



National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and
Youth Experiencing Homelessness
<http://nche.ed.gov>



BEST PRACTICES IN INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BRIEF SERIES

Partnering to Support Educational Success for Runaway and Homeless Youth

This NCHE brief

- provides an overview of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth and Runaway and Homeless Youth programs,
- reviews McKinney-Vento Act and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act requirements related to cross-systems collaboration, and
- suggests cross-systems collaboration strategies in support the education of runaway and homeless youth.

INTRODUCTION

Education is important for all young people, but may be an especially critical need for runaway and homeless youth. Research by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that young people who lack a high school diploma are at a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers who complete high school (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017, p 12). Further, educational attainment beyond high school is associated with increased employability, income levels, and ability to afford housing. People with higher levels of education have lower levels of unemployment (U.S. Department of Labor [DOL], 2018) and higher lifetime earnings (Social Security Administration [SSA], 2015). A higher income also supports a person's ability to secure and maintain stable housing (Aurund et al, 2018), which reduces a person's risk of experiencing or returning to homelessness.

This brief is designed for educators and providers of services for youth experiencing homelessness, including

McKINNEY-VENTO DEFINITION OF HOMELESS 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term "homeless children and youth"—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
 - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
 - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...;
 - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - iv. migratory children...who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

State Coordinators for Homeless Education, local homeless education liaisons, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Program grantees. It provides a brief overview of the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) and RHY programs, highlights statutory requirements for cross-program collaboration, and suggests specific strategies for building effective education-RHY partnerships. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available at <https://nche.ed.gov/resources/>.

ABOUT THE EHCY PROGRAM

The federal [Education for Homeless Children and Youth \(EHCY\) Program](#) is authorized under Subtitle VII-B of the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (hereafter *the McKinney-Vento Act*), and administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The Act supports children and youth experiencing homelessness by ensuring their equal and immediate access to school, and providing valuable educational and other supports needed for school success.

Rights and services provided by schools to students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act include

- immediate school enrollment, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment;
 - continued enrollment in the same school (school of origin), even if moving to a different area, if this is in the student's best interest;
 - the provision of transportation to and from the school of origin;
 - assistance with expenses and fees that may create a barrier to full school participation; and
 - assistance with college readiness and accessing federal student aid for college.
- Additional supports and services provided to students experiencing homelessness under other federal programs include
- free school meals under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#);

- educational supports, such as tutoring, the provision of school supplies and uniforms, and counseling to address issues affecting learning, under the federal [Title I, Part A Program](#); and
- special education services for homeless students with disabilities under the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, State educational agencies must appoint a State Coordinator for Homeless Education (State Coordinator) to oversee the implementation of the Act within school districts throughout the state. Likewise, school districts must appoint a local homeless education liaison (local liaison) to oversee the implementation of the Act within schools throughout the district. [Contact your State Coordinator](#) to find out who the local liaison is in your area.

ABOUT THE RHY PROGRAM

The federal [Runaway and Homeless Youth \(RHY\) Program](#) is authorized under the [Runaway and Homeless Youth Act](#) and administered by HHS' [Family and Youth Services Bureau \(FYSB\)](#). The Act supports the [Street Outreach Program \(SOP\)](#), [Basic Center Program \(BCP\)](#), and [Transitional Living Program \(TLP\)/Maternity Group Home \(MGH\) Program](#).

The SOP funds grants to public and private organizations for street-based services to runaway and homeless youth who have been subjected to, or are at risk of being subjected to, sexual abuse, human trafficking, or sexual exploitation. SOPs help to meet these youth's basic needs and provide information about safe places and available supports.

The BCP funds grants to community-based public and private agencies to provide emergency shelter and counseling to youth under the age of 18. BCPs also conduct outreach, and provide crisis intervention and aftercare services to runaway and homeless youth and their families. BCPs provide up to 21 days of shelter; food, clothing and medical care; mental and physical health services; education and employment assistance; and individual, group, and family counseling.

The TLP/MGH program provides grants to public and private organizations for community-based, adult-supervised group homes for youth ages 16 to 21, including pregnant and parenting youth, who cannot

safely live with their own families. TLPs/MGHs offer or provide referrals for long-term, safe, and stable shelter; individual and group counseling; life and interpersonal skills building; educational advancement; job attainment skills; physical and behavioral health care; and parenting support.

[Visit the FYSB grantee webpage](#) to find out who the RHY grantees are in your state.

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

No single system or program has the capacity to solve homelessness on its own. Recognizing this, both the McKinney-Vento Act and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act include mandates for their respective programs to collaborate with one another and other system partners.

