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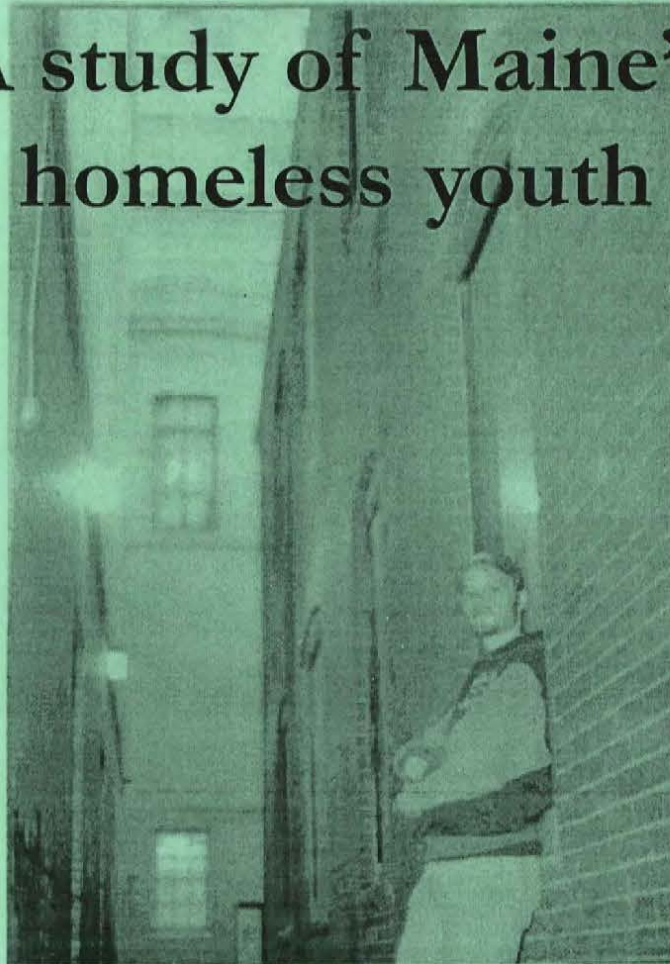


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**YOUNG AND HOMELESS**

**A study of Maine's  
homeless youth**



**Prepared by the  
Maine Interagency Task Force on Homelessness  
and Housing Opportunities**

**February 1999**

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# **Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities**

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*Preble Street Teen Center, Portland*

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*Pictures are of "Ajai", a homeless youth at the Preble Street Teen Center in Portland.*

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# Executive Summary

## **Background:**

The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities was directed by the 118<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature to study the plight of homeless youth in Maine. It was asked: to examine the causes of homelessness among young people; to review the efforts to address their needs; to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current shelter system serving them; to anticipate their future needs; and to recommend legislation, if appropriate.

## **Maine's Homeless Shelter System:**

The Maine State Housing Authority distributes state and federal funds to 38 homeless shelters that have a total of 720 beds. There are homeless shelters in 12 of Maine's 16 counties. There are 19 shelters that serve adults and families, 3 shelters that serve those with mental illness or substance abuse problems, 9 shelters that serve victims of domestic violence, and 7 shelters that serve youth. These shelters house 450 Maine citizens each night, including about 135 youth.

## **Key Findings:**

- A. There are three categories of homeless youth:
  - **Unaccompanied youth** who are homeless, by themselves, and have no home to return to.
  - **Accompanied youth** who are homeless but are with one or more family members. They could be with their mother at a domestic violence shelter or with their family at a family shelter.
  - **Runaways** who are unaccompanied and homeless, but have a home to which they could return if family conflicts could be resolved.
- B. The overwhelming major causes of homelessness are family violence and family conflict. Other causes that contribute to youth homelessness are substance abuse, mental illness, unemployment, and housing costs.
- C. Some facts about homeless youth:
  - Youth comprise 30% of the overall shelter population or about 135 persons on an average night.
  - The average age of a homeless youth is 13. One-half are between 13 and 18 years old; 21% between 5 and 12.
  - 15% are minorities.
  - Only 50% attend school regularly.
- D. The shelter operators have difficulty finding appropriate services for those youth that are not yet served by the Department of Human Services or Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services programs.
- E. The social service programs for youth are sometimes difficult to access because of the rules and restrictions that accompany specialized funding.
- F. Funding is neither adequate nor predictable. For example, General Assistance has been reduced from \$21,000,000 in 1991 to \$7,000,000 today and 80% of General Assistance supports housing.

## **Recommendations:**

1. The Legislature should conduct a more extensive study of Maine's runaway and homeless youth system which would identify the appropriate services that would most effectively connect the youth to the services they need and would analyze barriers to services. Estimated cost: \$20,000.
2. Require state agencies to improve youth transitional service plans that are necessary when the youth become too old to qualify for the services they are receiving.
3. Fully fund the Shelter Operating Subsidy Program at \$3,150,000 per year; provide \$500,000 to the Department of Human Services to fund basic outreach and counseling programs; and increase the Temporary Housing Assistance Program from \$250,000 to \$500,000 per year.
4. The Legislature should conduct a study on how the reduction in General Assistance from \$21,000,000 in 1991 to \$7,000,000 today has impacted homeless people. Estimated cost: \$5,000.
5. The Department of Human Services should convene local meetings of all involved parties to develop plans to enhance youth program coordination and to share information.
6. The public housing authorities should be required to give a preference on their Section 8 Voucher and Certificate Programs' waiting lists to homeless families.

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# Background

## Legislative Charge

The 118th Legislature charged the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities with the following responsibility:

Study and Report on the problems of Homeless Youth. The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities shall prepare a report examining the causes of homelessness among youth and young adults, existing efforts to address those causes, the strengths and weaknesses of the current homeless shelter system, anticipated needs of youth and young adults, conditions in the shelters, and any recommended legislation. The Interagency Task Force shall submit its report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human service matters in the First Regular Session of the 119<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

This report focuses on this charge — issues facing homeless youth.

## The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness

In 1989 the Maine State Legislature created the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities. This action recognized that homelessness was a problem in Maine and that homeless persons needed services and assistance. It marked the first time policy makers from The Departments of Education, Labor, Housing, Human Services, Mental Health, and Corrections collectively acknowledged that homelessness existed in Maine. Explicit in the creation was recognition that homeless persons need support from all these agencies to transition their way from homelessness.

