



## Federal Resources for Feeding Homeless Children and Youth

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-265) expands federal child nutrition programs in several ways to assist homeless and runaway children and youth by providing:

- Automatic eligibility for free school meals to homeless and runaway children
- Streamlined procedures to document such eligibility
- Full school year eligibility for free school meals
- Federal nutrition funds for shelters that serve children and youth up to age 18

### Automatic Eligibility for Free School Meals

Before the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act was passed, administrative guidance made homeless children, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, automatically eligible for free school meals. The Reauthorization Act establishes in law this categorical eligibility for homeless children, meaning that all children who are defined as homeless are eligible for free school meals.

The Reauthorization Act also confers automatic eligibility for free school meals on migrant children served through the Migrant Education Program and runaway children and youth served through the three grant programs established under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA): Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth, and Street Outreach Program.

Please see *USDA Memo SP 4* ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization\\_memos\\_04/2004-07-19.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization_memos_04/2004-07-19.pdf)) and FRAC's school meals brochure for homeless families ([www.frac.org/html/publications/homelesseducpamphletgovt.PDF](http://www.frac.org/html/publications/homelesseducpamphletgovt.PDF)) for more details.

### Documentation of Free Meal Eligibility

The McKinney-Vento Act requires every school district to designate a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth. The liaisons ensure that children receive the educational and other services for which they are eligible – including free school meals. Local educational agency liaisons, homeless or domestic violence shelter directors and RHYA service providers may provide documentation that children are homeless or runaway to school food service directors or other officials who determine school meal eligibility.

The documentation must include the child's name or a list of their names, effective date(s), and the signature of the local educational agency liaison, homeless or domestic violence shelter director or RHYA service provider. This list is acceptable in lieu of a school meal application usually submitted by the child's parent or guardian and is sufficient for school officials to approve the child's eligibility for free school meals.

School food service directors, principals and other school officials should work closely with local educational agency liaisons, homeless or domestic violence shelter directors and RHYA service providers to ensure that homeless and runaway children and youth are provided free meal benefits as promptly as possible.

For more details, please see *USDA Guidance on Determining Categorical Eligibility* ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization\\_memos\\_04/2004-09-17.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization_memos_04/2004-09-17.pdf)) and *USDA Memo SP 4* ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization\\_memos\\_04/2004-07-19.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization_memos_04/2004-07-19.pdf)).

# CHILD NUTRITION BRIEF

## Federal Resources for Feeding Homeless Children and Youth

---

### Full School Year Eligibility

Once a student has been certified as eligible for free meals, including when based on designation as homeless or runaway by a local educational agency liaison, homeless or domestic violence shelter director or RHYA service provider, the eligibility remains effective for the remainder of the school year. This policy holds even if children or youth move into permanent housing and are no longer homeless or served by RHYA programs. In such instances, a new eligibility determination shall be made in the subsequent school year. Schools are allowed to continue a student's eligibility from the previous school year for 30 operating days into the subsequent school year, or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever occurs first.

Please see *USDA Memo SP 3* ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization\\_memos\\_04/2004-07-07.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization_memos_04/2004-07-07.pdf)) for more details.

### Federal nutrition funds for shelters serving children and youth

Homeless, runaway and domestic violence shelters are eligible to use the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to feed children and youth up to 18 years of age in their facilities. The Reauthorization Act raised the age limit for children who may be fed through the program, and this expansion of eligibility from a maximum age of 12 to 18 years will help provide financial support for often strained shelter budgets.

Shelters will be reimbursed for meals and snacks served to children age 18 and under residing in the shelter. Participating shelters can receive a reimbursement of \$1.23 for breakfast, \$2.24 for lunch or supper and 61 cents for a snack. For each child served, shelters can receive reimbursement for up to three meals or two meals and one snack each day.

To apply for this program, contact your state CACFP agency. Please see *USDA Memo CACFP 5* ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization\\_memos\\_04/2004-07-07.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/policy/Reauthorization_memos_04/2004-07-07.pdf)) and FRAC's brochure on federal funds for shelters ([www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/homeless/CACFP\\_Brochure\\_Blank.pdf](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/homeless/CACFP_Brochure_Blank.pdf)) for more details. Also see FRAC's website ([www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)) for a CACFP in Shelters Outreach Toolkit, which includes a list of state CACFP agency contact names and numbers.

### Food stamps and homeless children and youth

Youth who live in a shelter or entirely alone should be able to apply for food stamps on their own. Their parents' income should not be used in calculating whether they are eligible for food stamps. If they live in a shelter, service providers may assist such youth by providing letters for them to bring to food stamp offices.

Homeless people living in shelters are eligible for food stamps, even if the shelter provides meals. The food stamp office has special rules that allow homeless families to receive food stamps, even if they do not have photo IDs or do not have a regular address. The food stamp office may accept as ID the word of a shelter director who can identify the food stamp applicant. If a household's income is low enough, the food stamp office must issue food stamps within 7 days of when the household applies, and in some states sooner.

Please see *Homeless Persons' Rights Under The Food Stamp Program* fact sheet ([www.frac.org/html/news/options\\_homeless.html](http://www.frac.org/html/news/options_homeless.html)) for more details.