Making the Invisible Visible

Westchester's Hidden Homeless Children & Youth

WESTCHESTER
CHILDREN'S
ASSOCIATION

Children's Champions   Since 1914

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Westchester Children's Association   *Making the Invisible Visible: Westchester's Hidden Homeless Children & Youth*

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Background

Though everyone should have access to stable, affordable, and safe living arrangements, thousands of children and youth experience homelessness every year in Westchester County. Some live in shelters and others live doubled or tripled up with family or friends, without stable housing of their own. Westchester's children and youth experiencing homelessness live in layered, frequently changing situations that often vary based on family circumstances, durations of homelessness, and living conditions.

> "Homelessness is about survival. Once you've lost everything, it puts you in a different zone. Building yourself back up is the hardest part."
> –Shauna, Formerly Homeless Parent

Initial Research Findings on Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Experiences of homelessness among children and youth are caused by several system-spanning, interconnected factors including family dysfunction, economic and housing insecurity, and discrimination. Additionally, experiences of homelessness are deeply traumatic and have far-reaching short-term and long-term effects across the life span, including physical, mental, and emotional health issues, developmental delays, learning and educational difficulty, toxic stress, and risk for health problems.

Child and Youth Homelessness Definitions and Data

Westchester's children and youth experiencing homelessness come in contact with various local, state, and federal agencies, which often have different homelessness definitional standards and approaches. As agencies only gather data on children and youth who meet their particular data collection requirements and assist children and youth who meet their specific definitional standards, (1) agencies recognize different populations of homeless children and youth and (2) many of Westchester's thousands of homeless children and youth do not receive the assistance they need. Westchester cannot fully meet the needs of its homeless children and youth without capturing an accurate count of this population.

Current Programs and Supports for Homeless Children and Youth

Westchester's Coordinated Entry System provides universal services to all people experiencing homelessness across the County. It consists of Drop-In Shelters, Department of Social Services Placement Family Shelters, and Youth Shelters where children and youth can temporarily stay, as well as transitional housing and financial and housing assistance programs, among many other supports. An array of programs are available to children and youth who meet eligibility requirements. However, without meeting eligibility requirements, there are few options available besides Drop-In Shelters.

Initial Recommendations

1. Broaden the Westchester County definition of homelessness and standards for alternative housing.
2. Collect and assess comprehensive data on the scale of child and youth homelessness in Westchester.
3. Convene a workgroup to focus on Westchester's children and youth experiencing homelessness.
4. Further expand homeless prevention services.
5. Explore the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI).

Background

Westchester Children's Association (WCA) began its investigation into child and youth homelessness in Westchester County in fall 2017, to identify how the organization can lend its voice in advocacy to develop adequate and permanent housing for this population. Through comprehensive data analysis and conversations with homeless and formerly homeless community members, County service providers and stakeholders, and an array of government officials and staff, WCA began to identify and understand the complex experiences of homelessness among Westchester's children and youth. This is WCA's initial report on child and youth homelessness in Westchester and will be followed with additional information and analysis as WCA continues its work.

With our investigation, we have observed that homelessness among Westchester's children and youth has steadily risen during the past four years, from 2015 to 2018—in fact, it has increased across New York State by almost 100 percent since 2006-2007.[1] WCA also recognized that many people experience homelessness as a legacy of poverty and poverty-related issues, and that there are thousands of homeless children and youth who do not receive County assistance or support. School-age children and youth should not spend their childhood—their most formative years—worrying about where they are going to sleep, in a precarious state of stress and danger. WCA is prepared to help improve outcomes and opportunities for homeless children and youth in any way we can, because we believe all children should be healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges.

Different Experiences of Homeless Children and Youth

It is critical to note that homeless children and youth are not defined by one type of experience, such as living on the streets. Homeless experiences have various layers, circumstances, and factors, which can change frequently and affect each person differently. Programs often serve specific age ranges, especially when it relates to children and youth. Though the age and definitions of homeless children and youth often vary with particular programs—from age 18 and under in some programs, to age 21 and under in other programs—all homeless children and youth lack *stable* housing.

Family circumstances:

(1) **Unaccompanied homeless children and youth** are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.[2]	(2) **Homeless families** include parents or guardians and children.

Duration of Homelessness:

(1) **Runaway children and youth** or fleeing children and youth tend to return home within a week.[3]	(2) **Transitionally homeless children and youth** are generally homeless for a short time before transitioning to more stable housing.[4]	(3) **Episodically homeless children and youth** frequently move in and out of homelessness, as they face limited economic security.[5]	(4) **Chronically homeless children and youth** are the least common type of homeless children and youth as well as the most long-term and entrenched group on the child and youth homelessness spectrum.[6]

Living Situations:

(1) **Shelter-using children and youth** stay in youth- and family-serving homeless shelters.	(2) **Unsheltered children and youth** stay on streets and places that are not designed for sleeping, such as cars and parks.[7]
(3) **Doubled or tripled up children and youth** or "couch surfing" children and youth share others' housing due to a loss of their own housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.[8]	(4) **Children and youth in temporary and unreliable housing accommodations** stay in places like hotels, motels, camping grounds, or trailer parks due to a lack of adequate alternative accommodations.[9]

Testimony Youth Perspective

"When I was 17 years old, my grandma passed away. We lost our apartment and our family split up, everyone trying to find a place to stay. I was able to live with a friend until I was accepted to a Westhab transitional housing program. I had a great Case Manager and received help setting up my apartment and a voucher for furniture. There were trainings for time management, resume writing, job applications, and life skills. Two years after I began the program, I'm studying education and am thinking of working with kids who've gone through trauma."

