



Homelessness in Minnesota: Youth on their Own

Findings from the 2015 Minnesota Homeless Study

A P R I L 2 0 1 7

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Contents

The numbers.....	1
Key findings.....	2
Who are homeless youth?	6
Digging deeper into the numbers	6
Housing and homelessness	11
Current homelessness.....	11
Factors leading to homelessness	13
Trauma and abuse	14
Abuse and exposure to violence in childhood	14
Exposure to violence and exploitation	15
Out-of-home placements.....	16
Health and mental health	17
Resources	20
Employment and income	20
Health care	21
Helpful services	21
Special populations	24
Youth who are parenting.....	24
Youth of color	28
Youth in greater Minnesota compared to youth in the Twin Cities metro area.....	32
Comparison of homeless minor youth (age 17 and younger) with minor youth in the general population.....	33
Addressing homelessness.....	35
Housing affordability	35
Some issues to consider	36

Figures

1.	Changes in homeless counts by age group, 2009-2015	7
2.	2015 counts by metro and greater Minnesota, and sheltered vs. not in shelter	7
3.	Race and ethnicity of unaccompanied homeless youth compared to overall Minnesota population.....	8
4.	Minors' school attendance: Unaccompanied youth age 17 and younger	9
5.	Where unaccompanied youth were staying on the night of the 2015 survey	11
6.	Places unaccompanied youth stayed in the 30 days prior to the 2015 survey	12
7.	Top 10 factors leading to homelessness: youth perceptions.....	13
8.	Selected adverse childhood experiences.....	14
9.	Violence and sexual exploitation.....	15
10.	Out-of-home placements.....	16
11.	Health issues	18
12.	Co-occurrence of health issues (mental illness, substance abuse, chronic physical health conditions, or brain injury) among homeless youth.....	18
13.	Types of assistance received in the month of the survey.....	22
14.	Proportion of homeless youth who have ever had children, and proportion who have children with them while homeless	25
15.	Housing situation in last 30 days for youth with and without children	25
16.	Health issues and out-of-home placements for youth with and without children	26
17.	Health and care needs of children accompanying homeless youth and adult parents	27
18.	Top 5 factors leading to homelessness: youth perceptions.....	29
19.	Physical and mental health factors for youth of color and white youth.....	30
20.	Abuse and placement experiences for youth of color and white youth	30
21.	Education and employment for youth of color and white youth	31
22.	Services used and most helpful for youth of color and white youth.....	32
23.	Number of youth experiencing homelessness, by age group and region.....	32
24.	Selected adverse childhood experiences among homeless youth, by region.....	33
25.	Comparison of selected characteristics experienced by minor youth experiencing homelessness versus their same age peers	34
26.	Fair market rent versus income, by region.....	35

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Volunteer interviewers and service providers are not only the backbone of this study, but 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 workforce went to approximately 370 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, this study depends on the willingness and participation of 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 high. Respondents spend more than 30 minutes answering 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 is dedicated to them.

Age groups of children and youth referenced in this study

As part of the statewide homelessness study, we define three segments of homeless persons age 24 and younger:

Children age 17 and under who are homeless with their parents*

Minors age 17 and under who are homeless and on their own

Young adults age 18 through 24 who are homeless and on their own

Youth refers to both minors and young adults on their own.

*Data regarding children with their parents is reported separately.

The numbers

As part of the overall study conducted on October 22, 2015, 1,463 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, 213 were age 17 and younger (referred to in this report as “minors”) and 1,250 were 18 through 24 (“young adults”). Youth on their own make up 16 percent of the total homeless population counted in October 2015. Compared to their representation in the total Minnesota population, children and youth age 24 and younger are the most likely of all age groups to be homeless.

On any given night, an estimated 6,000 Minnesota youth experience homelessness. This includes an estimated 2,500 minors age 17 and younger, and 3,500 young adults age 18-24. These estimates cannot be directly compared to previous years due to the addition of youth age 22-24 to the “youth” category. As before, however, these numbers are considered conservative estimates; the actual number of unaccompanied youth is likely considerably higher.

Finding youth in a one-night study

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. Homeless minors in particular 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 one-third of youth on their own in the 2015 study were found outside of the shelter system — a higher percentage than any other group. This is especially true for male youth, of whom 40 percent were interviewed outside of formal shelter programs.

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. In addition, over one-third of youth have children of their own. 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.

Racial disparities are particularly glaring in the population of youth experiencing homelessness.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of homeless youth are African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, or of mixed race. But youth in these groups represent only 26 percent of Minnesota's total youth population.¹ Historical trauma and generational impacts of discriminatory housing and child welfare policies, as well as other systemic inequities, have contributed to the overrepresentation of youth of color in Minnesota's homeless population.

Homeless youth of color were more likely than white youth to be enrolled in school (70% vs. 58%) and be employed full time (18% vs. 12%).

Proportion of youth of color in Minnesota's ...

Homeless youth population



Total youth population



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2014 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates [statistics from data file]. Retrieved from <http://factfinder2.census.gov>

An additional inequity among youth experiencing homelessness is the overrepresentation of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ): 18 percent of homeless youth identified as LGBTQ.

Many youth experiencing homelessness have children of their own.

Thirty-five percent of all homeless youth are parents; 26 percent have at least one child with them. For female youth, the percentages are even higher: 48 percent have children; 41 percent have at least one child with them. Of all youth with children, 21 percent said they were employed full time, compared to 15 percent of homeless youth who are not caring for children. The two services on which youth parents report they most depend were SNAP (food stamps, 82% used in the past month) and WIC (64%).

Nine out of 10 youth had experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, including trauma and abuse.

Over half (54%) of homeless youth report that they had been physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected at some point in their childhoods. Other common adverse experiences in childhood include living with a substance abuser (61%), witnessing abuse (60%), and having at least one out-of-home social service placement (54%).

In addition, 59 percent of all youth reported having a parent who had ever been incarcerated, either while the youth was a child (47%) or since childhood (12%).

The majority of youth have serious health issues including mental health or chronic physical health problems.

Fifty-seven percent report significant mental health issues and 36 percent have chronic physical health problems. Anxiety or panic disorders are the most common mental health issues (37% of all youth). Nineteen percent report symptoms of a traumatic brain injury, and 13 percent report a drug or alcohol abuse disorder. Homeless youth were less likely to have health issues than homeless adults.

Youth are least likely to use shelters and many are long-term homeless.

Forty-four percent of homeless youth age 17 and younger, and 29 percent age 18-24 were not in shelters on the night of the study. In the previous 30 days, 47 percent had couch hopped or doubled up at least one night and 30 percent had stayed outside at least once. Twenty-four percent of youth had been turned away from shelter due to lack of space.

Of homeless youth interviewed, 56 percent meet the Minnesota definition of “long-term” homelessness (homeless at least a year, or four times in the last three years). Forty-seven percent had been homeless for one year or more.

Over half have experienced violence and exploitation related to their housing or homeless situation.

One-third of youth (33%) have stayed in an abusive situation to avoid being without a place to live, and 14 percent have been sexual with someone in order to secure shelter, clothing, or food. Nineteen percent of homeless youth have been attacked while homeless.

Compared with the general population of high school youth, minor youth (age 17 and younger) experiencing homelessness have experienced some higher risk factors.

