

Homeless Children and Youth

Indicators of Child
and Youth Well-Being



Although estimating the homeless population is difficult, about 1.4 million students in the U.S. were homeless at the start of the 2013-14 school year. Children not enrolled in school, although their numbers are less easily measured, push the total number of homeless children and youth significantly higher.

Importance

Children who lack a stable home are vulnerable to a number of adverse outcomes. Some threats, such as poverty and hunger, may precede episodes of homelessness; others stem directly from living without a home. Homeless children are more likely than other children to have moderate to severe acute and chronic health problems, and less access to medical and dental care.¹ Symptoms of asthma, hyperactivity/inattention, and behavior problem are more prevalent among this group.^{2,3} Children without stable homes are more than twice as likely as others to repeat a school grade, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school. A quarter or more of homeless children have witnessed violence, and more than half have problems with anxiety and depression.⁴ Family homelessness may result in children's separation from their parents—either because children are formally placed in foster care, or because parents leave children in the care of relatives and friends.

"Unaccompanied youth" are children and youth who are homeless and on their own—that is, not living with their families. This group includes "runaway" youth, youth whose parents encouraged them to leave or locked them out of their home, and independent youth from families where irreconcilable conflicts or loss of contact have made it impossible for them to return home. Many are victims of abuse; many spent time in foster care as children.⁵ Due to the challenges in identifying them, unaccompanied youth are often excluded from estimates of the homeless population.

A number of factors contribute to homelessness among children and youth. In surveys of city officials, the most frequently cited reasons for family homelessness are a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence; for unaccompanied youth, the chief factors cited are mental illness, substance abuse, and lack of affordable housing.⁶

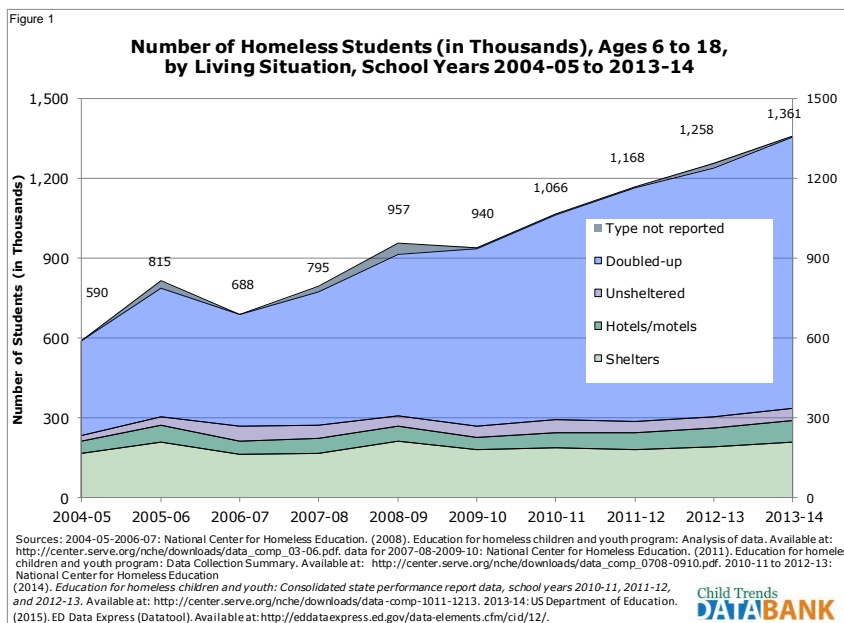
Almost by definition, homeless children and youth are difficult to count, as their living situations frequently change. Attempts are made to estimate the extent of the homeless problem in the United States, using various methods, but all have their limitations. For this report, we use data that count children who are homeless and enrolled in school, and also data on homeless children who are served by formal shelters

(either short- or long-term) over the course of a year, some of whom are also in school. Because of the different methods used make the counts, the two measurements are not comparable.