"Now, I hear they require that all youth stay overnight in a homeless shelter if they want to be accepted to the transitional housing program I was a part of. Shelters are hard and sometimes aren't safe. I don't know if I would've been able to do that."

–Christian, Formerly Homeless Youth

Initial Research Findings on Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

The road to homelessness starts long before a child or youth is declared homeless. Homelessness in children and youth stems from the challenges, violence and trauma they encounter prior to becoming homeless, which can be far-reaching and protracted.[10]

Causes of Homelessness Among Children and Youth

Homelessness among children and youth is caused by four often-interrelated circumstances:

1) **Family dysfunction and dangerous situations** such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and violence, and mental health, substance use, and addiction issues.[11,12] Additional circumstances include child and youth trafficking, children and youth being asked to leave the house by a parent or caregiver, parental neglect, and a lack of positive social support.[13,14]

2) **Family economic insecurity** due to poverty, limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, a lack of affordable housing, no medical insurance, or limited welfare benefits.[15]
3) **Residential instability** such as institutional or residential placements like foster care, the youth justice system, and other public systems where youth are emancipated or discharged with little or no income or housing support.[16]
4) **Discrimination and racism** particularly affecting youth of color—particularly African-American and Native American youth—as well as pregnant and parenting youth, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ) youth.[17]

Testimony **Service** **Provider** **Perspective**	"The major issues these families wrestle with are trying to secure basic necessities. Those who enter the County's network of emergency shelters and transitional apartments should have those needs met consistently, but those who are couch-surfing or doubled up without enough money for food and housing are always scrambling to make it day by day." The other longer-term issue is the often long-lasting emotional impact and chronic trauma, especially for children, of losing your home (sometimes repeatedly), often losing treasured possessions like toys, photographs, and clothing, and most importantly losing the sense of safety and comforting routines that you lose when you lose your home. - Co-Chairs, Westchester Continuum of Care Partnership for the Homeless

Effects of Homelessness on Children and Youth

Homeless children and youth face additional challenges and experience further adversity while homeless due to their vulnerable living conditions in shelters and unreliable housing, on the streets, and living in doubled up or crowded housing.[18] This web of physical, emotional, and personal hardship has severe and far-reaching effects on their health, well-being and basic development.

Age-Specific Short Term Effects

The experience of homelessness affects children and youth differently depending on their age.

Homeless Prenatal Mothers

- Receive **fewer** well-visits, **less** prenatal care, and are **less likely** to take prenatal vitamins.[19]

- **Higher rates** of maternal mental illness and substance abuse disorders.[20]

- **More likely** to have pregnancy complications, such as lower birth weights, neonatal intensive care, and longer hospital stays.[21]

Homeless Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers

- **More likely** to be in poor health, have **little access** to health care and **lack** essential immunizations.[22,23]

- **More likely** to experience significant developmental delays and missed educational opportunities, as well as suffer from hunger, and behavioral and emotional problems.[24,25]

Homeless School Age Children

Constant change in homeless school age children's lives causes acute stress, which accumulates over time and is associated with many adverse outcomes.

- **Higher incidence** of mental disorders, behavioral issues, and chronic and acute health problems.[26,27]

- **High rates** of anxiety, depression and withdrawal, **two times as likely** to experience hunger than children who are not homeless, **three times as likely** to have an emotional disturbance, and **four times as likely** to have delayed development.[28,29]

- **Twice as likely** to have learning disabilities as children who are not homeless.[30]

- **Half** of homeless children are held back one grade in school and **22 percent** are held back multiple grades.[31]

- **More likely** to score poorly on math, spelling, vocabulary and reading tests, are chronically absent at **twice the rate** of overall students, and are **87 percent more likely** to drop out than non-homeless peers.[32,33,34]

- **Face difficulty re-assimilating** into society, and suffer with **depressed motivation**, which creates obstacles to their becoming independent, contributing members of their communities.[35]

Testimony
Parent
Perspective

"My sons didn't fully understand what was going on during our homeless experience but they felt its effects. They fell through the cracks, faced social issues that required therapy, and their school performance suffered. I faced a lot of anxiety because I couldn't provide for my family, and we faced many issues that made it hard to raise my children."