McKINNEY-VENTO ACT REQUIREMENTS

The McKinney-Vento Act requires State Coordinators to coordinate activities and collaborate with RHY programs in order to improve the provision of comprehensive education and related services to homeless children and youth, and their families [42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(4)(B)]. Similarly, school districts serving students experiencing homelessness must coordinate the provision of services to these students with RHY programs and other agencies serving homeless children and youth, and their families [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(5)(A)]. SEAs also must ensure that programs are provided for school personnel—including local liaisons, principals and other school leaders, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and specialized instructional support personnel—to heighten their awareness of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youth [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(D)].

RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH ACT REQUIREMENTS

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act requires BCP and TLP grantees to develop and implement a plan to help youth they serve stay connected with their schools, or obtain other appropriate educational, training, or employment services. These efforts must involve coordination with school district local liaisons to ensure that runaway and homeless youth are informed about the services available under the McKinney-Vento Act.

BCP and TLP grantees also must coordinate with local college placement services and provide access to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) [45 C.F.R. § 1351.26(c)].

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Postsecondary students who wish to receive federal student aid, which constitutes the largest source of financial aid for higher education, must complete a FAFSA for each academic year for which they wish to receive aid. Under the Higher Education Act (HEA), students experiencing homelessness on their own (“unaccompanied homeless youth”) are considered independent students and, as such, do not need to include parent information on their FAFSA; rather, they may complete the FAFSA independently, as their federal student aid package is determined based only on their own income and assets. The HEA names local liaisons and RHY program directors as two of the role groups that may make determinations of independent student status for unaccompanied homeless youth [20 U.S.C. § 1087vv(d)(1)(H)]. The McKinney-Vento Act also requires local liaisons to inform unaccompanied homeless youth of their independent students status on the FAFSA and assist them with receiving verification of this status [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(x)(III)]. Additionally, the McKinney-Vento Act requires school counselors to advise students experiencing homelessness about college preparation and readiness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(K)].

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING TOGETHER

While the McKinney-Vento Act and RHYA mandates for collaboration are specific in nature, to implement them most effectively and, ultimately, build a coordinated community response capable of supporting a sustainable exit from homelessness for runaway and homeless youth, schools and RHY grantees will need to work together with a range of community stakeholders. This coordinated community approach should bring together education, housing, and other partners to ensure that runaway and homeless youth are identified and connected with all needed supports to secure safe and stable housing, and make a successful transition to adulthood.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

The first step to building a partnership is to connect with your new partner. Find contact information for State Coordinators, local liaisons, and RHY programs below:

- State Coordinators for Homeless Education: Visit <https://nche.ed.gov/data/>
- Local liaisons: Visit <https://nche.ed.gov/data/>, click on your state, then click the link to your state's homeless education webpage or local liaison directory
- RHY program: Visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/grants/fysb-grantees>

Reach out to learn more about your partner's work, and how you might support one another's program goals and the young people you serve in a mutually beneficial manner.

OUTREACH AND REFERRALS

In order to support runaway and homeless youth, schools and RHY grantees first must identify them. The McKinney-Vento Act requires local liaisons to conduct outreach, in coordination with other entities and agencies, to ensure the identification of students experiencing homelessness by school personnel [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)]. Similarly, the Runaway

Partnership Profile: Raleigh, NC

RHY Program: [Haven House Services](#)

School District(s): [Wake County Public School System](#)

Haven House Services (HH), based in Raleigh, NC, partners with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) in a variety of ways to support educational access and success for the young people served in their SOP, BCP, TLP, and MGH programs.

Identification and referral: HH and WCPSS work together to ensure the identification of youth experiencing homelessness through a mutual referral protocol. HH's SOP and BCP staff notify the district local liaison or school-based point of contact when they identify a school-age youth who is experiencing homelessness. In turn, the liaison and school contacts reach out to or refer a family/youth to HH when working with a youth in need of RHY services.

Supporting high school graduation: HH and WCPSS work together continually to remove any barriers to student success for the young people they serve. With releases of information, HH and WCPSS staff communicate regularly about school struggles of individual students, and collaborate to wrap services around students that meet their individual needs. Areas of focus include ensuring school transportation, regular attendance and full participation in school, and the receipt of tutoring, when needed.

Supporting higher education access and success: As a critical first step, HH and WCPSS encourage students experiencing homelessness to view higher education as a viable and beneficial next step after high school. They couple this encouragement with practical supports, such as assistance filling out college and financial aid applications, and planning campus visits and advisor meetings at local community colleges and universities.

