

Youth and young adults on their own

Wilder Research

Many homeless young people come from troubled backgrounds and face multiple challenges including mental health issues (49%) and parental neglect (34%). About half have been physically or sexually mistreated, and one-third said they had considered suicide.



About the study

Since 1991, Wilder has conducted a statewide homelessness survey every three years to better understand the causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness, and to promote efforts toward permanent, safe housing for all Minnesotans.

Young people on their own are some of the least visible and most 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.

Thanks to extensive efforts of outreach workers, more youth and young adults

were interviewed in 2006 than in any previous study. As a result, this study provides the most comprehensive picture to date of homeless young people in Minnesota.

Key findings

More youth and young adults are homeless and not in shelters

On any given night, an estimated 550 to 650 Minnesota youth under age 18 and an estimated 700 to 1,650 young adults (age 18-21) are homeless and on their own. Results from the outreach portion of the study, coupled with the number of youth who reported they were turned away from shelters, suggest more youth are on the street, at least part of the time, than in 2003. About two-thirds of homeless young people had been homeless before.

What do we mean by homeless?

Any adult whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised, publicly- or privately-operated temporary living accommodation, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and battered women's shelters; or whose nighttime residence is not meant for human habitation, such as under bridges or in cars. This is based on a definition by the U.S. Congress.

By law, this definition is expanded for youth age 17 or younger to include those who stay temporarily in other people's homes, with or without their parents, because they have nowhere else to live.

In addition, to fit with recent changes in legislation, when describing young people on their own, we group homeless persons age 21 and younger in three ways:

- **YOUTH**—age 17 and under and not with their parents
- **YOUNG ADULTS**—age 18 through 21
- **YOUNG PEOPLE**—combines both groups to describe all homeless persons ages 21 and under and on their own.

More youth in school

The percentage of homeless youth on their own age 17 and younger enrolled in school has climbed steadily, rising from 52 percent in 1994 to 89 percent in 2006.

Most homeless youth and young adults are long-term residents of Minnesota

Ninety percent of homeless youth and 83 percent of homeless young adults reported their last permanent housing was in Minnesota, and most (84% youth and 67% young adults) who were interviewed had lived in Minnesota for all or most of their lives.

Racial disparities persist

Homeless youth are more likely than the youth population as a whole to be persons of color. Sixty-six percent of homeless youth are persons of color, compared to only 16 percent of Minnesota's overall youth population. Sixty-four percent of young adults are people of color.

High incidence of mental health issues and history of abuse

Homeless young people continue to experience high rates of mental health issues. About half report significant mental health issues, and a third have considered suicide. About half have been physically or sexually mistreated, and about one in three have experienced parental neglect.

Who are the homeless young people?

The numbers

Children with their parents, youth, and young adults make up about half of the people who are homeless in Minnesota. On any given night, an estimated 550 to 650 homeless youth age 11 through 17 are on their own, with an additional 700 to 1,650 young adults age 18 through 21 estimated to be homeless. Over the course of a year, between 12,300 and 22,000 Minnesota youth and between 4,900 and 8,000 young adults experience at least one episode of homelessness.

Age and gender

The average age for youth on their own was 16 (19 for young adults). The youngest person interviewed in 2006 was age 11. Approximately 6 out of 10 homeless youth and young adults are female. This compares to 47 percent in the overall homeless population. National studies show that females are more likely to seek shelter and services.

Sexual orientation

Ninety-one percent of homeless youth and 86 percent of homeless young adults identified themselves as heterosexual; 6 percent of homeless youth (7% young adults) as bisexual, 2 percent homeless youth (5% young adults) as gay or lesbian, and 1 percent homeless youth (2% young adults) were unsure of their sexual orientation.

Young people as parents

Overall, 13 percent of homeless youth (19% of females) had children of their own compared to 16 percent in 2003 and 8 percent in 2000. Thirty-eight percent of young adults (49% of females) had children of their own. Most of these young parents had their children with them on the day of the survey.

Youth of color

The number of homeless youth of color is disproportionately high compared to the number of people of color in the overall Minnesota youth population. In this study, about two-thirds (66%) of homeless youth are Black, American Indian, Asian, or of mixed race, compared to just 16 percent of all Minnesota youth. In the metro area, youth of color made up 80 percent of the homeless youth population; in greater Minnesota, youth of color made

up 53 percent of the homeless youth population. Twelve percent of homeless youth are Hispanic (any race).

