



# Child and Youth Homelessness:

## A Problem of Epic Proportions

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The dynamic of homelessness has changed in this country. According to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 30 years ago the face of homelessness comprised mostly of single adults. However, due to the recent economic downturn, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of homeless children and youth.

Despite media headlines that the economy is improving, the recession continues to have a significant effect for millions of Americans, resulting in a record number of children and youth that continue to experience homelessness.

We must address this growing problem by establishing and funding programs that will provide a safety net to families at-risk of homelessness and keep them in their home. For children and youth who are already homeless, it is imperative that they are able to access affordable housing, school, and additional supportive services as needed.

### HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS?

The answer to this question is not as simple as it seems. Federal agencies differ in how they count homeless children and youth, and there are two categories of homeless children and youth: those who are living with their families, and unaccompanied homeless children and youth, who are living unattached to any family or caregivers.

#### U.S. Department of Education

In the 2012-2013 school year, the U.S. Department of Education identified 1,258,182 homeless students enrolled by U.S. preschools and K-12 schools.<sup>1</sup>

- This includes children and youth who are living in emergency or transitional shelters, as well as those who are sharing the housing of other persons (“doubling up”) due to loss of housing, economic hardship, as well as living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.<sup>2</sup>
- It also includes both children and youth living in families, as well as those who are unaccompanied. In the 2012-2013 school year, there were 75,940 unaccompanied homeless youth identified by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>3</sup>

The Census Bureau counted 23.5 million shared households in 2014, representing 19 percent of all households in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

- These are households that include at least one outside person (or an entire family) living in the household. There are many reasons that a family might share a household, and while the Census Bureau does not separate these reasons out, we know that many families share a household due to economic hardship.

#### U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identifies homeless individuals through their annual Point-in-Time Count, which identifies people living in emergency homeless shelter or transitional housing programs or living on the street.

##### *Homeless Families*

- In 2014, there were 216,261 homeless people in 67,613 families, making up nearly 37 percent of the homeless population.<sup>5</sup>
- There were 135,701 children (under 18) living in families, making up 60 percent of all homeless people in families.<sup>6</sup>

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- Half of the unsheltered people in families were children under 18.<sup>7</sup>

### Unaccompanied homeless children and youth

- There were 6,274 unaccompanied homeless children (under 18) and 45,205 unaccompanied homeless youth (18-24), totaling 51,749 unaccompanied homeless children and youth.<sup>8</sup>
- Around half of unaccompanied children and youth were unsheltered, a rate higher than for all homeless people.<sup>9</sup>

The Point-in-Time Count significantly undercounts homeless children and youth because it fails to count those living in motels (unless they are paid for a charitable organization or federal, state, or local government program for low-income individuals), or living with temporarily with others because they have nowhere else to go. Despite recent efforts to better identify and serve unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth, they also remain significantly undercounted because they fail to access shelters or services due to fear of being reported by authorities as criminal offenders. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimates that nearly 2 million youth experience at least one night of homelessness.<sup>10</sup>

## CAUSES OF CHILD AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

There are many reasons for the rise in child and youth homelessness. Many families who lose their homes because of foreclosure are finding themselves homeless due to a lack of affordable housing. In addition, unaccompanied homeless youth often lack the resources to live on their own and support themselves.

### Foreclosure

- More than 8 million children are directly affected by the ongoing foreclosure crisis.<sup>11</sup>
- Studies show that children who live in areas with high rates of foreclosure experience decreased health and well-being.<sup>12</sup>
- Many low-income families are renters, and find themselves homeless when their rental property goes into foreclosure. Currently about 43 million households are renters, and 40 percent of households at risk of eviction due to a foreclosure are renters.<sup>13</sup>

### Lack of Affordable Housing

- Approximately 46 percent of households with children (both homeowners and renters) report that they struggle to afford housing, or their housing is physically inadequate or overcrowded.<sup>14</sup> HUD defines housing as “affordable” when any rent or mortgage payments comprise 30 percent or less of monthly household income.<sup>15</sup>
- For every 100 extremely low income renter household, there are just 31 affordable and available units.<sup>16</sup>
- 11.3 million renter households pay more than half of their incomes on housing.<sup>17</sup>

### Maternal Trauma and Depression

- In a recent longitudinal study that tracked a group of homeless children and families for a year and a half, 93 percent of homeless mothers had a history of trauma.<sup>18</sup>
- The most common trauma experienced was interpersonal violence, and trauma symptom severity and low self-esteem in the mothers were the only two predictors for residential stability after 30 months.<sup>19</sup>
- Poor outcomes for children were predicted by maternal major depressive symptoms.<sup>20</sup>

