

Key questions

What do we know about the number of homeless youth in Minnesota?

This study is designed to describe the characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults in Minnesota through a personal interview that collects information about past and current circumstances and needs. The study is not designed to provide a definitive count of unaccompanied homeless youth. Counting or estimating the number of homeless youth is complicated by several factors including the following:

- As defined in federal law in the McKinney Vento Act, youth homelessness includes youth who are doubled-up on a temporary basis with friends as well as those who are staying in shelters and places not intended for habitation. This study relies on shelters and agency staff to identify unaccompanied homeless youth and does not systematically gather information from youth who are doubled-up. Other research has shown that doubled-up homeless youth outnumber youth staying in shelters. Therefore, these youth are substantially under-represented in our study.
- The number of unaccompanied homeless youth found in our point-in-time study is partly dependent on shelter capacity for youth at the time of the study. Between 2000 and 2003 the total number of beds available in youth shelters in Minnesota declined considerably.

Given these facts the present study cannot be used for the purpose of developing a *definitive* count of unaccompanied homeless youth in Minnesota.

Estimates on any given night

Due to the difficulties mentioned above in counting the number of homeless youth, estimates must be used as the basis for understanding the extent of homelessness among youth in Minnesota. Our estimate is based on a statewide count of youth unaccompanied by their parents who were staying in shelters, transitional housing, or other temporary housing programs on October 23, 2003. To estimate the number of youth who are temporarily “doubled-up” on any given night, we multiply the number of sheltered youth by 2.7. This method is based on a 1989 U.S. General Accounting Office report which found that there were 2.7 times as many children and youth in doubled-up situations as in emergency shelters.¹

For the 2003 study period, we estimate there are between 500 and 600 homeless youth on any given night in this state, a number very similar to the estimate derived from the 2000 study of homeless youth. This should be regarded as a conservative estimate, since the

¹ U.S. General Accounting Office. (1989). *Children and youths: About 68,000 homeless and 186,000 in shared housing at any given time*. Washington, DC: Author.

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number could be substantially higher if large numbers of youth or young adults avoid services and seek shelter in places not intended for habitation.

Estimates of homelessness among unaccompanied youth on any given night

On any given night – one night snapshot	Number
Number of unaccompanied “sheltered” youth (under age 18) counted in shelter sites (October 23, 2003)	141
<i>Number of youth interviewed on the street or other non-sheltered locations (October 23, 2003)</i>	34
Estimated number of doubled-up youth – temporarily staying with friends or others. Doubled-up youth are included in the federal definition of homeless, while doubled-up adults are not. (conservative estimate based on G.A.O. study) = 141 X 2.7	381
Sheltered (counted) + doubled-up (conservative estimate) = 141 + 381	522
Total estimated number of unaccompanied youth under age 18 who are homeless on any given night	500-600

Estimates of unaccompanied youth homelessness over the course of a year

As in a one-night snap-shot, it is impossible to definitively count the number of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness *over the course of a year*. However, it is possible to provide an estimate based on the prevalence of homelessness in the general youth population. As part of the National Health Interview Study sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1992 and 1993, researchers interviewed a nationally representative household survey of 6,496 youth ages 12 to 17. Youth were asked if they spent at least one night in the past year in a variety of places unaccompanied by a parent or guardian including shelters as well as places not intended as housing such as outside, in a public place, with a stranger, in an abandoned building, or in a subway. In one study, Research Triangle Institute found that 2.8 percent of this national sample of currently housed youth (12-17) had spent at least one night in one of these settings. In a later study, by the same authors, this figure was revised to 5 percent of all 12 to 17 year olds.²

- Based on this research, it is estimated that between **12,635** and **22,563** Minnesota youth ages 12 to 17 have spent at least one night homeless in the past year.

² Ringwalt, C., Greene, J.M., Robertson, M., McPheeters, M. (1998). The prevalence of homelessness among adolescents in the United States, *Am J Public Health*, 88; 1325-1329.

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- This conservative figure was obtained from multiplying the 2.8 percent and 5 percent estimates by Minnesota's total youth population of 451,251 (based on 2000 Census data).³

What do we know about the number of homeless young adults in Minnesota?

