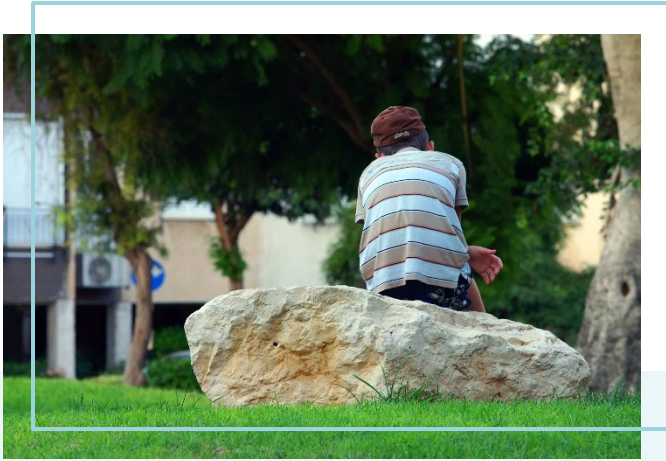


The Impact of Homelessness on Youth with Out-of-Home Placement History



Homelessness is a result of multiple system failures.

This includes a profound shortage of housing for people with extremely low incomes, as well as inadequate systems to support complex, interrelated needs. In addition to a lack of housing, homelessness can be caused and sustained by trauma, systemic racism, unemployment, or personal health challenges. As a result, homelessness is different for every person who experiences it.

Many youth involved in the foster care system experience housing instability and homelessness. This instability often begins with their first placement in a foster or group home, continues throughout their system involvement, and may persist for the long term if youth “age out” and leave the system without a permanent family. Youth who leave foster care often must figure out how to secure employment and housing with limited formal or informal supports, putting them at greater risk of homelessness.

This brief explores data from the 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study, comparing the experiences of youth ages 24 and younger who have lived in a foster or group home (who have a history of out-of-home placement, or OHP history) with those who have not.

Issue Brief

This brief is part of a series that examines interview data from the 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study. Each report explores a specific aspect of homelessness and provides detailed data that can be used to inform services, interventions, and policies across our state.

For all available results from the study, as well as the Reservation Homeless Study, visit mnhomeless.org.

Executive summary

Background

There is a close relationship between placement in foster or group homes, experiences with trauma, housing instability, and homelessness. Housing instability and homelessness may contribute to involvement in the child protection system and create barriers to family reunification. Conversely, when a young person is placed in a foster or group home, disruptions to their family and community connections put youth at greater risk of homelessness when they exit care. Homeless youth who have lived in foster or group homes face a complex constellation of interrelated challenges and traumas and often must navigate them without a strong support system.

Key findings

Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history...



Experienced housing instability prior to, during, and after being placed in a foster or group home.



Have a longer and more recurrent history of homelessness than their peers.



Were more likely to face violence, abuse, and neglect before and during their time without housing.



Face higher rates of physical and mental health problems than their peers.



Face greater barriers to obtaining employment.



Cite lack of affordable housing as one of their top challenges.

In the face of these adversities and traumas, youth with OHP history who were interviewed as part of the Minnesota Homeless Study shared several sources of strength: their **determination**, **optimism** and **resilience**. These are the most common factors that keep youth moving forward despite very difficult circumstances.



Youth voice

In 2026, Wilder partnered with Foster Advocates to host a series of participatory data meaning-making sessions with a group of Foster leaders, or youth with lived experience of the foster care system who had experienced housing instability or homelessness. The purpose of these sessions was to receive feedback from youth on the issue brief, incorporate their reflections and context from their own lived experience, and identify opportunities for action and policy change based on findings that emerged from the data.

Foster Advocates is Minnesota's only Foster-led and Foster-focused organization dedicated to transforming the child welfare system through stabilization services, leadership development, participatory research, and individual and systems advocacy.

In the first session, Wilder delivered a data presentation to a group of 12 youth with OHP history. Youth then reviewed presentation materials and the draft issue brief and participated in reflection activities through individual worksheets and group discussion. Youth received a \$200 stipend for sharing their time and expertise. Youth feedback on the presentation of data informed the issue brief, and direct quotes from Foster leaders (such as those below) are included throughout to provide context, personal anecdotes, and reflections from those with lived experience of the topics covered in the data.

This [data] reflects what many of us know firsthand. ... It reinforces how widespread these challenges are and how often systems fail young people after they age out of care. – Foster leader

While some [people] have friends or family that could take them in, Fosters typically don't have these supports. It's our responsibility to take care of our community in the same way that we do with children and the elderly. We all need support in some way, some groups just need a little more. – Foster leader

A Foster leader's story

When I first aged out of foster care, I didn't really have anywhere to go. I was homeless, trying to go to school, and school was really my home for a while until I was able to get housing. I ate the food at the school. The very few friends and resources I had helped me to eat.

