

A Glimpse of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Homeless Young Adults in New Hampshire

Annually in the United States, between 1.6 and 2.8 million homeless youth live in shelters, abandoned buildings, cars, are doubled-up with friends or relatives, on the streets or in other inadequate housing. Some of these are unaccompanied youth who are not in the care of a parent or guardian. The primary causes of homelessness among unaccompanied youth in the United States are physical and sexual abuse by a parent or guardian, neglect, parental substance abuse, and family conflict. Other youth are thrown out of their homes because they are pregnant, gay or lesbian, or because their parents believe they are old enough to take care of themselves. For many of these young people, leaving home ensures survival.

Over half of youth living in shelters report that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care. Additionally, over half report being physically abused at home and over one third report sexual abuse. One in ten unaccompanied homeless youth have been raped with at least half been assaulted or robbed and over two-thirds report that at least one of their parents abuses drugs or alcohol. While some of these young people may return home shortly after leaving, others will live on their own long-term or even permanently.

Unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults often live in high-risk environments. Most youth temporarily live doubled-up or with friends or relatives for a short period of time only. As homeless young adults, they remain reluctant to seek help for fear of being forced to return home or placed in foster care and many are unaware of available assistance. Working to provide for their basic needs and balance school many fall behind in school. As for higher education, most homeless young adults do not know how to apply for college, prepare and take the SAT or ACT, or complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Once attending college, many homeless young adults are not able to be financially self-sufficient and often struggle to provide for their basic needs. Lastly, when dorms close during academic breaks at residential colleges and universities, homeless students living in the dorms often have nowhere to go and insufficient funds to pay for housing.

In New Hampshire during the 2010-2011 school year 3,164 homeless youth and young adults (under 22 years old) were homeless. To identify the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in New Hampshire, in February 2012, local homeless education liaisons completed a voluntary survey. Ninety-one homeless education liaisons completed the survey. From September 2011 to February 2012 the survey identified 524 homeless unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults in New Hampshire. Of those 234 youth are between the ages of 14-17 years old. Furthermore among the known homeless students attending school in New Hampshire, 143 young adults are 18-22 years old.

Given the disparities in youth homelessness research, the unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults remain an understudied segment of society on which the least research is available. Difficulty in collecting data on mobile populations and youths' reluctance to admit their unstable living situations create challenges in determining the true scope of the problem. In addition, much of the existing research on homeless youth is even less comprehensive than research on homeless adults or families despite the fact that some studies report 12-17-year-olds are at higher risk of homelessness than are adults. Given the homeless education liaison survey on unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults was voluntary and only focused on those in New Hampshire schools it is probable the numbers are much greater than have been recorded.