The Task Force issued its initial report, *By Sundown*, in 1991. The report examined the number and the needs of Maine's homeless citizens. The Homeless Task Force continued to meet regularly after that report to identify key homelessness policy issues, and worked with state agency policy makers to deal with the issues.

The Task Force's work demonstrated that the financial support for shelters for homeless Mainers was increasingly inadequate. In 1997 the Legislature approved a bill reconfiguring the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness. The new membership included key state policy makers, including relevant state commissioners or deputy commissioners. Membership was reduced from 21 to 12. The Task Force had three specific mandates in 1997:

- recommend the best way to provide housing assistance and services to homeless persons with mental illness or substance abuse problems;
- identify and recommend the future role of the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness;
- and study and recommend licensing requirements for homeless shelters.

The result of that mandate was the 1998 report *More...and More Needy; A study of Maine's homeless population*. The report focused on changes in the homeless system, funding, and the relationship of Maine's mental health system to people who are homeless and mentally ill. The report led to three significant legislative initiatives.

- charging DMHMRSAS and MSHA with coordinating the delivery of assistance to those with mental illness that are homeless.
- increasing the Shelter Occupancy Subsidy (SOS) from \$500,000 to \$1,100,000. While less than the \$3.1 million requested (and needed), the increase was the first since 1989.
- charging the Task Force with studying causes of youth homelessness and needs of homeless youth.

This report represents the work of the Task Force in studying homeless youth.

## Maine's Homeless Shelter System

The emergency shelter system for youth is part of a larger network that includes family shelters, general shelters, and shelters serving those with substance abuse problems or mental illness. This network, when created in the mid-1980s, was largely volunteer, church-based organizations. The shelters provided warm meals and respite to those who had a "run of bad luck." Shortly after opening, though, the shelters experienced more complex issues, including assisting people who had mental illness or substance abuse problems in addition to being homeless.

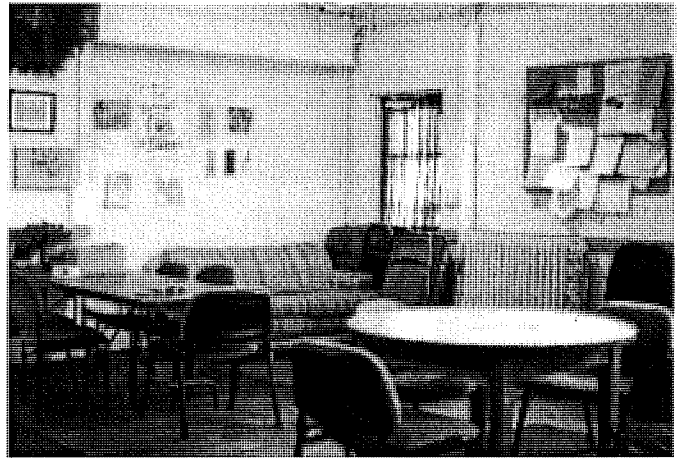
Today each shelter is an independent entity and, except for the network helping victims of violence, not part of any unified delivery system. No single government agency administers funding for shelters. Shelters compete against each other for scarce funding resources located in various state and private agencies.

Shelters have been helping more homeless people since 1993. Maine shelters housed 2,622 more guests in 1998 than in 1993, a 22% increase. During that same period, bednights (the number of nights a bed is filled during the year) increased even more, by some 35,000 guests (27%).

The day to day operations vary among shelters. Some shelters are open only from evening to morning, while others are open for 24 hours. Screening and assessment processes also vary.

Some shelters ask a few simple questions to screen out persons under the influence of alcohol or substance abuse, while some specialized shelters focus questions on violence, alcohol, or drugs to admit persons and start intervention. Shelter screening and assessment staffs range from minimally trained to skilled clinicians.

Shelters are unique in appearance. Guests at domestic violence shelters find themselves in a home atmosphere complete with individual bedrooms, dining room, living room, and play areas for children. The Oxford Street Shelter in Portland, in contrast, has rows of cots lined up in room after room. Guests at Oxford Street are greeted by a sign limiting each person to two blankets. Some shelters are not located in a shelter per se, but operate in a safe home network, utilize hotel rooms, or both.



The work at emergency shelters ranges from basic tasks such as making beds, cooking meals and doing laundry to complicated jobs such as preparing budgets, recruiting and managing staff, coordinating volunteers, and fund raising. Providing emergency shelter often means providing support services, such as transportation, physical health care, child care, and psychiatric counseling.

Recently the increase in homeless persons with a mental illness and substance abuse problems forced shelters to improve assessment and support service capabilities. This led some shelters to limit the intake of mentally ill persons because of a lack of capacity, skill, or beds. In the youth system, there is the added issue of differing DHS licenses to serve various youth populations.

Homeless Demographic Data						
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
<i>Total Guests</i>	12,031	12,351	13,442	14,219	13,614	14,741
<i>Total Bednights</i>	127,031	138,203	142,492	169,167	148,368	163,930

## Other Emergency Housing Assistance

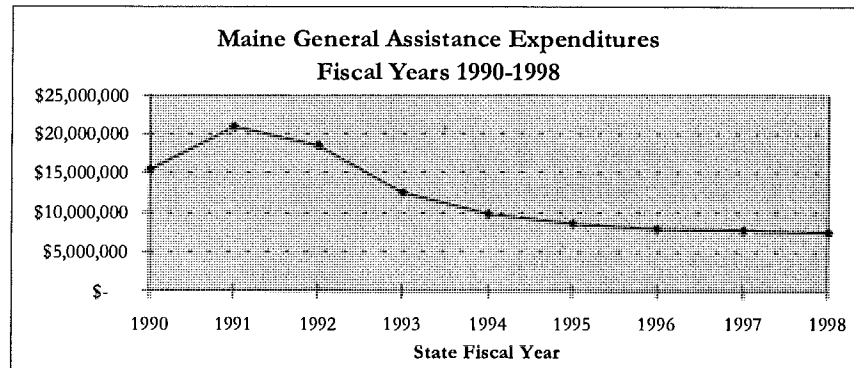
There are several state and local programs that provide a safety net of resources for youth and families who are in danger of becoming, or who are, homeless. General assistance, delivered through municipalities with the Department of Human Services, was designed to provide emergency help to families in need. Assistance includes money for housing, health needs, and food. General assistance has long been considered a program to help the poorest of the poor, but since 1991 general assistance expenditures have **declined** from \$21,000,000 to \$7,000,000 a year.

