

DEFINITION

Homeless youth is the number of Rhode Island youth ages 13 to 17 who received emergency housing services at emergency homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters during the State Fiscal Year 2008 (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008).

SIGNIFICANCE

Homelessness among youth has a number of causes including family problems (such as strained relationships with parents and physical and sexual abuse), economic hardship, family homelessness, and residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements.^{1,2} Studies of homeless youth have found that 40% to 60% of homeless youth have been physically abused, and 20% to 50% have been sexually abused in their homes. One study found that between 20% and 40% of homeless youth identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and many homeless youth are forced out of their homes by parents who disapprove of their sexual orientation.³

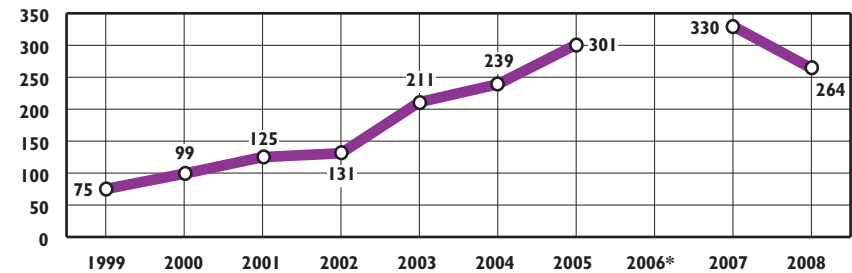
Other youth become homeless because they run away from or are discharged from the foster care system and have nowhere to go. More than one in five homeless youth come directly from foster care, and more than one in four were in foster care in the previous

year.⁴ In fact, studies show that one in five youth who are in foster care at age 16 “exit” foster care by running away.⁵

It is often difficult for homeless youth to obtain the food, clothing and medical care they need and to maintain personal hygiene. While living on the streets, homeless youth face a high risk of both physical and sexual assault. They are highly susceptible to sexual exploitation as a means of obtaining their basic daily needs. Consequently, homeless youth face an increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.^{6,7}

Homeless youth are typically disconnected from positive community assets such as education, employment, and health care.⁸ They often experience higher rates of school suspensions and are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of school when compared to their peers.⁹ Three-quarters of homeless youth do not finish high school.¹⁰ Homeless youth also experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem than youth with stable housing.¹¹ 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.¹²

Homeless Youth Ages 13-17 in Rhode Island's Emergency Shelter System, 1999-2008



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, 1999 – 2008. *Data were not available for 2006 due to data system issues.

- ◆ Between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008, 264 youths ages 13-17 entered the Rhode Island Emergency Shelter system accompanied by a parent or another adult.¹³
- ◆ Rhode Island has a limited number of beds designated for runaway and unaccompanied homeless youth.¹⁴ Between October 1, 2007 and September 30, 2008, 15 unaccompanied youth received Basic Center services (up to 15 days of shelter) and seven received Transitional Living services (up to 18 months of housing and supportive services).^{15,16,17}
- ◆ As of December 31, 2008, there were 81 youth in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families who were classified as unauthorized absences/runaways.¹⁸
- ◆ In 2008, the National Runaway Switchboard handled 201 calls from or about youth ages 12-21 in Rhode Island.¹⁹

References for Homeless Youth

- ^{1,4,7,11} National Coalition for the Homeless. (2008). *Homeless youth (NCH fact sheet #13)*. Retrieved February 16, 2009 from www.nationalhomeless.org
- ^{2,8,12} 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, Administration for Children and Families.
- ⁶ The National Network for Youth & Volunteers of America. (n.d.). *Issue brief: Runaway and Homeless Youth Act reauthorization*. Retrieved February 15, 2008 from www.nn4youth.org

^{5,10} Juliane, P. (2008). *Using what we know: supporting*

the education of unaccompanied homeless youth. Washington, DC: The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

(continued on page 157)