

Following decreases in 2003 and 2006, the number of homeless children and their families has increased to its highest level since the study began in 1991.

## *2009 Minnesota homeless study*

# Homeless children and their families



Homelessness is especially traumatic for children. Studies of homeless children show that they have more health problems than children with housing, more trouble developing healthy relationships, and more difficulty staying on track in school.

Their parents have high rates of chronic physical and mental illness, as well as low employment and wages. Many of their mothers are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

Long-term studies show that homeless children are more likely than other children to be homeless as adults, and that young adulthood is a particularly risky time of life for them.

This report provides an in-depth look at homeless children and families in Minnesota. It is based on the 2009 Minnesota statewide survey, the latest in a series of triennial surveys conducted since 1991 to document the needs and characteristics of homeless adults, youth, and children across Minnesota. Other than small, specialized studies, most surveys of homeless people include only adults and provide little information about the children who are with them. The Minnesota homeless study is one of the richest available sources of point-in-time and trend data about homeless children and their parents.

## What do we mean by “homeless?”

A homeless adult is any person whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised, publicly- or privately-operated temporary living accommodation, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and battered women’s shelters; or whose nighttime residence is not meant for human habitation, such as under bridges or in cars. This is based on a definition by the U.S. Congress.

By law, this definition is expanded for youth age 17 or younger to include those who stay temporarily in other people’s homes, with or without their parents, because they have nowhere else to live.

In 2009, the definition for adults also expanded to include a small proportion of those who stay temporarily in other people’s homes: if they have children with them, have a history of residential instability, and have a serious barrier to housing or employment. Only 2 percent of all the parents interviewed fell into this category, and it did not affect year-to-year comparisons.

## About the study

As you read this report, please keep in mind that the information comes from a **one-night** survey. It presents counts and characteristics of only those people who were homeless on October 22, 2009. People who are homeless frequently or for a long time are more likely to be found by such a study than people who are homeless only once or for a short time. This means that:

- The actual number of homeless families is almost certainly under-represented in this study since parents with children tend to be homeless for shorter times than adults without children.
- This study will tend to under-report the characteristics that are more common among families who are homeless for only a short time. For example, since women in short-term shelters are more than twice as likely to be fleeing domestic violence (compared to women in longer-term transitional housing), the true incidence of this problem among all homeless families over the course of a year is higher than the 30 percent found in this one-night study.
- By contrast to these one-night figures, some other sources of information about homeless children and families—such as school districts and the Minnesota Department of Education—keep their figures on a cumulative, **annual** basis, presenting counts and characteristics for all those who experienced homelessness over the course of a year.

More details about the methods and sources used to estimate total numbers of homeless children and families are shown in the full report on the 2009 statewide study, *Homelessness in 2009: Results of the Wilder statewide survey* (available on the Wilder Research web site, <http://www.wilder.org/homeless2009.0.html>).

Many of the sections in this report update information from a similar report developed from the 2003 survey. When meaningful, other years are cited as points of comparison. For example, *homeless parents who had themselves first experienced homelessness as a child* increased significantly between 2006 and 2009, and is noted.

## Key facts at a glance

On any given night in Minnesota, we estimate that about 3,900 children are homeless and with their parents. An additional 550 youth age 17 or younger are estimated to be homeless and on their own, for a total of nearly 4,500 homeless children.

Over the course of a full year, we estimate that about 14,120 children with their parents and 4,800 unaccompanied minor youth are homeless. Many of these are homeless for just a short time and would not be counted in a single-night survey.

**In shelters: 1,455 families a night.** On October 22, 2009, Minnesota's emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs were providing shelter to 1,455 homeless families that include 2,857 children age 17 and younger. They also served 143 unaccompanied youth age 12-17 (not included in the count of families).

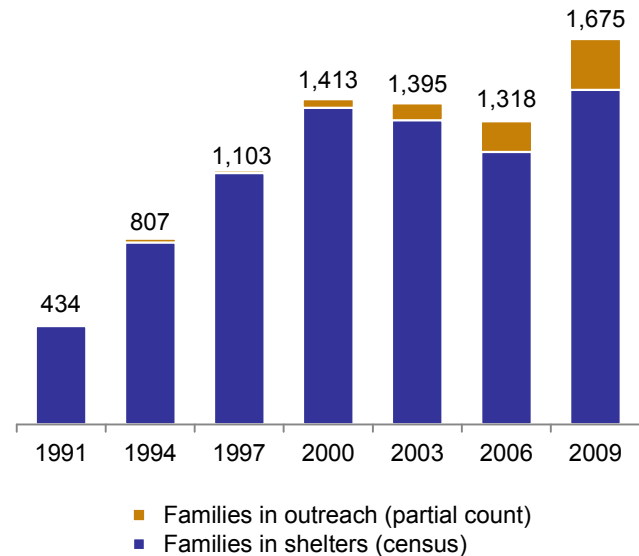
**Outreach: 220 parents interviewed.** The statewide study is not designed to systematically find or count families not using the shelter system. This includes those in brief informal arrangements, as well as families living in cars or other places not meant for habitation. However, through outreach on October 22, 2009, the Minnesota statewide homeless survey located and interviewed 220 parents in such situations, who had a total of 394 children with them.

The survey results reported here are based on all of our interviews with homeless parents, whether in sheltered or other locations. This group includes 16 parents, age 15-17, not yet adults themselves.

**Fastest-growing segment.** Homeless families and children have made up the fastest-growing segment of homeless people in Minnesota since the statewide homeless survey began in 1991. At 3,251, the number

of children in 2009 is more than three times the number — 889 homeless children — found in 1991. These findings parallel national studies that also show faster growth in the number of homeless families than among homeless single adults.

### TRENDS: NUMBER OF HOMELESS FAMILIES IN MINNESOTA, 1991–2009



**Many more families and children are without a regular home but not “homeless.”** Using conservative calculations based on studies done elsewhere, we estimate that another 24,000 to 34,800 children and youth were “doubling up,” or staying temporarily with family or friends because they have nowhere else to live. Under the current definition by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), most of these do not qualify as “homeless” for purposes of housing assistance, but do qualify for assistance under U.S. Department of Education programs for homeless students. The statewide study reported here is not designed to systematically find or count doubled-up students.

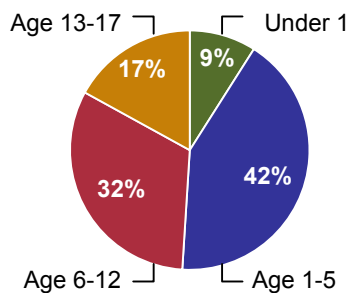
The total estimated number of children, including those in shelters, in unsheltered locations, and “doubled-up” or in other temporary arrangements in Minnesota on any given night is 29,000 to 39,000.

