

Homeless Children

DEFINITION

Homeless children is the number of Rhode Island children under 13 years old who received emergency housing services at homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002.

SIGNIFICANCE

Poverty, low wages, lack of affordable housing and domestic violence are factors in family homelessness.^{1,2,3} With a large percentage of family income going toward rent, any interruption in income or unexpected expense can place families at risk of homelessness.⁴ In Rhode Island, the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$863. To be considered affordable, this rent would require an annual income of \$34,520, or an hourly wage of \$16.60 working full-time.⁵ This is nearly three times the state's minimum wage of \$6.15 per hour.

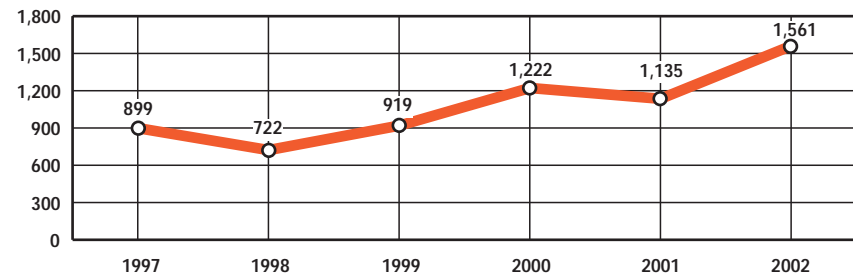
The shortage of affordable apartments and the dwindling availability of subsidized housing have caused many Rhode Island families to double-up, resulting in overcrowded, unstable living conditions. More than a third of families (40%) with children in the Rhode Island shelter system had been doubled up with family members or friends just before moving to the shelter.⁶ Of the 12,000 families enrolled in the Family Independence Program in December of 2002, 30% (3,563) lived in another

person's home or apartment either temporarily or permanently at the time that they applied for FIP.⁷

Family homelessness in the United States has increased during the last 15 years.⁸ In the U.S., 41% of the homeless are families with children.^{9,10} Homeless children are more likely to get sick, have poor nutrition, develop mental health problems, have academic problems, and experience violence than children who are not homeless.¹¹ Infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are homeless develop more slowly and may develop emotional problems serious enough to require professional care.¹²

Between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002, an all time high of 1,692 children under age 18 received shelter from Rhode Island's emergency shelter system.¹³ More than half, 974 were age 5 or under, 587 (35%) were ages 6 to 12, and 131 (8%) were ages 13 to 17.¹⁴ Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are only admitted into the emergency shelter system with adult supervision. Nearly three out of four families (72%) entering the emergency shelter system were headed by a single parent, and 92% of families with children had income below \$15,000 per year.¹⁵ The average length of stay in shelters was 34 nights in 2002 and one of every two shelter users (46%) had been turned away from a shelter at least once in the last year.¹⁶

Children Under Age 13 Living in Shelters, Rhode Island, 1997 – 2002



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project Annual Reports FY 1997 – FY 2003. Providence RI: Emergency Food and Shelter Board.

◆ **1,561 children under age 13 received emergency housing in a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter in Rhode Island between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002.**

Homeless Children and Education

- ◆ **Children who are homeless are more likely to repeat a grade or be suspended. Homeless children are more likely to be learning disabled, but are less likely to receive treatment for their learning disabilities and less likely to receive special education services.¹⁷**
- ◆ **In 2002 Congress reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to ensure that all homeless children (including preschool children) and youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate education provided to other children and youth. This includes children who are doubled up with friends and relatives, those who are staying in a motel or campground, those who are living in emergency or transitional shelters, and many other living situations.¹⁸**
- ◆ **The Act allows children to remain enrolled in their school of origin the entire time they are homeless, to receive assistance from the school district in obtaining immunization records, and to be provided transportation to and from school, paid for by the school.¹⁹ The McKinney-Vento Act also requires that each school district designate a homeless liaison to identify children living in homeless situations and remove policies and practices that act as barriers to school enrollment, attendance and success for homeless children.²⁰**