

## Where do homeless people live?



As the prelude to a discussion about homelessness, this question tends to trigger some predictable responses. In shelters. Under bridges. In their cars.

But when we start to think outside the (cardboard) box defining what is meant by "homeless," we may become more aware of people living in circumstances which, while technically "housed," are actually so impermanent, uncomfortable, or unsafe as to be detrimental to the pursuit of a productive livelihood.

In relation to children, youth and families, "homeless" and "highly-mobile" have been operationally defined by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) Homeless Program, so that virtually any child or youth whose living circumstances are such that they are not able to access and/or succeed in school, can be served. (This presumes the child or youth is not already receiving full educational services through another federal educational program, such as Migrant Education).

Following are broad definitions of "homeless" and "highly-mobile" which the LDE Homeless Program uses to determine eligibility for educational services through the McKinney Homeless Education and Title I IASA programs at the state and local level. The point of these definitions is to be more inclusive than exclusive: children and youth who are considered at risk of becoming homeless are also eligible for services under these programs. Exceptions to the definitions describing circumstances which are not considered "homeless" are also included:

### **Definitions: Homeless and Highly-Mobile Children and Youth**

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-645) defines a homeless individual as "one who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and/or who has a primary nighttime residence that is a short-term or transitional shelter, or a place not designed for / or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings."



Homeless children and youth may be accompanied by family members, or be on their own (unaccompanied). The U.S. Department of Education advises that determinations of whether a child or youth is homeless should be made on a case-by-case basis.

In Louisiana, expanded definitions have helped local districts understand who may be in need of assistance. Children and youth living in the following types of situations are eligible for assistance from local homeless education programs:

### **Children and Youth in Transitional or Emergency Shelters**



Children and youth in transitional or emergency shelters, with or without other family members, are considered homeless. This applies to families and youth in shelters for economic reasons as well as to those who are displaced from housing due to natural or other disasters (e.g., earthquakes, flooding, house fire). In the event of massive homelessness such as that which can be caused by natural disasters, it is suggested that districts provide services for one family or individual student only to the degree that similar services can be extended to all families and students in the district presenting similar needs.

### **Children and Youth Living in Trailer Parks, Camping Grounds, Vehicles**

Children and youth staying temporarily in trailer parks or camping areas because they lack adequate living accommodations should be considered homeless. Those living in trailer parks or camping areas on a long-term basis in adequate accommodations should not be considered homeless. Inadequate shelter/housing can include that which lacks electricity, plumbing, or sufficient heating, as well as housing affected by unhealthy circumstances such as head lice infestation, particularly when such circumstances lead to frequent school absences and/or poor school performance.

### **Children and Youth "Doubled-Up" in Housing**

Children living in "doubled-up" accommodations, sharing housing with relatives or friends, are considered homeless if they are doubled-up because of loss of housing or similar circumstances which force them to share housing. Families voluntarily living in doubled-up accommodations to save money generally should not be considered homeless, but should be considered eligible for services if the accommodations are such that the children involved have difficulty accessing or succeeding in school. For example, overcrowded housing can have detrimental effects on student school performance. The U.S. Census Bureau considers housing overcrowded if there are more than 1.5 persons per room (i.e., three people living in a two room apartment may not be overcrowded, but four people in the same space would be considered as such).



### **Children and youth living in motels and weekly-rates apartments**

Some social service agencies will provide vouchers to motels for clients, in lieu of emergency shelter space. Children and youth placed in motels for lack of shelter space are still considered homeless. Other families find motels to be affordable, while move-in expenses and deposits for more permanent housing are not within reach. Children and youth who live under such circumstances are eligible for homeless education services to the extent that they are inadequately housed (e.g., without cooking facilities) and/or are living in over-crowded situations.

### **Foster Children and Youth**

In general, children and youth in foster homes are not considered homeless. Many foster children are in the care of a public agency awaiting placement in more permanent situations. The foster home, although temporary, serves as a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Children placed in foster homes for lack of shelter space, however, should be considered homeless.

### **Incarcerated Children and Youth**

Children and youth who are incarcerated for violation or alleged violation of a law should not be considered homeless, even if prior to their incarceration they would have been considered homeless because they were living in inadequate accommodations. Children and youth who are under care of the state and are being held in an institution because they have no other place to live should be considered homeless. Once these children are placed in more permanent facilities, they are no longer considered homeless.

### **Migratory Children and Youth**

Migratory children and youth should not be considered homeless simply because they are children of migratory families. To the extent that migratory children and youth are staying in accommodations which are unfit for habitation, they should be considered homeless. In Louisiana, children from migratory families who are not in the service area of a Migrant Education Program are eligible for services from school district homeless education projects.

### **Unaccompanied Minors: Runaway and Abandoned Youth**

Children or youth who have left home and live in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, with friends, on the streets, in parks or other inadequate accommodations, are considered homeless, even if their parents have provided or are willing to provide a home for them. Abandoned youth, those whose parents will not permit them to live at home, or those who have been left on their own, are also considered eligible for services. The term "constructive runaway" has been used in Louisiana to describe youth who have fled abusive situations in their parental homes.



### **Highly-mobile Families and Youth**



Highly-mobile children and youth may move frequently as part of families in search of housing or work, as part of the migratory labor force or for many other reasons. This includes all children and youth whose frequent school changes may result in reduced school attendance, instability, erratic performance and socialization difficulties. Highly-mobile children and youth, while perhaps not always categorically "homeless," have some of the same needs as those who are homeless due to lack of affordable housing, and can benefit from some of the same techniques and services. Students who have had two or more school changes in a year should be regarded as eligible for homeless program services if they demonstrate such needs.