

Preparing for Back to School in Unusual Times Transcript of the Webinar

Marc: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Marc Mannes with the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to all of you for attending today's webinar on Preparing for Back to School in Unusual Times. I want to mention that one of our planned presenters, Ben Thornton II with Anchor House Inc. is not able to participate this afternoon, but we have two excellent presenters you will be meeting over the course of the webinar and who will be sharing important information on our topic. Please know the webinar is being recorded and it will be available on the Clearinghouse website in a couple of days. Also, to reinforce, remind you that all of you are on mute. Questions that you wish to ask each presenter can be written into the question box you see on your screen. After each panelist concludes their presentation, we will devote a portion of the webinar to answering several of your questions as time permits. Please know, we will do our very best to respond to questions we cannot address during the webinar.

I'd like to begin the webinar by introducing Elizabeth Darling, who serves as the commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, and the acting associate commissioner of the Family, Youth and Services Bureau. Commissioner Darling.

Elizabeth: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you to the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families. The title of this webinar couldn't be more pertinent, Preparing for Back to School in Unusual Times. We know that youth homelessness continues to be a major issue in America that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic and the loss of employment during this time. We also know how dangerous and traumatic life on the streets is for youth experiencing homelessness. Youth can become victims of violence, serious mental health issues may develop, addiction problems, and be forced into trade for sex or labor for basic needs. FYSB, Family Youth Services Bureau, is committed to addressing youth homelessness, runaway, and homeless youth. Our program serves as the national leader for the provision of sheltering services for homeless youth. The grants that we administer to public and private organizations establish and operate street outreach programs, youth emergency shelters, and maternity group homes, and transitional living programs.

We know from our regional staff that FYSB grantees have made COVID-19 an opportunity to be innovative and creative in meeting the challenges of the youth that they serve. The new complexities also brought about some very interesting innovations among these grantees, and we hope that you will take some of those away with you today. Some grantees adopted an all hands on deck mentality to

maintain appropriate staff coverage. That has meant organizational administrators and managers taking on frontline service responsibilities. Some have institutionalized hazard pay to alleviate and overcome employee concerns about showing up at work to ensure that necessary staff is present to meet the needs of youth. And one grantee access to temporary employment agency to make sure that the needed number of staff were available to serve the youth in their care. Another grantee who was forced to test all youth and temporarily sought housing for them in hotel rooms.

These uncertain times are also jeopardizing the health and safety, not only of our runaway and homeless youth but of our staff. Grantees are beginning to normalize temperature checks each and every time a youth walks in. Grantees are making sure that youth wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and wash their hands while they're in the facility. Grantees are working diligently to reinforce safe behaviors when youth are out and about in the communities. Grantees are seizing the moment to make sure that infectious diseases and the plans for addressing them are incorporated into their emergency preparedness planning, I should say your emergency planning. The upcoming school year also introduces a number of difficult issues for runaway homeless youth grantees.

Today, our webinar continues a dialogue of how to organize and prepare for the uncertainty surrounding the coming school year. Our panel members will share emerging and promising strategies, and practices on how you, our grantees, can be more effective in navigating the upcoming school year for the youth that you serve. The actions of our grantees and our youth-serving organizations demonstrate the inherent resourcefulness and ingenuity of the FYSB and RHY community. Please know that all of you will continue to have our full support and our deepest appreciation for the work that you do every day, especially during these stressful and difficult times. Thank you, and enjoy the webinar.

Marc: Thank you, Commissioner Darling for those welcoming remarks. Our first presenter is Christina Duke, deputy director of partnerships and policy at the National Center on Homeless Education. Christina.

Christina: Thank you, Marc, and thank you to Commissioner Darling for those welcoming remarks. For those of you who don't know NCHE, I'm going to just briefly share a little bit about the work that we do. So, the National Center for Homeless Education, or NCHE, serves as the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth, or EHCY program. And so, of course, we have a primary focus on supporting educational access and success for young people experiencing homelessness, which places us in the position to interact a lot with state

coordinators for homeless education or local homeless education liaisons at the district level. But we do also engage in quite a bit of cross-systems work or partnership work, including with RHY grantees.

I may have crossed paths with some of you guys at the annual RHYTTAC conference or maybe a previous ACF family and youth homelessness forum that took place last year, so we do sort of extend our reach beyond just education stakeholders to help support coordinated community responses to youth homelessness. Also, we've begun working or have been working for about the last two and a half years with YHDP, or Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program communities that are HUD-funded, including some active partnerships from local RHY grantees. If you're not familiar with us, please do check out the resources that we make available to the field. Maybe visit our website. We have products available for downloading or even ordering in hard copy. We do have a Listserv if you'd like to receive periodic announcements, a helpline to call or email with questions, and if you're into social media, please follow us on Twitter or Facebook. Next.