Compared with the general population of teenagers who took part in the Minnesota Student Survey, homeless minors were 14 times more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant, seven times more likely to have attended at least two different schools in the most recent school year, approximately three times more likely to have experienced a variety of adverse childhood experiences, and about three times more likely to have been treated for mental health or substance abuse.

Conclusions

Youth on their own experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable because of their histories of trauma and abuse. Many also face challenges related to physical and mental health issues. Youth are not always able to access youth shelters or housing programs; many must sleep in adult shelters, outside, or move from couch to couch.

There is a lack of affordable housing for youth, including those with children.

Youth on their own have built no credit histories and landlords may hesitate to rent to them. The most common barriers to obtaining housing cited by youth include lack of job or income (36%), no affordable housing (23%), or no knowledge of how to find rental housing (13%). Thirty-four percent of youth were on a waiting list for Section 8 housing, and 10 percent could not get on a waiting list because it was closed. Thirty-seven percent of homeless youth report the amount they were able to pay for rent was less than \$200 per month. Employment alone does not solve the affordability dilemma because only 16 percent of youth are employed full time, and most employed youth (54%) earn less than \$10 per hour.

Despite significant needs and areas of concern, youth experiencing homelessness are resilient. The data show the importance of intervening early to break the cycle of homelessness.

The 2015 study illustrates the need to intervene early to break the cycle of homelessness, because unstable housing, and the challenges associated, often begins in childhood. One-quarter of homeless adults report that their first experience of homelessness was as a child (age 17 or younger). These rates are even higher for homeless adults who are American Indian (44% homeless as a child) or African American (32% homeless as a child).

Youth experiencing homelessness do not yet have the severity or chronicity of some of the problems experienced by homeless adults. For instance, fewer homeless youth than homeless adults report health issues, including chronic physical health problems, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury.

In addition, homeless youth are more likely than homeless adults to be employed (42% of youth versus 30% of adults). This is even more pronounced considering that many youth are also pursuing educational opportunities. Ninety-one percent of minor youth (17 and younger) were enrolled in school, 52 percent of young adults were enrolled in an educational program, and 68 percent of 19-24-year-olds had completed high school or a GED.

The factors contributing to youth homelessness are complex, and no simple answers exist. These youth have demonstrated incredible resilience in their day-to-day lives. Solutions should focus on stabilizing youth by weaving together housing and community supports in order to address the needs of each individual and break the cycle of homelessness.

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](#) 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 (mnhomeless.org).

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Who are homeless youth?

Felicia is an 18-year-old American Indian youth living on the street in northern Minnesota. She has been sleeping on the floors and couches of friends and acquaintances for most of the last month, but has stayed in contact with her family during that time. She left her home a couple months ago for multiple reasons. She doesn't think her identification as bisexual was the direct cause because her home life was troubled for other reasons, including her own drug use and her father's alcohol abuse. There was also violence in the neighborhood and the landlord had neglected their apartment to the point that it was barely habitable. Her home life and life on the street has worsened her depression and increased her drug use. She hopes to stabilize her mental health so she can get her GED and find work. She does have some essential resources to build on, including a driver's license, a smart phone that connects her to critical services, friends and family, and medical coverage through Medical Assistance.²

Digging deeper into the numbers

Of all age groups in the statewide study, the greatest percent increase in the counts between 2012 and 2015 was among unaccompanied minors under 18 (up 46%) (Figure 1). However, the youth population is very difficult to count because many youth stay temporarily with friends or family and do not use shelters. Fluctuations in these numbers can easily be due to better identification through school outreach and slight increases in youth shelter beds, including those added with the recent passage of Safe Harbor and other homeless youth legislation.

² Youth profiles were compiled from information provided in specific interviews. Names are fictitious, and other identifying information has been modified to protect anonymity.

1. Changes in homeless counts by age group, 2009-2015

	2009 study	2012 study	2015 study	Percent change (2012-2015)
Unaccompanied minors (17 and under)	227	146	213	+46%
Young adults (18-21)	1,041	1,005	779	-22%
Young adults (22-24) ^a	Not counted	Not counted	471	-
Total counts (21 and under)	1,268	1,151	992	-14%
Total counts (24 and under)^a	Not counted	Not counted	1,463	-

^a The 2015 study was the first time that young adults age 22-24 were counted separately from the "adults" category.

Some of the differences in numbers between 2012 and 2015 varied by age group and shelter type.

- For minors age 17 and younger, the number found in emergency shelters was up 23 percent, and the number staying in transitional housing programs was up 124 percent.
- Among young adults age 18-21, the number staying in emergency shelters was down 27 percent, and the number in transitional housing programs was down 9 percent.

Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely than youth in the 7-county Twin Cities metro area to be found outside the shelter system (Figure 2). Thirty-seven percent of youth in the study were in greater Minnesota.

2. 2015 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)	82	50	132	37	44	81
Young adults (18-24)	593	192	785	296	169	465
All youth	675	242	917	333	213	546

Of youth counted in this study, female youth were more likely than male youth to be in sheltered settings (75% of females in shelter vs. 60% of males). This may be due in large part to more female youth than male youth having children with them.

Gender and sexual orientation

Fifty-eight percent of homeless youth are female. Among homeless adults (age 25 and older), 46 percent are female. National studies show that females are more likely to seek shelter and services.

Eighty-three percent of homeless youth identify themselves as heterosexual. Seventeen percent of homeless youth identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual orientation. Two percent 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 18 percent of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, 26 percent cite this as a contributing factor to their homelessness, including 8 percent who identify it as the main cause.

Overrepresentation of youth of color

Youth who identify as African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, or multiple races represent a startling 73 percent of the homeless youth population, compared to 26 percent of all Minnesota youth (Figure 3). For the purposes of this report, youth who identified with these racial or ethnic groups were grouped together to understand more about their experiences.

In the Twin Cities metro area, 84 percent of youth experiencing homelessness are youth of color; in greater Minnesota, youth of color comprise 56 percent of the youth homeless population. The largest disparities were observed for American Indians (especially in greater Minnesota) and African Americans (especially in the metro area).

3. Race and ethnicity of unaccompanied homeless youth compared to overall Minnesota population

	Statewide percent of homeless youth	Percent of homeless youth in Twin Cities metro area	Percent of homeless youth in greater Minnesota	Percent of all Minnesota youth^a
Black/African American	42%	57%	21%	8%
White, non-Hispanic	27%	16%	44%	74%
American Indian	9%	4%	17%	1%
Asian	2%	2%	1%	6%
Other/More than one	9%	11%	7%	4%
Hispanic	11%	11%	10%	7%

Note. Respondents were asked to select one racial category, and were asked separately about Hispanic ethnicity. Those who report Hispanic ethnicity are not included in the racial categories.

^a Source. 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey. Age groupings included were youth 10-24.

The “Special Populations” section later in this report includes additional analysis about the background and experiences of youth of color experiencing homelessness.