Estimates on any given night

For purposes of this study, “homeless young adults” refers to young people between the ages of 18 and 20 – a much smaller age span than the youth who were interviewed (ages 8 to 17). Young adults are found at adult shelters as well as youth shelters. In 2003, for the first time, temporary housing programs were asked to provide a count of young adults (ages 18-20) who were residing in these facilities on the survey night. There were 335 young adults staying in shelter and temporary programs and 98 young adults interviewed in non-shelter locations on October 23, 2003. The actual number of non-sheltered young adults on October 23, 2003 is not known.

Using conservative techniques, we estimate that between 500 and 1,200 young adults are homeless on any given night in Minnesota.

The lower end of the estimate is based on research conducted by the Urban Institute in other states which found that the “non-shelter-using” homeless population ranges between 20 and 40 percent of the shelter-using population, depending on the availability of shelter beds, the season, and weather conditions.⁴ We know that applying Urban Institute's most conservative estimate (20%) to the shelter-using population is too low of an estimate for the homeless young adult population in Minnesota, because we found more young adults in street and other non-shelter locations through our survey. Ninety-eight young adults were interviewed, exceeding the Urban Institute low (20% of sheltered) estimate of 67 unsheltered young adults. Therefore, using the what appears to be the more reasonable figure of 40 percent, there was a low estimate of 134 young adults unsheltered on the night of the survey.

The upper end estimate is based on the technique used for homeless youth based on the 1989 U.S. General Accounting Office report⁵ which found that there were 2.7 times as many children and youth in doubled-up situations as in emergency shelters. Based on our

³ U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data*; generated by Heather Johnson; using American FactFinder; <http://factfinder.census.gov> (8 December 2004).

⁴ Burt, M., & Cohen, B. (1989). *America's homeless: Numbers, characteristics, and the programs that serve them*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office. (1989). *Children and youths: About 68,000 homeless and 186,000 in shared housing at any given time*. Washington, DC: Author.

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count of 335 sheltered young adults, this would indicate an additional 905 young adults who were homeless, but not in a shelter. Therefore, we estimate between 470 and 1,240 young adults are homeless on any given night (see Figure below).

This should be regarded as a conservative estimate since the number could be substantially higher if large numbers of young adults seek shelter in places not intended for habitation.

Estimates of homelessness among young adults on any given night

On any given night – one night snap-shot	Number
Number of young adults (18-20) in shelter sites (October 23, 2003)	335
<i>Number of young adults interviewed in non-sheltered locations (October 23, 2003)</i>	98
Number of young adults not counted (conservative estimate based on Urban Institute study = $335 \times .4$; upper estimate based on G.A.O. study used for youth = 335×2.7)	134 – 905
Total estimated number of young adults ages 18 to 20 on any given night: low end of range = $335 + 134 = 469$; high end of range = $335 + 905 = 1,240$	500 – 1,200

Estimates over the course of the year

It is important to emphasize that our study is not designed to provide a definitive count of homelessness among young adults in Minnesota. Annual estimates for youth homelessness (see previous section) or for adult homelessness (published separately in *Homeless adults and children in Minnesota*) are based on known patterns of homelessness, determined by studies of those populations. We know of no studies that have examined patterns of annual homelessness specifically for young adults. We know that patterns for youth are different from those of adults in general. We presume that patterns for young adults are intermediate between those for youth and adults. To estimate annual figures for homelessness among young adults, we therefore compute estimates separately based on the two patterns, and assume that the best estimate for young adults is in the middle ground between them.

- **Estimate based on youth pattern:** Based on youth patterns, we estimate 2.8 to 5 percent of the total state population of young adults (218,285 in the 2000 Census), yielding a range from 6,000 to 11,000.⁶
- **Estimate based on adult pattern:** Based on adult patterns, we estimate the annual number of homeless young adults is about 3 times the number who are homeless on a given night (470 to 1,240), yielding a range from 1,410 to 3,720.⁷

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data*; generated by Heather Johnson; using American FactFinder; <http://factfinder.census.gov> (8 December 2004).