And I can't see you guys, but maybe you'll just kind of raise your hand there in your home office. How many of you are familiar with Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count research? Hopefully, some of you. It is a research initiative that is led by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. It's a very large-scale research on youth homelessness. We began to learn about the results of that initiative a couple of years ago. What you see on your screen is sort of a key feature that was highlighted in some of the early results from that research. And basically, what Chapin Hall did through its research is identify six subpopulations of young people who are at elevated risk for experiencing homelessness. As someone who comes from the education community, I think I knew that education would show up somewhere in the research. I don't know that I knew it would show up in such an impactful way.

So, what you see on the screen there are the six groups of young people identified as at an elevated risk, but you'll notice that the young people with the highest risk for homelessness are those without a high school credential, at a 346% higher risk, to be specific. And then when we look at issues of intersectionality, right? So, maybe a black youth without a high school credential, or a low-income unmarried parenting youth, of course, we're going to see that risk for homelessness increase. And so, as we're thinking about how we as whole communities wrap support around young people experiencing homelessness, of course, I'm biased, but I would make a very strong case based on the research and probably the life experiences of many of us that education really can propel a young person into adulthood, ready to secure living-wage employment and make a sustainable exit from homelessness. Next.

And just another quick look at some of the findings from Chapin Hall. What you're seeing is essentially summarizing what we call in the broader education research base The Education Premium, and what that says is basically the more you learn, the more you earn, or the higher one's educational attainment, the more likely that person is to have higher income, have access to on-the-job benefits, and by extension, be able to secure and maintain stable housing. And so, again, as we're thinking as a community how we're wrapping supports around young people, let's not only focus just on the moment but kind of the long-term effects of a young person's ability to engage, and succeed, and continue on in education so that they will have access to that income and many of those safety nets that many of us are fortunate to have in our own lives, and we want that for the young people that we're serving. Next.

So, shifting now to what is on probably most of our minds, and that is the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm sure that we are all feeling the effects of it in our individual lives and in our work as well, but I'm going to just sort of tease out some of what we're hearing from schools, so, in particular, the effects of the pandemic on the education system. As many of you may have observed in your own lives, if you have school-age children, or maybe if you are a follower of news media, schools, and that would include pre-K, K-12, and higher education undertook a massive and very abrupt, so a quick shift to remote learning in the Spring. This shift was not without its challenges. Some of the primary concerns that schools have expressed with the shift to remote learning are shown on the slide, although, certainly, there are more beyond what's shown on the slide. So, I'm just going to kind of tease those out a little bit.

Firstly, many schools have expressed concern over how students would access many of the school-based supports that they depend on or that are traditionally delivered in a brick and mortar or in-person school experience. So, for instance, many students, including young people experiencing homelessness or struggling with basic needs really depend on schools for things like daily meals, free school meals. Also, students experiencing homelessness do express or often express that school can really help provide a sense of normalcy, routine, connection to others, whether that's to friends or to supportive adults, and even a sense of hope, right? So, young people often give voice to, if I can stay in school and get my education, then I have hope for a different future and exit from the stresses of poverty and homelessness, and the possibility of a fulfilling career.

Another concern that we've had schools express and students as well is, can we adapt successfully to a remote learning model and remain meaningfully

connected? Right? So, schools are asking themselves, do our students, including our students experiencing homelessness, have access to the technology that is needed to engage in remote learning? What happens to students whose parents are not available to support them? Maybe they're working outside the home or who are uncomfortable with technology. Will a virtual connection be sufficient to keep students engaged in learning? There are also concerns over the effect, and Commissioner Darling referenced this in her welcoming remarks, the effect of the economic upheaval that is accompanying the pandemic, and what the effects that might have on levels of family and youth homelessness. Many people are anticipating an increase in family and youth homelessness, especially once eviction moratoria lift, and we see the full effects of prolonged unemployment for some Americans, and also the end of possible stimulus supports.

And so, also, I think another thing on everyone's mind, communities are weighing right now, as we speak, very complex and sometimes seemingly competing considerations for how to reopen schools for the new school year. Many communities are considering what we call a fully virtual model, a handful are considering a fully in-person model, and many are settling somewhere in between with a hybrid in-person or a virtual model, or allowing families or students to choose between fully virtual or hybrid. Just a few of the considerations that are driving those decisions are the health and safety of teachers, school staff, and students, students' ability to learn effectively and feel connected, whether that's remotely or in-person, and the interplay between school engagement and parents' ability to work. Again, with many parents hoping or needing to go back to work in person but wanting to make sure that their children are taken care of. Next slide.

Just a few sort of framing suggestions for partnership as you think through, maybe you have an existing partnership with your local K-12 school districts or institutions of higher ed, or maybe you're kind of on the front-end of that and might want some concrete ideas for areas of focus for partnership. So, first of all, it's always a good idea to start by framing your partnership around statutory requirements, and RHY grantees are actually specifically mentioned in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act and educators, so local liaisons, and even the FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid is mentioned in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. So, we have some statutory requirements for how we should be working together, but also let's not forget to focus on the desired outcomes of the young people that we're supporting.

