

Understanding Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY)

A Resource Guide for Pennsylvania Schools



Who Are Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Pennsylvania?

Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are children and youth who lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and **are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian including:**

- Runaway children and youth.
- Children and youth forced out of their homes/told to leave by parent/guardian.
- Children and youth living in shelters, including domestic violence shelters.
- School-aged parents living in houses for school-aged parents without other housing options.
- Migratory children and youth.
- Children and youth who enter the country without their parent/legal guardian and/or for any other reasons have been separated from them (i.e. natural disaster, deportation, incarceration, etc.)

In 2023–24, 18 percent of the 50,030 children and youth identified as experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania were unaccompanied.¹ UHY in Pennsylvania can be any age from birth to 21 and if they are still eligible for public school enrollment. They **do not** need to have experienced a precipitating event that caused a loss of housing to be eligible

for services under the McKinney-Vento Act and often cite family dysfunction/conflict as a key reason for leaving home. Other contributing factors can include:

- Abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment.
- Substance abuse in the home.
- Teen pregnancy.
- Lack of support of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Issues related to blended families.
- A family becoming homeless and cannot secure shelter for the entire family, forcing them to split up.
- Lack of enough room for an entire family in a doubled-up situation, forcing the unaccompanied youth to live elsewhere.
- Opting out of the foster care system.
- Parental illness, death, or incarceration.
- Deportation of parents or caregivers.

It is important to note that the presence of a custody or guardianship issue alone does not make a student eligible for McKinney-Vento services; rather, the student's living arrangement also must be considered homeless.