Education

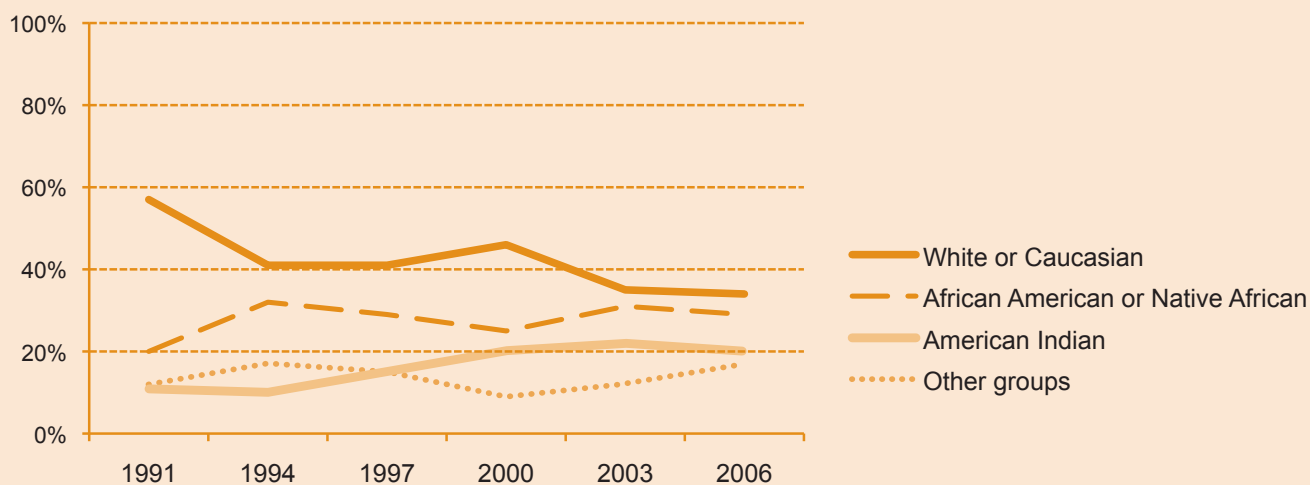
A growing number of homeless youth are enrolled in school, rising from 52 percent in 1994, to 73 percent in 1997 and 2000, to 84 percent in 2003 and to 88 percent in 2006. Thirty-five percent of homeless youth reported receiving special education services.

Sixty-one percent reported attending school on the day of the survey. These rates are lower than the rates for children who are with their homeless parents (90% of parents surveyed said that all of their children attended school that day). The main reasons youth report they did not attend school include lack of motivation, location or transportation issues, and illness.

Of those homeless youth who attended school during the previous school year (2005-2006):

- 55 percent stayed in the same school all year (47% in 2003)
- 22 percent attended two schools (27% in 2003)
- 19 percent attended three schools (17% in 2003)
- 5 percent attended 4 or more schools (9% in 2003)

RACE OF UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH 17 AND UNDER



Forty-four percent of homeless young adults had completed high school or passed their GED, and 68 percent had attended school or GED classes in the previous school year. Forty-two percent of homeless young adults received special education services, and 55 percent of homeless young adults attended a program that offers training in life skills or independent living skills.

Employment and income

Over half (52%) of homeless youth had never been employed. Fifteen percent of homeless youth were currently employed, with 83 percent earning less than \$8.00 an hour. The other primary source for income was parents, relatives, or friends. The median total monthly income was \$88 for males and \$200 for females.

Only about one-quarter (27%) of homeless young adults had never been employed. Thirty-seven percent were currently employed (13 percent full-time), with 52 percent earning less than \$8.00 per hour. Other primary sources of income included MFIP and General Assistance. The median total monthly income was \$203 for males and \$416 for females.

