

# 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

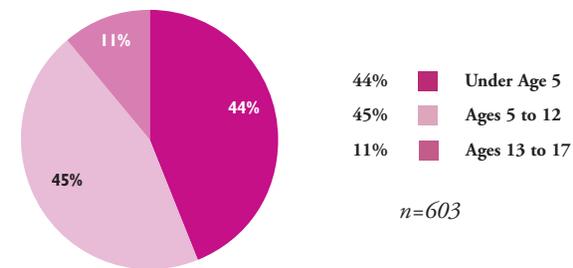
achievement.<sup>6,7</sup> When homeless children are exposed to multiple traumatic events, they may have increased levels of anxiety, poor impulse control, and difficulty developing trusting relationships.<sup>8,9</sup>

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 2019, 279 families with 603 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island. Children made up 21% of the people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing in 2019. Nearly half (44%) of these children were under age five.<sup>11</sup> As of October 30, 2019, there were 88 families on the state's wait list awaiting shelter.<sup>12</sup>

In 2019, United Way 211 received 87,187 calls from individuals and families seeking housing or shelter and 2,710 related to foreclosure prevention.<sup>13</sup>

## Children in Emergency Shelters, Domestic Violence Shelters, and Transitional Housing Facilities by Age, 2019



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT analysis of data from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, Homeless Management Information System, 2019 and Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2019.

## 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>14</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 provide access to all services and programs that the child is eligible for, including preschool, before- and after-school care, school meals, and services for Multilingual Learners/English Learners.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ The *McKinney-Vento Act* defines a child as homeless if he or she does not have a “fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence.”<sup>16</sup> During the 2018-2019 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,475 children as homeless. Of these children, 70% lived with other families (“doubled up”), 16% lived in shelters, 13% lived in hotels or motels, and 1% were unsheltered.<sup>17</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>18</sup>

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**Educational Outcomes for  
 Children Experiencing  
 Homelessness**

◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 25% of homeless students met expectations on the third grade *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* English language arts assessment compared to 48% of non-homeless students. In eighth grade, 12% of homeless students met expectations on the English language arts assessment compared to 37% of non-homeless students.<sup>19</sup>

◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 11% of homeless students met expectations on the third grade *RICAS* mathematics assessment compared to 36% of non-homeless students. In eighth grade, less than 5% of homeless students met expectations on the mathematics assessment compared to 25% of non-homeless students.<sup>20</sup>

◆ In Rhode Island, the four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2019 was 65% for homeless students and 84% for non-homeless students.<sup>21</sup>

Table 8. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2018-2019 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,343	*
Bristol Warren	3,232	35
Burrillville	2,277	58
Central Falls	2,695	85
Chariho	3,218	18
Coventry	4,723	108
Cranston	10,479	30
Cumberland	4,675	26
East Greenwich	2,535	*
East Providence	5,136	40
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,641	23
Foster	272	*
Foster-Glocester	1,306	*
Glocester	523	*
Jamestown	507	0
Johnston	3,265	39
Lincoln	3,129	19
Little Compton	244	0
Middletown	2,153	27
Narragansett	1,290	*
New Shoreham	133	0
Newport	2,156	82
North Kingstown	4,007	38
North Providence	3,565	47
North Smithfield	1,677	*
Pawtucket	8,772	82
Portsmouth	2,439	*
Providence	23,944	298
Scituate	1,231	0
Smithfield	2,413	18
South Kingstown	2,978	20
Tiverton	1,777	*
Warwick	8,800	70
West Warwick	3,579	46
Westerly	2,738	52
Woonsocket	6,050	143
Charter Schools	8,427	51
State-Operated Schools	1,783	*
UCAP	135	0
Four Core Cities	41,461	608
Remainder of State	91,441	830
Rhode Island	143,247	1,475

**Source of Data for Table/Methodology**

Rhode Island Department of Education, Public School Enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2019.

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 Achievement First Rhode Island, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander, Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute, Segue Institute for Learning, 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 and William M. Davies Jr. Career and Technical High School.

The Central Falls, Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Providence, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket school districts received grants that provide 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.

Rhode Island totals are not the sum of all of the districts because some students move districts during the school year and are counted as homeless in both districts.

**References**

<sup>1</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.

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