

# SUMMIT VIII: PAVING THE WAY

## REACHING & ENGAGING HOMELESS YOUTH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2016 • WYNDHAM GRAND HOTEL, DOWNTOWN PITTSBURGH

## OVERVIEW

What if you were 17 years old and living on the streets, unsure of where to go and what resources are available to you? You begin to lose hope that you will ever be able to connect with service providers who really care, because you do not know where to start. However, you do have a cell phone and social media at your fingertips, so you try to reach out online in an effort to find help. In Allegheny County and across the country, using social media can serve as a lifeline for homeless youth, and is a key way that service providers can assist youth experiencing homelessness in our region.

On November 18, 2016, the Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) convened 400 community stakeholders for a day of learning and dialogue focused on ways to reach and engage homeless youth through social media.

The event drew diverse participants from HCEF's Homeless Education Network, including educators, social workers, researchers, advocates, health and wellness providers, law enforcement personnel, business leaders, the technology community, funders, and homeless or formerly homeless youth.

The Summit recognized the amazing efforts being made by dedicated organizations and individuals throughout the Pittsburgh area and honoring the young people who are overcoming obstacles, working to improve their lives, and inspiring others along the way.

The Summit also challenged attendees to further their efforts to engage homeless youth through social media. HCEF's vision is that all youth experiencing homelessness have

opportunities to use social media as a way to improve their lives, ultimately providing them with as many opportunities as possible to reach the services they need and meet the goals they have set for themselves in their lives. At a time when social media is becoming more and more important each day, we cannot settle for anything less than our best efforts to effectively use social media to engage homeless youth, and in turn, improve how we deliver our services to assist those youth who are experiencing homelessness in our community.

This event was made possible through the generous support of Highmark and Allegheny Health Network. Key partners included the Allegheny Department of Human Services, Auberle, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the 2016 Summit Steering Committee.





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## SUPPORT FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS



**Evan Frazier**, the Senior Vice President of Community Affairs at Highmark Health, framed the day by stressing the importance of collaboration among service providers in addressing the numerous circumstances where we continue to fall short in reaching all homeless youth. He offered a broad definition of youth homelessness, which is key when considering the populations that providers serve. It is crucial to understand that although a portion of homeless youth are in fact living on the streets, many more are “doubled-up” or living with friends for short periods of time. He also emphasized the importance of meeting the needs of young people who are aging out of foster care. Twenty-five percent of former foster youth experience homelessness at some point in their lives. Finally, he reinforced that “investing in the wellbeing of homeless youth benefits everyone.”

**Rich Fitzgerald**, Allegheny County Chief Executive, championed Allegheny County as having a national reputation for working together to create solutions that enhance the wellbeing of all residents. He stressed that we need to continue to do so, especially in our efforts to reach homeless youth by taking advantage of the power of social media. He highlighted the success of Auberle’s 412 Youth Zone, which opened in January 2016 and is already serving hundreds of youth. In closing, he reminded all of us that Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh are committed to always being welcoming to all.



**“INVESTING IN THE WELLBEING OF HOMELESS YOUTH BENEFITS EVERYONE.”**

- Evan Frazier

## SUMMIT VII STEERING COMMITTEE

**Nicole Anderson**  
Allegheny Intermediate Unit

**Dr. David Barkovich**  
North Hills High School

\* **Jamie Baxter**  
Allegheny Intermediate Unit

**Maurita Bryant**  
Allegheny County Police Department

**Dr. Wayne Centrone**  
Center for Social Innovation

**Karina Chavez**  
Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education

**Judy Eakin**  
HEARTH

**Bob Firth**  
Informing Design

**Evan Frazier**  
Highmark Health

**Dr. Erik Garrett**  
Duquesne University

**Monica Hershberger**  
The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh

**Abigail Horn**  
Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services

**Kevin Jenkins**  
Manchester Bidwell Corporation

**Chuck Keenan**  
Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services

**Cheryl Kleiman**  
Education Law Center

**Commander Anna Kudrav**  
Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

\* **Dr. Joseph Lagana**  
Homeless Children’s Education Fund

**Fred Massey**  
FamilyLinks

\* **Chris McAneny**  
Homeless Children’s Education Fund

**Carmen Medina**  
Pennsylvania Department of Education

**Jess Netto**  
Community Human Services/Project SILK

**John O’Connell**  
Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Sonia Pitzi**  
York Learning Center

**Dr. Eric Rice**  
USC School of Social Work

**Susy Robison**  
Homeless Children’s Education Fund

**Hilary Scherer**  
Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services

**Dr. Jeffrey Shook**  
University of Pittsburgh

\* Chairs





# THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

## DR. ERIC RICE

*Associate Professor,  
 University of Southern California  
 School of Social Work*

In his keynote address, Dr. Rice highlighted his research and showed us how using social media is a way to link homeless youth with services. He has been working with homeless youth in drop-in centers since 2002, and was very impressed with the 412 Youth Zone opened this year in Allegheny County. In his work, he found that there is a need to have youth-friendly ways for these young people to access services. One key way to do that is through social media. Although relatively few homeless youth had cell phones when he began his research in 2009, most do have them today, and they often serve as a major asset to the resiliency of these youth. Despite often not having data plans, most find ways to access wireless Internet fairly regularly, usually interacting with ten to twelve main people.

