

# Children Pay the Price for Homelessness

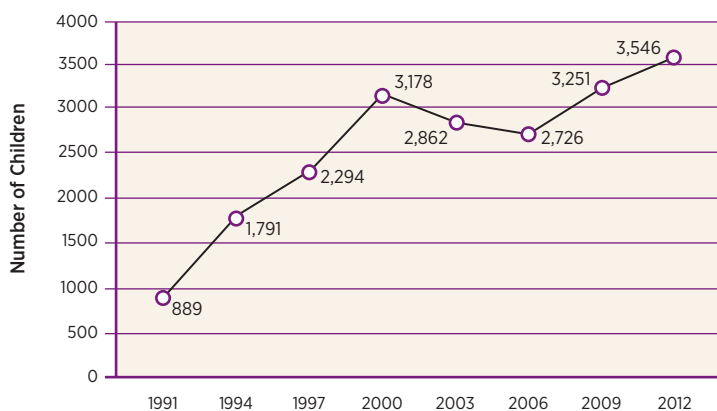
## Childhood Homelessness on the Rise

Family homelessness remains a deeply troubling and persistent challenge both locally and nationally. Since 1991, Wilder Research has conducted the triennial Statewide Homelessness Survey to document the needs and characteristics of homeless children and adults across Minnesota. The reports show that from 2006–2012, the number of homeless children with their families grew 30 percent and that the number of homeless children is four times greater than in 1991.

Homelessness among people of all ages has risen sharply in the Twin Cities metropolitan area since the beginning of the recession. From 2006 to 2012, the number of people experiencing homelessness and living in temporary housing—such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, or domestic violence shelters—grew from 3,756 to 7,961.<sup>1</sup>

The causes of homelessness are complex and include, among others: the inability to find housing that is affordable; declining wages; foreclosures; public assistance time limits; crises such as job loss, illness, family violence, or divorce; discrimination; and chronic conditions such as chemical dependency or mental illness. The result, however, is painfully simple—every year thousands of Minnesota children and their parents spend time in homeless shelters and other emergency housing because they have no permanent place to live.

**One-Night Count of Homeless Children in Minnesota<sup>1</sup>**



From 1991 to 2012, the number of children in shelters on a single night increased 300%.

## Homelessness Affects Children's Health<sup>2</sup>

Compared to children with homes, homeless children have:

- Four times the rate of respiratory infections
- Twice as many ear infections
- Five times the rate of gastrointestinal problems
- Four times the rate of asthma
- Twice the rate of experiencing hunger, which leads to nutritional deficiencies and high levels of obesity

## Homelessness Affects Children's Development<sup>2</sup>

Compared to those with homes, homeless children are have:

- Four times the rate of developmental delays
- Twice the rate of learning disabilities
- Three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems

## Homelessness Affects Children's Education<sup>4</sup>

Changing schools is proven to negatively affect a child's education, yet:

- 42% of homeless children transfer schools at least once per year
- 23% of homeless children repeat a grade

## Homelessness Impacts School Age Children

More than ever before, a homeless person is likely to be a child. According to Wilder Research, about 35 percent of the total homeless population are children with their parent(s). Of these children, 87 percent are 12 years old or younger; more than half are five years old or younger. In addition to the children experiencing homelessness, another 2,000 children throughout the state have been affected by a parent's homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

The sharp increase in homelessness among children and families is straining public and private agencies' ability to provide emergency shelter and services to all who need them. Additionally, the rise of family homelessness is affecting local school systems. There are nearly 9,000 homeless children in the Minneapolis and St. Paul Public School districts. Homeless students now make up 12 percent of the districts' enrollment.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness often reduces a child's school attendance and their ability to focus. According to Wilder Research, 13 percent of parents reported that their children had trouble attending

