the rights of and provision of services for homeless youth.

To that end, this research identifies in the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness the plan known as Opening Doors. This plan was amended in 2012 with the intent to prevent and end homelessness among families, youth, and children by 2020. The plan, while robust and well-intended, lacked a data collection component that resulted in the discontinuation of the plan two years ahead of the deadline (USICH, 2018). Now more than ever, then, evidence-based practice must highlight program effectiveness in order to justify funding and inform policy addressing youth homelessness.

In October 2018, a new federal campaign, Education Leads Home, focused on closing education achievement and attainment gaps for homeless youth was initiated. This campaign grew out of existing data to support that the single most important factor in ending youth homelessness is a high school diploma (NAEHCY, 2012). Still, further research is needed to monitor the success of this campaign and identify barriers to academic achievement for homeless youth. Including the voices of homeless youth in the research process would ensure that their needs and desires are reflected in resource development in communities across the U.S.
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Social Work Care and Treatment of Homeless Youth During the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras

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Abstract

Youth homelessness in the United States has been an issue for over a century. Today, over three million homeless youth are enrolled in school systems in the U.S., from the pre-kindergarten through high school grade levels. Homeless youth experience greater challenges academically due to instability and highly mobile lifestyles, and the impact of homelessness on youth is devastating for both the individual and society. As an issue of public concern, youth homelessness rose to the forefront of society during the Progressive Era (1890-1920), when large numbers of immigrant and impoverished youth were living on the streets of urban areas. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of the McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present) is an intervention targeting youth homelessness, requiring all public schools to identify homeless youth and provide them key services for academic success. This dissertation examines the administration of services for homeless youth during the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras. Focusing on best practices implemented during the eras and their merits and shortcomings, dissertation examines the eras with a Social-Ecological lens, and proposes a Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness that may enable social workers and researchers to gain a more accurate perspective on interventions to support and efforts to end youth homelessness.

*Keywords: youth, homeless, Progressive Era, McKinney-Vento, Social-Ecological Framework*
Social Work Care and Treatment of Homeless Youth During the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras

Over 1.3 million homeless students are presently enrolled in public schools in the United States (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2012). In 1986, landmark legislation relating to homeless youth was introduced in the form of the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, later renamed the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act following the death of Representative Stuart B. McKinney in 1987. This legislation enacted key entitlements to homeless students with high hopes of increasing academic success for this vulnerable population. In 2000, the legislation was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act following the death of Representative Bruce Vento, a leading supporter of the act (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2019). While homelessness is highly problematic for children at any age, it is most challenging for school districts to serve unaccompanied/homeless youth in their teenage years (Julianelle, 2012). The scope of need for these students exceeds the capacity of the public-school systems; yet, teachers and administrators are often the first line of providers for this population (Julianelle, 2012). Homeless youth have increased propensities to drop out of school, engage in school truancy, be vulnerable to human trafficking, be untreated for mental and physical health problems and be involved with the criminal justice system (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015). In addition to the above, high mobility rates associated with frequent moves increases the rates of childhood sexual abuse experienced by children who are homeless (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011).

In this paper, the author explores the care and treatment of homeless youth in the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras, during which homelessness among youth was a major issue. There are many difficulties related to access to resources for homeless youth during the
Progressive Era (1890-1920). As society continued to change at a rapid pace, instability both in society at large and in the family unit manifested in the belief that the poor and otherwise immoral groups were to blame (Abrams & Curran, 2000). This view led to a high number of homeless youths, with few places for them to turn (Kennedy, 2008). Filling the vacuum was the Traveler’s Aid Society, which became a primary resource for homeless youth and answered the call for help when children were found to be in danger and without resources (Stadum, 1997). Professionals working with Traveler’s Aid were providing care and attention to meeting the needs of this vulnerable population led to the creation of resources and development of charitable organizations meant to support homeless youth. The dominant view of homelessness of the Progressive Era persists in some ways to this day, and an examination of the concept is needed to order to inform and provide best practices for social work educators today.

The social work profession has been intimately involved in providing care and treatment for homeless youth, yet the numbers of homeless youth continue to soar, and in that sense, the Progressive and McKinney-Vento eras have yet to end. The McKinney-Vento Era and its namesake legislation requires school districts to count homeless students enrolled in school and remove all barriers to academic success (NAEHCY, 2012). Students who lived in a homeless shelter at least one time during their high school years are twice as likely to drop out of school or graduate one or more years behind their non-homeless peers (Institute for Children Poverty & Homelessness, 2018). Federal attention and funding have increased in recent years with an initiative called ‘Opening Doors- Ending Youth Homelessness by 2020’ (United States Interagency Council for Homelessness, 2010). This initiative, combined with the efforts of the Grand Challenge to End Homelessness (American Academy of Social Work, 2015), demonstrates the urgency of this issue. To fully address the problem of youth homelessness and
its impact on society, it is necessary to examine the history associated with this issue so that social work educators are more informed and better prepared to equip students with tools required to end youth homelessness.

**Theoretical Framework: Social-Ecological Model**

The deeper vulnerabilities embedded within experiences of homeless youth are complex. For this reason, the researcher has selected the Social-Ecological Model (SEM) to best demonstrate the larger picture with emphasis on the impact of youth homelessness on both the individual and society. The SEM model was introduced by the developmental theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 (see figure 1.1), and focuses on the relationships and exchanges between the individual and his or her environment.

**Social Ecological Model**

![Social Ecological Model Diagram](image-url)

This model gradually integrates layers that build upon one another much like ripples in water. The individual is in the center of the model, which then moves out to interpersonal,
organizational, and community and ends with public policy (Dougherty, Fields, & Schuman, 2017). This model is well-suited to research on societal systems because it looks at the person in the environment from a strengths-based perspective and incorporates the levels of intervention needed to end youth homelessness, as stated in the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare’s Grand Challenges of Social Work (Henwood, B., Wenzel, S., Mangano, P., Hombs, M., Padgett, D., Uretsky, M., 2015).

The central idea of SEM is that the environment and societal systems are directly related to outcomes, such as homelessness among youth (Slesnick, Prestopnik, Meyers, et al., 2007). The main assumption of the social-ecological systems theory is that the individual is in continuous exchange with his or her environment. Systems are interrelated parts or smaller subsystems that form a whole. Consequently, impact is felt interdependently within each subsystem and affect the whole system. Finally, systems can have open or closed boundaries, yet there is a tendency toward equilibrium (Gitterman & Germain, 2008).

In the context of this framework, the social worker may begin evaluating issues that are present in four domains connected to the homeless youth. Using this theory, one would begin with examining issues that are affecting the homeless youth at an individual level. Homeless youth are more likely to experience increased episodes of mental health problems. They experience a higher rate of physical and/or sexual abuse as a child, and report higher exposure to family violence than non-homeless youth (Fernandes-Alcantara, A., 2015). The second logical and necessary step is to examine relationships and the impact of relational acceptance and/or rejection in the experience of the homeless youth. Third, a study of the community surrounding the homeless youth would reveal patterns and common themes including poverty, unemployment, addiction, and truancy and poor school attendance and high dropout rates.
Finally, one should examine the ways in which society is responding to the needs of homeless youth. Resource development, advocacy, and education of the public regarding the impact homelessness has on young people are all crucial components of adequately addressing the needs of perhaps the most vulnerable citizens in society.

The Progressive Era

The Progressive Era (1890-1920) was a time of rapid change in American society. By its own evolving standards, American society began to confront issues of injustice and instability, particularly within the family unit. The Progressive Reform Movement was a collaboration of sorts between the federal government and Progressive Maternalists, who were supportive of the government taking a major role in big business and the health and welfare of society.

The need for reform was brought to the attention of the American public by a group of influential journalists who called themselves the Muckrakers, a term coined by President Roosevelt in 1906. Their work was not always based on truth, but also often targeted the poor, immigrants, minorities and other vulnerable people in sensational headlines that promoted fear of real and perceived dangers associated with the rapidly changing landscape of society. The Progressive Era was marked with the urbanization of the community and industrialization of the economy. With this, women and children were traveling alone to larger cities in search of better wages, often in factories. This period was marked with palpable tension between society and industry. Social workers began to advocate for child labor laws that would impose limits for length of work days for women and children in factory settings. Compulsory school attendance became the focus of legislation that would drive the child labor laws (Trattner, 1999).

The federal response to the breakdown of the family unit was to limit the number of hours that a woman could work outside of the home. By the turn of the century, more than a
third of all urban women, some 433,000, had traveled alone to the cities (Weiner, 1979, p. 189). This was happening all across the country and led to the development of Settlement Houses and Travelers Aid programs, called upon to protect and rescue women who were traveling on their own or who were strangers to an area with limited resources (Stadum, 1997). In addition to the safety of women and children, there was concern that too many women were abandoning their responsibility of staying at home and raising children. Crime in urban areas was on the rise including human trafficking. In response “social reformers, including early social workers, were inspired by the abolition of the chattel slave trade . . . [and] helped to organize the first movements against sexual slavery or ‘white slavery’ as it was called” (Bromfield, 2016, p. 129).

The Travelers Aid Association had a front row seat in observing the best and worst of society as women and children were traveling alone by train across the country for work or relocation due to immigrant status. This is essential to the conversation because there is value in fully understanding the role of social work with homeless youth who were found to be inextricably linked to every societal woe during the Progressive Era.

**Social Work and the Treatment of Homeless Youth in the Progressive Era**

The profession of social work experienced growth and identity formation that centered around agencies and organizations created to address societal problems. The needs of homeless youth are profound at any stage of history however, a rapidly changing society, urbanization and immigration created significant risk factors for this population. Settlement Houses, the Travelers Aid Society, Eugenics, White Slavery, the Children’s Aid Society and the newly formed Juvenile Justice System will be discussed here as it relates to social workers who were often called upon to address the needs of homeless youth.
It is important to acknowledge that children were often victimized and powerless to protect or defend themselves. Volunteers and staff of the Travelers Aid Society and federal child protection organizations were making slow progress with addressing the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. It is reported that Travelers Aid was providing services for protection, reunification or relocation of over 5,000 homeless children per year (Nearing, 1916). Children were found to be in particular danger of falling into the hands of sexual predators and the Travelers Aid Society was the front line of defense for the protection of women and children. Addams was quite aware of the danger and traps that easily snared women and children who had no resources. Addams expressed concern when she observed the nature of sex predators on young girls and desperate women and remarked, “it is horribly pathetic to learn how far a nickel, or a quarter will go towards purchasing the virtue of these children” (Addams, p.111, 1914).

One major study by the Vice Commission of Philadelphia presented an extensive report to the Mayor in 1913 that covered details of conditions affecting children. The report targeted an area of Philadelphia known as the “Tenderloin,” which was notorious for vice, poverty and corruption and warned that the early independence of children in recreation, money making, and the life of the overcrowded home leave no room for ignorance of evil and childhood innocence (The Vice Commission of Philadelphia, 1913).

