



## Homeless Teens and Young Adults in New Hampshire

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**G**rowing numbers of adolescents and young adults are coping with homelessness across New Hampshire. Some are children under 18 living on the streets trying to make it on their own without families to support them. Others are young adults, often parents themselves, without the resources to rent a place, who are striving to stay in school or find employment. Still others are adolescents living with parents who have lost their jobs and permanent residences. In an economic downturn when jobs are low paying or hard to find and housing is unaffordable, these homeless young people struggle to find safe shelter from weather, to meet basic needs, and to obtain help coping with their often overwhelming problems.

This brief presents an overview of the homeless youth population in New Hampshire, including who they are, the size of the problem, and recommendations for improving the state's response. The analysis synthesizes data from federal and state agencies and information from those who work with homeless youth, including interviews with state agency staff members and a survey and interviews with sixteen providers of homeless services in New Hampshire, as well as homeless education liaisons who work with homeless students in the schools.

### Who are New Hampshire's Homeless Youth?

"Homeless youth" is a loosely defined category used in the policies, programs, and press about New Hampshire's homeless population. These youth range in age from as young as 12 or 13 to as old as between 17 and 25, depending on the definition used. If they are individuals under age 18 living without a parent or guardian, they are referred to as "unaccompanied youth." Subgroups of unaccompanied youth include "runaways," who have left home without parental permission; "throwaways," who have been forced out of their homes; or "street youth," who have spent some time living without shelter.<sup>1</sup> The definition of homeless youth is often broadened to include single young adults from age 18 to 25 living on their own or in families, either with homeless parents or relatives, or as young parents with children. Often they are "systems youth" who, at 18 years old, have aged out of foster care, juvenile justice, or other state care systems.<sup>2</sup> Whether single or part of a family, in their teens or early twenties, all of these young people share a common condition: they lack a stable, permanent residence.

According to the service providers we interviewed, it is not easy to create a profile of homeless youth in New Hampshire. Some are young adolescents, but most are high school age or older. Nationally, African Americans and Native Americans are over represented among homeless youth, as are those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender,<sup>3</sup> and providers confirmed their presence among homeless youth in New Hampshire as well. Many homeless youth are in

### Key findings

- More than 1,000 adolescents and young adults live in New Hampshire without a stable, permanent home every year.
- Homelessness among New Hampshire high school students rose 168 percent between 2004 and 2009.
- Homelessness among youth is a hidden problem: if staying with friends or otherwise off the streets, young people may not call themselves homeless so do not seek out services where they could be counted and helped.
- New Hampshire has no emergency housing for unaccompanied youth and lacks adequate housing for young adults.
- Homeless services for young people are too few and are difficult to navigate.

## Federal Definitions of Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as an individual who “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” or is living in “a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.”<sup>4</sup> Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Act, which authorizes the Education for Homeless Children and Youths program and requires the establishment of local liaisons for homeless children and youth in the schools, extends the HUD definition, adding, “children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.”<sup>5</sup> This is a situation often referred to as “doubling up” in apartments or houses with other families or friends and is often found among homeless youth who also “couch surf,” or spend nights in friends’ homes, moving from house to house.

school, some live in transitional programs while studying for GEDs, while others have dropped out of school, are working, or cannot find a job. Some are young women evicted from their apartments after the breakup of marriages or relationships, and others are young mothers escaping from abusive partners. The young homeless who come to the shelters and use services are more likely to be female than male.

Although their individual characteristics and circumstances vary, homeless youth share a common set of risk factors for homelessness. A recent national study found a number of risk factors that our service providers reported were also common among New Hampshire youth.<sup>6</sup> The study found that up to 40 percent of homeless youth reported alcohol problems in their lifetime, and as many as 50 percent had drug problems. In the past year, 45 percent had mental health problems. Over 50 percent of homeless youth under age 20 reported abuse and neglect experiences before age 18. Almost three-quarters of the youth in the study under age 20 were suspended from school, one-third were expelled, and almost one-half had dropped out of high school.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the New Hampshire state agency administrators and service providers said that youth also often struggle with physical, developmental, or learning disabilities and the emotional trauma that result from a history of child abuse and neglect.

