

Homeless Children

DEFINITION

Homeless children is the number of Rhode Island children under age 13 who received emergency housing services at emergency homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters during the state Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007).

SIGNIFICANCE

Lack of affordable housing, poverty and low wages were identified as major causes of family homelessness in the United States in 2007. Other causes of homelessness include unemployment, mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and prisoner re-entry.^{1,2} Low-income families spend a large portion of their income on housing, consequently any interruption in income or unexpected expense can place these families at risk of homelessness.³

Compared to their peers, homeless children are more likely to become ill, develop mental health issues (such as anxiety and depression), have academic problems (including high rates of school mobility), be victims of violence and exhibit delinquent or aggressive behaviors.^{4,5} Homeless children go hungry at twice the rate of other children and are more likely to experience illnesses such as stomach problems, ear infections and asthma. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are homeless are more likely to have

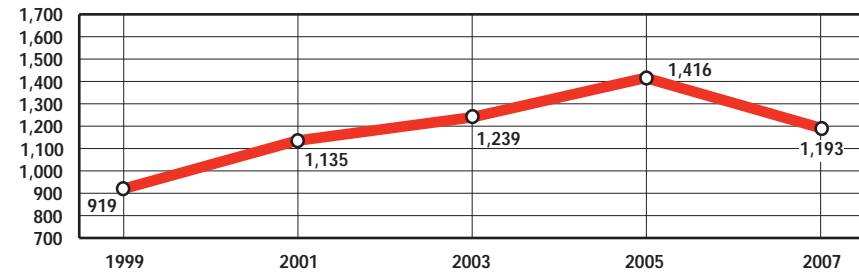
one or more developmental delays compared with poor children living in stable housing.^{6,7}

In a 2007 survey of 23 major U.S. cities, almost one-quarter (23%) of homeless people receiving shelter services were members of families with children. Ten cities reported increases in requests for emergency shelter by homeless families with children during the previous year. Half of the cities surveyed reported that they turned people away due to lack of capacity and limited resources.⁸

In Rhode Island between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007, 766 families sought emergency shelter. Of these families, nearly one-quarter (23%) were employed and were earning income. Of families seeking shelter, 90% were female-headed households. Of these households, 52% reported staying with family and friends prior to seeking shelter.⁹

The high rate of home foreclosures has also contributed to increases in the number of homeless families. Rhode Island has higher foreclosure rates than the national average and has the highest foreclosure rate in New England.¹⁰ In December 2007 in Rhode Island there were 308 notices of foreclosure initiated, an increase from 36 foreclosures in January 2007. In total, 2,171 properties were noticed for foreclosure in Rhode Island in 2007.¹¹

Children Under Age 13 Living in Shelters, Rhode Island 1999 – 2007



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project 1999 – 2007.

◆ **In Rhode Island, 1,193 children under age 13 received emergency housing in a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter in 2007.¹²**

Neighborhood Opportunities Program

◆ **The Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP) was established in Rhode Island in 2001 to provide funding for the development of affordable housing. NOP also provides funding to cover the difference between the average cost of operating rental units and what very low-income renters (family income less than 50% of the median income) can afford to pay.¹³**

◆ **The Neighborhood Opportunities Program has helped many homeless families move into affordable housing and also has prevented other families from becoming homeless. As of August 2007, the NOP committed more than \$13 million to the production of 306 housing units for families and leveraged an additional \$188 million in public and private funding.¹⁴ With an annual allocation of \$7.5 million in state funding every year since 2003, NOP has created 1,031 new affordable homes.¹⁵**

References for Homeless Children

^{1,6} *Homeless families with children* (Fact sheet #12). (2007). Washington, DC: National Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved February 6, 2008 from <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/families.html>

^{2,8} *Hunger and homelessness survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities*. (2007). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Mayors – Sodexo, Inc.

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