**Many homeless parents have children who are not with them.** Fifty percent of homeless adults were parents of children age 17 or younger, yet only 30 percent had a child with them. Twenty-four percent of adults had at least one child who was not with them because of program restrictions at the shelter (50% of parents).

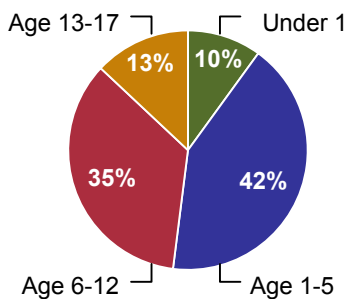
**Homeless children tend to be young.** Fifty-two percent of homeless children were age 5 or younger (including 9% who were less than 1 year old). Thirty-three percent were age 6-12, and 16 percent were 13-17. Children in greater Minnesota were slightly younger than those in the metro area, with about the same proportion of preschoolers, but a higher proportion of children age 6-12 and a lower proportion age 13-17.

## AGES OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

### Twin Cities metro area



### Greater Minnesota



Source: Wilder Research, 2009.

**Most families are in transitional housing.** Fifty-eight percent of homeless parents with children were staying in transitional housing programs. Emergency shelters served 20 percent of parents, and battered women's shelters served 10 percent. Thirteen percent were not in shelter programs. In greater Minnesota, only 50 percent of parents were in transitional housing, compared to 61 percent in the metro area.

### Shelters are less available in greater Minnesota.

Greater Minnesota parents were less likely to be in emergency or battered women's shelters than metro area parents (23% vs. 33%). By contrast, they were more likely than metro parents to be in nonshelter or unknown arrangements (28% vs. 5%). A look at where nonshelter-using parents in greater Minnesota spent most of their nights in October shows they were much more likely than metro area nonshelter-using parents to have patched together a series of "doubling up" or other temporary arrangements, and slightly more likely to have slept outside, in their cars or some other place not meant for habitation.

Compared to shelter-using families, those not using the shelter system disproportionately include a male caregiver (37% vs. 24%), are in greater Minnesota (70% vs. 26%), and/or are American Indian (27% vs. 9%).

**Most families lived in Minnesota before becoming homeless.** Three-quarters of homeless parents had their last regular housing in Minnesota. Of those who had lived in Minnesota less than two years, one-third had lived in Minnesota before.

Over half of families (52%) had their last housing in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area, including 16 percent who were living in the Twin Cities suburbs when they became homeless. Most of those who became homeless in greater Minnesota were living in rural areas (places of less than 25,000 population).

**Most children are with just one parent.** Most homeless households with children were headed by single adults who had never married or were divorced, separated, or widowed. Fifteen percent of homeless families with children were headed by couples. This is a slightly higher percentage than the 12 percent in 2003. The rise is likely explained partly by increases in efforts to reach out to interview homeless persons not staying in shelters or programs. Some two-parent families avoid shelters because some shelters exclude fathers and older male children for safety reasons. In some shelters, same-sex partners are not allowed to stay together. Two-parent families were more common among American Indians and whites, in greater Minnesota, and in informal and unsheltered settings, and less common among long-term homeless families.

**Racial disparities are severe.** African American and American Indian families are ten times as likely to be homeless as their white neighbors in Minnesota. Although American Indians are only 1 percent of all Minnesota parents, they are 11 percent of homeless parents. African Americans are 4 percent of Minnesota parents but 48 percent of homeless parents in Minnesota.

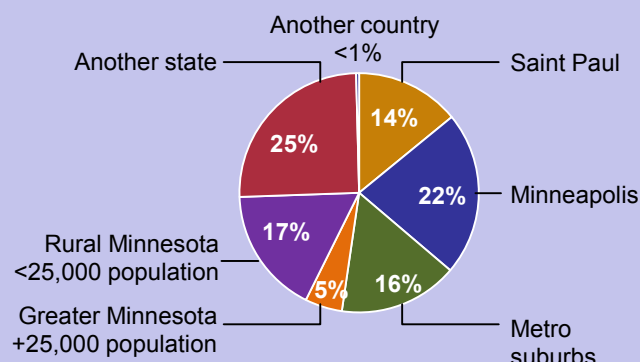
#### RACE AND ETHNICITY OF HOMELESS PARENTS

Sources: Data on homeless parents, Wilder Research, 2009.

Race or ethnicity of parent	% of homeless parents	% of all Minnesota parents
American Indian	11%	1%
Asian American	1%	3%
African American	48%	4%
White	28%	88%
Other, including multi-racial	9%	2%
Hispanic (any race)	9%	3%

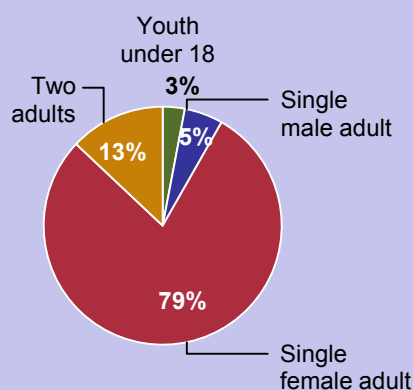
Data on general population, U.S. Census Bureau 2008 American Community Survey.

#### WHERE PARENTS LAST HAD REGULAR HOUSING

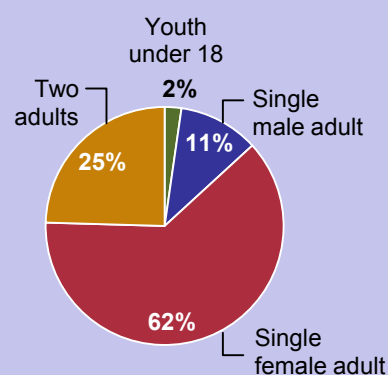


#### A SINGLE WOMAN HEADS MOST HOMELESS FAMILIES IN MINNESOTA

##### Heads of sheltered families (N=1,455)



##### Heads of families not in shelters (N=220)



Source: Wilder Research, 2009.



## A deeper look

### *Children's health, nutrition, and mental health*

Studies show that children in poor families have more physical and mental health problems than those in non-poor families, and homeless families have even more health issues than poor families. While homelessness has lasting consequences for children at any age, the effects are especially harmful in the earliest years of life.