The report describes an entire community of children who had been affected negatively by the sex industry, prevalent use of drugs, alcohol and huffing of gasoline. It also suggested that children were wandering the streets unsupervised and even homeless due to their parents’ addictions. The seriousness of the situation can hardly be overstated as the report reinforced the understanding that disengagement from school at such a young age lends itself to a pattern of truancy, street life and criminal behavior (Vice Commission of Philadelphia, 1913).
Furthermore, findings from the report indicated that the economic and social backgrounds of the children are the root problem. This line of thinking was not uncommon given the societal belief that criminal behavior was due to a genetic flaw and parallels the evolution of the professionalization of social work. In the late 19th century social workers had mostly been volunteers who engaged in benevolent activities such as friendly visitors, and were often from families of great privilege and steeped in conservative Protestant traditions. At the turn of the century it became clear that the Charity Organization Society (COS) had gained significant ground in achieving professional status for social workers who embraced a more secular and scientific belief system about the cause of crime, poverty and sexual immorality. The philosophy of charity organizations culminated in a system of beliefs and moral judgements about causes of poverty and consequences of sinful human nature (Lubove, 1965; & Wencour & Reisch, 1989). Taking a scientific approach to solving problems that were plaguing society became appealing to the social work profession as it aligned them with intellectual giants in the academy and medical community. New ideology would contribute to an argument for eugenics and the need for strict social control regarding the perceived beliefs about the poor.

**Settlement Houses**

One tangible resource developed by social workers for women and children came with the Settlement House Movement. Stanton Coit opened the first settlement house in America in 1886 called Neighborhood Guild (Trattner, 1999). Coit believed that the concept of settlement houses must welcome all people irrespective of their religious beliefs, color of their skin, gender and ethnicity. He spoke with certainty that family cooperation would lead to reform and the best way to engage reform was in a community setting, creating an organic community that included people and institutions in a specific location that promotes upward mobility. Residents of the
settlement house movement viewed themselves as neighbors and friends of those in poverty and did not believe that the work they were doing should be viewed as charity (Trattner, 1999).

Jane Addams founded Hull House, one of the first of the Settlement Houses established in the United States. Addams worked to create a safe place of belonging for women who did not necessarily meet the standards of society and welcomed them into settlement homes established in large cities (Addams, 1912). The mission of settlement houses is significant because the idea departed from simply providing funding and philanthropy to examining the cause of the undesirable behavior. Their goal “was to bridge the gap between the classes and races, to eliminate sources of distress, and to improve urban living and working conditions” (Trattner, 1999, p. 163). A concept commonly used among professionals at the Hull House was intentional neighboring, a living arrangement which created a culture of understanding and sympathy that empowered citizens from diverse backgrounds and social status. (Trattner, 1999). Settlement Houses quickly realized they were not equipped to deal with the complex problems of homeless youth. They relied on services provided by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and Traveler’s Aid Society to rescue and find placement for children found to be orphaned or unaccompanied.

Travelers Aid

The Travelers Aid Association began as a movement in 1851. The initial purpose was to assist travelers heading West, however this role would quickly evolve to meet the growing demands for protection of young women and children under the age of sixteen traveling alone (McCall, 1950). The role and purpose of social work with Travelers Aid and transients is addressed by Nearing as he examined the needs of children traveling alone and runaways. He states that Travelers Aid provided services to over 80,000 cases per year where “failure to meet
relatives or friends” was marked in the records and many of those cases were children (Nearing, 1916). This information indicates just a few of the serious challenges that were addressed by the Travelers Aid Society nationwide.

In late 1915 the Chairman of the Travelers Aid Society of Detroit wrote a letter asking for support, guidance and policy regarding children found traveling alone. The letter contained an urgent tone that demonstrated the serious strain being placed on urban communities and need for structure as the magnitude of social problems increased (Wineman, 1915). The unaccompanied youth were determined to be at great risk of falling into a life of crime and immorality if they weren’t already engaged in criminal and immoral activities. Society’s answer to stopping the spread of immorality and criminal activity in the Progressive Era led to the creation of a eugenics movement that would address perceived inherited traits, often found in young women and street children.

Eugenics

The eugenics movement was well established during the Progressive Era and often created a challenge for social workers and agencies offering assistance and rehabilitation to individuals who did not fit the mold of desired societal behaviors (Kennedy, 2008). Entire groups of people deemed a danger to society and unfit to reproduce, were target by the medical community and even by social workers. This included women who were unmarried and sexually active, the poor, criminals, gays and lesbians, epileptics, alcoholics, the mentally ill, and the mentally retarded (Kennedy 2008). The idea of sterilizing citizens because of their background, flaws, and criminal activity seemed to be a fit solution for the problem at hand. In her work on Eugenics, Kennedy makes a connection between this line of thinking and leading social workers of this time period, such as Addams, Richmond, Breckenridge and Abbot, who embraced the
methodology and policy solutions that were associated with eugenics (Kennedy, 2008). Kennedy further explains that the Social Diagnosis work of Richmond is laced with language and scientific reasoning that accompanied the eugenics movement. For example, “In her diagnosis questionnaire for feebleminded children, she placed moral behavior in the category of a long list of inherited conditions” (Kennedy, 2008, p. 28).

During the Progressive Era there was an air of civil agreement that implicated those who were seen as degenerately unfit. Their primary targets were unmarried young women who were sexually active including adolescents. Their list of degenerates would expand to include other socially unacceptable behaviors such as criminals, alcoholics and paupers. One final group of vulnerable people who fell into this unfortunate category in society were those who were medically impaired with conditions such as epilepsy, mental illness, mental retardation and feeblemindedness (Kunzel, 1993). Many of these issues were prevalent among homeless youth and deeply affected the care and treatment of homeless youth who were served by social workers during the Progressive Era. White slavery and the trafficking of young children who were often homeless became a very real problem for social workers to address.

White Slavery

The roots of sex slavery or “white slavery” are deeply connected to the profession of social work during the Progressive Era. This is the first time in history where women who traded sex for money were viewed as victims in need of rescue. The term carries an intentional racial undertone that applied to whites only revealing the carryover of prejudice against people of color (Bromfield, 2015). Jane Addams is arguably the most outspoken social worker against white slavery. Addams insisted on referring to the young women as victims as opposed to sex workers. She included many stories describing the experiences of young women and girls who were
victims of white slavery in her book *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* and used this platform to introduce the concept of social justice as a political issue (Addams, 1912).

The societal view of social workers began to shift towards a more professional role as they successfully engaged and reformed the “unfit” in society (Abrams & Curran, 2000). Social workers were charged with leading the fight against white slavery and they employed their fundamental religious beliefs to justify their moral judgement of the women they rescued using a casework model. The diagnosis of “feeblemindedness” arose out of medical models in 1910 and was embraced and liberally applied by social workers (Abrams & Curran, 2000). The widely accepted definition of feeblemindedness included any deviant behavior such as sexual preoccupation, low mental functioning, and masculine features which often required forced sterilization to control the population and prevent the disease from spreading to the next generation (Carlson, 2001). Children diagnosed as feebleminded were often sent to reformatories or orphanages where their young minds would be reformed with strict supervision and a kind caretaker.

**Orphanages and Foster Care**

The Progressive Era is marked with the proliferation of orphanages and foster care as an alternative to almshouses and indentured servanthood for the poor during the 19th century. In 1899, the National Conference of Charities and Correction’s Committee on Children submitted a report containing approved practices for dealing with children in substitute care. Their recommendations included a type of family preservation model that retains the child in the home when possible or placing the child out, or “boarding” the child in an institution with constant supervision (Trattner, 1999). Orphanages in urban cities were literally busting at the seams with children of immigrants, plagued with poverty, homelessness and deceased or incapacitated
parents. Social workers were employed to provide casework and manage the process of finding suitable families for the children (Trattner, 1999).

The Children’s Aid Society, founded in 1853 by Charles Loring Brace continued to be a resource to homeless youth in the Progressive Era. Brace is credited with the idea to place orphaned children on trains and transporting them out West to farm communities where they would be provided the sheltering love of a family while learning a trade (Nunez & Sribnick, 2013). This controversial practice, beginning in 1854, came to be known as the “Orphan Train Movement” and continued until the early 1930’s.

Brace understood the drastic nature of the orphan train, but felt it was his duty to help the homeless children. There were too few social services and orphanages and children were provided sparse amounts of food and education. It was not uncommon for children to be released by the orphanage at age fourteen and expected to find their own way in life (Warren, 2001). By the late 1800’s social workers began providing casework that provided much needed oversight into the process of matching the children with appropriate families and monitoring their assimilation to a new culture (O’Conner, 2001). The role of social workers in orphanages and foster care during the Progressive Era continued to be guided by the mindset that the youth were degenerate and socially inferior to live in society without reformation (Kennedy, 2008). Youth who were more extreme with sexual promiscuity and criminal behavior were left to the charge of the criminal justice system that was not equipped to provide protection for the vulnerable youth in an adult environment.

**Juvenile Justice System**

Prior to the Progressive Era there were few options for youth in the criminal justice system. Youth were housed with adults and not guaranteed protection or insulation from the
older inmates. The turn of the century ushered in a host of formal training schools for social workers who were anxious to address the problem of juvenile delinquency (Trattner, 1999). Attention to the problem had gained momentum in the minds of citizens with the publication of journals aimed at highlighting needed reforms for youth. Social work reformers and “child savers” began the work of designing a court system and correctional facilities that were intended to support and protect youth while providing the needed reformation for them to function in society (Platt, 1969). A traditional view of the origin of delinquency held by many social workers included the negative impact of poverty, immigrant cultures and urban life found in the slums of large cities. Others would argue that delinquency was a logical outcome of parental conflict, the breakdown of the family unit and single mothers raising children (Platt, 1969).

Regardless of the origins of delinquency, social workers continued to operate in the mindset that youth prone to criminal and deviant behavior are a product of their genetic predisposition. A major criticism of the juvenile justice system is that police often apprehended and detained children who were minorities and the juvenile court judge would sentence the child to probation or have them committed to an institution without following due process. It seemed that the rights of the child were non-existent in the juvenile justice system around the turn of the 20th century (Trattner, 1999). Social workers had advocated for the safety of the child within the system, but without rights and due process, the youth remained victimized by systems in society.

**The McKinney-Vento Era**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (PL100-77) is the only federal legislation ever created specifically to address the needs of homeless youth who are enrolled in Pre-K to grade 12 in the United States (National Coalition for the Homeless, Fact Sheet #18). This legislation provides school districts a definition of homelessness and several key provisions
or mandates that require schools to identify and address the needs of homeless youth in order to promote academic success. In 1987, the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law. At that time, the law required schools to review and revise their proof of residency requirements for students who were homeless. In 1990, the law was amended to include more specific actions with stronger terminology that included removal of enrollment barriers to permit access to school and promote student success. The law continued to be revised to focus on the needs of homeless youth, and in 2000, the name of the law was changed to McKinney-Vento Act to honor the legislator, Bruce Vento, who fought hard for this bipartisan legislation. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was strengthened in 2015 with the passage of (ESSA), which highlights the primary role that schools play in addressing the educational needs of homeless youth (Ingram, et. al. 2016).