Most grew up living with their parents in Minnesota

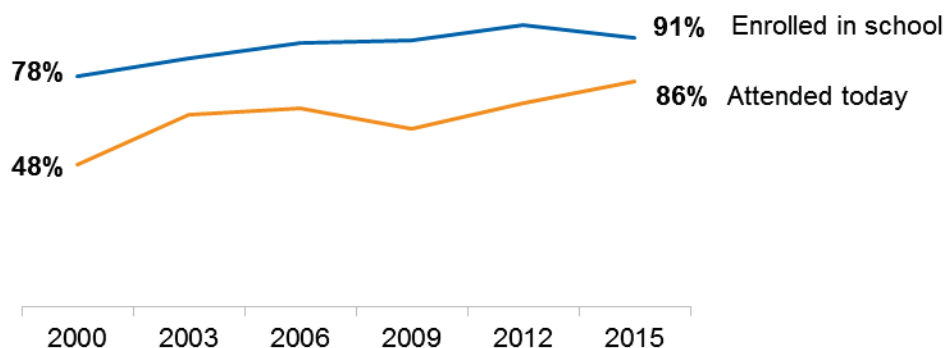
Nearly three-quarters of youth (72%) said they grew up in Minnesota, with about one-quarter (26%) growing up in greater Minnesota, 31 percent growing up in Minneapolis or Saint Paul, and another 15 percent growing up outside the core cities but in one of the seven counties in the metro area. Two-thirds of homeless youth (67%) said they had lived in Minnesota for over 10 years. Ninety-six percent of homeless youth were born in the United States.

Two-thirds (67%) of homeless youth grew up living mostly with biological parents. Others lived most of their childhoods with grandparents or other family members (12%), in a blended family (8%), in a foster family (6%), or in an adoptive family (6%).

Education

Over the last 15 years, a growing proportion of homeless minors were enrolled in school (Figure 4). After a steady increase from just over three-quarters (78%) in 2000 to nearly all (95%) minors in 2012, the latest survey shows a slight drop in 2015 (91%). The proportion of minors who attended school on the day of the survey has also increased over the past 15 years, up from 48 percent in 2000 to 86 percent in 2015, the highest proportion ever. Sixty-eight percent of homeless youth age 19-24 had completed high school or received their GED, and over half (52%) of homeless young adults (18-24) were enrolled in an education program.

4. 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. Forty-three percent of unaccompanied minors said they have (or have ever had) an IEP or special education plan in school. Eighty-eight percent of unaccompanied minors without a diploma or GED had been enrolled in school in the previous school year, but this group reported several kinds of situations that made it difficult for them to get to or stay in school:

- 52% reported poor or failing grades
- 49% reported problems with truancy or skipping school
- 40% reported trouble getting to school because of housing and transportation issues
- 24% reported suspensions or expulsions

Housing and homelessness

Sam is a 17-year-old African American youth who for the past six months has been living on the streets of Minneapolis, sleeping outside or in vacant buildings. Sam has had to face many challenges in his life. When he was very young, his father committed a felony and was sentenced to a lengthy prison term. Over the years, his mother struggled with mental illness and alcohol abuse, which contributed to instability and conflict at home. At school, Sam's academic progress was slow, and he received special education services. When Sam was 13, his mother locked him out of their house. He then moved in with relatives but soon left to be on his own, mainly because he had problems getting along with them and did not feel safe living in their home. Since then, he has alternated between staying with other relatives and living on the street. Sam has not completed high school and has never had a job. He has frequent contact with a trusted relative and recently received help from an outreach worker to get Medical Assistance health care coverage and other services. He hopes to find work soon, but at this time has no plans to go back to school. Sam has never had stability in his life.

Current homelessness

Fifty-six percent of youth interviewed met the Minnesota definition of “long-term” homelessness. Eleven percent had been homeless for less than a month, and 47 percent had been homeless a year or more. Youth in the metro area were more likely to have been homeless for one year or more (50% vs. 42% for greater Minnesota).

On the night of the study, youth, and especially minors, were less likely than any other age group to be using shelters (Figure 5).

5. Where unaccompanied youth were staying on the night of the 2015 survey

	Emergency shelter	Transitional housing	Rapid re-housing	Domestic violence shelter	Not in shelters
Unaccompanied minors (17 and under)	33%	22%	0%	1%	44%
Young adults (18-24)	23%	36%	7%	4%	29%
All youth (24 and under)	25%	34%	6%	4%	31%

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.

When asked where they had stayed in the 30 days prior to the study, 64 percent of youth had spent at least one night in a shelter or transitional housing program, 47 percent had doubled up or couch-hopped, and 30 percent had stayed outside at least once (Figure 6).

Minors were more likely than young adults to say they had been in regular housing (22% vs. 6%) or doubled up (60% vs. 45%) in the past month. Young adults were more likely than minors to say they had been in a shelter (66% vs. 55%) or outside (33% vs. 16%).

Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely than youth in the metro area to say they had been doubled up (51% vs. 45%). Youth in the metro area were more likely to say they had stayed in a shelter (67% vs. 60%). Youth in the metro area and greater Minnesota were equally likely to have stayed outside (30%).

6. Places unaccompanied youth stayed in the 30 days prior to the 2015 survey

	Emergency shelter/ transitional housing	Doubled up	Outside	Housed
Unaccompanied minors (17 and under)	55%	60%	16%	22%
Young adults (18-24)	66%	45%	33%	6%
Greater MN	60%	51%	30%	8%
Metro area	67%	45%	30%	10%
All youth (24 or under)	64%	47%	30%	9%

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

Twenty-four percent of youth had been turned away from shelter due to lack of space in the three months leading up to the survey. About equal proportions of these youth ended up sleeping with a friend or family member (38% of those turned away) or in a place not meant for sleeping (outdoors, on transit, or a vacant or commercial building, 37%); fewer ended up in an alternate spot in the shelter system (22%). Youth in the metro area were more likely to have been turned away (28% vs. 18%).

Factors leading to homelessness

On average, homeless youth first left home at age 16, and more than one-half (53%) have been homeless for less than one year. Three-quarters of youth (75%) have had multiple experiences with homelessness.

Youth were asked about a number of items and whether they were part of or a main cause of their homelessness. Figure 7 shows the most commonly reported reasons for youth leaving home.

7. Top 10 factors leading to homelessness: youth perceptions

If you think it was a main cause, part of the cause but not the main cause, or not really a factor in your being homeless today	A main cause	Part of the cause or a main cause
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	29%	57%
Told to leave or locked out	25%	47%
Not willing to live by parents' rules	14%	42%
Neglect or parents not attending to basic needs	12%	31%
Family lost their housing	12%	23%
Parents' use of drugs or alcohol	11%	31%
Didn't feel safe because of violence in the house	10%	24%
Home was too small for everyone to live there	9%	25%
Own use of drugs or alcohol	9%	24%
Physical or sexual abuse by someone in the household	8%	21%

Note. The table includes the top 10 "main" causes of 12 total causes reported. Youth were read a list and could pick more than one factor.

Minors were more likely than young adults to report parents' use of drugs or alcohol (35% vs. 30%) and parental neglect (36% vs. 30%) as part of the reason for being homeless. Compared to minors, young adults were more likely to report their own use of drugs or alcohol (24% vs. 19%) and leaving an out-of-home placement with no place to go (14% vs 9%).

Trauma and abuse

Marisol is a 19-year-old Latina youth who experienced neglect and abuse as a child, and this led to her placement in foster care. After a short stay in a foster home, she was taken in and raised by her grandparents. After near constant fighting and struggling to get along with her family, she and her toddler were locked out and left to be on their own shortly after her 18th birthday. Since then, they have been living in emergency shelters and numerous other places, including on the street and with friends when there was room. She recently graduated from high school. Marisol has had help making connections to services from friends, social workers, youth workers, and teachers.

