



# Homeless in Minnesota: Youth on Their Own

*Findings from the 2012 Statewide Study of Homelessness*

**M A Y 2 0 1 5**

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# Acknowledgments

This report, and other companion reports and fact sheets that describe the results of Wilder Research's eighth triennial study of homelessness in Minnesota, would not be possible without many helping hands. This study is, by its very nature, an exercise in cross-sector collaboration and there are many people to thank.

First, thanks to our funders, who always seem to find the resources necessary to bring this study to life: the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Housing, and the Minnesota Departments of Education, Veterans Affairs, Corrections, and Public Safety provided half of the resources necessary to complete the study. Private funders also played a critical role by providing the other half of the funding needed. This includes F.R. Bigelow Foundation, Blandin Foundation, Bush Foundation, Family Housing Fund, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, Greater Twin Cities United Way, The McKnight Foundation, The Minneapolis Foundation, and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Thanks also to Boston Scientific, who provided their facilities and technical assistance to produce our training video, and to Cummins Power Generation, Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, and Wells Fargo for their special efforts recruiting staff to serve as volunteer interviewers.

Volunteer interviewers and service providers are not only the backbone of this study; they also raise awareness about homelessness through the many friends, co-workers, and family members each one touches. This year, community volunteers, agency and program staff, and virtually the entire Wilder Research work force went to 390 locations across the state to conduct interviews. The study would not be possible without them. They endure our training videos and instructional materials, and still find the courage to return for the next study cycle. They are special people.

Finally, all social science research depends on the willingness and participation of the individuals who make up the population of interest; in this case, adults and youth throughout Minnesota who have no permanent place to live. Despite the depth of the survey and the personal nature of many questions, participation rates are extremely high (90%). Respondents answer more than 300 survey questions in face-to-face interviews and receive in exchange only a \$5 honorarium. Their generosity in sharing the details of their lives gives voice and substance to the reality of homelessness in our state and helps planners, funders, and advocates in their efforts to find solutions. This report tells their stories.

# The numbers

## Finding youth in a one-night study

Young people on their own are some of the least visible and more vulnerable homeless people. They are less likely than adults to stay in shelters, more often staying temporarily with friends or in places not intended for habitation. Compared to homeless adults, they have fewer shelters available and have fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs. Finding youth outside of the shelter system is extremely difficult, and the numbers reported here are an undercount. Nevertheless, nearly 4 in 10 youth on their own in the 2012 study were found outside of the shelter system — a higher percentage than any other group.

As part of the overall study conducted on October 25, 2012, **1,151** unaccompanied youth were identified. These youth were found in youth and adult shelters, transitional housing facilities, and through the efforts of outreach workers. Of these, 146 were age 17 and younger (referred to in this report as “minors”) and 1,005 were 18 through 21 (“young adults”). Youth on their own make up 11 percent of the total homeless population counted in October 2012.

After a steep rise in youth homelessness between 2006 and 2009 (up 46%), the number of unaccompanied youth identified as part of the 2012 study is down slightly overall. However, compared to their representation in the total Minnesota population, youth age 21 and younger continue to be the age group most likely to be homeless.

On any given night, an estimated 4,080 Minnesota youth experience homelessness. This includes an estimated 2,211 minors ages 17 and younger, and 1,869 young adults aged 18-21. These estimates are much higher than in previous years, because of updated ways of estimating minors ages 17 and younger staying outside of the shelter system and those who may be homeless for short periods of time. Nevertheless, these numbers are considered conservative estimates; the actual number of unaccompanied youth is likely considerably higher.

# Key findings

Homeless youth on their own often come from troubled backgrounds and face significant challenges. These include physical and mental health issues and histories of abuse and other trauma. A majority have a parent who has been incarcerated. Over one-quarter are parents themselves, and one-fifth have children with them. Study volunteers conducted face-to-face interviews with youth to learn more about their backgrounds, housing histories, education, employment, health issues, and other characteristics. The following is a summary of key findings.

## More youth in school

A growing proportion of homeless minors age 17 and younger are enrolled and attending school. The percentage enrolled in school has climbed steadily, rising from 52 percent in 1994 to 89 percent in 2006 and 95 percent in 2012. Nearly three-quarters of youth (73%) attended school in the last year; more than two-thirds (69%) attended school on the day of the survey.

## Most homeless youth are long-term residents of Minnesota

The vast majority of homeless youth grew up in Minnesota (76%), including 43 percent who grew up in the metro area, and 32 percent who grew up in greater Minnesota. Compared to 2009, this proportion has increased (up from 69%).

## Racial disparities persist

Homeless youth are more likely than the youth population as a whole to be persons of color. Seven in 10 homeless youth (70%) were African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, or of mixed race, compared to just 24 percent of all Minnesota youth.

## High incidence of health issues

Homeless youth continue to experience high rates of mental health issues. More than half (52%) report significant mental health issues, and more than one-third of youth (36%) have considered suicide.

Homeless youth also continue to experience high rates of physical health issues. More than one-third (36%) report long-term physical health problems, and nearly a quarter (23%) report symptoms of a traumatic brain injury.

## High incidence of adverse childhood experiences

More than three-quarters of youth (78%) had a difficult start in life, including being physically or sexually abused as a child, becoming a parent before age 18, or experiencing an out-of-home placement. More than one-half of youth (55%) had been physically or sexually abused, or neglected, with female youth reporting higher rates of maltreatment overall.

## Disproportionately affected by parental incarceration

Sixty percent of homeless youth have had at least one parent incarcerated. Compared to those with no history of parental incarceration, youth with a parent who has ever been incarcerated are more likely to have experienced abuse and a difficult start in life, including being physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected as a child. Youth affected by parental incarceration are more likely to have a health condition, significant mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or traumatic brain injury. They are also more likely to have ever lived in a social service or treatment facility and to have ever been held in a correctional facility themselves.