The Fostering Independence Grant that is available now wasn't around when I aged out of care, so I didn't have the extra funds to help me get stable. Extended foster care just made things harder instead of helping. Yes, they gave me a check every month for going to school or working part time, but they made it so difficult to get the money that we deserve, and they didn't help me budget, talk to me about savings, none of those things. Eventually, I dropped out.

Let me tell you, a lot of Fosters didn't have parents around or someone guiding them, so a lot of the things we learn, we had to find out the hard way when the way could've been paved for us.

When I was able to finally get housing, I felt safe, secure, and stable, and I had a place to call home. **From that day forward, I told myself I'll never be homeless again.**

Moving forward

Minnesota has an obligation to ensure the well-being and stability of youth with OHP history for the long term, not just the short term. Because many youth with OHP history have had child protection system involvement, there is a clear intervention point that provides an opportunity for ensuring housing stability as youth exit care.

Community and system partners must work together to provide youth with wrap-around stability plans, programs and policies that involve both formal and informal supports, especially as they hit young adulthood. It is essential for providers and policymakers to engage with and be guided by the voices of youth with lived experience throughout the planning process.

For more information about Foster-identified housing issues and action steps, please refer to Foster Advocates' [Minnesota Promise report](#).

Many youth experienced housing instability prior to, during, and after being placed in a foster or group home.

Among youth ages 24 and younger interviewed during the 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study, experiences with foster and group homes were common (Figure 1).

1. Experiences with foster or group homes among youth experiencing homelessness



About 4 out of 10 youth experiencing homelessness had been placed in a foster or group home at some point in their childhood.

Over 4 in 10 of homeless youth with OHP history had left a foster or group home in the year before the study (44%). Among these youth, over half (54%) were homeless when they went into the foster or group home. A similar proportion of youth, over half (58%), did not have a stable place to stay when they left the foster or group home.

Homelessness for Foster youth is not a failure of the individual, it is a predictable system exit. If 58% of youth leave care without stable housing, the system is essentially "aging youth out" into homelessness. – Foster leader

The transition out of care is a critical intervention point. If stable housing and long-term support are not guaranteed at that moment, the system is essentially passing youth from one form of instability into another. – Foster leader

Overall, out of all homeless youth with OHP history, 45% of youth had run away from either a foster home or group home. Slightly more youth said they had run away from a foster home than a group home (Figure 2).

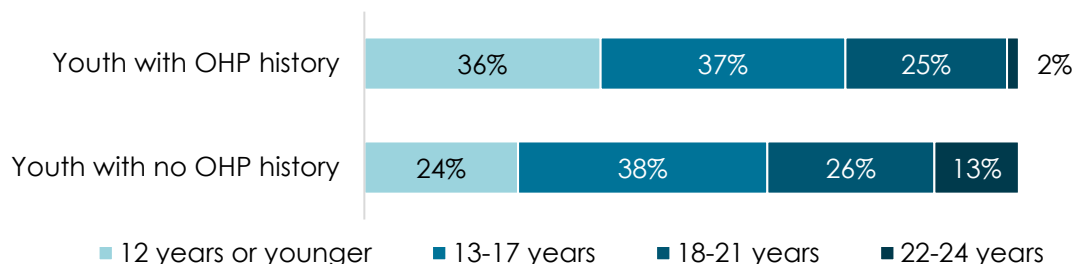
2. Homeless youth with OHP history who have run away from a group home or foster home



Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history have a longer and more recurrent history of homelessness than other homeless youth.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of homeless youth with OHP history first became homeless when they were children, either with or without their parents, compared to 62% of other homeless youth (Figure 3). On average, homeless youth with OHP history became homeless at the age of 13, compared to age 16 among homeless youth who had never stayed in a foster or group home.

3. Age youth first experienced homelessness, with or without their parents



It is important to note that the question about what age people first became homeless may be particularly difficult for youth with OHP history to answer. Foster leaders described how for youth with OHP history, their placement in a foster or group home in itself may be experienced as “homelessness” by that child or youth, even if it’s not counted in official definitions.

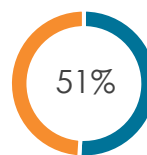
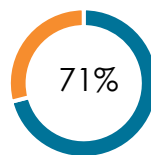
This is complicated for Fosters. Many might count the day they were removed from home as their first “homeless” experience, even if they went to a foster home. The term “homeless” carries a heavy stigma; youth might interpret it only as “sleeping on the street,” potentially underreporting early housing instability.
– Foster leader

The question assumes a clear, identifiable “first time,” but in reality, housing instability can be gradual, repeated, or difficult to define. For someone with foster care experience, homelessness might not feel like a single event. For example, moving between placements, staying temporarily with friends or relatives, or aging out of care without stable housing could all feel like forms of homelessness, even if they are not officially labeled that way. – Foster leader