Any experience of homelessness as a youth is itself a risk factor for a cascading series of problems that can, over time, lead to long-term homelessness. Those interviewed for this brief reported that the housing instability experienced by homeless youth and its associated stigma create barriers to engaging consistently in social activities like clubs and sports that lead to friendships and other positive relationships with other youth and adults. Lack of appropriate clothes and transportation further limits participation in school events and increases isolation.

While living on the streets or moving from place to place, homeless youth often cannot get enough sleep. This affects their ability to stay alert in school, and if they get behind, it may lead to dropping out. Without the necessary education and skills, they often have trouble finding a job. With little knowledge or sense of responsibility about their bodies and sex, they often do not have or use birth control and can get pregnant or contract sexually transmitted diseases. Those with children struggle to find child care so they can apply for and hold a job. Food insecurity and hunger put them at risk for illness but also can push them to shoplifting and entanglement with the police. Young people involved with drugs and alcohol or who have committed a felony find obtaining public housing difficult, thus bringing the homelessness problem full circle.

## What is the Extent of Youth Homelessness in New Hampshire?

The best estimate we have for the numbers of homeless adolescents and young adults is over 1,000, a number that social service providers have told us is probably much smaller than the actual numbers of homeless youth. We calculated this number by combining the best data available for homeless adolescents from the New Hampshire Department of Education with an estimate of homeless young adults age 18 to 24.

The New Hampshire Department of Education, which is required under the McKinney-Vento Act to ensure that homeless students have equal access to an education, reported the following numbers for the 2008–2009 school year. Professional homeless education liaisons working in the schools identified 2,132 elementary, middle school/junior high, and high school students as homeless. Relevant to

this brief, 549 were homeless adolescents, or high school students in grades nine through twelve.<sup>8</sup> This school year total represents about 1 percent of the entire school enrollment in the state, with homeless high school students also about 1 percent of the high school enrollment. The state's entire homeless population is estimated to be 1.6 percent of the population in any given year.<sup>9</sup> By comparison, one national estimate of the broader age group of homeless adolescents (12 to 17 years) from both middle and high school is 7 to 8 percent of the total population for that age group.<sup>10</sup>

We have less information about the number of older young adults age 18 to 24 who are homeless. However, with the national average for the 18 to 24 age group estimated to be 12 percent of the adult homeless population,<sup>11</sup> we estimate that out of 4,306 total adults in emergency and transitional shelters across the state in 2008,<sup>12</sup> approximately 517 were homeless young adults. We have added this number of homeless young adults to the number of high school students reported above, a number that leaves out homeless middle/junior high school students, to produce a conservative estimate of over 1,000 adolescents and young adults that are homeless in New Hampshire each year.

The providers we interviewed said they have seen a sharp rise in the numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth they serve in the last several years. This increase comes at a time when high school enrollment has declined statewide by three percent. One provider reported talking to 17 year olds who were asked by their parents to leave home because they could no longer support them.

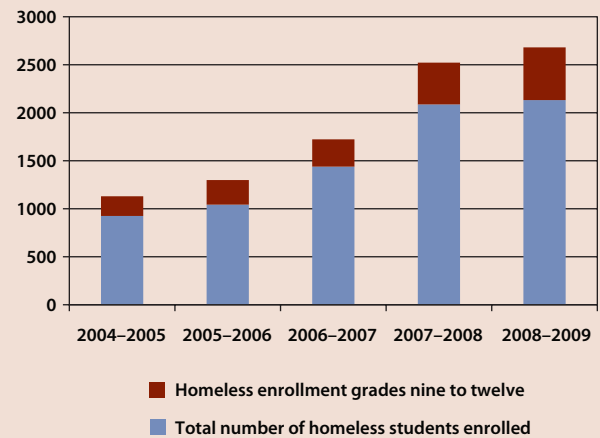
Because of the concentration of people and services in the larger cities and towns, these homeless adolescents and young adults are not distributed evenly across the state. One service provider, the Street Outreach Program of Child and Family Services of New Hampshire, reported that in Manchester in January 2010, they served 100 young people age 16 to 22. Of these, twenty-eight were at risk of homelessness and seventy-two were homeless, either couch surfing, doubling up, in a shelter, in a transitional living program, or sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation. For all of 2009, the program served 1,098 young people in Manchester alone who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.<sup>13</sup> A program that recently started on the Seacoast served an additional twenty-seven young people in 2009.