Tough circumstances

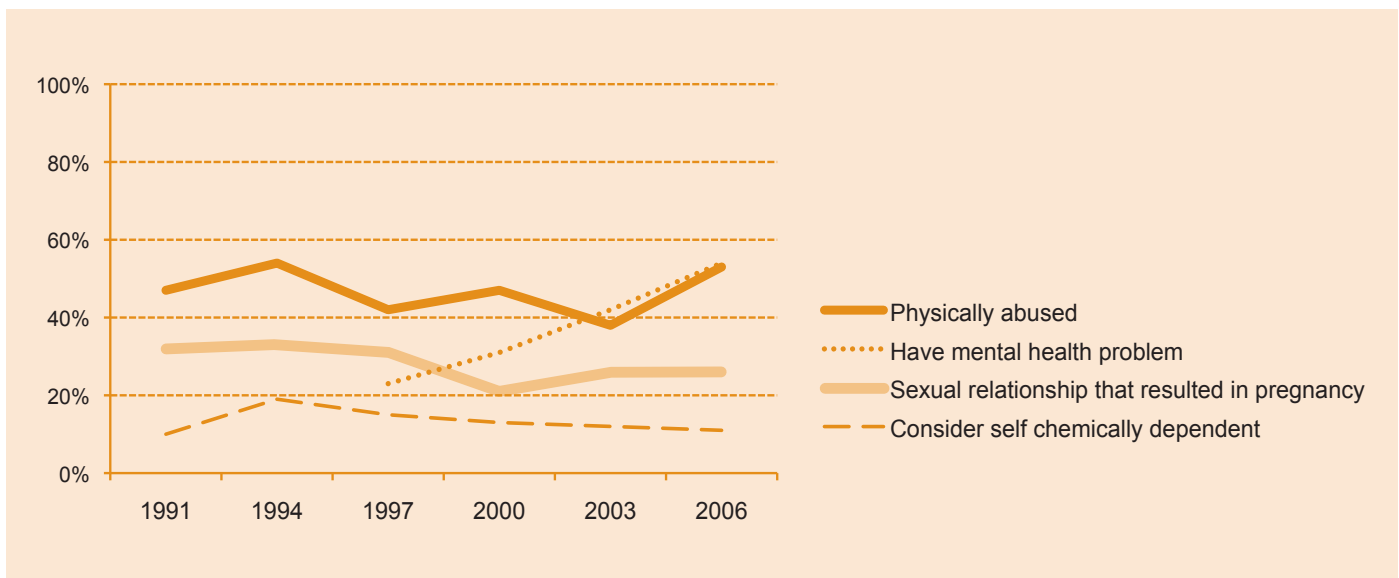
Young people on their own have often had difficult starts in life and have experienced serious upheaval before reaching adulthood. They are troubled by conflict with parents, abusive relationships, turbulent housing, and mental health problems.

Abuse and exposure to violence

Over half of homeless youth (54%) and homeless young adults (51%) had been physically abused or sexually abused. Over one-third of homeless youth (35%) and young adults (34%) reported their parents neglected to provide food, shelter, or medical care, or consistently ignored their physical or emotional needs.

About one-third of female homeless youth (33%) and young adults (37%) reported they had been assaulted or threatened with violence in a relationship in the past year. Seventeen percent of homeless male youth and 23 percent of homeless male young adults reported assault or the threat of violence in a relationship in the past year. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of homeless youth and one-third (32%) of homeless young adults said they stayed in an abusive situation because they had no other housing options.

SELECTED LIFE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS YOUTH 17 AND UNDER



Homeless young people had high rates (70%) of previous out-of-home placements. Nearly two-thirds of homeless youth (65%) and young adults (60%) experienced some type of social service or treatment placement, while 34 percent of homeless youth and 45 percent of homeless young adults spent time in some type of correctional facility.

Experiences of homelessness

Over two-thirds of youth and young adults (71%) interviewed in 2006 had been homeless before. Almost one-third slept outside at least one night in October (29%), and more than one-half were “doubled up” at least one night in October (51%). Three in 10 (30%) had stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options.

