



International Network for School Social Work

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School Social Workers Help Meet Students' Basic Needs

In many countries the school year starts in September. Poor families are often unable to buy the school clothes, shoes and school supplies that children need for the start of school. Those children who are poorly equipped are more liable to be absent from school and to fall behind their peers. This problem is most likely in countries with high poverty rates among children and where a large difference in income between rich and poor leads to a lasting gap in educational opportunity.

Among developed countries the United States is the outstanding example of high poverty rates among children and a wide gap in income between rich and poor. The US Census shows that 20% of children live below poverty level <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-01.pdf>, the second highest relative child poverty rate in the developed world in 2013 according to UNICEF. A UNICEF study of material well being ranks the US as close to the bottom of 29 developed countries while the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are at the top <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/RC11-ENG-embargo.pdf>. In addition the US Census shows that the gap between rich and poor continued to grow in 2013.

School social workers understand that children whose basic needs are inadequately met will be more likely to do badly in school. While poor children may possess the basic need for love, they are likely to lack adequate food, shelter, clothing, school supplies and access to cultural enrichment such as books. So when the school year starts many school social workers identify the children who need material help. A 2012 international study of school social work conducted by the International Network showed that school social workers supply material needs such as food and clothing. The Scandinavian countries were the exception to this.

In the US, while school social workers are central to this effort, the scope of the problem is such that the school system itself is significantly involved in working with voluntary organizations, Parent Teacher Associations, businesses, churches and others to provide families with school clothing and supplies. Clothing banks are typically run by volunteers. The school social workers may be heavily involved with organizing the effort or act primarily as referral agents. At the beginning of the school year, schools all around the US are involved with making sure that poor

children have clothes and a backpack with the school supplies they need. Shoes, hygiene supplies, detergent and haircuts are other basics that children need and are often supplied by school systems in order to have children ready for school. School social workers in the US are involved especially with the material needs of homeless children, families affected by local disasters and teens who are emancipated by court order from the age of 16 and must then meet their own material needs. In some places working with these special groups is an assigned priority for school social workers.

News items in local and national newspapers highlight the effort to get poor children ready for the start of school. For example in Broward County, Florida, more than 4,000 children came for an annual event to receive school uniforms, gently used shoes, backpacks with school supplies and even haircuts. The children were pre-registered with school social workers before the end of the previous school year. This year's drive collected 5,500 backpacks, so even those who were not pre-registered will be able to receive help later. <http://thewestsidegazette.com/broward-back-to-school-extravaganza-at-bbt-center-this-saturday/>

Poor Hillsborough students get more help with clothing, hygiene items

By Erin Kourkounis | Tribune Staff

TAMPA — When Ken Gaughan began his career in Hillsborough County as a school social worker in the 1980s, he collected clothing and other necessities for students who came from poor families.

He stored the supplies in the trunk of his car and sometimes spent his own money.

“I’d have to wash them, and I never had the right size,” said Gaughan, now the district’s supervisor of school social work services.

Today, school social workers still gather these things — along with hygiene basics such as toothbrushes and laundry detergent.

But they have help from the Outreach Assisting Students in Schools Network, a nonprofit organization that has helped school social workers for 13 years.

OASIS is on track to open a fourth center in Seffner this fall, a request from social workers in eastern and southern Hillsborough schools.

<http://tbo.com/news/education/poor-hillsborough-students-get-more-help-with-clothing-hygiene-items-20140707/>

You can read about how these Clothing Banks are organized in the US on web sites of school districts across the country. Here are some examples:

- In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a town of half a million, the school system’s Community Clothing Bank estimates it will provide 5,000 children with three outfits this school year. <http://www.aps.edu/community/clothing-bank>
- In Evansville, Indiana, a town of 120,000, the Clothing Closet (called Hangers) has moved to a 7,000 square foot space that is set up like a Department Store. The PTA and local Painters and Carpenters Unions have been involved in the refurbishment. In the winter, supplying winter coats will be a priority as it is in many parts of the US. They expect to serve 2,500 students this year. http://www.courierpress.com/news/education/making-the-grade/pta-clothing-bank-moves-to-a-new-home-at-ais-diamond_45371693