## Exposure to violence while homeless

Three in ten youth (30%) have stayed in an abusive situation to avoid being without a place to live, and 17 percent have been sexual with someone in order to secure shelter, clothing, or food. Two in ten youth (21%) have been physically or sexually attacked while homeless. Forty-six percent of homeless youth have experienced at least one of these forms of violence and exploitation.

## Youth as parents

Twenty-nine percent of homeless youth are parents, and 21 percent have at least one child with them. Eighty percent of homeless youth parents are persons of color. Youth with children were more likely than youth with no children to report staying in a shelter in the last two years (80% vs. 66%). One-third of youth with children (32%) said they were employed full time.

## About the study

Every three years since 1991, Wilder Research has conducted a statewide study of people who are homeless or living in temporary arrangements. This study investigates the causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness to inform efforts toward permanent, safe housing for all Minnesotans. The study includes face-to-face interviews with people throughout the state who meet the [federal definition of homelessness](#)<sup>1</sup> and a count of homeless people.

Detailed data tables for youth responses to each question, broken down by gender, type of shelter, and metro versus greater Minnesota can be found on our website at [www.wilder.org](http://www.wilder.org).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/changes-in-the-hud-definition-of-homeless>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Research-Areas/Homelessness/Pages/Statewide-Homeless-Study-Detailed-Data.aspx>



# Who are homeless youth?

## Digging deeper into the numbers

Though the number of youth counted has decreased 9 percent since 2009 (Figure 1). It is not clear if this recent trend is due to a real decrease or our inability to find youth – who are often some of the most hidden homeless. Youth are more likely than other age groups to stay outside the shelter system – often putting together a series of places to stay – couch hopping and staying on the streets.

### 1. Number of homeless youth counted by age group (2009 and 2012)

	2009 study	2012 study
Unaccompanied minors (17 and under)	227	146
Young adults (18-21)	1,041	1,005
<b>Total counts</b>	<b>1,268</b>	<b>1,151</b>

For unaccompanied youth, some of the differences in numbers between 2009 and 2012 varied by gender and shelter type.

- For the young adult population, there was a 16 percent decrease in the number of females, and a 17 percent increase in the number of males between 2009 and 2012.
- For minors age 17 and younger, there was a 73 percent decrease in the number in transitional housing sites while the number of minors found in emergency shelters was up 8 percent.

Youth in greater Minnesota were even more likely than youth in the 7 county Twin Cities metro area to be found outside the shelter system (Figure 2).

### 2. 2012 counts by metro and greater Minnesota, and sheltered vs. not in shelter

	Metro in shelters	Metro not in shelter	Total Metro	Greater MN in shelters	Greater MN not in shelter	Total greater MN
Unaccompanied minors (17 and under)	45	29	74	33	39	72
Young adults (18-21)	402	188	590	225	190	415
<b>Total</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>487</b>

## *Age*

Eighty-six percent of homeless youth are young adults and 14 percent are minors (Figure 3). The average age of all homeless youth is 19; the average age of unaccompanied homeless minors is 16. Minors are more likely to be in greater Minnesota than the metro area (56% vs. 44%), while youth adults are more likely to be in the metro area than greater Minnesota (59% vs. 41%).

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### **3. Age of youth experiencing homelessness**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
15 and younger	22	3%
16	19	3%
17	57	8%
18	160	22%
19	166	23%
20	160	22%
21	134	19%

## *Gender and sexual orientation*

Fifty-five percent of homeless youth are female down from 61 percent in 2009. In the overall Minnesota homeless adult population, 47 percent are women. National studies show that females are more likely to seek shelter and services.

Eighty-five percent of homeless youth identify themselves as heterosexual. Fifteen percent of homeless youth identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or unsure of their sexual orientation. Two percent overall said they consider themselves to be transgender. Overall, relatively few homeless youth (6%) reported that they were homeless due to a lack of tolerance for their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, of the 15 percent of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, 29 percent cite this as a contributing factor to their homelessness, including 15 percent who identify it as the main cause.

### ***Overrepresentation of youth of color***

The number of homeless youth of color is disproportionately high compared to their prevalence in the general population of Minnesota youth (Figure 4). In fact 70 percent are black, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, or of mixed race, compared to just 24 percent of all Minnesota youth. In the Twin Cities metro area, 82 percent are youth of color; in greater Minnesota, youth of color comprise 48 percent of the youth homeless population. These are similar percentages to 2009.

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#### **4. Race of youth experiencing homelessness by geographic location**

	<b>Greater MN</b>	<b>Metro</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
African American	16%	54%	37%
White	52%	18%	33%
American Indian	23%	5%	13%
Multi-racial/other	6%	17%	12%
African Native	<1%	4%	3%
Asian	2%	2%	2%
<i>Hispanic (may be of any race)</i>	9%	10%	10%

### ***Most grew up living with their parents in Minnesota***

More than three-quarters of youth (76%) said they grew up in Minnesota, with about one-third (32%) growing up in greater Minnesota, 29 percent growing up in Minneapolis or St. Paul, and another 14 percent growing up in one of the seven counties in the metro area. Compared to 2009, this proportion overall has increased (up from 69%). Two-thirds of homeless youth (66%) said they had lived in Minnesota for over ten years. Ninety-six percent of homeless youth were born in the United States.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of homeless youth grew up living with biological parents. Others lived with grandparents or other family members (11%), in a blended family (9%), in a foster family (6%), or in an adoptive family (5%).