Trends

Data reported here come from two primary sources: school districts, which are required to report on the number of homeless students they serve, and censuses of homeless shelters and temporary housing conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In school year 2013-14 there were 1.4 million students who were homeless at the beginning of the year. While this is more than twice as many as in school year 2004-05 (590,000), some of this increase may be due to improved reporting, as only 65 percent of school districts reported data in that year (compared to 99 percent in 2013-14⁷). However, there is good reason to believe that a least some of the increase reflects real growth in this population; in school year 2007-08, with 91 percent of school districts reporting, there were only 795,000 students who were homeless. (Figure 1) A smaller peak in 2005 may be due to families displaced by the unusually destructive hurricane season in late summer/early fall of that year.⁸



Differences by Living Situation

In school year 2013-14, the majority (75 percent) of homeless students were “doubling up” with other families. One-seventh (15 percent) were staying in shelters, six percent were in hotels or motels, and three percent were “unsheltered,”

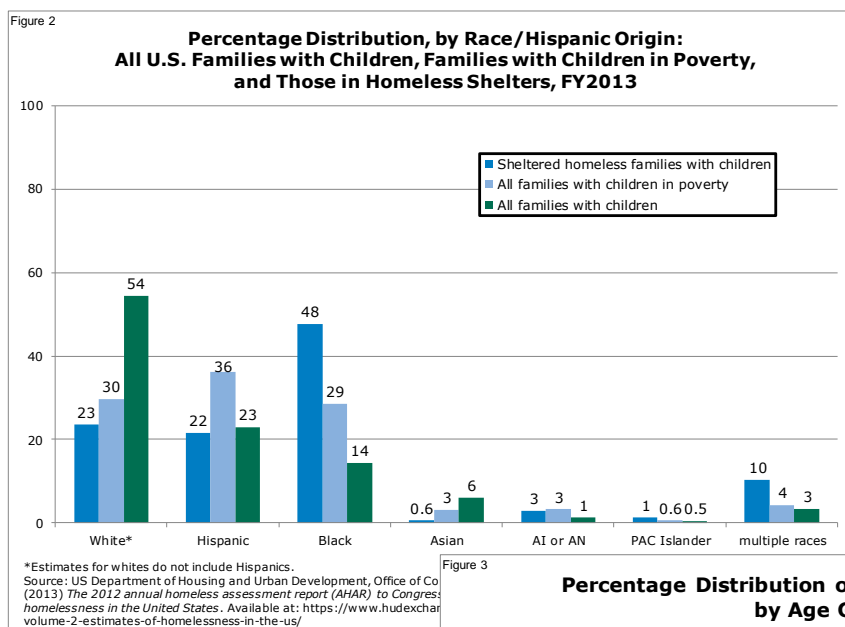
meaning that they were living outside, in abandoned buildings, in cars, or in other places not meant for human habitation. (Appendix 1)



Most of the increase in homelessness since the 2006-07 school year has been in the number of students who are “doubled up”. In that time the number increased by 143 percent, from 421,000 students to over a million students, and rising from 60 to 75 percent of all homeless students. In that same time, the number of those living in hotels or motels increased by 60 percent, and those living in shelters increased by 29 percent. The number of unsheltered homeless students actually fell, from 54 to 45 thousand students. However, the number of unsheltered homeless students peaked in 2006-07, more than doubling in two years. In 2013-14, the number was still twice as high as it was in 2004-05. (Figure 1)

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin⁹

Black families are disproportionately represented among homeless families with children. In 2013, approximately 48 percent of sheltered homeless families with children were black, although black families made up just 14 percent of U.S. families with children, and 29 percent of families with children in poverty. Conversely, white families with children were under-represented: while they comprised 54 percent of all families with children, whites accounted for 23 percent of sheltered homeless families. Similarly, while Hispanics comprised 23 percent of families with children, and 36 percent of those in poverty, they made up just 22 percent of the sheltered homeless population. American Indians, Pacific Islanders, and those with multiple races are overrepresented in the homeless population, while Asians are underrepresented. (Figure 2)



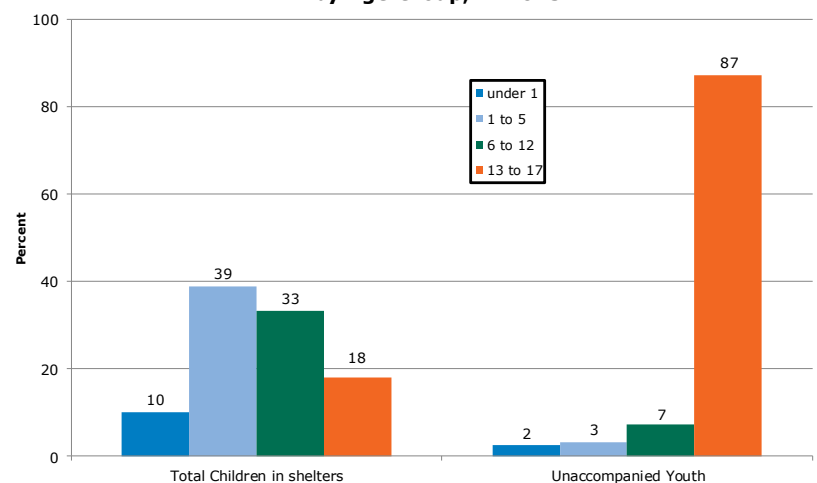
Differences by Age

Sheltered homeless children are disproportionately young. In 2013, fully 10 percent of homeless children who spent time in shelters were under