Most general assistance pays for housing. In FY 98, \$5 million (68%) of general assistance was for housing assistance and 10% for utilities, resulting in almost 80% of general assistance for housing related costs. The net impact from severe cuts in general assistance has been a significant reduction in housing assistance for families who most need it. Assuming 78% is the constant share of general assistance dedicated to housing, the general assistance program provided \$12,000,000 **less** for housing in 1998 than it did in 1991.

It is unclear whether there is a direct relationship between the decline in general assistance and the increase in homelessness. No analysis of this

safety net program has been conducted since the changes in eligibility were made to cut general assistance costs in the early 1990's.

The Temporary Housing Assistance Program (THAP) assists with rent payments or other housing needs (up to \$400 per family) that will prevent homelessness. THAP is provided through the Community Action Agencies, where families apply for rent assistance to avoid becoming homeless. THAP funding has been flat for many years at \$250,000 per year. During the period an average of 700 families have been served annually, at an average of \$357 per family.



**“Assuming 78% is the constant share of general assistance dedicated to housing, the general assistance program provided \$12,000,000 less for housing in 1998 than it did in 1991.”**



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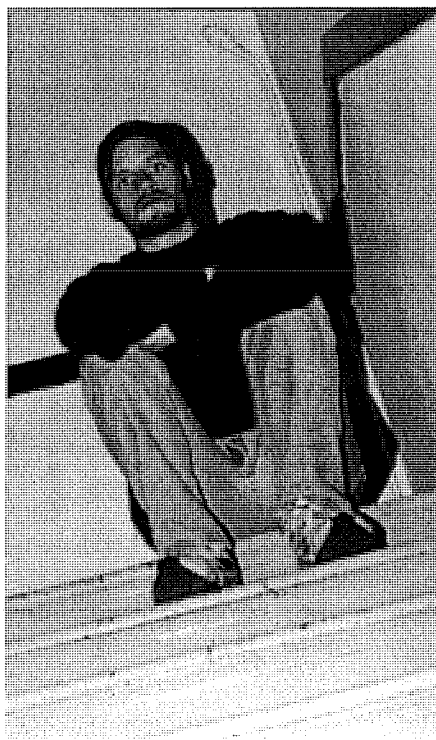
# Homeless Youth Shelter Services

## Homeless Youth

Many researchers agree that homelessness is difficult to define (Clary and Olney, 1992). In the context of this report, the Task Force chose the following definition:

*Homeless youth are children or adolescents temporarily living in emergency shelters, on the streets, or with friends or acquaintances.* Further refinement of this definition identifies three basic categories of homeless youth

- **Runaways:** Children or adolescents who have chosen to leave their home, whether that home is with their parents, relatives, a foster home, or another institutional home. Their decision to leave is made without permission. It is possible that these children or adolescents can return to a home that wants them, with the proper outreach and services.
- **Unaccompanied homeless youth:** Children and adolescents who are homeless, have no home, and live alone, away from parents or family surrogates.
- **Accompanied youth:** Children and adolescents who are homeless, have no home, but are accompanied by one or more parents.



## The Shelter System Serving Homeless Youth

Seven licensed homeless shelters in Maine serve unaccompanied youth exclusively. Shelters for victims of domestic violence serve many youths accompanied by a parent. Family and general population shelters serve some youths ages 18-21 and some youth accompanied by a parent.

The seven Maine youth shelters are: New Beginnings in Lewiston, Salvation Army Lighthouse Shelter in Portland, Shaw House in Bangor, Youth Alternatives in Portland, Youth and Family Services in Skowhegan and Fair Harbor in Portland. The Rumford Group Home is a licensed group home serving homeless youth.

These shelters generally house clients ages 10-18. Day to day operations vary. Shelters such as the Salvation Army Lighthouse Shelter are only open from evening to morning. The Shaw House is closed during the day and operates a separate day shelter to provide education and assistance. The other shelters are open all day. Many offer in-house educational programs for youth who are not enrolled in a local school system.

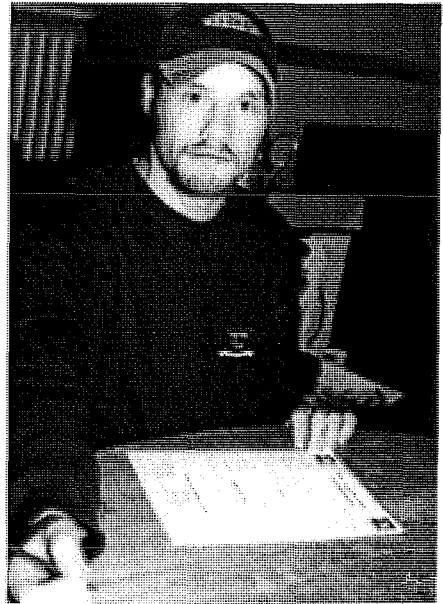
**“...researchers agree that homelessness is difficult to define...”**

There are roughly 90 beds dedicated to unaccompanied youth between 12 and 18 years of age in these shelters. Only three (New Beginnings, the Lighthouse Shelter, and the Shaw House) take homeless youth on a first come, first serve basis. Other youth shelters have beds that must be filled with eligible homeless youth in order to maintain needed DHS or DMHMRSAS revenue flow for specific clinical diagnoses.

Youth shelters vary in the length of stay restrictions. The Rumford Group Home does not have any limit, while other youth shelters restrict stays from 3 to 30 days. These restrictions are determined by DHS licensing requirements and are often caused by funding source requirements.

Shelters link with resources in the community to connect specific services to individual needs. These links depend on the individual's eligibility for a given program. For example, if the youth is eligible for a DMHMRSAS substance abuse program, then the services the youth needs are charged to that program. If not, the youth may not receive the services.