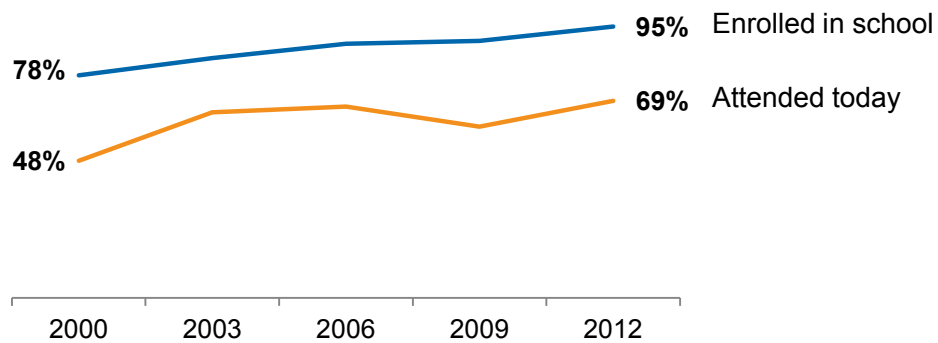
### ***Education***

A growing proportion of homeless minors are enrolled in school (Figure 5). The number has increased steadily from just over three-quarters (78%) in 2000 to nearly all (95%) minors in 2012. The proportion of minors who attended school on the day of the survey has also increased over the past 12 years, up from 48 percent in 2000 to 69 percent in 2012. Fifty-eight percent of homeless 19-21 year olds had completed high school or received their

GED, and almost two-thirds (63%) of homeless young adults (18-21) were enrolled in an education program.

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## 5. Minors' school attendance: Unaccompanied youth age 17 and younger



While enrollment and attendance have been increasing, homeless unaccompanied minors still experience significant challenges related to school. Thirty-seven percent of unaccompanied minors said they have an IEP or Special Education plan in school, and a number of situations have made it difficult for unaccompanied minors to get to or stay in school.

- 45% report problems with truancy or skipping school
- 40% report trouble getting to school because of housing and transportation issues
- 39% report poor or failing grades
- 29% report suspensions or expulsions

# Housing and homelessness

## Long-term homelessness

In Minnesota, people are considered “long-term homeless” if they have been homeless for a year or longer, or if they have been homeless four times in the past three years.

## Current homelessness

Fifty-three percent of youth interviewed meet the Minnesota definition of “long-term” homelessness (see sidebar). Eleven percent had been homeless for less than a month, and 43 percent had been homeless a year or more.

On the night of the study, youth were more likely than any other age group to be found outside the shelter system (Figure 6).

### 6. Where unaccompanied youth were staying on the night of the 2012 survey

	Emergency shelter	Transitional housing	Battered women’s shelter	Outreach (not in shelter)
Minors	39%	14%	0%	47%
Young adults	20%	39%	3%	38%
<b>All youth</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>39%</b>

When asked where they had stayed in the 30 days prior to the study, 62 percent had stayed in shelter, 53 percent had doubled-up or couch-hopped, and 33 percent had stayed outside (Figure 7). Minors were more likely than young adults to say they had been in regular housing (31% vs. 9%) or doubled-up (62% vs. 52%) in October. Young adults were more likely than minors to say they had been in shelter (64% vs. 52%) or outside (35% vs. 23%). Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely than youth in the metro area to say they had been outside (39% vs. 29%) or doubled-up (59% vs. 49%). Youth in the metro area were more likely to say they had stayed in shelter (70% vs. 52%).

### 7. Places unaccompanied youth stayed in the 30 days prior to the 2012 survey (youth could stay in more than one location during this period)

	Emergency shelter/ transitional housing	Doubled-up	Outside	Housed
Minors	52%	62%	23%	31%
Young adults	64%	52%	35%	9%
Greater MN	52%	59%	39%	16%
Metro area	70%	49%	29%	9%
<b>All youth</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>12%</b>

**Note:** Row totals are greater than 100% because many youth stayed in multiple settings during the month prior to the survey.

Twenty-six percent of youth had been turned away from shelter in the three months leading up to the survey.

## Factors leading to homelessness

On average, homeless youth first left home at age 16, and more than one-half (57%) have been homeless for less than one year. Nearly three-quarters of youth (73%) have had multiple experiences with homelessness (similar to 2009).

Figure 8 shows the most common reasons that homeless youth cite for leaving home.

### 8. Youth’s views of what led to their homelessness, top 10 factors

	A main cause	Part of the cause or a main cause
Told to leave or locked out	30%	59%
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	29%	61%
Not willing to live by parents’ rules	12%	48%
Neglect or parents not attending to basic needs	12%	33%
Parents’ use of drugs or alcohol	12%	30%
Didn’t feel safe because of violence in the house	11%	25%
Family lost their housing	11%	23%
Home was too small for everyone to live there	10%	26%
Parent or guardian had mental health problems	9%	23%
Delinquent activities by the youth	9%	32%

**Note:** The table includes the top 10 “main” causes of 17 total causes reported.

Minors were more likely than young adults to report families losing housing as part of the reasons for being homeless (33% vs. 21%). Compared to minors, young adults were more likely to report contributing factors to homelessness included their own delinquent activities (33% vs. 23%), their own use of drugs or alcohol (25% vs. 16%), and leaving an out-of-home placement with no place to go (16% vs. 6%).

# Trauma and abuse

Youth experiencing homelessness have often experienced serious upheaval before reaching adulthood, including conflict with parents, abusive relationships, turbulent housing, and mental health problems. Overall, 78 percent of youth report elements related to a difficult start in life, such as being physically or sexually abused as a child; becoming a parent before age 18; or living in a foster home, treatment facility, or any other kind of facility.