### Leaving Home/Aging Out of Public Systems

- 43 percent of homeless youth report being beaten by a caretaker and leave home to escape this abuse or other family conflict.<sup>21</sup>
- 20 percent of homeless youth had conflicts with their parents around their sexual orientation that caused them to leave.<sup>22</sup>
- Out of 700 former foster youth surveyed in 2010-2011 in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, 36 percent had experienced homelessness by age 26.<sup>23</sup> Nearly 25,000 youth age out of foster care system annually.<sup>24</sup>

### EFFECTS OF HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN

When children and youth experience homelessness, they are thrown into a world of instability. They are living in transient situations that are chaotic, overcrowded, and stressful, and often provide no quiet place for a student to sleep or study. This negatively affects their educational performance, as well as their physical and mental health.

#### Education

- Homeless children and youth face a unique set of barriers such as the inability to meet enrollment requirements (providing proof of residency), lack of transportation, lack of school supplies, and lack of other basic necessities such as clothes and food.
- Children who switch schools have lower levels of math and reading achievement than their more stable peers, even after controlling for poverty and other family characteristics that are associated with both residential mobility and poor academic performance. Each move equals a reduction of one month of school.<sup>25</sup>
- Children and youth who experience numerous moves are also less likely to graduate from high school than children who move less frequently.<sup>26</sup>

#### Health

- Physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, and resilience and resistance against risky activities also suffer when a child faces homelessness or an instable living environment.<sup>27</sup>
- Homeless children are more likely to utilize emergency rooms, are less likely to have a stable source for medical care, and overall are more likely to have worse physical health when compared to the overall population and low-income children that are housed.<sup>28</sup>

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Homelessness is a lagging indicator, so we may very well continue to see an increase in homelessness due to the recession in the coming months and even years. In order to stem this increase, we need to support programs and funding streams that will help families stay in their homes.

- **Pass the Homeless Children and Youth Act**

Re-introduced in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Homeless Children and Youth Act (HR 5186/S 2653) would allow all of America's homeless children and youth get the supports they need inside and outside of the classroom. This legislation would amend the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development definition of "homeless" children by including children and youth who have been verified as homeless by personnel in other federal programs. In addition, it would allow- but not require – local service providers to prioritize funding for homeless families and unaccompanied youth based on the needs in their communities. It therefore returns control over these decisions to local communities, who know their needs best.

- **Fund the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF), which was created by Congress in 2008 (but has never been funded), to address the severe shortage of affordable rental homes and provide adequate funding for the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8).**

These programs address the current severe shortage of affordable rental homes by creating new affordable housing units, as well as preserving existing rental units and making additional units available.

- **Through the annual appropriations process, fully fund HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants and prioritize homeless children, youth and families.**

This funding would go to homelessness prevention programs such as re-housing assistance, and the development of additional permanent supportive housing.

- **Restore funding for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education for Homeless Children and Youth program (EHCY) for FY2013 (back to the FY2011 funding level of \$75 million).**

This will provide public school districts with the resources to identify homeless children living in their district, enroll them in the school that is best for the child, and ensure that the child has the proper resources to succeed in school.

- **Restore the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Supplemental Grants and Emergency Contingency Fund in order to help families and children in need.**

TANF is currently operating under short-term extensions, which have continued the flat rate of funding for the overall block grant, but as of January 2012, Congress did not continue funding the Supplemental Grants or the Emergency Contingency Fund. The Supplemental Grants were previously in place to assist 17 states with high child poverty levels and particularly high-need populations. Without these vital funding streams, even more disparity has been created among states in terms of providing adequate levels of cash assistance to meet families' most basic needs, including rent. These states also now lack the funding to maintain the same level of essential services for families -- though the need for these services remains high.

- **Encourage more states to take advantage of a state option to extend care for youth up to age 21 under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.**

Under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, states were given the option to allow youth to remain in the foster care system until age 21. Less than half of states have take advantage of this option so far, with two additional states waiting for federal approval to take advantage of this option.<sup>29</sup> We need to encourage additional states to use their Title IV-E funds for youth beyond age 18. This would give youth that are near aging out of the foster care system the opportunity to prepare for the transition to independence, finish school or job training programs, and the ability to save enough money to secure housing as they leave the system.

- **Protect the existing safety net for homeless children and youth.**

Supports such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) lift millions of children out of poverty every year and keep them fed and healthy. CHIP's funding is set to expire in September 2015, which puts 8 million children at risk of losing their health coverage. We must extend CHIP as well as protect SNAP, Medicaid, and other programs critical to the well-being of homeless children.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Center for Homeless Education, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Consolidated State Performance Report Data, September 2014, available at: <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data-comp-1011-1213.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> (U.S. Code, Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter I, § 11301), the term "homeless children and youths"

1. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section [11302 \(a\)\(1\)](#) of this title); and

2. includes —

A. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

B. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section [11302 \(a\)\(2\)\(C\)](#) of this title);

C. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;

D. migratory children (as such term is defined in section [6399](#) of title [20](#)) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this part because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (A) through (C).