Youth experiencing homelessness have often experienced serious upheaval before reaching adulthood, including conflict with parents, abusive relationships, turbulent housing, and mental health problems.

Abuse and exposure to violence in childhood

Just over half (54%) of homeless youth report that they had been physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected as a child. Female youth have higher rates of each of these kinds of maltreatment, and they are especially more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse (38% vs. 19% for male youth).

54% of all homeless youth have been abused or neglected.

Nine out of 10 homeless youth had at least one of the eight adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) asked about in the survey. The most common of these were living with a substance abuser (61%), witnessing abuse (60%), and having at least one out-of-home social service placement (54%) (Figure 8).

8. Selected adverse childhood experiences

	Minors ≤17	Young adults 18-24	All youth ≤24
At least one adverse childhood experience	89%	90%	89%
Lived with substance abuser as a child	61%	61%	61%
Witnessed abuse as a child	58%	61%	60%
Out-of-home (social service) placements as a child	56%	54%	54%
Lived with parent/guardian with mental illness	45%	48%	48%
During childhood, had a parent serve time in prison	51%	46%	47%
Physically abused as a child	42%	47%	46%
Sexually abused as a child	19%	33%	30%
Neglected as a child	23%	30%	29%

A total of 59 percent of all youth reported having a parent who had ever been incarcerated, either while the youth was a child (47%) or since childhood (12%).

Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely to have experienced physical mistreatment (53% vs. 42%) and have had a parent who struggled with mental health issues (55% vs. 43%).

Exposure to violence and exploitation

Violence can be a cause, and is often a result, of homelessness. One-third (33%) of homeless youth have stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options, and 14 percent have traded sex for shelter, food, clothing, or other essentials (Figure 9). Female youth are more likely to be homeless due to domestic violence, to have been attacked while homeless, to have stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options, and to have been encouraged to make money from the sex trade.

19% of homeless youth have been attacked or beaten while homeless.

Nineteen percent of homeless youth have been attacked or beaten while homeless, and 12 percent sought health care in the past 12 months because of an injury or illness resulting from violence. Fourteen 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.

9. Violence and sexual exploitation

	All youth ≤24	Female youth	Male youth	Minors ≤17	Young adults 18-24
Stayed in an abusive situation due to no other housing options	33%	38%	27%	25%	35%
Left last housing due to domestic violence	23%	30%	13%	23%	23%
Physically or sexually attacked while homeless	19%	21%	15%	10%	20%
Encouraged to make money by dancing, stripping, or exchange sex for money	14%	19%	7%	6%	16%
Has been sexual with someone only for the purpose of getting shelter, clothing, or food	14%	14%	15%	6%	16%
Sought health care in last 12 months due to an injury or illness resulting from violence	12%	12%	11%	5%	13%
At least one of the above	52%	56%	45%	43%	53%

Out-of-home placements

Two-thirds of youth (68%) have experienced either a social service or corrections placement (Figure 10). The most commonly experienced placements were foster homes, correctional facilities (mainly youth detention), and mental health facilities.

Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely to have a history of social or correctional placements than youth in the Twin Cities area (73% vs. 64%). Specific kinds of placements where differences were largest include foster care (42% in greater Minnesota vs. 32% in the metro area), mental health facilities (37% vs. 26%), drug or alcohol treatment facilities (23% v. 14%), and halfway houses (15% vs. 7%). Male youth were more likely than female youth to report a social or correctional placement (74% vs. 63%). Young adults were more likely than minors to have experienced a placement.

10. Out-of-home placements

	Minors ≤17	Young adults 18-24	All youth ≤24
Foster home	34%	36%	36%
Facility for people with mental health problems	34%	30%	31%
Group home	17%	24%	23%
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	10%	19%	18%
Halfway house	3%	12%	10%
Residence for people with physical disabilities	3%	4%	4%
Any of these social service placements	56%	62%	61%
Any correctional placement for over a week	25%	37%	35%
Any social or correctional placement	63%	69%	68%

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 17 percent of youth left some type of social service placement. Of these, 42 percent left a mental health facility, 19 percent left foster care, and 18 percent left a drug or alcohol treatment facility. For youth who had left a social service placement in the previous 12 months, 47 percent reported they had a stable place to live when they left.

Of those who had been in a social service placement, 28 percent of youth said they had run away from foster care, a group home, or other out-of-home placement, and 10 percent had to leave a placement because they became too old to stay.

In the same 12 months prior to the survey, 14 percent of youth had left some type of correctional facility. Of this group, 60 percent had left a county jail, 32 percent had left juvenile detention, and 7 percent had left a prison. Forty-six percent of those released had a stable place to live when they left.

Health and mental health

Brittany is in her early 20s and has been living with her husband in an emergency shelter in northern Minnesota for the past nine months. She has struggled with bipolar disorder and depression. She also has a drinking problem. Brittany has been in residential treatment programs for her mental health problems as well as for her alcoholism. She left home for the first time at age 18 when she was fighting with her parents about her substance use. Brittany and her husband became homeless recently because of their alcohol use, and because they could no longer afford their rent. Brittany has her high school diploma, but has been unable to find work. She has medical insurance, a driver's license, a cell phone with a data plan, and access to a computer at the shelter.

Similar to the adult homeless population, high proportions of homeless youth have physical, mental, and chemical health problems. Over one-half (57%) have a serious mental illness, with anxiety or panic disorder being the most common (37%). More than one-third of youth (36%) have a chronic physical health condition, most often asthma (22%) or high blood pressure (10%). Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely than youth in the metro area to report a serious mental illness (62% vs. 53%). Youth in the metro area were more likely to report a chronic physical condition (39% vs. 32%).

57% of homeless youth report some type of significant mental health problem, and 36% have chronic physical health issues.

Thirteen percent (18% in greater Minnesota and 10% in metro area) have been told by a medical professional within the past two years that they have a drug abuse disorder (12%) or an alcohol abuse disorder (7%). Nineteen percent reported evidence of a traumatic brain injury.

Nearly one-quarter of youth (24%) said they have a prescription they need, but are not taking; of these, 78 percent said the medication is one prescribed for a mental health problem.

Almost one-half of youth (46%) have received outpatient care for a mental health issue, with 80 percent of these saying they had received care in the past 2 years.

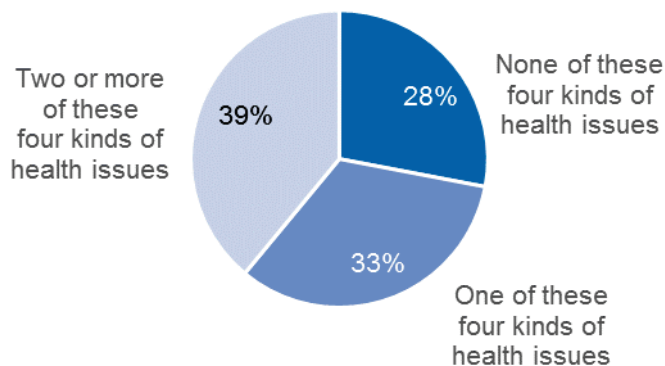
Although the percentage of youth with mental illness is similar for minors (58%) and young adults (56%), in other kinds of health issues, young adult incidence rates are substantially higher (Figure 11). Continuing the pattern of increasing incidence with age, homeless adults age 25 or older have significantly higher rates of each of these kinds of issues compared to youth.

