

RSU 57's McKinney-Vento Program

Featuring McKinney-Vento Liaison, **Megan Wakefield**

Throughout our state, school districts are developing innovative and compassionate approaches to support students experiencing housing instability. In **RSU 57**, this work is defined by proactive outreach, relationship-building, and an intentional focus on ensuring students have their basic needs met so they can engage and thrive in school.

RSU 57 serves students across **six towns in southern Maine**, which includes Alfred, Limerick, Lyman, Newfield, Shapleigh, and Waterboro. RSU 57's McKinney-Vento program supports learners from Pre-K through grade 12 with a coordinated, districtwide approach that connects school-based teams with community resources to ensure every student has the support they need to succeed.

Megan Wakefield is the Homeless and Outreach Coordinator at RSU 57. While RSU 57's Assistant Superintendent, Amanda Doyle, serves as the official McKinney-Vento liaison, Megan carries out direct service and coordination of McKinney-Vento identification and student support.

A Focus on Prevention and Connection

In her full-time role as Homeless and Outreach Coordinator, Megan works directly with students and families to address barriers related to housing instability, food insecurity, and access to basic needs. A graduate of the district herself, Megan brings both professional experience and personal connection to the community she serves.

Prior to joining RSU 57, she worked in Child Protective Services with the Department of Health and Human Services, where she developed a strong foundation in supporting vulnerable children and families. While meaningful, she found herself drawn more to the human connection and preventative side of the work.

"I always felt compelled to protect kids. But part of protecting kids is prevention and making sure families have their basic needs met so they're not in survival mode all the time. I just felt like I wanted to make more of an impact, be more boots on the ground. Those one-on-one connections were more meaningful to me than the investigative work. Now I'm more focused on preventative work and outreach."



RSU 57 serves six towns in southern Maine, a region that is north of Sanford.

That mindset shapes everything she does. Whether it's helping a family access housing, delivering food to a school pantry, or simply listening, Megan approaches each interaction with a clear goal: remove barriers so students can show up and learn.

"I don't want people to leave my office until we have some sort of solution or a plan," she says. "I wanted to create a space that felt nonjudgmental, where financial status is not a barrier."

A Districtwide System of Support

RSU 57's McKinney-Vento program is built on both structure and relationships. While Megan serves as the primary coordinator, the work is shared across a network of school-based teams. Two years ago, the district transitioned from a two-liaison model to a single liaison covering all grade levels. To support this shift, RSU 57 strengthened its internal systems.

"We decided that I could manage the McKinney-Vento population Pre-K through 12," Megan explains. "And then the attendance teams would be held within each school."

These attendance teams are made up of counselors, social workers, nurses, administrators, and support staff. They meet regularly to identify and respond to student needs.

"We'll sit down and say, 'Okay, this student hasn't been to school in five days, why?'" Megan says. "It could be eviction, parent divorce, economic hardship, black mold, a storm where a tree falls on the house, anything."

When concerns arise, referrals are made to Megan, who coordinates outreach and support. This approach allows schools to respond quickly while ensuring students are connected to broader resources.

"It's really full circle. The schools identify the need, and then I can step in and support the family."

Identifying Students and Building Trust

Identifying students experiencing homelessness is both a formal and relational process in RSU 57. Each year, the district distributes an annual verification form to all families. Embedded within it is a McKinney-Vento questionnaire that outlines different living situations.

"My other really strong identification method is relationships: staff training, community training, working closely with school counselors and social workers. That's huge for identifying students."

Megan also meets families where they are, both physically and virtually.



Megan Wakefield (left) stands with Jenn Stonehouse (right), a community member and real estate broker, who donated Thanksgiving meal baskets for RSU 57 families.

"We have community Facebook pages for all five towns. I'll post flyers for available resources depending on the season, like school supplies, winter gear, food resources, and always include information about my role."

This visibility helps reduce stigma and increase access.

"A lot of people say there aren't enough resources," Megan reflects. "But many people don't know what resources are available. If they don't know, of course it feels like there's nothing."

Meeting Basic Needs With Dignity

Across RSU 57, the needs are significant and growing.

"This year alone we've identified 83 students so far," Megan shares. "Last year, we had over 100."

The reasons vary: rising housing costs, evictions, house fires, and harsh winters.

"We've had a lot of families living in campers. And this winter, so many people ran out of propane. It was really cold, and the resources didn't last. The lack of affordable housing is the number one issue. There just aren't enough options in this rural area."

For unaccompanied youth, the situation is even more difficult.

"There aren't many teen shelters nearby. And the ones that exist are far away. Taking a student out of their community and placing them somewhere unfamiliar...it's a huge culture shock."

Instead, Megan works with students to find the safest and most stable local options.

"They need something close to what they know. We just try to figure out the best plan for each individual situation."

Food insecurity is one of the most pressing challenges.

"Food needs are really significant. Not just for McKinney-Vento students, but across the district."

RSU 57 McKinney-Vento Program: By the Numbers

- **83 students** identified as McKinney-Vento (current school year to date)
- **100+ students** identified during the 2024–2025 school year

Basic Needs & Resource Distribution (2025–2026)

- **193** winter jackets and cold-weather items distributed
- **117** Thanksgiving meals provided to families
- **157** holiday boxes distributed in December
- **250 students** supported through the gift-giving program, representing **142 families**



Two students from Massabesic Middle School volunteer to help unload basic necessity items. Megan says *"When students participate in this work, we take time to teach them what is in the bags, where the items are going (while maintaining family confidentiality), and why this work matters."*

In response, RSU 57 has built a robust network of support, which has included **193 winter jackets** distributed, **117 Thanksgiving meals** provided, **157 holiday boxes** delivered, and **250 students supported through a gift-giving program**.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to dignity.