I would interpret this question more broadly than just sleeping outside or in emergency shelters. I would include times where housing was not stable, safe, or consistent such as couch hopping, moving between temporary placements, or situations where I didn’t have a stable place to stay. I think for many people with foster care involvement or system involvement, homelessness can start much earlier than what official definitions capture. – Foster leader

4. Experiences with long-term homelessness among homeless youth with and without OHP history

More homeless youth with out-of-home placement (OHP) history have experienced **long-term homelessness** than their peers.¹

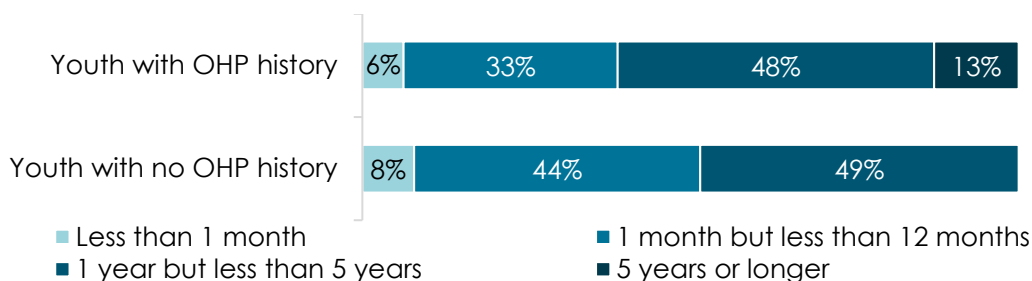


Youth with OHP history

Youth with no OHP history

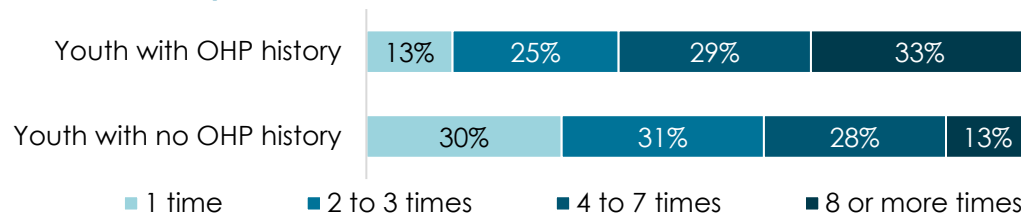
Six out of 10 homeless youth with OHP history had been without a permanent place to live for at least a year, compared to about half of homeless youth with no OHP history (Figure 5). Thirteen percent of homeless youth with OHP history had been homeless for 5 years or longer; none of their peers had been homeless for more than 4 years.

5. Length of time without a permanent place to live among homeless youth with and without OHP history



Homeless youth with OHP history also experienced more recurrent episodes of homelessness than their peers (Figure 6). One-third of homeless youth with OHP history (33%) had been homeless eight or more times in their life, compared to 13% of homeless youth with no OHP history. A greater proportion of homeless youth with no OHP history said they had experienced just one episode of homelessness (30%) than homeless youth with OHP history (13%).

6. Number of lifetime episodes of homelessness among homeless youth with and without OHP history



The "revolving door" of homelessness matches the reality of youth who lack a "safety net" family to return to when a job is lost or a roommate leaves. – Foster leader

It costs more to ignore us: The cost of 8+ episodes of homelessness is higher than the cost of one stable apartment. – Foster leader

¹ In Minnesota, long-term homelessness is defined as having been homeless for at least one year, or four or more times in the past three years.

