

# Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

## DEFINITION

*Youth and young adult homelessness* is the number of unaccompanied youth under age 18 who accessed emergency shelter without their families and the number of youth or young adults ages 18 to 24, including young parents, who accessed emergency shelter.

## SIGNIFICANCE

There are three primary causes of homelessness among youth and young adults – family conflict, residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements, and economic problems. Many youth run away from home due to abuse, strained family relationships, substance abuse by a family member, and/or parental neglect. The Housing and Urban Development (HUD) *Voices of Youth Count* estimates that there are approximately 700,000 homeless and runaway youth ages 13 to 17 and 3.5 million homeless youth or young adults ages 18 to 25 in the U.S., but the exact number is not known.<sup>1,2</sup>

Youth may become homeless when they run away from or are discharged from the foster care system. Youth who “age out” of foster care without a proper transition plan or permanent families are more likely to experience homelessness. National estimates find that by age 21, 43% of youth who had been in foster care had experienced homelessness.<sup>3,4</sup>

Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (or queer) (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, some of whom report being forced out of their homes by parents who disapprove of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQ homeless youth experience greater levels of violence and physical and sexual exploitation than their heterosexual peers while on the streets and in shelters.<sup>5,6</sup>

It can be difficult for homeless youth to obtain needed food, clothing, and shelter. To meet these basic needs, some turn to prostitution and/or selling drugs which can result in exploitation, arrest, assault, and/or contracting sexually transmitted infections.<sup>7,8</sup>

Homelessness often has a negative impact on education, employment, and health outcomes for youth and young adults. Homeless youth are more likely than their peers to be chronically absent, face disciplinary actions, be held back, and drop out of school. They are more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health problems, bullying, and suicide than youth with stable housing. Homeless youth often have trouble accessing health services because they may lack health insurance, information about their coverage, and/or parental consent for treatment. Black and Hispanic youth are twice as likely to experience homelessness as white youth.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>



## Homeless Youth and Young Adults in Rhode Island

- ◆ In 2022, 170 youth or young adults stayed at an emergency shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island, including three unaccompanied minors, 115 unaccompanied young adults ages 18-24, 30 parenting young adults, and 22 young adults who were sheltered with their parents.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ In January 2023, outreach workers identified 49 youth or young adults ages 18 to 24 who had slept outside or in their cars for at least one night during the previous 30 days, including seven parenting youth or young adults. No youth under age 18 were identified.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Starting in 2022 Family Service of Rhode Island began operating a Basic Center Program that provides up to 21 days of shelter in emergency host homes, food, clothing, and counseling services to youth under age 18. In 2022, three youth under age 18 received emergency shelter services without their families through this program.<sup>15,16</sup>
- ◆ During the 2021-2022 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 19 unaccompanied homeless youth who were living in doubled up situations, in shelters, or unsheltered.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ On December 31, 2022, there were 25 youth between the ages of 15 and 20 in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families who were classified as absent from care (formerly called AWOL), 10 females and 15 males. These youth were absent from either foster care or juvenile justice placements.<sup>18</sup>
- ◆ In 2021, the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency awarded Rhode Island \$3.5 million in Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP) funds. These funds are designed to support Rhode Island in developing and implementing a coordinated approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness that centers the voice, agency, and leadership of youth.<sup>19</sup>

## References

<sup>1,7,9</sup> Ingram, E. S., Bridgeland, J. M., Reed, B., & Atwell, M. (2016). *Hidden in plain sight: Homeless students in America's public schools*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises & Hart Research Associates.

<sup>2,3,8,10</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2019). *Runaway and homeless youth: Demographics and programs*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

(continued on page 185)