One major component of the Every Student Succeeds Act is that each school district is required to appoint a homeless liaison who is responsible for ensuring that all students are enrolled and able to access an education while ensuring that the key provisions of the law are implemented to serve homeless students. Specifically, the law provides a definition and guidelines to support the homeless liaison as they determine eligibility of students to receive these services. Students are considered homeless if they lack shelter that is fixed, adequate, and regular. This includes living in a shelter, hotel, campground, cars, transitional housing, doubled-up with friends or relatives due to economic hardship, or residing in places not meant for human habitation. The definition also addresses students who are unaccompanied and no longer living with a custodial parent or custodial relative (Dill, 2015). Students who are homeless receive free breakfast and lunch, and if needed, they are given school supplies, clothing, and transportation to their school of origin so that they are not required to change schools each time they move. Fees
for extra-curricular activities are waived to ensure that students can continue participating in sports, music, and other school related activities. Federal funding for these resources is limited, however, leaving schools with the challenge of providing these services with little or no money to do so. (Ingram, et al., 2016).

Homeless liaisons must be identify and code students as homeless, and during the 2013-2014 school year, there were over 1.3 million homeless students identified during the school year (Morewitz, 2016). Schools are central to the lives of students and their communities and are uniquely suited to providing a safe and stable place to continue learning during this time of vulnerability. Schools can also function as a resource for referrals to community agencies for housing, food, transportation, medical and mental health care, and other supports needed to help students overcome the hardship of homelessness (Wong, J., Elliott, L., Reed, S., Ross, W., McGuirk, P., Tallarita, L., & Chouinard, K., 2009).

Social Work and the Care and Treatment of Homeless Youth in the McKinney-Vento Era

There are many different terms used to identify homeless youth: street kids, runaways, unaccompanied youths, unaccompanied minors, throwaways, and missing children, to name a few. Of these, four are most commonly used and the primary terms used in discussions of youth homelessness. “Runaway youth” are youth who run away from home; “throwaway youth” are youth who have been forced out by one or both biological parents; “street youth” indicates youth who live on the streets; and “system youth” is used to describe youth who have exited foster care or the juvenile justice system (Rahman, Turner & Elbedour, 2015). Regardless of the terminology, it is imperative to consider the effects of homelessness on youth so that we can properly address issues that impact their well-being. School social workers and community agencies continue to advocate for federal funding and resources to meet the needs of families and
youth experiencing homelessness. In 2015 the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare included ending homelessness as one of twelve Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative. The initiative includes all types of homelessness plaguing society; however, focus will be on youth homelessness in this research.

Ending youth homelessness is a broad term that applies to children living with homeless families and youth who are alone or unaccompanied. Limited research has been done on this population despite increased services and resource development since the late 1990’s. Social workers will need to focus on program evaluation of existing and newly developed resources to determine best practice models that will aid in the initiative to end youth homelessness (Henwood, et al., 2014). Existing research reveals that this population is particularly vulnerable to substance abuse, mental health issues, physical and sexual abuse, human trafficking, sexually transmitted disease, and traumatic episodes (Morewitz, 2017). The compounded risk factor of dropping out of school while homeless and dealing with the aforementioned issues, leaves very few opportunities for homeless youth to thrive in adulthood.

A collaborative effort with schools will be required to create supports for students that promote academic achievement that leads to positive outcomes within the classroom and out in the community. The voice of homeless youth must be integrated into the process of identification, service development, provision of services and referrals to resources and the evaluation of programs and service delivery. School social workers are in a prime position to identify, advocate, and collaborate on behalf of homeless youth (Morton, Dworsky & Samuels, 2017).
**Education and Truancy**

Homeless youth experience higher rates of health problems and emotional distress because of their unstable living situation and frequent relocations (Morewitz, 2016). This results in increased absences from school with 45% of children who are homeless reporting issues with school attendance, and absenteeism often leads to greater disciplinary issues (Wong, et. al., 2014). Truancy is highest among runaway teens, and they are more likely to be expelled from school than their non-runaway, but homeless peers. This group is also at higher risk for school detention and school suspension (Morewitz, 2016).

The challenges of serving homeless youth in schools are large and complex. The National Center for Family Homelessness (NCFH) reports that over 50% of homeless youth are at least one grade level behind in reading and math, and experience higher rates of developmental delays than non-homeless students. Homeless youth are also reported to have three times more emotional behavioral problems than non-homeless students (NCFH, 2012). This demonstrates the need for school social workers to be engaged with this population, which requires additional support and resources that exceed the capacity of educators alone.

Dropout prevention has been identified as a primary goal to serving homeless youth. The goal of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is to promote academic success for youth experiencing homelessness. In her research on homeless youth in New York City, Papas (2016) identifies several barriers that affect school attendance. In addition to housing instability and frequent relocations, families and youth residing in shelters report difficulty with transportation and access to clean clothing, poor access to child care, food insecurity, long commutes to school, and shelter placements that do not consider the student’s need to attend their school of origin, all of which are cited as reasons for absenteeism (Papas, 2016). Given the great need for basic
resources and the lack of a guarantee or security in accessing them, homeless youth struggle with maintaining their physical and mental health.

Physical Health and Mental Health

Homeless youth frequently report experiencing domestic violence and mistreatment prior to becoming homeless. This trauma and abuse is compounded by the abuse and violence they often experience as homeless youth. Moreover, homeless youth report higher rates of rape and assault than their non-homeless peers (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). A study of homeless youth who experienced verbal and physical abuse prior to becoming homeless shows that they were twice as likely to experience abuse perpetrated by their partner in adolescence and early adulthood (Slesnick, et.al., 2009). This subsequent trauma results in higher rates of depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and mental health issues for homeless youth (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Yoder, 1999). A diagnosis of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD) is dominant in female youth who are homeless with almost half of that population meeting the criteria for a lifetime PTSD diagnosis (Whitbeck, Chen, & Hoyt, et. al., 2004).

The physical health of homeless youth differs radically compared to that of their non-homeless peers. Ongoing abuse and fragile and often dangerous living situations combined with a lack of financial support are often accompanied by substance abuse, food insecurity, sleep deprivation, and high-risk sexual behavior. This in turn leads to a higher incidence of physical illness with limited access to health care (O’Connell, 2004). High-risk sexual behavior among homeless youth places them at an increased risk for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. In Ennet, Bailey & Fedderman’s (1999) research, it was found that 32.6% of the homeless questioned reported a diagnosis of some type of STD. Even more discouraging is the reality that homeless youth report feeling perplexed by the rules of helping institutions, believing
there may be a hidden agenda behind them, when there should be no barriers to accessing health services (Hudson, et. al., 2010). Medical social workers in particular are needed to address the problems that homeless youth encounter with access to services and to provide opportunities for health education that will improve quality and length of life.

**Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a pervasive threat to homeless youth and runaway youth experience a higher risk of being trafficked. This common form of modern-day slavery has become profitable for criminals who seek out homeless youth as targets because of their high vulnerability due to their fragile existence and survival and the lack of basic necessities on the street (NCHE, 2014). Multiple studies have shown that 19% of homeless youth self-report that they have been victims of human trafficking and engage in survival sex as an exchange for necessities such as money, food, shelter, drugs, and other items (Morewitz, 2016).

Traffickers are known to manipulate homeless youth by making false promises of highly desired items and then use force and coercion to maintain control of the homeless youth with the threat of extreme insecurity to prevent the youth from escaping their captors. Homeless youth report being subjected to working long hours without breaks and under strict control. Traffickers also introduce the youth to alcohol and other drugs so that they become more easily managed for trafficking.

For these reasons, the National Center for Homeless Education proposed a model for best practices to be used in homeless education that includes training educators on the issues of sex trafficking and how to respond to students who are at risk of or engaged in sex trafficking (2014). School social workers in particular are ideally situated to participate in creating local policy and leading this best practice model on campuses and in the community.
**Juvenile Justice**

Living on the street lends itself to criminal activity because homeless youth are exposed to higher rates of violence, crime, substance abuse, and other deviant behaviors (Miles & Okamoto, 2008). Homeless youth are also disproportionately represented in disciplinary action in schools and the juvenile justice system. Truancy, suspension, and expulsion can serve as a gateway to the street for homeless youth. In his research on disproportionality and the school-to-prison pipeline, Mallet found that the number of youth in the juvenile justice system is similar to the number of youth in school discipline systems (2017). Many of the youth identified in either system are at risk for homelessness, if not homeless at the point of entry into the system.

Poverty also plays a significant role in youth homelessness, leading to increased likelihood that homeless youth will become enmeshed in juvenile justice system prior to graduation. Poverty impacts educational outcomes, and this is even more pronounced for children of color (Mallett, 2017). Low-income children are more likely to function below grade level, which contributes to lower graduation rates for children of color. Poverty, homelessness, lower academic performance, increased absenteeism, and minority status are contributing factors to the overrepresentation of this vulnerable population in the juvenile justice system (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014).

Another sub-population of youth in society who are overrepresented in school discipline referrals and the juvenile justice system is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youth. LGBT youth represent about one-third of the population of homeless youth, reporting that they are frequently kicked out or told to leave home after coming out to family. These youths also report experiencing a hostile environment in school with increased risk of bullying incidents or fighting to protect themselves (Snap, Hoening, Fields & Russell, 2015). Family
rejection compounded with various other risk factors mentioned in this research leads to a greater risk of LGBT youth attempting suicide and facing major depression and addiction (Dill, 2015). Across all of these vulnerable subpopulations, the complex needs of homeless youth are profound and will require intentional collaboration of community agencies, schools, and social workers, all equipped to manage and implement solutions to ending youth homelessness.

**Housing Resources and Programs**

There are limited resources available to meet the needs of homeless youth. Drop-in centers provide an unstructured environment for provision of basic resources such as laundry, showers, food, transportation assistance, and limited case management where funding is available. While these resources are considered minimal compared to the vast array of needs that have been discussed, there is evidence that drop-in centers make a positive difference in taking a step towards ending youth homelessness (Slesnick, Kang, Bartle-Haring & Aukward, 2008). Shelters and transitional living programs (TLP) offer emergency or longer-term housing solutions with an array of services that include case management, crisis counseling, street outreach, and family counseling. Family counseling is required to the extent that shelter staff are required by federal law to reunite homeless youths with their families or ensure that they are offered vocational assistance, job readiness training, and independent living skills (Pollio, Thompson, Tobias, Ried & Spitznagel, 2006).

In addition to drop-in centers, host homes have increased in popularity as a viable solution to offering select youth a safe alternative to life on the street. Host homes are successful when the individual needs of the student are taken into consideration and staff are available to help facilitate conflict resolution (Julianelle, 2012). The greatest challenge with providing housing resources to youth, however, is the reality that funding is extremely limited. A majority
of communities lack access to basic resources outside of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison and are unprepared to manage the needs of homeless youth. As social workers move forward with the initiative to end youth homelessness, this will likely prove to be the greatest challenge of all.