“We try not to make people feel different because of their socioeconomic status. We do things like formal pop-ups where students can get prom dresses, shoes, and makeup. It’s a full experience.”

The Power of Community Partnerships

Megan is quick to emphasize that she doesn’t do this work alone. RSU 57 partners with a wide range of community organizations to meet student needs, from food distribution to housing support to domestic violence services.

“York County Community Action is phenomenal. They are my go-to. We meet monthly to talk through housing cases and figure out solutions together.”

Other partners include the York County Family Shelter, the Waterboro Eagles, Sanford Housing, Youth Full Maine, Caring Unlimited, Beloved, Maine Needs, the local Masonic group, local churches and food pantries, some local campgrounds, Seeds of Hope, and Sweetser. These partnerships allow the district to respond creatively and quickly, even in moments of crisis.

During a recent federal shutdown that impacted SNAP benefits, Megan and the district mobilized rapidly.

“We knew it was coming, and there was a sense of panic. So we put out flyers everywhere – schools, Facebook, newsletters – asking people to donate food. And the response was overwhelming. We had more people donating than people asking. And we didn’t stop once benefits came back. We kept going.”



Members of the **Waterboro Eagles** stand with the RSU 57 Transportation Director, **Richard Newton**. Together, they donated turkeys and Thanksgiving meal baskets for families in need at RSU 57. The Waterboro Eagles support countless local efforts throughout the year and have also contributed financially to RSU 57’s outreach program to help ensure that all student needs are met, even the unique or unexpected ones.

A Highlight Story

For Megan, the impact of this work is best captured through the stories of students. One story in particular stands out. Just before the holidays, Megan learned about a student who had recently moved in with her father, who was living in a camper. Nearby, the student’s grandfather, who had medical needs, was also living in a camper. At a community housing meeting, Megan mentioned the family.

“There was one housing voucher left. And everyone in the room said, ‘We want to give it to this family.’”

The opportunity was time-sensitive, and at first, the family was hesitant.

"They thought it might be a scam," Megan says. "I told them, 'This is real. This is your chance to get out of the cold.' They accepted and the housing voucher gave them access to housing that turned out not to be an apartment, but a whole house."

Soon after, the student came to find Megan at school.

"She said, 'I've never had my own bedroom before.' She told me her whole family could finally be together in a warm, safe place."

The student's attendance improved and she ended up graduating early.

"Her dad even messaged me and said, 'You don't know it, but I love what you've done for my family.' I feel like I'm making an impact. I'm not ready to give it up. I feel like a lifer."

Advice for New McKinney-Vento Liaisons

For those entering the field, Megan offers honest and hard-earned advice.

"When I first started, I felt so lost and disconnected. I didn't know what to do and everything felt confusing. Over time I realized that this job is not linear. Every single day is different. You're not going to know how to do it right away. You figure it out as you go."

Her advice centers on connection, flexibility, and self-compassion. She also emphasizes the importance of remembering you're not alone.

"Reach out. Talk to people. Get into the community. Bring flyers to libraries, corner stores and make yourself known. And don't be afraid to mess up. People want to help you. You will be very well known, and people will find you."

Through it all, Megan continues to evolve alongside the role.

"I've grown with this job. And I'll keep growing with it."

Each year, RSU 57 collaborates with a local group that donates winter coats to schools and neighboring districts. In this photo, Megan (left), a teacher (center), and a student (right) organize coats by size and color to prepare them for distribution. This initiative also includes winter hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves.



RSU 57 National Honor Society students during the Holiday 5K. They raised funds to give back to schools across the district by supporting holiday wishlists, providing Hannaford gift cards, and even gas cards. This event is student- and staff-run, with the help of volunteers and fundraising efforts like bake sales.



Tiffany Cox, another generous donor of meal baskets, runs a nonprofit volunteer program in Waterboro called **Waterboro Angels**. Through this program, she shares needs and requests from community members and gives back in meaningful ways. She has helped provide diapers, wipes, clothing, holiday gifts, food, and gift cards for those facing difficult times.





Left: The box of socks came from RSU 57 elementary schools, which hosted a "Socktober" event, renamed "Sockvember" to push it into November, a time of giving. Fifth grade classes led a **"Warm Souls, Warm Soles"** campaign by creating flyers, organizing collection boxes and drop-off locations, and learned how to talk to donors, including family and friends. Megan visited classrooms to explain why sock donations are so important, who they support, and the value of giving back.

Right: During the holiday season, Megan and Santa deliver gifts to families in need, and as Megan says, "spreading joy and ensuring that we bring smiles to those who need it most."



Thank you to Megan and all the RSU 57 staff, administrators, and community partners who come together to support McKinney-Vento students and families.

Across the state of Maine, McKinney-Vento liaisons like Megan work to ensure that students experiencing housing instability and homelessness have the support they need to stay in school and have opportunities to succeed. McKinney-Vento liaisons serve as a vital bridge between students, families, and the resources that help them feel supported and safe.

Each month, we will feature McKinney-Vento programs, the liaisons who lead them, and the teams of staff, administrators, and collaborative partners who support McKinney-Vento students and families each day. If you are a McKinney-Vento liaison or an SAU that would like to be featured, please reach out to Signe Lynch, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Specialist, at signe.lynch@maine.gov and we would love to set up an interview.