

# Uncovering Hidden Homelessness

~ raising awareness and promoting change



SPRING ISSUE - APRIL 2024

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## Getting to Know You:

Jani Koester



**What is your job, and how long have you been in it?(How long has the position been in existence?)**

I have worked as the Lead Resource Teacher in Madison Schools' Transition Education Program (TEP) for the past 35 years, implementing the federal McKinney-Vento law in our public schools. In my 42 years as an educator, TEP has provided support, training, education and resources for students experiencing homelessness and their families. Every school district across the U.S. have a homeless liaisons or programs that implement McKinney-Vento that supports students and their families experiencing homelessness.

**What does a typical day look like?**

My day involves a range of responsibilities to support students and families experiencing homelessness. This includes phone calls, emails, and connecting directly with families and schools to provide resources, build relationships, and advocate for students. I train staff on McKinney-Vento laws and build community partnerships to ensure schools have the necessary support. Each day brings new challenges as I work to identify and eliminate barriers to education such as transportation, enrollment, attendance, school supplies, tutoring, mentoring, childcare, and basic needs. I especially enjoy collaborating with school staff on strategies to support these students academically, socially, and emotionally. My advocacy extends into the community through committees, early childhood initiatives, legislation, and raising awareness. The overarching goal is to connect students and families to the support they need to be successful in school. While every day is different, my priority remains breaking down barriers, building relationships, and ensuring access to education.

**What is HEN?**

The Homeless Education Network (HEN) brings together homeless liaisons and school staff from all Dane County school districts to support students experiencing homelessness. This group meets 2-3 times per year to collaborate on addressing issues that impact these students and families.

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Summertime fun is coming soon! It's never too early to start planning. Here are some links to help you see what's available:



[MSCR Summer Program Guide](#)

[MSCR Elementary School Camps](#)

[Madison-area Out of School Time](#)



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(Click on a link below to be transported to the article)

[Eviction filings in Dane County skyrocket amid housing crunch](#)

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## Ways to Help...



BPNN is one of the largest food pantries in Dane County -- and the only pantry entirely led and operated by volunteers. When you volunteer with BPNN, you can feel satisfaction knowing you are helping families and meeting neighbors who also value giving their time and talents to help. Get started by signing up for Volunteer Orientation. BPNN offers sessions on Thursday afternoons from 1:30-3pm and two Saturday per month from 9-10:30am. Visit [www.bpnn.org](http://www.bpnn.org) to register, make a donation and learn more about BPNN's mission to end hunger and fight poverty.



Introducing **Jani Koester** (Continued from page 1)

We often explore specific topics and dig deeper into ways that we can work together as a community to support our students and families experiencing homelessness. HEN also invites relevant community agencies to participate in these meetings, further extending the network available to provide comprehensive support. These collaborative meetings facilitate communication between districts regarding shared transportation and families, enabling schools to better coordinate services for homeless students.

### **What is the best part of your job? The hardest part of your job?**

One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is having the chance to talk with students and families. Our conversations sometimes open the door for them to share their stories and feelings through writing. With their permission, I help turn these personal accounts into poetry and stories to share with the community. This provides a window into their lives in their own words, building understanding beyond just my perspective. The greatest challenge is that schools lack the capacity to directly help families seeking shelter or housing. Though we cannot offer refuge or housing aid, we do our best to connect them with local partners who can provide those critical services. Informing parents and youth that we cannot meet those basic needs is hard; the most we can do is link them to available resources in the community.

### **One random fact about you!**

I was recently honored to be selected as a 2024 Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Teacher Fellow. The foundation chose me from a competitive pool of candidates, citing my leadership, passion for inspiring learning, and commitment to being an agent of positive change. I am honored by this recognition and hope to leverage the fellowship to raise awareness of the challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness.

### **One thing you want people to know about doubled up homelessness in our schools/community?**

One of my passions is ensuring our community and support systems understand that doubled up homelessness is still homelessness. For years, I've been told that people experiencing doubled up homelessness are less vulnerable than those in shelters or not "literally" homeless. But not having a permanent home is homelessness. Getting evicted is homelessness. Living out of a suitcase while sharing a friend's floor isn't a home. If we don't acknowledge these realities, we won't end homelessness. At least families in shelters have some stability - a guaranteed place to sleep, store belongings, and eat meals without worrying about having to leave abruptly. Doubling up means uncertainty, insecurity, hunger, and mobility. It's still homelessness.

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This newsletter is brought to you by the Doubled Up Committee.

Since 2019, we have been working to raise awareness about doubled up homelessness in our community and advocating for resources to support this population.

Questions or comments?  
Email us at [doubledupworkgroup@gmail.com](mailto:doubledupworkgroup@gmail.com)