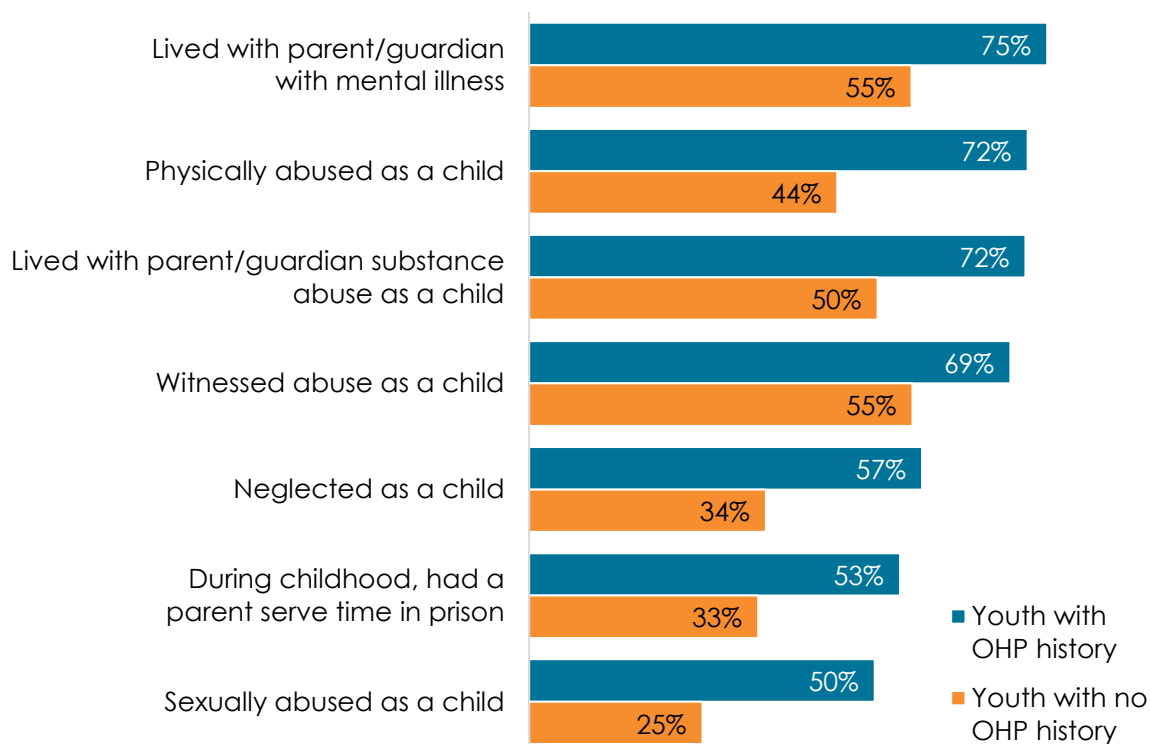
Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history were more likely to face violence, abuse, and neglect before and during their time without housing.

The traumas that people experience early in life can have a profound impact on their health and well-being. Adverse childhood experiences (or ACEs) can cause children to experience high levels of stress for extended periods of time; this “toxic stress” can impact children’s brain development and contribute to long-term cognitive, behavioral, and physical health problems.² Many people, regardless of homelessness or OHP history, have experienced at least one ACE. However, research has found that individuals who have experienced four or more ACEs are at heightened risk of negative health outcomes, particularly substance misuse and attempted suicide.³

Two-thirds of homeless youth with OHP history had 4 or more ACEs.

Half or more of homeless youth with OHP history reported experiencing each of the ACEs measured in the study (Figure 8). Importantly, the questions do not differentiate between experiences youth had with a parent versus a guardian; these ACEs may have occurred with a birth parent, a guardian within the foster care system, or someone else.

7. Adverse childhood experiences among homeless youth with and without OHP history

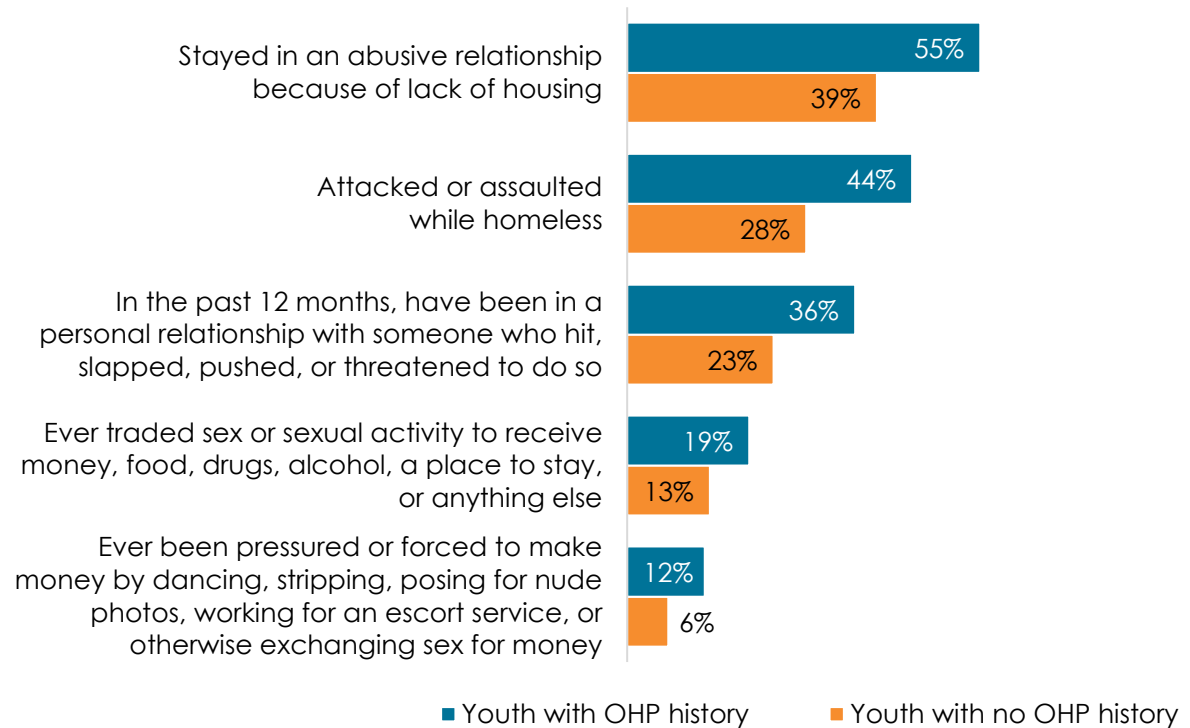


² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *About Adverse Childhood Experiences*. <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>