11. Health issues

	Minors ≤17	Young adults 18-24	All youth ≤24	Adults 25+
Significant mental illness	58%	56%	57%	64%
Chronic physical health condition	29%	38%	36%	55%
Substance abuse disorder	9%	14%	13%	25%
Evidence of traumatic brain injury	14%	20%	19%	35%
At least one of the above	68%	73%	72%	84%
Two or more of the above	33%	40%	39%	57%
Three or more of the above	8%	13%	12%	30%

Overall, 39 percent of homeless youth report a combination of two or more of these kinds of health issues (mental illness, substance abuse, chronic physical health conditions, or brain injury). Thirty-three percent report only one of those three, and 28 percent report none of the four (Figure 12).

12. Co-occurrence of health issues (mental illness, substance abuse, chronic physical health conditions, or brain injury) among homeless youth



Compared to homeless adults, homeless youth were significantly more likely to have none of these conditions and significantly less likely to have multiple health issues. This may suggest that intervening early may help prevent some conditions from developing. Further, youth without these conditions may need different kinds of programs to address their needs than those who have multiple health issues.

Twelve percent of youth said they consider themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent, although half that proportion (6%) report a current need to see a medical professional about a substance abuse problem. Fifty-eight percent reported use of tobacco, 35 percent reported use of marijuana, and 33 percent reported use of alcohol in the past 30 days.

Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely to report the use of tobacco (63% vs. 54%) and less likely to report the use of marijuana (29% vs. 39%).

Of those who smoked, three in five youth (60%) reported starting to smoke cigarettes at age 15 or younger. Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely than metro youth to have started smoking at or before 15 (66% vs. 56%).

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

Resources

Vanessa is a 23-year-old youth who has been living in an emergency shelter in Minneapolis for almost two years. This is the fourth time she has been homeless since age 10, when her mom lost their apartment and they slept in their car. Besides living in the emergency shelter, she has been sleeping outside and on a friend's couch. Vanessa was neglected and physically and sexually abused as a child, and now struggles with depression and anxiety. Her alcoholic stepfather struggled with mental illness and physically abused her mother. She felt unsafe and left home because of the neglect and violence. In spite of these struggles, she has completed some college courses and has a job at a clothing store about 10 hours a week, where she makes \$9/hour. She would like to work more hours so she can improve her income in order to get her own place. Vanessa has a few really good friends who provide a lot of support. Shelter staff have also helped her apply to a number of permanent housing programs, as well as for health coverage and food assistance.

Employment and income

Forty-two percent of youth were employed at the time of the survey. This is a higher rate of employment than among all homeless adults age 18 or older (30%). However, only 16 percent of youth were employed full time (35 or more hours per week). More than half of youth (54%) earned less than 10 dollars an hour. Youth in the metro were more likely than those in greater Minnesota to be employed (47% vs. 35%), to be employed full time (19% vs. 12%), and to be earning at least 10 dollars an hour (49% vs. 39%). Young adults were more likely to be employed than minors (45% vs. 30%).

Among youth who were not currently employed, 69 percent said they were looking for work. More young adults (75%) said they were looking for work, compared with 48 percent of minors.

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

- Transportation (34%)
- Personal reasons (e.g., motivation, time, family problems) (18%)
- A lack of housing (16%)
- A lack of resources needed to work or look for work (16%)
- A lack of child care (13%)
- Mental health issues (12%)
- Job experience/job history (10%)
- Criminal history (10%)

Youth reported a median income of \$437 during the month of the survey, with minors reporting a median of \$100 and young adults reporting a median income of \$500. For youth overall, the median income was \$500 in the metro area versus \$400 in greater Minnesota. Over one-quarter of youth (28%) reported an income of \$100 or less, including 15 percent who said they had no income.

Youth who had an income during the month of the survey were asked to name their main source of income. The most common responses are listed below:

- Steady employment (38%)
- MFIP/TANF (14%)
- Parents, other relatives, or friends (13%)
- General Assistance (7%)
- SSI (Supplemental Security Income) (6%)
- Temporary work or day labor (6%)

Health care

Sixty percent of youth said they have a regular place to go for health care (66% in greater Minnesota and 56% in the metro area). Their regular place was most often a clinic requiring fees or insurance (71%), a free clinic (15%), or the emergency room (ER, 7%). Four in ten youth (39%) had been to the ER in the past six months. Nearly one-third (32%) reported that their visits to the ER during that time had resulted in at least one hospital stay.

Twenty-four percent of youth said they need to see a health professional about a physical health problem, 31 percent said they need to see a health professional about an emotional or mental health problem, and 46 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.

Over two-thirds (69%) of youth said they had some type of medical coverage during the month of the survey.

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 (59%)
- Youth workers (46%)
- Social workers (46%)
- Shelter staff people (38%)

Not surprisingly, services to assist with meeting basic needs for food, transportation, and health and outreach-related services dominate assistance received by homeless youth (Figure 13). The variety of services accessed and valued by many youth illustrates the importance of offering a mix of services.

In addition to being the most common type of assistance received, food assistance (specifically food stamps and WIC) also ranked at or near the top among services youth report helped them the most. Other services that were most highly rated as helpful by those who received them were transportation assistance and drop-in centers.

13. Types of assistance received in the month of the survey

	Percent of youth who received the service during October	Of those who received the service, percent who say it is one of 3 services that have helped the most
Food assistance	66%	
Food stamps/SNAP	41%	81%
Food shelf	29%	42%
Hot meal program	25%	39%
WIC	19%	60%
Transportation assistance (including bus cards)	46%	62%
Outreach-related	42%	
Drop-in center services	33%	59%
Outreach services	20%	41%
Health-related services	38%	
Emergency room	26%	30%
Free medical clinic	19%	44%
Free mental health clinic	9%	33%
Free dental clinic	9%	26%

13. Types of assistance received in the month of the survey (continued)

	Percent of youth who received the service during October	Of those who received the service, percent who say it is one of 3 services that have helped the most
Free/almost free clothing	28%	28%
Employment-related services	28%	
Help to find a job	24%	32%
Job training	13%	40%
Help getting financial or other public benefits	23%	32%

Some differences are evident in service use, according to age and geographic location. Young adults are more likely than minors to report receiving food assistance (68% vs. 54%), outreach assistance (44% vs. 28%), and clothing assistance (29% vs. 21%). Youth in the metro area are more likely than those in greater Minnesota to receive transportation assistance (58% vs. 30%) and health services (41% vs. 34%). Figures related to food and transportation assistance likely reflect availability of, and ability to access, such services in the metro area compared to more rural areas of the state. Thus, for example, although 57 percent of all youth report using public transit (a local bus and/or light rail) at least weekly, the rate of use is much higher in the metro area than in greater Minnesota (72% vs. 34%).

Nineteen percent of youth said they had lost or were unable to afford benefits in the last year. Of those who lost benefits, they most often lost food stamps (64%) and medical coverage (35%).