**Discussion**

The literature is replete with risk factors that affect homeless youth. Youth experiencing homelessness are not equipped to navigate life as an adult while carrying the heavy load of trauma, abuse, violence, addiction, and daily insecurity with basic necessities. Social workers are needed and perhaps best equipped to address the needs of homeless youth, but they must be willing to look at the history associated with serving this population. Many of the same risk factors that impacted homeless youth in the Progressive Era continue to plague this vulnerable population today. It seems that the voices of homeless youths may be the missing element needed to end youth homelessness.

“Lessons Learned from Opening Doors: A Federal Campaign to End Family and Youth Homelessness by 2020” calls for robust data collection in an effort to target funding, which alone is not enough to end youth homelessness even with the best of intentions. Without such data collection, is difficult to determine the extent of success or failure of the campaign due to the difficulties a lack of data leads to in accessing program evaluation, and more effective programs may well be what are needed to determine an effective path out of homelessness. One fact remains: we continue to experience a significant increase in youth experiencing homelessness. Agencies and helping organizations will need to prioritize program evaluation and data collection for the population they serve. The data and research will be useful in forging a
solution to end youth homelessness, which will require interdisciplinary collaboration equipped with tools needed to serve this vulnerable population.

**Implications for Social Work Practitioners and Educators**

Social workers are indeed best positioned and equipped to address the grand challenge of ending youth homelessness. Giving a voice to homeless youth that would otherwise not be heard may be the best place to begin. Issues that impact individuals who experience homelessness are extensive and easily identified in multiple courses of the social work curriculum. Using a micro, mezzo, or macro perspective will provide an opportunity to train social work students on how ask questions and seek information for program evaluation and data collection. This will increase the voice of the student in their work and address the gaps in research with this population so that permanent solutions can be found. Importantly, the deficit of available data about this population affords macro social workers a unique opportunity to create pathways that lead to improved data collection and inform policy more fully.

Data collection at the micro level promotes the individual needs of the homeless youth and validates the individuality of each client. The population is diverse and complex which indicates a need for diverse solutions for the problems experienced by homeless youth. Social work with homeless youth in a mezzo setting will give rise to collectively understanding their needs and designing resources that address the necessities for overcoming homelessness. Macro social workers have power to affect change with policy and advocacy, but they need to possess a foundational understanding of the needs of homeless youth.

The data and knowledge gained from these efforts will assist in the development of best practices that can be used by school and community social workers who provide services to youth experiencing homelessness. Social work educators can be intentional with equipping
students to work in micro, mezzo, and macro settings that inform the Grand Challenge of Ending Youth Homelessness.

**Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness**

A key feature of the SEM that promises lasting change is programming. In exchange for the hardship faced by homeless youth at each level in the SEM, programming must infuse something positive to address the negatives of the hardship. SEM attempts to address problems that arise within the micro-systems (targeted settings within each domain) and examines relationships between the homeless youth in a specific ecological context (Slesnick, N., et al., 2007). This model works well in social research because it views the person in the environment from a strengths-based perspective and incorporates the levels of intervention needed to address complex social issues, and the model points to insufficient progress in ending youth homelessness.

One flaw with the SEM model in both the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras is the lack of focus on the voices of the homeless youth. The value of listening to the youth and allowing them to speak about their needs and solutions to their problems has been identified as a promising practice when working with this population in order to ensure policy and programs address their specific needs and problems (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016).

To solve the problem of youth homelessness, one must examine the issues through the lens of the individual, which will connect to a deeper understanding of the impact on society. The Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness (see figure 1.2) has enhanced the SEM Model to include a bi-directional flow of “voice” that informs every level of intervention on behalf of homeless youth. The central focus of this model is the homeless youth and including
their voice and ensuring it is welcome and expected to speak in the helping process. The goal is to create solutions with the homeless youth.

The next layer of support is found in relationships that are referred to as Agencies of Socialization. Agencies of Socialization represent relationships that inform and support role identity and formation in the lives of homeless youth. This includes individuals, groups, and institutions that interface in a meaningful way to socialize the youth (Reuven, 2015).

The third level of this model promotes considering the voice of youth in services. This includes program development, implementation, and evaluation with attention paid to promising practices for service delivery and housing needs. Finally, the fourth level focuses on the need for homeless youth to be heard, believed, and acknowledged as a priority in society. The greatest opportunity for this is through the creation of public policy that adequately addresses the needs of homeless youth based on data collection and evidence-based practice. In this way, homeless youth themselves become active in advocacy and policy regarding issues that must be resolved in order for them to permanently exit homelessness.
Conclusion

The role of social work in ending youth homelessness will require a shift in thinking from both the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras. Social workers have a long history of caring deeply about youth homelessness, but need to create solutions with the youths who are experiencing homelessness.

Increasing our historical perspective of this issue is necessary to learn from the past, as it impacts the present and informs the future. Creating a trauma-informed pedagogy that informs a Nested Model for Ending Youth Homelessness gives rise to hope for someday successfully addressing the suffering and trauma that compound the problems experienced by homeless youth. For a modern society cannot sustain itself long in the midst of growing family and youth homelessness.
A Narrative Review of Strategies Used to Support Homeless Youth and
End Youth Homelessness in the McKinney-Vento Era

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Abstract

Youth homelessness in the United States has become increasingly progressive during this century, and has led to a national focus on ending homelessness among youth. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) reported that 1,354,363 children were identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness in the 2016-2017 school year (McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Wang, K., Rathbun, A., Barmer, A., Forrest Cataldi, E., and Bullock Mann, F., 2018). This number, the highest on record, represents a 70% increase from the 2007-2008 school year. Certain groups of youth face a higher risk of homelessness. The Chapin Hall Youth Count report found that homeless youth have a 346% greater risk of dropping out of school than their non-homeless peers and that black or African American youth have an 83% increase in reporting homelessness (Morton, Dworsky & Samuels, 2017). In light of the youth homelessness crisis, in 2015, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (ASSW) included ending homelessness as one of its twelve grand challenges. During the McKinney-Vento Era, from 1987 to present, social work has played a strong role in addressing youth homelessness, and to better understand this history, a narrative review of the literature scrutinizes recurring themes related to successful strategies used to support homeless youth and end youth homelessness, paying particular attention to strategies employed by the field of social work and social workers. Using a qualitative approach, the author analyzed federal research reports that focus on issues related to homeless youth and literature that is relevant to social workers and the grand challenge to end youth homelessness. The narrative review produced four major themes: services, relationships, policy and data, and promising practices. Explored in succession, the themes will contribute to knowledge that will inform social work educators and support social workers in developing a framework for
understanding what is needed to end youth homelessness. The narrative review suggests that ending, and not simply managing, homelessness in the U.S. would require a bold shift in how American society has traditionally viewed and treated homelessness and the solutions it has long pursued.

*Keywords:* homeless youth, unaccompanied youth, ending youth homelessness, promising practices, McKinney-Vento
Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) reported that 1,354,363 children were identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness in the 2016-2017 school year (McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Wang, K., Rathbun, A., Barmer, A., Forrest Cataldi, E., and Bullock Mann, F., 2018). This number, the highest number on record, represents a 70% increase from the 2007-2008 school year, causing some communities to declare a state of emergency (ICPH, 2015). Youth experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable and require special attention due to increased rates of substance use, history of childhood trauma, experience with institutional placement, and increased mental and physical health issues including sexually transmitted disease and a higher risk for HIV (Logan, Frye, Pursell, Anderson-Nathe, Scholl, & Korthius, 2013; Saperstein, Lee, Ronan, Seeman, & Medalia, 2014). School districts have been federally mandated to identify students experiencing homelessness since the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law in 1987. The law was named after State Representative Stuart B. McKinney who championed the legislation for homeless youth. In 2000 the law was re-named the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) to honor the hard work and support for homeless youth shown by State Representative Bruce Vento following his death (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2019).

Pursuing solutions to youth homelessness in the United States dates back to the Orphan Train Movement in 1856, when Charles Brace began shipping orphaned and impoverished children on trains out West to join host families who promised to protect and educate the children in exchange for housing (Holt, 1992). The Progressive Era (1890-1929) saw tremendous changes in laws for the protection of children, their rights to education, age limits on number of hours they can work, and children’s personal, all of which were efforts assisted by
social workers (Trattner, 1999). However, even with further changes in policy and well over a century of assistance from social workers, the problem of youth homelessness remains. In 2015 the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASW) announced the Twelve Grand Challenges of Social Work (GCSW). Including youth homelessness in the overall Grand Challenge of Ending Homelessness (GC2H) is essential to addressing youth homelessness. This grand challenge coincided with the development of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness framework for ending youth homelessness (USICH, 2018). There is a clear relationship between these two entities that have come together to create solutions to ending youth homelessness. The focus of this research is to explore data related to the effectiveness of social work practice with homeless youth while answering the research question: in what ways are social workers effectively working to end youth homelessness and what promising practices are emerging in recent (or current) literature are positively impacting homeless youth to this end?

This paper is a narrative review of the literature that contains key words and concepts related to ending youth homelessness during the McKinney-Vento Era from 1987 to present. The period since the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) has seen the greatest increase in funding for programs aimed at homeless youth. MVA requires school districts to appoint a homeless liaison who is responsible for identifying homeless students, removing barriers to enrollment, and overseeing key provisions for supporting homeless youth. Key provisions include free breakfast and lunch, access to uniforms and school supplies, transportation to the student’s school of origin, and immediate enrollment for students who lack documentation often required of non-homeless students. Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are included in this federal protection and include students who no longer reside with a
parent or legal guardian and still desire to attend school (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persuad, Pitt, Hosek, Reker, Turner, Flores, & Flores, 2015; Canfield, 2014).

The MVA can be assessed using a strengths-based policy framework for policy analysis for social workers and human service professionals (Chambers & Wedel, 2005). The framework, designed by Chambers and Wedel, argues that the value or “goodness” of policy can be determined when policy “is just, fair, or appropriate to the population” (Hill, 2008). The framework is value-based and aligns with strengths-based social work and views people as the best source of information for creating solutions. The “voice” of the client is foundational to the framework, which recognizes the benefit of using existing strengths within the environment to address areas of need. This strengths-based framework for social policy analysis differs from traditional policy analysis because it focuses on the people facing the problems rather than the problem itself.

The MVA demonstrates a strengths-perspective in regard to advocacy for students and provisions, but there are notable weaknesses that directly impact the homeless youths. One issue is the lack of accountability for schools that do not identify or report their numbers of homeless students. Funding does not immediately flow from this legislation; rather, school districts must apply for competitive grant funding, a process that is lengthy and complex and frequently viewed by school districts as falling short in a cost-benefit analysis of time and effort to maintain grant requirements. Additionally, the MVA does not rely on the voice of the client, a noted element of the strength-based approach. Perhaps the greatest strength of the MVA is found in its definition of homelessness, because its language for determining homeless status differs greatly from other federal terminology and criteria that determine homelessness. The differences between the
federal definitions of homelessness greatly impact policy and provision of services, including who is eligible for which services based on the guiding definition of homelessness.