## Abuse and exposure to violence in childhood

More than one-half (55%) of homeless youth report that they had been physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected as a child (Figure 9). Female youth have higher rates of each of the kinds of maltreatment, and they are especially more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse (38% vs. 14% for male youth).

**More than half (55%) of all homeless youth have been abused or neglected.**

### 9. Childhood histories of trauma among unaccompanied youth

	All youth	Female youth	Male youth
Physically abused as a child	44%	46%	41%
Sexually abused as a child	27%	38%	14%
Neglected as a child	31%	33%	28%
<b>At least one of the above</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>51%</b>

## Exposure to violence and exploitation

Violence can be a cause and is often a result of homelessness (Figure 10). Thirty percent of homeless youth have stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options, and 17 percent have traded sex for shelter, food, clothing, or other essentials. Female youth are more likely to be homeless due to domestic violence and to have stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options.

**21% of homeless youth have been attacked or beaten while homeless.**

Twenty-one percent of homeless youth have been attacked or beaten while homeless, and 13 percent sought health care in the past 12 months because of an injury or illness resulting from violence. Eighteen percent have been encouraged to make money by dancing, stripping, or otherwise exchanging sex for money. The average age at which homeless youth were approached to work in the sex industry was 16 years old.

## 10. Violence and sexual exploitation among unaccompanied youth

	All youth	Female youth	Male youth
Stayed in an abusive situation due to no other housing options	30%	35%	24%
Physically or sexually attacked while homeless	21%	26%	17%
Homeless due to domestic violence	20%	27%	13%
Encouraged to make money by dancing, stripping, or exchange sex for money	18%		
Has been sexual with someone only for the purpose of getting shelter, clothing, or food	17%	15%	18%
Sought health care in last 12 months due to an injury or illness resulting from violence	13%	11%	14%
<b>At least one of the above</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>48%</b>

### Out-of-home placements

Almost two-thirds of youth (65%) have experienced either a social service or corrections placement.

- 35% of youth have lived in a foster home
- 23% of youth have lived in a facility for persons with emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems (up from 18% in 2009)
- 22% of youth have lived in a group home
- 37% of youth had been held for more than a week in a correctional facility, including 24% of minors and 40% of young adults



The number of homeless youth who said they had experienced at least one social service placement (57%) was comparable to 2009 (55%) and 2006 (57%). Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely to have a history of placements than youth in the Twin Cities area (62% vs. 52%), and male youth were more likely than female youth to report an out-of-home placement (60% to 53%). Young adults were more likely to have experienced a placement (Figure 11).

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## 11. Out-of-home placements

	Minor	Young adult	Total
Foster home	37%	35%	35%
Facility for people with mental health problems	19%	23%	23%
Group home	20%	23%	22%
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	14%	20%	19%
Halfway house	5%	8%	8%
Residence for people with physical disabilities	7%	3%	3%
<b>Any of these facilities</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>57%</b>

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 16 percent of youth left some type of social service placement, including more than a quarter (26%) who left a drug or alcohol treatment facility, and 19 percent who had left a facility for people with emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems. For youth who had left a social service placement in the previous 12 months, 36 percent reported they had a stable place when they left.

More than a third of youth (37%) said they had run away from foster care, a group home, or other out-of-home placement. One in ten youth had lived in an adoptive home.

# Health and mental health

Similar to the adult homeless population, high proportions of homeless youth have physical, mental, and chemical health problems. About one-half (52%) have a serious mental illness, with depression being the most common (29%). More than one-third (36%) have a chronic physical health condition, most often asthma (22%), high blood pressure (10%), or chronic lung or respiratory problems (7%).

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**Fifty-two percent of homeless youth report some type of significant mental health problem, and 36 percent have chronic physical health issues.**

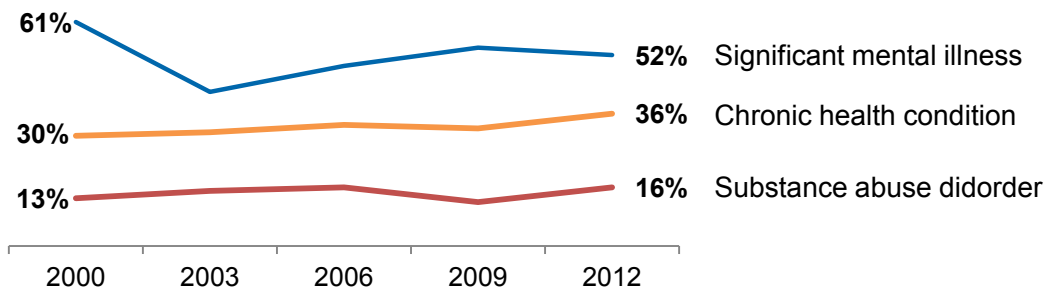
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Sixteen percent have been told by a medical professional within the past two years that they have a drug abuse disorder (14%) or an alcohol abuse disorder (10%). Nearly one-quarter (23%) reported evidence of a traumatic brain injury.

Figure 12 shows the incidence of chronic health conditions, significant mental illness, and substance abuse disorder going back to the year 2000.

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## 12. Physical, mental, and chemical health (2000-2012)



One-quarter of youth (25%) said they have a prescription they need, but are not taking; of these almost three-quarters (73%) said the medication is one prescribed for a mental health problem.

Almost one-half of youth (46%) have received care for nervousness, depression, or mental health, with more than three-quarters (77%) of these saying they had received care in the past 2 years. More than one-third of youth (36%) had considered suicide, a quarter (24%) had attempted suicide, and 22 percent had received help for this.

