

Homeless Children

DEFINITION

Homeless children is the number of children in preschool through grade 12 who are identified as homeless by public school personnel because they meet the federal *McKinney-Vento* definition of homelessness, which includes any child who does not have a “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” including children doubled up with families due to financial hardship.

SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, 2.5 million children (one in 30) are homeless each year.¹ Families experiencing homelessness often include young adults and young children, and infants are more likely to experience homelessness than any other age group. Black children and families are more likely to experience homelessness than other racial and ethnic groups.²

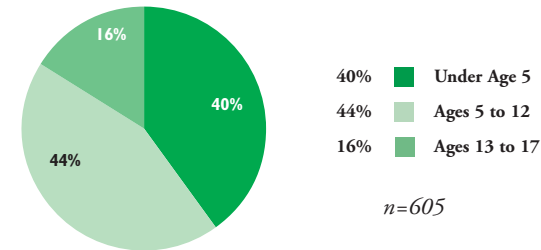
For many families living in deep poverty, episodes of homelessness are part of a cycle of housing instability that often includes living in housing that is unaffordable and/or unsafe, doubling up with families or friends, and being evicted. For these families, the shortage of housing that is affordable to them is the primary reason they became homeless. However, family violence is another major factor. More than 80% of women with children who experience homelessness have experienced domestic violence.³

Compared with their peers, homeless children are more likely to become ill, develop mental health issues, and exhibit delinquent or aggressive behaviors, and homeless children go hungry at twice the rate of other children. Homeless children also are at a higher risk of abuse and exposure to violence. This trauma can lead to an increase in developmental delays and emotional distress and a decrease in academic achievement. When homeless children are exposed to multiple traumatic events, they may have increased levels of anxiety, poor impulse control, and difficulty developing trusting relationships.^{4,5,6}

Lack of stable housing is often a precipitating factor for a family’s involvement in the child welfare system, and unstable or inadequate housing can delay family reunification. Addressing families’ housing needs can reduce child neglect and abuse and help families stay together.^{7,8}

In 2020, 323 families with 623 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island. Children made up about one quarter (23%) of the people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing in 2020. Forty percent of these children were under age five. In April 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic), there were 27 families on the state’s wait list awaiting shelter.⁹


Children in Emergency Shelters, Domestic Violence Shelters, and Transitional Housing Facilities by Age, 2020



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT analysis of data from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, Homeless Management Information System, 2020 and Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2020. Note: 18 children had unknown ages.

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, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have housing.¹⁰**
- ◆ **The federal *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act)* requires that states identify homeless children, allow them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents, allow them to stay in their “home school,” provide transportation when needed, and provide access to all services and programs that the child is eligible for, including preschool, before- and after-school care, school meals, and services for Multilingual Learners/English Learners.¹¹**
- ◆ **The *McKinney-Vento Act* defines a child as homeless if he or she does not have a “fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence.”¹² During the 2019-2020 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,531 children as homeless. Of these children, 66% lived with other families (“doubled up”), 23% lived in shelters, 9% lived in hotels or motels, and 2% were unsheltered.¹³**
- ◆ **The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, which re-authorized *McKinney-Vento* in 2015, strengthens existing provisions for homeless students, guarantees school stability for students starting in preschool, and requires schools to report on student achievement and graduation rates for homeless students.¹⁴**



Educational Outcomes for Children Experiencing Homelessness

◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 25% of homeless students met expectations on the third grade *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* English language arts assessment compared to 48% of non-homeless students.¹⁵

◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, less than 5% of homeless students met expectations on the eighth grade *RICAS* mathematics assessment compared to 25% of non-homeless students.¹⁶

◆ In Rhode Island, the four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2020 was 57% for homeless students and 84% for non-homeless students.¹⁷

◆ The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund includes funds to support the needs of students disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, including students experiencing homelessness, Students of Color, students receiving special education services, Multilingual Learners, and children in foster care.¹⁸

Table 8. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2019-2020 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,397	*
Bristol Warren	3,173	37
Burrillville	2,247	56
Central Falls	2,878	73
Charlho	3,238	12
Coventry	4,548	74
Cranston	10,475	72
Cumberland	4,668	13
East Greenwich	2,595	*
East Providence	5,251	31
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,663	*
Foster	239	*
Foster-Glocester	1,355	*
Glocester	555	*
Jamestown	489	0
Johnston	3,258	32
Lincoln	3,211	20
Little Compton	237	0
Middletown	2,133	83
Narragansett	1,278	*
New Shoreham	135	0
Newport	2,154	47
North Kingstown	3,992	31
North Providence	3,585	42
North Smithfield	1,666	0
Pawtucket	8,784	98
Portsmouth	2,426	*
Providence	23,836	304
Scituate	1,226	0
Smithfield	2,382	22
South Kingstown	2,882	27
Tiverton	1,759	*
Warwick	8,610	85
West Warwick	3,629	37
Westerly	2,648	39
Woonsocket	6,027	194
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>9,014</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,786</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>41,525</i>	<i>669</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>91,104</i>	<i>803</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>143,557</i>	<i>1,550</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, Public School Enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2019.

Number of children identified as homeless by public school personnel includes children in preschool 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 nighttime residence." This includes children who are living with other families ("doubled up"), in shelters, living in hotels or motels, and unsheltered.

Charter schools reporting include Achievement First Rhode Island, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Charette, Highlander, Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute, Rise Prep Mayoral Academy, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. State-operated schools reporting include the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center and William M. Davies Jr. Career and Technical High School.

The Central Falls, Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Providence, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket school districts received grants that provide additional resources to identify and serve homeless students.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Rhode Island totals are not the sum of all of the districts because some students move districts during the school year and are counted as homeless in both districts.

References

¹ Bassuk, E. L., DeCandia, C. J., Beach, C. A., & Berman, F. (2014). *America's youngest outcasts: A report card on child homelessness*. Waltham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research.

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