This research considers three different federal definitions of homeless youth, and demonstrates the need for uniformity as a solution to homelessness amongst youth is sought. A narrative review of the literature seeks to identify recurring themes related to successful strategies and approaches to ending youth homelessness, paying particular attention to those including social work and social workers. Findings of the research are discussed with implications for social work educators and future research.

To begin, it is necessary to understand the complex challenges that arise due to multiple definitions of the term homeless youth within three federal agencies providing services to homeless youth: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). While federal agencies agree that a universal definition of homelessness would be beneficial to state and local organizations that provide services, federal agencies have been unsuccessful in creating an interagency definition of homelessness. Not only do the numbers of youth experiencing homelessness vary greatly depending on the definition of homelessness applied, there are critical differences within each definition that social workers must understand as the profession embraces the grand challenge to end youth homelessness.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identifies four categories of criteria that can determine homelessness: 1) literally homeless, 2) imminent risk of homelessness, 3) homeless under other federal statutes, and 4) fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). Next, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) is required to use the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance
Act (MVA) to determine homelessness as homeless children and youth who do not have a fixed, adequate, or regular nighttime residence and unaccompanied youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (USICH, 2018). Finally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers a definition that is guided by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). The RHYA defines homeless youth as youth under the age of 21 who are unable to safely reside with a relative and have no alternative living arrangement (USICH, 2018).

The literature is replete with evidence that homelessness increases the risks for devastating and lifelong struggles for youth as they move into adulthood (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017; Buckner, 2008; Child Trends, 2013). Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are youth enrolled in school who no longer reside with a parent or legal guardian. UHY often experience food insecurity and limited access to healthcare, which places them at an increased risk for mental and physical health and social issues (Miller, 2011; Schneir, 2009; Pergamit, Cunningham, Burt, Lee, Howell, & Bertumen, 2013). UHY with a history of severe physical or sexual abuse and neglect are at a higher risk for re-victimization and human trafficking (Morewitz, 2016; Rice, Lee, & Taitt, 2011). Additionally, particular sub-populations experience a higher risk for homelessness. The Voices of Youth Count results bring to light that students with less than a high school diploma or GED have a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Other factors in their study place the increased risk of homelessness for LGBT youth at 120%, low-income youth at 162%, and unmarried parenting youth at 200% (Morton, Dworsky & Samuels, 2017).

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) began a competitive funding opportunity within the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. The funding is offered to states and school districts that demonstrate need. There is evidence to
suggest that promising practices are emerging with the help of federal funding and improved data collection. Social workers will be a necessary component to successfully reduce the numbers of homeless youth (Teasley, 2015; Groton, Teasley, & Canfield, 2013).

This compels us to question the effectiveness of social work with homeless youth and to ask the question, in what ways are social workers effectively working to end (youth) homelessness? What promising practices are positively impacting homeless youth to this end? This study focused on promising practices and successful strategies identified in published literature focusing specifically on unaccompanied minors. The study defined unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) as school age youth between the ages of 12 and 19 who no longer reside in the care of an adult with legal guardianship or custody. It is clear that social workers have been at the forefront of this issue for well over a century, yet the problem of youth homelessness remains.

A narrative review of the literature was conducted to explore the role of social work in ending youth homelessness during the McKinney-Vento Era from 1987 to present. The author used a narrative review to identify recurring themes related to successful strategies and approaches, paying particular attention to the role of social work and social workers. The findings of this research identified areas of focus for social workers in clinical and community practice as well as social work educators to address gaps in curriculum to strengthen competencies needed to make an impact that promotes ending youth homelessness.

**Literature Review**

During the Progressive Era (1890-1929), social workers influenced the creation of the juvenile justice system, compulsory school attendance laws, and child labor laws (Trattner, 1999; Popple, 2018) With formal social case work becoming the norm, a new lens was created with
which to view the needs of homeless youth (Trattner, 1999). The McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present) has ushered in a deeper level of understanding of the needs of homeless youth (NAEH, 2019). Recent growth in the numbers of homeless youth have given homeless youth desperately needed attention that has resulted in increased federal funding to address the issue (USICH, 2018). In spite of progressive laws and policy created to protect homeless youth, social workers have been largely unsuccessful in eradicating homelessness.

**McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA)**

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law in 1987. This groundbreaking bipartisan federal legislative response to homelessness required states to revise residency requirements and remove barriers to academic success for homeless students. The MVA mandates that every school district appoint a homeless liaison who is accountable for identification of homeless students using a specific definition of homelessness and overseeing key provisions of the legislation (Tierney, 2015). The literature identifies three primary functions of the MVA: preparation, accessibility, and collaboration (Canfield, Teasley, Abell, & Randolph, 2012). Schools must be prepared to enroll and serve homeless youth. This requires schools to have a protocol that outlines their plan for serving homeless students that demonstrates adherence to the law (Canfield, 2014).

Accessibility presented and continues to present a challenge to schools because it allows the student to remain in their school of origin (the school they were attending at the time they became homeless) regardless of where the student resides during their homelessness, with the financial burden of transportation falling on the school district (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Isreal, 2006; Canfield, 2014). Removing barriers to enrollment include waiving proof of residence requirements and a grace period with enrollment documents such as a birth certificate,
social security card, and immunization records. Collaboration is a major function of the homeless liaison who must advocate for the needs and rights of homeless students (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). This often involves educating school staff and administrators about the rights of homeless students and building bridges to connect the school to community resources and agencies that serve homeless families (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan & Canfield, 2015; DOE, 2015).

The role of a homeless liaison appears to be straightforward, but there is little existing literature that examines the role of the homeless liaison and their understanding of the implementation of MVA. One study found significant inconsistencies in how homeless liaisons are perceived, specifically in their understanding of the implementation of MVA (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015). This creates tension for families and unaccompanied youth who are homeless and unable to access needed educational resources. Conversely, it is not uncommon for a homeless liaison to report that they were not aware that they had been appointed as homeless liaison for their district (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). This lack of communication places students and the school district at a disadvantage for meeting the needs of their most vulnerable students (Julianelle, 2008).

The needs of unaccompanied youth are complex and without a family to advocate for them, the homeless liaison is often their primary link to remaining in school and graduating (Julianelle and Foscarinis, 2003). Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY) experience higher dropout rates and increased risk for mental and physical health issues, being bullied, and becoming a victim of human trafficking. About one in three UHY are homeless due to family rejection after coming out as LGBTQ (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). The scope of needs presented by UHY in particular often exceed the skill set of school personnel, who become
overwhelmed with the complex and extreme issues that affect UHY (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Reker, Turner, Flores & Flores, 2015).

The National Center for Homeless Education reports that numbers of chronically homeless adults have significantly decreased over the past ten years due to federal efforts to end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness (NCHE, 2012). Accordingly, attention has shifted to deal with the increasing numbers of homeless children and youth that have more than doubled since 2005 (Child Trends, 2013; NCHE, 2012).

**Promising Practices and Federal Initiatives**

Ending youth homelessness was first addressed as a goal in 2010 when the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) launched Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, with a goal to end youth homelessness by 2020 (USICH, 2013). Each year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) conducts an annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count to determine the numbers of homeless adults, families, and youth on any given night in the U.S. The 2014 PIT count showed approximately 45,000 unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 living on streets, in shelter, or in transitional housing. The majority of youth in this number are over the age of 18 (USICH, 2013). Over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, there were more than 90,000 UHY under the age of 18 enrolled in school districts (NCHE, 2015). These numbers alone are cause for alarm and justify the need for increased resources to provide the necessary support to end youth homelessness.

The following promising practices are outlined in an interagency collaborative report with HUD, USICH, and the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This report is the most comprehensive summary of promising practices that exist in relation to services for UHY. Additionally, Ending Youth Homelessness Guidebook Series: Promising Program Models
is a resource intended for communities to use when applying for federal funding with the Continuum of Care (CoC) competitive grant cycle. This funding is a primary source of funding for agencies providing direct services to homeless individuals (HUD, 2017). The report identifies specific programming typology and promising practices that are assessed when communities and agencies apply for federal funding.

Street Outreach

Street outreach programs are often the first place to provide an intervention and meet basic needs for UHY. Street outreach teams are considered to be highly skilled with engagement and building trust. Teams that include peer-based intervention are especially effective in street outreach because youth are reported to be more honest with their peers than with professionals (HUD, DHHS, HSICH, 2016). Centers that operate with a trauma-informed approach have been found to be more successful and competent with engaging LGBTQ youth who are especially vulnerable to homelessness, and that such an approach may be necessary (HUD, 2017).

Drop-In Centers

Drop-in centers provide an informal atmosphere that is appealing to UHY. Key elements of promising practices of drop-in centers include a low-or-no barrier approach where UHY experience limited rules in a non-judgmental environment where basic needs are met and staff are trained in a trauma-informed approach to service delivery (USICH, 2013). Drop-in centers that offer counseling services that include crisis intervention and conflict resolution are especially helpful with family reunification. The ability to provide services specifically to LGBTQ youth is also necessary (HUD, 2017).

Family Engagement
Family engagement services provide much needed support to help youth determine what a safe and appropriate re-entry into their family will require. Promising practices include comprehensive intervention that provides services to the entire family. The intervention may include individual, group, and family counseling; mediation, respite care, alcohol and drug counseling; and referrals to community resources as needed (HUD, DHHS, & USICH, 2016). A focus on building strength with the help of a caseworker who is equipped to actively listen and include the voice of the youth is a central tenet of family engagement. Cultural competency is complimentary to a strength-based approach. Successful family engagement programs are designed to provide long-term support and aftercare to the family. This increases stability in life and improves capacity for connection and reducing homelessness when these supports are in place. Youth exit the program prepared to move safely forward with a plan that protects the UHY (HUD 2017).

**Youth Shelters**

Key elements of promising practices of youth shelters include providing a safe alternative to traditional shelters with a low-or-no barrier environment. A safety and harm reduction model provides screening for what is considered to be a safe behavior as opposed to enforcing substance abuse rules (HUD, 2017). Youth shelters that offer support for family connection are valuable in maintaining safe relationships and engaging with family reunification conversations. Access to case management, transitional housing, and financial assistance can provide a long-term benefit to UHY and prevent chronic homelessness (HUD, DHHS, & USICH, 2016).

**Host Homes**

Host homes provide an appealing alternative to youth shelters due to their cost effectiveness and the home-like atmosphere. Promising practices include recruitment and
specialized trauma informed training for host families, which includes support from case
management and conflict resolution with special training focused on boundary setting, cultural
competency, and conflict management. Strict screening protocol is enforced for the recruitment
of host homes to ensure the safety of the UHY. Case management services to provide problem
solving, skill-building, communication, and goal-setting are necessary, and youth need to
voluntarily be placed in a home. This model is most effective with youth who are able to build
caring and authentic relationships (HUD, 2017).

