

## S U M M A R Y

## Facts about homeless youth and young adults Minnesota statewide survey, October 2000

This survey provides a snapshot of youth homelessness in Minnesota during a single day in the last quarter of 2000.

On October 26, 2000, trained volunteers conducted interviews throughout Minnesota with 209 homeless youth (age 10 to 17) who were unaccompanied by adults. Additional interviews were conducted with 285 homeless young adults (99 males and 186 females) 18, 19, and 20 years of age who were homeless on the same date (October 26, 2000). Information on both the 209 unaccompanied youth and 285 young adults are included in this summary.

### **Number of homeless youth**

On any given night in Minnesota, an estimated 660 unaccompanied youth (persons 17 or younger) are without permanent shelter.

Over the course of one year, an estimated 10,000 unaccompanied youth (persons 17 or younger) experience at least one episode of homelessness in Minnesota.

### **Who is homeless?**

Slightly over half (51%) of homeless youth and about two-fifths of homeless young adults (42%) grew up in a single-parent household.

Homeless youth are much more likely than youth in the general population to be persons of color. For example, whereas only 8 percent of all youth in the Twin Cities metro area are African American, 44 percent of homeless youth in the Twin Cities area are

African American. Likewise, whereas 2 percent of all youth in greater Minnesota are American Indian, 32 percent of homeless greater Minnesota youth are American Indian.

### **History of homelessness or out-of-home placement**

On average, homeless youth began living on their own around age 13. This is slightly younger than the age reported in previous studies (1991, 1994, 1997).

The young adults surveyed in 2000 began living on their own between age 15 and 16.

Nearly one-third of homeless youth (29%) have been homeless for less than one month. In contrast, only 9 percent of homeless young adults have been homeless less than one month.

Two-thirds of all homeless youth (67%) have experienced some type of out-of-home placement. Close to half of homeless youth (46%) have spent at least one night in a detention center, and 41 percent have spent some time in foster care. One in ten homeless youth (13%) have lived in a drug or alcohol treatment facility.

Over three-fifths of the homeless young adults surveyed (62%) have experienced some type of out-of-home placement. About two-fifths of the homeless young adults surveyed (38%) have spent at least one night in a detention center, 34 percent have lived in a foster home, 30 percent in a group home, and 20 percent have lived in a residential program for people with behavioral or mental health problems. About one-fifth of homeless young adults (19%) have lived in a drug or alcohol treatment facility.

Funding for this study was provided by the State of Minnesota, Family Housing Fund, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. For additional copies of the summary *Facts about homeless youth and young adults* or to obtain the full report *Homeless youth in Minnesota*, contact Wilder Research Center at 651-647-4600 or online at [www.wilder.org/research](http://www.wilder.org/research).

## **Factors in youth homelessness**

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Conflict with parents is the most common reason for youth to be homeless (39%). This is also true for 27 percent of the homeless young adults surveyed.

The main reasons youth report for not returning home are: an adult in the household won't tolerate their being around (50%), alcohol or drug use by a parent or other household member (30%), adults don't attend to the youth's basic needs (30%), not enough space for everyone in the household to live (27%), and danger of physical or sexual abuse (25%).

Forty-one percent of girls (age 10-17) report having been sexually mistreated as a child or youth, as do 40 percent of young women 18-20 years of age. Homeless boys (10-17) and young men (18-20) report somewhat lower rates of sexual abuse (14% and 28% respectively).

Sixty-seven percent of the homeless youth report that they could return home if they wished to do so. This is the same proportion as in 1997, but higher than the 45 percent in 1994 who felt they could return home if they wished to do so. In 2000, 57 percent of the homeless young adults report that they could return home.

Youth who don't think they will ever live with their family again most often cite better communication as the issue that would have to change for them to again live with their family.

Greater Minnesota homeless youth are more likely to have been incarcerated than homeless youth in the Twin Cities area (56% vs. 31%). The same is true for homeless young adults (44% vs. 35%).

Greater Minnesota homeless youth are more likely than homeless youth in the Twin Cities area to have lived in a foster home (49% vs. 29%). Young adults in greater Minnesota are only slightly more likely to have lived in a foster home (35% vs. 32%).

Homeless youth cite several reasons for having had difficulty getting or keeping housing. These include: their age, lack of housing they can afford, lack of local rental history, the cost of application fees, and a criminal background. Homeless young adults cite similar reasons, with the addition of credit problems.

## **Streets vs. shelters**

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Homeless youth who stay with friends or on the street are more likely than those in shelters and transitional programs:

- To be female (59% vs. 49%).
- To have left home at a later age (average of 13.7 years vs. 12.9 years).
- To be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (14% vs. 8%).
- To feel unsafe in their current housing situation (17% vs. 3%).
- To have homeless relatives (37% vs. 27%).

Those who stay in shelters and transitional housing programs are more likely than those who stay with friends or on the street:

- To be attending school this year (81% vs. 71%).
- To have higher average monthly income (\$312 vs. \$260).

## **Pregnancy and parenting**

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Girls who are homeless are about seven times more likely than girls (ages 13-18) in the general population to report that they have had at least one pregnancy (29% vs. 4%).

Eight percent of homeless youth have at least one child (5% of the males and 10% of the females). Among the homeless young adults, 25 percent of males and 55 percent of females have at least one child.

