



Homeless Youth in America

By: Stephanie Stinnett

Today in the United States nearly one out of every 30 people under the age of 18 are homeless. That is almost 2.5 million school-aged children who have nowhere to live, or no permanent home. The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the developed world with a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of \$16.8 trillion, but it also has the second highest child poverty rate in the developed world (Homeless but not Hopeless: Homeless Youth in America, Philips). The homeless youth in America face many troubles when it comes to education, food, sexual assault, and substance abuse.

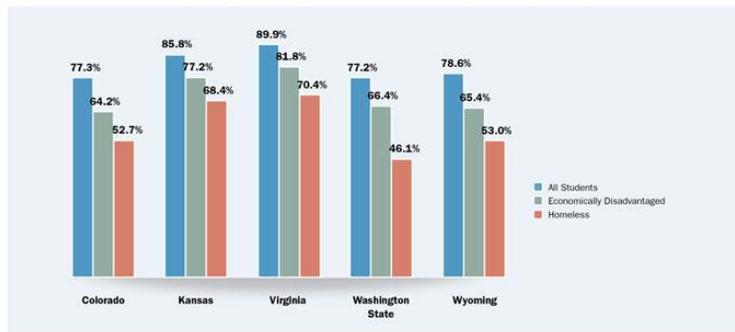
Many homeless youth and their families struggle with food insecurity as they have no real way to acquiring and preparing healthy foods. When homeless youth stay at a shelter they are typically provided with meals, and they can also get meals at local soup kitchens in their communities. What food, and how much they can receive can vary from facility to facility leaving the homeless youth and their families with short-term food insecurities. In mid-town Manhattan there is an organization called the Reciprocity Foundation, which opened in 2005, that serves almost 200 homeless youth healthy meals. They even started a vegetarian food program in 2012 (Providing Homeless Youth With a Healthy Meal and a Place to Gather, O'Neill).

Living on the streets and in shelters can put children at a higher risk of physical and sexual assault and human trafficking. 30 percent of youth living in shelters, and 70 percent of youth living on the street are victims of sexual abuse. Over 162,000 homeless youth are victims of sexual exploitation each year (Homeless Youth: Defining the Problem and the Population, NRCDDV). Every year almost 20,000 youth are forced into prostitution due to human trafficking (Teen Homelessness Statistics, Covenant House). Along with human trafficking, substance abuse

is also a very large risk for homeless children. A study by the National Network for Youth, homeless youth are 3 times more likely to use marijuana and 18 times more likely to use cocaine than non-homeless youth (Unaccompanied Youth Fast Facts, NN4Y).

The youth living on the streets are less likely to graduate than youth who have stable housing. When living on the streets or in shelters, they are focusing most of, if not all, of their resources on just surviving. 75 percent of elementary students who were homeless scored below average when it came to math and reading. That number jumped up to 85 percent in high school aged students. Half of the homeless students surveyed said that at one point or another they had to change school, which can also put the mat a higher disadvantage academically. It is difficult to say the percentage of homeless students that graduate, because only five states (Colorado, Kansas, Virginia, Washington State, and Wyoming) report the graduation rates of homeless youth. From the graph you can see that the number of homeless youth that graduate is far less than the youth who have homes (Hidden in Plain Sight Homeless Students in America's Public Schools, America's Promise Alliance).

Graph 2: Class of 2014 On-time (Four-year) State High School Graduation Rate by Poverty and Housing Status



Source: Colorado Department of Education, 2013-14 State Policy Report: Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement; Kansas State Department of Education, State Level 2013-14 Graduation and Dropout Data—State-level Four- and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates by Subgroup (Public Schools Only); Kansas State Department of Education, Four-year and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates 2014-15 Fact Sheet; Virginia Department of Education, State-level Cohort Report, Four Year Rate—Class of 2014; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report, April 2015; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bulletin No. 072-11 Assessment and Student Information—Attachment 2 Class of 2011 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculations; Wyoming Department of Education, “Wyoming State Graduation Rates: Federally Adjusted Graduation Rates for the 2013-14 Cohort,” <http://edu.wyoming.gov/data/graduation-rates>.

To improve the lives of homeless youth and their families there need to be more programs in place to help with schooling, food, and education. Communities also need to all come together to ensure that no child goes hungry or sleeps on the street or in a shelter. More resources could be in place for counseling to help with mental health and drug issues. We need to all help as a community because no child deserves to grow up without a safe home.

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