



THE PROMISE ZONE CONNECTING THE DOTS INITIATIVE

A FEDERAL INTERAGENCY
PARTNERSHIP

KENTUCKY HIGHLANDS PROMISE ZONE PROFILE

ABOUT THE PROMISE ZONE “CONNECTING THE DOTS” INITIATIVE

Promise Zones are high-poverty communities where the federal government has partnered with local leaders to improve educational opportunities, reduce violent crime, enhance public health, increase economic activity, leverage private investment, and address other priorities identified by the community. The Connecting the Dots (CTD) initiative, an interagency collaboration of the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that began in May 2015, sought to focus Promise Zone community efforts on providing targeted supports to local children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

ABOUT THE KENTUCKY HIGHLANDS CTD INITIATIVE

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Designated as the first rural Promise Zone in 2014, the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone includes the southeast Kentucky counties of Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, and Perry, and six of the eight census tracts in Whitley County. The area is home to 206,263 people across 3,071 square miles. In the 2014-2015 school year, Kentucky had the highest rate of homeless students in the U.S. and the rate among the Promise Zone's 16 local education agencies (LEAs) was higher than the overall state rate. This prompted a prioritization on youth homelessness.

PARTNERS

The lead entity, Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, collaborates with Partners for Education (PFE) at Berea College; Fahe (a network of over 50 local nonprofits); the Kentucky Department of Education; the Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC); the Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky; Eastern Kentucky University; 16 LEAs; and the homeless education liaisons in Whitley County School District and Harlan County Public Schools.

EDUCATION AND HOUSING GOALS

Educational goals included assuring geographic and affordable access to post-secondary education and workforce training for youth and adults through enhanced pre-K through adult education. To ensure access to a high-quality education for all youth, Berea College ran evidence-based college and career readiness programs for high school students, while Eastern Kentucky University expanded their technical education programs. Specific housing goals were to increase access to affordable, energy-efficient, quality housing for families and individuals of all ages and income levels.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Working with organizations from dissimilar fields required stakeholders to invest time to understand their differences. In doing so, they became more aware of the different definitions of homeless used by HUD and ED and how to coordinate services for different subgroups of homeless children and youth.

Few Promise Zone LEAs could afford to send their homeless education liaisons to a two-day training in Lexington, so PFE hosted a training for liaisons in the Promise Zone. Since many stakeholders and community members were unaware of the issues surrounding homeless youth, PFE hosted an Ending Homelessness Summit attended by over 125 school personnel, members of the faith-based community, government officials and other regional, state, and national stakeholders. The existing working relationships created opportunities for the partners to collaborate and pursue additional funding. Recently, KHC, PFE, and the Kentucky Balance of State Continuum of Care were awarded funds to participate in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program to develop methods designed to end youth homelessness.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the work in the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone, contact:

Sandi Curd, Promise Zone Coordinator
Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation
s.curd@khic.org
606.864.5175

The Connecting the Dots initiative was supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

