

# Homeless Children

## DEFINITION

*Homeless children* is the number of children under age 18 who stayed at homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters or transitional housing facilities in Rhode Island with their families. This number does not include homeless and runaway youth who are unaccompanied by their families.

## SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, 2.5 million children (one in 30) are homeless each year.<sup>1</sup> Families can become homeless due to lack of affordable housing, unemployment, low-paying jobs, extreme poverty and decreasing government supports. Other causes include domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and frayed social support networks.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Compared with their peers, homeless children are more likely to become ill (particularly with illnesses such as stomach problems, ear infections, and asthma), develop mental health issues (such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal), experience significant educational disruption, and exhibit delinquent or aggressive behaviors. Homeless children go hungry at twice the rate of other children.<sup>5</sup>

Homeless children are at a higher risk of abuse and exposure to violence. This trauma can lead to an increase in developmental delays and emotional distress and a decrease in academic

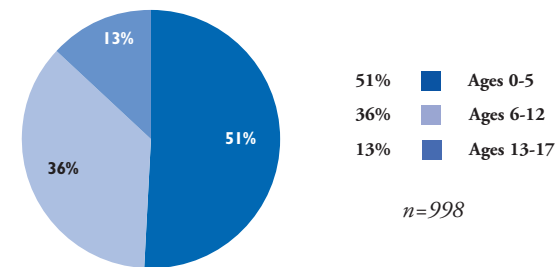
achievement.<sup>6,7</sup> When homeless children are exposed to multiple traumatic events, they may have increased levels of anxiety, poor impulse control, and difficulty developing trusting relationships.<sup>8,9</sup>

Families who have experienced homelessness have higher rates of family separation than other low-income families, with children separated from their parents due to shelter rules, state intervention, and/or parents' desires to protect their children from homelessness. Homeless children are more likely to have been placed in foster care (12%) than other children (1%). Homelessness also can be a barrier to reunification; it is estimated that more than 30% of children in foster care in the U.S. could return home if their parents had adequate housing.<sup>10</sup>

In 2017, 539 families with 998 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island. Children made up 22% of the people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing in 2017. Half (51%) of these children were under age six, not yet school age.<sup>11</sup> Other families are on the state's family shelter waiting list, awaiting placement when a slot opens up.

In 2017, United Way 211 received 124,553 requests from individuals and families seeking housing, housing information, or shelter and 3,758 related to foreclosure prevention.<sup>12</sup>

## Children in Emergency Shelters, Domestic Violence Shelters, and Transitional Housing Facilities by Age, 2017



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, 2017.

## Supporting Homeless Children in Schools

- ◆ Family residential instability and homelessness contribute to poor educational outcomes for children. Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have housing.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ The federal *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act)* requires that states identify homeless children, allow them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents, allow them to stay in their “home school,” provide transportation when needed, and refer homeless children and families to services including health, dental, and mental health services, tutoring, etc., needed to help them succeed in school.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ The *McKinney-Vento Act* defines a child as homeless if he or she does not have a “fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.”<sup>15</sup> During the 2016-2017 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,245 children as homeless. Of these children, 65% lived with other families (“doubled up”), 27% lived in shelters, 7% lived in hotels or motels, and 2% were unsheltered.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, which re-authorized *McKinney-Vento* in 2015, strengthens existing provisions for homeless students, guarantees school stability for students starting in preschool, and requires schools to report on student achievement and graduation rates for homeless students.<sup>17</sup>

## Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

◆ Many homeless families are comprised of single mothers with children. There are significant barriers to employment for these mothers experiencing homelessness, including low levels of education, lack of employment histories, and unreliable child care. To secure stable employment, homeless parents need education, job skills, and safe, dependable care for their children.<sup>18</sup>

◆ The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a federal and state partnership program authorized under the *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG)*. CCDF provides financial assistance to low-income families for child care, so parents can attend work, job training, or educational programs.<sup>19</sup>

◆ Despite the fact that early care and education can help mitigate the impacts of homelessness on children, homeless parents are less likely to receive child care assistance than other families.<sup>20</sup>

◆ New CCDBG regulations were issued in 2016. Under the new regulations, homeless children are considered a priority category. Offering priority to families experiencing homelessness can include prioritizing enrollment and waiving copayments for child care.<sup>21</sup>

Table 8. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2016-2017 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,355	*
Bristol Warren	3,218	11
Burrillville	2,341	37
Central Falls	2,589	63
Chariho	3,270	24
Coventry	4,713	22
Cranston	10,415	33
Cumberland	4,568	*
East Greenwich	2,504	*
East Providence	5,238	37
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,654	*
Foster	265	0
Foster-Glocester	1,147	*
Glocester	547	*
Jamestown	488	*
Johnston	3,190	*
Lincoln	3,002	15
Little Compton	246	0
Middletown	2,191	115
Narragansett	1,326	*
New Shoreham	120	0
Newport	2,198	78
North Kingstown	4,047	60
North Providence	3,493	31
North Smithfield	1,707	*
Pawtucket	8,984	63
Portsmouth	2,464	*
Providence	23,983	227
Scituate	1,305	0
Smithfield	2,384	64
South Kingstown	3,111	22
Tiverton	1,841	0
Warwick	9,124	109
West Warwick	3,474	24
Westerly	2,865	46
Woonsocket	5,863	91
Charter Schools	7,024	25
State-Operated Schools	1,746	*
UCAP	142	0
Four Core Cities	41,419	444
Remainder of State	91,811	770
Rhode Island	142,142	1,245

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, Public School Enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2016.

Number of children identified as homeless by public school personnel includes children in preschool through grade 12 who are identified by public school personnel as meeting the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, which includes any child who does not have a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

Charter schools reporting include Blackstone Academy, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, Southside Charter School, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. State-operated schools reporting include the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center.

The Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Warwick, and Woonsocket school districts received grants that provided additional resources to identify and serve homeless students.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

See Methodology Section for more information.

### References

- <sup>1,4,18</sup> Bassuk, E.L., DeCandia, C.J., Beach, C.A., & Berman, F. (2014). *America's youngest outcasts: A report card on child homelessness*. Needham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness.
- <sup>2,5,10</sup> *The characteristics and needs of families experiencing homelessness*. (2011). Needham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness.
- <sup>3</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2018). *What causes homelessness?* Retrieved February 6, 2018, from [endhomelessness.org](http://endhomelessness.org)
- <sup>6</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. (2013). Providing care for children and adolescents facing homelessness and housing insecurity. *Pediatrics*, 131(6), 1206-1210.

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