Several concrete areas of focus that you may want to zero in on include working together to identify young people experiencing homelessness and

referring them to support from other community partners, right? So RHY grantees referring to schools and schools referring to RHY grantees. In broad terms, supporting high school graduation, supporting the transition to higher education and success in higher education, and then supporting pregnant and parenting youth with early care and education. And I'm just going to draw your attention very quickly, and I'm kind of mindful of time as well, but NCHE did work with a couple of RHY grantees and FYSB a couple of years back to release a partnership brief on RHY education partnerships. And a couple of communities that we profiled, so we profiled the partnership between Haven House Services, a RHY grantee in Raleigh and the Wake County Public School System, and the ways they partner together, specifically to identify, support high school graduation, and higher ed completion for young people. I'm just going to mention a couple of quick highlights. Oh, and then also we did highlight Santa Clara, California, so the partnership between Bill Wilson Center and several local high school, or excuse me, school districts.

So, a few things. Both sites did mention having an established protocol to refer from one system to the other when they identified a young person who might need care from their partner system. Both sites mentioned supporting high school graduation in specific ways, so, for instance, Bill Wilson Center does develop what they call a student-specific case plan. And I think Sheila will refer to that in a moment based on some stuff they do locally in her community. For higher education access and success, the Bill Wilson Center offers a six-week college prep program that include college visits and tours, and then in Raleigh, first of all, I think this is important. The Raleigh site mentioned, "As a critical first step, we encourage youth experiencing homelessness to view higher education as a viable and beneficial option for our young people," right? So, number one, reminding young people, you can make it in higher ed, you're cut out for this, you belong and we want to help you, and then some of the helps that they provide are assistance filling out college and financial aid applications, planning campus visits, and advisor meetings at local community colleges and universities. Those are a few examples of partnerships, but happy to answer or provide additional detail as we move forward. And the next slide, please.

Here's a quick starter pack if you're on the front-end. If you haven't met your education partner across the aisle, I guess speaking specifically to RHY attendees, NCHE does have on our website a link to updated state coordinator contact information. Every state education department has a state coordinator required under federal law. Every school district has designated a local homeless education liaison, and you can find that information on our website by clicking the state on the map there on that webpage. Higher education landscapes, we do want to make sure we're giving a nod to higher education because education extends beyond K-12 for many of our young people, and

that's a good thing, but the higher education landscape does vary a bit by state and even institution. An example of a couple of states, so Tennessee, actually several, Tennessee, Louisiana, and California, all have state statutes that require points of contact for homeless students at institutions of higher ed, so sort of a local liaison, but at the higher ed level. But that's not the case in all states, and so that landscape may look a little different, but if you want some support and sort of teasing out who your higher ed partners may be, maybe a trio program or another higher ed partner, please do reach out to our NCHE helpline. We're happy to help connect you, or you can even email me, and I'm happy to help.

It's always a good idea to focus pretty early on concrete partnership efforts, right? If you get together and have meeting after meeting and you feel like you're kind of talking about the same thing, I think it can kind of lose momentum, so focus on concrete and mutually beneficial efforts. Of course, you need to start somewhere and then build. And then as you build over time, you may want to...Again, you're going to have to remain in contact to kind of decide what's been working, what are some new things we want to take on? So, just continuing that conversation over time. Next.

A few considerations as we move forward, and then I believe this is my last slide, which entails applying a pandemic lens to your partnership. How can we partner to identify and connect young people experiencing homelessness in the current environment, knowing that a lot of things are happening virtually rather than face-to-face? How can we connect young people to needed supports across our two systems? How can we partner to support school engagement in the current environment? And I know Sheila is going to speak a little bit to that as well, some specific ways. How can we help young people play the long game with education in times of uncertainty and stress? We don't want young people to feel so overwhelmed by what they're dealing with in the moment that they lose sight of goals and some things that they maybe really could, or should, or it would benefit them to focus on past sort of the current crisis, so let's remind people to play the long game. And then how can we ensure that young people experiencing homelessness are connected with needed food security, school-based supports, remote learning support, and technology? Next.

One more thing I do want to mention that the CARES Act, you've probably heard of the CARES Act that was the large stimulus bill signed into law in March, did designate funding specifically to schools to support the education of students, even given sort of some of the complications of the current environment. So, I'll just sort of put a pin in that that the CARES Act may help meet some of those technology and other needs that you're going to see arising in the new school year. A few resources here. For more information, I'll draw your attention to that partnership brief there that may be of interest to you,

again, including those community supports, or excuse me, those community profiles, and then a few other resources from NCHE, the CDC, and the Department of Education. Next. And I think that's all for me. So, thank you for your time, and I'll turn it back to you, Marc.

Marc: Thank you, Christina. And Helga, questions for Christina from participants?

Helga: Yes, we do have a few questions here. One is, is there research including youth homelessness in rural areas?

Christina: Yes, in fact, Chapin Hall has released a handful of topical briefs based on their Voices of Youth Count initiative, and one is specifically about rural youth homelessness. And so, if you can, go to their website, or if you have trouble finding it, you're welcome to email me and I'll point you in that direction. There are both research funding specific to youth homelessness in rural communities and some recommendations for strategies.