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Income and Poverty in the United States 2013, 18 (2014) available at: <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, Homeless Resource Exchange, 2014 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs, Homeless Populations and Subpopulations, 22, available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2014-Part1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Id. p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> National Network for Youth, Youth Homelessness in America, March 2014, available at:

<http://www.nn4youth.org/system/files/NN4Y%20-%20Youth%20Homelessness%20in%20America%20-%202014.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Isaacs, Julia B., Brookings Institution and First Focus, *The Ongoing Impact of Foreclosures on Children*, 2012, available at: [http://www.firstfocus.net/sites/default/files/Foreclosures%202012\\_0.pdf](http://www.firstfocus.net/sites/default/files/Foreclosures%202012_0.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Pollack C, Lynch J. Health status of people undergoing foreclosure in the Philadelphia region. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2009; 38:387-407.

<sup>13</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies. *America's Rental Housing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University 1 (2013), available at [http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs\\_americas\\_rental\\_housing\\_2013\\_1\\_0.pdf](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs_americas_rental_housing_2013_1_0.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Housing and Urban Development, American Housing Survey (2012). Tabulated by Department of Housing and Urban Development, available at: [http://childstats.gov/pdf/ac2013/ac\\_13.pdf](http://childstats.gov/pdf/ac2013/ac_13.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Affordable Housing," available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/>.

<sup>16</sup> Extremely low income renter households are those with incomes at or below 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Out of Reach 2014*, 1, available at: [http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR2014\\_Introduction.pdf](http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR2014_Introduction.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies. *America's Rental Housing: Evolving Markets and Needs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University 6 (2013), available at [http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs\\_americas\\_rental\\_housing\\_2013\\_1\\_0.pdf](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs_americas_rental_housing_2013_1_0.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness: A practice area of the American Institute for Research's Human and Social Development Program, The Service and Housing Interventions for Families in Transition (SHIFT) Longitudinal Study, available at: <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/shift.php?p=sm>.

<sup>19</sup> Id.

<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and National Network for Youth, *Alone Without a Home: A State-By-State Review of Laws Affecting Unaccompanied Youth* 5 (2012), available at:

<http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/Alone%20Without%20a%20Home,%20FINAL1.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Id.

<sup>23</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, (2011) available at: <http://www.chapinhall.org/research/inside/predictors-homelessness-during-transition-foster-care-adulthood>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Report, November 2013, available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport20.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Arthur J. Reynolds, Chin-Chih Chen, and Janette E. Herbers. "School Mobility and Educational Success: A Research Synthesis and Evidence on Prevention." Paper presented at the Workshop on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, National Research Council, June 29-30, 2009, Washington, DC, available at: <http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Activity%20Files/Children/ChildMobility/Reynolds%20Chen%20and%20Herbers.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Rog J, Maynard M, Weiss E. *The hidden costs of the housing crisis: The long-term impact of housing affordability and quality on young children's odds of success*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, The Partnership for America's Economic Success; (2008), Rumberger R, Larson K. Student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout. *American Journal of Education*. 1998; 107(1):1-35.

<sup>27</sup> J. Obradovic et al., *Effortful Control and Adaptive Functioning of Homeless Children: Variable-Focused and Person-Focused Analyses*, 31 *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 109-117 (2010); J.C. Buckner et al, *Characteristics of Resilient Children Living in Poverty: The Role of Self-Regulatory Processes*, 15 *Development and Psychopathology* 139-162 (2003).

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Garth Alperstein et al., *Health Problems of Homeless Children in New York City*, 78 *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH* 1232-1233 (1987); D.S. Miller & E.H.B. Lin, *Children in Sheltered Homeless Families: Reported Health Status and Use of Health Services*, 81 *PEDIATRICS* 668-673 (1988); D.L. Wood et al., *Health of Homeless Children and Housed, Poor Children*, 86 *PEDIATRICS* 858-866 (1990); L. Weinreb et al., *Determinants of Health and Service Use Patterns in Homeless and Low-Income Housed Children*, 102 *PEDIATRICS* 554-562 (1998).

<sup>29</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Success Beyond 18 Campaign, "Progress in the States on Extended Foster Care under the Fostering Connections Act," available at: <http://jimcaseyouth.org/progress-states>.