

Preface

“Daniel” is a 17-year-old American Indian youth who spent his early years in California, but moved to Minnesota when he was 12. Currently, he is couch-hopping – moving around from friend to friend to have a place to sleep. Daniel has been without a regular place to live for four months. It has been more than a year since he last had contact with his family. He says that he was physically mistreated and his parents neglected to provide for his basic needs at times. Daniel has lived in a lot of different places away from his family including a foster home, a group home, and a halfway house. He has lived in an emergency shelter and a battered women’s shelter with his family, and his parents are currently homeless. In fact, Daniel and his family have experienced homelessness several times. Within the past year, Daniel left a group home, but he did not have a place to live when he left it. Daniel has recently earned his GED, and has taken some classes to learn the construction trade. In the last month, Daniel has used drop-in centers and job training services. Daniel is currently working, but he does not have a steady job. Daniel does not think he will be with his family again. He does not think he can return home – not only because of substance abuse by his parents and criminal activity in the household, but also because of his own behavior.

This report on homelessness describes a population of youth and young adults who are troubled by conflict with parents, abusive relationships, and for some, a simple desire for freedom from authority. Behind the numbers, however, are the harsh life experiences of “Daniel” and more than 400 other young people. This report is dedicated to them.

In addition to the nearly 3,000 children who experienced homelessness in the company of their parents in Minnesota on a single night in October 2003 – and much less visible to most Minnesotans – were 500 to 600 homeless youth age 8 to 17 who were on their own.

Wilder Research estimates that between 12,000 and 22,000 Minnesota youth under 18 experienced at least one episode of homelessness on their own (not with their parents) during 2003. The full report *Homeless Youth in Minnesota 2003* describes in detail how we developed this estimate and why we think it is a conservative estimate.

Perhaps most distressing in this year’s report is the fact that many homeless youth and young adults have been in the child welfare system and are now experiencing homelessness. Seven out of 10 homeless youth previously lived in a foster home, group home, or other residential facility. One-quarter have lived in a foster home within the last two years. Nearly half have been abused – either physically or sexually. Four in 10 have serious mental health problems. Over one-third have been homeless before.

These youth have had a difficult start in life and have experienced serious upheaval before reaching adulthood. Many homeless youth need extra care because of abuse and victimization, mental health problems, delinquent behavior, difficulty with school, and substance abuse. Previous studies have taught us that housing instability does the most

harm to those with more than one of the above problems.¹ However, for many youth and young adults, housing alone will not solve their problems. 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.

National research by the Casey Family Foundation found that 42 percent of Casey’s foster care alumni (adults who had been in foster care as children) had been homeless at one time or another. Twenty-two percent were homeless for at least one night within the first year after they were officially discharged from foster care. The average age for first-time homelessness among these former foster children was 18.²

Although there are differences between homeless youth and homeless young adults – for one thing, youth under 18 have legal barriers to living independently – data from Wilder’s interviews support the observations of people who work with both homeless youth and homeless young adults that the two groups have many similar characteristics and needs. Throughout this year’s report you will find comparisons between these two age groups.

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 youth. 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. At a time of scarce resources to assist vulnerable populations, it is necessary to speak knowledgeably and frankly about what it will take to meet the needs of young people who are already homeless, as well as to prevent more youth from entering this situation in the future.

¹ Kids Mobility Project. (1998, March). *A report from the Kids Mobility Project*. Minneapolis: Author.

² Casey Research Services. (1993, March). *Assessing the effects of foster care: early results from the Casey national Alumni Study*. Seattle: Casey Family Services. Retrieved December 2, 2004, from: www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/NationalAlumniStudy.htm.

Summary

How many youth are homeless?

This study is designed to describe characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth (age 8 to 17) and young adults (age 18 to 20) in Minnesota through personal interviews. **The study is not designed to provide a definitive count of homeless youth and young adults.** Several major complicating factors make it difficult to estimate the number of homeless young people.

First, under federal law, youth homelessness includes youth who are doubled-up on a temporary basis with friends. However, these youth are substantially under-represented in this study, which relies on shelters and agency staff to identify homeless youth. Second, the number of homeless young people found in this point-in-time study is partly dependent on shelter capacity at the time of the study. Between 2000 and 2003, the total number of beds available in youth shelters in Minnesota declined. At the same time, homeless youth are less likely than adults to stay in shelters, more often staying temporarily with friends or in places not intended for habitation. School counselors and social workers often know of homeless youth in their schools, but seldom know where they spend the night and how frequently they move around. Compared to homeless adults and families, homeless youth have fewer shelters available and fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs. Further complicating the picture is the fact that many agencies that serve homeless youth also serve a significant number of young adults age 18 to 20.

Despite these difficulties, it is important to arrive at the best possible estimate of the extent of homelessness among young people in Minnesota.

Youth homeless on any given night: 500 to 600 homeless youth age 8 to 17 were on their own, in addition to the nearly 3,000 children who experienced homelessness in the company of their parents in Minnesota on a single night in October 2003.

Youth homeless over the course of a year: Wilder Research estimates that between 12,600 and 22,500 Minnesota youth under 18 experienced at least one episode of homelessness on their own (not with their parents) during 2003.