An intake assessment is completed when youths arrive at a shelter. This provides shelter staff insight into why a particular youth is homeless. The youth is then referred to service providers who specialize in various areas — if there is funding. For example, most youth shelters refer youth with substance abuse or mental illness issues to local counselors within the DMHMRSAS system. Family conflict issues often are handled by family mediators, who work with the parents and the youth



to solve the problems. Shelters refer abuse or neglect cases to the Department of Human Services. Employment and housing issues are referred to the Job Corps, employment counselors, and local housing authorities. In many cases, if a youth is not in any one department's care, no service is available.

Name of Shelter	Length of Stay Limitations
New Beginnings	21 consecutive days with possibility of extension up to 30
Rumford Group Home	No limit
Salvation Army Lighthouse Shelter	27 consecutive days
Shaw House	30 consecutive days
Youth Alternatives	Family conflict: 3 to 7 days; DOC custody and DHS open protective: 21 consecutive days; DHS custody: 28 consecutive days.
Youth and Family Services	21 consecutive days with possibility of extension up to 28 if involved with state agency; 21 consecutive days for all other youth.
Fair Harbor	30 consecutive days

The roles of domestic violence shelters, general shelters, and family shelters are different from youth shelters. Youth in domestic violence and family shelters are accompanied. The cause of their homelessness are family issues. Youth in victims of domestic violence and family shelters generally are much younger than those in youth shelters. There is more emphasis on education and safety. Domestic violence and family shelter staff do not provide educational services, but help parents enroll children in schools. Most shelters also help the parent find day care for the child, giving the adult time to address safety, housing and employment needs. General shelters house youth between 18-21 years of age and generally address housing affordability and job related issues.

General population shelters, family shelters, and shelters for victims of violence collaborate with other partners. Shelters refer youth for medical, dental, and mental health assistance when financial resources permit. In victims of domestic violence shelters an advocate addresses the needs of children. They hold weekly support groups and house meetings with shelter youth.

Limited available resources restrict shelter support efforts. Some community services may not be available if financial resources can not be con-

nected to the youth. The amount of counseling assistance the youth receives is therefore limited. When the time comes for the youth to leave, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, the individual may not have received services they needed.



*A shelter worker with Ajai*

Day shelters and drop in centers are an important part of the youth system. The Preble Street Teen Center in Portland serves meals seven days a week and operates a low barrier day shelter from 12-9 p.m. daily. The Teen Center has case workers, mental health and substance abuse workers, a health clinic, and an employment caseworker. It also runs an Alternative School for teens who want to pursue their GED. Shaw House in Bangor operates a drop in center providing similar services. They each operate clinics where health care professionals provide care four days a week. New Beginnings operates a drop in center that provides food,

clothing, laundry, and case management services. There are few other day centers existing in Maine.

Transitional housing that helps youth move from homelessness to independent living is scarce. New Beginnings operates a transitional housing program for homeless youths ages

16-21. It provides the youth an apartment with limited supervision. Youth living in the apartments must pay 30% of their income for rent or do community service. New Beginnings sets aside 50% of any rent paid by residents for the youth to use when they leave. A youth can reside in an apartment for up to eighteen months. Other transitional housing programs that may serve homeless

youth include Youth Alternatives and the Mainstay program in Portland.

There are generally shortages of quality foster homes and transitional housing options. It is also difficult to place youth in subsidized apartments. They are usually too young to receive rental assistance or, if not, are unable to find a landlord willing to rent to them.

**“There are generally shortages of quality foster homes and transitional housing...”**

# Characteristics and Causes of Youth Homelessness

## Data Analysis Approach

The Task Force examined the demographic characteristics of accompanied and unaccompanied homeless youth at the beginning of its study. It used the following resources:

- ⇒ semi-annual surveys conducted in the 38 shelters throughout Maine funded by MSHA;
- ⇒ information provided by Task Force, the Children's Cabinet, the Maine Homeless Coalition, and by specific homeless youth service providers;
- ⇒ a MSHA 1998 survey of homeless youth in shelters;
- ⇒ a statewide 1998 New Beginnings survey of homeless youth;
- ⇒ reviews of national publications regarding homeless youth; and,
- ⇒ testimonials of homeless youth to the Task Force.

**“Portland’s Preble Street Resource Shelter estimates that, of the 40-45 youth that visit their day shelter, only 10 will know where they are going to sleep that night.”**

## General Characteristics

Youth make up 30% of the population staying in Maine shelters. On average, 450 people stay in Maine emergency shelters every night; 135 are homeless youth. Monthly percentages for youth in shelters ranged from a low of 23% to a high of 33% during the last five years. The number of youth in Maine shelters has held relatively steady over the last five years:

**“The number of youth in Maine shelters has held relatively steady over the last five years.”**

Age of Homeless Guests; 1994-1998



Portland’s Preble Street Resource Shelter estimates that, of the 40-45 youth that visit their day shelter, only 10 will know where they are going to sleep that night. The number of youth visits to the day shelter for meals will double between last year and this year. Homeless youth received almost 10,000 meals in the first six months of the program year. There were only 10,000 meals served all the previous year.



Half of the youth staying in shelters are between 13 and 18 years old; 21% are between 5 and 12. The average age of youth in shelters is 13 years. Approximately 15% of homeless youth are a minority, while only 2% of Maine's total population are minorities.

For every youth staying in a shelter, it is estimated an additional youth is homeless and living on the streets<sup>1</sup>:

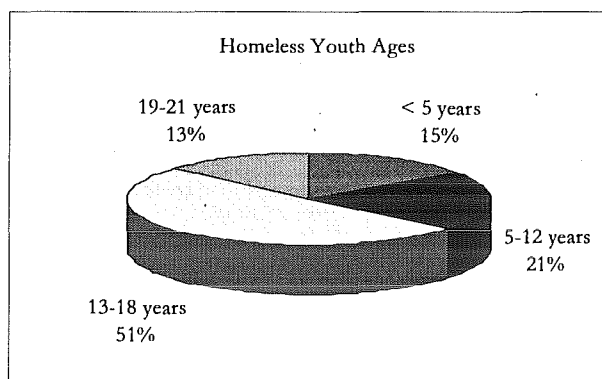
Few homeless youth are housed in emergency shelters as a result of lack of shelter beds for youth, shelter admission policies, and a preference for greater autonomy (Robertson, 1996; National Coalition for the Homeless).



