KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: real-life tricks to help homeless kids graduate

Jessica Sutherland
Homeless to Higher Ed
FIRST: A tale of unsolicited advice, tobacco, and Toblerone™
NEXT: Who Am I?

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MFA, University of Southern
California
BA, Cleveland State University
NEXT: Who Am I?

JESSICA SUTHERLAND
Homeless for 9+ of first 17 years
35 ‘homes’ I remember
- motel kid
- shelters
- doubling up
- car

Civil Guardianship/Foster at 17
Unattended, Homeless College Student
FINALLY: Why am I here?

IT’S ALL THIS KID’S FAULT

May 2012

Sept 2013
Ummmm...
I guess I’ll start a scholarship fund for homeless college kids.

Homeless to Higher Ed
— See the potential. Break the cycle of poverty. —
Money didn’t solve all of his problems.

There were other gaps.
There were other barriers...
A Period of Self-Examination

**K-12**
- strong academic foundation
- suburban
- goal oriented peers
- supportive educators
- engaged community

**UNDERGRAD**
- NCAA and scholarship oversight and resources
- dorm regimen
- athletic routine
- goal oriented peers
A Period of Self-Examination

K-12
strong academic foundation
suburban
good oriented peers
supportive educators
engaged community

UNDERGRAD
NCAA and scholarship
oversight and resources
dorm regimen
athletic routine
goal oriented peers

no adult oversight
uneducated peers
lack of structure
medical emergency

LIFE GOT IN THE WAY
but eventually,
I learned how to live
# A Period of Self-Examination

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>K-12</th>
<th>DROPOUT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strong academic foundation</td>
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<td>suburban</td>
<td>encouragement</td>
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<td>goal oriented peers</td>
<td>opportunity</td>
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<td>supportive educators</td>
<td>you can do/be more</td>
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<td>engaged community</td>
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<tr>
<th>UNDERGRAD</th>
<th>GRAD SCHOOL</th>
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<td>healthcare</td>
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<td>goal-oriented peers</td>
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<td>engaged community</td>
<td>exposure to affluence</td>
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CORRECTION:
I guess I’ll start a mentorship program for homeless college kids.

Homeless TO HIGHER ED
SEE THE POTENTIAL. BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY. —
TODAY:
I’m not a parent, but I have 4 kids in college.
What H2H Provides

Financial Support
Supplies and Necessities
Break Housing & Travel
Care Packages
Intense Mentoring
Shepherd To Resources
Lifeskills
No Flinch Factor
Peer Support: They’ve Been There
Cool Adult: I’ve Been There
Unconditional LOVE

YEAR 3: 100% Retention/SAP
Common Experiences & Traits

Culture of *conscription*  
(Just enough *entitlement*)

Distrust and fear of authority

Bad examples
Susceptible to influence

No safety net
Family as a burden

History of trauma

Shame
Excuses
Skewed Confidence
Feel Different & Powerless
Fierce independence
Strong self-reliance
Sweetheart
Bright, if not exceptional
Resilient (*ugh*)
Mature
EXHAUSTED
SCARED

Not every student is the same.
Common Mindsets

I DON’T BELONG HERE
I CAN’T DO THIS
GOOD THINGS DON’T HAPPEN TO ME
I CANNOT EVER MAKE MISTAKES
I’LL NEVER STOP MAKING MISTAKES
I DO NOT DESERVE HELP
OTHER PEOPLE HAVE IT WORSE
I AM A BURDEN
I DON’T WANT TO BE LIKE MY PARENTS
ASKING FOR HELP MEANS I’M WEAK
Common Knowledge Gaps

Healthcare
(body and mind)

Sexual Education
(health, consent, safer sex, birth control)

Nutrition
(shopping and cooking)

Money & Credit
(identity theft)

Professional
(resumes, networking)

Academic
(syllabi breakdowns, self-direction)

Self-Advocacy
(seeking help, saying no)
BEYOND FOOD AND CASH

Love Won’t Leave
(be consistent)

Speak Their Language
(friendly approach vs. parental)

You Make The Call
(offer guidance, not orders)

Just a Taste
(exposure to the good life)

You Are Not Alone
(peer-to-peer camaraderie)

Always A Space At The Table
(no flunking out of this program)

YOU MATTER

YES YOU CAN

YOU ARE NEVER A BURDEN
It’s hard enough to ask for help.

How can they ask if they don’t know the help is available?

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT YOUR MARKETING & OUTREACH.
Let your students help you do better.
Engage and Empower your students: they can help you build the program they want and need.

They can clarify what works and doesn’t, and help you prioritize services.

My kids are building Homeless to Higher Ed WITH me. They can’t wait to give back!
Always remember the stigma.
Brand events and resources in a way that makes it less about labels and more about getting what you need.
What About That Toblerone™
Questions? Comments?

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