Poor health among homeless adults and children probably reflects a mix of cause and effect, and it is difficult to separate the influences of homelessness and poverty, since most homeless families are also poor. On the one hand, people who live in poor neighborhoods are exposed to more environmental hazards (including lead, poor air and water quality, and crime) that can cause physical and mental disabilities. On the other hand, some people with disabilities are more likely to be or become poor as a result of a decreased ability to work or to make and maintain strong social networks.

Homeless parents are often separated from their children. Some shelters, to protect vulnerable clients, do not allow older boys or fathers to stay in the same place as women and younger children. Sometimes homeless parents

prefer to place children unofficially with family or friends in order to keep them housed. Whether or not children stay with their parents during an episode of homelessness, the experience is likely to interfere with their development of skills for forming and maintaining healthy, stable relationships.

**Chronic or severe physical health problems.** Thirteen percent of homeless parents reported that at least one of their homeless children had a chronic or severe physical health problem, about the same rate as in previous surveys.

**Access to health care.** Most homeless parents reported being able to obtain health care for their children when needed, but 8 percent reported that there had been occasions during the past year when they had been unable to obtain needed physical health care for them. Twelve percent had been unable to obtain needed dental care, and 3 percent had been unable to obtain needed mental health care. Parents in greater Minnesota were more likely to report having difficulty obtaining dental care for their children (17% were unable to obtain it in greater Minnesota, compared to 9% in the metro area). Parents not using shelter programs were generally less able to obtain all kinds of health care when needed.

**Missed meals.** Eight percent of homeless parents reported that at least one child had to skip meals in the previous month because there had not been enough money to buy food. This is slightly down from the 11 percent who reported children missing meals in 2000. There were more reports of missed meals among families not in shelters and long-term homeless families.

**Emotional or behavioral problems.** Twenty-one percent of homeless parents reported that at least one of their children had an emotional or behavioral problem that interfered with their daily activities.



These health and nutrition measures are similar to those found in 2003 overall. However, in 2009 we observed a greater level of difficulty for children with parents not in the shelter system. Among this group of families, 19 percent of parents reported an inability to secure needed dental care for their children, 20 percent said their children had had to skip meals in the past month, and 14 percent reported they had been unable to obtain needed health care for children in the past year.

**Separation from parents.** Of homeless people who had any minor children, half (50%) reported at least one child was not staying with them on the night of the survey. This included 80 percent of male parents, but only 33 percent of female parents. Sixteen percent of these parents reported that at least one of their children was not with them at the time of the survey because of program restrictions in the shelter.

Nine percent of parents reported that there was a child protection case open for one or more of their children. These parents also were more likely than other parents to report having children who were not with them (65% vs. 48%).

### *Children's education*

Although education is an important pathway out of poverty, poverty itself can introduce serious barriers to getting an adequate education, of which homelessness is one of the more serious. Unsafe or unstable housing and frequent moves often reduce attendance and impair children's ability to concentrate. Other barriers to homeless children's school attendance and success include problems with transportation, difficulty obtaining prior school records, crowded or unfamiliar settings that interfere with sleep, and lack of appropriate hygiene, clothing, and school supplies. Federal law requires that schools help homeless children to overcome some of these barriers.

## Homeless students in the public schools

Over the course of the 2009-10 school year, Minnesota public schools identified 9,858 students as in transition and homeless. This represents 1.1% of students statewide:

- 6.4% of all students in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul
- 0.7% of students in the suburban metro area
- 0.6% of all students in all other regions of the state

Fewer than half of these students were in formal shelter programs on the date they were first identified as homeless by the schools.

Their residence situations were:

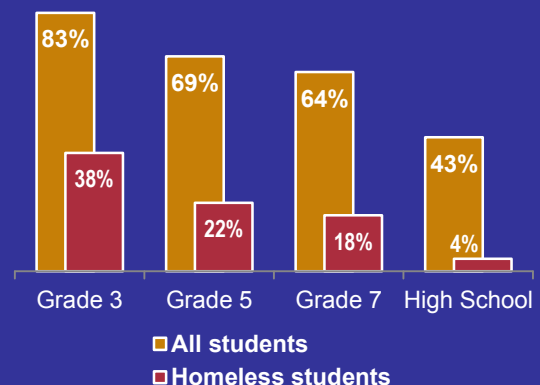
- 42% in a formal shelter program
- 49% doubled up
- 8% in a hotel or motel
- 1% unsheltered

Compared to other students, homeless students are equally likely to be identified as gifted or talented. However, they are twice as likely to be identified as in need of special education services.

Minority students are over-represented among the homeless in all regions (inner city, suburbs, and greater Minnesota).

Homeless students score significantly lower than their peers on standardized tests in reading and mathematics.

### STUDENTS SCORING "PROFICIENT" OR BETTER ON STATE MATH ASSESSMENTS IN 2009-10, BY GRADE

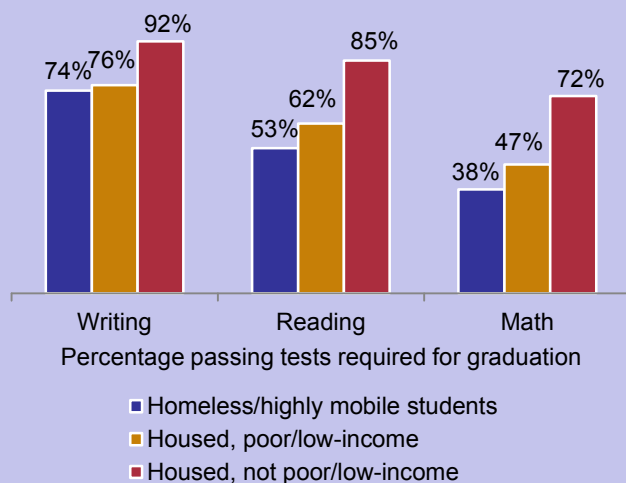


Source: Minnesota Department of Education, McKinney Vento Homeless Education programs.

## Homelessness and school children

Research literature shows that homelessness interferes with children's school success, even after taking into account the poverty that nearly always goes along with it. Data from the Minneapolis Public Schools illustrates this effect. Across grade levels, in all the basic skills tests that students must pass to graduate, children who are homeless have lower assessment results on average than their classmates from low-income families (those who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program).

### COMPARISON OF PASSING RATES FOR HOMELESS AND HOUSED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



Source: E. Hinz and C.K.Chan, 2009-10 McKinney Vento Attendance and Achievement Report, Minneapolis Public Schools, July 22, 2010 (chart by Wilder Research).

