

# OUR HOMELESS YOUTH

**I**n one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, is it ever okay for even *one young person* to be without a safe and stable place to call home?

## **T**he Need

Last year homeless shelters in our community served 467 children. Only through a collaborative approach can we meet the needs of the homeless children in our community.

### **Why are children homeless?**

Homelessness is often caused by a combination of factors:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Extreme poverty
- Decreasing supports
- Changing demographics of the family
- Domestic violence

## **T**he Impact



### **What are the experiences of homeless youth?**

- Higher rates of chronic and acute health problems
- Increased fearfulness and chance of violence
- Greater levels of depression and anxiety
- Profound effects on development and ability to learn

Sources: Fairfax County Public Schools Homeless Program; 2011 Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons; National Low-Income Housing Coalition; The National Center on Family Homelessness; National Child Traumatic Stress Network; Ending Homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Snapshot 2011.

## **Typical Day of Two Second Graders One in Permanent Stable Housing; the Other Homeless**

*In order to fully understand the impact of homelessness on a child, we need to view the world through the eyes of the child. Taking this example of two second grade students, it is easy, at first glance, to view the children in a given classroom as equal, but that is far from accurate.*

One child wakes up in his bedroom; goes into the family kitchen for his choice of breakfast prepared by his parent; gets ready for school by taking a shower, putting on clean clothes, collecting his school bag and lunch; then mom or dad walk him to the bus stop for school. When school is dismissed, he gets on his bus, gets off near home, and returns to his house. He then plays with his toys, does homework, has dinner with his family and gets ready for bed, following the same ritual every evening.

The other child in that same classroom has spent the previous night in a homeless shelter for families following the loss of his family home due to economic hardship. This child slept poorly, in a shelter with many people around whom he did not know. The family does not have their own kitchen, and he is uncomfortable with the unfamiliar food. He is not sure about how he will get to school as he knows he is not staying anywhere near the school. He is wearing the clothing that he wore the day before, because they need to

move around regularly and need to travel light. The family's belongings are scattered among a few places where they have temporarily stayed and mom and dad are trying to make a plan for the next place to stay. He can't find his homework, and will need to tell the teacher that he does not have it today. Mom could not make his lunch today, but she sent him with a few snacks that will have to do.

During his school day, he is filled with worry about the family situation—thoughts such as “Where will they go next? How long they will be living in the shelter? How will he get to school the next day? When will his parents stop being so sad?” His stress gets worse as he realizes that he is supposed to bring in a permission slip for an upcoming field trip with money and he knows that there is no extra money right now. In addition, he is not totally sure if

he will be staying at the shelter again tonight as mom talked about moving in with her sister, but mom's sister has a family conflict so he's not sure this will be the best place to stay.





## Our Response

There are services and resources in place that are working to assist children with housing instability in our community.

- Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness
- Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Homeless Liaison
- Nonprofit service providers
- Family shelter services
- Client database Homeless Management Information System
- Schools, county government, community members and parents

Through increased awareness and more sophisticated service delivery we are better able to identify homeless children. **Sustained effort and collaboration will be required to meet their needs.**

Learn more about homeless youth at: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless) and [www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/homelessinfo](http://www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/homelessinfo).

## What You Can Do

- Sponsor a child
- Volunteer in a mentoring or after-school tutoring program
- Provide financial support to FCPS' annual coat distribution
- Participate in weekend food backpack program
- Adopt a family through local holiday assistance programs
- Partner with a local nonprofit offering housing assistance
- Donate gift cards for families to purchase basic care supplies
- Educate yourself and your children about people who are homeless
- Ask your company or school to host fundraising events to help the homeless
- Volunteer at a shelter or participate in a community program or event
- Contact corporations to learn about affordable housing best practices
- Contact your government representative about the issue
- Suggest your faith-based organization take up special collections
- Support local food banks and food pantries
- Take a meal to someone who is homeless
- Employ those who are homeless

To request this information in an alternate format, call 703-324-9492, TTY 711.



Brief developed in partnership with the Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness and FCPS Homeless Liaison Office.

Preventing and Ending Homelessness  
Fairfax-Falls Church Community Partnership  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless)