Female youth are more likely to have a chronic physical health condition. Male youth are more likely to have a mental illness, traumatic brain injury, or a substance abuse disorder (Figure 13).

### 13. Health issues among unaccompanied youth

	All youth	Female youth	Male youth
Chronic physical health condition	36%	41%	31%
Significant mental illness	52%	45%	58%
Substance abuse disorder	16%	13%	19%
Evidence of traumatic brain injury	23%	19%	27%
<b>At least one of the above</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>63%</b>

Overall, one-third of homeless youth (32%) report a combination of mental illness, substances abuse, or chronic physical health conditions. This proportion is similar to the percent of homeless youth who report only one of those three (34%) and those who report none of the three (34%). These rates are lower than the homeless adult population. This may suggest that intervening early may help prevent some conditions from developing and that youth without these conditions may need different kinds of supports to get and keep housing than those who have multiple health issues.

Fourteen percent of youth said they have a current problem with alcohol. Two-thirds of youth (66%) reported use of tobacco in the past 30 days, while about a third reported use of marijuana (34%) and alcohol (32%) in the past 30 days. Of those who smoked, nearly two-thirds of youth (64%) reported starting to smoke cigarettes before the age of 15.

Twenty-two percent have a physical, mental, or other health condition that limits the kind or amount of work they can do.

# Resources

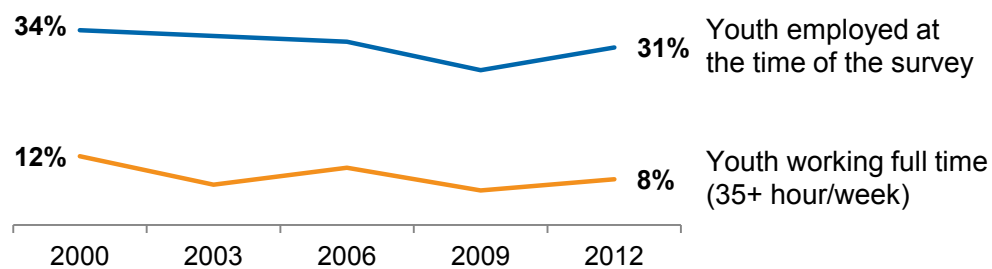
## Employment and income

Thirty-one percent of youth were employed at the time of the survey. This is a higher rate of employment than the homeless adult population (24%). However, only 8 percent were employed full time (35 or more hours per week). More than three-quarters of youth (78%) earned less than ten dollars an hour.

Figure 14 shows employment levels among homeless youth going back to 2000.

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### 14. Youth employed and working full time (2000-2012)



Among youth who were not currently employed, 79 percent said they were looking for work. More young adults (82%) said they were looking for work, compared to 58 percent of minors. Minors in the metro area were also more likely to be looking for work (77%) compared to 43 percent of minors in greater Minnesota.

Barriers youth identified that are keeping them from getting a job include:

- Transportation (29%)
- Job experience/job history (18%)
- Personal reasons (17%)
- A lack of housing (16%)
- A lack of employment opportunities (13%)
- A lack of resources needed to work or look for work (13%)
- Criminal history (12%)

- Education (10%)
- Mental health issues (10%)
- A lack of child care (10%)

Youth reported a median income of \$250 in October, with minors reporting a median of \$200 and young adults reporting a median income of \$278. Over one-third of youth (34%) reported an income of \$100 or less, including 20 percent who said they had no income.

Of those who had income, the top main sources of income youth reported for the month of October were:

- Steady employment (26%)
- MFIP (15%)
- General Assistance (13%)

## Health care

Almost two-thirds of youth (65%) said they have a regular place to go for health care; their regular place was most often a clinic requiring fees or insurance (66%), a free clinic (15%), or the ER (10%). Four in ten youth (41%) had been to the ER in the past six months, with an average of two to three visits. More than one-quarter (28%) reported that their visits to the ER had resulted in at least one hospital stay.

More than one-quarter of youth (26%) said they need to see a health professional about a physical health problem, 28 percent said they need to see a health professional about an emotional or mental health problem, and 44 percent said they need to see a dentist. Fewer (6%) reported that they need to see a health professional about an alcohol or drug problem.

Seventy percent of youth said they had some type of medical coverage in October. Of these, two-thirds (68%) said they had Medical Assistance.

## Helpful services

Housing alone is typically not adequate to solve the problems facing homeless youth. Background conditions and experiences mean that a combination of services are often required to help restore balance and hope, and a stable starting point for recovery.

Homeless youth reported being helped by a variety of people:

- Friends (68%)
- Youth workers (51%)
- Social workers (45%)
- Shelter staff people (44%)

Not surprisingly, meeting basic needs for food, transportation, and outreach dominate service use among homeless youth (Figure 15). A mix of services is important. Seven in 10 youth (72%) receive at least one type of food assistance, including Food Stamps (56%), food shelf (32%), hot meal program (26%), and WIC (16%). More than half of youth (55%) received transportation assistance, four in ten youth (43%) received outreach-related assistance, over a third of youth (38%) received health-related assistance, and a third of youth each received clothing assistance (33%) and employment-related assistance (32%).

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### 15. Types of assistance received by youth in the past month

Type of assistance received	Percent
Food assistance (food stamps, hot meal program, food shelf, WIC)	72%
Transportation assistance	55%
Outreach-related (drop-in center services, outreach services)	43%
Health-related service (emergency room; free medical, mental health and/or dental clinics)	38%
Free or almost free clothing	33%
Employment-related service (help to find a job, job training)	32%

However, almost a quarter of youth (23%) said they had lost or were unable to afford benefits in the last twelve months. Of those who lost benefits, the most often reported benefits lost were food stamps benefits (62%) and medical benefits (51%).

