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## Berks County Public Libraries Assist Displaced Youth for 2018 School Year

*For immediate release*— This school year, Berks County Public Libraries reached out into the community to assist displaced students in Berks County with school preparations. With the help of the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), the county library system sent 750 backpacks to school districts across the county that included school supplies and information about library services.

In the 2016-2017 school year, 30,264 students in Pennsylvania were identified as experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act. From that total, approximately 1,500 students were identified in Berks County. Individuals experiencing homelessness, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes youth living in shelters, transitional housing, hotels/motels, or students who live doubled-up with friends and family members due to an economic hardship.

Often forced to move and change schools against their will, displaced students encounter numerous educational barriers ranging from a lack of school supplies to limited or no Internet access, resulting in students being 2-3 years behind their peers academically.

For the beginning of the 2018 school year, Berks County Public Libraries wanted to remind affected students and families that library resources and services are available to them, including educational databases to assist with homework and school assignments. Even those lacking a permanent address can request an electronic card for digital-based resources. eCards issued by the Reading Public Library allow patrons to access the libraries' digital collection and download items that will automatically be returned at the end of the borrowing period with no late fees or fines. Vouchers for these digital-only library cards were placed in bags to be sent to the approximately 350 affected students in the Reading school district.

“It is crucial to connect homeless youth to the libraries,” says Tabitha Kramer, BCIU program specialist. “Libraries can offer various resources including books, free activities, and free Internet access.”

Kramer works in the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness program (ECYEH), an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The program’s mission is to ensure that all students experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to succeed in school.

Earlier this year, Kramer spoke in front of an audience of children’s librarians from the Berks County Public Libraries, offering insight into the struggles of displaced youth and how to offer assistance. It isn’t only about the resources, Kramer said. Offering homeless youth a warm, quiet place to spend the day can be just as valuable.

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*If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Emily Orischak, community relations coordinator for the Berks County Public Libraries. Information about available resources can be found online at [www.berkslibraries.org](http://www.berkslibraries.org).*