the age of one, 39 percent between one and five, 33 percent between six and twelve, and 18 percent between 13 and 17. Among unaccompanied youth, as one would expect, a large majority (87 percent) were between the ages of 13 and 17. However, seven percent were between the ages of 6 and 12, and another five percent

Figure 3

Percentage Distribution of Sheltered Homeless Children, by Age Group, FY2013



Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013) *The 2012 annual homeless assessment report (AHAR) to Congress: Volume II: Estimates of homelessness in the United States*. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3297/2012-ahar-volume-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>



were younger than 6. Younger unaccompanied children are likely staying with a parent or other relative who is younger than 18 years of age. (Figure 3)

Differences by Sex

In 2013, among unaccompanied youth in shelters, 54 percent were female. While this is consistent with the pattern since 2009, males were the majority of unaccompanied youth before then. (Appendix 2)

State and Local Estimates

The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research estimates the number of homeless children for school year 2012-13, by state, available here:

<http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/>

In addition, the National Alliance to End Homelessness publishes estimates for geographical units grouped as “urban,” “mostly urban,” “rural,” “mostly rural,” and “urban-rural mix.” There are 457 such “continuum of care” (CoC) units in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, used to award federal homelessness funding. The highest rates of homelessness are in urban and mostly-urban CoCs. More information is at

<http://endhomelessness.org/>

The U.S. Conference of Mayors reports on the past-year percent-change in family homelessness for 25 task- force cities. See <http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2014/1211-report-hh.pdf>

International Estimates

None available.

National Goals

The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End homelessness has set a goal to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by the year 2020. More information is available at: www.epaperflip.com/aqlaia/viewer.aspx?docid=1dc1e97f82884912a8932a3502c37c02.

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator



In New York City, housing subsidies have been shown to be effective in promoting housing stability among families previously using shelters. Intensive permanent supportive housing programs also have positive effects on housing stability and, to a lesser extent, on parental employment and participation in education programs. For more information, see: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/10/HomelessChildrenRoundtable/index.pdf>.

Access to legal representation may also forestall eviction of low-income families. See www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/downloads/pdf/preventionreport.pdf

In Toronto, unaccompanied youth who had dropped out of school who were helped to attain a high school diploma equivalent were more likely to obtain legal employment.¹⁰

Specifically on providing trauma-sensitive environments, and trauma-specific care, for homeless families, see The National Child Traumatic Stress Network publications:

- *Complex trauma: Facts for shelter staff working with homeless children and families* http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/complex_trauma_facts_homeless_shelter_staff_final.pdf, and
- *Complex trauma: Facts for service providers working with homeless youth and young adults* http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/complex_trauma_facts_homeless_youth_final.pdf

Related Indicators

- Children in Poverty: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=children-in-poverty
- Foster Care: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=foster-care
- Child Recipients of Welfare: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=child-recipients-of-welfareafdctanf
- Food Insecurity: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=food-insecurity
- Secure Parental Employment: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=secure-parental-employment
- Adverse Experiences: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=adverse-experiences

Definition

Homeless students include those who meet the definition contained in the HEARTH act of 2009:

- Someone who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.



- Someone who has as a primary nighttime residence a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
- Someone living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements.
- Someone who resided in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided.
- Someone who will imminently lose their housing, including housing they own, rent, or live in without paying rent, are sharing with others, and rooms in hotels or motels, has no subsequent residence identified, and lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.
- A family that has experienced a long-term period without living independently in permanent housing, has experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period, and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.

The sheltered homeless are those who have used a federally supported housing shelter in the past 12 months.