High rates of mobility and homelessness also undermine the overall success of schools that must work with many students who come and go throughout the year. By law, districts must transport homeless students to their original school for the rest of the school year, if their parents request it. However, funding is not adequate to help districts pay the cost of all the supportive services needed to help homeless students make adequate yearly progress in school as well as the “catch up” work that many need.

**Early care and education.** Forty percent of parents with children under age 6 reported that at least one of their children was enrolled in Head Start or some other early education program. This number is up from the 18 percent enrolled in early childhood programs in 2000 and the 26 percent in 2003. About two-thirds (66%) of parents had been able to obtain regular child care when they needed it during the previous year, up from 54 percent in 1997 and similar to the rates since 2000. Parents of preschoolers were much more likely to report problems obtaining child care (41%, compared to 17% of parents with only school-age children). Families where a father was present were less likely to have trouble obtaining child care (28%, vs. 36%), but also less likely to have a child in an early education program (35% vs. 40%) than families without a father present.

**Learning or school problems.** Thirty-eight percent of homeless parents reported at least one of their children age 6 or older had a learning or school problem. That is within the same general range observed since 1997. Nineteen percent reported a child had repeated a grade, somewhat lower than in 2000 and 2003 (25–26%). About a quarter of parents in greater Minnesota reported repeated grades (26%) compared to 17 percent of homeless parents in the Twin Cities area.

**School attendance.** Eighty-four percent of homeless parents reported that all of their school-age children attended school on the date of the survey. This percentage has been close to 90 percent since the study began in 1991. Attendance tends to be higher in the metropolitan area than in greater Minnesota (88% vs. 75%).

Eleven percent of parents reported that their children had trouble going to school because of their housing situation, an increase from rates below 10 percent seen in 2003 and 2006. Not surprisingly, the problem was greatest among the small number of families not in shelter programs, where 39 percent had trouble attending



school. It was least common in transitional housing, where only 4 percent of parents reported their housing situation interfered with school attendance.

### *Parents' housing history and access to housing*

In Minnesota and nationwide, there is a growing gap between housing costs and wages, especially for workers without a college education. There is no place in the United States where a full-time, minimum-wage worker can afford the fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment (as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). At the same time, federal housing subsidies for poor households are shrinking.

The shortage of affordable housing is clearly a large contributing factor to the causes of homelessness among families and single adults. It also increases the length of time that people are homeless, making it hard for them to move out of shelters and thereby free up space for other homeless people.

Evidence from evaluation studies suggests that, while services play an important role in helping homeless people regain stable housing, the availability of affordable housing is necessary for services to be successful.

In the 2009 study, we see clear evidence that the shortage of affordable housing was made much more acute by losses in family income due to the recession and the accompanying foreclosure crisis.

**Prior experiences with homelessness.** Twenty-six percent of homeless parents reported that this was the first time they had been homeless (the same percentage as for homeless nonparents).

Thirty-four percent of homeless parents first experienced homelessness as a child (age 17 or less). This is a significant increase from the 25 percent of parents in

the 2006 study. This pattern of transmitting homelessness from one generation to the next will make it more difficult for Minnesota to end homelessness.

Parents with a history of homelessness were more likely than those in their first episode to report that their children had emotional and school problems. However, they also more frequently reported that their preschool-age children were enrolled in early childhood programs, and that all of their school-age children had attended school on the day of the survey. This difference could be because parents homeless for the first time were still suffering from the disruptions associated with loss of housing, or that parents who had experienced homelessness before had learned some ways of providing for their children's care and education as a result of their prior experiences.



## Childhood stress and cross-generational poverty

A large body of research consistently shows the link between high levels of stress and decreased success in a variety of areas, including school, work, and relationships. This chronic, or “toxic,” stress is different from normal levels of stress, which help promote resilience. Children and families in poverty typically experience the accumulation of many chronic stresses – including concerns for safety, inadequate sleep, inadequate nutrition, and disrupted relationships due to frequent moves. Racial discrimination is another cause of chronic stress for many children and parents. The chronic stress causes damage to the body and brain, reduces overall physical health, and contributes to poor outcomes for children by limiting short-term working memory, which is critical to learning and judgment. Poverty in early childhood has the most severe consequences. If chronic poverty is combined with other risk factors, such as neglect or abuse, exposure to parental mental illness or substance abuse, or exposure to violence, the odds of long-term damage to the child’s learning capacity are multiplied. However, these effects can be minimized through effective services to children and their families.

### Sources:

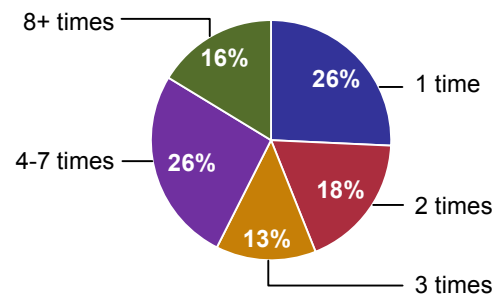
Evans, G.W., & Schamberg, M.A. (2009). Childhood poverty, chronic stress, and adult working memory. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106(13), 6545-6549.

Duncan, G.J., & Magnuson, K. (2011, Winter). The long reach of early childhood poverty. *Pathways Magazine*, 22-27.

Shonkoff, P. (2011, Winter). Building a foundation for prosperity on the science of early childhood development. *Pathways Magazine*, 11-15. Online at [www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/media\\_magazines.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/media_magazines.html).

Previously-homeless parents reported higher rates of most adult health disabilities than parents who were homeless for the first time, as well as more experiences of violence and lower employment rates.

### NUMBER OF TIMES PARENT HAS BEEN HOMELESS



Source: Wilder Research, 2009.

**Length of time homeless.** Forty-five percent of parents had been homeless for six months or less, and 44 percent had been homeless for a year or more. Long-term homelessness was more common among metro area parents, where 46 percent had been homeless a year or longer, compared to 40 percent in greater Minnesota. Parents in informal or unsheltered settings included a higher proportion who had been homeless for less than a month in the current episode (21% vs. 9%), but also more who had been homeless eight or more times in their lives (25% vs. 15%).

The proportion of parents who had been homeless for a year or more grew from 14 percent in 1991 to 31 percent in 2003 to 44 percent in 2009. This is likely affected by several factors including an increase in the share of parents being served in transitional housing programs, an increase in the length of transitional services, or a shortage of affordable housing to move to after a temporary shelter stay.

