

Children and Homelessness

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HousingMinnesota

Homes For All By 2012



Families with Children Are the Fastest Growing Group of Minnesotans Experiencing Homelessness

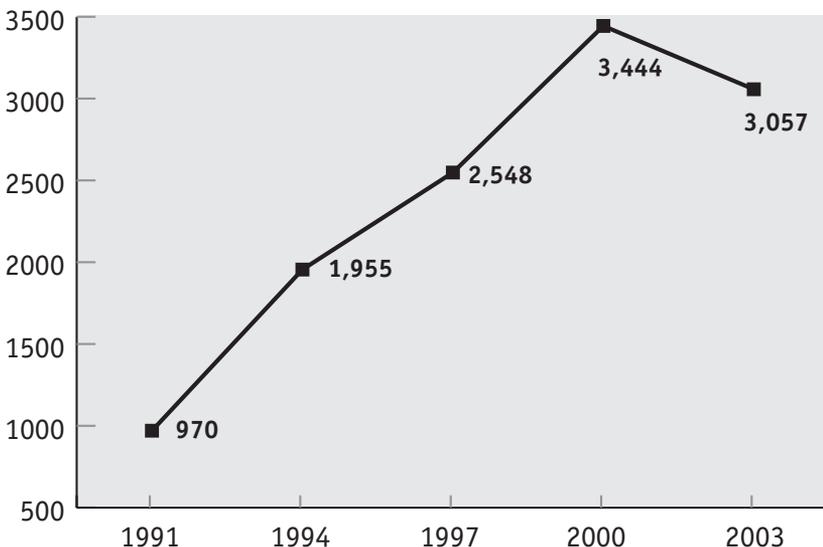
The 5 Most Common Reasons Homeless Parents Left Their Last Housing

1. Inability to afford rent or monthly payments
2. Eviction or foreclosure
3. Breakup with a spouse or partner
4. Abuse by someone in the household
5. Lost job or had hours cut

Source: Wilder Research Center, June 2004

Since Minnesota's first statewide survey of homelessness was conducted in 1991, families with children have been the fastest growing segment of people experiencing homelessness. The most recent survey conducted in October 2003 found that Minnesota's shelters served 1,323 homeless families with 2,724 children on the night of the survey.¹ Another 138 children were found unsheltered (living on the street with at least one parent) and another 7,736 children and youth were in unstable or temporary housing, often doubled-up in unsafe situations.² Many factors can contribute to homelessness for children and youth, including: abuse, chronic neglect, chemical dependency, alcoholism, disability, economic crisis, or the death of a parent or guardian.³

Homeless Children and Youth in Minnesota (1991–2003)



Source: Wilder Research Center, June 2004

When parents become homeless, their children are directly affected. Homeless parents and their children are forced to seek emergency shelter or live temporarily in unsafe situations. For many families, the challenge is simply finding an affordable place to live. On the day of the 2003 Wilder survey, 63 percent of homeless parents were on a waiting list for subsidized housing and the average length of time on the waiting list was 12 months. Another 17 percent of homeless parents were unable to get on a waiting list because it was closed.⁴

Who Are Minnesota's Homeless Children and Youth?

Minnesota's homeless children and youth come from every corner of the state and have become homeless for a number of reasons. Whatever the causes might be, all of our children deserve a safe place to live.

Unaccompanied youth and children make up 39 percent of all homeless

individuals in Minnesota. Of those homeless children with their parents, 82 percent are age 12 or younger and 44 percent are age 5 or younger.⁵ The average age of homeless youth living on their own is 16 and the youngest was 8 years old. Between 10,000 and 12,000 Minnesota youth under 18 have had at least one episode of homelessness on their own during 2003.

It is estimated that between 500 and 600 youth were homeless on any given night in Minnesota in 2003. Nearly 40 percent of homeless youth had been homeless before, 23 percent slept outdoors for at least one night in October 2003, 16 percent had had no stable place to live for over a year, and 13 percent lived in an abusive situation because of lack of other housing options.⁶

Homelessness disproportionately affects children of color. While non-Hispanic whites make up 85 percent of Minnesota youth ages 10-17, they make up only 35 percent of Minnesota's homeless youth.

How Homelessness Affects Children of Color

	American Indian	Asian American	African American	White (non-Hispanic)	Other (including mixed race)	Hispanic (of any race)
Percent of homeless youth	22%	1%	31%	35%	11%	10%
Percent of all Minnesota youth	2%	4%	5%	85%	4%	3%

Source: Wilder Research Center, May 2004

What Are the Impacts of Homelessness on Children and Youth?

Homeless children face major setbacks in school performance due to poor attendance and frequent moves

The high rates of mobility that go along with being homeless have a detrimental effect on the education of homeless children and youth. Forty-one percent of homeless children attended two different schools in a year and 28 percent attended three or more schools in a year.⁷ Elementary school students with three or more moves during a six and a half month study scored 20 points lower on a 99-point test than those who didn't move at all. On the other hand, elementary school students with close to perfect attendance scored more than 20 points higher than those whose attendance rate was less than 80 percent.⁸

Nationally, 75 percent of homeless

children perform below grade level in reading, 72 percent perform below grade level in spelling, and 54 percent perform below grade level in math.⁹ Minnesota's school performance tests show the significant performance differences between highly mobile students and the general student population for those in third and fifth grades. Highly mobile students, including homeless students, consistently scored at lower levels than the general student population in math and reading.

