



# HOW TO FIND HOMELESS YOUTH HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Identification, Challenges, Housing, Education,  
Success

~Kimber Thompson, McKinney Vento/Foster  
Care Liaison Amarillo ISD

# DEFINITION:

- Per the McKinney/Vento act an unaccompanied youth is defined as a “homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.”
  - “Couch Surfers”



# BY THE NUMBERS: 2022-2023

- Drastic increase in number of UY in Amarillo. (Approx: 185)
- Concerns for parent/child conflict
- Sexual orientation
- Race/Ethnicity Differences



# ENROLLMENT: WHY IS IT SO COMPLICATED?

- McKinney/Vento states the following: Youth must be enrolled IMMEDIATELY upon arriving on a campus and requesting enrollment. They may enroll without a parent or legal guardian, a permanent address, school records, immunization records, proof of residency, or other required documentation. Most unaccompanied youth are living without a parent or legal guardian and may not have all their documentation. They have 30 days to provide required documents. The school cannot create any barriers to the enrollment of unaccompanied youth.
- EXAMPLES: THS (Enrollment barriers), CHS (Senior Class 2023)

# WHY DO KIDS RUNAWAY?

- Main factors: lack of safety, wanting to escape to a peaceful environment, and lack of normalcy in the system
  - Mental Health Challenges
  - Sexual and/or physical abuse
  - Substance abuse
- 
- When teens make a decision to run away from their current place of residence, they are acting on courage, strength, and hope.

# NEEDS/WANTS

- NEEDS

- Love
- Stability
- Guidance
- Acceptance
- Support
- Community
- Someone to really care
- Protection
- Someone to believe in them
- Clothes/Shoes/Hygiene

- WANTS

- To be treated the same as their peers
- Stability
- Equal participation
- Relationships
- Parents
- Graduation
- College
- Letter Jacket

# WHAT ARE TEENS MISSING OUT ON?

- School
  - Education
  - Social skills
- Learning Basic Skills
  - Cleanliness & hygiene
  - Personal healthcare
  - Manners
  - Organization skills
  - Laundry
  - Time management
  - Money management
- Normalcy
  - Lack of stability
  - Doing what other youth do
- General Safety
  - Feel safe to take risks and grow
  - Safe from harm: physical, emotional, verbal AND mental

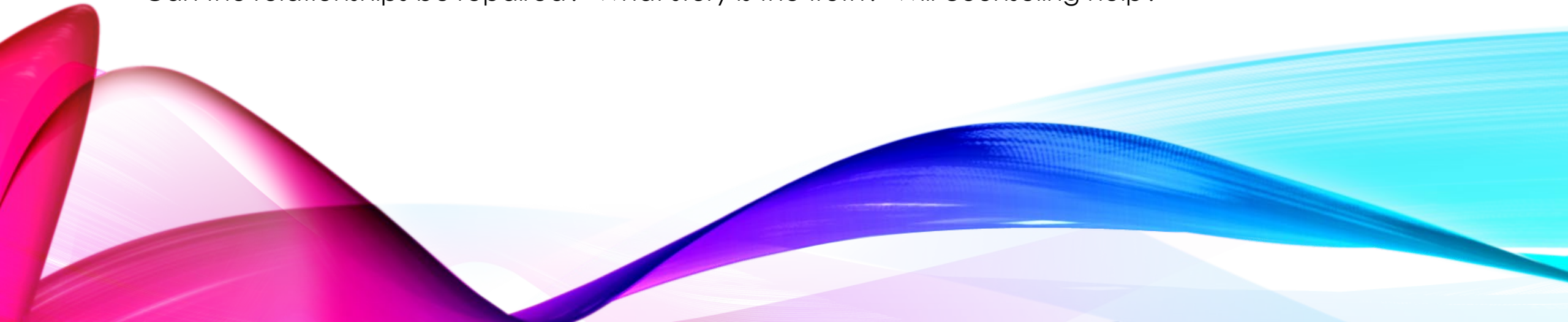
“

IT WASN'T ME MISSING OUT ON HAVING A DAD, IT WAS HIM MISSING OUT ON HAVING A GREAT KID!