**Families not in shelters.** Thirteen percent of parents were not using the shelter system at the time of the survey. This proportion was much lower in the metro area (5%) than in greater Minnesota (28%). It was also much lower among parents than among non-parenting adults, of whom 32 percent were not in shelters. Because this study is not designed to find all homeless people not using shelters, we do not know how many more nonshelter-using families there were in Minnesota. Evidence from other studies suggests that our findings accurately reflect a common pattern in which homeless families outside of urban areas are less likely to use shelters.

Of families not using shelters on the date of the study, 10 percent had stayed in an emergency shelter or battered women's shelter on the previous night. However, all the others had been outside the shelter system on that night as well, including 52 percent in a free, temporary arrangement (most likely with a friend or family member), 11 percent in some other kind of temporary arrangement (such as a motel), 10 percent outdoors or in a vehicle or abandoned building, and the remainder in a variety of other arrangements. Seventeen percent of homeless parents had spent at least one night in October doubled up with friends or family (25% in greater Minnesota, compared to 14% in the metro area). Only 7 percent had spent any nights outside, or in a vehicle or abandoned building (10% in greater Minnesota, and 6% in the metro area).

During the first three weeks of October 2009, non-parenting adults in the survey stayed outside for an average of 3.3 nights, compared to an average of 0.3 nights for homeless parents. During the same period, non-parenting adults reported an average of 2.8 nights doubled up, compared to an average of 2.1 nights for parents. Parents in greater Minnesota were much more

likely to spend at least some nights outside (0.6 average) than were metro-area parents (0.2 average). Parents of preschool age children were less likely to have spent any nights outside in October compared to parents with older children. American Indian parents were more likely to have spent some nights outdoors compared to parents of other races.

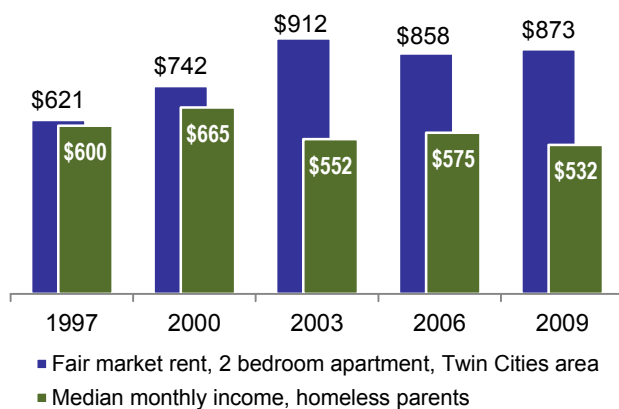
**Unsuccessful attempts to access shelter.** Parents were less likely than single adults to have been turned away from a shelter. Sixteen percent of parents said they had been turned away in the preceding three months due to lack of bed space, compared to 24 percent of nonparents. When this happened, parents were most likely to end up sleeping in a friend or family member's house (50% of those turned away, compared to 25% of nonparents). Next most common was a shelter, church, or motel for which they were given a voucher (33% of parents, 23% of others), or sleeping in a car, abandoned building, or outside (12% of parents, 48% of others).

**Ability to pay rent.** Asked what prevented them from getting housing, homeless parents most commonly mentioned the lack of any housing they could afford. Homeless parents said they could afford to pay an average of \$380 per month for housing (\$408 metro, \$314 greater Minnesota). This average includes the 11 percent of parents who said they could not pay anything at all. Reflecting the lower employment rates compared to previous years, the amount that parents could pay was also lower than in previous years. Standard guidelines consider housing affordable if it costs no more than 30 percent of a household's monthly income; this is especially important for low-income families, who do not have as much left for basic needs after paying for housing.



The figure below compares fair market rent and the actual monthly income reported by homeless parents since 1997.

#### COMPARING FAIR MARKET RENT AND MEDIAN MONTHLY INCOME OF HOMELESS PARENTS IN MINNESOTA



Sources: Homeless data, Wilder Research. Fair market rents, Wilder calculations using data from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Higher incomes were more common among families in transitional housing and those where a father was present. Lower incomes were more common among families with preschool children and those who were long-term homeless.



**Size of apartment needed.** Forty-seven percent of homeless parents said they would need two bedrooms, and 40 percent would need three or more. Units with three or more bedrooms are particularly hard to find in the housing market.

**Access to subsidized housing.** On the date of the survey, nearly two-thirds of homeless parents (65%) were on a waiting list for subsidized housing, and had been waiting for an average of 13 months (15 in the metro area, 9 in greater Minnesota). Another 16 percent had tried to get on a waiting list but were unable to because it was closed. In each of these categories, homeless parents reported more trouble accessing subsidized housing than non-parenting adults. During the past two years, 3 percent had received a housing voucher they were unable to use because no landlord would accept it (2% metro, 4% greater Minnesota).

Long-term homeless families were more likely to be on a waiting list for subsidized housing; families not using the shelter system were less likely to be on a waiting list.

#### Parent health and disabilities

Personal characteristics and experiences also can contribute to homelessness and are more likely to contribute to loss of housing among families who have fewer resources. Studies elsewhere have found that homeless parents are more likely than others to have chronic health conditions and mental health problems (especially depression). Such problems do not always interfere with stable employment or housing. However, the fewer other personal, social, and financial resources a person has, the greater the chance they will be unable to weather typical crises. Based on national research, the Urban Institute estimates that around 1 in 10 poor households are living close enough to the edge of their resources that they are at risk of becoming homeless at any time.

**Chronic physical health problems.** Forty-two percent of homeless parents report having at least one serious, chronic physical health problem (such as asthma, high blood pressure, or diabetes). This includes 43 percent of metro area parents, and 38 percent of parents in greater Minnesota. Of the parents with chronic health problems, 22 percent had not received care for one or more of their conditions during the previous year (24% in the metro area, 17% in greater Minnesota). Long-term homeless parents were more likely to report chronic health problems (45%) than other homeless parents (38%).

**Substance abuse.** Thirteen percent of homeless parents considered themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent, less than half the rate among non-parenting homeless adults (36%). Seven percent reported they left their last housing because of a drinking or drug problem, compared with 24 percent of homeless nonparents. Eleven percent said that a health professional had told them in the last two years that they had an alcohol and/or drug abuse disorder. Nine percent of parents had a dual diagnosis of at least one mental health problem and a drug or alcohol abuse disorder. This is less than one-half of the rate for homeless nonparents (20%).

Long-term homeless parents more often reported a substance abuse diagnosis (15% vs. 7%). American Indian parents more often reported alcohol abuse disorder than other homeless parents (18% vs. 6%).

