

# A little here, a little there: District uses resources wherever it can find them

By Michael Martinez

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"It takes a village" is true when it comes to providing resources that serve homeless students in Washoe County.

Community agencies that partner with the school district in various ways are essential to the social, financial, health, legal and family services needed to help keep a homeless child on an academic path.

The Washoe County School District has a \$150,000 competitive grant from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the primary federal legislation dealing with the education of children experiencing homelessness in U.S. public schools. The district also sets aside about \$250,000 annually for homeless services from federal Title I funding, which is provided to the school district on the basis of families that qualify as low-income.

The school district also received \$15 million in federal funds to use the next five years for the re-engagement centers that allow students to recover credits. A significant portion of students who use the centers are children in transition.

Rechelle Murillo, coordinator of the Children in Transition program for the district, said that these funds would not be enough to provide the all-inclusive services needed by many homeless students.

"We really don't know if we would need additional resources because we don't know how many students are really out there," Murrillo said.

Public and nonprofit agencies in the community often overlap services to assist students.

Alice Ledesma, children services coordinator for Washoe County Social Services/Kids Kottage, said her agency has several programs that work closely with the school district and its Children in Transition program and for children who are in care for neglect or abuse.

"Certainly, homelessness in a family might contribute to issues that might be a reason for removal or a voluntarily placement," Ledesma said. "We do come across families that might be recently homeless or that are homeless, so the children might be placed in regular care at the Kottage or in regular foster care."

"Neglect is a reason, and that could be if you can't take care of your kid adequately," she said.

## AGENCIES TO HELP HOMELESS CHILDREN

The Washoe County School District partners with many community agencies to assist homeless students.

- Washoe County Social Services
- Adams and Associates — Kids Kottage
- Sierra Association of Foster Families
- Quest Counseling
- West Hills
- Willow Springs
- Wraparound in Northern Nevada
- Briarwood Group Home
- Nevada Hispanic Services
- Nevada National Guard
- Washoe County Sheriff's Office
- Reno Police Department
- Sparks Police Department
- University of Nevada School of Social Work
- University of Nevada Dean's Future Scholars program
- Family Court System Model Court

"We also partner with the Community Assistance Center and the family shelter to provide educational opportunities," Ledesma said. "These are not kids that are in care or custody, but we work with the school district to provide pre-school opportunities."

The Kids Kottage has a pair of case managers at the assistance center to try to link families with services to preempt the need for taking a child into custody.

Ledesma said the Kids Kottage serves about 700 to 750 children a year on average.

The school district provides teachers to a school at the Kids Kottage near the Reno-Sparks Livestock Events Center, where the Children's Cabinet also provides partnership services with schools.

Children's Cabinet has partnered with a variety of community groups — McDonald's restaurants, Reno Police Department substations, Family Resource Centers, and the Reno Transportation Commission, among others — to provide Project Safe Place for homeless youth.

The Safe Place Drop-In Center is a facility where youths can spend time after school for discussion groups and other activities.

Children's Cabinet also provides mentoring services for youths who have left home or are homeless.