**Housing Options**

There are several housing programs that have been funded by HUD with the use of
Continuum of Care (CoC) funding. Transitional housing and transitional living provide short-
term (up to 24 months) of supportive housing that is designed to prepare the UHY for
independent living. The focus is on life skills, education, and employment. The use of peer
support is especially useful to help with building trust and supporting the idea of transition to
adulthood with the guidance of a mentor. Rapid re-housing can work well when programs offer
a housing first approach that combines immediate access to stable and safe housing with low-
barriers and persistent voluntary services with high-level engagement. Positive relationship
development with landlords, when evaluated, has been found to be critical to the success of this
model that is income-based. Intensive case management is offered and ensures services are
appropriate to the needs and goals of the individual as they create a transition plan to
independent living. A final housing option is non-time-limited supportive housing for youth
with complex needs. This model serves high need youth who are experiencing mental health
issues, substance abuse disorders, and trauma. LGBTQ youth in particular experience higher
rates of mental health disorders, which will require a cultural competency component for staff
who provide them services. All services in this model are individualized and designed to meet the youth where they are. It is important to create a “moving on” culture for youth who demonstrate readiness. Utilization of a youth advisory council is especially useful to help foster a sense of “community” and inform programming rules and expectations (HUD, 2017).

These promising practices provide a great deal of structural framework for agencies and communities planning to develop resources for UHY. Understanding and implementing these guidelines will likely involve a variety of professionals, with social workers having the crucial opportunity and responsibility to engage. The identification of ending homelessness as a Grand Challenge of Social Work (GCSW) provides an invaluable opening to address and end homelessness for UHY. Some questions we must ask ourselves as a profession include: Are we teaching skills needed to meet this challenge? Are we ready to prepare and equip social workers to collect data, develop policy, and provide micro, mezzo, and macro interventions that will truly end youth homelessness?

While this literature review focused on recommendations for homeless youth broadly, my narrative review will look at related literature more broadly with a specific focus. This research seeks to ask and clarify what might constitute emerging "best practices" or those practices and approaches associated with positive outcomes such as maintaining stable housing, becoming gainfully employed, becoming engaged in education or specialized job training particularly for UHY (unaccompanied homeless youth). Approaches involving or having specific implications for professional social workers are reviewed. The next section of this article focuses on qualitative narrative review of the literature that helps answer the research questions: In what ways are social workers effectively working to end (youth) homelessness? What promising practices are positively impacting homeless youth to that end?
Methodology

The decision to conduct a narrative review was made to objectively identify key roles as reflected in the literature of social work necessary to engage in promising practice models that have been effective with efforts to end youth homelessness. This method is advantageous when exploring themes between connections of strategies, interventions, and outcomes, or seeking to identify gaps in research (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2014). Narrative reviews become a sort of canvas for sorting out information to paint a clear picture of a particular theme or topic that seeks to answer a question in the research. One stated challenge of narrative review is the issue of replicability. As with other qualitative methods, it can be difficult for researchers to transfer the methodology. This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2014).

Sample

Five data bases were searched Social Work Abstracts, PsycInfo, Medline, Education Research Group, and ERIC, as well as Google Scholar. The review also includes results from two journals, Social Work and School Social Work, using the same specific search terms in the title. The selection of databases was made to include a wide scope of information that captures the nature of social work with homeless youth. Viewpoints from diverse disciplines were sought to include the micro and macro nature of social work practice with homeless youth. All journals are peer-reviewed and my search was limited to articles published during the McKinney-Vento Era. Federal reports are used to provide context and framework related to fit for social work roles. The selection criteria excluded articles that identified social work in the context of adults and families. Although the inclusion of this content may have been useful to the review’s findings, the magnitude of information created barriers to focus on information related to
unaccompanied or homeless youth and feasible methods of research for a journal article.

Although all articles offer specific insight needed to inform the research question, the federal reports offer specific content unique to the perspective of ending homelessness. The main search terms used were as follows: social work* AND ‘practice’ OR ‘homeless youth’ OR ‘unaccompanied youth’ OR ‘McKinney-Vento’.

The sample consisted of 22 journal articles and 15 Federal and Academic reports (see table 2.1) that specifically address needs of UHY and promising practices and existing data related to evidence-based practices with UHY. A coding system (see table 2.2) was developed to identify common terms, interventions, topics, etc., with four themes emerging: relationships, services, promising practices, and data and policy (see figure 2.1). These themes represent critical elements considered to be fundamental and essential to the work of ending youth homelessness.
Table 2.1

Sample of Federal and Academic Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample of 15 Federal and Academic Reports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing + High School = Success: Schools and Communities Uniting to House Unaccompanied Youth (2012) NAEHCY</td>
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ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS
Definitions

For the purpose of this study social workers are defined as professionals who are positioned to intervene or impact people, problems and issues on a micro, mezzo, and macro level. Social work with homeless youth at the micro and mezzo level includes direct practice with unaccompanied or homeless youth in individual or group settings and small institutions. Social work at the macro level includes a broad range of interventions that impact larger communities or systems of care (Zastrow, 2016). The definition of practice includes the manner in which the social work intervention is applied. Examples include, but are not limited to, case management, therapy with individuals, families and groups, policy and advocacy, and program development (Zastrow, 2016). As stated earlier, the definition of homeless youth and
unaccompanied youth are complex due to the differences in definitions between the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the US Department of Education (DOE). This paper will adhere to the definition provided by the DOE, which defines homeless and unaccompanied youth as youth who “lack a fixed, regular, and nighttime residence.” This includes living in shelters, hotels, or in a place not intended for human habitation.

Unaccompanied youth are youth who are homeless and no longer living in the care of a custodial parent or guardian (DOE, 2018). It is understood that the literature includes related terms to refer to homeless youth, such as throwaway youth, runaway youth, street youth, and systems youth. Throwaway youth are youth who have been ordered out of their home by parents or caregivers and have no other place to go. Runaway youth are youth who have left home without permission and stay away for more than one night. Street youth are youth who have lived on the street without the care of a parent or caregiver, and system youth are youth who became homeless after exiting the juvenile justice system or foster care system (Pergamit, 2010). The term “ending homelessness,” as defined by the USICH, means “every community will have a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can’t be prevented, it is rare, brief and one-time experience” (2018).

This narrative review is organized by themes in the literature that have been noted by the author, specific interventions that have been shown to be effective to the population of UHY, and a review of the federal strategy for ending youth homelessness.

Findings

The national focus on ending youth homelessness and the AASW Grand Challenge of Ending Homelessness (GC2EH) present a unique opportunity for the social work profession. For the first time in the history of the profession, there is potential to make a lasting impact on efforts
toward ending youth homelessness. This narrative review examined research and literature that illuminate promising practices that social workers are implementing to end youth homelessness. The literature selected for inclusion in this research focused on articles that identified specific strategies and evidenced-based practices that have been utilized by social workers or strategies that could be implemented by social workers, program evaluation that incorporated the voices of homeless youth, and federal strategies that have been identified as promising practices for ending youth homelessness.

Four dominant themes (see figure 2.1) emerged within this research that provide a framework for understanding what may be essential to end youth homelessness. The strongest theme involves types of services that are needed and methods for connecting the youth to resources that have been identified as more helpful to homeless youth. Second, the importance of relationships was a prominent theme. The ability to feel accepted and safe is central to this population. A third theme that emerged is policy and data. Understanding the influence of policies that impact homeless youth and the need for data collection to impact the creation of policy that makes sense when providing guidance on issues that impact homeless youth. The fourth theme that developed is promising practices with UHY. Each theme can be used to inform the research question and lead us toward a plan that will move beyond addressing needs of homeless youth to a place of providing services that are evidence-based and intentional in ending youth homelessness.

Services

Given the traditional model of addressing homelessness through services, a theme describing types of services broke through as most dominant in the literature. The literature included in this study revealed the need for services to be offered with “low threshold” or “no
barriers” to youth. This means that age should be the only consideration for who is eligible for services. Excluding youth from services based on their history with substance abuse or criminal history are often reported as barriers to service utilization (Leonard, et. al., p. 453, 2017). Youth who identify as LGBTQ present unique needs, such as sensitivity with gender-neutral bathrooms, showers, and sleeping assignments in shelters. Programs and policy need to be created with an understanding that the feeling of being accepted is paramount to getting the youth off the street. Youth who were interviewed in one study reported that feeling “at home” and the “family environment” helped them feel safe and build trust with staff. Youth report that feeling understood and supported in this type of environment was key in their decision to return for services, stating “you feel like this is where you needed to be your whole life (Leonard, et. al., 2017).”

There was agreement in the literature regarding basic services that youth require to permanently exit homelessness: case management, food and housing (including shelter), education, health care (including mental health), and relationships (including family re-engagement). The provision of case management is central to connecting the UHY to services, providing crisis intervention, and conducting a needs assessment (Leeuwen, 2004). Food and shelter are mentioned with equal emphasis in the literature. UHY experience food insecurity and subsequent physical health issues as a result of living on the streets in unsafe conditions. Sleep deprivation, food deprivation, and hunger lead to higher rates of respiratory distress, malnutrition, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s). A lack of food and shelter increases the risk for human trafficking, which frequently leads to increased physical and mental health trauma (Morewitz, 2016).
Education is vital to empowering UHY. Lack of assistance in enrolling in school and acquiring needed school supplies, clothing, and tutoring are frequently reported as barriers experienced by UHY (Groton, Teasley & Canfield, 2013). Unstable housing and high mobility while in high school increase the risk of UHY dropping out of school while youth who remain engaged in school experience increased stability with relationships and fewer mental and physical health issues (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012). UHY who drop out of school are 346% more likely to become chronically homeless in adulthood (NCHE, 2016).

Housing needs of UHY are at the heart of ending youth homelessness, yet solutions to youth housing are complex. Solutions must include low barriers such as the housing first model that has been successful with ending chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness. A housing first model takes into consideration that the youth are likely to have addiction or substance abuse issues, mental health problems, and involvement with the criminal justice system, yet housing is offered unconditionally to the UHY as trained case managers begin to connect them to resources (Leonard, Freeman, Ritchie, Gwadz, Tabac, Dickson, … Hirsh, 2017).

**Relationships**

Relationships and family re-engagement are essential to long-term success in ending youth homelessness. The relationship between case managers and staff working with UHY are important to creating trust and building healthy coping mechanisms that are needed if or when the youth decide to re-integrate back into their immediate family. The likelihood of chronic homelessness increases as the youth spends more time on the street. Shelter staff and street outreach workers who are trained to promote safe and appropriate family re-integration can have a positive outcome for ending homelessness for UHY (Thompson, Pollio, Constantine, Reid, & Nesbitt, 2002).
Creating supportive relationships with UHY is fundamental to the helping process and directly impacts the likelihood of ending youth homelessness. Developing trusting relationships and experiencing the benefits of mutual respect are foundational to honest and open communication. Engagement without judgment promotes a level of acceptance that the UHY will likely make decisions that are counterproductive to the helping process (Leonard, Freeman, Ritchie, Gwadz, Tabac, Dickson, … Hirsh, 2017).

**Data Collection and Policy**

There was a prevalent theme that centered on the need for increased data collection to fully capture the current state and needs of UHY. Ongoing program evaluation of existing services is needed to determine effectiveness of treatment, efficiency of services, and accountability in education. Policy development is needed to strengthen areas that directly impact UHY and remove barriers to access in housing, education, and community resources (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015). There are three operational definitions of homelessness. Each definition has an impact on how services can be delivered to UHY pointing to a need for interagency cooperation.