Data Sources

- Data for Students, 2013-14: US Department of Education. (2015). ED Data Express (Datatool). Available at: <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm/cid/12/>.
- Data for Students, 2010-11 to 2012-13: National Center for Homeless Education. (2014). *Education for homeless children and youth: Consolidated state performance report data, school years 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13*. Available at: <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data-comp-1011-1213.pdf>.
- Data for 2013 sheltered homeless: Solari, C. D., Cortes, A., Henry, M., Matthews, N, & Morris, S. (2015) *The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Volume II: Estimates of homelessness in the United States*. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4404/2013-ahar-part-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>



- Data for 2012 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013) *The 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Volume II: Estimates of homelessness in the United States*. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3297/2012-ahar-volume-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>
- Data for 2011 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2012) *The 2011 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2011AHAR_FinalReport.pdf
- Data for students 2007-08 to 2009-10: National Center for Homeless Education. (2011). *Education for homeless children and youth program: Data Collection Summary*. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_0708-0910.pdf.
- Data for 2010 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2011) *The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>
- Data for 2009 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2010) *The 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/5thHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.
- Data for 2008 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2009) *The 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/4thHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.
- Data for students, 2004-05 to 2006-07: National Center for Homeless Education. (2008). *Education for homeless children and youth program: Analysis of data*. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_03-06.pdf.
- Data for 2007 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2008) *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/3rdHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.
- Data for 2006 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2008) *The Second Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2ndHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.



- Data for 2005 sheltered homeless: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2007) *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Available at: <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/ahar.pdf>.

Raw Data Sources

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title X, of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>

Homeless Management Information Systems.

<http://www.hudhdx.info/VendorResources.aspx>



Appendix 1 - Number of Students (in Thousands), Ages 6-18, who were Homeless, and Percentage by Living Situation: School Years 2004-05 to 2013-14

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Percent of school districts reporting data	65	77	78	91	88	87	93	94	99	99
Number in Thousands										
Total homeless	590	815	688	795	957	940	1,066	1,168	1,258	1,361
Shelters	167	208	162	165	211	180	188	181	192	208
Unsheltered	21	30	54	50	40	41	52	42	42	45
Hotels/motels	46	65	51	56	58	47	55	65	70	82
Doubled-up	354	484	421	502	607	668	768	879	936	1,022
Situation not reported	2	27	-	21	42	4	3	2	17	4
Percentage										
Shelters	28.3	25.5	23.5	20.8	22.1	19.1	17.7	15.5	15.5	15.3
Unsheltered	3.6	3.7	7.9	6.3	4.1	4.3	4.9	3.6	3.4	3.3
Hotels/motels	7.8	8.0	7.4	7.1	6.0	5.0	5.2	5.6	5.7	6.0
Doubled-up	60.0	59.5	61.2	63.2	63.4	71.1	72.3	75.4	75.5	75.1
Situation not reported	0.3	3.3	0.0	2.6	4.4	0.4	0.3	0.2	1.4	0.3

Sources: 2004-05-2006-07: National Center for Homeless Education. (2008). Education for homeless children and youth program: Analysis of data. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_03-06.pdf. Data for 2007-08-2009-10: National Center for Homeless Education. (2011). Education for homeless children and youth program: Data Collection Summary. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_0708-0910.pdf. 2010-11 to 2012-13: National Center for Homeless Education. (2014). *Education for homeless children and youth: Consolidated state performance report data, school years 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13*. Available at: <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data-comp-1011-1213.pdf>. 2013-14: 2013-14: US Department of Education. (2015). ED Data Express (Datatool). Available at: <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm/cid/12/>

Appendix 2 – Number and Percentage of Children, Ages Birth through 17, who Spent Time in a Shelter, by Various Characteristics: 2005-2013¹

	2005 (Feb-Apr)	2006 (Jan-Jun)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total children in shelters	159,137	230,173	341,040	330,964	346,047	350,049	341,040	335,695	318,042
Gender									
Male	48.1	53.0	50.5	49.3	50.1	49.4	-	49.9	49.7
Female	51.9	47.0	49.2	49.5	49.4	49.5	-	49.9	49.1
Age									
Under 1	10.6	10.5	11.8	10.6	11.4	11.4	-	9.9	10.0
1 to 5	38.5	38.0	37.5	38.4	38.6	41.0	-	39.9	38.8
6 to 12	33.2	34.0	33.3	32.4	31.0	30.6	-	33.1	33.2
13 to 17	17.7	17.0	17.3	17.5	18.6	16.0	-	17.0	17.9
Unaccompanied youth²	9,858	34,526	52,923	21,705	22,722	14,678	19,492	16,957	16,694
Gender									
Male	45.4	58.7	51.3	53.1	45.6	47.5	-	44.4	45.6
Female	54.6	41.3	48.3	46.1	54.3	52.2	-	55.2	54.0
Age									
Under 1	14.1	9.7	9.3	14.2	8.1	8.2	-	2.7	2.4
1 to 5	14.1	29.1	29.1	15.9	7.8	8.2	-	4.0	3.2
6 to 12	18.8	36.4	32.1	14.7	5.3	12.0	-	7.4	7.2
13 to 17	65.7	26.7	29.4	56.0	72.7	71.0	-	85.7	87.2