**Mental health problems.** About half (49%) of homeless parents reported being recently told by a medical professional that they had a serious or persistent mental health disorder. The mental illness rates for parents are lower than for the overall homeless adult population (57%). The most common mental health problem reported by parents was major depression (35% of parents), followed by post-traumatic stress disorder (22%) and bipolar disorder (17%). Those rates have all been rising significantly and steadily since the survey began in 1991. Mental illness rates for homeless parents were higher in greater Minnesota compared to the metro area (55% vs. 47%). Among those reporting a serious mental illness, 20 percent in greater Minnesota and 23 percent in the metro area reported that they had not received either in-patient or out-patient care for their mental health in the past two years.

## Parents who suffer from depression

Studies show that mild to severe depression is common among parents who are struggling with poverty. It is estimated that at least one in ten infants in poverty is being raised by a mother with severe depression – a condition in which the mother is unable to respond to the child's needs adequately, reducing the child's ability to develop language, self-regulation, and skills to explore. These risks are multiplied by the fact that depressed mothers are more likely than similarly poor mothers to also suffer from domestic violence and substance abuse, which create additional vulnerabilities for their infants.

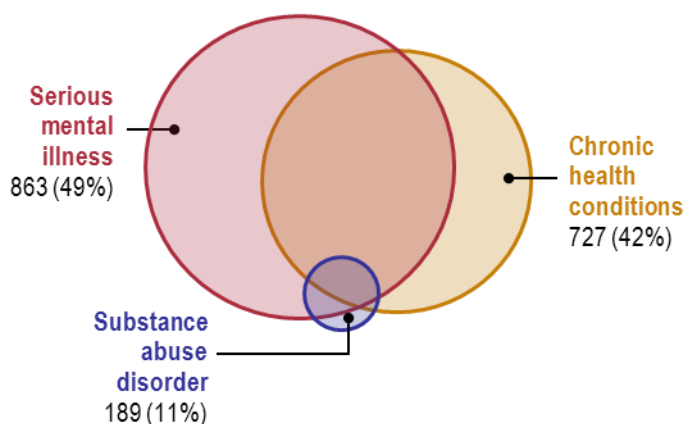
Source: Vericker, T., Macomber, M., & Golden, O. (2010). *Infants of depressed mothers living in poverty: Opportunities to identify and serve*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.



Mental illness is more often reported by parents who are long-term homeless (57% vs. 41% of other parents). African American homeless parents are less likely to report mental illness (42% vs. 56% of other parents) as are parents of homeless preschool-age children (48% vs. 54% of other parents). Only 33 percent of homeless parents (and only 23% of non-parenting adults) did not have a chronic physical health problem, mental health problem, or substance abuse disorder, and 37 percent have only one. However, nearly one-third of parents (30%) suffer from two or three of these problems simultaneously, as shown in the figure below.

### PARENTS: HEALTH ISSUES

None of these disabilities: 573 (33%)



**Parents' needs for health care.** At the time of the survey, 35 percent of parents felt they needed to see a medical professional about an emotional or mental health problem. This was lower than the 39 percent in 2003, but still significantly higher than the 23 percent who expressed such a need in 2000. Only 3 percent felt they needed to see a health professional about an alcohol or drug problem.

Parents who had health problems were more likely than nonparents to have received care for them within the past 12 months: 69 percent of parents had received care for each health problem they had, compared to 60 percent of nonparents.

**Domestic violence.** Thirty percent of mothers reported that they were homeless because of abuse by a partner (similar to the 27% of women not with children). These rates are higher in greater Minnesota (33%) than in the Twin Cities metro area (29%). Parents in greater Minnesota were also more likely to report seeking medical care for injuries caused by violence (14% vs. 11%), and having stayed in an abusive situation for lack of any other housing option (52% vs. 40%). Young parents (under age 17) and their children who are fleeing abusive relationships have few safe places to seek help. Typically, neither battered women's shelters nor regular youth shelters are well prepared to meet their needs.

**Criminal history.** Over one-quarter (28%) of homeless parents had a history of incarceration at some time in their lives, including as a juvenile (16%), in a county jail or workhouse (17%), or in a state or federal prison (5%). Six percent of parents had been incarcerated within the past two years. Long-term homeless parents, and those not in the shelter system, were especially likely to have been incarcerated within the past two years.

### Employment and income of parents

For most people, employment is the way to acquire the income needed to afford housing. Work is also increasingly a necessary condition for receiving a variety of forms of public assistance, including welfare, Food Stamps, and child care subsidy. However, as mentioned above, some people may be unable to earn enough in a full-time job to afford housing.

People without housing usually find it harder to keep or get jobs. In addition, many of the health conditions and problems that are more common among homeless people also interfere with employment, including chronic physical health conditions and mental illness. The extra care needs of children with health or mental health problems can also make it hard for parents to maintain stable employment.

Other employment barriers common among people experiencing homelessness include lack of reliable child care and transportation, and lack of education and training suitable for the jobs that are available.

**Employment.** Twenty-six percent of homeless parents were working at the time of the survey (25% in the metro area, 29% in greater Minnesota). Eight percent were working full-time. Those proportions are greatly reduced from the peak employment rates found in 2000. Employment rates are higher for parents than for other homeless adults. Among parents, they are lowest in emergency and battered women's shelters (13% vs. 33% in transitional housing and 26% not in the shelter system).

Sixty-nine percent of employed parents (compared to 67% of nonparents) earned wages of less than \$10 per hour. Among metro-area parents, 66 percent of parents earned less than \$10 per hour, compared with 76 percent in greater Minnesota. Parents not in shelter programs, long-term homeless parents, American Indian parents, and parents of preschool-age children more often reported low hourly wages.

Thirty-seven percent of homeless parents had left their last housing because they had lost a job or had their hours cut. This was the second most frequent reason cited (among multiple possible reasons), after being unable to afford the rent or monthly payments (45%). The third most frequently cited reason was eviction or foreclosure (35%). Each of these reasons was up compared to 2003, while other common reasons have stayed at relatively stable rates: a breakup with a spouse or partner (28%), and abuse by someone else in the household (24%).

**Sources of income.** Among homeless parents, 21 percent reported their main source of income was from steady employment (20% in the metro area, 23% in greater Minnesota). Another 5 percent received some income from steady employment. Forty-seven percent reported

the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP, or welfare) as their main source of income.