Many homeless youth are either out of school or are having trouble staying in school. Only 10% of the homeless youth surveyed for this report had graduated at the time of the survey. Twenty four percent dropped out of school or were expelled; 16% skipped school often. Only half attended school regularly.

Cumberland County has a disproportionately large share of homeless youth. Cumberland accounts for 20% of Maine's total population, but 27% of the homeless youth (the same pattern holds for the total homeless population).

York, Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin counties each contain 7-9% of the homeless youth population.

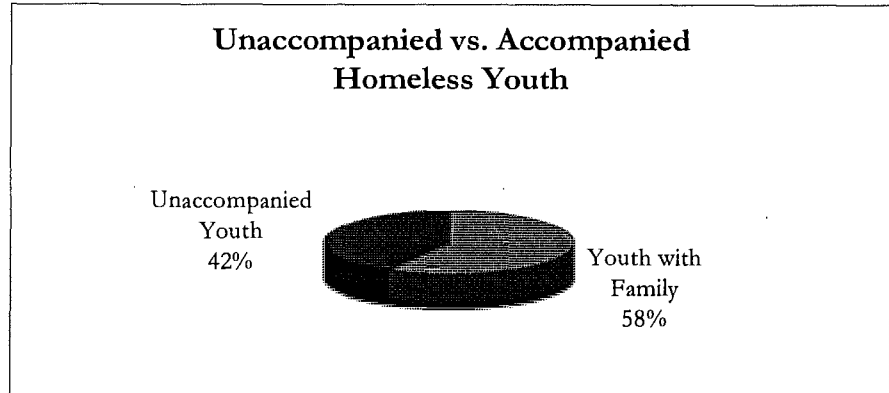


**“Only 10% of the homeless youth surveyed for this report had graduated at the time of the survey.”**

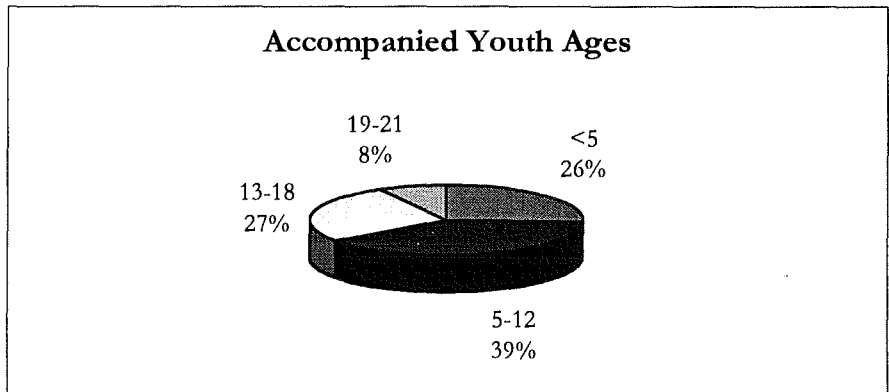
<sup>1</sup> Maine Coalition for the Homeless, 1998

### Differences Between Accompanied and Unaccompanied Youth

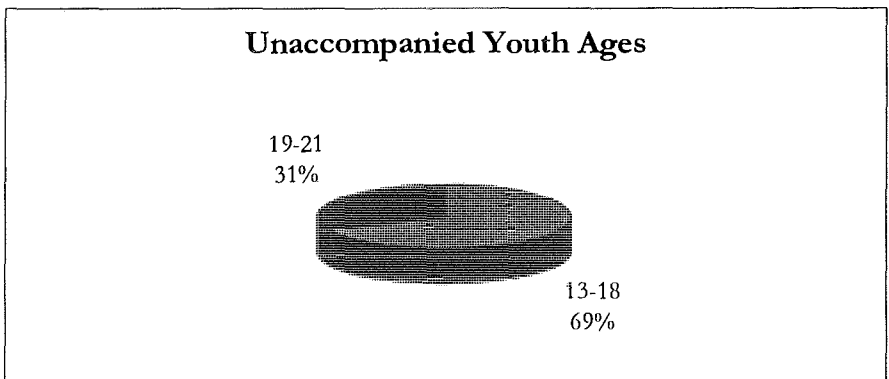
Forty two percent of homeless youth are unaccompanied; 58% are accompanied by a least one other family member:



Accompanied homeless children are younger and tend to be in a shelter with only their mother. Of those with a family member, almost two thirds are there with their mother, who is single and head of household. Over 73% of single female head of households have a child that is 12 and under.



In contrast, unaccompanied youth tend to be older and male. Sixty-nine percent are between the ages of 13 and 18, versus 51% of all homeless youth. The rest of the unaccompanied youth are between 18 and 21 years of age. Males make up 62% of the total unaccompanied youth population. Almost all unaccompanied females are between 13 and 18 years of age.



## Differences Between Sheltered and Non-sheltered Populations

MSHA and New Beginnings each conducted a direct survey of homeless youth in 1998. MSHA's survey focused on youth staying in shelters, while New Beginnings' survey included adolescents living on the streets. Each homeless youth was asked where they think they should live. While answers were similar, street youths more often did not want to live inside the "system", meaning group or foster homes. They also did not want to live at home with their parents.

In contrast, homeless youth in emergency shelters had a higher rate of interest in transition assistance, with 20% identifying foster homes as a preferred option.

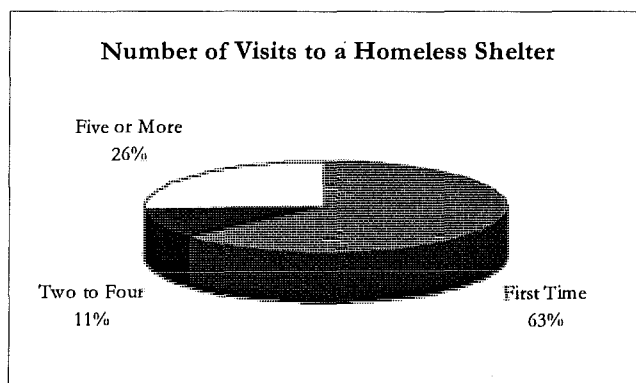
Many homeless youth end up on the streets after experiencing "shelter shuffle." Homeless unaccompanied youth with no housing options move

from one shelter to the next, as they exceed each shelter's length of stay limitation. They become frustrated with the "shelter shuffle," and seek other housing options that, while more permanent, may be unsafe. They then focus on surviving.