	2005 (Feb-Apr)	2006 (Jan-Jun)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Children in families	149,279	195,647	288,117	309,259	323,325	335,371	321,548	322,525	301,348
Gender									
Male	48.3	51.9	50.3	49.5	50.6	50.0	-	50.2	49.9
Female	51.7	48.1	49.4	50.2	49.2	49.8	-	49.6	49.8
Age									
Under 1	10.2	10.6	12.2	10.5	11.7	11.7	-	10.2	10.4
1 to 5	39.8	39.8	39.1	40.4	40.9	42.7	-	41.7	40.8
6 to 12	34.0	33.4	33.6	34.0	32.5	31.7	-	34.5	34.7
13 to 17	14.4	15.2	15.1	15.0	14.9	13.8	-	13.5	14.1
Race/Hispanic Origin³									
Non-Hispanic white	32.0	24.5	18.4	22.8	21.5	28.6	28.1	27.0	23.5
Hispanic	21.6	17.7	20.1	24.4	25.3	21.5	20.6	20.8	21.6
Black	50.7	61.0	47.7	47.4	43.7	38.8	43.6	43.8	47.5
Asian	1.3	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.6	-	0.6	0.6
American Indian or Alaska Native	2.4	1.7	4.2	2.2	3.7	4.3	-	2.7	2.9
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2	0.5	0.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	-	1.3	1.4
Multiple races	8.7	7.0	6.3	6.4	7.7	7.9	11.7	11.0	10.2
Other/unknown	0.0	0.0	13.7	6.8	8.7	7.6	6.0	2.6	2.0

¹While data from 2007 onward reflect a full 12 months of reporting (starting in October of the previous year), 2005 and 2006 data reflect three and six months of reporting, respectively, so caution should be used in comparing percentages. For instance, regional differences in climate may skew data collected in winter only.

²Unaccompanied youth includes children under 18 living together.

³Race/Hispanic origin of children in families reflects the race recorded for the family as a whole.

Sources: 2004-05-2006-07: National Center for Homeless Education. (2008). Education for homeless children and youth program: Analysis of data. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_03-06.pdf. data for 2007-08-2009-10: National Center for Homeless Education. (2011). Education for



homeless children and youth program: Data Collection Summary. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_0708-0910.pdf. 2010-2011: National Center for Homeless Education. (2012). Education for homeless children and youth program: Data Collection Summary. Available at: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_0909-1011.pdf. Data for 2011: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2012) *The 2011 annual homeless assessment report to Congress*. Available at: https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2011AHAR_FinalReport.pdf Data for 2012: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013) *The 2012 annual homeless assessment report (AHAR) to Congress: Volume II: Estimates of homelessness in the United States*. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3297/2012-ahar-volume-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>. Data for 2013: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2015) *The 2013 annual homeless assessment report (AHAR) to Congress: Volume II: Estimates of homelessness in the United States*. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3297/2013-ahar-volume-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>



Endnotes

¹ National Center on Family Homelessness. (2011). America's youngest outcasts 2010: State report card on child homelessness. Available at: http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/NCFH_AmericaOutcast2010_web.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., Rinaldi, M., Masten, A. S., and Oberg, C. N. (2010). Asthma and behavior in homeless 4- to 7-year-olds. *Pediatrics*, 125, 145-151.

⁴ National Center on Family Homelessness. (2011). Op. cit.

⁵ Burt, M. (2007). Understanding homeless youth: Numbers, characteristics, multisystem involvement, and intervention options. Testimony submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support. June 19, 2007.

⁶ United States Conference of Mayors. (2009). Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities. Available at: <http://usmayors.org/HHSurvey2007/hhsurvey07.pdf>

⁷ John McLaughlin, U.S. Department of Education, personal communication, January 8, 2015.

⁸ National Center on Family Homelessness. (2011). Op. cit.

⁹ Hispanics may be any race. Totals for whites in this report do not include Hispanics.

¹⁰ Gaetz, S. and O'Grady, B. (2002). Making money: Exploring the economy of young homeless workers. *Work, Employment & Society*, 16 (no. 3), 433-456.