

## Potential Project: Information Gathering

### PUBLIC AWARENESS COMMITTEE

In order to raise awareness of homelessness in Iowa, the ICH Public Awareness Committee has begun to document the prevalence of high school and middle school athletes who are experiencing homelessness or have been homeless in Iowa. The idea is to take advantage of Iowans' strong interest in their local sports teams and the media attention given to the teams, contests and tournaments. Did you see *The Blind Side*? This was a true story but not unique. There may be a surprising number of students experiencing homelessness in Iowa who are also involved in school sports. This initial information-gathering step is to look for students who are engaged in interscholastic sports, whether they are enrolled in public or private schools.

**Numbers:** Lacking a practical way to undertake a true survey of homeless student athletes, we will extrapolate from data being gathered from the Iowa Institute for Community Alliances as well as the Department of Education (DOE) and the two governing bodies of high school sports in Iowa. At this point, it looks as if at least 40% of students in grades 7 – 12 participate in sports. It stands to reason that transportation, financial and other barriers likely prevent students experiencing homelessness from participating in sports at the same rate as the general student population. However, based on preliminary findings, it seems likely that there are at least 1,000 Iowa boys and girls participating in sports who are homeless. This is especially true if one uses the more liberal DOE definition, which includes those “doubled up” with friends or relatives. That said, if someone claims to have an actual survey of homeless athletes within a district or even a school or team, please share this. We could use such information without attributing it to the particular school or school district.

**Anecdotes:** We need examples from anyone familiar with an applicable situation to comment on the struggles and successes of a homeless or formerly homeless client involved in athletics – without disclosing any identifying information. Details can be changed in sharing the story if necessary to ensure confidentiality.

**Personal stories:** Any athletes willing to share their personal story of being homeless – whether current or in the past – would be very helpful. If they are willing to be identified, please obtain a waiver or provide contact information for follow-up.

**Examples of teams' efforts to help address homelessness/hunger:** Please document ongoing or one-time fundraising events, food or clothing drives, volunteer work, or other instances in which teams have initiated an effort to help those experiencing homelessness.

The best sources of information are likely to be shelters and other service providers, school district McKinney – Vento liaisons, school guidance counselors, coaches, teachers, and clergy.

Please forward all information and questions to Tim Wilson, [wdesed@willisdady.org](mailto:wdesed@willisdady.org); 319 804-1566.