**Job loss and loss of benefits.** Sixteen percent of homeless parents had been laid off in the preceding six months (24% of those unemployed at the time of the survey). This is more than twice the percentage in 2003. Of this group, only 24 percent had received unemployment benefits. Thirteen percent of homeless parents had lost MFIP benefits during the preceding year. This number is half of all those who had received MFIP benefits during that time.

**Child support.** Nearly half (44%) of homeless parents (both women and men) reported that there was an order for at least one of their children to receive child support. Forty-eight percent of men reported that support was being provided for all of their eligible children, but only 37 percent of women said it was. Seventeen percent of all parents, and 23 percent of those with child support orders, reported receiving at least some income from child support in the month of the survey.



## Some issues to consider

The reversal of recent trends, resulting in a renewed growth in the number of homeless children, is cause for concern. Not only does it raise the likelihood of a future increase in homeless adults, but it also reveals the vulnerability of many of our state's children to worse health, less stable relationships, and lower educational opportunity.

The survey shows evidence that schools are sustaining most of their success helping homeless children stay in the same schools they were in before becoming homeless. However, there is not corresponding evidence that children's attendance is improving or their learning problems decreasing. Further progress in these areas may require initiatives and resources from public and private systems beyond the schools. The evidence is growing that prolonged poverty and toxic stress in early childhood is linked to lower school achievement and less job readiness. Minnesota faces a growing need for a well-educated workforce and cannot afford to write off the potential of any of its children by failing to address these needs.

The 2009 study shows that the availability of housing vouchers continues to be far below the number needed. There appears to be a need to help some voucher-holders, especially those with criminal records or poor credit histories, to find property owners willing to rent to them. There is also a serious shortage of larger units for larger families. Support services that assist both tenants and owners may be important in helping people with more barriers to find and stay in their own housing.

This study shows troubling conditions among families who are doubled up rather than staying in shelters. The school stability of children in doubled-up families appears to be nearly as poor as that among children in families living on the streets. In addition, these households are characterized by many other serious barriers including less early education for preschool-age children, less

access to subsidized housing, health care, and other mainstream services, lower employment rates, higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, and more frequent moves associated with problems getting along with others.

No matter how good the services for homeless people, we will not solve the problem of homelessness until we stop the flow of people into homelessness. To do this, it is clear that we must at a minimum address both the affordability of housing (on the income side and on the housing cost side) and the treatment for the often multiple physical and mental health problems among parents and children.

**The role of permanent supportive housing.** For some families, exiting homelessness can be as simple as finding an affordable apartment or finding a new job after being laid off. For other families support services may be needed for a short time, or, if barriers are severe or numerous, help may be needed at a more intensive level or for a longer time. Transitional housing, whose residents are included in the statewide study reported here, offers time-limited support. Permanent supportive housing offers housing and support services for an indefinite period of time.

Because permanent supportive housing is not temporary, its residents do not fit the definition of homelessness and are not included in the statewide survey. However, administrative records in Minnesota's HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) provide insight into the numbers and characteristics of families who receive such services to help them exit homelessness.

As described on the opposite page, in addition to the 5,171 people in 1,675 families who were enumerated through the statewide homeless study on a single night, an additional 3,250 to 3,500 previously homeless people in around 1,000 families were in permanent supportive housing on any given night. Their personal characteristics appear to be very similar to those of families in the statewide survey.

## Minnesota families in permanent supportive housing

Data for the year October 2009 to September 2010

Permanent supportive housing is affordable, long-term, community-based housing with support services for people with multiple barriers to getting and keeping housing. It is part of Minnesota's plan to reduce homelessness. There are approximately 7,300 beds available in permanent supportive housing programs specifically designated for people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Slightly over half of these beds – about 3,900 – are designated for people in families.

Because permanent supportive housing is not temporary, its residents do not fit the definition of homelessness and are not included in the statewide survey. However, Minnesota's HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) tracks service use throughout the year for 91 percent (about 3,500 beds) of the state's permanent housing beds designated for families, and provides an annual report for the federal fiscal year to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Key facts from the most recent report are provided below.

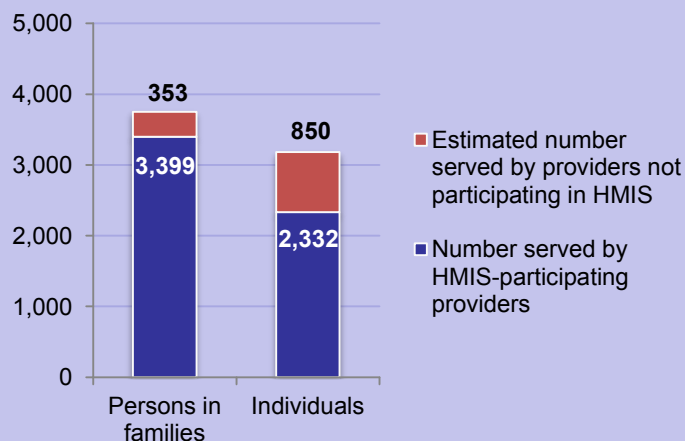
Data suggest that permanent supportive housing programs were operating at near-capacity throughout the year. For providers participating in HMIS, the high point came on July 28, 2010, when they served nearly 3,500 persons in 1,005 families.

An estimated 4,600 people in families headed by adults (18 or older) were served during the full-year reporting period, including 1,335 families and 2,900 minor children. Of these:

- Eighty percent of families were female-headed households.
- Forty-seven percent of persons in families identified as black or African American, 26 percent as white, 10 percent identified as multi-racial, 11 percent as American Indian, and a smaller proportion identified as Latino or Asian. (89% of Minnesota's population is white.)
- Over half of adults reported having a disability.

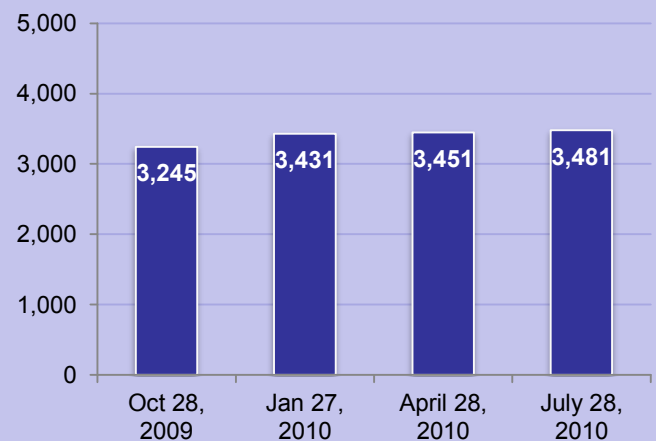
### AVERAGE NUMBER SERVED PER NIGHT IN PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010



### PERSONS IN FAMILIES: QUARTERLY HMIS POINT IN TIME COUNTS IN PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

October 28, 2009 to July 28, 2010



Source: Organizations participating in Minnesota's HMIS, Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) tables for federal fiscal year 2010.