-Shauna, Formerly Homeless Parent

Long Term Effects

The physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as neglect and family dysfunction that homeless youth often experience are collectively classified as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The intense and frequent nature of ACEs leads to prolonged activation of the body's stress response, causing toxic stress.[36] Without appropriate supports, this toxic stress has a destructive effect on the brain and body,

changing brain development and leading to many emotional, physical, and mental health problems *later* in life.[37]

- *Health complications* like **broken bones**, **diabetes**, **stroke**, **cancer**, and **heart disease.**[38]

- *Behavioral issues* such as **drug and alcohol abuse**, **chronically missing work**, **depression**, and **suicide attempts.**[39]

- Continued inquiry has also observed *lifetime* **post-traumatic stress disorder** (PTSD) in **more than one-third of homeless adolescents**, and that the *ACEs often affecting homeless children and youth* are **strongly linked** to *lifetime* **homelessness.**[40,41]

Child and Youth Homelessness Definitions and Data

The Importance of Homelessness Definitions

Many federal, state, and local government agencies provide funding and services to Westchester's homeless children and youth, and most set their own definition of homelessness to classify those who qualify for assistance. At their core, departmental and programmatic definitions set each agency's standards for child and youth homelessness and serve as the core organizing principles for their efforts to combat it. Often, funding to Westchester stakeholders mandates that these grantees only assist individuals who (1) meet federal agencies' specific definitions of children and youth homelessness and (2) follow all specified procedures in their interactions with homeless children and youth.

Definitions used in Westchester are hard to find collected in one place because they come from different levels of government. Additionally, due to the complex nature of the definitions, it can be difficult to navigate through the details of each one, let alone understand how each one affects children and youth differently.

Current Federal Definitions Utilized in Westchester[42]

The federal agencies that have a presence in Westchester are part of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, a partnership of 19 federal member agencies that coordinate the federal response to homelessness.[43]

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Over 30 grants are received through the [Westchester Continuum of Care Partnership for the Homeless](#) (CoC), a HUD-funded collaboration whose grantees include the Westchester County Department of Social Services, Department of Community Mental Health, and the cities of Yonkers and Mt. Vernon. These grantees distribute HUD funding through subgrants to many homeless-serving organizations across Westchester. Organizations and departments receiving HUD funding are required to (1) only provide services and programming to children and youth who meet the HUD definition of child and youth homelessness and (2) follow all HUD procedural mandates, which include a requirement to stay overnight in a shelter in order to access homeless support services. The HUD definition comes from Section 103 of Subtitle I of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

HUD Homeless Definition for Children and Youth[44,45]
Literal Homelessness: Individuals or families lacking a regular, fixed, and adequate nighttime residence. They stay in (1) public or private places not meant for human habitation and (2) public or private emergency shelters providing temporary living arrangements, or are (3) exiting an institution they resided in for 90 days or less after residing in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation.
Imminent Risk of Homelessness: Individuals or families face an imminent reality that they will lose their primary nighttime residence, as revealed by evidence that the housing will be lost within 14 days, and they have no subsequent residence arranged and lack the means to obtain other permanent housing.
Fleeing Domestic Violence: Individuals or families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions in their current housing arrangements, have no other residence, and lack the means to obtain other permanent housing.
Homeless Under Other Statutes: Unaccompanied youth under age 25 or families with children and youth who do not meet any of the other categories but (1) are defined as homeless under other federal statutes, (2) have not had ownership interest, a lease, or an occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the previous 60 days, (3) have experienced persistent housing instability as measured by 2 moves in the previous 60 days, and (4) can be expected to continue in this state for an extended time.

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

ED programming targets homeless children and youth through their interactions with schools. Programming mandates that each school district assign a McKinney-Vento or Homeless Liaison, an administrator who supports homeless students from across the district. There are currently 57 registered homeless liaison contacts representing the school districts across Westchester County. These liaisons are aided by an online resource, New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS), and a State Coordinator who provides technical assistance with state and federal policies and administers a subgrant process.[47] Many school districts across Westchester are also supported by Maria McGinty, the Program Coordinator of the Southern Westchester BOCES Homeless Student Program. The ED definition comes from Section 725 of Subtitle VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

ED Definition of Child and Youth Homelessness[46]
Children and youth under age 18 who lack a regular, fixed and adequate nighttime residence.
This includes the following places and situations: o Others' housing ("Doubled Up") due to a loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason; hotels, motels, trailer parks or camping grounds IF there are no adequate alternative accommodations; emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned in hospitals; awaiting foster care placement   o Public or private places not designed or ordinarily used for human being sleeping accommodations   o Living in public spaces, parks, cars, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, substandard housing or similar situations   o Migratory children living in one of the above situations

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

HHS funding targets unaccompanied homeless and runaway children and youth, and is currently being provided to Westchester Building Futures, a collaborative initiative of Westchester County Department of Social Services that works to prevent homelessness among youth involved in the child welfare system. HHS also administers its three Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, which use targeted definitions of runaway and homeless children and youth. They are administered locally by The Children's Village (Basic Center Program grantee). However, the overarching HHS definition of children and youth homelessness is located in Section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

HHS Definition of Child and Youth Homelessness[48]
Children and youth under age 21 for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and there is no other alternative safe living option.

Current New York State Definitions Utilized in Westchester

New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)

The Westchester County Youth Bureau administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Program as part of a grant from OCFS. It provides temporary shelter to runaway and homeless children and youth through The Sanctuary at The Children's Village. The Program defines runaway and homeless children and youth in the following ways.