Young adults homeless on any given night: between 500 and 1,200 young adults were homeless on a single night in October 2003.

Young adults homeless over the course of a year: Wilder Research estimates that 3,720 to 6,000 young adults age 18-20 experienced homelessness during 2003.

Age and gender

Homelessness is skewed toward the young. A striking 46 percent of all persons staying in homeless shelters or temporary housing on October 23, 2003, were under age 21. This includes 2,724 children under 18 who were with their parents, 141 youth under 18 who were on their own, and 325 young adults age 18-20.

Looking at youth on their own (not with parents), the average age is 16. The youngest in 2003 was 8 years old. More than 6 out of 10 (64%) of homeless youth are girls. For the young adults, 65 percent are female, while in the overall homeless adult population 48 percent are female.

Youth of color

About two-thirds of homeless youth on their own are Black, American Indian, Asian, or multiracial (65%). Among homeless young adults, 60 percent are people of color. The number of homeless young people of color is disproportionately high compared to their prevalence in the general population of Minnesota youth, of which only 15 percent are people of color.

Race	Homeless		All Minnesota youth age 8-17 (Census 2000)
	Youth under 18 (n=129)	Young adults (n=302)	
White	35%	40%	85%
Black	31%	35%	5%
American Indian	22%	10%	2%
Asian	1%	2%	4%
Multiracial or other	11%	12%	4%
Hispanic (any race)	9%	9%	3%

Education

A growing percentage 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. One-third of homeless youth report receiving special education services (33%). Nine youth (7%) have graduated or received a GED.

Nearly two-thirds of homeless youth surveyed attended school the day of the survey (64% of those who had not yet graduated or received their GED). These rates are lower than the rates for children who are with their homeless parents (88% of parents surveyed said that all of their children attended school that day). The need to deal with other problems is the main reason youth report for not being in school.

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Of those who had attended school during the previous school year (2002-2003):

- 47 percent had stayed in the same school all year
- 27 percent had attended two schools
- 17 percent had attended three schools
- 9 percent had attended 4 or more schools

One youth had attended 11 different schools during the last year.

Among homeless young adults in 2003, 25 percent were currently enrolled in an educational program, down from 37 percent in 2000. Of those who were enrolled, 59 percent attended on the day of the survey.

Employment and income

Sixteen percent of homeless youth received income from steady employment during the month prior to the survey. This is down from 25 percent in the 2000 survey. The other primary source of income was money received from parents, other relatives, or friends.

On the day of the survey, 19 percent of homeless youth were employed (compared to 27% in 2000). More than half of the youth who were employed (56%) were working 20 hours or more per week.

For homeless young adults, 39 percent had a job (the same percentage as in 2000). Of these, 78 percent were working 20 hours or more per week and 22 percent had a full-time job. Thirty-four percent had income from steady employment – up slightly from 26 percent in 2000.

History of abuse

Nearly one out of two homeless youth has been physically or sexually mistreated (46%); nearly 4 out of 10 have been physically abused (38%), and nearly 3 out of 10 have been sexually abused (28% overall; 31% of girls and 22% of boys).

History of placements

Seven out of 10 homeless youth have experienced an out-of-home placement (71%). Data from 2003 show a marked increase in the proportion of homeless youth who have been in foster care. The percentage remained relatively consistent between 1991 and 2000 (36%-41%), but increased to 53 percent in 2003. Twenty percent of youth have lived in a facility for persons with emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems. Twenty-nine percent have lived in a group home. One-third of homeless youth have spent more than a week in a juvenile corrections facility (34%).

One-third of homeless youth have run away from placement at some time in their lives.

History of homelessness

In 2003, over one-third of homeless youth had been homeless before (38%). Twenty-three percent had slept outside at least one night in October 2003. Over one-third of homeless youth had a relative who also did not have housing (38%). One out of eight homeless youth had stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options.

Most homeless youth (92%) lived in Minnesota in their last regular or permanent housing, primarily with parents (56%).

Mental health, substance use, and chemical dependency

Four out of 10 homeless youth report some type of significant mental health problem (42%). Twenty-three percent of homeless youth and 29 percent of homeless young adults report needing to see a health professional about a mental health problem. One-third of homeless youth have considered suicide (34%); 23 percent had attempted suicide.

Seventeen percent of homeless youth and 25 percent of young adults report needing to see a doctor about a physical health problem. Over one-third of homeless youth (36%) and 29 percent of young adults report at least one chronic health condition (asthma, other lung problems, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, diabetes, hepatitis, or HIV/AIDS).

Youth and young adults were asked about their substance use in the week prior to the survey. Over half (52%) smoked cigarettes, one-fifth (20%) used marijuana, 15 percent used alcohol, 3 percent used crack cocaine, and 3 percent used methamphetamines. For young adults (age 18-20), 68 percent smoked cigarettes, one-fifth (20%) used alcohol, one-fifth (19%) used marijuana, and 2 percent (each) used methamphetamines, crack cocaine, other cocaine, inhalants, and “other” illegal drugs. Older youth (age 15-17) report very similar rates of chemical use as compared to young adults (age 18-20). Unaccompanied youth under the age of 15 report significantly less.