The unaccompanied shelter youths and street populations identified similar short term needs. Almost 50% wanted food, shelter, and clothing. Six percent desired counseling and advice, while 11-14% wanted money and a job.

Chronic homelessness and repeat shelter visits reflect failure to end the homelessness cycle. Repeat visitors represent 37% of the total youth shelter population; 26% visited the shelter five or more times.

The New Beginnings survey found that 44% of youth have been away from home for more than one year. Almost 25% of those have been chronically homeless for 3 years or more.



### Where do you think you should live?

	In-shelter Responses	Non-shelter Responses
<i>Parents</i>	14%	14%
<i>Foster Home</i>	20%	9%
<i>Other Family</i>	6%	8%
<i>Don't Know</i>	6%	5%
<i>Independently</i>	37%	54%
<i>Boy/girlfriend</i>	6%	5%
<i>Friends</i>	9%	6%

**"Many homeless youth end up on the streets after experiencing 'shelter shuffle.'"**

## The Reasons for Youth Homelessness

Family conflict is the primary reason for homelessness among youth.

Other reasons include:

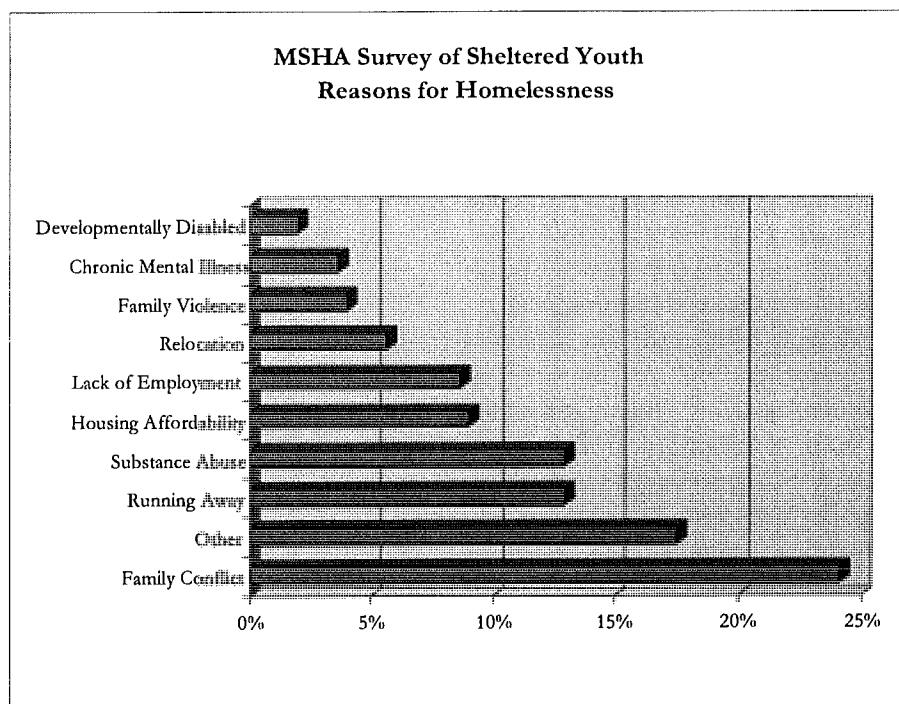
- Family Violence and Physical Abuse
- Running Away
- Substance Abuse
- Housing Affordability
- Lack of Employment
- Relocation or Transient
- Problems with the Law
- Chronic Mental Illness
- Developmentally Disabled

For those youths in shelters surveyed by MSHA the reasons are as shown:

The New Beginnings statewide survey, conducted in the Fall of 1998, asked similar questions of sheltered and non-sheltered homeless youth. Almost 60% identified family conflicts as the reason for homelessness. Non-sheltered youth experience higher rates of physical abuse, 16%, compared to 4% of those staying in a shelter.

The role of family conflict, running away, and family violence varies among age groups. Biennial surveys conducted in shelters by MSHA show:

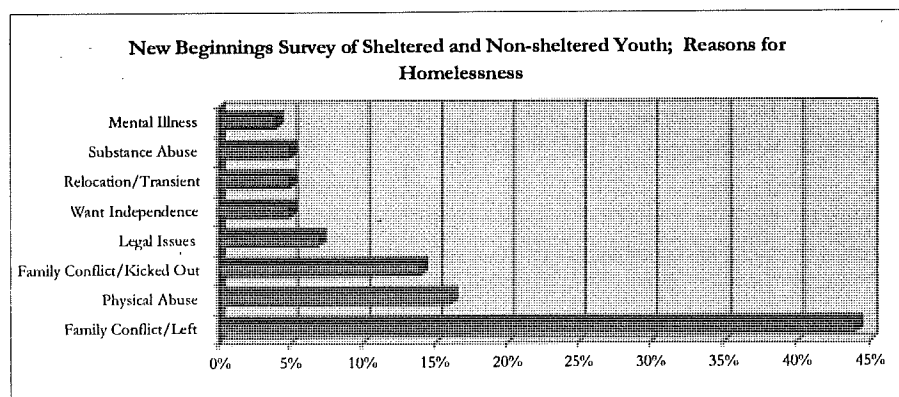
- For children between 0 and 12, family conflict and violence caused homelessness 43% of the time. Another 27% identified employment or housing affordability as the reason why the family is homeless.