All of these numbers are underestimates. Depending on how homelessness is defined and what ages are included, one or another group is included or excluded in the counts. However, the more difficult problem is actually locating and identifying the homeless young people to be counted. New Hampshire homeless education liaisons told us that students hide their homelessness from school staff for fear of it becoming known to other students or that their family will be investigated and split up by the state. Other youth are invisible because they stay with friends and relatives on a temporary basis and do not use services.

The problem of hidden homelessness is also common among young adults. The New Hampshire Bureau of Housing and Homeless Services conducted a small pilot study at shelters around the state in the spring of 2009.<sup>14</sup> The study found that 59 percent of the thirty-two young people age 18 to 25 in their survey stayed with friends or relatives while homeless. Young people in this situation are not necessarily avoiding homeless services. Instead, according to several providers, as long as

The total number of homeless students in New Hampshire has increased steadily during the last five school years, with the proportion of total high school students that are homeless growing and the actual numbers increasing by 168 percent.

**FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF HOMELESS STUDENTS ENROLLED IN NEW HAMPSHIRE SCHOOLS DURING THE LAST FIVE YEARS**



On one day in January 2009, the New Hampshire Department of Education and New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services counted 1,402 homeless elementary, middle/junior high, and high school students at school. Twelve percent (171) were unaccompanied youth under age 18, with most of them probably homeless adolescents.<sup>15</sup>

Nearly 70 percent of the homeless children and youth reported by New Hampshire's schools are not in temporary shelters but are doubling up with friends or relatives.<sup>16</sup>

## Meeting the Unique Needs of Homeless Youth: An Example of the Challenge

Programs developed for the homeless do not always adequately meet young people's needs. For example, in 2009, the New Hampshire Department of Education and a statewide homeless advocacy organization, New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness, created a new Web site, [www.Home4Hope.org](http://www.Home4Hope.org), which provides a one-stop source of information and resources for homeless people across the state, including homeless youth. The Web site directs young people to a Web page called "Homeless Teen Help," which lists resources for common adolescent problems, such as reproductive health, mental health, and alcohol and substance abuse. Except for drop-in centers, the page does not describe resources to help homeless young people with their immediate needs, including shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and financial assistance. Instead, this information is located elsewhere on Web pages for the homeless population in general. Although these pages are easy to find, the services listed do not say if young people are allowed to access them. For many youth, having to contact each program to find out is a barrier to use. They may conclude that there are no services for them and look no further. Those that make the effort may become discouraged when they find programs that do not accept them.

they are not living on the streets, homeless youth do not identify with other homeless people or call themselves homeless. This is a challenge for estimating homelessness in New Hampshire, but the more serious problem is that many homeless youth are not getting the help they need and are at risk for street homelessness.<sup>17</sup>

## What Opportunities Exist in New Hampshire for Homeless Youth?

New Hampshire has policies and programs in place to respond to the needs of its homeless youth primarily because of federal laws and funding, particularly the McKinney-Vento Act and the Homeless and Runaway Act. These laws direct housing and programming dollars to state agencies and nonprofit organizations to fund emergency shelters, transitional housing, education, support, and other programs for homeless youth. Regional Continuum of Care consortia of state and municipal agencies and nonprofit organizations coordinate the planning, policy, and resource allocation of funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Family Youth Service Bureau funds Child and Family Services of New Hampshire to provide street outreach to runaway and homeless youth and transitional living programs. The New Hampshire Department of Education obtains funding for homeless education liaison programs from the U.S. Department of Education.