Sixteen percent of the 15 to 17 year olds and 19 percent of the 18 to 20 years olds consider themselves an alcoholic or chemically dependent (none of the 8 to 14 year olds consider themselves so). Twenty-eight percent of youth and 31 percent of young adults used either alcohol or other drugs during the week prior to the survey.

Pregnancy and parenting

One in six homeless youth have a child of their own. This is up significantly from 2000 (16% in 2003, compared to 8% in 2000). Twenty-nine percent of young adults 18 to 20 have children. Most of these young parents had their children with them on the day of the survey.

Comparison to the general population of Minnesota youth

Overall, homeless youth report more difficult life experiences than youth who are housed. In addition, there is a higher proportion of African American and American Indian youth who are homeless compared to their representation in the general population.

Compared to youth in the general population, homeless youth are:

- Five times more likely to have been treated for alcohol or drug problems, although homeless youth are half as likely to report current use of alcohol
- More than three times more likely to have been hit by a date or intimate partner
- Three times more likely to have been physically abused
- Homeless boys are seven times more likely to have been sexually abused; homeless girls are three times more likely to have been sexually abused
- Three times more likely to use cigarettes or other tobacco
- For girls, about 20 times more likely to have been pregnant; for boys, 10 times more likely to have had a sexual relationship that resulted in a pregnancy

Reasons for not returning home

Homeless youth most often report these things prevent them from living with their parents:

- Conflict or fight with family (63%)
- Youth prefer to make their own decisions (51%)
- At least one adult in the home will not tolerate the youth's presence (39%)
- Alcohol or drug use by parent (24%)
- Danger of emotional abuse (22%)
- Adults in the household do not attend to the youth's basic needs (19%)
- Criminal or drug activity by someone else in the household (19%)
- Youth's substance use or delinquent activity (15%)
- Family does not have housing (15%)
- Not enough space for everyone in the household to live (15%)
- Danger of physical abuse (11%) or sexual abuse (5%)
- Parents will not accept youth's sexual orientation (7%).

On average, homeless youth originally left home around age 14. The main reasons cited for leaving home include: conflict with family (60%), kicked out or told to leave (43%),

and wanted to be on their own (43%). Over half of homeless youth (55%) indicate that if they wanted to return home, they could do so. However, less than half (46%) believe they will live with their families again.

Some things look different in non-metro areas

About half of the youth under 18 and one-third of young adults age 18-20 were interviewed outside of the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metropolitan area. Most homeless youth in greater Minnesota are Caucasian (55%), American Indian (31%), or Hispanic (10%). Homeless youth in the Twin Cities area are mostly African American (56%), Caucasian (16%), American Indian (13%), Hispanic (11%), or multi-racial (10%).

Twin Cities area homeless youth are more likely than those in greater Minnesota:

- To have been physically abused (43% vs. 34%)
- To be employed (24% vs. 14%)
- To feel that they now need to see a dentist about tooth or gum problems (47% vs. 31%)
- Metro boys are more likely to have been abused or neglected (58% vs. 37%), while greater Minnesota girls are more likely to have been abused or neglected (59% vs. 48%)

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In contrast, greater Minnesota homeless youth are more likely:

- To have been homeless less than one month (51% vs. 29%)
- To report that money from parents was their main source of income in October (30% vs. 8%)
- To report prior stays in foster homes, group homes, or other residential facilities (73% vs. 61%) as well as correctional facilities (47% vs. 22%)
- To feel that they now need to see a professional about a mental health problems (30% vs. 17%)
- To consider themselves chemically dependent (18% vs. 5%)
- To report that if they wanted to return home, their parent or guardian would allow them to do so (80% vs. 48%)

Services rated “most helpful” by homeless youth

Out of all services used by youth, those considered most helpful were food stamps (26%), transportation assistance (22%), other social services (19%), medical benefits (18%), and outreach services (18%).

Two thirds of homeless youth have a case manager (67%). Over 8 out of 10 homeless youth have regular contact with a trusted adult (81%).

About the research

On October 23, 2003, trained volunteers conducted interviews throughout Minnesota with 129 homeless youth (age 8 to 17) who were not with their parents and with 302 homeless young adults (age 18 to 20). These interviews were conducted in emergency shelters, battered women’s shelters, and transitional housing programs as well as drop-in centers, hot meal sites, and street locations. The study design and questions were based on similar surveys of homeless youth and adults conducted in Minnesota in 1991, 1994, 1997, and 2000. The purpose of the study is to provide a current description of the characteristics and needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults under 21 years of age.

School counselors and social workers often know of homeless youth in their schools, but seldom know where they spend the night and how frequently they move around. Homeless youth 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 and families, homeless youth have fewer shelters available and fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs.

For these reasons, it is more difficult when surveying homeless youth to be certain that changes from one study to the next reflect actual changes in the entire group rather than

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the sample of youth found on a given night in October. However, the comparisons we can make to the few national studies of homeless youth and young adults give us some measure of confidence that the information presented here is a valid representation of homelessness among youth in our state.