

Career Tech Matters

by Dennis Franks • March 13, 2020

It is no secret that the opioid epidemic has hit our community hard. While drug abuse negatively affects users, there's another group of victims who are caught in the fallout.

Pickaway-Ross has about 100 students whose parent or guardian, often because of addiction, is unable to provide a stable residence. They can be helped by the McKinney-Vento Act, which is overseen by Katt Marriott, Workforce Transition coordinator.

"McKinney-Vento is the only piece of legislation to protect the homeless," Katt said.

The Ohio Department of Education, which is required by McKinney-Vento to track the number of homeless students, reported that in the 2018-19 school year, Ohio's K-12 schools included 25,600 homeless students.



In her role, Katt helps these students secure resources, such as food, clothing or necessary government documents.

Katt prefers the word *transitional* to identify young people who may sleep in a different home several nights a week or

"sofa surf" among friends and family.

"Part of the issue is determining who is homeless," Katt said. "Just because they're staying with friends and not going home doesn't mean they're homeless. You have to determine stable housing."

Once that determination is made, Katt works to help students access benefits to which they are entitled once they turn 18. However, there are necessary documents, such as getting a driver's license, finding a Social Security card or number, a birth certificate or a state ID, that are needed first.

For students younger than 18, Katt will work with a family member to help the minor access his or her benefits.

Katt also works with colleagues Nick Anderson, Michelle Bochard and Jody French and their students to maintain a food bank and clothing pantry.



Students and staff members unload the delivery truck from J216 before stocking the shelves in the food pantry.

The food bank ensures that students who might otherwise go hungry have food for weeknights and weekends. Donations to Pickaway-Ross' food bank come from many in the community but a major provider is J216, a Bainbridge ministry that donates food to Ross County schools. Deb Leasure, an aide in Options for Transition, initiated the ministry's involvement.

"I think that the services we provide — getting them adequate food, adequate housing, adequate clothes — does give these kids some sense of normalcy," Katt said.

One hurdle is letting the students who need the services know they are available. Katt gets help with that from lab instructors, Mindy Frejowski and Josh Younge.

"Some of our students are very forthcoming and load up" with food, Katt said, while other students are embarrassed.

"I don't know how caseworkers do this for long periods of time. You have to take these cases home with you. You have to worry about where these kids are going to get food at night. Or where they're going to end up at night."

And after being in this job for five years, Katt is proud of what she's doing: "This program and all of us who work with students are making a big difference with the kids."

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