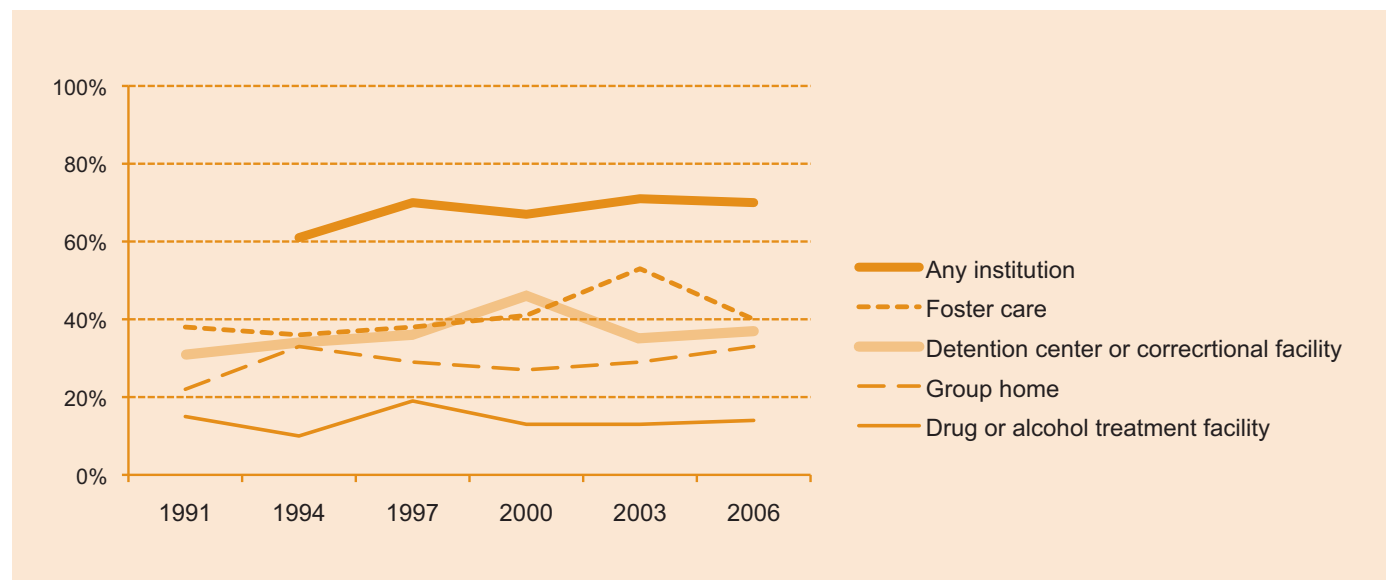
Twenty-two percent of youth and 34 percent of young adults had no regular place to live for more than a year. One-third of youth (33%) and 13 percent of young adults had been homeless for less than a month. However, because the study takes place on a single day, people who are homeless for longer periods of time have a greater chance of being interviewed compared to people who are homeless for only a short time so these figures under-represent the number of people who are homeless for short periods.

Mental health, substance use and chemical dependency

Mental health issues and chemical dependency are prevalent among homeless young people.

- 54 percent of youth and 47 percent of young adults reported some type of mental health problem
- 33 percent of homeless youth (38% of young adults) had been told by a doctor or nurse, within the previous two years, that they had a serious mental health problem
- 24 percent of homeless youth (28% of young adults) reported needing to see a health professional about a current mental health problem
- 18 percent of homeless youth (15% of young adults) had been told they had alcohol abuse disorder or drug abuse disorder
- 13 percent of homeless youth (9% of young adults) reported a dual diagnosis, a severe or persistent mental illness in addition to an alcohol or drug abuse disorder
- 49 percent of homeless youth (41% of young adults) received outpatient care because of mental health issues

HISTORY OF PLACEMENTS AMONG HOMELESS YOUTH 17 AND UNDER



Cassandra's story

Seventeen-year-old Cassandra appears to be a typical teenager. She attends technical school, working towards a graphic arts certificate. But, in fact, Cassandra's teen years have been anything but typical. For the past year, Cassandra has been homeless and couch-hopping from friend to friend. At age 15 she was sent to foster care after years of being physically and sexually mistreated in her home. Since then she has lived in an emergency shelter and a battered women's shelter. She has been approached to make money by dancing, stripping, or other work in the sex industry.

But over the past year, Cassandra has become hopeful for her future. She is experiencing success in her school program, and with the help of an outreach worker, a social worker, a shelter worker and friends, will move into her own apartment soon.

Cassandra reports that she currently has an adult in her life that she trusts who is helping her set goals and work towards a more stable life.