Some differences exist in service use, according to age and geographic location. Young adults are more likely than minors to report receiving food assistance (76% vs. 52%), outreach assistance (45% vs. 34%), and employment-related services (33% vs. 25%). Youth in the metro area are more likely than those in greater Minnesota to receive food assistance (76% vs. 68%), transportation assistance (70% vs. 35%), and outreach services (50% vs. 34%). Figures related to food and transportation assistance likely reflect actual availability of such services in the metro area vs. more rural areas of the state.

Among the homeless youth who receive services, the following services help them most:

- Food stamps (48%)
- Transportation assistance (37%)
- Drop-in centers (21%)
- Food shelves (15%)
- Free clothing shelf (14%)
- Help to find a job (12%)
- Outreach services (11%)
- WIC (11%)

More than one-half of youth (57%) reported they have a cell phone with a data plan, and more than two-thirds (69%) said they have access to a computer and Internet. Almost two-thirds of youth (64%) reported they have a valid ID.

Youth in greater Minnesota are less likely to have cell phones with a data plan (50% vs. 63% in the metro area), computer and internet access (58% vs. 78%), and a valid ID (55% vs. 70%).

# Special populations

The following sections describe characteristics of specific groups of homeless youth including: minors (youth on their own under age 18), youth who are parents, youth affected by parental incarceration, and youth who grew up in the suburbs.

## Minors 17 and younger on their own

On any given night, an estimated 2,200 minors 17 and younger are homeless. Minors often double-up or “couch hop” and may not use services for homeless persons. Our study conducted in October 2012 identified 146 unaccompanied minors. Of these, 98 were interviewed. Half (51%) were counted in greater Minnesota, outside of the metro area.

Throughout the previous sections of this report, some differences were pointed out between the characteristics and experiences of young adults (age 18-21) and those of minors (age 17 and younger). This next section pulls out some of the key characteristics of the youngest homeless persons on their own – minor youth age 17 and younger.

### *Characteristics of minors*

- Most minors grew up in Minnesota (85%)
- 42% are male and 58% are female
- 16% of minors identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or are unsure about their sexual orientation; 1% identify as transgender
- 9% of minors are parents and 6% have their children with them

### *Experience with homelessness*

- 75% of minors had been homeless at least once before the current episode of homelessness, including 80% of those in greater Minnesota and 69% in the metro area
- 44% of minors meet the MN definition of “long term” homeless <sup>1</sup>
- 23% of minors spent at least one night sleeping outside and 62% spent time doubled-up in October
- 23% of minors had been turned away from shelter in the past 3 months
- 46% said they thought they would live with their parents again

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<sup>1</sup> Homeless for a year or longer currently, or four or more times in the last three years.



## ***Racial disparities***

A smaller percentage of minors (29%) were African American, compared to 39 percent of young adults age 18 to 21 (Figure 16). Compared to minors in greater Minnesota, those in the metro area were more likely to be African American (44% vs. 16%) and multi-racial (21% vs. 4%). Minors in greater Minnesota were more likely to be white (46% vs. 23%) and American Indian (29% vs. 12%).

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### **16. Race of minors by geographic location**

	<b>Greater MN</b>	<b>Metro</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
African American	16%	44%	29%
White	46%	23%	36%
American Indian	29%	12%	21%
Multi-racial/other	4%	21%	13%
Asian	2%	0	1%
<i>Hispanic (may be of any race)</i>	7%	12%	9%

## ***Long-term health issues***

More than two-thirds of minors (69%) reported a physical health or mental health problem, or substance abuse disorder, including:

- 36% with a chronic physical health problem
- 46% with a significant mental health problem
- 9% with a substance abuse disorder

## *Adverse childhood experiences*

Minors in the metro area were more likely to have experienced physical or sexual abuse or neglect as a child. Minors in greater Minnesota were more likely to have had an out-of-home placement and to have had a parent who was incarcerated (Figure 17).

### **17. Adverse experiences of minors, by geographic location**

	<b>Greater MN</b>	<b>Metro</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
Physical abuse	29%	60%	42%
Sexual abuse	15%	46%	28%
Neglect	20%	49%	33%
Ever in out-of-home placement	62%	40%	52%
Ever ran away from a placement	38%	41%	39%
At least one parent incarcerated	73%	64%	69%

## *Violence and sexual exploitation*

Violence and exploitation are common among homeless youth, including homeless minors 17 and younger. Forty-one percent of homeless minors have experienced at least one of the following types of violence or exploitation:

- 25% have stayed in an abusive situation due to a lack of other housing options
- 21% have been in a relationship with someone who has hurt them or threatened to do so
- 16% have been attacked or beaten while homeless
- 14% have been sexual with someone to get shelter

## **Youth as parents**

### *Characteristics of youth parents*

Almost one-third (29%) of homeless youth are parents, and one out of five (21%) has at least one child with them. Most have only one child (77%), and three-quarters of these children are age two or younger.

Female youth are more likely than male youth to be parents. Thirty-nine percent of female youth have children (16% of male youth) and 35 percent of female youth had children with them on the night of the survey (4% of male youth). Nine percent of minors 17 and younger have children and one-third (32%) of young adults age 18-21 years have children.

Homeless youth parents are more likely to be youth of color. Eighty percent of youth accompanied by their children are African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic or of mixed race, compared to 64 percent of youth who are not parents. Youth accompanied by their children are most likely to be African American (60%) in the metro areas, while in greater Minnesota 39 percent of youth with children were white and 37 percent were American Indian.