More than two-thirds of youth (69%) reported they have a cell phone with a data plan, and nearly two-thirds (64%) said they have access to a computer and internet. Almost two-thirds of youth (62%) reported they have a valid ID. Youth in greater Minnesota are less likely to have cell phones with a data plan (64% vs. 72% in the metro area), computer and internet access (60% vs. 67%), and a valid ID (55% vs. 66%).

Special populations

The following sections describe characteristics of four specific sub-groups of youth experiencing homelessness: youth who are parents, youth of color, youth in greater Minnesota compared to metro area youth, and youth who are minors (age 17 and younger).

Youth who are parenting

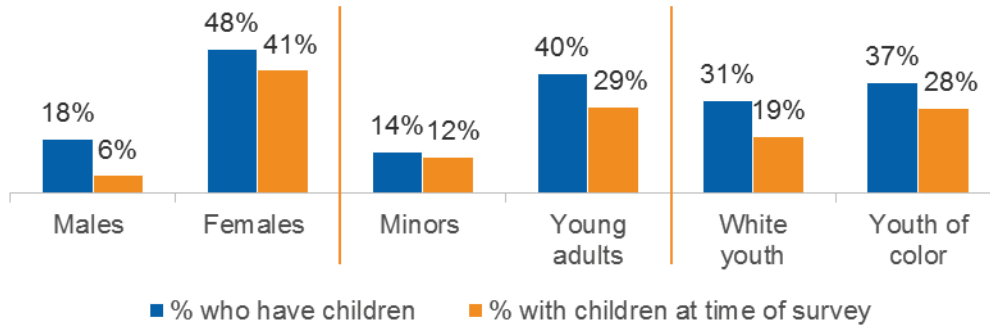
Kyah is a 17-year-old African American youth living with her 2-year-old daughter in transitional housing in Saint Paul. She received special education in school and dropped out when her daughter was born. As a child, her family was homeless many times, she witnessed both physical abuse and drug use in her home, and her mother spent time in prison. After several months of constant fighting, her mom asked Kyah to find another place to live. Kyah had a head injury when she first became homeless. She has also been diagnosed with PTSD. The transitional housing program has helped her stabilize. Kyah now has health care coverage through Medicaid, a cell phone, access to a computer, and a Minnesota ID, and shelter staff have helped her connect to services. She has also gotten support from an aunt, her daughter's father, and a friend.

About one-third (35%) of homeless youth are parents, and about one-quarter (26%) have at least one child with them. Most have only had one child (61%), and most of their children are age 2 or younger. Compared to youth without children, youth who have children with them while they are experiencing homelessness appear to be more connected to services and resources to meet basic needs, including shelter programs, food supports, and health coverage. They also report a higher monthly income. The section below describes the basic demographic characteristics in which youth parents (that is, those have children with them) differ most from youth who are not parenting.

Characteristics of youth parents

Female youth are more likely than male youth to be parents. About half (48%) of female youth have had children (vs. 18% of male youth), and 41 percent of female youth had children with them on the night of the survey (vs. 6% of male youth) (Figure 14). Fourteen percent of minors age 17 and younger have children, and 40 percent of young adults age 18-24 years have children. Thirty-seven percent of youth of color have had children, and 31 percent of white youth.

14. Proportion of homeless youth who have ever had children, and proportion who have children with them while homeless



Sixty-three percent of parenting youth have only one child with them, and nearly all (91%) have no more than two.

Youth parents in the metro areas are most likely to be black or African American (66%), with no other racial or ethnic group exceeding 10 percent. In greater Minnesota, 38 percent of youth parents were white, 20 percent were African American, 19 percent were American Indian, and 15 percent were Hispanic (of any race). These figures do not include youth on American Indian reservations; data from the companion reservation study are reported separately (mnhomeless.org).

Experience with homelessness

Youth with children were more likely to have stayed at least one night in homeless service programs such as transitional housing or emergency shelters in the previous 30 days, and less likely to have been doubled up (Figure 15). They were also less likely to have stayed outside during the previous 30 days, or to have been in regular housing during that time.

15. Housing situation in last 30 days for youth with and without children

	Youth with children	Youth not with children
In any shelter at least one night in last 30 days	83%	58%
Doubled up at least one night in last 30 days	31%	53%
Stayed outside at least one night in last 30 days	12%	35%
In regular housing at least one night in last 30 days	4%	11%

Sixty percent of parenting youth had been homeless at least a year, compared to 42 percent of non-parenting youth.

Adverse experiences of parenting youth

Parenting youth had significantly lower rates of mental illness and chemical health problems than non-parenting youth, although they shared similar rates of chronic health problems (Figure 16). Youth parents were also less likely than non-parents to have been in out-of-home placements.

16. Health issues and out-of-home placements for youth with and without children

	Youth with children	Youth not with children
Significant mental illness	49%	60%
Alcohol or drug abuse disorder	7%	15%
Chronic physical health condition	40%	36%
Ever in any social service placement	48%	65%
Ever in any correctional facility	23%	38%

Resources and services used by parenting youth

Most youth with children were receiving some mainstream safety net services, including 82 percent who said they had received SNAP/food stamps and 64 percent who said they had received WIC during the month of the study. Forty-six percent of youth with children said they had received transportation assistance in the past month.

Forty-nine percent of youth with children said they were employed (21% full time), higher than the 40 percent reported by youth without children (15% full time). Among employed youth, more parents than non-parents were earning \$10 or more per hour (57% vs. 41%). Including wages, family welfare (MFIP) or General Assistance benefits, and all other sources, youth with children reported a higher median monthly income (\$625 vs. \$285 for youth without children).

Youth with children were more likely to report having medical coverage during the month of the study (81% vs. 64%), as well as having a regular place for medical care (81% vs. 53%).

More youth with children said they have cell phones (82% vs. 64%), and more were on waiting lists for subsidized housing (53% vs. 27%).

Needs of children

Most children with homeless youth were very young. Eighty percent were age 3 or under. Forty-one percent of youth parents reported at least one of their children was enrolled in a Head Start or other early education program (a rate comparable to that of older parents).

Nine percent of youth parents said at least one of their children had emotional or behavioral problems, and 4 percent said a child had chronic or severe physical problems (Figure 17). At the same time, 5 percent said that in the past year they had been unable to obtain needed health care, and 6 percent said they had been unable to obtain needed dental care for their children. Six percent also said their children had to skip meals in the previous month due to a lack of money to buy food.

Forty-three percent of youth parents had received child care assistance in the past 12 months, but said they had been unable to obtain regular child care when they had needed it in the past year.

On most of these measures, the children who were with youth parents had lower rates of trauma and unmet needs compared to children who were with adult parents.

17. Health and care needs of children accompanying homeless youth and adult parents

	Youth ≤24 with children	Adults 18+ with children
At least one child has emotional or behavioral problems	9%	25%
At least one child has a chronic or severe physical problem	4%	12%
Could not get needed health care for at least one child in past year	5%	10%
Could not get needed dental care for at least one child in past year	6%	16%
Children had to skip meals in previous month because there was not enough money to buy food	6%	9%
Unable to get regular child care when needed in the past year	42%	39%

Youth of color

Luke is a 20-year-old American Indian young adult who has been living on the street and sleeping on friends' couches for the last 10 months. Due to abuse and neglect, he was removed from his home at age 3 and grew up in a Twin Cities suburb with a foster family. When he aged out of the foster care program at 18 he did not have a permanent place to live and ended up bouncing around treatment programs until he was able to stabilize in a residential mental health program. When he was released from treatment, he had a stable apartment for a few months, but relapsed and ended up on the streets. He received special education in school, and has struggled with depression and anxiety. In spite of his difficult start, he graduated from high school. He also has health care insurance through Medicaid, a driver's license, and a cell phone with a data plan that helps him stay in touch with the people who support him. He has connected to services through his contacts with a social worker and youth outreach worker.