³ Hughes, K., Bellis, M. A., Hardcastle, K. A., Sethi, D., Butchart, A., Mikton, C., Jones, L., Dunne, M. P. (2017). The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet Public Health*, 2. <https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667%2817%2930118-4.pdf>

Homeless youth with OHP history were also more likely to report having experienced violence and exploitation before and during the time they were homeless than their peers (Figure 9). Over half of homeless youth with OHP history reported that they had stayed in an abusive relationship because they had no other housing options, and twice as many homeless youth with OHP history had been pressured or forced to make money through sex work compared to their peers. Homeless youth with OHP history pressured into sex work were first approached at age 15, on average; one-third were just 14 years old or younger.

8. Experiences of violence and exploitation



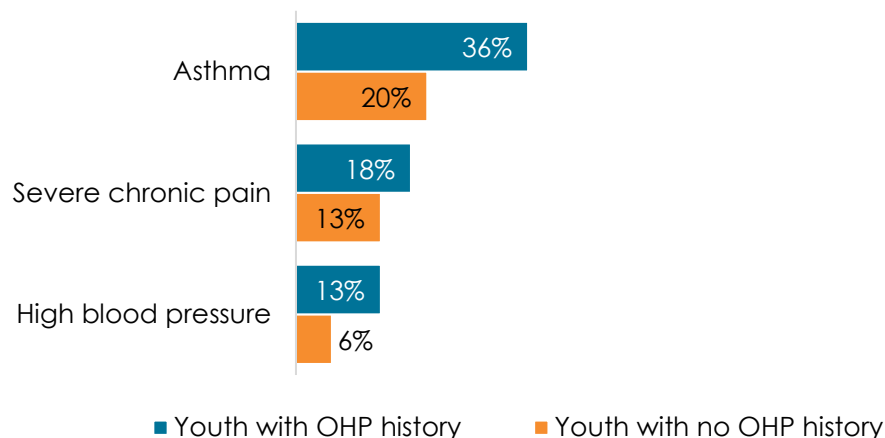
People fail to realize, for so many years, what people, including myself, carry around on our backs every day... There was not a lot of people informed about how many girls actually get taken advantage of just to have a place to stay, like personally, I didn't know that it was wrong because I was homeless, I was in the streets. – Foster leader

A lot of people go back to “the life” because they try to reach out and try to get coordinated access and things like that, if they even get denied or they don't qualify for something. And now here we are having repeated cycles again, more people in danger. You know, more and more victims to pimps and stuff like that. – Foster leader

Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history face higher rates of physical and mental health problems than their peers.

Nearly half of homeless youth with OHP history reported living with a chronic physical health problem (47%), compared to 36% of their peers. Most often, homeless youth with OHP history reported living with asthma, severe chronic pain, and high blood pressure (Figure 10).