According to Dr. Greg Owen, Project Director of the 2003 Homelessness in Minnesota Survey, "Nine out of 10 kids who were supposed to be in school were in school. That's a remarkable achievement." Real progress has been made toward educating Minnesota's homeless children but much more needs to be done. One federal law that has had a positive impact is the McKinney-Vento Act—the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program.

MN Comprehensive Assessments Testing Results (2003-2004)

		Grade 3		Grade 5	
		Low-Moderate Skill Level (Levels I & II)	Average-High Skill Level (Levels III, IV & V)	Low-Moderate Skill Level (Levels I & II)	Average-High Skill Level (Levels III, IV & V)
Math	Mobile Students	54%	46%	55%	45%
	Overall State Average	28%	72%	24%	76%
Reading	Mobile Students	52%	48%	51%	49%
	Overall State Average	26%	74%	22%	78%



The law was enacted to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness have access to a quality education.¹⁰

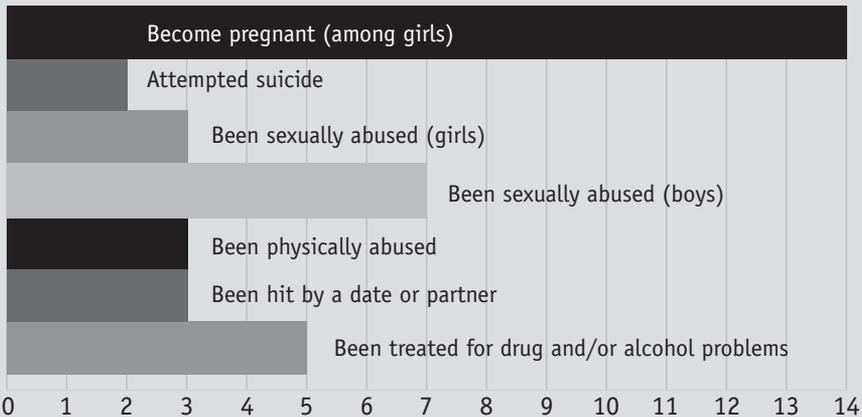
Homelessness harms the physical and mental health of homeless children and youth

The physical well-being of homeless children is compromised by homelessness and the poverty they experience. Among homeless parents, 16 percent reported at least one homeless child with a chronic or severe physical health problem compared to 11 percent of all children. Many homeless parents were unable to get needed dental care for their children (17 percent). In 2003, 7 percent of homeless parents reported that at least one of their children had to skip meals in the last month because of lack of money to buy food.¹¹

The emotional well-being of homeless children is greatly affected. Research

shows that children who have experienced homelessness are deeply impacted by the experience. They are less likely to report having a close friend, they have lower job aspirations, and more expect they might live in a homeless shelter as adults.¹² Twenty-three percent of homeless parents reported at least one homeless child with an emotional or behavioral problem that interfered with their normal activities.¹³ Many homeless children (47 percent) have problems with anxiety, depression or withdrawal, while 18 percent of all children experience these emotional issues.¹⁴ The comparison of homeless youth to the general youth population paints a stark contrast in the physical and emotional well-being of these vulnerable youth. One third of homeless youth have considered suicide and one out of five homeless youth has attempted suicide.¹⁵

Number of Times Homeless Youth Are More Likely to Be Abused, Become Pregnant, or Face Mental Health or Chemical Dependency Compared to the General Youth Population



Source: Wilder Research Center, May 2004

We Must Make Ending Homelessness a Top Priority in Minnesota

Solving homelessness is imperative for children, their parents and individuals experiencing homelessness. Almost one in ten of those experiencing homelessness today had been homeless as a child. It is unacceptable to allow this pattern to continue with the growing numbers of homeless children in Minnesota.¹⁶ We can break the pattern by:

- **preventing homelessness,**
- **providing the support services** needed by people experiencing homelessness, and



- ensuring that Minnesota has a **full range of housing opportunities** for all our community members.

Every child deserves a good start in life and ensuring they have a safe place to sleep at night is the most fundamental place to begin.

HousingMinnesota is a multi-year education, organizing and advocacy campaign that seeks to dramatically increase the preservation and production of affordable housing in Minnesota by raising public awareness, educating policy makers on housing issues, and translating the needs of people affected into community action. HousingMinnesota is a program of the Minnesota Housing Partnership.

For more information about housing and homelessness, please visit our website at www.housingminnesota.org.

Endnotes

¹ Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota: A Closer Look Families and Children*, June 2004.

² *Ibid.*

³ Richard Wayman, Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition, *Teens in Trouble Regional Dialogues Final Report: Addressing the Community Need of High-Risk Youth in Minnesota*, 2003.

⁴ Wilder Research Center, June 2004.

⁵ Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota: Key facts from the survey of Minnesotans without permanent housing*, May 2004.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Family Housing Fund, *Homeless and its Effects on Children*, December 1999.

⁸ Family Housing Fund, *Kids Mobility Project Report*, March 1998.

⁹ Family Housing Fund, December 1999.

¹⁰ National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, *Education of Children & Youth in Homeless Situations: The 2002 Guide to Their Rights*, January 2002.

¹¹ Wilder Research Center, June 2004.

¹² Ann S. Masten, "Homeless Children in the United States: Mark of a Nation at Risk," *Current Direction in Psychological Science*, 1992.

¹³ Wilder Research Center, June 2004.

¹⁴ Family Housing Fund, December 1999.

¹⁵ Wilder Research Center May 2004.

¹⁶ Wilder Research Center, May 2004.