Helga: Great. Another question is, what do you recommend for homeless youths that have no address for college applications?

Christina: I believe in what's called the AVG, or Application and Verification Guide. That's sort of like the Bible, if you want to say, for financial aid administrators, and it specifically says that young people experiencing homelessness may use the school address on their FAFSA, so when filling out and completing the FAFSA. If it's helpful to see that in black and white, please do email me and I'll dig that up for you, so you can have that handy. So, yes, they can use the school address if they don't have a stable address to use on the FAFSA or applications.

Helga: Thanks. We have a number of questions regarding the slide deck. The slide deck and recorded version of this webinar will be available on the website. So, the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families will provide both the recorded webinar and these questions will have responses to the questions and then the slide deck available as well. There's another question here. Do you have advice on how we can rebuild partnerships with partners that have become difficult during the COVID-related closures?

Christina: Yes, I mean, just to be honest, some of it. I think we're sort of in uncharted territory, so we're figuring things out, and I do think we're probably going to bump into some challenges that we're just going to have to muddle our way through. I would probably go back to what I said about really focusing on concrete and mutually beneficial partnerships. If there's a way that you can kind

of speak with your education partners and say, "What are some of the challenges that you're dealing with right now that I might be able to help alleviate?" Or pain points, that's sort of a buzzword sometimes people use. "What are your pain points and how can I help you?" But also be prepared, and it's fair that you would then ask for some things in return, like, "Hey, this is what I'm seeing with the young people we're serving, and, you know, I could really use your support in XYZ ways to help our young people succeed in education." I think anytime you can meet a need and talk about those needs, then that's sort of a step in the right direction.

Helga: Okay. Another question. How do we get youth experiencing homelessness to focus on education when they are focused on meeting their immediate needs such as housing?

Christina: I mean, that's a little bit of a \$64 million question, but I'll take a stab at it, and then maybe others want to share as well. Well, first of all, if we can help meet their basic needs, right? Stabilizing them in housing, making sure they have access to food, wrapping school-based supports around them so that they maybe don't feel so alone or burdened by some of those basic needs, and that can sort of check that box and we can shift the focus. Other than that, I don't know that there's a magic answer, just through relationship in communicating with young people, maybe from your own personal experience. Speaking for myself, I've never been homeless, but I did grow up in a family that struggled quite a bit financially, on and off of public benefits at different times, and I remember thinking, "Hey, if I can pursue my education, it's going to set me up, hopefully, that I won't need to deal with some of these stressors in my adulthood." And that has been the case, and I'm grateful, but anything we can do to communicate to young people, "Hey, let me help you see past the current moment, and encourage you as you do that."

Helga: I think that's it for the questions that we have for now, and we can move on to Sheila's portion of the presentation. Thank you, Christina.

Marc: Thanks, again, Christina. Our second presenter is Sheila Catron, the executive director of the Children's Aid Society of West Texas. Sheila.

Sheila: Hi, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm here to talk from the perspective of a RHY grantee recipient in a basic care emergency shelter. We do some street outreach. We are located in a smaller urban area in Texas. It's Wichita Falls, Texas, and we serve 11 counties in Indiana. Texas is quite a big state, so we have a lot of those really small rural communities that we reach out to. Our organization has been around since 1912, so we're over 100 years old. I've been with our agency 25 years, and we work with two different types of programs.

We have our children's home, which operates foster care program. We work with kiddos really about two years old to 17 years old, and then we also have our teen emergency shelter where RHY grant is a recipient and it is working with the runaway homeless population, primarily, kiddos ages 10 to 17. And that's kind of a little picture down at the bottom, and you're welcome to look at our website. Let's go to the next slide.

I want to talk to you today about how we address the situation of the pandemic and helped our young people here in our organization succeed educationally. We had like everyone else not experienced this before. I was blessed that I had a site review. If you get an RHY grant, sometimes you will have a site inspection and you have a peer monitor and a grants manager who comes to visit you. And my representative at the time came and visited with me about probably 9 to 10 years ago, and he said, "Sheila, you really need to have about, you know, 30 days of an emergency backup to everything, kind of that 30-day nest egg." And I was so blessed they told me that because, you know, in Texas, we can have bad storms, ice storms, you know, different things like that, and so I always kind of prepared, you know, have enough groceries, have enough toilet paper. We all were hunting for toilet paper, have kind of those things in the wings. Some of the things that I also had in the wings because of flu season being in the Fall, I had hand sanitizer, you know, and we had some other things that we had on hand. We paid attention to what was going on on the news, and so we were monitoring the news and making sure that we could look ahead about what we might need. So, I was fortunate that my staff and I were paying attention.

When the situation took form here in Texas, it was during March and that's during our Spring break time, our kids were currently in school, the rural kids were in Spring break, and we saw that the school closures were going to happen. So, we immediately had that cushion of a few days of Spring break to figure out what we were going to do next. And I'm going to kind of talk to you about how we survived that and managed to get all of our kiddos not only to complete school but complete school successfully. And we even helped one of our children in aftercare, who we got into college early. We got her in college in December. She was losing her dorm housing and we were able to get her into apartment housing immediately so she would not become homeless once again. And so, let me share with you that.

