



Champions of Change in the Fight against Child and Youth Homelessness



Champion of Change:

Sparky Harlan, Executive Director and C.E.O.

Bill Wilson Center

Santa Clara, CA

"Watching a child who is experiencing homelessness and who is without hope, become a bright and happy member of a stable family inspires me."

Sparky Harlan is CEO of the Bill Wilson Center (BWC) in Santa Clara, California. Bill Wilson Center provides comprehensive services for homeless youth and young families – from street outreach to permanent supportive housing. Under her leadership, Bill Wilson Center recruited other nonprofit, community and corporate leaders to work together in a county-wide initiative focused on ending youth and family homelessness by 2020.

The Bill Wilson Center's Family Advocacy Services Team (FAST), a school-based homeless prevention and intervention service, was developed by the Bill Wilson Center in 2011 to address the needs of extremely low-income families with high school-aged children enrolled in two local school districts who were either homeless or on the verge of homelessness. FAST provides strengths-based case management to connect families to community and public resources to prevent repeated episodes of homelessness. All case managers/advocates are English/Spanish bi-lingual, bi-cultural and work one on one with the family, who are often mono-lingual Spanish, to address the issues that are impacting their lives and housing stability.

Community Need

Latinos are over-represented in the homeless family population; in two local high schools 50 – 100 at-risk or homeless children were identified with attendance and academic/behavior problems. Seventy percent were Latino/Hispanic. Research

Each week, the White House *Champions of Change* program highlights the stories and examples of Americans, businesses, or organizations who embody 'Innovate, Educate, and Build.' Different groups are highlighted each week ranging from educators to entrepreneurs to community activists. USICH and the White House Office of Public Engagement hosted an event on July 12, 2012 at the White House to honor those who are "Winning the Future" and who further empower and inspire other members of their respective communities. The Champions honored here truly embody innovative, inclusive, and holistic approaches to child and youth homelessness in their communities.

*The key to the success of FAST is **linking families to the resources** that prevent multiple moves and family homelessness. To ensure the families get connected to services, they **need to be provided at school, in homes, or on the streets** – wherever the families are located. In order to end the generational pattern of homelessness and enable the children to be successful in school, the families must secure stable housing, food, healthcare, improve parenting skills, address substance abuse issues, and address and resolve immigration issues.*

indicates that 43 percent of homeless students repeat a grade, 25 percent are placed in special education, and 50 percent are failing academically.

Innovation on the Ground

The collaboration with two school districts and Bill Wilson Center to form the Family Advocacy Services Team (FAST) prevents family and youth homelessness and, for those already homeless, provides the rapid return of families to stable housing. BWC's Family Advocacy Services Team is innovative in that it provides an on-site social worker to work with the family, not just the identified troubled student. Additionally, FAST provides training to school personnel so that they are more knowledgeable and capable to work with families experiencing homelessness.

receives HHS Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) foster care funds and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding.

Impact

The FAST program will impact families facing homelessness by assisting 75 percent of the families in regaining or maintaining a stable living environment; 80 percent of students from these families will maintain or improve academically, and 80 percent of students will improve their attendance by reducing truancy, call outs, or tardiness.

Community Partners

The Bill Wilson Center works with a variety of community partners in the public and private sector. Community partners that support the work of the FAST program include the Lincoln High School (San Jose Unified School District) and Mt. Pleasant High School (Eastside Unified School District).

Federal Resources

Bill Wilson Center receives funding from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development, including Supportive Housing Program, Community Development Block Grant, and Emergency Shelter Grant. They also receive funding from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services HHS, Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs, including Runaway and Homeless Youth Basic Center, Street Outreach, Transitional Living Program, and Maternity Home Transitional Living Program. Additionally, Bill Wilson Center