Supporting pregnant and parenting youth: HH assist pregnant and parenting youth (PPY) first and foremost with securing shelter/housing. If the PPY is attending school, HH connects the youth with the district liaison or school contact to ensure that the student is receiving all services for which he/she is eligible. Additionally, HH and WCPSS support PPY by connecting them with needed early care and education supports, including Title I-funded preschool. IDEA early intervention (if needed), and preschool-focused school social workers.

To formalize collaborative efforts, HH and WCPSS developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining areas of partnership.

For more information: For more information, contact Michelle Mazingo, WCPSS McKinney-Vento Liaison, mmazingo@wcpss.net, or Kelsey Mosley, Director of Crisis and Homeless Services, Haven House Services, kmosley@havenhousenc.org.

and Homeless Youth Act includes requirements related to outreach to and the identification of runaway and homeless youth by agencies receiving RHY funding to operate an SOP [34 U.S.C. § 11279(5)(B)(i)], BCP [34 U.S.C. § 11212(b)(6)], or TLP/MGH [34 U.S.C. § 11222(a)(8)].

In addition to their own internal efforts, schools and RHY grantees can partner with one another to make referrals between their systems. RHY grantees can work with runaway and homeless youth they serve to connect them with the local liaison in their school district, who can ensure they are identified as McKinney-Vento eligible and provided with all available school-based supports. Conversely, schools can provide students who may need the supports provided by a local SOP, BCP, or TLP with referrals to RHY grantees.

SUPPORTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

After identifying students experiencing homelessness, schools and RHY grantees can partner to support their school success. According to the 2018 RHY grantee survey (Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], 2018), common ways that grantees and local liaisons work together include

- co-locating staff and program services;
- co-hosting joint meetings and trainings about the needs of runaway and homeless youth and supports available to meet those needs;
- ensuring the school identifies McKinney-Vento eligible students, and that these students receive needed education supports, including school enrollment, transportation, uniforms, meals, and tutoring; and
- delivering other needed supports, including assistance obtaining IDs and documentation necessary for school enrollment or RHY program participation, and referring students to medical and mental health supports.

In addition to the above, schools and RHY programs may wish to share aggregate-level¹ academic outcome data, such as chronic absenteeism, academic proficiency, and high school graduation rates, for students experiencing homelessness. These data may provide

¹ According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student-level information may only be shared with third parties outside of the school district when a parent/guardian or eligible student, as defined by

insight into areas where additional focus may be needed to ensure school success for runaway and homeless youth.

SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS AND SUCCESS

While high school completion is an important educational milestone, many youth experiencing homelessness will want to continue on to postsecondary education; and yet, they are likely to need the support of schools and their RHY program to make this happen. According to the 2018 RHY grantee survey (FYSB, 2018), common ways that grantees, K12 schools, and institutions of higher education work together to support higher education access and success include

- incorporating an intentional focus on higher education enrollment and completion in school counseling and RHY program case management;
- co-hosting joint meetings and trainings about the needs of runaway and homeless youth and supports available to meet those needs;
- conducting higher education awareness-building activities for students, including sharing informational resources and co-hosting college fairs or tours;
- partnering with local career and technical education (CTE) programs to support CTE access and success;
- assisting with FAFSA completion, and scholarship search and application completion; and
- assisting students with the higher education application and enrollment process, including gathering needed records and filling out required paperwork.

In addition to the above, schools and RHY programs may benefit from partnering [with local TRIO programs](#), which help low-income and first-generation college students access and complete higher education, to connect runaway and homeless youth with their services.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR PARENTING YOUTH AND THEIR CHILDREN

Schools and RHY programs working with parenting youth will want to focus not only on the needs of the

FERPA, gives consent. Visit <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/> for more information.

Partnership Profile: Santa Clara, CA

RHY Program: [Bill Wilson Center](#)

School Districts: [Eastside Union High School District](#), [San José Unified School District](#), and [Santa Clara Unified School District](#)

The Bill Wilson Center, based in Santa Clara, CA, partners with local school districts in a variety of ways to support educational access and success for the young people served in their BCP, TLP, and MGH programs.

Identification and referral: BWC works with local school districts to ensure that students in need of BWC services are identified and referred to BWC by local liaisons, school social workers, and school counselors. BWC also maintains a presence on local school campuses in order to build relationships with school staff and students.

Supporting high school graduation: BWC works with local school districts and the young people they serve to develop a student-specific case plan focused on improving grades in support of graduation. This includes connecting students with needed wrap-around supports, such as tutoring and credit recovery assistance. BWC also works to stabilize their clients' housing, whether through supporting stable independent housing for the student or family stabilization and reunification, so they can focus on school without the instability and trauma of homelessness. BWC also works with clients who have dropped out of school to help them re-enroll and get back on track for graduation.