⁷ Wilder Research (2003, September). *Homeless adults and children in Minnesota*. St. Paul, MN: author.

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- Taking the middle ground between these two patterns, we arrive at a conservative estimate of **3,720 to 6,000 young adults who are homeless over the course of a year.**

Estimated range in number of young adults, ages 18 to 20, who experience at least one night of homelessness over the course of the year in Minnesota

Estimate from adult model (range)		Estimate from youth model (range)	
1,407 to	3,713	6,112	to 10,914
Estimate from overlap (range)			

What do we know about changes over time in the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in Minnesota?

There is no way to know from our studies the actual number of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults in Minnesota – and whether the numbers have changed over time. Our study is meant to describe, in depth, the characteristics and needs of the population through a 30 minute one-to-one interview. It is not meant to provide a street sweep or census count. In fact, the data from 1991 to 2003 give us **conflicting** messages about changes in the numbers of homeless youth and young adults in Minnesota:

- *If we only examine the numbers of unaccompanied youth counted on a single night in shelters and do not count those who were not sheltered. . .the number of unaccompanied youth increased from 1991 to 2000, but declined slightly from 2000 to 2003.* However, this decline may be due to reduced shelter capacity to serve homeless youth. We know that the number of shelter beds available to youth on a self-referred basis has declined by about one-third in recent years. We know that oftentimes youth must receive a referral and have a case “open” with a county social service agency in order to access a bed. Therefore, there is no way to know whether or not the decline in the number of youth found in shelters or temporary housing programs in October 2003 shows an actual decline or merely reduced capacity of the system to serve youth.
- *If we only examine national studies to make estimates for the numbers of youth who are homeless. . .the number of unaccompanied youth increased since 1991.* This is because the total Census population of youth in Minnesota has increased. As described in the previous section, we use Census numbers to estimate the number of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness over the course of the year. This is problematic, because if Census figures go up, then our estimates increase. There is no way of definitively knowing whether this trend is real or not. It is based on a study conducted with a representative sample of youth ages 12 to 17 in 1993. There may be changes in the behavior or needs of this age group since that time.

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- *If we only examine information about young people who were found on the survey night. . . the number of unaccompanied youth (under 18) found through our one-night study (in shelters and on the streets) increased steadily from 1991 to 2000 and decreased slightly in 2003. However, there were nearly 150 more young adults (ages 18-20) found in 2003 than in 2000. Overall, there were nearly four times as many youth and young adults found on a single night in 2003 compared with 1991 (see the Appendix for the number of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults found through Wilder studies from 1991 to 2003).*

These numbers do not accurately reflect the number of youth doubled-up or staying in places not intended as housing. The number of completed interviews reflects efforts to recruit volunteers, as well as the involvement of youth-serving agencies in identifying homeless youth. We cannot determine if the number of homeless youth currently living in Minnesota is substantially larger or smaller than the number identified in previous surveys. However for the most part, the overall patterns of homelessness and characteristics of young people in these circumstances appear similar to previous years.

Have the background and life experiences of Minnesota's homeless youth population changed during the last dozen years?

Five studies have been conducted with Minnesota's homeless youth population during the last decade, in 1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, and 2003. These studies provide a number of useful comparisons. However, the reader should keep in mind that youth transitional housing did not exist prior to 1995, which may account for some of the changes over time. In addition, compared to the 2000 study, fewer youth were interviewed on the street on the 2003 survey night. On the other hand, more young adults were interviewed in 2003 than in any previous year.

Most of the demographic characteristics of homeless youth have changed little over the last decade. The average age has remained about 16. There are somewhat more females than males.

Homeless youth are primarily Caucasian, African American, or American Indian, with a notable increase in the percentage of American Indians over the last decade.

- There is a disproportional representation of youth who are African American and American Indian in the homeless population.
- 2003 shows a marked decline in the percentage of homeless youth who are White or Caucasian.

Demographics of unaccompanied homeless youth under age 18, 1991-2003

	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Average age	16.0	16.0	15.6	15.7	15.6
Female	49%	61%	54%	53%	64%
Race					
White or Caucasian	57%	41%	41%	46%	35%
African American or Native African ^a	20%	32%	29%	25%	31%
American Indian	11%	10%	15%	20%	22%

Note. (a) In 1991, 1994, and 1997, the response category was African American. In 2000, response categories included both African American and Native African.