**Promising Practices**

Promising practices within schools that became apparent are Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS), also known as Response to Intervention (RTI). The purpose of MTSS is to provide systematic support early in the life of children who are at-risk with poor academic performance or exhibit social and behavioral problems. The services are provided to students with a gradual increase in intensity when need for it is indicated. A primary benefit to MTSS is the incorporation of designated protocols and an integrated data collection and assessments to assist in program evaluation (Sulkowski and Michael, 2014).
Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a mentoring model that provides developmentally appropriate support to youth that promotes resiliency. The model identifies five key outcomes that are necessary for youth to transition into adulthood: competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion. PYD is dependent upon the entire community by engagement with family, friends, schools, and community organizations (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

It is important to note that both MTSS and PYD are not models specifically created to address the needs of homeless youth and the diversity within this population. However, there is evidence in the literature to support positive outcomes for homeless youth and youth who have been served in programs that utilize PYD and educational systems that utilize MTSS, because individual needs of the youth are incorporated into the model. (Leonard, Freeman, Ritchie, Gwadz, Tabac, Dickson, … Hirsh, 2017; Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014). This focus on the individual and unique needs provides an extra layer of support for homeless youth who identify as LGBT, for instance, and are risk for being overlooked in school and the community (Walls, Potter, & Van Leeuwen, 2009).
Discussion

This research sought to identify ways that social workers are effectively working to end youth homelessness and what promising practices are impacting homeless youth to this end. The narrative review of the literature revealed four dominant themes that are positively impacting outcomes for UHY and identified features of engagement that have proved to be beneficial. The four themes are services, relationships, data collection, and promising practices.

The dominant theme of services includes activities that often require the expertise of case management that connects UHY to resources including housing, education, shelter, health and mental health services, transportation, and access to food. The theme of relationships includes the importance of communication, empathy, acceptance, and human connection. The theme of data collection arose from a need to identify traits or current trends in UHY, service utilization,
and outcomes of service delivery that are offered to UHY both at school and in the community. The final theme that emerged from the literature was promising practices. Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Positive Youth Development (PYD) are two models that are not unique to programming for UHY, but serve the population well because of the emphasis on development of an individualized plan of intervention for the youth. MTSS is being used in many school systems to promote positive outcomes for at-risk youth and PYD is a community-mentoring model that engages family, friends, and schools to serve at-risk youth and equips the youth to thrive in adulthood.

This research creates a lens for evaluating the needs of UHY with the goal of ending youth homelessness. However, in order to accomplish this goal a universal definition of homeless youth is needed so that policy and funding can be equitably distributed to state and local programs serving homeless youth. Presently, there are three federal organizations (HUD, DOE, HHS) that provide funding for services based on their organizationally specific definition of homeless youth. This disjointed approach leaves gaps in funding streams by limiting the criteria of who can be served depending on the organizational definition, negatively impacting all four themes that were discussed in the narrative review.

Opening Doors was launched as a federal initiative to end (youth) homelessness by 2020. In 2015 the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare named ending homelessness as one of the Grand Challenges of Social Work. This common goal cannot be met without a unified and collective move that incorporates collaboration between schools, religious communities, and communities, along with liberal access to funding that promotes comprehensive data collection and implementation of promising practices discussed in this research. The goal of ending youth homelessness has far-reaching implications for society. The
detrimental impact of homelessness on mental and physical health alone indicates a need for a solution. Added to that is the financial burden on our society for the cost of long-term homelessness, which is not sustainable.

The role of social work in ending homelessness offers many opportunities and will require intentional action toward creating opportunities for curriculum development that informs and empowers students of social work to become deeply engaged with understanding the place of poverty, power, and privilege in society. Social work students can be given opportunities to learn how to write informed policy and advocacy that directly impacts issues that create and impact homelessness among youth. The promising practices that are outlined in the Ending Youth Homelessness Guidebook Series: Promising Program Models call for the implementation of the types of services and resources that are frequently delivered by social workers. The question remains: Are we as educators preparing social workers with the knowledge and skills to effectively orchestrate, implement, and evaluate the services that identified in promising practices? Equipping students to work at micro, mezzo, and macro levels must include dialogue that promotes critical thinking and creative solutions to ending youth homelessness.

The strengths of this research parallel what is found in the literature and the collaborative goals of ending homelessness as expressed by the Grand Challenge of Ending Homelessness and Opening Doors. There is broad agreement in the literature regarding key elements of promising practices and that a universal definition of youth homelessness is needed to help guide policy and funnel funding to programs at a state and local level where identification, eligibility, and provision of services materialize (Leonard, Freeman, Ritchie, Gwadz, Tabac, Dickson, … Hirsh, 2017).
The limitations of the research are found in the omission of significant themes around the needs of LGBT youth who are homeless, youth who are seeking refugee status, or immigrant youth. Recent legislative changes are likely to impact these youth, but the extent is not known due to a gap in research. The lack of data collection in and around programming and services for homeless youth indicates a need for social workers to increase the implementation of program evaluation and data collection that supports efforts to end youth homelessness.

A need for additional research of the literature is indicated and must include search terms that specifically identify needs of LGBT youth and refugee or immigrant youth. This information is needed to further evaluate the promising practices that would lead to ending youth homelessness. Additionally, research is needed to better understand the impact of political climate and legislative changes that are targeting the most vulnerable sub-populations of homeless youth.

This narrative review of the role of social work in relation to ending youth homelessness identified themes in the literature that point to solutions for ending youth homelessness. The dominant theme of services is not surprising given the outsized role the provision of services has played in addressing homelessness, but is deeply complex and demonstrates the immense needs of youth who experience homelessness. The effect that relationships have in creating, sustaining, and ending youth homelessness indicate a necessity for interventions that promote positive communication and empathy when assisting homeless youth. An interdisciplinary and collaborative approach is included in promising practices that can be implemented with the understanding that funding is a key part of both implementing and evaluating promising practices. The need for data collection to help identify and explain the needs and issues impacting homeless youth is fundamental to promising practices being truly informed by these
needs and issues. These four themes contribute to knowledge that have the potential to be central to the social work profession and meeting the grand challenge of ending youth homelessness.
Historical Lessons Learned with Homeless Youth: Moving Forward

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Abstract

In this presentation, I explored the care and treatment of homeless youth in the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras, during which homelessness among youth has been a major issue. Social workers and helping professionals have been intimately involved in providing care and treatment to homeless youth, yet the number of homeless youth continues to soar (Padgett, D., Henwood, B., & Culhane, D., 2016). The American Academy of Social Work’s (AASW) Grand Challenge to End Homelessness (GC2EH) (2015) and the Federal initiative called Opening Doors: Ending Youth Homelessness by 2020 (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010) demonstrate the urgency of ending youth homelessness. To fully address the problem of youth homelessness and its impact on society, I examined the history of the issue so that social work educators are informed and prepared to equip students with tools required to end youth homelessness. The presentation began with a discussion about the historical role of social work with homeless youth. Next, I presented information about McKinney-Vento legislation and its impact on services for homeless youth enrolled in school. In closing, I reviewed current efforts of the American Association of Social Work and the Open Doors federal initiative to end youth homelessness. An example of community collaboration with Waco Independent School District was offered as a model for promising practice.

Keywords: homeless youth, unaccompanied youth, Progressive Era, McKinney-Vento, social work
Historical Lessons Learned with Homeless Youth: Moving Forward

This author gave a presentation at the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAECHCY) in Anaheim, California, from October 27 to October 30, 2018. The conference entitled “All Together Now” is aimed at school social workers, educators and administrators who serve homeless youth. My session, “Historical Lessons Learned with Homeless Youth: Moving Forward,” was presented under the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth track. The conference presentation stems from a conceptual paper I wrote in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my banded dissertation entitled, “Social Work Care and Treatment of Homeless Youth During the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Era.” In this qualitative study of the literature I explored the role of social work in reducing youth homelessness during the Progressive era (1890-1920) and McKinney-Vento era (1987-present). I incorporated the work of Gitterman and Germain to view the issue of youth homelessness through a Social-Ecological lens, which led to the formation of a new model that promotes social worker and researcher understanding of effective interventions with homeless youth within the two eras. The focus of this study is in line with both the AASW’s Grand Challenge to End (Youth) Homelessness and the federal initiative called Open Doors, which endeavors to end family and youth homelessness by 2020.

Youth homelessness has been an issue for over a century. Today, over three million homeless students are enrolled in pre-kindergarten through high school in the United States. The impact of homelessness on youth brings devastating and profound consequences to both the individual and society (Padgett, et. al., 2015). Homeless youth experience increased challenges with academic success due to high mobility and instability (Julianelle, 2012). In response, social
workers seek program implementation and delivery of resources that lead to reducing the numbers of homeless youth.

**Overview of the Conference Presentation**

During the presentation, participants:

1. Evaluated the outcomes of social work interventions with homeless youth in the Progressive Era and made a comparison of these with current social work interventions and their effectiveness.
2. Restructured their existing understanding of youth homelessness to include new ways of thinking about ending youth homelessness and the added value of including the voices of homeless youth in program development and needed services.
3. Identified existing gaps in services for homeless youth in their school districts with the intention of creating a sustainable plan that addressed the most urgent needs of homeless youth in their districts.

**Presentation Proposal**

This presentation explored the care and treatment of homeless youth in the Progressive and McKinney-Vento Eras, during which youth homelessness was a major problem. The Orphan Train Movement was the first effort to end youth homelessness in the US from 1950 to 1929. During this period, the United States dealt with such issues as child labor laws, the creation of a juvenile justice system, the introduction of compulsory school attendance, the Social Hygiene Movement, and more. This historical context is critical to better understand the complexities of youth homelessness in the past and creating more effective to end youth
homelessness today; we must utilize the past to understand the present and create a sustainable plan for the future.

The social work profession has been intimately involved in providing care and treatment to homeless youth, yet the numbers of homeless youth continue to soar (Padgett, 2015). Federal attention and funding have increased in recent years with an initiative called Opening Doors-Ending Youth Homelessness by 2020 (USICH, 2010). This initiative, combined with the efforts of the Grand Challenge to End Homelessness, demonstrates the urgency of this issue.

To fully address the problem of youth homelessness and its impact on society, it is necessary to examine the history of this issue so that social work educators are informed and prepared to equip students with tools required to end youth homelessness. I chose to use the Social Ecological Model (SEM) as a theoretical framework for developing strategies to address the needs of homeless youth. SEM places focus on the relationship between the exchanges between an individual and his or her environment. The central assumption of the ecological systems theory is that the individual is undergoing continuous exchanges with his or her environment. In the context of this framework, the social worker must engage both the environment and the client to resolve the issues that contribute to youth homelessness.