Dr. Rice stressed the importance of connections—which are often made through Internet use. He made the distinction between the various Internet platforms that homeless youth use, and what they use them for. Typically, homeless youth use email to connect with employers and parents, while they

use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to connect with friends. These interactions are valuable. Talking to friends, parents, and case managers on social media and email increases the chance that a young person experiencing homelessness will look for jobs and achieve better overall outcomes in their lives. In addition, they can benefit greatly from establishing or enriching appropriate connections to agency staff through social media.

Finally, Dr. Rice spoke about his perspective on apps targeted toward homeless youth. On one hand, the ability of apps to quickly connect youth with services and intervention is necessary, especially for youth living on the streets and perhaps engaging in dangerous habits. However, at this time, many youth are unaware of the existence of these apps, and those who are aware are often not sharing them with other homeless youth. Thus, it is vital that providers work to train groups of youth in how to use these apps, and encourage them to spread the word as much as possible. Ensuring that youth have access to phones is key, and providers can help in that effort, too. It is important that we all work together to take full advantage of the power of social media to improve the lives of homeless youth.



**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL WORK TOGETHER TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF HOMELESS YOUTH.**



**RESOURCES:**

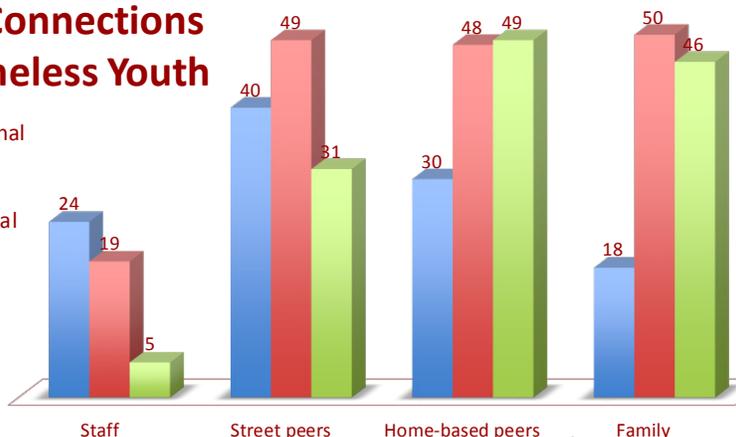
Presentation Powerpoint:  
<http://tinyurl.com/ericrice>

Social Context of Service Use Among Homeless Youth in Los Angeles, California  
<http://tinyurl.com/homelessLA>

Audio Clip - Youth Homelessness & Social Media  
<http://tinyurl.com/AudioClipYouth>

## Social Connections for Homeless Youth

- Informational
- Emotional
- Instrumental





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## CONNECTING YOUTH: UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

This panel convened a group of individuals with unique viewpoints on the importance of using social media to reach homeless youth. Dr. Jeffrey Shook, associate professor and doctoral program director at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, stressed that we do not limit our engagement to a single domain or social media platform. As service providers, we must focus on both online and offline structures to best engage homeless youth. Monet Spencer, an inspirational student representative from Brashear High School who overcame homelessness and is now in independent living, spoke about her experiences and the importance of youth and adults working together to end youth homelessness. Youth can help adults learn the value of social media and they can teach them how to use it so that they can best help serve youth experiencing homelessness with their social media outreach.

Grace Enick, an intern at HCEF, spoke about her outreach efforts on Facebook to get youth involved in her art show, We Live Here Too. In its second year, the art show grew from 19 artists to 39, and this year, the show had almost 300 pieces of art for sale. One-hundred percent of the sales went to the artists. Grace shared that she solely used Facebook to raise awareness about how to participate in the art show. Even youth who were previously disconnected from services were able to learn about the show. In turn, youth talked to their friends in a Facebook group they created on their own, expanding the number of artists even further. This is just one example of the powerful reach that social media can have in the community.