The most recent federal effort is the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program (HPRP), funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 in response to the current recession and associated housing foreclosures. New Hampshire received \$2.4 million through this program for short- and medium-term rental assistance, housing relocation, stabilization, and prevention services. The Bureau of Homeless and Housing Services and one of its grantees, Child and Family Services of New Hampshire, is targeting unaccompanied and transition-age youth in Manchester, Concord, and the Seacoast region for a portion of these services.

Other sources of support for homeless youth are the federal programs that target the larger population of low-income individuals and families like Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Unemployment Insurance, and programs offered by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Division of Family Support. Local city and town welfare offices, local churches, nonprofit agencies, and charities also help the state's homeless. These programs typically serve families and young adults over age 18.

Policy, practice, and funding favor creating homeless programs that serve either adults or unaccompanied minors, and homeless youth often must fit into either one or the other category to receive services. The service providers we interviewed said that they and the youth they serve are constrained by the age limitations in some programs on the one hand and by the lack of consideration in programs of the age and developmentally related needs of homeless youth on the other.

In the next two sections, we present some of these problems in more detail and suggestions for ways to improve them. The sources of these ideas were the service providers and state agency staff who were interviewed for this brief and national homeless advocacy organizations.

## The Need for Housing for Homeless Youth

The most frequently mentioned issue for homeless youth in New Hampshire is the lack of housing. There is a clear need for emergency, transitional, and permanent housing for several different groups.

### *Emergency Shelters*

Currently there are no emergency shelters in the state designed to provide overnight or short-term stays of a few days to children under 18 years of age who are living outside a family. The New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), which has responsibility for children without parents or guardians, and homeless service providers in the state typically deal with the lack of shelters by placing unaccompanied youth in foster or group homes or in other temporary arrangements. In 2009, the New Hampshire State Legislature's Task Force on Youth Homelessness reported on this problem and plans to address the lack of housing for this population are underway.<sup>18</sup> A local effort to provide a shelter for youth is also emerging in the Seacoast region.

For first time or frequent runaways, emergency housing is needed for a week or less, with youth returning to families after counseling, conflict mediation, and other intervention efforts. For youth that cannot be reunited with families, longer term transitional housing programs with life skills training, education, and employment is the next step.

A special challenge among unaccompanied youth is young adolescent mothers. Because they are under age 18, they cannot stay in family shelters unless they have a parent or guardian with them, so they are more likely to stay with friends or on the street. Domestic abuse shelters may take in these young women if violence is the reason for their homelessness. However, being under 18, some young mothers may prefer being on their own or with friends to staying in shelters where they are at risk of involvement with DCYF and separation from their children. Any effort to address their emergency housing requirement has to consider the needs of both mother and child.

Youth age 18 and older can stay overnight in adult emergency shelters around the state. Like other young adults, these youth are technically adults themselves but often lack maturity and experience. Providers reported that the adult shelters are not developmentally appropriate for young adults. Difficulties often arise when mixing them with older adults who have long histories of addictions, mental illness, abuse, crime, and other problems and who model survival strategies learned from years of living on the streets to the younger residents. Young women in particular tell providers that they are afraid to go to shelters, even if the shelters are sex segregated, if they have to deal with drug- or alcohol-addicted older adults. Providing more shelters specifically designed for young adults age 18 to 24 would increase their safety, discourage imitation of older homeless adults' behavior, and encourage participation in transitional living programs.

With the economic downturn, newly homeless families of all ages are placing pressure on the existing system of emergency shelters and services in the state. However, young adult parents with children who have fewer financial resources than older families are particularly vulnerable to job loss, eviction, and homeless-

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**  
Create emergency or overnight shelters for unaccompanied youth under age 18, which is the most urgent need for homeless individuals in this age group.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**  
Create emergency shelters for young *single adults* age 18 to 24.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**  
Add more emergency shelters for homeless *parents*, age 18 to 24.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

Provide more *transitional housing* designed for young adults 18 to 24 years old, including young parents.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

Create more *permanent housing* with support services young adult singles and parents, age 18 to 24.

ness and often have few alternatives to seeking help at shelters. Unfortunately emergency shelters are not available in all regions of New Hampshire, and some shelters are only available in winter. Homeless parents face special challenges trying to maintain a job if the only available shelter is a long commute from another part of the state.