NYS OCFS RHY Program Definition of Runaway and Homeless Children and Youth[49]
Runaway child or youth is a person under the age of 18 years who is absent from his or her legal residence without the consent of his or her parent, legal guardian, or custodian.
Homeless child or youth is a person under the age of 21 who is in need of services and is without a place of shelter where supervision and care are available.

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)

Westchester County Department of Social Services (DSS) uses Temporary Assistance guidelines and income requirements to determine if individuals and families are eligible for services, like placement in homeless shelters, for example. The available Temporary Assistance programs are Family Assistance, Safety Net Assistance, Emergency Assistance to Families, and Emergency Safety Net Assistance.

See page 12 for OTDA eligibility requirements.

NYS OTDA Temporary Assistance Eligibility Requirements[50]

Family Assistance provides cash assistance to eligible needy families with a minor child. It operates under federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) guidelines and requires that applicants be:
  o A New York resident, U.S. national, citizen, legal alien or permanent resident
  o Have no or low income
  o Either pregnant or responsible for at least one child under 18 years old, or under 19 years old and regularly attending secondary school
  o Comply with Federal work requirements, if determined able to work
  o Cooperate with the local DSS in locating any absent parent

Safety Net Assistance provides cash assistance to needy families who are not eligible for Family Assistance. It supports children living apart from any adult relative, families of persons found to be abusing drugs or alcohol, families of persons refusing drug/alcohol screening, assessment or treatment, and non-residents who are eligible for temporary assistance but who are not eligible for federal reimbursement.

Emergency Assistance to Families supports the emergency needs of either pregnant women or families with at least one child under 18 years old, or under 19 years old and regularly attending secondary school. Additionally, applicants must:
  o Meet citizenship/immigration and residency requirements
  o Have income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level for their household size and have resources determined to be insufficient to meet the emergency.

Emergency Safety Net Assistance supports families not eligible for Emergency Assistance to Families or recurring Temporary Assistance. It requires that families have insufficient resources to meet the emergency and income at 125 percent of the federal poverty line.

Available Data on Children and Youth Homelessness

Data collection standards determine the scale and severity of homelessness, according to each agency. The only two sources of county-wide data on children and youth homelessness are HUD and ED. For appropriate comparison, we provide data collected for children and youth under age 18 (as opposed to age 24), as both agencies collect this data.

HUD Data

Westchester County Department of Social Services—the agency that screens most individuals and families declaring homelessness—uses HUD data to track homelessness in our region. This data is collected by trained CoC staff and volunteers every year on a *single* night in January, as part of the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count.[51] During the PIT Count, the CoC must count all unsheltered homeless people and all sheltered homeless people living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens—which serve survivors of domestic violence. Due to the nature of homelessness in Westchester, the majority of children counted by the CoC are counted as part of a family household. However, there are no publicly available HUD data on the total number of children who are part of families— instead, persons in households with at least one adult and one child.

Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless Children Identified in Westchester - HUD					
	People in Households With At Least One Adult and One Child Under Age 18		People in Households Comprised Only of Children Under Age 18 (includes unaccompanied youth, parenting youth, and other household configurations composed only of children)		Total
	Sheltered**	Unsheltered	Sheltered**	Unsheltered	
2013	730	1	7	3	740
2014	775	0	9	0	784
2015*	622	0	6	0	628
2016	655	0	7	0	662
2017	696	0	6	0	702
2018	729	0	10	0	739

*2015 was the first year HUD conducted a Youth Count specifically tracking homeless youth in various situations.