Participants learned about the value of drop-in centers for meeting the needs of homeless youth to promote academic success and well-being. The Cove is an after school drop-in center that provides a nurturing environment and promotes academic success. Drop-in centers for homeless youth have been recognized as a promising practice model for service delivery to homeless youth. Participants learned that solutions for ending youth homelessness originate in researching promising practices, including the voice of the client, implementing programming, and providing resources that are diverse and culturally relevant to support the academic success
of the youth. The presentation emphasizes that the challenges that homeless youth face are many: increased likelihood for mental and physical health problems, traumatic incidents, bullying by peers, family rejection that is frequently related to their LGBTQ status, and poor academic performance that often leads to dropping out of school (Julianelle, 2012).

Discussion of the Conference Presentation

**Introduction of objectives, agenda, and outcomes. Slides 1-4.** In slides 1-4, I identified and discussed the time periods included in the Progressive era and the McKinney-Vento era. An introduction to the problem of youth homelessness using a quote from Jane Addams historical writing, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1918), is highlighted for demonstrating the persistence of homelessness among youth throughout both eras. A brief discussion of the importance of the historical lens and why it is required for solving the problem of youth homelessness and the agenda of the breakout session followed.

![Figure 3.1 Slide 1](image)

**ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PAST**

*Progressive Era 1890-1929*  
*Mckinney-Vento Era 1987-present*

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” ~ Albert Einstein
"It is as if we ignored a wistful, over-confident creature who walked through our city streets calling out, ‘I am the spirit of Youth! With me, all things are possible!’ We fail to understand what he wants or even to see his doings, although his acts are pregnant with meaning, and we may either translate them into a sordid chronicle of petty vice or turn them into a solemn school for civic righteousness.”

~ Jane Addams, The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets 1912
The Progressive Era (1890-1929). Slides 5-11 discuss the role of social work in the lives of homeless youth during the Progressive Era. The Orphan Train Movement, Social Hygiene Movement, eugenics, the creation of the juvenile justice system, the regulation of child labor, and compulsory school attendance all impacted youth homelessness. Despite the morality of the day, social workers in Social Welfare Agencies, the Children’s Aid Society, and the Traveler’s Aid Society directly impacted homeless youth, yet the issue was never resolved in a way that eradicated the problem. The discussion emphasized that in assessing past policy and programs, it is crucial to consider historical context and how and why the policy and program came about.
The Children’s Aid Society and Settlement House Movement were viewed as solutions to highly complex social problems.

In 1920 there were 120 miles of paved roads in the US.

We cannot judge the past through the lens of the present.

Figure 3.5 Slide 5

- **Charles Brace**: Wealthy seminary student who became overwhelmed with the “call” to help all of the children on the streets of NYC. Known as the founder of the adoption and foster care system in America.

- **Children’s Aid Society**: Ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children, and provide them with the support needed to become successful adults. Still thriving today.

- **Orphan Train Movement**: Mid-1850’s the first Orphan Trains began transporting children out West to be taken in with families who needed help on the farm and could support them. This had mixed results.

Figure 3.6 Slide 6
In 1950 she was asked to write a history of the National Travelers Aid Association from 1911 – 1948. The historical work provides evidence of the social issues that affected society during the Progressive Era and beyond.

There are multiple places throughout her historical document that point to concern for the safety of women traveling alone and children under sixteen traveling alone.

Very early in its formation it was agreed that the mission of Travelers Aid was to specifically provide protection for young women and children who were traveling alone.

This written history provides perspective on the magnitude and scope of the needs of urban communities, most palpable in their bus/train stations across the country and how social work responded.

Bertha McCall, A History of the National Traveler’s Aid Association
Jane Addams worked to create a safe place of belonging for women who did not necessarily meet the standards of society. She spoke of sex predators on young girls and desperate women ... “it is horribly pathetic to learn how far a nickel or a quarter will go towards purchasing the virtue of these children.”

They were welcomed into Settlement Homes established in large cities. Addams was quite aware of the danger and traps that easily snared women who had no resources.

Letter to a pastor who was seeking shelter for “unaccompanied youth” who are dropped on the doorstep.

The Washington Post sounded a National alarm with this headline in 1910. Big news all across America and prompted other cities to follow suit.

**TO AID WOMEN TRAVELERS – Y.W.C.A.**
Service at Union Station Will Extend Through Night. Additional Deaconess Appointed Following Organizations Chapter by Society Leaders at Tea.

“That the Young Women’s Christian Association may have a representative at Union Station, day and night, to assist women and children who may come into Washington as strangers and in need of aid, a number of prominent society women have organized a Traveler’s Aid Chapter… It is recognized that this work is growing too large for one person, and that a relief is needed, so that one deaconess can be present during the day and another at night “

The Washington Post, 1910
The McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present). Slides 12-13. Slides 12-13 provide attendees with a description of federal legislation known as the McKinney-Vento Act that protects homeless students who are school aged and offers key provisions to ensure that students experiencing homelessness succeed academically. I chose to focus on this era because many school districts utilize social workers to identify and address the needs of their students experiencing homelessness. This period introduced the federal framework for ending family and youth homelessness and acknowledges that there are various definitions of homelessness that impact the well being of families and youth and their access to resources.
**McKinney-Vento Era**

- Federal mandates that address the needs of school age children who are homeless.
- The definition of homelessness evolved and acknowledges that living in hotels and doubled-up is still homeless.
- Federal funding has followed.
- Best practices are emerging from the DOE, HUD and other collaborative agencies.
- Federal Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness
- Best Practices for developing host homes
- Significant advocacy from national organizations who are collaborating together to end youth homelessness
- Much more!

*National Center for Homeless Education, 2014*

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**Figure 3.12 Slide 12**

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**Figure 3.13 Slide 13**

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**Ending Homelessness What does it mean?**

An end to homelessness means that every community will have a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can’t be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and one-time experience.

Slides 14-17 explain the GCSW and address the role of social work in ending homelessness.

Figure 3.14 Slide 14
GCSW End Homelessness

Societal goal: 10 Year Plan

With a focused yet reimagined approach to the issue. Combines evidence, resources, innovative thinking, and political will. Including risk factors such as housing and income instability that contribute to the issue.

**Slide 3.15 Slide 15**

Youth homelessness refers to children within the context of their homeless families and youth who are alone.

Dennis, Locke, & Khadduri (2007) concluded that increased programming that began in the late 90’s has not produced a corresponding effort to evaluate them.

Seimer Institute is hiring multi-generational case managers to provide services, work with schools and other community stakeholders to promote family stability and prevent homelessness.

“We’ll end youth homelessness when we end family homelessness” (Barbara Duffield, Executive Director, School House Connection).

**Slide 3.16 Slide 16**
**Collaboration and School Social Work**

**Community Partnerships**

**Professional Collaboration**

Social workers are uniquely trained to work in both clinical settings and community practice settings.

*Figure 3.17 Slide 17*

**Best Practice Model: The Cove. Slides 18-21.** Slides 18-21 highlight the role of school social work and the collaboration that is necessary to create resources for homeless youth who are unaccompanied. The Cove is presented as an example of a best practice model for an after-school drop-in center, and was included in the presentation to highlight the value of utilizing social workers in program development. Social workers are trained to intervene at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. At the micro level, social workers identify and assess homeless youth to determine case management needs. In the mezzo level, social workers are actively creating opportunities for community and belonging and connections for social and academic support in the school setting. At the macro level, social workers engage the community and build momentum for the creation and/or implementation of programming to address the needs of homeless youth in a community setting. This may include engaging the local homeless coalition and writing grants to fund programs for homeless youth.
Figure 3.18 Slide 18

The Cove
Giving Youth Experiencing Homelessness
A Safe Place to Thrive

Food
Safety/Shelter

Clothing

Access to healthcare

Academic and Emotional Support

What do homeless youth need to be successful?

Figure 3.19 Slide 19
Cove is a safe place after school that provides:

- **Homework help, laptops, Wi-Fi, study space**
- **Absence and credit recovery**
- **Family-style dinners and healthy snacks**
- **SNAP and Medicaid Outreach**
- **Shower, toiletries and haircuts**
- **Laundry facilities**
- **Positive Youth Development Programming**
- **Counseling and Mental Health Services**
- **Case Management**

*Figure 3.20 Slide 20*

*Figure 3.21 Slide 21*
Final Comments and Questions. Slides 22-25. Slides 22-25 concluded the presentation. I spent 15 minutes taking questions from the audience. A majority of the conference attendees were school personnel, including faculty, counselors, administrators, school social workers and McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons. Their questions focused on the role of social work in creating community supports such as the Cove, and how to engage the community in increasing support and funding to implement this type of program in their school districts. Other questions focused on the use of social workers designated to identify and serve homeless youth on high school campuses. The opportunity to help school districts understand the need for involvement in local homeless coalitions was beneficial to them because that is the best place for schools to find support and collaborate with the community on behalf of their students. I provided my contact information and references with additional resources in the final slides.
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Figure 3.23 Slide 23

References and Resources


Figure 3.24 Slide 24
Figure 3.25 Slide 25

Summary of Feedback

Several conference attendees provided immediate verbal feedback following the session stating that they appreciated the work that was presented and believed that the information was useful to their work. Additionally, feedback was provided by conference attendees in the form of a session evaluation that is facilitated electronically by NAEHCY, the results of which are later provided to presenters. Written feedback included the following:

1. The presenter(s) had information that was relevant to my work.

   Very Satisfied = 6; Satisfied = 4

2. The presenter(s) information was well organized and delivered.

   Very Satisfied = 7; Satisfied = 3

3. The presenter(s) provided useful materials and handouts.

   Very Satisfied = 5; Satisfied = 5; Neutral = 1
4. The presenter(s) provided sufficient opportunities for questions and clarifications.

Very Satisfied = 5; Satisfied = 6

**Brief Critical Analysis of the Conference Presentation**

The conference session was well-attended with seating at full capacity. This indicates that the topic is of interest to educators and social workers who serve homeless youth. The presentation was allotted 90 minutes with the final 20 minutes for questions and clarifications. I remained in the room for an additional 15 minutes following the session to answer questions.

The content of the presentation was well-organized. There are no changes needed with regard to flow of topics or slide enhancement. All conference attendees have access to the presentation and contact information via the conference app; however, some attendees indicated that a handout would have been useful to them. In future presentations, I will consider providing a one-page handout with resources and contact information.

The presentation is directly related to my banded dissertation in both content and future implications for work on ending youth homelessness. The presentation included a robust discussion of the role of social work engaging with homeless youth using historical content from the Progressive Era (1890-1920) and McKinney-Vento Era (1987-present). In the course of the presentation, the discussion laid a foundation for understanding the history of youth homelessness in the U.S. as it relates to social work as a profession, which is key to accurately assessing what is needed to move forward with the Grand Challenge to End (Youth) Homelessness. In particular, we considered what must change or what must we do differently to successfully end youth homelessness. Finally, the federal framework for ending youth homelessness was offered as a tool that can be utilized by school social workers to collaborate with community members to create resources required to address the needs of school age
homeless youth. An example of an after-school drop-in center was offered as a best practice model for working with homeless youth. The implementation of the center became a key point of discussion in the presentation for educators and social workers alike who desire knowledge about the process of creating resources for homeless youth.