

FAFSA for Special populations

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Who Are Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

Unaccompanied homeless youth are young people who lack safe, stable housing and who are not in the care of a parent or guardian. They may have run away from home or been forced to leave by their parents. Unaccompanied youth live in a variety of temporary situations, including but not limited to:

- Shelters
- Homes of friends or relatives
- Cars
- Campgrounds
- Public parks
- Abandoned buildings
- Motels
- Bus or train stations

What About College? Can Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Apply for Federal Financial Aid?

Yes. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the federal application form that students must complete in order to apply for virtually all types of financial aid: Pell grants, state grants, institutional grants, tuition waivers, work study, and loans. The FAFSA asks a number of questions to determine if a student's parent or guardian's financial information is required on the form. Some of these questions address the student's housing situation. If the student is able to say "yes" to any of these questions they will need to provide support from one of the following persons.

- High school or school district homeless liaison,
- Director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or
- Director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program.

The letter of support will allow the college or university to award the student financial aid without their parent or guardian's financial information on the FAFSA. These students will be considered independent and will receive financial aid to help pay for college and housing expenses, including food.

For more detailed information on how to complete the FAFSA for unaccompanied homeless youth contact a financial aid counselor at the school you wish to attend. Do not forget to ask about housing options.

Foster Care Youth

Who are Foster Care Youth?

Foster care youth are those who have been placed away from their parents or guardians for at least a period of 24-hours whom the State has placement and care responsibilities. They may be placed into any one of the following types of settings but not limited to:

- Home of a noncustodial parent
- Approved home of a relative
- Approved home of a non-relative extended family member (such as a family friend)
- Foster home
- Group home
- Tribal foster home or other placement under the federal Indian Child Welfare Act
- Child care institution
- Pre-adoptive home

What About College? Can Foster Care Youth Apply for Federal Financial Aid?

Yes. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the federal application form that students must complete in order to apply for virtually all types of financial aid: Pell grants, state grants, institutional grants, tuition waivers, work study, and loans. The FAFSA asks a number of questions to determine if a student's parent or guardian's financial information is required on the form. Some of these questions address the student's independent status. If the student is able to say "yes" to any of the following questions and provide supporting court documentation the parent or guardian's financial information will not be required.

- At any time since you turned 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
- As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor?
- As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you in legal guardianship?

For more detailed information on how to complete the FAFSA for foster care youth contact a financial aid counselor at the school you wish to attend. Do not forget to ask about housing options.

What do all of these words mean?

The following definitions will help define if a student is unaccompanied homeless youth or a foster care youth.

- Youth – A student who is 21 years old or younger, or still enrolled in high school as of the date he or she signs the FAFSA.
- Orphan – A student whose parents are both deceased.
- Foster Youth or Ward of the Court – A student who, at any time since the age of 13, was a foster child or a dependent/ward of the court.
- Emancipated – The status of a youth legally released from control of their parent or guardian by a court in their state of legal residence.
- Legal Guardianship – A legal relationship in which a student has a guardian that was appointed by the court in student’s state of legal residence.
- Homeless Youth
 - At risk of being homeless – The term used when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate.
 - Homeless – The term used when a student lacks fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
 - Self-supporting – The term used when a student pays for his own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing. (This does not include students who moved from their parents’ home and are now using financial aid to cover their housing expenses).
 - Unaccompanied – The term used when a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.
 - Older than 21 but not yet 24 – Students who are older than 21 but not yet 24 and who, if not for their age, would be considered an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of being homeless, might qualify for a dependency override under professional judgment.

Sources:

- Foster Youth Success Initiative. (2011). Providing Effective Financial Aid Assistance to Students from Foster Care and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: A Key to Higher Education Access and Success, (Version 2.0). *Casey Family Programs: Fostering Families, Fostering Change*.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011). *2011-2012 FSA Handbook Application and Verification Guide*. Washington, DC: Author. P. 26.