**Sheltered denotes the total number of people in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens.
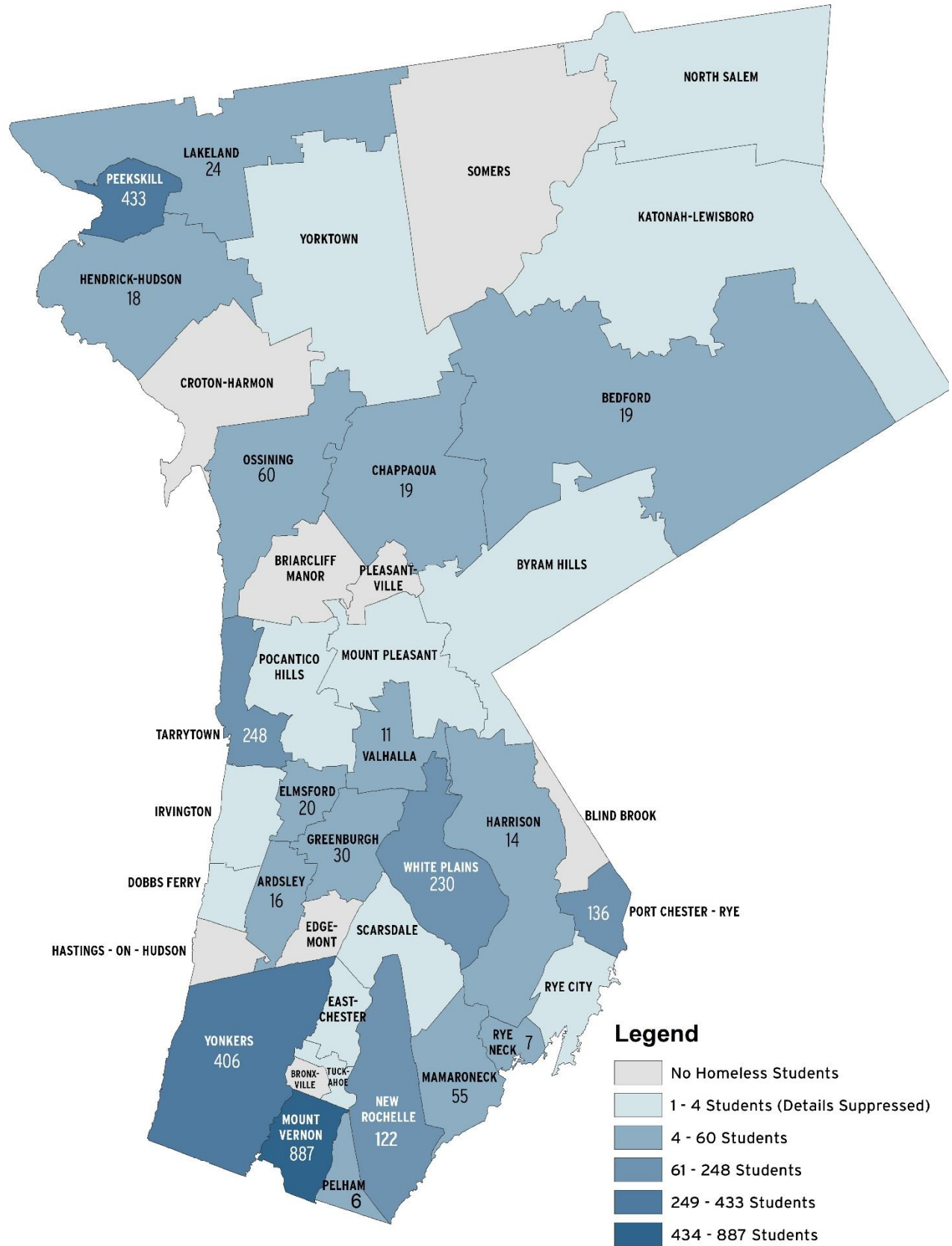
ED Data

ED Data are collected by each school district's McKinney-Vento liaison, who conducts outreach and coordination activities to identify homeless children and youth—classified as lacking a regular, fixed and adequate nighttime residence.[52] These activities include but are not limited to a housing questionnaire given to new students at the time of enrollment and to families who report an address change, public awareness campaigns, students' self-reporting, and working with staff and school personnel to identify students who may be experiencing homelessness. Data are disaggregated by primary nighttime residence and include the following categories: doubled up, hotel/motel, sheltered, unsheltered (cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailer, or abandoned buildings) and a total by primary nighttime residence. Data on the total number of homeless students are available for each grade from Pre-K through Grade 12, including students who are ungraded. Westchester County averages 193 homeless students per grade.

HHS uses ED data to track and assess homelessness in its regions across the country, and does not collect comprehensive data of its own. It only collects data from its grantees, who administer HHS programs.

Homeless Students (Pre-K to Grade 12) Identified in Westchester* - ED					
	Doubled Up	Hotel/Motel	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total by Primary Nighttime Residence
2013-14	1,724	s	877	s	2,662
2014-15	1,833	76	761	8	2,678
2015-16	1,887	59	778	8	2,732
2016-17	1,823	s	839	s	2,697
2017-18	1,876	s	887	s	2,799

*Data is a Westchester County total. Categories where 1-4 students identified as homeless are suppressed (denoted by "s") for confidentiality reasons but are reflected in the total.

Students Experiencing Homelessness in Westchester School Districts

NORTH SALEM

LAKELAND
24

SOMERS

PEEKSKILL
433

YORKTOWN

KATONAH-LEWISBORO

HENDRICK-HUDSON
18

CROTON-HARMON

BEDFORD
19

OSSINING
60

CHAPPAQUA
19

BRIARCLIFF
MANOR

PLEASANT-
VILLE

BYRAM HILLS

POCANTICO
HILLS

MOUNT PLEASANT

TARRYTOWN 248

11
VALHALLA

IRVINGTON

ELMSFORD
20

BLIND BROOK

HARRISON
14

GREENBURGH
30

DOBBS FERRY

ARDSLEY
16

WHITE PLAINS
230

HASTINGS - ON - HUDSON

EDGE-
MONT

SCARSDALE

136 PORT CHESTER - RYE

RYE CITY

EAST-
CHESTER

RYE
NECK 7

YONKERS
406

BRONX-
VILLE

TUCK-
AHOE

MAMARONECK
55

NEW
ROCHELLE
122

MOUNT
VERNON
887

PELHAM
6

Legend

⬜	No Homeless Students
⬜	1 - 4 Students (Details Suppressed)
⬜	4 - 60 Students
⬜	61 - 248 Students
⬜	249 - 433 Students
⬜	434 - 887 Students

Data Source: NYSTEACHS (2018). Data on Student Homelessness in NYS.