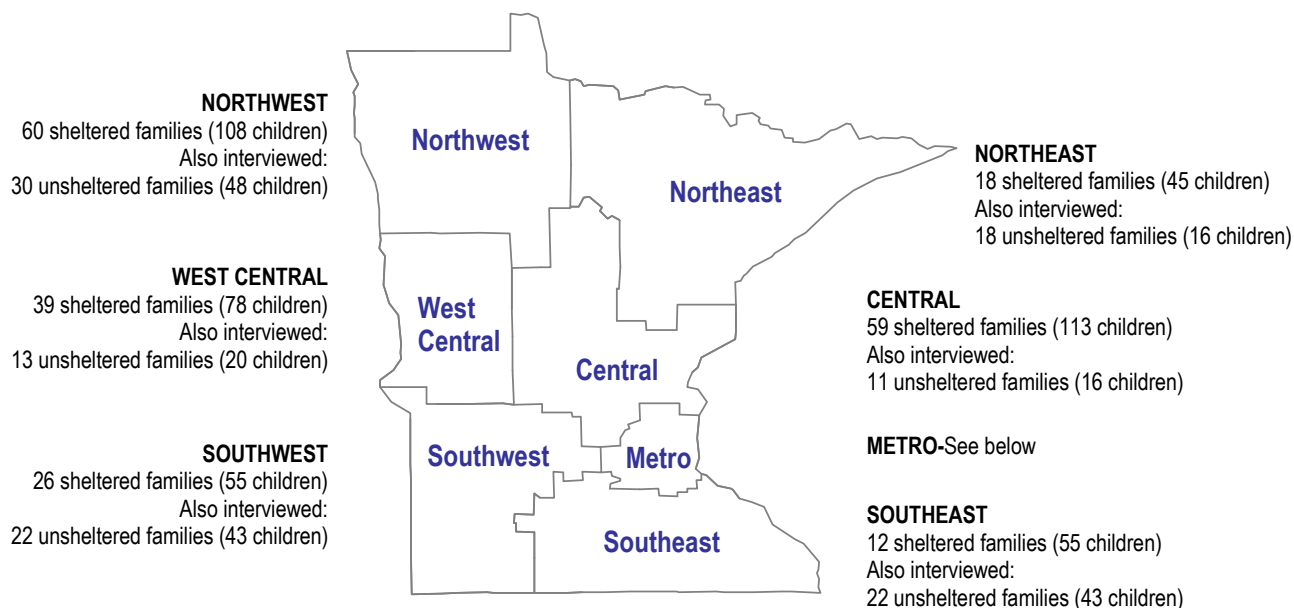
Minnesota's HMIS is managed by Wilder Research. Information about service use for transitional housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing is found in the report, *Homeless service use in Minnesota: Emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing, federal fiscal year 2010*, at [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org).

## HOMELESS FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN MINNESOTA, OCTOBER 22, 2009

### GREATER MINNESOTA TOTAL

391 sheltered families (755 children)

Also interviewed: 154 unsheltered families (285 children)

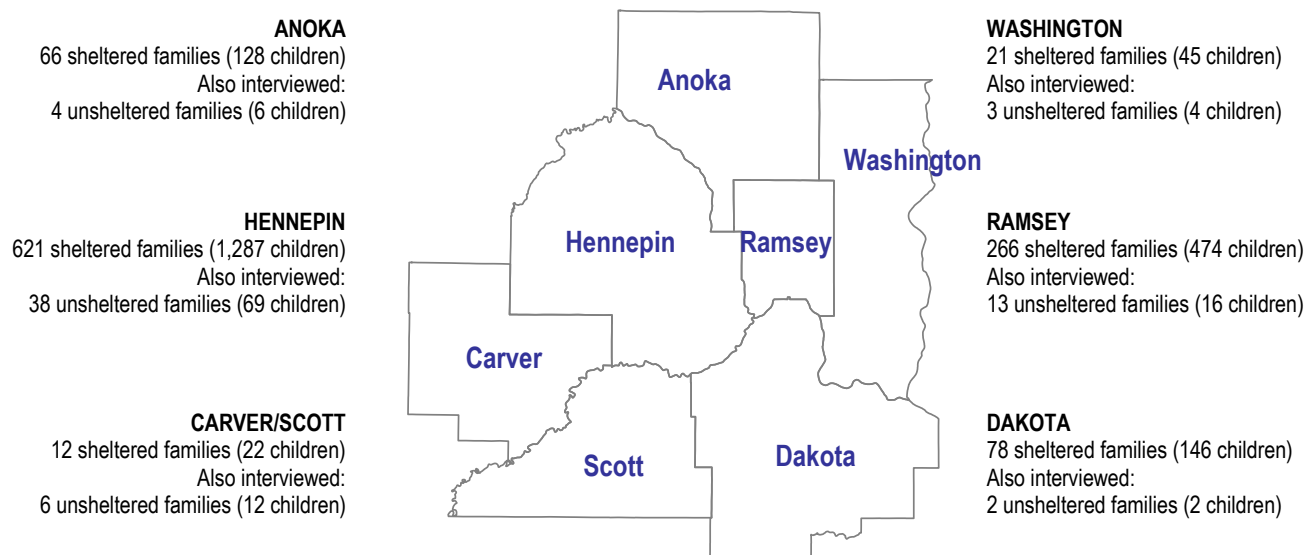


## HOMELESS FAMILIES IN THE METRO AREA, OCTOBER 22, 2009

### METRO TOTAL

1,064 sheltered families (2,102 children)

Also interviewed: 66 unsheltered families (109 children)





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### ABOUT THE STATEWIDE HOMELESS STUDY

Every three years since 1991, Wilder Research has conducted a statewide survey of people without permanent housing. On October 22, 2009, more than 1,000 trained volunteer interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews with about 4,570 people experiencing homelessness. Interviews took place throughout Minnesota in about 300 emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, battered women's shelters, and a variety of informal and unsheltered locations.

Find detailed results, data tables, special reports, and study methods from the 2009 study at [www.wilder.org/homeless2009.0.html](http://www.wilder.org/homeless2009.0.html)



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May 2011

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*2009 Minnesota homeless  
study*

**Homeless children and  
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May 2011