

# HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND

Spring 2009 E-Newsletter — Vol. 4 No. 2

## WINNIE SAYS "IT'S ALL ABOUT KIDS!"



### Kids whose families are suddenly homeless

may find themselves doubling up with relatives or friends crowding into a cheap motel room while waiting for space in a shelter taking refuge in an abandoned, substandard house

### Kids who are suddenly homeless

are no longer just kids  
are now defined as "individuals"  
lacking :  
a fixed  
a regular  
an adequate  
nighttime residence

**But kids who are suddenly homeless**  
still dream, still imagine  
home, their home . . .



with sunshine and birds,  
with deeply rooted trees, security

### Awareness

On a single day in January 2009 the **Allegheny County Department of Human Services'** semi-annual Point-in-Time survey identified 631 children (average age 8) being served by area homelessness programs (from street outreach to permanent housing) and 286 women with children being served by these programs.



A March 2009 report from the **National Center on Family Homelessness** numbers as homeless in Pennsylvania 18,103 unschooled children 6 and younger, 19,167 students grades K-8, and 5,833 grades 9-12.

**First Focus**, a children and families advocacy organization, estimates that nationwide 2+ million children are at risk of becoming homeless because of the current foreclosure crisis and the broader economic downturn.

Children caught up in homelessness may not know how to name it, but they surely experience a stressful uncertainty about "tomorrow."

Will I be OK?  
Will my parents be OK?  
Where will we stay?  
Will we all be together?  
Will I still go to school?

When will we go home?

## ADVOCACY

HCEF's mission statement begins: "To serve as the voice of homeless children in Allegheny County . . ." Speaking up on their behalf has been central to our work over the 10 years since the organization's founding in 1999.

Speaking up has helped secure the continued renewal of the McKinney-Vento Act, ensuring that every child who is homeless has the right to attend school.



Speaking up has made possible shelter and transitional housing-based Learning Centers and Resource Libraries, up-to-date computer technology, free

access to much respected on-line reading improvement programs, and accelerated learning opportunities in the arts and sciences.

## ACTION – By individuals

**Housing agencies act on the kids' behalf:** The Salvation Army Family Caring Center staff has completed its move from downtown to a newly renovated facility in East Liberty. HCEF is not only working with them to fill the new Learning Center with the educational materials and supplies that were featured in the previous location but also is adding a colorful mural to the Center walls.



**The kids act on their own behalf:** Seven children at Bridge to Independence reached their reading goals in the Building Blocks for Success literacy program. They were rewarded with a cake and pizza party at the end of March. During the party the children played games, read books, and received prizes for their accomplishments. Students at Sojourner House MOMS, who have just begun the journey toward greater literacy, look forward to earning a party for themselves!

**And happily for HCEF, volunteers of all ages act on the kids' behalf:** During these difficult times for non-profit organizations, HCEF is fortunate to have been able to expand its small staff from 3 to 4 with the addition of an experienced Volunteer Coordinator – Susy Robison.

In the few weeks since her arrival she has helped organize the donation of Easter baskets to Sisters Place, the baskets having been made and filled by 40 Dorseyville Middle School Students.



AND, Susy arranged for teen volunteers from the Agency for Jewish Learning to help prepare a new green play space and host a party for the children residing at Sojourner House MOMS.



Both groups of young people will shortly grace the *Winnie's All-Stars – Kids Helping Kids* page on the HCEF website.

Kids are not, of course, the only ones helping HCEF's kids. A strong volunteer corps of **"Reading Tutors"** is being recruited, interviewed, and trained to provide elementary and middle school children with the 1-on-1 assistance they need to improve their reading skills and to discover that reading can be fun.

We have opportunities also for **Homework Helpers** and **Learning Center Volunteers** as well as **HCEF office aides**.

## How YOU Can Be Part of the Action

Visit the *Helping* page on the HCEF website:  
<http://homelessfund.org/helping/helping.html>

Here, if you are a young person or a parent/teacher of children and youths, you'll find a link to *Winnie's All-Stars – Kids helping Kids*: <http://homelessfund.org/helping/allstarkids.html>  
This may be the first step toward imagining a fundraising project and then making it happen.

For adults, the *Helping* page itself – <http://homelessfund.org/helping/helping.html> – suggests many ways an individual, a community organization, or the representative of a business can contribute to making sure that HCEF's mission – *to ensure that children who are homeless in Allegheny County are afforded equal access to the same education opportunities and experiences as their peers* – is fulfilled.

If you have the time and inclination to become a regularly scheduled HCEF volunteer, follow the *volunteering* link in the box at the top of the *Helping* page or simply scroll down to the volunteer section.

Potential Reading Tutors should follow the link to "more information" for details about the responsibilities and qualifications of a reading tutor. If these speak to you, call Susy at 412-562-0154 and arrange for an interview.  
<http://homelessfund.org/helping/ReadingTutorForm.pdf>



## ACTION – By Community Organizations

**PGH Party for a Purpose (PPP)** hosts "fun, creative, affordable parties for diverse, young-minded individuals" (21 and older) as a way of raising funds and support for non-profit organizations in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Where people come to give back...  
and have a great time doing it

Friday, May 15th, 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., PPP is hosting an event at the Firehouse Lounge (2216 Penn Avenue in the Strip District) with proceeds benefiting HCEF. Cost: \$10 at the door. Musicians and DJ's donate their time and talent. The Firehouse Lounge is donating the use of their space as well as drink and food specials.



AND

The **Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Community Partners Concert** is a yearly collaboration between the PSO and a rotating list of other greater Pittsburgh non-profit organizations, including HCEF.



This year's concert, hosted by Honorary Chair **Lynn Swann**, will be at Heinz Hall, June 25th, 8:00 p.m. PSO Resident Conductor Lawrence Loh conducts the orchestra for the first half of the concert, and R&B singer **Chaka Khan** headlines the second half.



Ticket prices range from \$21.50 to \$112.50 with the latter including a post-concert reception. Proceeds from ticket sales are donated back to the Partner organizations. Tickets can be bought at the Heinz Hall box office and by phone at 412-392-4900. Be sure to indicate that your purchase is to benefit HCEF: **Code 11774**

***Grateful thanks to all whose monetary donations help HCEF serve the educational needs of "our kids."***



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"Providing hope through learning"