

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

Lack of affordable housing, unemployment, low-paying jobs, extreme poverty, and decreasing government supports all contribute to the problem of family homelessness. Other causes of family homelessness include domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and the fraying of social support networks.^{1,2,3,4} More than 80% of homeless mothers with children have experienced domestic violence.⁵

Compared to their peers, homeless children are more likely to become ill, 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 and are more likely to experience illnesses such as stomach problems, ear infections and asthma.^{6,7}

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 parents' desires to protect their children from the homelessness experience. Homeless children are 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care than other children. Homelessness also can be barrier to reunification for families. Studies suggest that more than 30% of children in foster care could return home if their parents had adequate housing.⁸

In Rhode Island, children in homeless families made up just over one-quarter (26%) of the people who used a shelter or transitional housing between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009. One-half (844) of these 1,676 children were under the age of six.⁹

Several forces have contributed to the high number of families experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island, including rising unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and high rates of foreclosure. From December 2007 to December 2009, Rhode Island's unemployment rate more than doubled from 6.0% to 12.9%.¹⁰ In 2009, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island was \$1,170 or 91% of the monthly earnings of a full-time worker earning the minimum wage.^{11,12} In 2009, 5,065 properties in Rhode Island were filed for foreclosure and many families (both renters and owners) lost their homes.^{13,14}



Neighborhood Opportunities Program

- ◆ Started in Fiscal Year 2001, the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP) was the first state-funded program for affordable housing in Rhode Island. When it began, the program subsidized both the development and operation of affordable housing. Since 2008, NOP funds have been used only to subsidize rents for families with very low incomes. Families generally pay 30% of their income and the subsidy makes up the difference between this amount and the total rent.^{15,16}
- ◆ The Neighborhood Opportunities Program has helped many homeless families move into affordable housing and prevented other families from becoming homeless. As of April 2009, NOP has contributed \$41.5 million toward the development and operation of 1,127 homes in 26 cities and towns.^{17,18}



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, repeat grades, and have learning disabilities than children who have housing.¹⁹
- ◆ The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* requires that state and local educational agencies support homeless students by allowing them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents (such as birth certificates or immunization records), allowing them to remain in their "home" school district, and providing transportation when needed.²⁰
- ◆ The *McKinney-Vento Act* defines as homeless any child who does not have a "fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence."²¹ During the 2008-2009 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,099 children as homeless. Of these children, 57% (622) were living in shelters, 38% (423) were doubled up, 4% (46) were living in hotels or motels, and 1% (8) were unsheltered.²²
- ◆ Schools can support homeless families by identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness, ensuring that families and staff are aware of students' rights under the *McKinney-Vento Act*, developing relationships with community agencies serving homeless families, and helping homeless children get food, clothing, school supplies, and other supports they need to succeed in school.²³

Table 9.

Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2008-2009 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Barrington	3,434	0
Bristol Warren	3,537	3
Burrillville	2,513	23
Central Falls	2,862	29
Charlho	3,574	7
Coventry	5,401	9
Cranston	10,774	14
Cumberland	5,025	2
East Greenwich	2,393	0
East Providence	5,740	24
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,906	0
Foster	257	0
Foster-Glocester	1,383	6
Glocester	596	0
Jamestown	487	0
Johnston	3,200	0
Lincoln	3,355	4
Little Compton	317	0
Middletown*	2,361	136
Narragansett	1,467	7
New Shoreham	126	0
Newport*	2,106	55
North Kingstown*	4,456	147
North Providence	3,289	6
North Smithfield	1,829	1
Pawtucket	8,838	41
Portsmouth	2,859	22
Providence	23,847	238
Scituate	1,656	0
Smithfield	2,508	0
South Kingstown	3,581	27
Tiverton	1,966	0
Warwick*	10,507	74
West Warwick	3,594	21
Westerly	3,193	67
Woonsocket*	6,086	110
<i>Charter Schools</i>	2,331	NA
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	1,628	26
<i>UCAP</i>	136	NA
<i>Core Cities</i>	47,333	494
<i>Remainder of State</i>	93,690	579
<i>Rhode Island</i>	145,118	1,099

Table 10.

Sheltered Homeless Children, Rhode Island, July 1, 2008 - June 30, 2009**

CITY/TOWN	2000 POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	# OF CHILDREN IN SHELTERS BY LAST PERMANENT RESIDENCE
Barrington	4,745	3
Bristol	4,399	10
Burrillville	4,043	5
Central Falls	5,531	81
Charlestown	1,712	3
Coventry	8,389	18
Cranston	17,098	50
Cumberland	7,690	5
East Greenwich	3,564	13
East Providence	10,546	44
Exeter	1,589	0
Foster	1,105	0
Glocester	2,664	0
Hopkinton	2,011	8
Jamestown	1,238	0
Johnston	5,906	5
Lincoln	5,157	0
Little Compton	780	0
Middletown	4,328	23
Narragansett	2,833	0
New Shoreham	185	0
Newport	5,199	94
North Kingstown	6,848	13
North Providence	5,936	16
North Smithfield	2,379	5
Pawtucket	18,151	153
Portsmouth	4,329	5
Providence	45,277	556
Richmond	2,014	5
Scituate	2,635	0
Smithfield	4,019	2
South Kingstown	6,284	3
Tiverton	3,367	2
Warren	2,454	3
Warwick	18,780	57
West Greenwich	1,444	5
West Warwick	6,632	39
Westerly	5,406	39
Woonsocket	11,155	151
<i>Out of State</i>	NA	260
<i>Core Cities</i>	91,945	1,074
<i>Remainder of State</i>	155,877	342
<i>Rhode Island</i>	247,822	1,676

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Table 9. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2008-2009 School Year

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Public School Enrollment in grades pre-K to 12 on October 1, 2009.

Number of children identified as homeless by public school personnel includes children in pre-kindergarten 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 night-time residence” including children living in shelters as well as children doubling up with relatives and friends and living in hotels and motels, cars, campsites, parks, and other public places. Schools report the child’s primary night-time residence as sheltered, doubled-up, unsheltered, or in a hotel/motel. State-operated schools include the Metropolitan Career & Technical Center and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

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

Table 10. Sheltered Homeless Children, Rhode Island, July 1, 2008 - June 30, 2009

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, July 1, 2008 - June 30, 2009.

Number of homeless children who stayed in shelters by last permanent residence includes all children under age 18 who stayed at homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, or transitional housing facilities in Rhode Island with their families between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009.

**These data include some children whose families were in permanent housing but who continued to receive supportive services.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References

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