**Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

McKinney-Vento Act includes the following provisions specific to unaccompanied youth:

• The right to immediate enrollment without proof of guardianship

• Assistance from the local homeless education liaison (hereafter *local liaison*) to

* Select a school of attendance, whether the local attendance area school or the school of origin
* Receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested
* Ensure the prompt and fair resolution of any disputes in accordance with the Act

Identifying unaccompanied youth is a crucial first step in ensuring that they receive the educational supports they need. The identification of unaccompanied youth, however, can be challenging, as they often avoid disclosing their circumstances for a variety of reasons, including:

• a lack of understanding of the McKinney-Vento definition of *homeless*, which is broader than some common conceptions of homelessness;

• a desire to avoid the stigma often associated with homelessness;

• discomfort discussing the circumstances, which often are very personal and sensitive, that led to their being homeless and on their own;

• fear of being treated differently by school personnel or other students if they are “found out”; and

• fear of being reported to child welfare and/or law enforcement agencies.

and engagement strategies:

• Post outreach materials where youth congregate, including laundromats, parks, campgrounds, skate parks, youth clubs/ organizations, libraries, and 24-hour stores.

• Develop outreach materials targeted specifically to youth; visit https://nche.ed.gov/products.php to order NCHE’s youth educational rights posters or youth booklets entitled *Surviving on Your Own: Information for Youth on How School Can Help*.

• Include the contact information for the local liaison in all outreach materials so that youth needing assistance will know whom to contact.

• Use youth-friendly means of communication, such as websites, email, texting, and social media.

• Enlist other students to help spread the word about services offered to students in homeless situations.

• Make the school a welcoming and supportive place.

• Build trusting relationships with unaccompanied youth by

* conducting conversations with youth in a sensitive manner and in an office or other area that allows for confidentiality, and
* informing youth up-front about the circumstances under which they may be required to report concerns to child welfare and/or law enforcement.

• Keep in mind the challenges that youth experiencing homelessness on their own are facing when working with these students.

• Inform eligible youth of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act.

• Listen to the youth’s concerns and wishes in a nonjudgmental way.

• Provide support as you are able. Items that may seem trivial, such as a small packet of school supplies or hygiene items, may be very helpful to unaccompanied youth and received as a caring gesture.

• Encourage unaccompanied youth to stay in school, and advocate for supports needed for their educational success.

**ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Many unaccompanied youth want to pursue higher education after high school, but lack the information needed to help them see this as a realistic option. Local liaisons and other school and district personnel play a key role in ensuring that unaccompanied youth are aware of postsecondary education opportunities, and have the information and support they need to apply to and enroll in higher education. Local liaisons should work with school counselors and other specialized instructional support personnel to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are aware of the following supports:

* Help to prepare for college and improve their college readiness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(K)]
* Fee waivers for Advanced Placement (AP) exams, college entrance exams (ACT and/or SAT), and college applications
* Verification of independent student status for unaccompanied youth on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)3
* Various need- and merit-based scholarship opportunities

For more information about higher education supports for students experiencing homelessness, visit NCHE’s Higher Education Access webpage at https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/higher\_ed.php.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**National Runaway Safeline (NRS) https://www.1800runaway.org/** NRS serves as the federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth. NRS provides education and solution-focused interventions, offers non-sectarian and non-judgmental support, respects confidentiality, collaborates with volunteers, and responds to at-risk youth and their families through their 24-hour hotline at 1-800-RUNAWAY.

**National Safe Place**

**http://nationalsafeplace.org/** Safe Place is a national youth outreach and prevention program for young people in need of immediate help and safety. As a community-based program, Safe Place designates businesses and organizations as Safe Place locations, making help readily available to youth in communities across the country. Locations include libraries, YMCAs, fire stations, public buses, various businesses, and social service facilities.

**Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Programs https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/grants/fysb-grantees** RHYA Programs support street outreach, emergency shelter, transitional living, and maternity group home programs to serve and protect runaway and homeless youth.