***Transitional Housing***

New Hampshire lacks adequate transitional housing, which typically provides short-term shelter for adults of all ages for several weeks to a year until they are ready to move or permanent housing is available to them. Service providers told us that the adults coming into transitional housing are becoming increasingly younger, with more in their teens than ever before. With the problems of the young homeless more complex and extensive than those of the older homeless population,<sup>19</sup> it is important that transitional housing incorporate “wraparound services.” These are comprehensive services tailored to the needs, strengths, and interests of the young adult and focused, for example, on education and job skills training, sex education, and parenting programs. The services should be guided by a plan developed with the young adult and a case manager who ensures that services are coordinated, monitored, and evaluated.<sup>20</sup>

***Permanent Housing***

Once in transitional housing, many young adults find themselves “stuck” for as long as programs will allow—up to two years or even longer in some circumstances—because of the lack of affordable permanent housing in the state. Section 8 public housing and affordable rentals are scarce in New Hampshire’s expensive real estate market, and providers told us that young adults under age 21 are at a particular disadvantage in this rental market. Landlords are reluctant to rent to them, particularly if they have a history of evictions or bad credit, even if they have the support of nonprofits supplying security deposits, rental funds, and rent guarantees. Young adults sometimes face income requirements to rent, and they typically have lower-paying jobs than older adults.

In the short term, the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program may help some young adults in New Hampshire locate housing through rent subsidies and other financial assistance. However, for longer-term solutions, the National Alliance to End Homelessness advocates implementation of a spectrum of permanent youth housing models “that appropriately respond to the broad range of needs of youth as they learn and test independent living skills during their transition to adulthood.” They define this spectrum as “various forms of housing without predetermined time limits that allow youth to transition from one housing model to another according to their individual developmental needs.”<sup>21</sup> These models encourage varying levels of case management, independence, and responsibility and differ from adult housing in their use of adult mentors and positive youth development approaches to help young people until they can become self-supporting.

**The Need for Services for Homeless Youth**

The system of services available to homeless young people in New Hampshire was described by providers as complex and challenging to navigate. The state has programs that cover basic needs plus transportation, education, job training, health and dental care, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and recreation.

However, just as most of the shelters and housing are located in the central and southern parts of the state, access to the full range of program services depends on where one lives, with more options available to those in Manchester, Nashua, Concord, and Portsmouth. Although the issue of uneven geographic distribution of services was mentioned, the providers we interviewed raised more concerns about the nature of the services provided in the state and how these are delivered.

### *“Aging Out” and the Transition to Independence*

New Hampshire law establishes age 18 as the age of majority. Young people in state care, for example, the juvenile justice, mental health, developmental disabilities, and child welfare/foster care systems, face a major transition to independence from these systems when they reach age 18. This transition is often referred to as “aging out” of the system. Before they age out of state support programs, they participate in transitional planning programs to help them adjust to living on their own. State support and services are available to these young adults up to age 23 in some cases, but participation is voluntary. Some young adults choose not to continue in the state system. Of those youth, some are unsuccessful in their transition and they end up homeless.

The hurdles that any homeless youth must jump over in order to achieve independence are especially difficult for special populations that have relied on state support. One provider said that space in group homes and other shared housing for the mentally ill or developmentally disabled is limited, putting pressure on families who may not be able to house their young adult children. Other providers point out that young people who do want the state services face learning how to negotiate a complex array of bureaucratic systems and programs, a particular challenge for young people with limited education or with disabilities.

Ideally these young adults should learn how to manage their needs and the resources required for support while still in state care. Thinking and planning for the transition should begin as soon as a child enters the state system. An individually tailored plan sets in motion the vital services and supports that will be needed throughout state care and beyond so any setbacks do not result in homelessness. A New Hampshire system that allows transition from child dependence to adult independence determined by the individual's stage of development rather than by a fixed age would also have a better chance of helping young adults adjust to and accept the responsibilities of adulthood.

