



Vulnerable Population: Youth Experiencing Homelessness

The purpose of this document is to provide background information on Youth Experiencing Homelessness.

Defining Homelessness

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) defines **homeless youth** as individuals who are “not more than 21 years of age...for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.” This definition includes only those youth who are unaccompanied by families or caregivers.¹

A **throwaway youth** is a youth that has been asked, told, or forced to leave home by parents or caregivers with no alternate care arranged.²

A **runaway youth** is a young person who has left home without parental permission and stay away for one or more nights.³

References

¹ [Runaway and Homeless Youth Act](#)

² [Federal Definitions](#)

Street youth are youth who have spent at least some time living on the streets without a parent or caregiver.

Systems youth are youth who become homeless after aging out of foster care or exiting the juvenile justice system.⁴

Fast Facts on Youth Experiencing Homelessness

There were 35,686 unaccompanied homeless youth in January 2016. Most were between the ages of 18 and 24, while the remaining 11 percent were under the age of 18. Accompanied youth with families made up 60 percent of people experiencing homelessness in families were children under 18 years of age.⁵

Youth aging out of foster care are at high risk for becoming homeless during the transition to adulthood. Between 31% and 46% of study participants that had been in foster care had been homeless by age 26.⁶

Federal Laws Regarding Youth Experiencing Homelessness

[The McKinney-Vento Act](#)

[Runaway and Homeless Youth Act](#)

³ [Federal Definitions](#)

⁴ [Longitudinal Predictors of Homelessness](#)

⁵ [2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report](#)

⁶ [Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood](#)