***Experience with homelessness***

Youth with children were more likely to stay in homeless service programs such as transitional housing or emergency shelters (Figure 18). Youth with children were less likely to stay in doubled-up situations or in regular housing, and were also less likely to stay outside.

**18. Housing situation in last 30 days for youth with children**

	<b>Youth with children</b>	<b>Youth with no children</b>
In any shelter at least one night in last 30 days	78%	58%
Doubled-up at least one night in last 30 days	40%	57%
In regular housing at least one night in last 30 days	5%	14%
Stayed outside at least one night in last 30 days	16%	38%

***Resources and services***

One-third of youth (32%) with children said they were employed full time. As far as resources, 85 percent said they had received food stamps, 62 percent said they had received WIC, and 52 percent said they had received transportation assistance in the past month. Youth with no children most frequently reported receiving transportation assistance (56%), followed by food stamps (48%), and using drop-in centers (37%). Youth with children reported a higher median monthly income (\$437 vs. \$200).

Youth accompanied by their children were more likely to report having medical coverage in the last six months (84% vs. 66%), as well as having a regular place for medical care (77% vs. 61%).

More youth with children said they have cell phones (65% vs. 55%) and a state ID or driver’s license (73% vs. 61%).

## ***Impact on children***

Most children of homeless youth are very young. More than three-quarters of the children (76%) are under age 3. For youth who have children with them, 13 percent said their children have emotional or behavioral problems, and 9 percent said their children have chronic or severe physical problems. At the same time, 7 percent each said they have been unable to obtain needed health care or dental care for their children. Thirteen percent said their children have had to skip meals due to a lack of money to buy food. Just under half of parents (46%) said they have been unable to obtain child care when they have needed it.

## **Youth affected by parental incarceration**

For the first time, the 2012 study asked unaccompanied youth if they had a parent who had ever been incarcerated. A surprising 60 percent of youth have a parent who has been incarcerated at some point, and 13 percent have a parent who is currently incarcerated. Three-quarters (73%) of American Indian youth are affected by parental incarceration.

Many issues facing homeless youth appear to be universal, although some key differences exist between youth who have been affected by parental incarceration compared to those who have not. Youth affected by parental incarceration have generally had a more difficult start in life and continue to experience more difficulties.

## ***Experience with homelessness***

Compared to youth not affected by parental incarceration, youth who have a parent who has ever been incarcerated are more likely to:

- Have lived in any homeless service program as a child (38% vs. 23%)
- Have been homeless four or more times (52% vs. 37%)
- Be homeless due to criminal activities by a household member (23% vs. 9%)
- Be homeless due to physical or sexual abuse by a household member (25% vs. 12%)
- Be homeless due to the mental health of a household member (29% vs. 14%)

### *Top reasons for becoming homeless*

The top three reasons youth reported for being homeless were the same regardless of history of parental incarceration, but youth affected by parental incarceration were more likely to report all three reasons (Figure 19).

Youth with a parent in prison were also more likely to report their parents' use of drugs or alcohol, neglect, and a parent with mental health problems as the main reasons for becoming homeless.

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#### **19. Top reasons for becoming homeless; youth affected by parent incarceration**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Affected by parental incarceration</b>	<b>Not affected by parental incarceration</b>
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	64%	57%
Told to leave or locked out	63%	53%
Not willing to live by parents' rules	47%	48%
Parents' use of drugs or alcohol	37%	18%
Neglect or parents not attending to basic needs	37%	28%
Parent with mental health problems	29%	14%

**Note:** Percentages include youth who reported the reason as a "main" cause or "part" of the cause of their homelessness.

### *History of facility placement*

Youth who have a parent who has ever been incarcerated are more likely than other homeless youth to have ever lived in a social service or treatment facility (67% vs. 45%) or been held in any correctional facility (42% vs. 30%).

### *Exposure to violence or abuse*

Youth affected by parental incarceration were more likely than their counterparts to report exposure to violence, abuse, and neglect (Figure 20). Eighty-two percent of youth affected by parental incarceration said they had experienced a difficult start in life (defined as physical or sexual abuse, becoming a parent before age 18, or being placed outside the home). Nearly one-half of youth (48%) of youth affected by parental incarceration same group had experienced abuse or violence while homeless, and nearly two-thirds (63%) had suffered abuse or neglect as a child. Figure 20 below shows more detail.

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## 20. Youth exposure to violence or abuse

Situation	Affected by parental incarceration	Not affected by parental incarceration
<b>Have experienced a difficult start in life</b>	82%	71%
<b>Experienced any abuse or violence while homeless</b>	48%	31%
Sexual for purpose of shelter/clothing/food	21%	11%
Stayed in an abusive situation	33%	24%
Encouraged to make money by dancing, stripping	22%	13%
Attacked or beaten while homeless	25%	16%
<b>Experienced any childhood physical or sexual abuse, or neglect</b>	63%	45%
Have been physically mistreated	52%	31%
Have been sexually mistreated	31%	21%
Have been neglected as a child	37%	21%

### *Health status*

Youth affected by parental incarceration were more likely to have a health condition, significant mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or traumatic brain injury. Three-quarters of youth (73%) reported one of the three conditions, compared to 62 percent of youth who were not affected by parental incarceration. Particularly noteworthy is that 44 percent of youth affected by parental incarceration reported having a head injury, compared to 27 percent of the other group.

Youth affected by parental incarceration were also more likely to report needing to see a health professional about a health problem (31% vs. 20%) or receiving care in the ER that lead to a hospital admission (32% vs. 22%).