The Connection between Definitions and Data

ED data and HUD data report significantly different numbers of homeless children and youth. This is because the two agencies employ different procedures for counting child and youth homelessness. While ED's data collection includes doubled or tripled up children and youth, for example, HUD's data collection does not. HUD's CoC PIT Counts only count all unsheltered homeless people and all sheltered homeless people living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens. Further, PIT Count data do not provide a transparent count on the *total number of children* in homeless families—instead, HUD tracks persons in households with at least one adult and one child. This inclusion of adults in the category guarantees that the PIT count of total children is well below the totals cited in the data above.

In addition, there is evidence suggesting that *public school counts only identify roughly half of high school students experiencing homelessness*.[53] This is particularly concerning because children and youth counted in the PIT Count only constitute a *fraction* of homeless children and youth identified by public schools, suggesting an even more severe PIT undercount of children.[54]

Westchester's homelessness data and definitions collectively determine (1) who classified as homeless and (2) who receives support. Fundamentally, the available data tell different and likely inaccurate stories regarding the scale of child and youth homelessness. There is also a high likelihood that the current combination of varied homelessness definitions, standards, and approaches—which determine eligibility for services—has gaps, and as a result, allows many of Westchester's thousands of homeless children and youth to slip through the cracks, without assistance. Without capturing data that is accurate, inclusive, and true to the varied and complicated experiences of children and youth homelessness, the County will be unable to develop and tailor a response of the necessary magnitude.

Testimony

School District Perspective

"Safe affordable housing is difficult to come by, and one of our biggest struggles is with tracking housing status. Having protocols and procedures in place in order to follow up on housing status is very important.

We have clinical staff in each building that will assist with accessing public assistance at various levels. However, for most of our students who we identify outside of the shelter system, we find that some of the various forms of public assistance are difficult to access."

–Scott, School District Administrator

Current Programs and Supports for Homeless Children and Youth

The following is a list of services and supports for homeless children, youth, and families who solicit *immediate* assistance in the form of shelters and financial support in Westchester County. An important consideration with this list is that many homeless children, youth, and families may not solicit county assistance because they do not consider themselves homeless, face language barriers, or feel embarrassed, fearful of repercussions, or

unqualified. Additionally, there are gaps between (1) what they might need and are looking for and (2) what is currently available and what they qualify for. Therefore, there is a possibility that many homeless children, youth and families who need services and supports, such as doubled up, unstably housed (no lease or ownership interest in the last 60 or more days, or two or more moves in the last 60 days), and/or severely overcrowded (more than 1.5 people per room) children, youth, and families—who often lack a regular, fixed, and adequate nighttime residence—may not receive the assistance that they need.

Eligibility for Supportive Services

The Westchester CoC's Coordinated Entry System provides universal services to all people experiencing homelessness across the County. Westchester County Department of Social Services' (DSS) District Offices in Mount Vernon, Peekskill, White Plains, and Yonkers determine eligibility for services during normal business hours. During non-normal business hours, homeless children, youth, and families can go to the Drop-In Shelters, DSS Placement Family Shelters, and The Sanctuary to access Westchester's Coordinated Entry System. County policy requires that individuals and families be eligible for Temporary Assistance and be placed overnight into DSS Placement Shelters in order to access additional services, like transitional housing, through the Coordinated Entry System's partnerships with nonprofit service providers.

DSS refers individuals and families not eligible for Temporary Assistance to Drop-In Shelters where anyone can stay overnight. Westchester also has several local seasonal shelters that house homeless people during freezing periods, from late fall through winter.

Disclaimer: Transitional housing, permanent housing placements, food insecurity programs, and rent/utility assistance are not included with this list, as this list is a first inquiry, and is intended to represent resources available to children, youth, and families at the onset of homelessness and their solicitation of assistance.

Available Supportive Services

Drop-In Shelters

Some of the Drop-In Shelters, including Oasis Shelter and Jan Peek Shelter, serve more clients than they are contracted for, suggesting there is unmet need.

Oasis Shelter is a co-ed facility in New Rochelle with 50 beds, although it often serves up to 65 people per night.

YWCA of Yonkers is providing a shelter after the June 30th closure of Sharing Community's Hudson Street facility. The temporary facility has a capacity of 80 people, pending the completion of a permanent site.

Jan Peek Shelter is a co-ed facility in Peekskill with 24 beds (Though, it had 55 people on the night of the CoC PIT Count.).

Open Arms is a male-only shelter in White Plains with 15 beds for drop-ins and 38 beds for those in residence.

Samaritan House Shelter is a female-only shelter in White Plains with 17 beds.

DSS Placement Family Shelters

The Coachman Family Center in White Plains is a 100-family homeless shelter for families placed by DSS. The Coachman also offers drop-in service daily for emergency cases, but the vast majority of families are processed by DSS prior to placement.

WestHELP in Mt. Vernon provides shelter to 46 families after they are processed by DSS.

Vernon Plaza in Mt. Vernon provides shelter to 34 families after they are processed by DSS.

