

Youth Homelessness in Minnesota

Every night in Minnesota, nearly 5,000 youth experience homelessness and do not have a safe place to sleep.

Youth are disproportionately affected relative to their population, making up nearly half of the homeless (46%). In Minnesota 13,300 unaccompanied youth experience homelessness over the course of a year; this includes 5,800 minors ages seventeen and youngerⁱ. In Hennepin County, 1,324 minor-age youth represent 33% of the homeless populationⁱⁱ.



The urgency to address youth homelessness is clear. In Hennepin County, currently there are only eighty-five emergency shelter beds, and 200 rapid rehousing/transitional housing beds, 20 host homes, and 181 non-time limited permanent supporting housing units specifically for youth. These services are inadequate to meet the need, and the number of youth experiencing homelessness identified on Point in Time (PIT) counts continues to rise. Recent research from the Voices of Youth Count found that one in ten youth experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year, suggesting that substantially more youth may be experiencing homelessness than have been identifiedⁱⁱⁱ.

Disparities in Youth Homelessness

Nearly three quarters (73%) of youth experiencing homelessness identify as Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), compared to just 26% of all Minnesota youth; and 23% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+, compared to 4% of all Minnesota youthⁱ. For youth at The Bridge, annually over 80% identify as BIPOC and 20% as LGBTQ+. Systemic and institutional racism, as well as acute and long-term family conflict, leads to their sense of non-acceptance and lack of belonging.

Root Causes of Youth Homelessness

Homelessness is often preceded by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); 84% of youth experiencing homelessness have experienced at least one ACE, and 59% have experienced three or more ACE's before turning 18. Amongst these youth; 61% lived with a substance abuser, 60% witnessed abuse as a child, 59% lived with a parent or guardian with mental illness, 48% were physically mistreated or abused, and 31% were sexually mistreated or abusedⁱ. It's further alarming that 64% of youth experiencing homelessness reportedly have a "serious mental illness."ⁱⁱ Every youth at The Bridge has experienced trauma; 85% are survivors of domestic violence, half of youth report their mental health as poor or fair, 23% had self-injured, and 17% attempted suicide. Left unsupported, these youth experience significant barriers to emotional safety, identifying supportive adult relationships, and securing their basic needs.

Early intervention is key to disrupting the cycle of homelessness.

Homelessness involves not just lack of housing, but disconnection from basic resources, supportive relationships, educational and economic opportunity, and full participation in community life. When homeless adults were asked about their repeated homelessness starting at an early age, over a third (36%) first experienced homelessness at or before the age of 18^{iv}. While immediate shelter and safety is vital, providing shelter alone is not enough. These youth need comprehensive assessment and intervention tailored to their developmental level that addresses underlying issues and effectively involves their family members and caregivers.

The Bridge for Youth



The Bridge for Youth centers youth voice, justice, and equity in all we do and empowers youth experiencing homelessness through safe shelter, basic needs, and healthy relationships. Our vision is a community where all youth feel safe, accepted, and supported. Since 1970, The Bridge has provided over 50,000 youth safety and stability through emergency shelter, as well as transitional housing for youth – including parenting youth and their young children; individual, family and group counseling; specialized case management for crime victims and youth who identify as LGBTQ+; phone/text crisis intervention; as well as street, site, and mobile outreach. The Bridge is at the forefront of addressing youth homelessness in Minnesota, positively

impacting the lives of the most vulnerable youth in our community, through youth-centered programs that offer a pathway out of poverty and chronic homelessness.

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i Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2018 Study. <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/homelessness-minnesota-2018-study>

ii Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2018 Study. Hennepin County Homeless Fact Sheet. <http://mnhomeless.org/minnesota-homeless-study/reports-and-fact-sheets/2018/2018-hennepin-county-homeless-fact-sheet-1-20.pdf>

iii Voices of Youth Count, an Initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/>

iv US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)



Homelessness Amongst Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Minnesota

Youth are disproportionately affected relative to their population, making up nearly half (46%) of the homeless. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of youth experiencing homelessness identify as BIPOC, compared to just 26% of all Minnesota youth. Alarming 35% of youth experiencing homelessness are pregnant/parenting, and in Hennepin County this increases to nearly 50%ⁱ. In Minnesota, the birth rate of youth who identify as BIPOC is three times higher than that of white youth, and youth with the highest percent of subsequent birth are from BIPOC communitiesⁱⁱ. Amongst adults experiencing homelessness, 36% experienced homelessness as childrenⁱⁱⁱ.

Risks and Challenges for Pregnant and Parenting Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Experiencing homelessness puts youth at significant risk of becoming pregnant due to abuse or assault. Minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are 14 times more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant^{iv}. Over half (54%) of youth experiencing homelessness reported that they had been physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected at some point in their childhood, and 48% reported having been in a social-service placement as children^v. Parenting is challenging enough in the best of circumstances, but for parenting youth experiencing homelessness, the difficulties facing them can be overwhelming. These youth are at increased risk for exposing their children to substances in-utero, premature births, low birth rates, child abuse or neglect, limited access to critical supports, removal of their children into the child protection system and exposure to violence and abuse. Research shows experiencing homelessness as an infant or toddler can have life-long repercussions; early developmental trauma (child abuse, neglect, and disrupted attachment) is often a direct pathway to homelessness. Homelessness itself also involves further trauma and increases the risk of cyclical victimization and re-traumatization^{vi}.



Specific Programming and Mental Health Services Critically Needed

Of the minor-age youth who are pregnant or have gotten someone pregnant, 49% reported a significant mental health issue^{vii}. Youth experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are dealing with decisions with long term repercussions, that are compounded in complexity when they are dealing with mental health issues and homelessness. Timely and specific programming is key to providing the services they need, when in fact studies show that youth are much more likely to engage with support such as counseling when they feel their voice is heard. A critical aspect of youth feeling understood is them viewing their service providers as being able to relate to them through similar socio-demographic identity and experiences.^{viii}

Disrupting the Cycle of Inter-generational Homelessness

Recognizing an urgent and growing need for housing for pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness, in 2019 The Bridge for Youth opened Marlene's Place, the first and only site-based transitional housing program specifically for pregnant/parenting youth (ages 16-20) and their children (ages 0-3) currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness in Hennepin County. Marlene's Place provides housing, comprehensive case management, access to healthcare, and parenting education for up to five families. In 2020, programming expanded with the opening of Gloria's Place, the only emergency shelter in Minnesota for pregnant/parenting youth (ages 15-17) and their children (ages 0-3), providing emergency shelter, case management, access to healthcare, and parenting education for up to six families. By providing immediate housing stability for young families in crisis, collectively Marlene's Place and Gloria's Place address the unique needs of parenting youth and their children and provide individualized support to secure safe and stable long-term housing. Together, these two innovative programs disrupt the cycle of intergenerational homelessness, involvement in child protection, foster care and other systems, and foster housing stability across two generations – both parenting youth and their children.

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- i <http://mnhomeless.org/minnesota-homeless-study/reports-and-fact-sheets/2015/2015-homeless-youth-4-17.pdf>
- ii Wilder Study – Homeless in MN – Youth on Their Own
- iii US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- iv <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>
- v Voices of Youth Count, an Initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/>
- vi <https://ojs.uwindsor.ca/index.php/csw/article/download/5882/4872?inline=1>
- vii https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/21_Sohn_2021.pdf