9. Chronic physical health problems among homeless youth with and without OHP histories



10. Traumatic brain injuries among homeless youth with OHP history

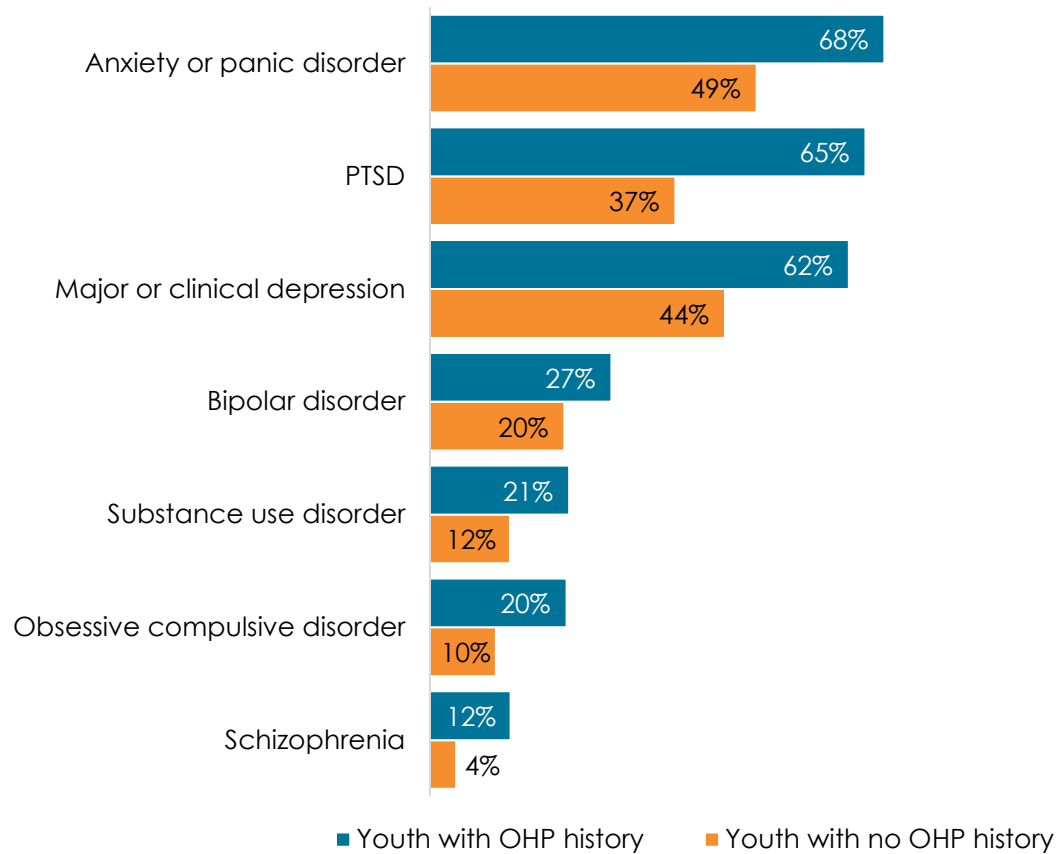


Nearly half of homeless youth with OHP history have had a traumatic brain injury (TBI; 46%), compared to 30% of other homeless youth.

On average, homeless youth with OHP history who have had a TBI were just 14 years old when they were injured. Two-thirds of those injured started having problems with headaches, concentration or memory, understanding, excessive worry, sleeping, or getting along with people after their head injury.

Three-quarters of homeless youth with OHP history reported a significant mental health issue. The most common mental health conditions reported were anxiety or panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression (Figure 12). In all cases, rates were higher than homeless youth with no OHP history.

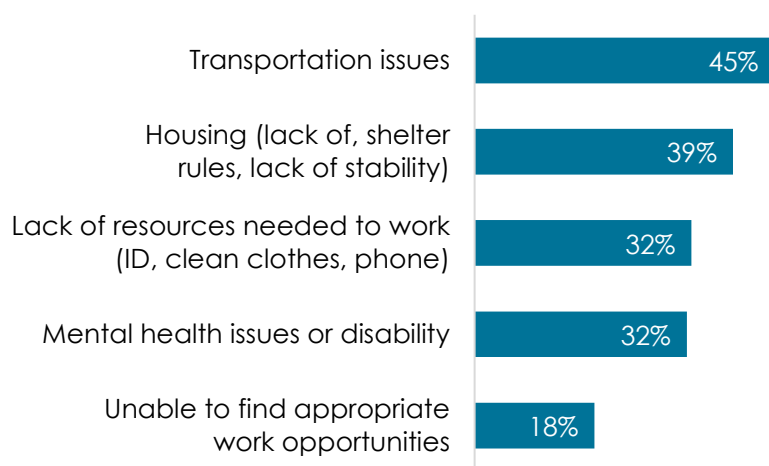
11. Mental health conditions among homeless youth with and without OHP history



Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history face greater barriers to obtaining employment.

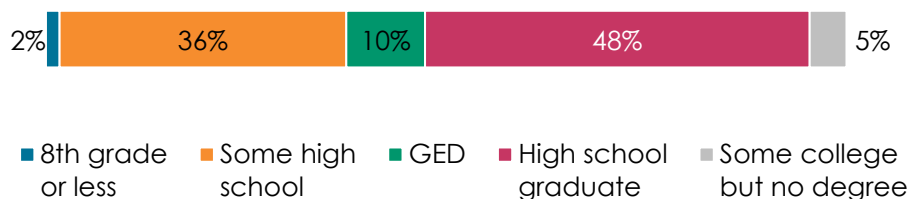
Homeless youth with OHP history face higher rates of unemployment than their peers. About one-quarter of homeless youth with OHP history (24%) reported being employed either full- or part-time, compared to 38% of homeless youth who have never stayed in a foster or group home. Among homeless youth with OHP history who are not currently employed, when asked about the biggest barriers or problems to getting a job, youth most often said transportation and their housing situation (Figure 13). Foster Advocates reports that less than 5% of Fosters who age out of care obtain a driver's license.⁴

12. Barriers or problems to getting a job among homeless youth with OHP history who are unemployed



Some homeless youth with OHP history may face additional barriers to employment due to limited educational credentials or learning disabilities. Over one-third of homeless youth with OHP age 18 and older did not finish high school or get a GED (38%; Figure 14). These data align with high school graduate rates among youth with OHP history statewide.⁵

13. Educational attainment among homeless youth with OHP history

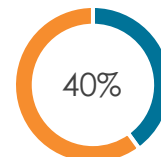
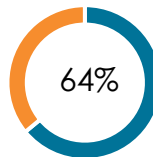


⁴ Severns Guntzel, J., & Leomi, E. (2025). *The Minnesota promise report: A foster-led vision for child welfare systems change*. Foster Advocates. <https://www.fosteradvocates.org/mnpromise>

⁵ Minnesota Department of Education. (2025). Statewide 4-year graduation rate among students ever in foster care. *Minnesota Report Card*. Retrieved June 29, 2026 from <https://rc.education.mn.gov/>.