Our three focuses that my staff and I developed were a key essential thing, communication with youths, families, and schools. Not only talking to the children that we serve that are in our building, but also those kids in aftercare, and the kids who are even beyond aftercare. Touching base with some of those kiddos that we knew that their families were struggling and they were making

it. They had finished their aftercare and they were making it, but we knew that they could be at risk because of these new circumstances. And then those connections to schools. You've got to know who your school leadership team are, and you also need to know who your homeless liaisons are, and so we're going to talk more about that later, but you got to have those key connections.

Another thing is providing those basic needs. Christina also touched base on that, and Commissioner Darling also touched base on that. If you don't have your basic needs being met or even access to the resources for learning, you're not going to thrive. You're not going to be successful. And so, knowing how to get those things and who might be at risk to not having those things, to identify those and how we can be a partner like Christina said, being a partner to the school districts, being a partner to your community, and definitely being a partner to the people who've gone through your program and are no longer with you. And our final thing was we didn't want to just be surviving. We wanted to be thriving. We wanted our young people to reach those academic goals and be successful in this new changing time. Next slide.

With communicating with our youth and families in schools, effective communication strategies to support our RHY program, our key thing is knowing that relationship with the school district. Our agency contacts before each semester our schools, and we normally work in partnership with other non-profits to participate in a thing that's called Project Back to School, and so this is where young people can go to a big event. They get a backpack. They can get immunizations. They can speak to non-profit agencies that can have services that would help them for the school year. Sometimes they get a physical. We provide usually outreach resources at that event. This year, that's a non-event. The backpacks are going to be at the schools, so we have to get our outreach materials to the schools and help them get those in those backpacks so the young people that are going to do that live school contact are going to have access to our runaway homeless services and know how to get help fast.

In addition to that, we talked to our guidance counselors, and we usually try to visit with the guidance counselors and the teachers at their kickoff meeting. And this year, they're going to have a Zoom kickoff meeting, and so I'm going to be presenting in a Zoom meeting. And so, we like to remind them how to recognize and report child abuse to keep our kids safe. We also like to let them know about the runaway homeless population and what that trauma does to our kiddos who are living on the streets or who are CouchSurfing or who struggle and go from family member, to friend, to family member. And so, we want them to understand how to communicate with our kiddos and how to identify their needs, so we participate in those events.

One thing that I actually took away from a RHY conference one time was somebody who had established a relationship to be the point of contact in their school policy handbook. From that conference, I went back to my school district and I talked to them about, "Hey, when kids are left at school and no parent picked them up," or, "Hey, if kids are on that school bus and nobody is at home when that kid gets there, put us in your school handbook and you have those young people brought to us so we can help buffer that situation and get these kiddos back into a safe environment." We, on average, have about 25 to 30 kids who just need a place to stay till something happens, so if parent had a flat tire or something simple happened. But on occasion, we're hearing those dire needs where it's a chronic situation and somebody really needs help and nobody has identified it.

Another step that we have taken is successful student school engagement strategies we've fostered on behalf of our kiddos is reaching those at-risk identified youth, talking to your homeless liaison. In our area, the homeless liaison is in charge of the McKinney-Vento proceeds at the school, and they're the one who do the main reporting. They then have another person called a homeless coordinator who's in the actual school themselves. Sometimes that's a coach. It could be a teacher. It could be the attendance clerk, depending on the size of the school. That person is going to know the real children who need services in that particular school. And always you get guidance counselors. We take the time to meet with these individuals and find out if there's at-risk kiddos in the schools that actually need us to come in and talk to them about services. We talk with youths, we talk to the parents, and we also talk to these young people to try to find out if we can help them through this trying time.

This last year was more trying than even before because those children didn't get that opportunity in the spring. Everything came to a halt. So, we had to figure out some new resources to get these kiddos information out. Our kiddos were doing remote learning, and so you don't always have that opportunity to go off to the side with remote learning, and especially if you're in a home setting and the parent is with you with your electronic to ask for help if you're in a dangerous situation. So, these were some of our concerns that we had, but we figured out another way to get that message out there. And so, taking that opportunity to visit people about services and then making sure that we follow through and help them. Oftentimes, we can give a referral to somebody. If you give somebody a phone number and you never follow back up to make sure that they got the services they need, we're doing them a disservice, so we need to make sure that we're with them to make sure that we can get those services established.

Promoting RHY services in the schools with contact cards, posters, gateway items, and supplies. These are key things, like bottles of water or little bags of personal hygiene items. This year, we actually took those items because we couldn't do street outreach and go to community events and things like that. We couldn't do things where there were large gatherings of people, but we knew that the free lunch program was serving food in the community, and I was really proud of my staff. They took the time to make sure that those gateway items got to the foodservice trucks that were taking the Meals on Wheels type food to the children. They had access to like a stress ball with our phone number or a bottle of water with our phone number. They had some hygiene items to make sure that they could stay clean, especially if they were in a situation of poverty and they didn't have the resources to buy those needs. And so, we did that.