(Name and details changed to protect privacy.)

Physical health

Over one-fifth (21%) of homeless youth and more than a quarter (29%) of young adults reported needing to see a doctor about a physical health problem. About one-third of homeless youth (32%) and young adults (35%) encountered barriers to getting needed care, most frequently due to lack of insurance or money. Still, about three-quarters (76%) of homeless youth and six out of ten (61%) young adults had some type of medical coverage in the previous month.

In addition, over one-fourth (26%) of homeless youth and nearly half (49%) of homeless young adults reported having had sexual relationships that resulted in pregnancy.

Five percent of homeless youth and 4 percent of homeless young adults reported they had had a sexually transmitted disease (other than HIV/AIDS) within the previous 12 months. Less than one percent of homeless young people reported testing positive for HIV/AIDS.

Comparisons to others

Overall, homeless youth report more difficult life experiences than other Minnesota youth. Compared to the general population, homeless youth are:

- Five times more likely to have been treated for alcohol or drug problems, and less likely to report current use of alcohol
- Five times more likely to use cigarettes or other tobacco
- Three times more likely to have been hit by a date or intimate partner
- Twice as likely for males and four times more likely for females to have been sexually abused
- Six times more likely for males and four times more likely for females to have been sexually abused

Thirty-five percent of homeless female youth versus 1 percent of the general Minnesota student population had ever been pregnant.

Addressing homelessness

The purpose of this report is to bring about effective action on the problem of youth homelessness by spelling out some of the realities facing homeless youth and young adults. In large part, the volunteer interviewers who made this study possible represent the front line of services for these young people. They report that their efforts are often hampered by inadequate resources, too few housing options for minors, and limited public understanding about the origins and seriousness of youth homelessness in Minnesota.

Barriers to finding housing

The most common reasons homeless youth cited for having difficulty in getting or keeping housing included lack of a job or income (32%), their age (29%), no housing they could afford (27%), no local rental history (16%), and alcohol or chemical use by the youth or someone in the household (16%). The most common reasons young adults cited for difficulty getting or keeping housing were lack of a job or income (55%), lack of housing they could afford (51%), lack of local rental history (29%), their age (28%), the cost of application fees (24%), and credit problems (22%).

Addressing current housing needs

Close to half of homeless youth (45%) reported that they could not afford to pay any amount for rent, and about one-quarter (24%) reported they could pay between \$1 and \$200 for rent and utilities. Most homeless youth (84%) needed only a one-bedroom or a studio apartment; 16 percent reported they needed two or more bedrooms.

Not surprising, more young adults than youth reported they could pay rent. Just over one-fifth (22%) said they could not afford to pay any amount for rent, and about another quarter (26%) reported they could pay between

\$1 and \$200 for rent and utilities. Two-thirds of homeless young adults (66%) needed only a one-bedroom or a studio apartment, and one-third (34%) needed two or more bedrooms.

Eleven percent of the youth were on a waiting list for Section 8 housing. Of those on a waiting list, the average wait had been two months. One-third (33%) of homeless young adults were on a waiting list for Section 8 housing. Of those on a waiting list, the average wait had been seven months.

Helpful services

Housing alone is typically not adequate to solve the problems facing these young people. Backgrounds of abuse, neglect, and other forms of trauma mean that a combination of services are often required to help restore balance and hope and a stable starting point for recovery.

Many need skills in independent living – such as how to keep a checking account, how to do laundry, and how to prepare low-cost meals. Others need the support of a caring adult – having someone they can call in a crisis. Twenty percent of the young people surveyed report that there is no trusted adult in their lives.

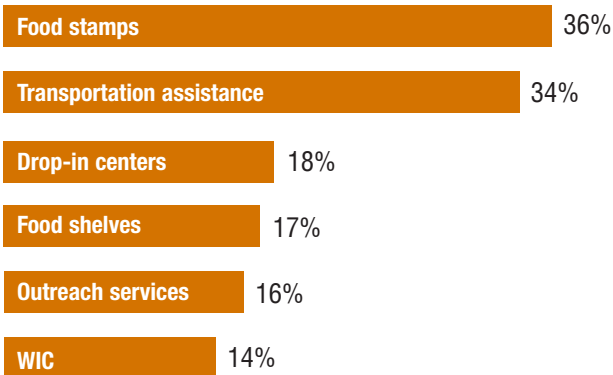
What young people say led to homelessness

In addition to backgrounds of trauma and abuse that are known to increase the likelihood of homelessness, young people ages 20 and younger were asked to identify from a list of factors what contributed to their current lack of housing. The adjacent figure shows that there are multiple reasons that often relate to troubled relationships.