Finally, Nicole Anderson, regional coordinator of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, talked about some of the challenges faced when working with social media. She spoke on the generational gap that is currently preventing some service providers from taking full advantage of the influence social media can have on the students in their care. Providers could address this issue by implementing Monet's idea to engage youth to teach adults how to use social media. Nicole also touched upon the issue of personal and professional boundaries with regard to social media use, which is an important topic. While it can be helpful to use platforms such as Facebook to engage youth experiencing homelessness, she recommended that providers create a separate account solely for work purposes so as not to give youth access to their personal Facebook pages.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

ALLEGHENY COUNTY LEGISLATORS SOCIAL MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION:

<http://tinyurl.com/ACLegislators>

IT'S OKAY TO ASK SOMEONE (IOTAS):

<http://tinyurl.com/HCEFIOTAS>



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## FIRST RESPONSE: IDENTIFYING HOMELESSNESS WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS AND FINDING THE RIGHT APPROACH

**David Barkovich, Ed.D., Allegheny Country School Counselors Association**

**John O'Connell, MSW/LSW, Pittsburgh Public Schools**

**Tim McDowell, LCSW, HSV, North Hills School District**

**Samantha Murphy, Med, NCC, Department of Human Services**

Even affluent school districts have youth experiencing homelessness, and it is vital that school employees know how to take the next step if they are the first to learn about a student's homelessness. Because these individuals are often unsure of how to respond, the panelists in this session offered recommendations for schools to identify homeless students and to provide the most effective services. It is key that students be referred to the correct person, oftentimes a social worker, who can serve as their McKinney-Vento liaison. School nurses should also be educated on this matter and have outreach materials available to provide students with connections to community supports such as food pantries, transportation assistance, and backpack distributions. A discussion on school cell phone policies prompted some discussion, for schools do not want students distracted by phones during school, but taking a phone away from as student experiencing homelessness could be taking away their lifeline. In summary, panelists stressed that it helps every single one of us to identify these students and work to enhance their success.

*www.aiu3.net is a key resource in identification of youth experiencing homelessness*



## MEETING THE CHALLENGE: UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH TASK FORCE AND ACCESSING RESOURCES

**Abigail Horn, Allegheny County Department of Human Services**

**Sharon Langford, Action Housing, My Place and the Lofts**

**Aimee Plowman, Auberle 412 Youth Zone**

**Lenny Prewitt, Familylinks**

Panelists for this section were all key community leaders working on the Unaccompanied Youth Task Force to engage and serve youth experiencing homelessness. Members of the task force reinforced the notion that homeless youth are difficult to reach because they often do not want to be identified as homeless. Unfortunately, this is not a new problem. Aimee Plowman, the Director of the 412 Youth Zone, shared that agencies across the country use Facebook, Twitter, and even YouTube to spread the word about their services, and the Task Force is currently examining best practices in this area.

**POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS:**

**First Response:**  
<http://tinyurl.com/HCEFFirstResponse>

**Technology in Action:**  
<http://tinyurl.com/SummitBigBurgh>



## TECHNOLOGY IN ACTION: BIGBURGH.COM

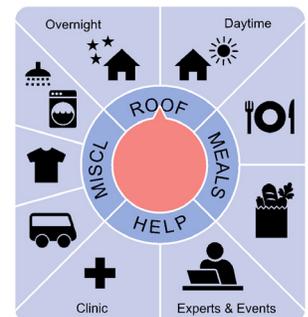
**Bob Firth, Informing Design, Inc.**

**Commander Anna Kudrav, Pittsburgh Police Department**

**Chris Roach, Operation Safety Net**

**Debra Smallwood, HCEF Teen Outreach Program**

BigBurgh is a mobile-compatible website, very similar to a traditional app, that helps homeless youth, service providers, police officers, and other first responders in quickly linking youth to services catered to them. Users have the ability to select their age and gender identity, and BigBurgh will return a list of categories that they can choose from, such as drop-in centers, food, and medical care. Current statistics on BigBurgh usage are positive and promising, with the ultimate goal being that all homeless youth in the region are aware of this great resource that is so often at their fingertips. The police are also taking advantage of BigBurgh to assist those in crisis, with the most important aspect for them being that it remains an accurate and up-to-date resource. So far, BigBurgh has been a success, and the hope is that it only becomes more successful moving forward.





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## INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA:

A 101 COURSE ON HOW TO ACCESS AND USE SOCIAL MEDIA

**Jess Netto,**  
*Community Human Services Project Silk*

**Kate Horowitz, MPH,**  
*Planned Parenthood of Western PA*

This workshop explored strategies of national and local models, ethics related to technology, and the service continuum, as well as components for social media strategic planning. The incorporation of technology can help youth-serving agencies successfully engage their consumers through mass media messaging, campaigns for transformative cultural shifts, and diversification and expansion of targeted outreach networks. Throughout this session, attendees learned how to effectively integrate social media platforms into everyday practice.



## USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO

**ADVOCATE:** THE "INS AND OUTS" OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE WITH POLICYMAKERS

**Jamie Baxter,**  
*Allegheny Intermediate Unit*

**Jamie Glasser, Esq.,** *District Chief of Staff to Senator Jay Costa, Jr.*

This session discussed the "ins and outs" of utilizing social media to become

an effective advocate for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Presenters provided specifics on how legislative offices utilize social media and how this platform can influence positive change in Harrisburg and Washington DC. Jamie Glasser gave specific insight on how offices use social media to get messages out, while at the same time monitoring position statements and concerns from constituents and advocates. This session also explored phrasing, timing, and platforms to maximize efforts.



## HOMELESSNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: IDENTIFYING AND SERVING THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Misti McKeenan,**  
*University of Pittsburgh*

**Erik Garrett,** *Duquesne University*

**Grace Enick,** *HCEF intern and Chatham University student*

**Sivon Dewitt,** *Carlow University*

There are students in Allegheny County's colleges and universities who are experiencing homelessness and are succeeding in post-secondary education. Members of the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education, a voluntary, multi-purpose consortium of the ten accredited colleges and universities in Allegheny County, shared how they develop strategies to identify and support students experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness. Attendees heard success stories and best practices from students and staff on how to reach and engage students experiencing homelessness.

**BUILDING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE CORE OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY EFFORTS.**

## POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS:

### Intro. to Social Media:

<http://tinyurl.com/HCEFSocialMediaIntro>

### Social Media Advocacy:

<http://tinyurl.com/SocialMediaAdvocate>



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## PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

### A Message from Dr. Eric Rice:

**90%** OF ATTENDEES RATED THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DR. ERIC RICE AS HIGH IN QUALITY AND RELEVANCY.

**89%** RATED THE CONNECTING YOUTH PANEL AS "VERY EFFECTIVE" OR "EFFECTIVE".

**81%** RATED THE OVERALL RELEVANCY OF THE SUMMIT'S CONTENT AS "VERY HIGH" OR "HIGH".

**80%** GAVE A RATING OF "VERY HIGH" OR "HIGH" FOR QUALITY OF NETWORKING AND INTERACTIVITY.

Getting to see the work with homeless youth that is happening in Pittsburgh was truly inspiring. There has been a great deal more attention paid to homeless youth around the country over the past several years and it is wonderful to see that Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh community are so actively engaged in this movement. There are three things that I want to briefly touch on about what I saw.

First, it is rare that I have seen communities so successfully engage such a wide range of stake holders to address the issues of youth homelessness. But at Summit VII, there were not only homeless youth providers, but representatives of the school system and the police.

Second, it was clear that Allegheny County has taken seriously the task of trying to provide resources and outreach for homeless youth in meaningful ways that meet youth where they are. The 412 Youth Zone is a truly world class drop in center and it was clear that youth feel welcomed and cared for in this space.

Finally, I want to laud the BigBurgh.com mobile web-based app. I have been working with homeless youth around technology access for the past 10 years and there are only a small number of communities who have even attempted to build an app to help youth access services. BigBurgh.com is one of the best implementations I have seen. Youth today, and that of course includes homeless youth, are almost constantly connected via cell phones and social media. It is so important to meet these youth with the sorts of technologies that they use. I was amazed to hear that this app was built as a collaboration between youth, providers, and police. What an amazing moment of a community coming together to help youth to get connected so they can receive the assistance they need to achieve stable, successful lives. Congratulations to all of you for your hard work.



"I ALWAYS FEEL SO ENERGIZED AND REJUVENATED AFTER ATTENDING THE HCEF SUMMIT. GREAT WORK!"

- Family Support Specialist

"LOVE BIGBURGH! SUCH A FABULOUS RESOURCE AT OUR FINGERTIPS. CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT GROW AND DEVELOP."

- Housing Specialist

"I CAN ALREADY THINK OF WAYS TO OFFER MORE OPTIONS TO STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY RESOURCES FOR WHEN CHILDREN ARE AWAY FROM THE SUPPORT OF SCHOOL."

- Higher Education Representative



"IT IS ALWAYS HUMBLING TO HEAR FROM OTHERS WHO HAVE PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED THESE SITUATIONS. THANK YOU FOR BEING WILLING TO SHARE YOUR STORY!"

- Service Provider

"JUST AWESOME. WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY?"

- Service Provider



**HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND**

creating hope through learning  
[www.homelessfund.org](http://www.homelessfund.org)

### For More Information:

Contact Chris McAneny  
(412) 562-0154 x204

[cmcaneny@homelessfund.org](mailto:cmcaneny@homelessfund.org)

# SUMMIT CONGRESS • MAY 5, 2017

APPLY: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/HCEFCONGRESS](http://tinyurl.com/HCEFCONGRESS)