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More students homeless



SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/STAFF

■ Local governments, school districts, nonprofits working to give youths much-needed stability

By Theresa Harrington

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Tina Anglin's son Bubba remembers clearly the day his mother told him she planned to go into drug rehab.

"I was 9," said the boy, now 11. "I was happy and kind of sad at the same time. I was happy she'd get off drugs so we could have a good Christmas, a good life and she would not hang out with the people she used to hang out with."

But his family broke up when his mom entered the treatment center.

"The day I turned 10 was the day I moved in with my grandpa," he said.

Bubba has moved so often with his mother and two sisters that he has trouble remembering which schools he attended. His 13-year-old sister, R'ryanna, estimates she has gone to 12 different schools as she moved between Antioch, Concord and Martinez, living with relatives

and friends.

The family now lives together in transitional housing for the homeless in Antioch operated by the nonprofit Shelter Inc. The children, including 3-year-old Anjali, are among a growing number of homeless students nationwide.

Any student who lives in a homeless shelter or motel, is living with family or friends or who has no residence qualifies as homeless, according to the federal government.

California's homeless student population of preschool to 12th-grade

See **HOMELESS**, Page 13

R'ryanna Anglin, left, works on science homework at the Lyle Morris Family Center in Antioch. The 13-year-old attends public school and gets tutoring through the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

Homeless

From Page 1

ers grew from 178,000 to 288,000 between 2006 and 2009, an increase of more than 25 percent annually over the past two years. About 1,625 homeless students are in Contra Costa County and more than 5,100 attend schools in Alameda County.

Double whammy

“California’s increases were pretty phenomenal,” said Barbara Duffield, policy director of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. “I think the recession and the housing crisis have sort of had a double impact for states like California.”

Nationwide, the number of homeless students jumped 17 percent between 2006 and 2008, from 679,724 to nearly 800,000. Data for 2008-09 is still being collected, but is expected to climb because of high unemployment and the poor economy, Duffield said.

To help states keep such students enrolled and to improve their academic achievement, the federal government doles out about \$65.4 million a year in grants through the 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. But the money has reached about 9 percent of school districts nationwide, leaving many with no resources to combat the growing problem, Duffield said.

To help fill the extra need, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allotted an additional \$70 million for homeless student services, including nearly \$13.8 million for California. Of that, about \$180,500 trickled down to the Contra Costa County Office of Education and three of its districts and about \$537,000 to the Alameda County Office of Education and six of its districts.

They use the money to help transport homeless children to school, pay for supplies, tutoring and other services. Federal law says students are entitled to remain in the schools they attended before they became homeless.



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Anjali Anglin, 3, is caught trying to help herself to a beverage. Her mother, Tina Anglin, 32, and two siblings attend public schools and are getting tutoring through the County Office of Education at the Lyle Morris Family Center in Antioch.

Hard to reach out

But many families are unaware of the services or do not want to admit they are homeless, said Tashaka Merriweather, homeless education coordinator for the West Contra Costa school district, which served 881 homeless students last year.

"People don't know what the true definition is," he said. "The hardest part is to actually get to the kids and let the parents know."

The Mt. Diablo school district has seen its homeless students triple in the past three years, from 128 to 430, said James Wogan, who administers the Homeless Outreach Program for Education. He expects to reach 500 homeless students this school year.

"We're seeing the effects of the economy," he said. "We're seeing families tripled up (in one home)."

Deborah Williams learned of the district's homeless services last summer when she was living in a motel with her two grandchildren, whose mother had died. Wogan brought the family food, helped them pay for the mo-

BY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Contra Costa districts with most homeless in 2008-09

Antioch	68
Liberty	27
Mt. Diablo	430
Pittsburg	47
West Contra Costa	881
Other pre-K	132

Total 1,624*

*Total includes some districts not listed

Source: Contra Costa County Office of Education

ONLINE

Details about services for homeless students in Contra Costa County are at www.cocoschools.org/yds. Alameda County information is at www.acoe.org/acoe under "Student Programs." State homeless program information is at www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs. National Center for Homeless Education resources are at www.serve.org/nche.

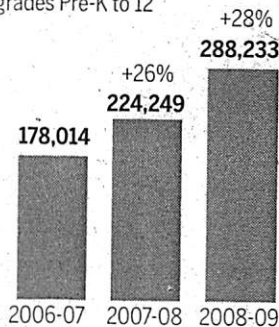
tel and told them about other resources.

"Mr. Wogan is really there to help you, if you find him," said Williams, who now lives in a Pittsburg apartment with the children and their father.

Districts and counties that receive homeless grants are required to provide staff who help identify qualified students and provide services. They must also immediately

Homeless students

California's increase in homeless students, grades Pre-K to 12



Source: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

STAFF

enroll homeless children in school, even those who lack required paperwork.

In Contra Costa County, the Antioch and Pittsburg school districts do not receive homeless grants, although they educated 68 and 47 students respectively who qualified for services last year. The Liberty Union High School district in Brentwood, on the other hand, applied for a grant and received nearly \$6,000 for its 27 homeless students.

Filling the gaps

County offices of education try to fill in the gaps for districts that do not provide services. They also serve eligible students in the juvenile justice system and partner with other agencies for counseling, health services, housing assistance and food.

The Contra Costa County Office of Education has teamed up with Shelter, Inc. to provide tutoring to students such as

Anglin and her children. Anglin is studying welding at Los Medanos Community College and hopes to earn a certificate that will enable her to support her family and move into their own home.

Tutors help adults earn their GEDs and help children graduate on time, said Timothy O'Keefe, executive director of Shelter Inc.

"For every six months that a child is homeless," he said, "they fall a year behind in school, assuming that they go to school. They're twice as likely to repeat a grade. One-fifth do not attend school."

But with help, homeless people such as Lisa Suchon have overcome issues such as drug abuse to build stable lives with their children. Four years ago, she moved with her son into the transitional housing complex where Anglin lives.

After studying with the same tutor, she got a job as an office manager, moved into an apartment and joined the Shelter Inc. board of directors. This year, her son will graduate from high school.

"To have one person advocating for you is amazing," said Suchon, 40.

Anglin is determined to set a similar example for her children.

"When you're on drugs, you're like a prisoner," she said. "I'm just now starting to take parenting seriously."

Bubba is happy with the change.

"I think she's going to be a good welder," he said. "I hope she's going to be safe. I'm very proud of her."

350