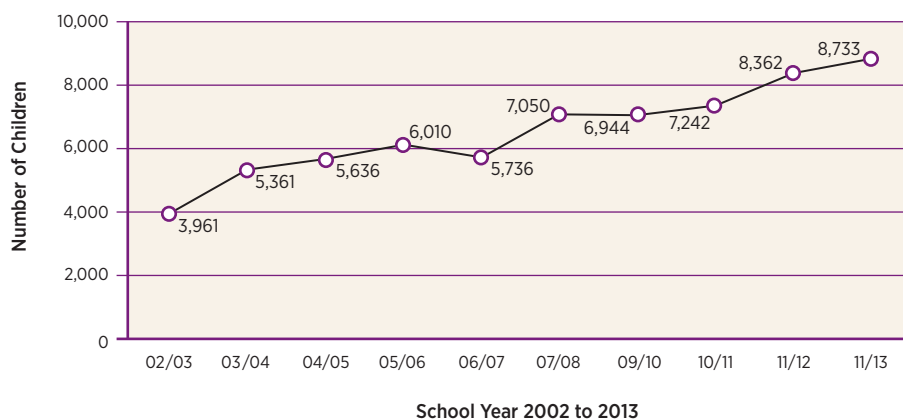
school because of their housing situation; that percentage rises to 31 percent for families who are not living in a shelter. The unfamiliar and crowded settings of temporary shelter can disrupt a child's sleep, putting them at a disadvantage to their housed peers. Additionally, homeless children face unique challenges with transportation; obtaining prior school records; and appropriate hygiene, clothing, and school supplies.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, more than 75 percent of homeless elementary school children perform below grade level in reading and math because of these challenges. The effect is even worse on homeless high school students—85 percent of whom perform below grade level.<sup>2</sup> The impact of homelessness is greatest in the early years of childhood, and yet has consequences that last into adulthood.

### More Supportive Housing Is Needed to Serve Homeless Families

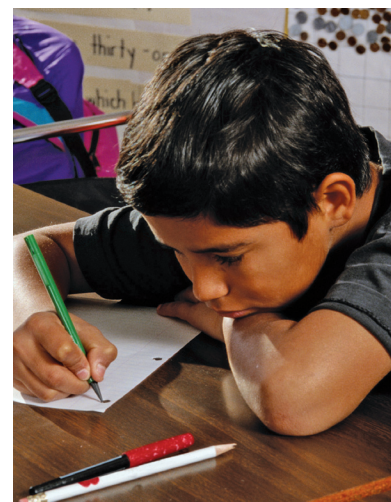
According to Wilder Research, while one-third of homeless parents in Minnesota are working, 62 percent of them make less than \$10 per hour, making it difficult to find affordable housing. This challenge is compounded by the fact that 61 percent of homeless parents suffer from chronic illness, mental illness, and/or substance abuse.<sup>1</sup>

The primary response to family homelessness is the development of a comprehensive system of supportive housing—affordable housing combined with a wide range of programs and services such as job training, child care, transportation, and chemical and mental health support. It strengthens the ability of parents to nurture, care for, and support the healthy development of their children. Unfortunately, more than half of Minnesota's homeless families report being on a waiting list for supportive housing.<sup>1</sup> It is important that our community continue to push to provide supportive housing; without these resources, children will continue to pay the price for homelessness.

**Homeless Children in the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public School Districts<sup>3</sup>**



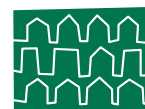
Homelessness in the central city public schools has increased by 24% in the past five years.



*The statistics on children experiencing homelessness in this publication have been updated using the most current data available as of June 2014.*

*This publication is part of a Public Education Initiative on affordable housing sponsored by the Family Housing Fund. The Family Housing Fund is a private, nonprofit organization created in 1980 to help bridge the gap between the housing that people need and the housing they can afford. Its mission is to provide safe, affordable, sustainable homes to all families in the Twin Cities metropolitan area through ongoing partnerships with the public and private sector.*

*For more information about the Family Housing Fund and/or to view other publications available in this series, please visit [www.fhfund.org](http://www.fhfund.org).*



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<sup>1</sup> Wilder Research Homelessness in Minnesota studies available at at <http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Pages/results-Homelessness-Housing.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> National Center on Family Homelessness. *Fact Sheet on Family Homelessness*. Available at: <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/306.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public School Districts, Title I Homeless Program data.

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Children and Poverty. 2003. *Miles to Go: The Flip Side of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*. <http://www.icphusa.org/PDF/reports/MilestoGo.pdf?Submit1=Free+Download>.