### *Education, employment, and income*

Youth affected by parental incarceration were more likely than other homeless youth to report issues related to education. This includes:

- Problems with suspensions and expulsions in the last year (31% vs. 16%)
- Poor and failing grades in the last year (42% vs. 28%)
- Had an IEP or received Special Education services while in school (46% vs. 36%)

They also averaged less monthly income (\$382 vs. \$402) and, of those employed, they were less likely to have been employed for at least three months (42% vs. 58%). However, those not employed had been unemployed for less time (306 days vs. 332 days).

## Youth who grew up in the suburbs

Homelessness among youth is not exclusive to urban and rural locations. Of the homeless youth interviewed for the study, 14 percent (102 youth) said they grew up in a suburb of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The findings in this section compare results for youth who grew up in the suburbs to results for youth who grew up in greater Minnesota or the cities of St. Paul or Minneapolis (610 youth).

### *Characteristics*

Sixty percent of homeless youth who grew up in the suburbs were female and 40 percent were male. More youth who grew up in the suburbs were white, compared to those who did not grow up in a suburb (41% vs. 28%).

### *Experience with homelessness*

Compared to youth who did not grow up in a suburb, youth who grew up in the suburbs were less likely to be staying in an emergency shelter (9% vs. 22%) and more likely to be contacted through outreach (66% vs. 49%) during the survey. They were also more likely to be doubled-up (64% vs. 52%). Youth who grew up in the suburbs were less likely to report ever living in an emergency shelter (49% vs. 59%).

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**Eight out of 10 homeless youth (84%) report that they have regular contact with a trusted adult.**

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While homeless, youth who grew up in the suburbs were more likely than youth who did not grow up in the suburbs to have received the following assistance:

- Money or public benefits (35% vs. 22%)
- Food shelves (45% vs. 30%)
- Outreach services (34% vs. 24%)
- Contact with an adult they trusted (93% vs. 83%)

### ***Exposure to hardship and trauma***

Youth who grew up in the suburbs were more likely than youth who did not grow up in the suburbs to report staying in an abusive relationship because they had no place to go (38% vs. 29%), but less likely to have experienced other adverse experiences, including:

- Physical or sexual mistreatment (44% vs. 53%)
- Parental incarceration (28% vs. 39%)
- Held in juvenile detention (23% vs. 33%)

### ***Health and mental health status***

Sixty-two percent of youth who grew up in the suburbs said they had been diagnosed with a significant mental illness, compared to just half of youth who did not grow up in the suburbs (50%).



# Addressing homelessness

## What’s an affordable rent

A rule of thumb for housing affordability, particularly for lower-income households, is that housing should cost no more than 30% of monthly income. Housing that costs 50% or more of monthly income is considered a severe housing cost burden.

At the time of the study, “fair market rent” (an amount, determined annually by the federal government, that makes 40 to 50 percent of local apartments available to a renter) was \$745 per month for a one-bedroom apartment in the Twin Cities metro area, and averaged \$531 per month in the other 80 counties of greater Minnesota.

## Housing affordability

Housing affordability is the balance between the cost of housing and the income available to pay for it. Survey results show that youth experiencing homelessness face serious challenges on both sides of this equation (Figure 21).

The three most common barriers to housing cited by youth:

- Lack of a job or income (42%)
- No housing they could afford (29%)
- No local rental history (12%)

On the income side, 57 percent of homeless youth report that the amount they would be able to pay for rent is \$200 or less per month. While 61 percent reported that an efficiency apartment or SRO would meet their needs, the amount they can afford is still well below the fair market rent anywhere in the state. Rent is considered affordable if it is no more than 30 percent of income; the median monthly income among youth is \$250 and more than one-quarter (28%) said they have no money available for rent.

### 21. Fair market rent versus income, in the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota

	Fair market rent (FMR) for a 1-bedroom apartment	Monthly income at which FMR would be affordable	Median monthly income, homeless youth
Twin Cities metro	\$745	\$2,483	\$300
Greater Minnesota	\$531	\$1,770	\$203

More than one-third (35%) of youth said they were on a waiting list for Section 8 housing. However, 21 percent reported they could not get on a waiting list because it was closed (23% of young adults and 10% of minors).

Employment alone does not solve the affordability dilemma because only 8 percent of youth are employed full time, and most employed youth (78%) earn less than \$10 per hour.

### ***Barriers to regaining stable housing***

Once someone has lost their regular housing, they often face a new set of barriers in their efforts to regain stable housing. Even under the best of circumstances, age is the most significant barrier for homeless youth. They have not built credit histories, and landlords may hesitate to rent to youth (even those over the age of majority).

To supplement what survey respondents themselves see as their housing barriers, information elsewhere in the survey offers other possible housing barriers facing homeless youth.

- 73% have been homeless before their current episode
- 69% are unemployed
- 57% could not afford to pay \$200 or more for rent
- 52% have a serious mental illness
- 42% have been homeless for at least a year
- 38% have a criminal history

Virtually all youth surveyed (97%) report at least one of these barriers.

### **Some issues to consider**

After a sharp increase between 2006 and 2009, the number of homeless youth has leveled off, but their situations are more troubling than ever. Youth on their own are particularly vulnerable because of their histories of trauma and abuse. Youth are often turned away from shelters; many must sleep in adult shelters, outside, or move from couch to couch.

Homeless youth also face serious challenges such as chronic physical and mental health issues. These challenges, coupled with the lack of affordable housing – especially for this age group which may have no rental history and a difficult time finding a steady job – pose ongoing and serious threats to homeless youth’s ability to obtain housing. The factors contributing to youth homelessness are complex, and no simple answers exist. Action is needed that addresses the pervasive issue of insufficient affordable housing and also provides youth with supportive services that consider their unique circumstances and developmental needs.