	Part of the cause	
	or a main cause	A main cause
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	63%	32%
Someone in home they couldn't stand to be around	62%	30%
Told to leave or locked out	55%	29%
Not willing to live by parents' rules	50%	19%
Delinquent activities by the youth	38%	14%
Neglect or parents not attending to basic needs	34%	13%
Parents' use of drugs or alcohol	33%	11%
Didn't feel safe because of violence in the house	29%	14%
Home was too small for everyone to live there	25%	11%
Youth's own drug or alcohol use	25%	10%
Physical and sexual abuse	24%	14%

Homeless young people used many different services in the month prior to the survey. Of homeless young people, 50 percent used transportation services, 39 percent used Food Stamps, 30 percent used food shelves, 28 percent used outreach services, 27 percent used drop-in centers, and 21 percent used a free medical clinic.

Among homeless young people who received services, the following services helped them most:



Outside the Twin Cities area

About 36 percent of homeless young adults and 54 percent of homeless youth were interviewed outside the Twin Cities metro area. Compared to the Twin Cities area, a higher percentage of homeless youth in greater Minnesota are White (47%) or American Indian (28%). This is also true of homeless young adults, most of whom are White (60%) or American Indian (19%). In contrast to this, homeless young adults in the Twin Cities area are mostly African American (51%) or White (25%).

Greater Minnesota homeless **youth** are more likely:

- To have been evicted from public housing (19% vs. 9%)
- To have parents as their main source of income (33% vs. 15%)
- To have been told they have a chemical dependency problem (22% vs. 13%)
- To have attended school on the day of the survey (84% vs. 63%)



Minnesota's definition of "long-term homeless"

"Long-term homeless" includes those who are homeless for one year or more or those who have been homeless four or more times in the last three years.

Nearly four in ten homeless youth (39%) and 49 percent of young adults surveyed met Minnesota's "long-term homeless" criteria.

In contrast, Twin Cities area homeless **youth** were more likely than those in greater Minnesota:

- To have lived in a group home (46% vs. 21%)
- To have attended a program that offered life skills training (50% vs. 35%)
- To have a chronic health condition (34% vs. 24%) or asthma (33% vs. 19%)
- To have been pregnant or made someone pregnant (33% vs. 21%)
- To have used a free medical clinic in October (34% vs. 22%)
- To have used transportation assistance (64% vs. 24%)
- To have used drop-in centers (37% vs. 14%)
- To have used help getting public benefits (23% vs. 8%)
- To have used outreach services (30% vs. 17%)
- To have been in an abusive relationship in the last year (34% vs. 20%)

Greater Minnesota homeless **young adults** were more likely:

- To have left home because of their parents' use of drugs or alcohol (37% vs. 26%)
- To think that they will ever live with their parents again (21% vs. 13%)
- To have spent at least one month in a county jail or workhouse (26% vs. 17%)
- To have received special education services while in school (52% vs. 36%)
- To report a need to see a mental health professional (35% vs. 26%)
- To have received outpatient care for nervousness, depression, or mental health problems (52% vs. 36%)
- To have used cigarettes in the previous month (78% vs. 69%)
- To have been treated in an outpatient alcohol or drug treatment program (26% vs. 16%)
- To have an adult in their life with whom they have regular contact (87% vs. 75%)

In contrast, Twin Cities area homeless **young adults** were more likely than those in greater Minnesota:

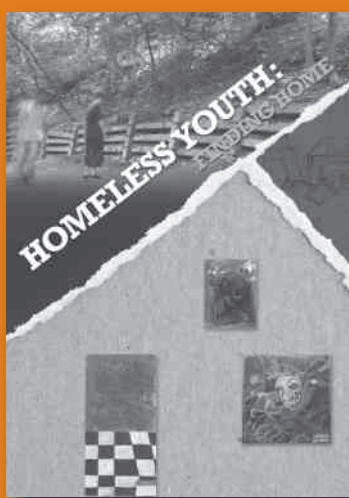
- To have been told to leave or were locked out (62% vs. 51%)
- To have been homeless for a year or more (39% vs. 23%)
- To be currently enrolled in an educational program (48% vs. 37%)
- To use transportation assistance in October (61% vs. 37%)
- To use drop-in centers in October (36% vs. 14%)
- To have used alcohol (36% vs. 25%) or marijuana (34% vs. 18%)

Jack's story

Jack is a nineteen-year-old American Indian and the father of a one-year-old son. During the past year, he moved in with his girlfriend's parents, but that didn't work out. He, his girlfriend, and their son are now living temporarily with a couple of Jack's friends. Unable to find a job, he is pawning some of his things so they can get by. When asked why he can't find work, Jack says most of the jobs he's looked for want a high-school graduate, and he didn't finish school. He also says he can't get to some interviews because he doesn't have a car or a ride. He doesn't have regular daycare for his son. Jack hasn't seen his family for a few years, and doesn't have any other adults he trusts. He doesn't know where they will move next, but knows they need to find somewhere soon.

(Name and details changed to protect privacy.)

New documentary Homeless Youth: Finding Home



In this half-hour documentary, six young adults share personal stories of being homeless as teens. Their stories reveal lives of instability, abuse, and neglect, as well as the challenges of “couch-hopping,” and living on the streets. But they also show hope and strong determination to get their lives back on track.

Homeless Youth: Finding Home, a co-production of Wilder Foundation and *tpt* MN, is funded by:
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
The McKnight Foundation
The Minneapolis Foundation
Target

Learn more about homelessness

To get a more in-depth look at youth homelessness read the full report, *Overview of youth and young adult homelessness in Minnesota*. You will find additional trends, findings, and study methodology. There are also data tables comparing greater Minnesota versus Twin Cities area youth and young adults as well as those in shelters to those not in shelters.

Other Wilder Research publications on homelessness include:

Overview of homelessness in Minnesota 2006

Drawn from interviews with more than 3,700 homeless people, this report describes some of the causes, effects and circumstances surrounding homelessness. Includes sections on youth, long-term homeless adults, veterans, older adults, ex-offenders, and homeless people not in shelters.

Homeless adults and their children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota 2006

This study gives a snapshot of the people experiencing homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota on a single day in October 2006.

Homeless veterans in Minnesota 2006

On any given night in Minnesota, some 625 military veterans are homeless. Ninety-five percent are male. This report provides an in-depth look at who they are and the challenges they face.

Homeless and near-homeless people on northern Minnesota Indian reservations, 2006 study

This is the first in-depth study of homelessness on northern Minnesota Indian reservations. It was conducted in conjunction with Wilder Research's statewide study in the fall of 2006 and includes information about both homeless people and those who are "doubled up" in temporary arrangements.

Minnesota business and homelessness: Impacts and solutions

This report demonstrates why businesses should invest in solutions to homelessness and gives examples of innovative and successful business responses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Our new documentary, these publications, and additional research and resources on the issue of homelessness can be found at
<http://www.wilder.org/homelessness.0.html>



Not a survey of all homeless youth and young adults

On October 26, 2006, trained volunteers conducted interviews throughout Minnesota with 151 unaccompanied homeless youth and 455 homeless young adults. This sample represents only a portion of all youth and young adults who were homeless in Minnesota on that day. About 20 more youth under 18 were interviewed in 2006 than in the 2003 study, however, shelter staff indicate that there have been losses in youth shelter capacity and an increase in turn-aways when shelters were full. Because shelter services are less available for youth than for adults, they are more likely to be sleeping in temporary arrangements with friends and less likely to be found in a one-night survey.

Study funders:

- Family Housing Fund
- Greater Minnesota Housing Fund
- Hennepin County
- Metropolitan Council
- Minnesota Department of Corrections
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
- Minnesota Housing
- Veterans Home Board
- Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

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Wilder Research
451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, MN 55104

651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org

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Homeless in Minnesota 2006:

At a glance

**Youth and young adults on
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