14. Special education services among homeless youth with and without OHP history

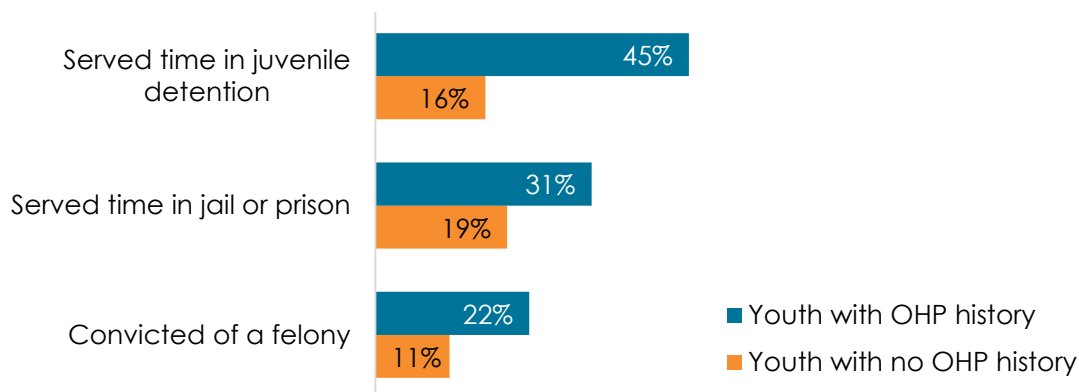
Nearly **two-thirds** of homeless youth with OHP history had an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** or received **special education services** while in school.



Youth with OHP history Youth with no OHP history

Additionally, justice system involvement may create barriers to employment among some homeless youth with OHP history. About three times as many homeless youth with OHP history have served time in juvenile detention as their peers, and 1.5 times as many have served time in jail or prison (Figure 16). Additionally, twice as many homeless youth with OHP history had been convicted of a felony compared to their peers. Importantly, some youth may have spent time in juvenile detention not due to their own actions, but because there was not an appropriate foster care placement available to them.⁶

15. Criminal justice system involvement among homeless youth with and without OHP history



⁶ Severns Guntzel, J., & Leomi, E. (2025). *The Minnesota promise report: A foster-led vision for child welfare systems change*. Foster Advocates. <https://www.fosteradvocates.org/mnpromise>

Lack of affordable housing for homeless youth with out-of-home placement history is a top challenge.

When asked about challenges finding housing, most often, homeless youth with OHP history said there was no housing they could afford (Figure 17). Lack of affordable housing has consistently been the greatest challenge reported by people experiencing homelessness over the 30-year history of the Minnesota Homeless Study. About 1 out of 5 homeless youth with OHP history encountered challenges related to transportation, lack of rental history or references, and credit problems.

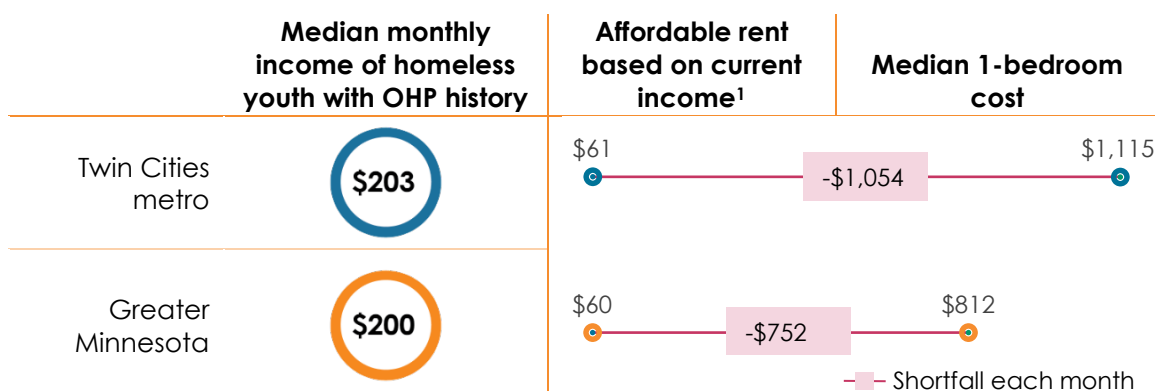
16. Challenges to finding housing for homeless youth with OHP history



Note. Respondents could select more than one challenge to finding housing.

