

Executive Summary

It is unacceptable for one child in the United States to be homeless for even one day.

The year 2008 will long be remembered by Americans as a time when grossly overpaid bankers, captains of industry, and carmakers hobbled to Washington, hats in hand, begging for bailouts and infusions of billions of dollars. Ignored by members of Congress and the media were scores of children – many still infants and toddlers – who were homeless in the midst of this economic turmoil.

Without a voice, **more than 1.5 million of our nation's children go to sleep without a home each year.** Homeless, these children also endure a lack of safety, comfort, privacy, reassuring routines, adequate health care, uninterrupted schooling, sustaining relationships, and a sense of community. These factors combine to create a life-altering experience that inflicts profound and lasting scars.

The National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH) has created *America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness* to provide a comprehensive snapshot of child homelessness in America today. Updating a study NCFH released in 1999, this report shows that the problem of child homelessness is worsening. The *Report Card* describes the status of homeless children in four areas: extent of child homelessness, child well-being, structural risk factors, and state-by-state policy and planning efforts.

Who are these children? Where do they live? What are the policies, circumstances, and failings that make it possible for **one in every 50 American children** to experience homelessness? What does it say about our country that we are willing to bail out banks, but not our smallest, most vulnerable citizens? The effects of our nation's economic downturn – including increasing numbers of foreclosures, job layoffs, rising food and fuel prices, and inadequate supplies of low-cost housing – will surely add to the legions of children who are homeless.

This report shows that the majority of homeless children reside in very few states. During 2005-2006, 75% of America's identified homeless children lived in 11 states.

Children without homes are twice as likely to experience hunger as other children. Two-thirds worry they won't have enough to eat. More than one-third of homeless children report being forced to skip meals. Homelessness makes children sick. Children who experience homelessness are more than twice as likely as middle class children to have moderate to severe acute and chronic health problems. Homeless children are twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade in school, to be expelled or suspended, or to drop out of high school. At the end of high school, few homeless students are proficient in reading and math – and their estimated graduation rate is below 25%.

We must not allow grim forecasts about the nation's economy to delay aggressive action.

It is possible to end child homelessness within a decade with dedicated funds from local, state, and federal governments that are combined with reallocated dollars. All states must specifically address child homelessness in their plans to end homelessness. In almost half of the states' current plans, children and families are not even mentioned. Making homeless children a priority must come from the top. This is a perfect opportunity for President Obama to ensure that the Interagency Council on Homelessness expands its focus to include children and families and to coordinate their efforts with similar Congressional activities.

Updating a study NCFH released 12 years ago, this report shows that the problem of child homelessness is worsening.

Ending child homelessness is within our reach, despite current economic circumstances. This report shows that several states have created the infrastructure and programs needed to turn the tide. At least six states have created extensive plans to combat child homelessness, and a dozen additional states have done significant planning. By looking at innovative programs described in this report, all states can draw on these successful ideas to develop their own plans and strategies for ending child homelessness.

Ending homelessness for all children in the U.S. is possible if a concerted effort is made by national, state, and local political leaders, funders, the White House, service providers, advocates, and philanthropic foundations. If we fail to act, the consequences will play out for years to come as a generation of lost children grow to adulthood. It is virtually impossible to reclaim the life of a child who has spent his childhood without a home.



Short-term federal activities should include the following:

- Capitalize the National Housing Trust Fund at \$10 billion for two years to rehabilitate or build 100,000 rental homes for the lowest income households.
- Fund 400,000 new Housing Vouchers at \$3.6 billion for two years.
- Fund the homelessness prevention component of the Emergency Shelter Grant at \$2 billion for two years.
- Set aside one-third of housing program resources (e.g., vouchers, National Housing Trust Fund, etc.) for families who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.
- Protect renters by assuring continuity of voucher assistance for rental properties in foreclosure. Keep homeowners stably housed by requiring banks and other mortgage holders to approve affordable loan modifications.
- Fully fund Subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act at \$210 million.
- Ensure that 30% of the proposed \$2 billion to the Emergency Shelter Grant is dedicated to trauma-informed services for children and families.
- Invest \$3 billion into child care vouchers for children experiencing homelessness.
- Allocate funds within all federally funded programs for workforce development.
- Expand the TANF contingency fund so that states are able to provide cash assistance to the increasing number of very poor families.
- Provide a temporary increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (food stamps).
- Fully fund the Violence Prevention and Services Act at \$175 million and increase the Victims of Crime Act Cap to \$717 million annually.
- Require the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) to make child and family homelessness a high priority.
- Coordinate Congressional committee activities on homelessness with the federal ICH.

Short-term local and state activities should include the following:

- Place families directly into permanent housing rather than into motels. In addition to being safer and more stable, it is less expensive to pay a family's rent than to pay for their stay in a motel.
- Prevent children's placement into foster care due solely to homelessness or unstable housing by providing families with intensive wrap-around services (e.g., income supports, job training, health care, trauma-specific services, supports for parenting, programs for children).
- Enroll families into federal entitlement programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (food stamps), and WIC rather than paying for costly emergency services (e.g., emergency room visits).
- Pay for stabilization services for families exiting the shelter system, helping them remain housed.
- Make family homelessness a priority of the state interagency councils on homelessness and other planning efforts related to homelessness and poverty.

America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness paints a picture of a nation with the greatest number of children enduring or on the brink of homelessness since the Dust Bowl Era of the Great Depression. As you read it, we urge you to agree that it is unacceptable for one child in the United States to be homeless for even one day. Each of us must take the actions necessary to end this national disgrace.

Ending homelessness for all children in the U.S. is possible if a concerted effort is made by national, state, and local political leaders, funders, the White House, service providers, advocates, and philanthropic foundations.