

DEFINITION

Homeless youth is the number of Rhode Island youth ages 13 to 17 who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, have run away from home or have been thrown out of their homes and are not allowed to return during state Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007).

SIGNIFICANCE

Homelessness among youth has a number of causes, including family problems (such as strained relationships and abuse), economic hardship, involvement in the juvenile justice system, family homelessness and residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements. Some runaway youth are considered to be throw-aways who were told or forced to leave a household, or who were abandoned by their parents or guardians.^{1,2}

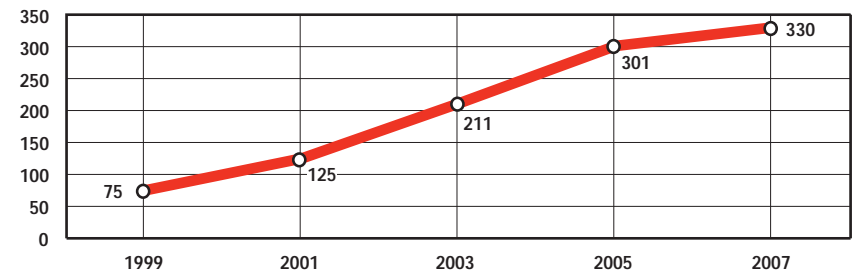
It is often difficult for homeless youth to obtain food, clothing and medical care, as well as find the means to continue their education and maintain personal hygiene. While living on the streets, homeless youth face a high risk of both physical and sexual assault. They are also highly susceptible to sexual exploitation in order to obtain their basic daily needs. Consequently, homeless

youth face an increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.^{3,4}

Homeless youth are typically disconnected from positive community assets such as education, employment, and health care.⁵ Homeless youth often experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Health issues can go untreated due to the lack of access to health and mental health care. In addition, homeless youth may not seek health care because they are likely to be asked for a permanent address, health insurance information or parental permission for treatment.⁶

Homeless youth experience higher rates of school suspensions and are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of school than their peers.⁷ The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2002 required school districts to identify homeless children and youth and remove policies and practices that act as barriers to school enrollment, attendance and success.⁸ McKinney-Vento is due to be reauthorized by Congress in 2008. The inclusion of new resources for emergency shelter, supportive services and providing a framework for greater homeless prevention would strengthen local communities' abilities to provide for the needs of homeless children, youth and families.

Homeless Youth Ages 13-17 in Rhode Island's Emergency Shelter System, 1999-2007



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

◆ **Between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007, 330 youths ages 13-17 were documented as having entered the Rhode Island Emergency Shelter system accompanied by a parent or another adult. This number is an underestimate of homeless youth in the state because the Emergency Shelter system in Rhode Island does not accept unaccompanied children over the age of 12 and does not have an overnight shelter for runaway youth.⁹**

◆ **As of December 31, 2007, there were 85 individuals in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families who were classified as unauthorized absences/runaways.¹⁰**

◆ **In 2007, the National Runaway Switchboard received 606 calls from youth ages 12-21 in Rhode Island.¹¹**

References for Homeless Youth

- ^{1,3} *Homeless youth* (Fact sheet #13). (2007). Washington, DC: National Coalition for the Homeless.
- ^{2,5,6} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *Promising strategies to end youth homelessness: Report to congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ⁴ The National Network for Youth and Volunteers for America. (n.d.). *Issue brief: Runaway and homeless youth act reauthorization*. Retrieved February 15, 2008 from <http://www.nn4youth.org>
- ⁷ Toro, P. A., Dworsky, A. & Fowler, P. J. (2007). *Homeless youth in the United States: Recent research findings and intervention approaches*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ⁸ *Education of homeless children and youth* (Fact sheet #10). (2007). Washington, DC: National Coalition for the Homeless.
- ⁹ Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007.
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, December 31, 2007.
- ¹¹ National Runaway Switchboard, 2007.