History of placements outside of the home

- 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.

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- A consistent proportion of homeless youth report having been in alcohol or drug treatment facilities (10%-19%) and group homes (22%-33%) over the past 12 years.
- Over the past 12 years, about one-third of homeless youth report having lived in a correctional facility. This percentage increased slightly in 2000 to 46 percent, but decreased to 35 percent in 2003. As noted previously, a higher percentage of homeless youth were interviewed in street locations (not in shelters) in 2000 compared to 2003.

History of placements among homeless youth, 1991-2003

Have you ever lived in:	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Foster care	38%	36%	38%	41%	53%
Group home	22%	33%	29%	27%	29%
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	15%	10%	19%	13%	13%
Detention center or correctional facility	31%	34%	36%	46%	35%
Any institution	Not available	61%	70%	67%	71%

Life experiences

Over the past 12 years (five statewide studies):

- Over one-third to one-half of homeless youth report having been physically abused.
- 10 to 20 percent of homeless youth consider themselves chemically dependent.
- From 1991 to 1997 approximately one-third had a sexual relationship which resulted in a pregnancy; this decreased to one-fifth in 2000 and increased slightly to one quarter in 2003.
- The proportion of homeless youth who have children remained relatively constant between 1991 and 2003. Although there was a slight dip in 2000, research from the other years indicates that about one out every six homeless youth has children.

Life experiences of homeless youth, 1991-2003

	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Physically abused	47%	54%	42%	47%	38%
Consider self chemically dependent	10%	19%	15%	13%	12%
Told by a medical professional in the past 2 years that they have a significant mental health problem	Not available	Not available	23%	31%	29%
Have children	16%	18%	17%	8%	16%
Sexual relationship that resulted in pregnancy	32%	33%	31%	21%	26%

Income and employment

The percentage of youth reporting steady employment as their main source of income increased to one in four in 1997 and 2000, but decreased back to earlier levels with 17 percent reporting steady employment as their main source of income in 2003. In 2003, the percentage of youth who said that their parents, relatives, or other friends provide their main source of income increased to 36 percent – up from 25 to 30 percent of youth in previous years.

Main source of income for homeless youth, 1991-2003

	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Steady employment	16%	15%	26%	25%	17%
Temporary work	16%	4%	6%	7%	7%
Parents	24%	13%	16%	18%	19%
Other relatives or friends	14%	12%	14%	12%	17%

Are homeless youth different from youth who are housed?

Overall, homeless youth report more difficult life experiences than youth who are housed. Homeless youth report experiencing abuse, alcohol or drug treatment, and pregnancy more often than youth who are housed (see the section titled “Comparison of homeless youth to general youth population”). In addition, a higher proportion of African American and American Indian youth are homeless compared to the general population. Information from the Minnesota Student Survey (2004) show that homeless youth, in comparison to youth in the general population, are:

- Five times more likely to have been treated for alcohol or drug problems. However, homeless youth are half as likely to report current use of alcohol.

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- 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.

Do homeless youth in the Twin Cities area differ from those in greater Minnesota?

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 have children (21% vs. 12%). Twin Cities boys are more likely to report having a sexual relationship that resulted in pregnancy (28% vs. 16%); girls in the Twin Cities and girls in greater Minnesota are equally likely to have been pregnant (29%).
- 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%).

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 have medical coverage (65% vs. 56%).
- 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 have been sexually abused (32% vs. 23%).

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- To feel that they now need to see a professional about a mental health problem (30% vs. 17%).
- To report having been hit on the head so hard that they lost consciousness or saw stars (36% vs. 16%).
- 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%).
- To have regular contact with a trusted adult (86% vs. 77%).

Does Minnesota attract homeless youth and young adults?

Although some homeless people may be drawn here because of Minnesota's reputation as a safe environment with many social services, most of the homeless youth we interviewed are long-term residents of Minnesota.