Lack of affordable housing is a pressing challenge for all people experiencing homelessness in both greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro. Median income for homeless youth with OHP history is nowhere near adequate to cover median rent prices, just \$200 per month in greater Minnesota and \$203 per month in the Twin Cities metro (Figure 18). Housing is considered affordable if the occupant spends 30% or less of their income on housing costs—which, for homeless youth with OHP history, would be \$61 per month in the Twin Cities metro and \$60 per month in greater Minnesota.⁷

17. Median monthly income for homeless youth with OHP history, compared to median monthly rent in 2023



Source for median monthly rent: Housing Link. (2024). *Rental Revue* data.

¹ Based on their current income, this is the most that respondents should pay (30% of current income) in order for their housing to be considered affordable.

With median rent prices at \$1,115 per month in the Twin Cities, homeless youth with OHP history would need 5.5 times more income per month than they currently have just to cover the cost of rent.

⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm>

Sources of strength

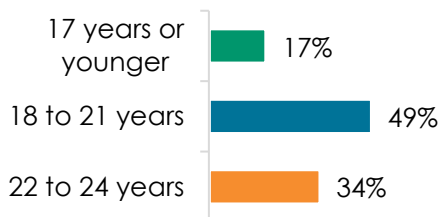
While the Minnesota Homeless Study asks respondents to share difficult experiences around homelessness and its related factors, it also asks an open-ended question about important sources of strength that help them deal with challenges in their lives. These responses were coded into themes, which are shared below alongside illustrative quotes.

These young people are resilient, not by choice, but by necessity. Their determination, optimism, and will to survive did not emerge from opportunity. They emerged from repeated encounters with systems that were supposed to protect them and did not. – Foster leader

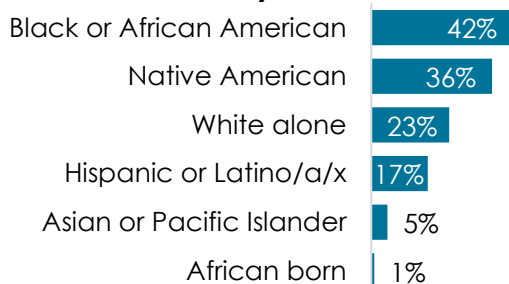


Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history

Age



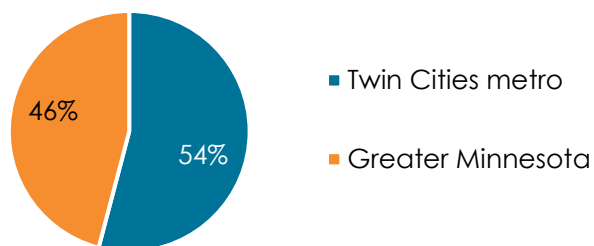
Race and ethnicity



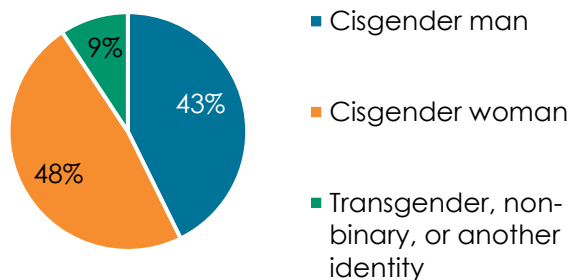
Note. Respondents could choose more than one racial or ethnic identity. This chart presents the proportion of respondents who identified as White alone (no other races or ethnicities) and those who identified with other racial/ethnic identities (whether alone or in combination).

Region

Respondents were staying in:



Gender identity



About the Minnesota Homeless Study

Every three years, Wilder Research conducts a one-day statewide study to better understand the prevalence of homelessness in Minnesota and the circumstances of those experiencing homelessness. The most recent study took place on October 26, 2023 and included:

- **Face-to-face interviews** with people throughout the state who meet a [federal definition of homelessness](#).
- **A count** of people experiencing homelessness.

A note about sample sizes. Throughout this report, sample sizes, or Ns, vary by question. In general, Ns for the two primary categories in this brief are:

- Homeless youth with out-of-home placement history, N=227
- Homeless youth with no out-of-home placement history, N=320

Visit mnhomeless.org for question-by-question data tables for all persons interviewed.

The study is an independent initiative of Wilder Research in partnership with public and private funders and in-kind support from service providers throughout the state. Funding for this special analysis and issue brief was provided by the Sauer Family Foundation.

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Supported by: Michelle Decker Gerrard, Stephanie Nelson-Duchek, Phil Cooper, Walker Bosch, Anna Alba, Elena Leomi, and Whitney Behle