After COVID got more at-risk in our area, they actually stopped that service, and so they had a service where they were having volunteer sign-up to deliver food. And so, my staff, again, I'm so proud of them, were rallied to the case and they said, "Hey, can we go do that? We want to do that," and I'm like, "Absolutely." So, they went, and then they picked neighborhoods where they knew we served kids that were more at-risk and they chose those neighborhoods to deliver in, and then we could actually, again, put those resources out there, and get more of a face-to-face contact with some of our kiddos. Next slide.

Communicating. Again, we're dealing with strategies that we implemented to strengthen linkages with McKinney-Vento liaison. You don't just touch base with these people once a year. You need to touch base with these people monthly and ongoing. We actually have a formal annual meeting at the beginning of the year and at the end of year to see if there's gaps in services. Did we meet all the needs that the school had for their homeless youths that they identified? And if not, how can we improve on that? Did all the kids that we did make referrals on and that we did work services on, did they improve? They usually know that information and they know if those children stayed successful. And, we can kind of get feedback on what both of us can do to strengthen our partnership. Monthly reports. We do statistical monthly reports, not only to our school district, but to juvenile probation, and the court systems to let them know how many runaway children we've actually served in our community. We attend meetings for community resource coordination group and our local homeless coalition to also identify other homeless kiddos that might need services that we're not reaching.

And then we also want to talk about how our homeless liaison can help us meet these children's needs better. We actually learned from the school district that a

lot of the times, kiddos in schools actually don't have access to clothing, or they don't have access to school supplies like you get that start-up with school supplies, and now you're out. Sometimes it's just personal hygiene items. My facility is a pretty big facility. It's 34-bed unit, so we have a huge clothing garage that we've turned a 3-tier car garage into a beautiful clothing shed, and so the schools can call me, and I don't need to have that kid in my program to give them some clothes. And so, they can call me and say, "Hey, we got a family just struggling financially. They need some clothes." Well, we take that family some clothes. We help them. So, we establish that the school district is helpful and we establish that our non-profit RHY program is helpful, and so you may not need the full gamut of my services, but we're a community that cares and we're here for you.

Supporting our kiddos this year, as far as the completion of their assignments, man, this was the most challenging time ever. Everybody was doing it differently. We have kids in, you know, pre-K-12, and they were doing things differently from school to school. And so, sometimes I'll get a kid from a rural area too that comes in and they're doing it absolutely different than the other kiddos, so we actually had to tailor our staff to each child's individual needs. We also have our case managers talk to the teachers, guidance counselors, and find out if we're weak. And I mentioned that girl who was in college. She actually was able to accelerate her high school graduation in December because we knew she was going to be homeless in the spring. She was already accepted into college in the fall, but with the help of my caring staff, they were able to advocate for her, and the college changed that enrollment admission from fall of 2020 to January of 2021, and we helped that child from being homeless. It just takes that extra step. Next slide.

Getting those basic needs met and getting the resources we need for learning. How do we get those basic needs, and especially in a time when everything is closing their doors? Basic needs, food, shelter, clothing, hygiene, and medical. We even had medical facilities closed, and so you had to do more of those FaceTime office visits. We actually had to take some kids in aftercare to the doctor, so we went and helped with transportation to get those kiddos to the doctor. But even with my staff's health, it was challenging getting some of these appointments met. It's important to make sure that people have food, they have clothing, they have the resources they need to survive. Understanding who's got food in your area. If you've got families who are struggling, and they didn't have a reserve of food, they didn't think ahead, or if your shelter was in that place where you did not think ahead and finances became tight, or you didn't have a backup supply of food, then you have to contact individuals to get more services, so you've got food banks, you've got churches.

We were really blessed that there were some restaurants that were closed to the public because they couldn't serve people in the restaurants that offered boxes of food to the community. So, we had to contact individuals that we knew were going to be at risk. We knew they needed food. And sometimes it's lack of information, lack of a phone availability, lack of knowledge, and sometimes it's pride, to be honest. We want these people not to use any of these excuses to get help. It's our job to help sometimes hold somebody's hand and lead them to the services they need, getting the things they need to care for their family. You need to make a referral list of agencies that can assist with providing these key items. Sometimes you can call 211 in your community if you have access to that. Sometimes you can call another non-profit if you have community meetings like Child Abuse Prevention Month meetings, or Runaway Homeless Prevention Month meetings, or coalition meetings.

This is your opportunity to network with other non-profits and other state and federal organizations and say who provides what services and update your list because just like Christina mentioned, just like other people have talked about some places are closed. That was one of the questions. Where do you go if they're closed? We need to know who's closed right now in our own community. Afterschool programs are not available. Summer camps are not available. Some of the social groups that get kids off the street and put them in a nice Christian wholesome environment so they're not out in danger on Friday and Saturday night, the doors are not open. So, how can we still reach these kiddos who normally went to those programs and asked for help?