- 80 percent of youth and 66 percent of young adults have lived in Minnesota for most of their lives.
- For 92 percent of youth and 80 percent of young adults, their last permanent housing was in Minnesota. Similar percentages of youth and young adults have lived in Minnesota for two or more years.

Over the last decade, a consistent majority of youth interviewed said they grew up in Minnesota (74% in 1991, 75% in 1994, 70% in 1997, 72% in 2000, and 80% in 2003).

What are the pathways toward youth homelessness?

As part of the *Our Children: Our Future* project in 2003, Wilder Research conducted a study examining the overall picture of children who are living away from home, regardless of the reason: children who are in the child welfare system because of abuse, neglect, or needs that their parents cannot meet, children who are in corrections settings because of delinquency, and those who are homeless. This study found that there are about 30,000 Minnesota children and youth who stay in some type of publicly supervised treatment program, foster care, correctional facility, or shelter each year. Sadly, many of the children who experience these varying types of placements have had similarly difficult lives. What follows is a summary of some of the information about pathways toward homelessness that were presented in the *Our Children: Our Future* report.⁸

Three primary groups of youth are found in the unaccompanied youth homeless population: 1) “throwaway youth,” adolescents whose parents demand that they leave the home; 2) “runaway youth,” adolescents who make a decision to leave home; and 3) “systems” homeless youth, adolescents who have been involved in government systems due to abuse, neglect, or homelessness with their families and whose transitions from previous placements did not result in stable living situations. In other words, homeless youth are not from a homogeneous population, and there is overlap among these groups. The causes of homelessness among youth fall into three interrelated categories: family problems (which include the behaviors of both parents and youth), economic problems, and residential instability.

Other researchers investigated the backgrounds of homeless youth and have found different pathways toward youth homelessness based on the “throwaway,” “runaway,” or “systems” categories. In a study of 356 homeless youth in the Seattle area, researchers found that:⁹

- Boys are more likely to be kicked out of the home, while girls are more likely to run away.
- 35 percent of runaways, 36 percent of throwaways, and 56 percent of systems homeless youth had been sexually abused.
- Runaways are more likely than other homeless youth to report that they could live with their mother or father.

⁸ Wilder Research. (2003). *Our children: our future, a research report on Minnesota children who do not live at home*. St. Paul, MN: author, 13-15.

⁹ MacLean, M., Embry, L., & Cauce, A. (1999). Homeless adolescents' paths to separation from family: Comparison of family characteristics, psychological adjustment, and victimization. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(2), 179-187.

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- Getting kicked out of the family was not associated with a higher average level of “acting out” behavior, so it is possible that throwaway youth homelessness is more closely related to parental instability and intolerance than with the behavior of the adolescent.

Many homeless youth leave home after years of physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, addiction of a family member, and parental neglect.¹⁰ These stressors are found in the vast majority of youth who participated in this study. Disruptive family conditions are the principal reason that young people leave home. Nearly two-thirds of the youth in our study cite “conflict with parents” as one of the reasons they originally left home and one of the primary reasons for not returning home.

Some youth become homeless when their families become homeless, but are later separated from the family by policies of shelters, transitional housing, or the child welfare system.¹¹ Over one-third of the homeless youth (38%) and one-quarter of young adults (26%) in our study had a family member who was currently homeless. It is not known how many of these youth were separated because of these policies.

The following table describes some of the risk factors and predictors associated with homelessness among youth identified in other studies and confirmed by our own research. This table was compiled as part of the *Our Children: Our Future* project.¹²

¹⁰ Whitbeck, L. & Simmons, R. (1990). Life on the streets: The victimization of runaway and homeless adolescents. *Youth and Society*, 22, 108-125.

¹¹ Shinn, M. & Weitzman, B.C. (1996). Homeless families are different. In Baumohl, J. (Ed.) *Homelessness in America*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 109-12.

¹² Wilder Research (2003). *Our children: our future, a research report on Minnesota children who do not live at home*. St. Paul, MN: author, 13-15.