- For youth between 13 and 18 years of age, 48% identified family conflict and running away as the root cause of homelessness. In this group a high of 22% identify substance abuse or mental illness as a primary reason for homelessness. This group also has the highest percentage of repeat visits.
- For youth between 18 and 21 family conflict had minimal impact. More than 60% identified

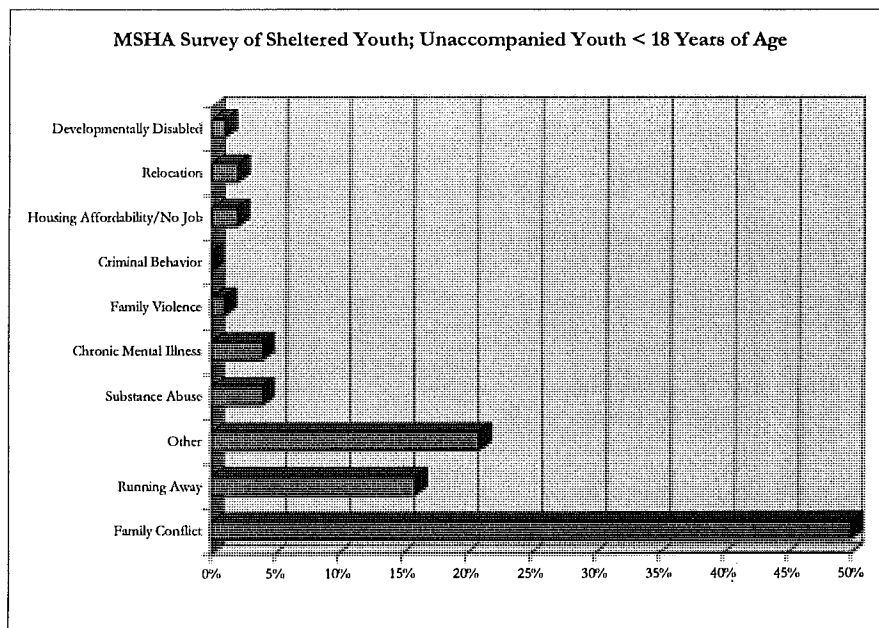
employment, housing affordability, and the need to relocate as the primary reasons for homelessness.

Data suggests that youth cycling through the system and continuing to be homeless experience higher instances of substance abuse, sexual experimentation, and criminal behavior in an increasingly desperate circle.

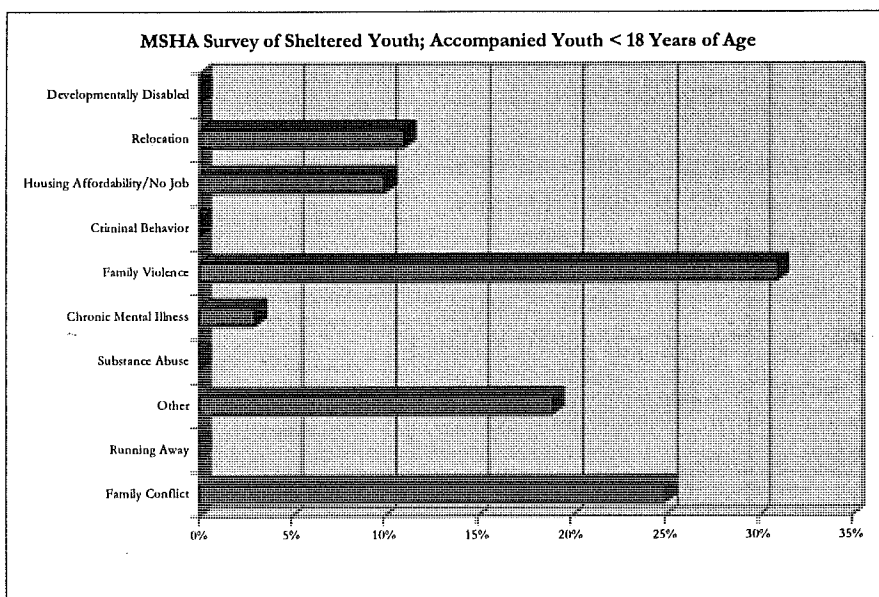




This analysis also examined youth that are less than 18 years old, by accompanied and unaccompanied status. Family conflict and running away remain the dominant reasons for homelessness (66% of the total) of **unaccompanied youth** (generally 13 years of age or more). This group needs careful assessment to establish whether the child is a runaway and can return home, or needs alternative housing. If the child returns home, additional follow up is necessary.



For **accompanied youth**, family violence is the reason for homelessness 31% of the time, and family conflict the reason 25% of the time. Substantial intervention and counseling is required for the child to avoid long term developmental delays. This population tends to be one-time visitors and needs to be connected to regional housing and job services.



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# Conclusions

1. *The homeless youth system has difficulty matching service and funding to individual needs due to categorical funding rules, license requirements and unique situations.* For example a homeless, unaccompanied 15 year old youth with a mental illness may receive services through the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services and thus be connected to housing, education, and other critical services. A youth not connected to the Department may receive no services at all.
2. *Most youth are homeless because of a family conflict or family act of violence, abuse, or neglect.* Their need for low barrier access to services and counseling is varied and dependent upon the individual and living situation.
3. *There are three types of Homeless Youth: runaways, unaccompanied homeless youth, and accompanied youth.*
  - Runaway youth have chosen to leave their home and may be able to return home. These youth often need counseling or mediation services.
4. *The number of homeless youth staying in shelters has remained steady over the last four years.* Annual numbers in shelters remain at around 270 youth per month, or 3,240 per year. Youth comprise about 30% of the population staying in shelters.
5. *Homeless shelter staff think that the number of homeless youth not staying in shelters is increasing.* Data on meals and services at Maine day shelters suggests that there are at least as many homeless youth living out of a shelter as in one.
6. *The number of homeless youth visiting day shelters is increasing, and the needs of homeless youth have become more complex.* National studies and Maine trends demonstrate that the continued state of homelessness among youth can lead to increased incidences of substance abuse, mental illness, and physical health issues. These complex issues combine to make service provision difficult.
7. *There are a few, small, uncoordinated, and inadequately funded youth shelters that help unaccompanied homeless youth who are not receiving state funded services.* There are very few low barrier options for the unaccompanied youth who are the most needy.
8. *Differing rules and licenses for youth shelters restrict the development of a comprehensive, easily accessible community based system.* There is a need to lower the technical barriers to receiving services. Critical assistance can be provided more quickly and costly problems can be avoided if help is provided earlier.