We've had a challenging time. We've had to use social media. Some of those programs are accessing kids through the internet, through email, through webinars like this, and so we still need to make that effort to get information about our basic center out to these individuals through that resource. Also, we've had food delivery and food pantries like I talked about before. Can your organization assist with food delivery? Can you yourself provide food as an organization to some of your former clients if you know they're struggling? You might not be able to keep them going, but can you keep them going long enough to get the financial assistance they need started? Mental health and counseling.

Marc: Sheila, this is great... We also want to make sure we have some time for questions.

Sheila: Okay. I'm going to wrap it up. PPE is one that I don't want to lead aside. Right now, we have access to hand sanitizer. Right now, that's great. We also have access to masks that are disposable. But if we get in a situation where that is not an option, you need to look at other resources for these items. Your local

FFA programs or 4-H programs, those children in there can actually sew sometimes, and they're making masks right now in mass quantity. I know in Texas, the Fashion Ambassadors with 4-H are actually making masks in mass quantities for individuals, and so you can contact them to see if there's a fashion ambassador in your area who would be giving some masks available. We're using that as a resource. Hand sanitizer, so if you can't get them in the school district, talk to your restaurant distributors because you can actually get hand sanitizer from a food distribution program and you can get those stations with the hand sanitizer, and then you won't run out. Those are key.

Another big factor is the internet. When your kids are online with school, you're going to need a tablet, a phone, a laptop. If you don't have enough of those resources, we are at a critical point where you need to be asking for those. Now, it's hard to buy a computer even on the internet right now because people are buying them up. Look at used resources, pawnshops, businesses who actually supply computers to businesses like ourselves, but might have an older device that they're willing give you. And sometimes they don't have access to a data plan and they need free Wi-Fi. You need to know where people can get Wi-Fi and to make it work. All right, I'm going to be open for questions.

Helga: Okay. We do have a couple of questions already. One is, how are you handling identifying safe studying areas for students during COVID?

Sheila: Because I run a facility. For kiddos in my area, we actually have to space everybody out. We have to take temperatures of our staff and the children. My staff are masked. Like right now, I'm in my office with the door shut so I don't have a mask on. When I'm outside my office, I'm in a mask. We have to take temperatures more than one time a day. Our area is really climbing, so we have to be very sensitive to that. And so, we actually have children not all tightly sitting together for studying in-house, so we have to space them out throughout the building. And that's where you might need an internet booster or a router booster because if you have the internet and you have all the children on the computer, plus all your staff on the computer, you're not going to have enough power to operate, so you might want to look at a router booster for that. In our community, we've had parents who still have access to transportation like cars. They've actually had to go sit in the school's parking lot and work on some of their kiddos' studies when they're not working in the school parking lot because they had stronger Wi-Fi. They are trying to set up some mobile hotspots in our community. Some of them were restaurants, but you really can't go in there and sit. Now we're trying to find some mobile hotspots where people can go sit outside or sit in their car and have access to the internet.

Helga: Thank you. We have another question here. Understanding that parenting youth have a high chance of experiencing homelessness, have there been any recent efforts to consider the gaps and access to sex education for youth experiencing homelessness during the upcoming school year and access to reproductive healthcare models more broadly?

Sheila: You know that is a challenge. I mean, in our area the children actually get access to that in their health classes, and we have a class called Hot Topics that comes into the schools, and they were not able to have those classes this year. That is a downfall that we had, and that was a shortcoming that we had. Now, in our agency, we're able to provide those resources, but for the children just in the school district who don't have access to that, they weren't able to get that this year. And so we did make mention of that when we had an opportunity to talk to our schools about this gearing up session, about what kind of things that we missed out on like safety, and some of the sex ed, and things like that, even dating relationships and safety. So, it's important that we try to get that out there and talk to our partners of how we're going to get it out there, like if you yourself teach that at your organization, can you provide it for the school district in a webinar format?

Helga: Okay. Another question here. Do you conduct life skills at the schools? And if so, what are your plans for this upcoming school year?

Sheila: In our schools, we are not allowed to do that. We actually provide life skills for the kids in our facility and also in our aftercare program. We can go into some of the aftercare afterschool programs, you know, like boys and girls clubs, and straight...some of those kinds of things. So, we're allowed to do that at some of those organizations, but our school district has those through those Hot Topic classes. It's kind of, like, an ongoing series. They do it at certain grades for different ages. And so, this is one thing that we're really trying to figure out is, especially for elective classes, you know, like sports, or band, or theater, or any special topic classes for life skills, how are we going to implement that? So, really the school district and agencies like ourselves are trying to figure out how we can work together and partner with one another to make these things happen.

Helga: Another question. Can you talk about what your staff did to help the young lady graduate and start college early?