Risk factors and predictors of unaccompanied youth homelessness

Location of the risk factor	Risk factors and predictors (listed in no particular order)
Individual child	History of abuse and/or neglect Chemical dependency Sexual orientation different from parents Delinquency History of out-of-home placement
Family	Few family resources Parental substance abuse Poor parent/child relationship
Neighborhood/community	Children of color are disproportionately represented Substandard or temporary housing

Primary sources: Wilder Research statewide homeless studies and Wattenberg, 2002, April; MacLean et al., 1999; Wilder Research, 2001.¹³

What is the link between foster care or other out-of-home placements and homelessness?

In 2002, there were 17,202 children and youth who spent at least one night in an out-of-home placement in Minnesota.¹⁴ Of this group, 11,137 were between the ages of 8 and 17. Youth in out-of-home care (primarily foster care) represent 1.5 percent of the general population of 8 to 17 year olds in Minnesota. The results of this study show that about half of the youth who are homeless and on their own in Minnesota have spent time in foster care. This is consistent with other studies, both in Minnesota and elsewhere.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services reports that in 2002, 572 discharges from out-of-home placement were due to “runaway from placement (placement no longer planned)” and 568 discharges were due to the fact that the youth reached the age of 18. Together these children represent nearly 1 out of every 10 discharges from care in 2002 (4.7% each). About one-third of the homeless youth interviewed for the 2003 homeless study reported that they had run from an out-of-home placement at some point in their lives.

¹³ Wattenberg, E. (2002). *Responding to the needs of children unable to live at home*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota and Wilder Research statewide homeless studies..

¹⁴ Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2004). *Minnesota’s Child Welfare Report for 2002*. St. Paul: Author.

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A history of foster care is correlated with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining homeless for a longer period of time.¹⁵ Some youth living in residential or institutional placements become homeless upon discharge. Many researchers and advocates have voiced concern about youth “aging out” of the system.¹⁶ One national study reported that more than one in five youth who arrived at emergency shelters came directly from foster care, and that more than one in four had been in foster care in the previous year.¹⁷ 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 a year after being officially discharged from foster care. The average age for first-time homelessness of foster care alumni was 18.¹⁸

Two-thirds (71%) of the youth who participated in the Wilder Research Homeless Study reported having lived in foster care, chemical dependency treatment facilities, correctional facilities, halfway houses, residential treatment centers, orphanages, group homes, or Indian schools.

Some advocates feel that the over-representation of former foster care youth reveals a lack of transition services from childhood to adulthood for this population. Others feel that family issues that may have led to the out-of-home placement may also contribute to family homelessness. In addition, mental health and behavior problems may contribute to a youth’s inability to get or keep housing. The data show us that homeless youth and youth in out-of-home placement share many of the characteristics associated with a difficult start in life.

¹⁵ Roman, N.P. & Wolfe, P.B. (1995). *Web of failure: The relationship between foster care and homelessness*. Washington, D.C.: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

¹⁶ Robertson, M. (1996). *Homeless youth on their own*. Berkley, CA: Alcohol Research Group.

¹⁷ National Association of Social Workers. (1992). *Helping vulnerable youths: Runaway and homeless adolescents in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers.

¹⁸ 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.

Are homeless youth and young adults who have recently been in out-of-home placement different from other homeless young people?

Researchers examined survey information provided by youth and young adults who had lived in a foster home, residence for people with physical disabilities, residential treatment facility, orphanage, or group home in the past **two years**. Their responses were compared to youth and young adults who had not lived in one of these placements in the past two years. The data provide some interesting differences, but should be interpreted with caution. We know that some of the youth who have not had a recent placement have been in out-of-home care earlier in their lives.

In all, 44 of 129 youth (34%) and 64 of 302 young adults (21%) have lived in a foster home, group home or residential treatment program in the past 2 years.

Demographic differences between youth and young adults who recently left placement versus others

Homeless young people who have recently left a placement are:

- More likely to be White (49% vs. 29% of youth; 49% vs. 38% of young adults).
- Less likely to be African American (21% vs. 35% of both youth and young adults)
- More likely to have grown up outside of Minneapolis/St. Paul – in Twin Cities suburbs and greater Minnesota (52% vs. 34% of youth; 56% vs. 31% of young adults) and to have had their last permanent housing in these locations (68% vs. 45% of youth; 59% vs. 36% of young adults).
- More likely to have lived in Minnesota more than 10 years (70% vs. 55% of youth; 73% vs. 54% of young adults).
- Less likely to have children (9% vs. 20% of youth; 16% vs. 32% of young adults), and less likely to have children with them on the day of the survey (7% vs. 13% of youth; 8% vs. 27% of young adults).