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9. **Categorical funding.** Over the last twenty years, change in funding sources and rules has created dilemmas. Often, eligibility criteria, requirements, and barriers have prevented many youth from getting help. Those that do get through the intake exercise often receive extensive help.
10. **Some Department of Human Services and Department of Corrections programs do not fully prepare their clients to transition out of their systems at 18 years of age.** Some youth almost immediately end up in homeless shelters or lose essential services when they turn 18. Smoother transitions are needed.
11. **Homeless youth have limited access to job training programs.** Last year, only 57 individuals of the 5,500 persons served through the State's job training programs had been homeless. Job training needs are particularly acute for homeless youth.
12. **There are limited statewide services for youth who are part of homeless families.** Given that 58% of all youth are accompanied by a family member and that 65% of those are 12 years old or less, there is a need to ensure that the State meets the special needs of these homeless accompanied youth, in addition to that of their parents.
13. **It is unclear how effective other safety net programs, such as General Assistance and Temporary Housing Assistance Program (THAP), are assisting homeless families locally.** Changes in eligibility for General Assistance and a lack of funding increase for THAP limit assistance to homeless persons. No analysis of this funding crisis in either program has been conducted.
14. **The financial assistance available to Maine's neediest citizens has decreased. Inadequate funding plays an important role in each of the previous conclusions.** In last year's report *More...and More Needy: A study of Maine's homeless population*, the Task Force found that:
- the cost to house a homeless person and provide adequate services was \$37 per day;
  - State support through the Shelter Operating Subsidy was \$500,000 and had remained so for ten years;
  - that level of support converted to a state funding contribution of roughly \$3 per night; and therefore,
  - The Task Force requested an increase of funding to assist the homeless of \$2.6 million dollars, or the equivalent of \$18.50 per night, roughly half the cost of a stay in a shelter.
  - General Assistance has declined 52%, THAP has remained unchanged, and Shelter + Care support from Housing and Urban Development is in jeopardy.
  - Last year's increase in Shelter Operating Subsidy of \$600,000 **leaves a funding gap of roughly \$12 per night per person.**
15. **Federal funding sources to serve the homeless are not stable or predictable.** Continued reliance on federal resources, with its peaks and valleys, makes it difficult to plan and manage homeless programs. Efforts must be made to reduce the reliance on federal resources.

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# Recommendations

## Recommendations Specific to Homeless Youth

1. *The Task Force recommends that the legislature fund and conduct a study of a potential Maine Runaway and Homeless Youth System.* The purpose of the study is to establish a minimum level of service that assures the safety and well being of unaccompanied homeless youth. The analysis will examine community based options, low barrier access, assessment, treatment, family mediation, and outreach services that are consistent statewide. The study should include:

- a detailed description of unaccompanied youth by age, the services they need, and the barriers they face;
- a review of all statutes and regulations regarding unaccompanied homeless youth, including all license requirements and associated service descriptions,
- a review of current funding programs for homeless youth through the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Human Services and their relative success in serving homeless youth;

- the creation of programmatic standards for providers to insure that these services reach the population targeted and are effective;
- identification of potential funding sources that can be pooled to provide flexibility in serving unaccompanied youth; and,
- identification of the state agency responsible for implementing a runaway youth act.
- examination of legislative proposals for Children in Need of Services or Supervision or "CHINS". CHINS laws allow courts to mandate treatment for youth who desperately need help.

Funding to conduct this study is recommended at \$20,000.

2. *The Task Force recommends that the Department of Human Services, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Labor and the Department of Education develop additional services and plans to serve youth who have aged out of the system.* On their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, some youth are released from state care and services, sometimes with no preparation or support. The agencies are

requested to develop plans for youth prior to leaving their care which help connect the youth to job training, education, and housing programs.

3. *The Task Force recommends that the Auditing, Contracting, and Licensing Service Center eliminate licensing restrictions that make it difficult for youth to obtain housing and services.* The Service Center, a joint working group of the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Human Services, should eliminate or minimize licensing barriers that hamper providing assistance to youth with immediate homeless crises. The Service Center should also examine the conflicts that arise from the need to notify the parents of underage homeless youth and the need for those parents to grant permission if the youth is to remain in the shelter.

4. *The Task Force recommends establishing and funding an RFP program in the Department of Human Services to provide outreach and services to homeless youth.* Appropriate \$500,000 to the Department of Human Services to offer a program to serve homeless youth. The program should fund basic services by homeless providers and will assist youth in arranging necessary educational services. It will be developed through a Request for Proposals (RFP).



## General Recommendations That Would Affect Homeless Youth

1. *The Task Force recommends that the Shelter Operating Subsidy be funded at the level of \$3,150,000 recommended in last year's report: More and More Needy; A Study of Maine's homeless population.* Last year the legislature increased the Shelter Operating Subsidy from \$500,000 to \$1,100,000. This year the legislature should increase the funding by \$2,050,000 to an annual level of \$3,150,000. This appropriation will result in a bednight reimbursement of \$18.50 or roughly half the total bednight cost in the State. The flexible money will permit the different kinds of shelters to meet the unique needs of all homeless groups.
2. *The Task Force recommends that the Legislature establish and fund a \$5,000 study of the impact of legislative changes to the General Assistance program that have occurred in the last 8 years.* The study should assess program effectiveness, administrative practices at the local and state level, cost of delivering general assistance, client benefits, and the effect on homelessness.
3. *The Task Force recommends increasing the Temporary Housing Assistance Program (THAP) from \$250,000 to \$500,000.* Dedicate the increase to serve homeless families with children or homeless youth staying in shelters. The assistance, which will be limited to referrals from homeless shelters, will be delivered through the Community Action Programs. The new funds will secure housing by providing security deposits and rental assistance.
4. *The Task Force recommends that the Department of Human Service's Regional Executive Managers, through the Regional Children's Cabinets, convene local meetings with representatives of emergency shelters, Community Action Agencies, Education, and the Department of Corrections to develop a plan on how best to deliver services to homeless guests.* This planning process should be modeled after the approach DMHMRSAS implemented in the past year. Regional meetings should occur at least once per year to update the plans.
5. *The Task Force recommends that all public housing authorities establish a priority preference in the Section 8 certificate and voucher programs for homeless families with children.* The local housing authorities would exercise an option to give preference to homeless persons.
6. *The Task Force recommends that the Department of Human Services review and make changes, where necessary, to assure that licensing restrictions do not create situations where youth are separated from families or guardians because of their homeless condition.* There is a need to eliminate restrictions placed on shelter licenses that do not allow guardians and their youth, acting as a family unit, to remain intact when they come into a shelter.