### *Mental Health Issues*

Many homeless young people struggle with mental health problems that are the result of the traumas that put them on the street. Those in their late teens and early twenties are also at the age when serious mental illnesses like depression and schizophrenia begin to emerge. Alcohol and substance abuse frequently complicate these problems. A common outcome of mental and behavioral health issues is illegal behavior that leads to involvement with the juvenile justice system.

According to state agency staff and providers, New Hampshire lacks adequate numbers of mental health providers who have the training to work through these complex issues with homeless youth and their families, particularly disorders that can occur simultaneously, such as mental illness and substance abuse. Integrating mental health into homeless housing programs provides a better opportunity for both professionals and young people to acknowledge and address these issues and make better decisions about the resources they need. In addition, mental health providers working outside homeless shelters and programs need to recognize and address the problems of homeless youth in their communities.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**  
Base transitions from state care to independence on developmental stage and readiness rather than chronological age.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**  
Improve the integration of mental health services with programs for homeless youth.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** Improve responsiveness to the needs of adolescent children in family emergency and transitional housing, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health issues.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** Expand prevention efforts to develop creative strategies that keep homeless youth engaged in school and build stronger school-to-work and mental health connections.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Change health care laws to permit youth under age 18 to access additional health care and other services without parent or guardian permission.

### *Health Issues*

Homeless youth, particularly those living on the street, are at high risk for health problems, such as infections, fevers, diarrhea, asthma, and physical injuries. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental illnesses are high.<sup>22</sup> In New Hampshire, youth at least 14 years of age can obtain testing and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases without consent, and youth at least 12 years of age can obtain drug or alcohol treatment without parental consent.<sup>23</sup> However, other health or mental health services typically require parental consent until the youth turns 18. Several service providers told us that this situation creates serious barriers to unaccompanied youth obtaining health care or counseling.

### *Special Problems of Adolescents in Shelters*

Parents are the first priority of staff and programs in family shelters. Children, including adolescents, are assumed to be the responsibility of the parents who are expected to supervise their children's activities and behaviors. In most shelters, there are few programs or activities available for adolescents, putting the youth at risk for loneliness, boredom, socio-emotional and behavioral problems, and other consequences of being homeless. Efforts to address the needs and specific problems of adolescent children in these shelters could prevent the development of long-term problems and also relieve some of the pressure on parents trying to cope with their own situations.

Families in Transition, a Manchester-based program that provides long-term temporary shelter for women and children, received funding to address this issue. Their project, the Family Place, provides wraparound services to the entire family, not just the parents, targeting homeless families coping with multiple stressors, particularly disorders that occur simultaneously. In addition to clinical work with the adolescent family members on socio-emotional and behavioral problems, trauma, and substance abuse issues, teenage children have access to an after school group, work with staff on job skills, and may attend a variety of workshops on topics like safe sex. Staff also advocate for the young people's rights in school and with health care providers. This innovative project could serve as a model for other programs in the state.

### *The Importance of Keeping Homeless Youth in School*

Keeping homeless youth in school until they are 18 years of age is now required by New Hampshire law, but keeping them engaged in learning can be challenging. For example, one study of homeless students in Chicago found that homeless youths transferred schools up to 3.2 times while they were homeless, resulting in lower educational achievement than their stable peers across all grade levels.<sup>24</sup>

Research on youth homelessness increasingly points to schools as the last defense against the cycle of homelessness, a place where students can be safe from the conflicts at home, can develop positive social networks, and can gain the practical education and skills needed to become a contributing adult. Implementing mentoring programs and models of school discipline that replace suspension and expulsion with positive reinforcements and networks of support can benefit all students but particularly those at risk for dropping out and becoming homeless or those already homeless.

Schools are designed to place a higher priority on academic skills than life skills, leaving homeless students especially ill-prepared to cope with challenges outside of school. Several service providers described the new Job Corps Center planned

for Manchester as an ideal alternative education for many of the homeless youth they see. In addition to education and job skills, the Job Corps Center would offer stable housing to young adults age 16 to 24 years. Although the project is sidelined for several years, it may yet provide a positive model and generate ideas for programs that serve homeless youth.