Providence House in New Rochelle is a 10-family shelter for DSS-placed homeless women and children. It limits each family to 2 people—the mother and 1 infant or small child.

Additional Family Shelters – Safe Havens

My Sisters' Place provides a 20-bed confidentially-located Safe Haven to families fleeing abusive partners, with 24-hour supportive services.

Hope's Door provides a 16-bed confidentially-located Safe Haven to families fleeing domestic violence, with 24-hour supportive services.

Youth Shelter

The Sanctuary in Valhalla is managed by The Children's Village and has a 15-bed capacity. It provides temporary shelter to runaway and homeless boys and girls ages 12 to 17 and offers a safe space for pregnant and parenting teens and LGBTQ youth. The Sanctuary is available 24 hours a day, and served an estimated 137 children and youth in 2018.

See page 18 for a map charting the distribution of Westchester shelters.

Economic and Financial Assistance
Temporary Assistance

Family Assistance provides cash assistance to eligible needy families with a minor child. Westchester served an estimated average of 267 homeless families per month in 2018.
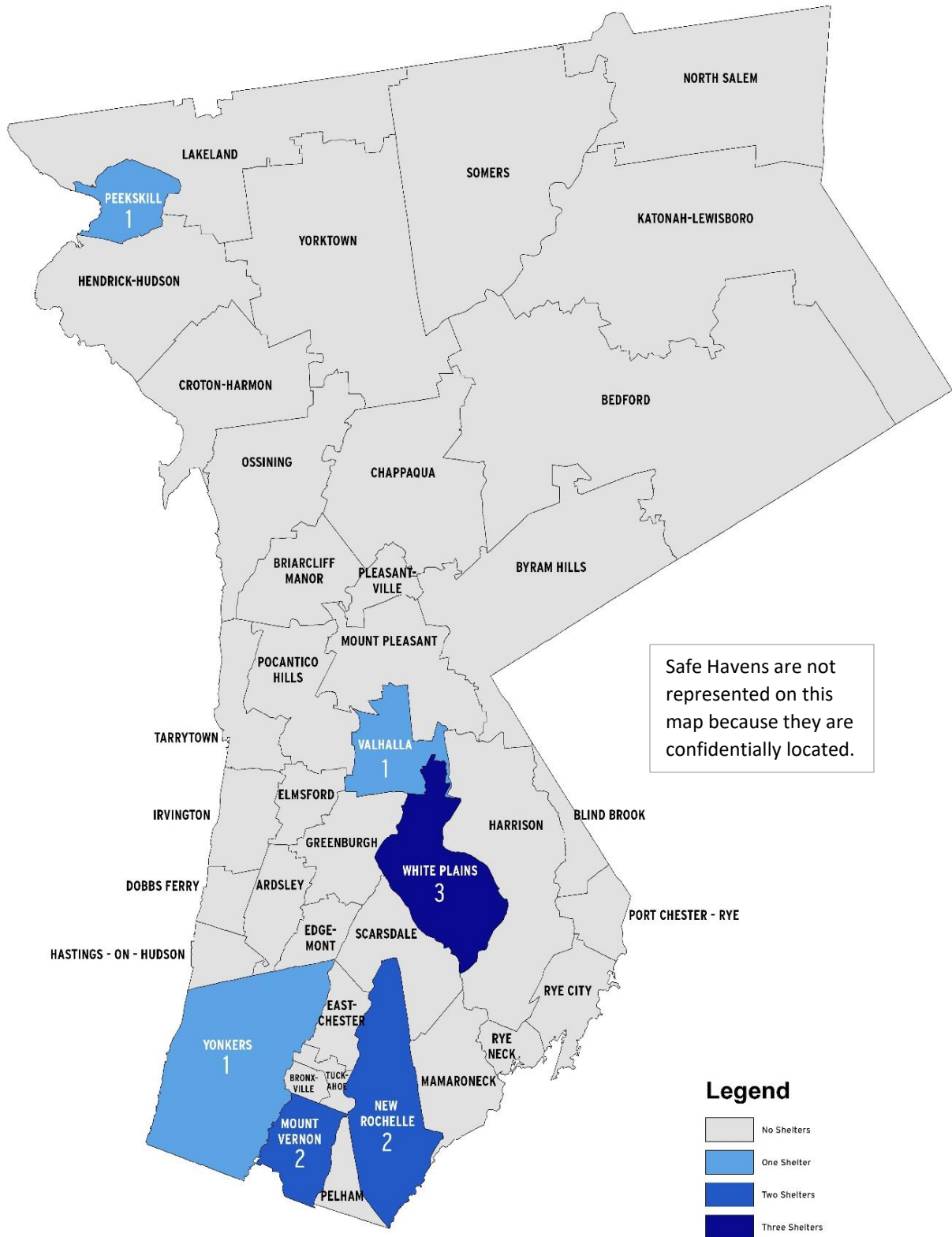
Safety Net Assistance provides cash assistance to needy families who are not eligible for Family Assistance. Westchester served an estimated average of 125 homeless families per month in 2018.

Emergency Assistance

Emergency Assistance to Families supports emergency needs of either pregnant women or families.