Differences in experiences with housing and homelessness between youth and young adults who recently left placement versus others

While many of the reasons for leaving home are similar, those who have recently left a placement are twice as likely to have left home originally because of physical abuse (15% vs. 9% of youth; 34% vs. 17% of young adults). In addition, young adults (18-20) are less likely to be currently staying in emergency shelter (8% of recent leavers vs. 16% of other young adults) and more likely to be staying in temporary arrangements (36% of recent leavers vs. 24% of other young adults). Young people who have recently left

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placement have stayed in their current location for a shorter period of time (average of 29 days vs. 62 days for other youth; 74 days vs. 110 days for other young adults).

In addition, young people who have recently left placement are:

- More likely to be younger when they first left home (average age is 13.7 for recent leavers vs. 14.5 for other homeless youth; average age is 15.5 for recent leavers vs. 16.4 for all other young adults).
- More likely to have lived with foster parents in their last permanent housing (30% vs. 4% for youth; 10% vs. 1% for young adults).
- Less likely to have left their last housing because of eviction or foreclosure (7% vs. 19% for youth; 8% vs. 24% for young adults).
- More likely to have left their last permanent housing because of their own drinking or drug problem (21% vs. 10% for youth; 19% vs. 11% for young adults).
- More likely to have had difficulty getting or keeping housing because of their own or someone else's substance use (25% vs. 12% young adults)

Differences in experiences with out-of-home placements between youth and young adults who recently left placement versus others

It makes sense that youth who recently left placement are about twice as likely to have *ever* lived in an out-of-home placement as other youth (100% vs. 49%). They are similarly about twice as likely to have lived in foster homes (75% vs. 42%) and drug treatment programs (75% vs. 42%). However, young people who have recently left a placement are seven to nine times more likely to have lived in a residential treatment program for persons with emotional or behavioral issues (48% vs. 5% of youth; 58% vs. 8% of young adults).

In addition, young people who have recently left placement are:

- More likely to have run from a placement (63% vs. 19% for youth; 49% vs. 16% for young adults).
- Twice as likely to have lived in a correctional facility (57% vs. 24% for youth; 61% vs. 31% for young adults).

Differences in mental health and other needs between youth and young adults who recently left placement versus others

In terms of mental health status, there are few differences between youth who have recently left placement and other homeless youth. However, young adults (ages 18 to 20) who have left a placement within the past two years appear to have more substantial mental health issues.

Key Questions

- Young adults who have recently left placement are twice as likely to report mental health problems in the past year (19% vs. 15% for youth; 40% vs. 17% for young adults).
- Young adults who have recently left placement are nearly three times more likely to have been told by a doctor or nurse in the past two years that they have serious mental health problems (39% vs. 24% for youth; 73% vs. 25% for young adults).
- Young adults who have recently left placement are twice as likely to have a dual diagnosis – which means both mental health and chemical dependency problems (30% vs. 7% of young adults).

In terms of other factors, young people who have recently left placement are:

- More likely to have received special education services while in school (44% vs. 27% for youth; 53% vs. 33% for young adults).
- More likely to have ever been hit on the head so hard that they saw stars or were knocked unconscious (42% vs. 18% for youth; 57% vs. 35% for young adults).
- Two to four times more likely to consider themselves chemically dependent (24% vs. 6% for youth; 34% vs. 15% for young adults).
- More likely to have been physically or sexually abused as a child (50% vs. 44% for youth; 66% vs. 46% for young adults).
- For youth, more likely to have been encouraged to make money in the sex industry (19% vs. 8% for youth). This was equally likely for about one-quarter of the young adult sample.
- More likely to report their main source of income as money provided by parents, relatives, or friends (44% vs. 32% for youth; 20% vs. 9% for young adults).