”

~Gabe Salazar

Can the relationships be repaired? What story is the truth? Will counseling help?





# IS SCHOOL STAFF PAYING ATTENTION?

- SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

- Dropping grades
- Poor attendance
- Hoarding food
- Dirty clothes
- Sleeping in class
- Depression/Anxiety
- Increased Illness

- HOW DO WE HELP THEM PAY ATTENTION?

- Trainings
- Mentoring programs
- SEL (Weight of the Word)
- Involving them in the process/identification
- Be there emotionally, even if you can't provide anything material
- Cabe & Henley

# TIPS/CAN YOU HELP BREAK THE CYCLE?

- WHEN ADDRESSING YOUTH RUNAWAYS, REMEMBER THESE TIPS

- Youth are always running away for a reason
- Youth need basic needs met first and foremost, and secondary needs are also important
- Understand many runaways may have had exp. with trauma; providers need to be trained to respond
- Youth who have run away may need more support than any one provider can offer. Wraparound services and community collaborations are key to meeting needs

- WHAT CAN PROVIDERS/EDUCATORS DO TO BREAK THE CYCLE

- Find a mentor that youth can relate to
- Take actions on savings account, money matter, and follow up
- Shift their perspective
- Meet them where they are
- Connect with youth to understand their situation
- Listen to what they have to say
- Meet the needs youth are trying to meet for themselves

# ESTABLISH STABILITY

- STABILITY
  - Sense of self competence
  - Develop self-regulation skills
  - Develop positive relationships w/caring adults
  - Develop positive relationships w/peers
  - Involvement in extracurricular activities
  - Successful completion of grade level/graduation
- “I WISH SOMEONE WAS ACTUALLY LOOKING AT ME, NOT JUST MY BEHAVIOR.”
- “I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE NOTICED THAT I WAS GONE.”
- “I WISH SOMEONE WOULD NOTICE THE POSITIVE THINGS I DID, NOT JUST THE NEGATIVE THAT I COULDN'T CONTROL.”

“I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE WOULD NOTICE THAT I WASN'T THERE.”

- Homelessness does not define them. It is just something they are going through. Looking past the behaviors related to their situation is vital to their success.
- That little fire within you now will become a big fire later.



# WHAT WORKED/WHAT DIDN'T

## SUCCESS AT SCHOOL

- Schedule changes
- Graduation plan changes
- Snack Pack/Snack Shack
- Counseling
- Participation

## UNSUCCESSFUL

- Not acknowledging
- Ignoring needs/requests
- Refusing to provide counseling
- Not following up
- Not seeing the positive

What happens when we send our UY to DAEP? How much does that disrupt any progress made?

# HOUSING /LACK OF HOUSING

- Shelters for unaccompanied youth
  - How do they get started, funding?
  - What do areas without those shelters do?
  - Are “host homes” appropriate?
  - What have you done to house this population?
  - HUD laws
  - Mental health
  - Long term solution

# PERSONAL SUCCESSES/FAILURES

- DW-Positive graduation/Movement
- AE-Fire Academy? Barriers?
- KO-Where did the “failure” start?
- NG-AHS Perfect family?
- Another Chance House



## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Partnership with local professionals
- Other non-profits
- City government
- 211

We must  
find time to stop  
and thank the  
people who make  
a difference in  
our lives.

John F. Kennedy

[www.wow4u](http://www.wow4u)



# TALK ABOUT IT!



## **Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil**

by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up  
Because we ain't got an alarm clock  
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,  
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform  
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,  
Cause the lights ain't on  
Even got my baby sister ready,  
Cause my mama wasn't home.  
Got us both to school on time,  
To eat us a good breakfast.  
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed  
Cause I ain't got a pencil.

“

"TO MEND A HEART YOU  
DIDN'T BREAK IS PART OF  
LOVING A CHILD YOU  
DIDN'T MAKE."



# Burning Through Every Corner

by Dwaylyn White

Burning through every corner  
every bend  
four years of burning and passion  
never fail, never give up  
trials and tribulations  
worth it at the end  
running through the finish line  
the sweat running —  
down your forehead,  
your face,  
your neck.  
Four years of becoming who you are.  
Maybe the hurt was worth it.

— To our future