Among youth, 42 percent identified as African American, 9 percent identified as American Indian, 9 percent said they were multi-racial, and 11 percent identified as Hispanic.

These youth (grouped together as “youth of color” in analysis for this report) represent nearly three-quarters (73%) of the homeless youth population. Historical trauma and generational impacts of discriminatory housing and child welfare policies, as well as other systemic inequities, have contributed to the overrepresentation of youth of color in Minnesota’s homeless population. For the purposes of this report, youth who identified with these racial or ethnic groups were grouped together to understand more about their experiences.

Basic demographic characteristics in which youth of color differ from their white counterparts are described below. In addition, youth of color, overall, appear to be more connected to services and resources. White youth appear to have had more troubles during childhood, and to have more physical and mental health issues at the time of the survey.

Demographic characteristics

Compared to white youth, youth of color are more likely to have grown up in Saint Paul or Minneapolis (41% vs. 6% of white youth) or outside of Minnesota (30% vs. 20% of white youth). In contrast, white youth are more likely to have grown up in greater Minnesota (51% vs. 17% of youth of color) or in the suburbs (23% vs. 12% of youth of color).

Thirty-seven percent of youth of color have had children, compared to 31 percent of white youth.

Experience with housing and homelessness

Forty-three percent of youth of color said that their last regular housing had been in the cities of Minneapolis or Saint Paul, while 81 percent of white youth said their last regular housing had been in a metro suburb or greater Minnesota.

Youth of color and white youth reported similar top reasons for becoming homeless, although white youth often reported more contributing reasons, resulting in higher percentages for each one. Figure 18 below provides further detail.

18. Top 5 factors leading to homelessness: youth perceptions

If you think it was a main cause, part of the cause but not the main cause, or not really a factor in your being homeless today	Youth of color	White youth
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	53%	66%
Told to leave or locked out	46%	52%
Not willing to live by parents' rules	39%	49%
Own use of drugs or alcohol	19%	36%
Parents' use of drugs or alcohol	30%	32%

White youth were less likely to say they would be allowed by parents to return home if they wanted to (40% vs. 53% of youth of color).

White youth were slightly more likely to say that this was their first episode of homelessness (31% vs. 23%). Youth of color were more likely than white youth to have spent time in some kind of homeless shelter during their childhood (40% vs. 19%). In the three months before the survey, youth of color were more likely to have been turned away from a shelter due to a lack of space (27% vs. 16% of white youth). Youth of color were also more likely to be on a waiting list for some type of subsidized housing (37% vs. 25% of white youth). Of those who were not on a waiting list, 21 percent of youth of color could not get on a list because it was closed, compared to 10 percent of white youth.

While both groups of homeless youth reported similar top reasons preventing them from getting housing, a greater proportion of white youth cited a lack of a job or income as a current barrier (45% vs. 33% of youth of color). The median monthly rent youth of color said they could afford to pay was \$350; white youth said they could afford to pay \$200 per month, on average.

Health and mental health

For most health problems addressed in the survey, incidence rates were lower for homeless youth of color than for white youth, and youth of color reported less need for medical interventions, as well as less use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

However, youth of color were more likely than white youth to report having a chronic health condition (38% vs. 31%), including higher incidence rates of asthma (24% vs. 19%), the most common chronic illness (Figure 19).

19. Physical and mental health factors for youth of color and white youth

	Youth of color	White youth
Mental health diagnosis	45%	68%
Anxiety or panic disorder	31%	52%
Major depression	27%	44%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	21%	29%
Bipolar disorder	18%	27%
Chemical dependency diagnosis	9%	24%
Both mental health and chemical dependency diagnosis	8%	21%
Any chronic physical health condition	38%	31%
Asthma	24%	19%
Cognitive disability (often feels confused or has trouble remembering things)	23%	38%
Outpatient care for mental health issues in the past two years	41%	60%
Need to see a provider for emotional or mental health issue	28%	38%

Trauma, abuse, and out-of-home placement

Compared to youth of color, white youth experiencing homelessness reported a more difficult childhood and young adulthood (Figure 20). White youth also reported more experience in social service and treatment facilities.

20. Abuse and placement experiences for youth of color and white youth

	Youth of color	White youth
During childhood, had a parent with mental health issues	41%	64%
Physically mistreated during childhood	42%	57%
Neglected during childhood	26%	34%
Ever stayed in an abusive relationship because they had no other housing options	30%	40%
Ever lived in a facility for persons with mental health issues	26%	43%
Ever lived in a drug or alcohol treatment facility	15%	24%
Ever lived in any social service or treatment facilities	59%	67%

History with corrections

- 62% of youth of color had a parent who had ever been incarcerated (vs. 50% of white youth), including 51% who said this happened during their childhood (vs. 35% of white youth)

- Similar proportions of both groups (34% of youth of color and 35% of white youth) said they had ever been held in a correctional facility
- White youth who had been in correctional facilities were more likely to have left in the last 12 months (48% vs. 37% of youth of color)

Education, employment and income

Youth of color are more likely than White youth to be enrolled in school as well as employed. Of those who had been enrolled in school during the previous year, 45 percent of youth of color said they had trouble getting to school due to problems with transportation or housing, compared to 21 percent of white youth.

Youth of color were more likely than white youth to be working full time, and those with any employment reported a higher average monthly income (Figure 21).

21. Education and employment for youth of color and white youth

	Youth of color	White youth
Highest level of education completed		
Not yet completed high school	50%	44%
High school diploma or GED	33%	45%
At least some college	17%	11%
Enrolled in school	70%	58%
Attended school in the past year	72%	60%
Employed	43%	39%
Employed full-time	18%	12%
Median monthly income	\$467	\$378

Resources and services

Youth of color more often reported use of transportation assistance (53% vs. 28% of white youth), food stamps (43% vs. 37% of white youth), and drop-in centers (36% vs. 27% of white youth) during the month of the study (Figure 22). Similar proportions of both groups said that food stamps were among the three most helpful kinds of assistance they received. A greater proportion of youth of color said transportation assistance was one of the most helpful services they received, and a slightly greater proportion of white youth said that hot meals were among the most helpful. Some services, such as the WIC food program and job training, were only received by a small percentage of youth of

color, but were rated as among the most helpful by a high proportion of those who received them.

22. Services used and most helpful for youth of color and white youth

Top services	Used in the month of the study		Among the 3 most helpful (% of those who received it)	
	Youth of color	White youth	Youth of color	White youth
Transportation assistance/bus card	53%	28%	63%	58%
Food stamps/ SNAP	43%	37%	82%	82%
Drop-in centers	36%	27%	58%	58%
Food shelves	29%	30%	39%	50%
Hot meals	25%	28%	32%	59%
WIC program	20%	16%	55%	76%
Job training	14%	9%	39%	44%
Outreach services	20%	20%	34%	55%

Youth of color were less likely to have a state ID (59% vs. 68% of white youth).

