

Collaborations Required by Law

The McKinney-Vento Act names several collaborative partners, either by program name or by general description (e.g., local housing agencies), with which local liaisons must work to meet the needs of homeless children and youth. Information about those partners, the laws that authorize their activities and collaborations, and descriptions of services they offer are listed below.

National School Meals Programs

Legal Authority: National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1751 et seq.

This Act establishes that homeless children are categorically eligible for free meal benefits under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. These students and families do not have to complete an application for free meals. Rather, USDA policies allow for expedited enrollment of these students to ensure they receive meals quickly. More information, including related USDA memos, is available at <https://nche.ed.gov/child-nutrition/> and <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn>.

Head Start

Legal Authority: Head Start Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9801 et seq.

Related Regulations: 45 C.F.R. § 1301 et seq.

The Head Start program offers grants to public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children (aged three through five) and their families. Additionally, the Early Head Start program, established in 1995, serves families with children aged birth to three. Congress amended the latest version of the Head Start Act in 2007, adding many new provisions related to homeless children including:

- adopting the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless;
- qualifying homeless children as automatically eligible for Head Start services; and
- mandating that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issue regulations that require Head Start agencies to
 - identify and prioritize homeless children for enrollment;

- allow homeless families to apply to, enroll in, and attend Head Start programs while required documents are obtained within a reasonable time frame; and
- establish coordination between local Head Start programs and local homeless liaisons.

In 2016, new Head Start Performance Standards (<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/hs-final-regs-sept2016-homeless-1.pdf>) included provisions to help programs better serve children experiencing homelessness by encouraging the use of tools like the community needs assessment, providing a grace period for families experiencing homelessness to meet immunization requirements, and allowing programs to reserve up to three percent of slots for foster children and children experiencing homelessness.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs

Legal Authority: Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), 42 U.S.C. § 5601 et seq.

The RHYA authorizes three programs that address the needs of runaway youth and youth experiencing homelessness. A brief description of the three programs is provided below.

- 1) Basic Center Programs meet the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth by providing emergency shelter, food, clothing, counseling, and referrals for health care. These shelters can serve youth under 18 years old for up to 21 days. To learn more, see the fact sheet available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/bcp-fact-sheet>.
- 2) Transitional Living Programs provide long-term residential services to help homeless youth ages 16 through 21 successfully transition to self-sufficient living. A fact sheet on Transitional Living Programs funded by the RHYA is available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/tlp-fact-sheet>.
- 3) Street Outreach Programs offer outreach, services, and referrals to youth living on the street in order to move them into stable housing and prepare them for independence. By achieving these goals, the program also prevents sexual abuse and exploitation.

The fact sheet on street outreach programs is available online at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/sop-fact-sheet>.

In addition to the mandates in the McKinney-Vento Act that require collaboration on the part of liaisons and LEAs, Basic Center and Transitional Living Programs are required by the RHYA to coordinate with McKinney-Vento programs in school districts. The *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Regulations (45 CFR Part 1351) December 2016* provides information on the RHYA Final Regulations including the requirement for collaboration between local homeless liaisons and RHYA programs; it is available online at <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/rhya-final-regs-nche-markup-dec-2016.pdf>.

In addition to the housing assistance provided through the RHYA, the Act also funds a national communications system, the National Runaway Safeline. The communication system helps homeless and runaway youth by providing crisis intervention, referrals, communication with youths' families, and emergency transportation home after a youth has run away. National Runaway Safeline assistance is also available for youth who are contemplating running away. While the Safeline has long been known for operating a crisis line for youth (1-800-RUNAWAY), the organization also has the option for youth to chat online with staff as well. Liaisons may benefit by visiting the Safeline website (<http://www.1800runaway.org/>), as it has a number of publications, including a runaway prevention curriculum, which could be used to raise awareness and provide training.

Local Social Services or Human Services Agencies

Legal Authority: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), 42 U.S.C. § 601 et seq. (Title IV, Part A of the Social Security Act)

TANF funds can be used to help families avoid homelessness. The funds can be used for short-term assistance, such as rent or utility payments, without triggering the 60-month lifetime limit for assistance. As long as the funds are used to pay crisis related, non-recurring expenses, they can be used by a family more than once during a year. For example, a family could receive assistance for overdue rent, a car repair, and to bring utilities current all within the same year. A memorandum issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services discusses this issue in more detail and may be

downloaded at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-acf-im-2013-01>.

Legal Authority: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 7 U.S.C. § 2011 et seq

Formerly known as Food Stamp Program, SNAP helps people with low incomes buy food. Although it is a federal government program, SNAP is administered by state or local agencies. The USDA has a Q&A document targeted specifically for homeless persons, including youth, about services available through SNAP. The information can be accessed at https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Homeless_QA_0.pdf. In addition, a USDA memorandum, *SNAP - Clarification of Policies Barriers Facing Homeless Youth*, (https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Policy_Clarifications_Homeless_Youth_Issues.pdf) was issued to ensure homeless youth can obtain food. Please note, the SNAP program is not the same as the USDA school meals program; instead it provides meals for both families and children outside of the school setting.

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD currently administers a [variety of programs](#) dedicated to preventing or ending homelessness within the United States. They also collaborate with other Federal agencies for similar programs and administer the funding for several [mainstream resource programs](#) that provide resources to low income persons in addition to those experiencing homelessness.

Legal Authority: McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, 42 U.S.C. § 11301 et seq.

Continuum of Care (CoC)

The [Continuum of Care \(CoC\) Program](#) is designed to promote community commitment to ending homelessness; provide funding for nonprofits and government entities to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness; promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs; and optimize self-sufficiency among those experiencing homelessness. Contacts for CoCs are listed at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees>

Each CoC is charged with identifying resources and areas of need and developing a plan for serving homeless persons in their area. This planning document will contain much of the community information that schools will need to effectively serve students experiencing homelessness by providing referrals. In addition, CoCs and their agency members are required to collaborate with the school district's local liaison to ensure the educational needs of children and youth are considered. This includes placing families in shelters or other housing close to the school of origin when possible.

Communities that receive CoC funds have participated in an extensive needs assessment, including the identification of existing resources, agencies, and services. Other potential sources for this valuable information include State interagency councils on homelessness, as most States have a State level council that mirrors local CoCs.

Institutions of Higher Education

Legal Authority: Higher Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1001 et seq

Unaccompanied homeless youth can be qualified as “independent students” for the purposes of filling out the FAFSA. Financial aid administrators are directed to obtain verification of this status from liaisons, if possible, when determining the financial aid available. A sample form letter for liaisons to make the determination as well as a verification form for financial aid administrators can be downloaded at <https://nche.ed.gov/higher-education/>.