

Homeless Children

DEFINITION

Homeless children is the number of Rhode Island children under 13 years old who received emergency housing services at emergency homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004.

SIGNIFICANCE

Poverty, low wages, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, mental illness or substance abuse, domestic violence and prisoner reentry are factors in family homelessness.^{1,2} With a large percentage of family income going toward rent, any interruption in income or unexpected expense can place families at risk of homelessness.³

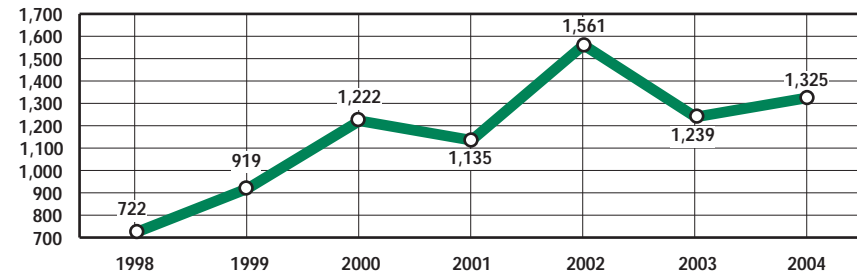
Compared to their peers, homeless children are more likely to get sick, develop mental health problems (such as anxiety and depression), have academic problems, have high rates of school mobility, have higher rates of learning disabilities diagnoses, be victims of violence, or exhibit delinquent and aggressive behavior.^{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.⁶ Infants, toddlers and

preschoolers who are homeless develop more slowly and may develop emotional problems serious enough to require professional care.⁷

Last year in the U.S., the average increase in requests for emergency shelter by homeless families with children was 7%.⁸ On average, 32% of the shelter requests by homeless families in the U.S. are estimated to have gone unmet, largely because of inadequate resources.⁹ Nationally, it is estimated that families with children comprise 40% of the homeless population, with 66% of these families being headed by a single parent.¹⁰

Between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004, 1,564 children under age 18 received shelter from Rhode Island's emergency shelter system, an increase of 8% from the year before.¹¹ Nearly half, 701 (45%) were age 5 or under, 624 (40%) were ages 6 to 12, and 239 (15%) were ages 13 to 17.¹² Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are only admitted into the emergency shelter system with adult supervision.

Children Under Age 13 Living in Shelters, Rhode Island, 1998 – 2004



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project 1998 – 2004. Providence RI: Emergency Food and Shelter Board.

◆ In Rhode Island, 1,325 children under age 13 received emergency housing in a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter in 2004.¹³

◆ Very young children under the age of 5 in Rhode Island are more likely to be homeless, with a rate of 9.3 per 1,000, compared to 5.8 per 1,000 for all Rhode Island residents.¹⁴

Supportive Housing

◆ Housing assistance alone does not always solve the housing problems for vulnerable families. Low wages, substance abuse and mental health issues can exacerbate a parent's inability to cope with pending homelessness or their ability to find and keep stable housing.¹⁵ Supportive housing, a combination of affordable housing and on-site or visiting supportive services and employment services, helps people who suffer from long-term homelessness as a result of chronic physical and/or mental health conditions.¹⁶

◆ In Rhode Island, the Supportive Housing Program helps to prevent and end homelessness among those who experience long-term or episodic homelessness. Services provided include: assistance with budgeting and paying rent, access to employment, medication monitoring, daily living skills related to food, housekeeping and socialization, counseling and referrals to health and mental health programs.¹⁷

◆ In 2004, 131 families with children in Rhode Island were served in the Supportive Housing Program.¹⁸