Supporting higher education access and success: In support of their client's higher education goals, BWC provides assistance with applying for financial aid and scholarships. BWC also hosts a six-week college prep summer program that includes weekly college visits and tours.

Supporting pregnant and parenting youth: BWC partners with two local schools that provide targeted support to pregnant and parenting students, including having a BWC case manager on site at these schools two days per week.

To formalize collaborative efforts, BWC develops memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local districts to outline areas of partnership.

For more information: For more information, contact Laura Foster, Director of Housing, lfoster@bwcmail.org.

young parent, but also those of his or her child(ren). Supporting access to early care and education (ECE) for the children of parenting youth experiencing homelessness serves the dual purpose of connecting these children with the supports they need to remain on a path of healthy development despite the instability and hardship caused by homelessness, and allowing parenting youth to focus on school or employment. To this end, RHY programs and K12 schools can work together by

- surveying the [federal, state, and local ECE policy and program context](#) to identify leverage points and possible partners
- convening local ECE, K12, and RHY program leaders to survey available local resources and identify gaps to be addressed through cross-systems partnerships;

- ensuring the identification of and connection to supports for parenting youth and their young children, including through targeted outreach and cross-systems referrals;
- ensuring referrals are made to [early intervention services](#) for young children who may be experiencing developmental delays; and
- [leveraging federal statutory requirements](#) to prioritize families experiencing homelessness for [Head Start programming](#) and [Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\) childcare subsidies](#).

OTHER PARTNERS

In order to build the most effective collective impact approach, schools and RHY programs will want to connect not only with ECE providers and institutions of higher education, but also other potential community

partners, including:

- public benefits programs, such as [WIC \(Women, Infants, and Children\)](#), [SNAP \(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program\)](#), and [TANF \(Temporary Assistance for Needy Families\)](#);
- philanthropic organizations and faith-based communities with an interest in youth wellbeing, homelessness, and/or education;
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded [Continuums of Care](#), which are responsible for administering HUD [homeless assistance programs](#);
- [local workforce development boards](#), which are responsible for administering U.S. Department of Labor-funded [youth formula programs](#) under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; and
- other community organizations focused on youth wellbeing, homelessness, and/or education.

MORE INFORMATION

By partnering together, schools, RHY programs, and community partners help young people experiencing homelessness secure safe and stable housing, prepare to compete in the housing and labor markets, and achieve upward economic mobility. For more information, consult the following resources:

- [National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\) website](#)
- [NCHE Early Childhood Homelessness webpage](#)
- [NCHE Higher Education webpage](#)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center \(RHYTTAC\) website](#)
- [Sample Form Letter to Determine the Independent Student Status of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#) (SchoolHouse Connection sample template)
- [Supporting In-School and Out-of-School Youth Experiencing Homelessness Through Education and Workforce Partnerships](#) (NCHE issue brief)
- [Questions and Answers: Federal Student Aid and Homeless Youth](#) (Office of Federal Student Aid issue brief)
- [Voices of Youth Count \(VoYC\) website](#) (Chapin Hall youth homelessness research initiative)

REFERENCES

- DeVol, R. (2016). *Career technical education: Reducing wage inequality and sustaining California's innovation-based economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.milkeninstitute.org/publications/viaw/814>
- Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB]. (2018). *2018 RHY grantee survey*. Unpublished resource.
- Higher Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1001 et seq. Retrieved from <https://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/Higher%20Education%20Act%20Of%201965.pdf>
- Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Retrieved from <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/VoYC-National-Estimates-Brief-Chapin-Hall-2017.pdf>
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, 34 U.S.C. § 11201 et seq. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/rhy-act>
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, 45 C.F.R. § 1351. Retrieved from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-12-20/pdf/2016-30241.pdf>
- Social Security Administration. (2015). *Education and lifetime earnings*. Retrieved from <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/research-summaries/education-earnings.html>
- Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq. Retrieved from <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
- U.S. Department of Labor [DOL]. (2018). *Employment projections*. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>

This brief was developed by:
National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
800-308-2145 | homeless@serve.org
<http://nche.ed.gov>

March 2019

NCHE operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. NCHE is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of School Support and Accountability.

This document contains resources that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these resources is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products, or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.



Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at <https://nche.ed.gov/data/>.

For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 (toll-free) or homeless@serve.org.

Local Contact Information:

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light pink background, intended for local contact information.