

Promoting public policy that enhances the lives of children and youth in Vermont.

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## **Issue Brief: Homeless Children and Youth on the Rise “Back-to-School” Brings normalcy to homeless children**

(Montpelier) Sometimes school is the most consistent setting in a homeless child's life. But even that stability can be tenuous. In the crush of “back-to-school” rituals and anxiety about new teachers and classes, there are some students whose new school year is fraught with more uncertainty and challenges than most others. They are the growing numbers of homeless children and youth in Vermont, who make up at least one-third of all homeless people—and that's just out of the numbers that are counted.

Many homeless students begin at a new school every August; some change twice or more during a single school year. Family moves related to unstable living situations or rent increases can result in transferring to a new school in mid-year.

“For each move to a different school, homeless children and youth lose 3-6 months of education.” That's according to an issue brief released today by Voices for Vermont's Children (Voices), a statewide, nonpartisan research and public policy organization. “This is an urgent issue—children are among the fastest growing group of homeless people in Vermont and nationwide,” said Beth Burgess, research coordinator for Voices.

*Homeless in Vermont: Children, Youth and Families* is the first Vermont report to focus on the youngest homeless. The issue brief outlines some of the reasons and contributing factors related to homelessness, definitions and statistics, the impact of homelessness on children's well-being including education and health, and looks at the sometimes-different reasons older youth become homeless.

A total of 870 children were served by emergency shelters in 2006, but an unknown number are not counted. They are the “hidden homeless”—kids whose parents must rely on family and friends to let them “couch surf” temporarily.

“It's a situation of too little paycheck and not enough affordable housing—sometimes worsened by layoffs, unexpected medical bills, rent increases, or other costs,” noted Burgess. “Low wages, fewer health insurance benefits, low rental vacancy rates and increasing rents, unexpected family crises—it doesn't take much to end up struggling to find decent housing,” she said.

Copies of the issue brief, *Homeless in Vermont: Children, Youth and Families*, are available from “Voices for Vermont's Children, P.O. Box 261 Montpelier, 05602, (802) 229-6377, [bburgess@voicesforvtkids.org](mailto:bburgess@voicesforvtkids.org). Copies can be downloaded from [www.voicesforvermontschildren.org](http://www.voicesforvermontschildren.org). Voices (formerly called the Vermont Children's Forum) has been the leading voice for Vermont children and youth for nearly 25 years, addressing the issues facing disadvantaged children and youth through its policy analysis, data research, and public education.

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**Editors:** County homeless data can be accessed at <http://www.helpingtohouse.org/profile.php>.