Youth in greater Minnesota compared to youth in the Twin Cities metro area

Geographic differences, where they are significant, have been noted throughout this report. The following section describes some of the characteristics, by region.

Youth who were counted in greater Minnesota were 37 percent of all youth in the 2015 study; this percentage was almost the same for unaccompanied minors as for older youth (Figure 23). Youth in greater Minnesota included higher percentages who identified as white or American Indian, while those in the Twin Cities metro area included higher percentages who identified as black or African American or of mixed/multiple races.

23. Number of youth experiencing homelessness, by age group and region

	Greater Minnesota		Twin Cities metro	
	N	%	N	%
Unaccompanied minor (17 and younger)	81	38%	132	62%
Young adult (18-24)	465	37%	785	63%
All youth	546	37%	917	63%

Other differences are consistent with higher rates of adverse childhood experiences in greater Minnesota (Figure 24). A large majority of homeless youth (89%) had at least one of the selected adverse childhood experience asked in the survey. However, youth in greater

Minnesota had higher rates of nearly every selected adverse childhood experience. The only exception was having had a parent spend time in prison during their childhood (49% for metro youth versus 44% for greater Minnesota youth). While greater Minnesota youth have higher rates of each kind of these experiences, they are especially more likely to have had a parent with mental illness (55% versus 43% of metro youth), to have been physical abused as a child (53% versus 42% of metro youth), and to have been placed outside of the home (60% versus 50% of metro youth).

24. Selected adverse childhood experiences among homeless youth, by region

	Greater Minnesota	Twin Cities metro	All youth
Lived with substance abuser as a child	63%	60%	61%
Witnessed abuse as a child	64%	58%	60%
Out-of-home placements as a child	60%	50%	54%
Lived with parent/guardian with mental illness	55%	43%	48%
During childhood, had a parent serve time in prison	44%	49%	47%
Physically abused as a child	53%	42%	46%
Sexually abused as a child	34%	27%	30%
Neglected as a child	32%	27%	29%
At least one of the above adverse childhood experiences	91%	88%	89%

Health conditions among homeless youth were more mixed in how differences are seen between greater Minnesota and the metro region. Youth in greater Minnesota were more likely to have used tobacco in the previous 30 days, have an alcohol or drug abuse disorder, or have a serious mental health condition. They were also more likely than metro youth to report having a regular place to go for medical care. Metro youth were more likely to have a chronic physical health condition, and more likely to have used marijuana in the past 30 days.

Comparison of homeless minor youth (age 17 and younger) with minor youth in the general population

To compare the characteristics of minors experiencing homelessness with their non-homeless peers, survey responses for homeless minors (age 17 and younger) were compared to student responses to similar questions from the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey.³

³ The Minnesota Student Survey was administered during 2016 to students in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 in 85 percent of Minnesota's public school districts. Four to seven percent of the Minnesota Student Survey respondents reported being homeless for some time in the last year. These students' responses are included in the statewide student survey results, so the comparison to the Minnesota Homeless Study findings will be a slight underestimation of the difference between homeless and non-homeless minors. Student survey results vary by grade level; the figure cited here is for whichever grade had the highest percent, which also causes relative differences to be underestimated.

This comparison identifies several characteristics that show increased challenges faced by youth experiencing homelessness (Figure 25). Adverse childhood experiences are consistently reported about three times as often by homeless youth compared to their non-homeless peers. Homeless minors are about 14 times more likely than non-homeless minors to report having been pregnant or having gotten someone else pregnant.

Similar to adverse childhood experiences, mental health and substance abuse also are approximately three times more prevalent in responses by homeless minors compared to their non-homeless counterparts. Changing schools one or more times in the last year was much more likely in homeless minors compared to non-homeless minors (6.8 to 1). An LGBTQ sexual orientation was reported 1.5 times as often in homeless youth as in non-homeless minors; this relative difference was smaller than some of the other characteristics observed.

25. Comparison of selected characteristics experienced by minor youth experiencing homelessness versus their same age peers

Selected adverse childhood experiences	Homeless minors	Minnesota Student Survey ^{abc}	Ratio: Homeless minors (%) vs MSS (%)
Parents ever in prison?	51%	17%	3.0 to 1
Lived with a problem drinker, or drug user ^d	61%	16%	3.8 to 1
Physically abused as a child	42%	12%	3.5 to 1
Sexually abused as a child	19%	4%	3.1 to 1
Health related			
Long-term mental health problems ^e	58%	20%	2.9 to 1
Ever treated for mental health	53%	21%	2.5 to 1
Ever treated for alcohol or drug problem	11%	3%	3.7 to 1
Ever pregnant, or gotten someone else pregnant	27%	2%	13.6 to 1
Gender/sexual orientation			
Sexual orientation: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, Not sure	17%	11%	1.5 to 1
Do you consider yourself transgender	2%	3%	0.7 to 1
School related			
Do you have an IEP or get special education services	43%	11%	3.9 to 1
How many different schools did you attend this year (2 or more)	95%	14%	6.8 to 1
Not feeling safe at school	10%	8%	1.3 to 1

^a Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) results are for 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders. Because of their mature nature, some questions are only asked of higher grade levels

^b MSS results shown here are the maximum for any of the different grade levels surveyed.

^c 4 to 7 percent of MSS grade level respondents reported being homeless in the last 12 months.

^d MSS asks in the present tense, "Do you live with..." while the Minnesota Homeless Study survey asks about the current and past, "... did you ever live with ..."

^e MSS survey asks if health problems last 6 months or more, while the Minnesota Homeless Study survey asks if the health problems were experienced in the last 12 months.

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 40-50% of local apartments available to a renter) was \$796 per month for a one-bedroom apartment in the Twin Cities metro area, and averaged \$558 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 26).

The four most common barriers to housing cited by youth include three that are directly related to finances:

- Lack of a job or income (36%)
- No housing they could afford (23%)
- Don’t know how to find rental housing (13%)
- Credit problems (13%)

On the income side, 37 percent of homeless youth report that the amount they would be able to pay for rent is less than \$200 per month. While 31 percent reported that an efficiency or studio apartment 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 \$437 and nearly one-quarter (22%) said they have no money available for rent.

26. Fair market rent versus income, by region

	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	\$796	\$2,653	\$500
Greater Minnesota	\$558	\$1,860	\$400

More than one-third (34%) of youth said they were on a waiting list for Section 8 housing. However, 10 percent reported they could not get on a waiting list because it was closed.

Employment alone does not solve the affordability dilemma because only 16 percent of youth are employed full time, and most employed youth (54%) 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 age 18).

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

- 76% have been homeless before their current episode
- 58% are unemployed
- 37% could not afford to pay \$200 or more for rent
- 57% have a serious mental illness
- 47% have been homeless for at least a year
- 35% have been incarcerated

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

Some issues to consider

Youth on their own experiencing homelessness 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. Many efforts are underway in Minnesota to address the complex needs of homeless youth. However, action is needed to address the pervasive issue of insufficient affordable housing and provide youth with supportive services that consider their unique circumstances, histories of trauma, and developmental needs.