Emergency Safety Net Assistance supports families not eligible for Emergency Assistance to Families or recurring Temporary Assistance.

Homeless Shelters in Westchester School Districts

Safe Havens are not represented on this map because they are confidentially located.

NORTH SALEM

LAKELAND

PEEKSKILL
1

SOMERS

KATONAH-LEWISBORO

YORKTOWN

HENDRICK-HUDSON

CROTON-HARMON

BEDFORD

OSSINING

CHAPPAQUA

BRIARCLIFF MANOR

PLEASANT-VILLE

BYRAM HILLS

MOUNT PLEASANT

POCANTICO HILLS

TARRYTOWN

VALHALLA
1

ELMSFORD

BLIND BROOK

IRVINGTON

GREENBURGH

HARRISON

WHITE PLAINS
3

DOBBS FERRY

ARDSLEY

EDGE-MONT

SCARSDALE

PORT CHESTER - RYE

HASTINGS - ON - HUDSON

EAST-CHESTER

RYE CITY

YONKERS
1

BRONX-VILLE

TUCK-AHOE

RYE NECK

MAMARONECK

MOUNT VERNON
2

NEW ROCHELLE
2

PELHAM

Legend

	No Shelters
	One Shelter
	Two Shelters
	Three Shelters

Data Source: Westchester County Department of Social Services (2019).

Initial Recommendations

1. **Broaden the Westchester County definition of homelessness and standards for alternative housing so more children, youth, and families qualify for homeless assistance**. Westchester DSS will not place people in shelters if safe and adequate alternative housing is available. Oftentimes, however, alternative housing is *inadequate* and results in more homeless children, youth, and families living doubled or tripled up, as well as severely overcrowded (more than 1.5 people per room) and unstably housed (no lease or ownership interest in the last 60 or more days, or two or more moves in the last 60 days).

   Minimum standards for alternative housing must include:
      i. WITH a bed,
      ii. NOT severely overcrowded
      iii. NOT unstably housed

2. **Collect and assess comprehensive data on the scale of child and youth homelessness in Westchester County using adequate living standards as a baseline.** Public school (ED) data are reported to undercount homeless students by nearly 50 percent. HUD data likely have an even greater undercount, as HUD counts children and youth under more restrictive standards than ED—and does not track doubled or tripled up children and youth in its PIT Count. There are also not enough data on non-school age homeless children and youth (below age 5 and from ages 18-24). These children and youth are hard to identify. They are not tracked by ED because they are not in school (though ED does count homeless Pre-K students) and are only counted by HUD if they are in homeless shelters, transitional housing or unsheltered when the CoC conducts its PIT Count of Westchester.

3. **Convene a workgroup to focus on Westchester's children and youth experiencing homelessness**. Currently, there is no collaborative Westchester group of stakeholders addressing homelessness from a children and youth-focused lens. We expect the workgroup to partner with existing coalitions, organizations and stakeholders addressing broader homelessness in Westchester.

4. **Further expand homeless prevention services.** Increase funding for and further publicize the various homeless prevention programs that are part of Westchester's Coordinated Entry System, such as financial, rent, and utility assistance services, eviction prevention programs, and temporary and emergency assistance. Doing so will help reach families before they lose everything—it is more effective to prevent homelessness than respond to its many and varied effects.

5. **Explore the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI)**. ESSHI funding could create new permanent homeless housing for doubled and tripled up children, youth, and families.

Conclusion

Westchester's homeless children and youth face situations, stresses, and challenges many of us are fortunate to never know. The experience of homelessness costs children and youth—society's most rapidly developing and highly impressionable age groups—a safe, secure, and decent quality of life. Further, the lack of stability and resulting stress and trauma bring life-altering and, in some cases, life-long physical, emotional, and mental health effects.

Unfortunately homeless children and youth in Westchester face additional obstacles, as their opportunities for support and assistance are constrained by the system they interact with and its sometimes restrictive definitional standards for assistance. Westchester's different definitions and disparate counts of homeless children and youth, combined with evidence that counts of homeless students only identify one-half of students actually experiencing homelessness, suggest that Westchester's homeless children and youth can—and do—slip through the cracks, not receiving support they might urgently need. Westchester's current efforts on homelessness are inadequate for many of its youngest residents because the County does not have an accurate count of this demographic and cannot appropriately tailor its efforts to their needs across systems.

There is precedent of what a concentrated effort on a homeless population can achieve. The County has seen a significant reduction in homelessness among veterans through targeted efforts. Additionally, those involved in domestic violence have seen an increase in services and housing support as a result of increased awareness and outreach. Westchester can do the same for its children and youth. To best serve children and youth experiencing homelessness and make the most effective use of resources focused on supporting this demographic, Westchester needs to (1) build more inclusive standards for homeless assistance and support, (2) investigate the scale of child and youth homelessness across the county, (3) convene a child and youth homelessness workgroup, (4) adopt a more preventive approach, and (5) explore ESSHI. These actions are a starting point, and will better align Westchester's efforts with the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Westchester Children's Association is fully committed to assisting with this work.

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