Of the homeless youth who have children, 60 percent (none of the males and 90% of the females) have their children with them in temporary housing. Of the homeless young adults, 71 percent (13% of the males and 83% of the females) have their children with them in temporary housing.

## **Education, employment, and income**

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The percentage of homeless youth enrolled in secondary schools increased from 52 percent in 1994, to 73 percent in 1997 and 2000. Among homeless young adults in 2000, 37 percent are currently enrolled in an educational program.

One-fourth of homeless youth (25%) receive income from steady employment. The other primary sources of income for homeless youth are support from parents or from other relatives. Among the homeless young adults, 26 percent have income from steady employment.

Twenty-seven percent of homeless youth have a job (5% have a full-time job). Thirty-nine percent of homeless young adults have a job (23% have a full-time job).

### **Public assistance and service use**

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Youth and young adults most often mention the following people as having helped them find the services they need: a friend, a shelter staff person, a social worker, a youth worker, or an outreach worker.

Youth report that, other than housing, their main needs are: a job, school, money or budgeting assistance, food/food stamps, clothing, and getting their family together. Young adults report, other than housing, their main needs are: a job, transportation, money or budgeting assistance, school or training, and clothing.

Five percent of homeless youth receive income from MFIP and 8 percent from General Assistance. Twenty-eight percent of homeless young adults receive income from MFIP and 6 percent receive General Assistance.

Sixteen percent of all homeless youth report that they need help applying for services. About one-fourth of homeless young adults (24%) report that they need help applying for services.

### **Health and well-being**

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The percentage of youth who feel they need to see a medical professional about a physical health problem has decreased from 31 percent in 1994, to 19 percent in 1997, to 14 percent in 2000. Over one-fourth of homeless young adults (27%) report that they need to see a medical professional about a physical health problem.

Thirty-one percent of homeless youth have been told by a doctor or nurse in the past two years that they have a serious mental health problem (defined as schizophrenia, paranoia or other delusional disorder, manic depression, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post traumatic stress disorder), an increase from 23 percent in 1997. An equal number of homeless young adults (31%) have recently been told by a doctor or nurse that they have a serious mental health problem.

One in five homeless youth (19%) have been told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have an alcohol or drug abuse disorder, no change from 1997. Fewer than half of these youth (43%) consider themselves to be chemically dependent. Ten percent of homeless young adults have been told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have an alcohol or drug abuse disorder. Most of these young adults (72%) consider themselves to be chemically dependent.

Eleven percent of homeless youth have been told within the last two years that they have both a serious mental health problem and an alcohol or drug abuse disorder. Six percent of homeless young adults report having been told within the last two years that they have both a serious mental health problem and an alcohol or drug abuse disorder.

About half of all homeless youth (46%) report drug or alcohol problems within their immediate family, compared to over two-thirds of homeless youth (71%) in 1997. Forty-one percent of homeless young adults report drug or alcohol problems within their immediate family.

Compared to the general population of 12- to 16-year-olds, youth experiencing homelessness are over three times more likely to report that they have been sexually abused (28% vs. 9%) or physically abused (47% vs. 13%) in the past. For homeless young adults, 44 percent report that they have been physically abused, and 36 percent report that they have been sexually abused.

Twin Cities area homeless youth are less likely to report having been in a violent relationship in the past 12 months than are homeless youth in greater Minnesota (20% vs. 28%). Just over one-third of homeless young adults in both the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota (36% and 38% respectively) report having been in a violent relationship in the past 12 months.

Greater Minnesota homeless youth are less likely than those in the Twin Cities area to report having left their last housing because of abuse (13% vs. 23%). The same is true among homeless young adults (16% vs. 20%).

Twin Cities area homeless youth are more likely than those in greater Minnesota to report having been physically assaulted since becoming homeless (19% vs. 15%). The same pattern is seen for homeless young adults (25% vs. 17%).

### **About this survey**

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The study design, based on similar surveys of homeless youth conducted by Wilder Research Center in 1991, 1994, and 1997, involves working with a network of service providers, shelters, and agency staff to identify potential respondents. The purpose of the study is to provide a current description of the characteristics and needs of unaccompanied homeless youth.

This study defines homelessness with the same criteria used by the United States Congress in allocating resources through the McKinney Act (P.L. 100-77, sec 103(2)(1), 101 stat. 485 [1987]).

The term “homeless” or “homeless individual” includes an individual who (1) lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and (2) has a primary nighttime residence that is (a) a supervised, publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Homeless youth are defined as follows:

Youth who currently have no parental, substitute, foster, or institutional home to which they can safely go. They are unaccompanied by an adult and have spent at least one night either in a formal emergency shelter, improvised shelter, doubled-up, or on the street. Components of this definition are described in Kryder-Coe, J., et al. (Eds.). (1991). *Homeless children and youth* (pp. 34-35). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Youth and young adults who meet this definition of homelessness were asked to participate in a 30-minute personal interview to answer questions about family background, housing history, physical and mental health, experiences while being homeless, school and employment status, service use, and related needs. A total of 209 youth (98 males and 111 females) age 17 and younger were interviewed in locations throughout Minnesota, including shelters, youth transitional housing programs, drop-in sites, health clinics, and schools, as well as in non-shelter locations. A total of 285 homeless young adults (99 males and 186 females) age 18 to 20 were interviewed in battered women’s shelters, emergency shelters, transitional housing, and in non-shelter locations throughout Minnesota.

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#### **For more information**

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