## Conclusion

More than 1,000 adolescents and young adults live in New Hampshire without a stable, permanent home every year. This is a conservative estimate; the real number is probably much higher. Because young people are so good at hiding their homelessness, it is easy for adults to be unaware of the extent of the problem. Yet homeless youth can be found in our schools, on our streets, in apartments, and in our neighbors' homes across the state.

Homelessness is a traumatic experience for these young people, putting them at risk of disease, injury, isolation from family and friends, mental illness, addiction, incarceration, and further homelessness. Such experiences have been found to delay or even stop the development of the brain before full adulthood, which studies show is a long process, lasting from about age 12 to 25.<sup>25</sup> For many young people, particularly between the ages of 16 and 24, learning to become an adult is challenge enough, but if they are homeless as well, the burden can be overwhelming.

New Hampshire's laws, policies, and programs should be designed to help homeless youth. However, many are based on an earlier model of child development that assumed maturity at age 18.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence, young adults are expected to handle their homelessness as if they are adults but often lack the experience or capacity to do so without more support. Recognizing this problem, the service providers in our study proposed creating new programs tailored to yet another subset of young homeless adults, and several of our recommendations are based on their suggestions. However, New Hampshire might instead benefit by asking this question: How can we design a comprehensive system that will serve the needs of all homeless people seamlessly across the lifespan, responsive to each developmental stage?

An effort toward a more comprehensive system began in 2006 with the governor's approval of "New Hampshire's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness."<sup>27</sup> The plan outlines an ambitious set of goals, objectives, and strategies for the state but which, for lack of funds during the economic downturn, have been slow to move forward.<sup>28</sup> Except for a brief mention of unaccompanied youth, the plan is surprisingly silent on the challenges and issues of homeless youth in the state. If funding for the plan is revived, we hope that a human development lifespan approach, inclusive of homeless youth, will be part of the implementation.

In the current recession, the path to adulthood for young people has never been more challenging. Addressing the need for temporary and permanent housing is the critical first step to meeting the needs of homeless youth. However, housing alone is not sufficient to prevent further homelessness in New Hampshire. We need also to find better strategies to keep young people in school until graduation, provide opportunities for livable wage jobs or further education and training when they graduate, and deliver an accessible, comprehensible, and comprehensive system of supports to help move them smoothly through the transition from early to late adolescence to young and older adulthood. With the right supports and opportunities, these homeless youth can become adults contributing to the future prosperity of New Hampshire.

## Endnotes

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2. Ibid.
3. Yumiko Aratani, "Homeless Children and Youth: Causes and Consequences." (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009).
4. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Federal Definition of Homelessness," <http://www.hud.gov/homeless/definition.cfm>.
5. U.S. Department of Education. "Elementary and Secondary Education, Part C—Homeless Education Subtitle B—Education for Homeless Children and Youths, Sec.725. Definitions," also known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html#sec723>.
6. We have no data on these risk factors for New Hampshire youth, so we do not know how accurately these percentages describe homeless youth in this state. However, the frequency with which these risk factors came up as problems for homeless youth in New Hampshire suggests that these are all common problems for this population.
7. M. Burt, "Understanding Homeless Youth: Numbers, Characteristics, Multisystem Involvement, and Intervention Options," (testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support on June 17, 2007).
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12. New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Homeless and Housing Services, "Homelessness in New Hampshire: A Report by the Emergency Shelter and Homeless Coordination Commission, July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008." (Concord, NH: New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).
13. Unduplicated counts of young people, age 16 through 22, served. Data provided by the Street Outreach Program, Child and Family Services of New Hampshire.
14. New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Homeless and Housing Services, "New Hampshire Homeless Access Survey," (data obtained from the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Bureau, October 2009).
15. This one-day "point-in-time" count provides a useful snapshot of homelessness in the schools, including children in homeless families and unaccompanied youth without parents or guardians. However, because the data do not separate adolescents age 13 to 17 years from the younger children that were either members of homeless families or unaccompanied youth, we include it in this brief because it is one of the few numbers that we have for the problem of homelessness among children and youth statewide.
16. Statistic was provided to the author by the New Hampshire Department of Education.
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