Sheila: I have an amazing team with my runaway homeless program. I'm just blessed. I'm just going to be honest. I'm throwing it out there to them. They're passionate. They have a heart for the kiddos. And this is a young lady we've worked with multiple times, and so we knew that she could graduate, but we

needed to go to self-paced learning to make her graduate faster. She was already in dual enrollment classes, so she was already college-focused, but we knew with the health concerns of her parent being terminally ill that she was going to be homeless. And so, we had to talk to the school district about allowing her to try to expedite her graduation, and that child worked day and night with the help of my staff to make that happen. With our homeless liaison, we actually contacted the school and coordinated, and so for the last two years, we've actually had a paid staff from the school district who works K-12, special ed who's bilingual who does tutoring for our agency, and so we do it Monday through Friday during the school year. And so, this individual was also able to help us make sure that she got everything done in an efficient manner.

Helga: Okay. I think that's it in terms of questions. For the participants, if you do have questions, we're going to continue taking them. Any questions for Sheila and Christina, feel free to add them into the question section and we'll get those out.

Christina: Hold on. I was just going to mention because I did hear it come up in a question. I didn't spend time on it earlier. Someone asked about sort of pregnancy prevention, sort of upstream type of initiatives, and I think that's definitely a worthy conversation. I did also want to mention, though, and you'll see this in the partnership brief from NCHE and the community profiles. There are some intentional efforts about supporting pregnant and parenting youth by connecting them to early care and education support, so that's a specific piece of the partnership in both Raleigh and Santa Clara. And just a quick nod in case you guys don't dip your toes into early care and ed world very much, a couple of large scale federally-funded early care and education programs, so Head Start, and childcare and development fund childcare subsidies, number one, require providers to prioritize families experiencing homelessness, and that's as defined by the education definition for program access, so the early care and care access. And then also there are a few other things in their federal statute or regulations such as when possible providing transportation or preserving Head Start stability, even if the family moves outside of the Head Start service area, etc. So, if you are interested in early care and education for parenting youth, and I can be of service in kind of sharing resources with you, please feel free to email me.

Marc: Thank you, Christina. And Sheila, I know we zipped through a couple of slides that were part of the deck and just wanted to give you another moment or two to make some points that you think are important to share during this webinar itself.

Sheila: I think I'm already filtering calls locally from my community, and then I've already had my meeting with the schools. Some of the things that the rural schools struggled with most was having enough technology because they don't have as much funding, and so they were wondering how to have access to more devices so the kids can do online programming. And so, there are several...I've been writing grants all week, just small business grants, so like \$1,000 here, \$1,000 there. If anybody wants to email me, they're welcome to email me at my email address and I can tell them some resources that are, you know, more of chain resources, but then there might be people that haven't thought of to ask for, you know, used cell phones, like any cell phone selling business can sell you a smartphone, and they even have some smartphones they get rid of and they just throw away. And, if they can wipe those cell phones clean, and a child can actually finish their schooling on a cell phone, that's better than nothing at all. And, it would be wonderful if every child had, you know, a Chromebook or something like that, but that's not always financially feasible.

And then again, making sure that these individuals have masks. I know in our local communities they're going to require masks for children to go back to school. Some of the schools that we're dealing with are providing masks, but not all the schools can do that, and so how can they get creative in getting a mask, you know. Can you Google it on how to make them? Can your organization make masks? Can you partner up with some of these quilting people, or sewing people, or these kiddos who craft and get them to make some of these masks? Because we know we're going to have to wear them. We're going to need them. How can we just have those basic needs to make sure that these kids have success?

Christina: I'll add as well that sort of going back to the CARES Act... Sorry, I'll be quick, Marc, that there was additional funding allocated to school districts through the CARES Act, and some of the allowable usages of funds are geared specifically to the shift to remote learning, and so some of the allowable usages of funds speak specifically to connectivity or devices that may be needed. And so, while I think it's amazing, if you, as a RHY grantee have funding or the ability to support those needs, like I bet the schools would welcome it, but also schools may have some...We're hearing some schools say, "Wow, the needs are so great that we feel like that CARES Act funding is going to be gone like that," but some also may not feel that way, so don't forget to ask your schools to help equip the young people they are teaching with needed technology and connectivity, or if you can help meet that need that would be great as well.

Marc: Thank you, Christina. Here is the link to the Clearinghouse website. There, you will find many valuable resources and tools to help you, not just through the current situation, but continue to provide the kind of prevention,

intervention, and aftercare services that have been discussed during this webinar. Wanted to say if you are not already a Clearinghouse subscriber, please subscribe to our mailing list to be notified when today's webinar is available, and to learn about future webinars. I also want to be clear with folks that you can subscribe to the Clearinghouse website. A link to subscribe to the Clearinghouse website will be included in a follow-up email each of you will receive later this afternoon in about an hour or so. So, you will also again be provided with the link that you can access to make sure you get on our subscriber list and keep informed of not just when this webinar is posted, but other valuable information. I want now to give a special thanks to Commissioner Darling, to Christina, and to Sheila, and to each and every one of you for your participation in today's webinar hosted by the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families. I wish all of you a safe and wonderful remainder of Thursday. Take care, everyone. Be safe. Goodbye.