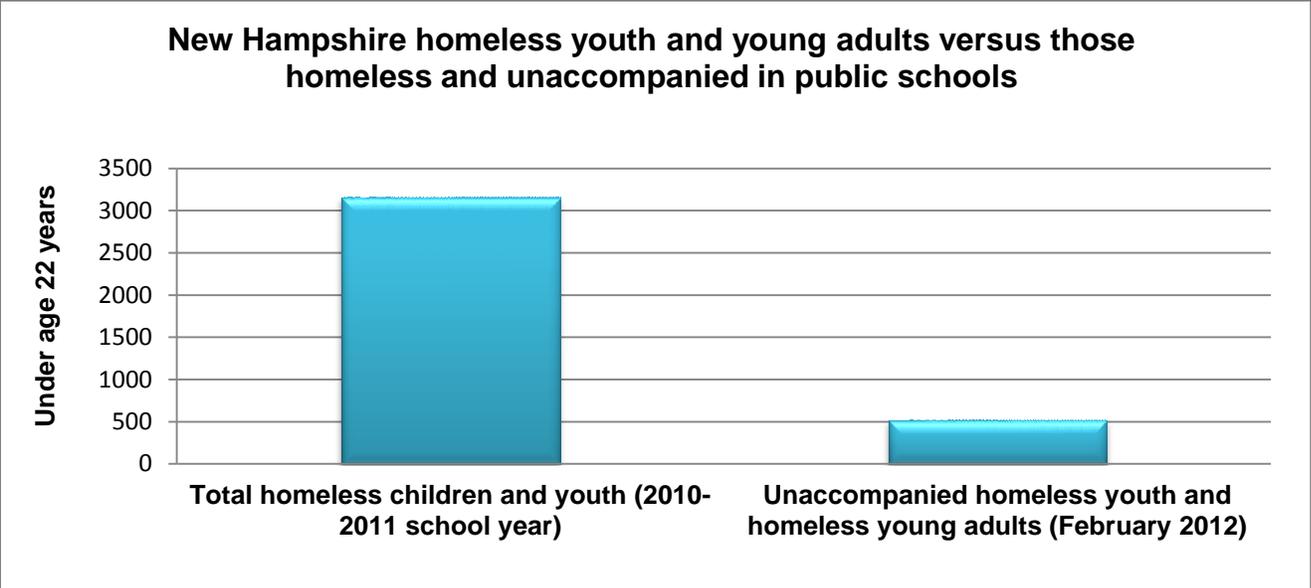


Figure 1: During the 2010-2011 school year (grades K-12) 3,164 homeless youth and young adults (under age 22 years) were identified. From September, 2011 to February, 2012, a voluntary survey identified 524 unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults in New Hampshire.

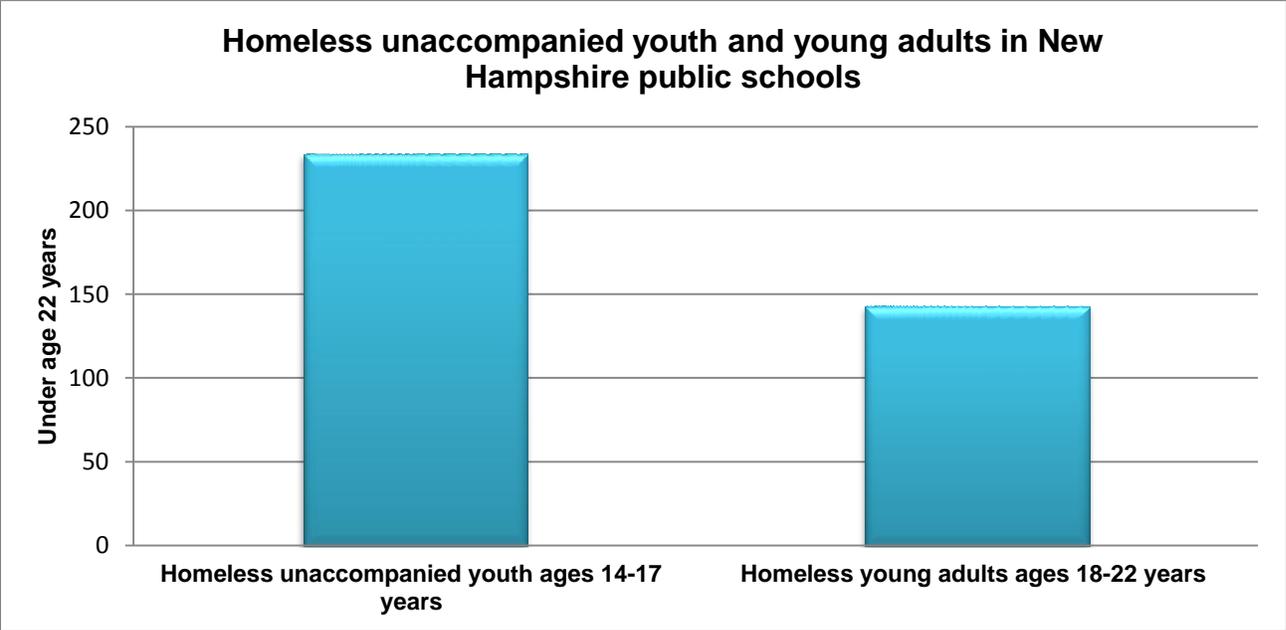


Figure 2: From September, 2011 to February, 2012 unaccompanied homelessness numbers were 234 youth (ages 14-17) and 143 young adults (ages 18-22) in New Hampshire were identified in New Hampshire.

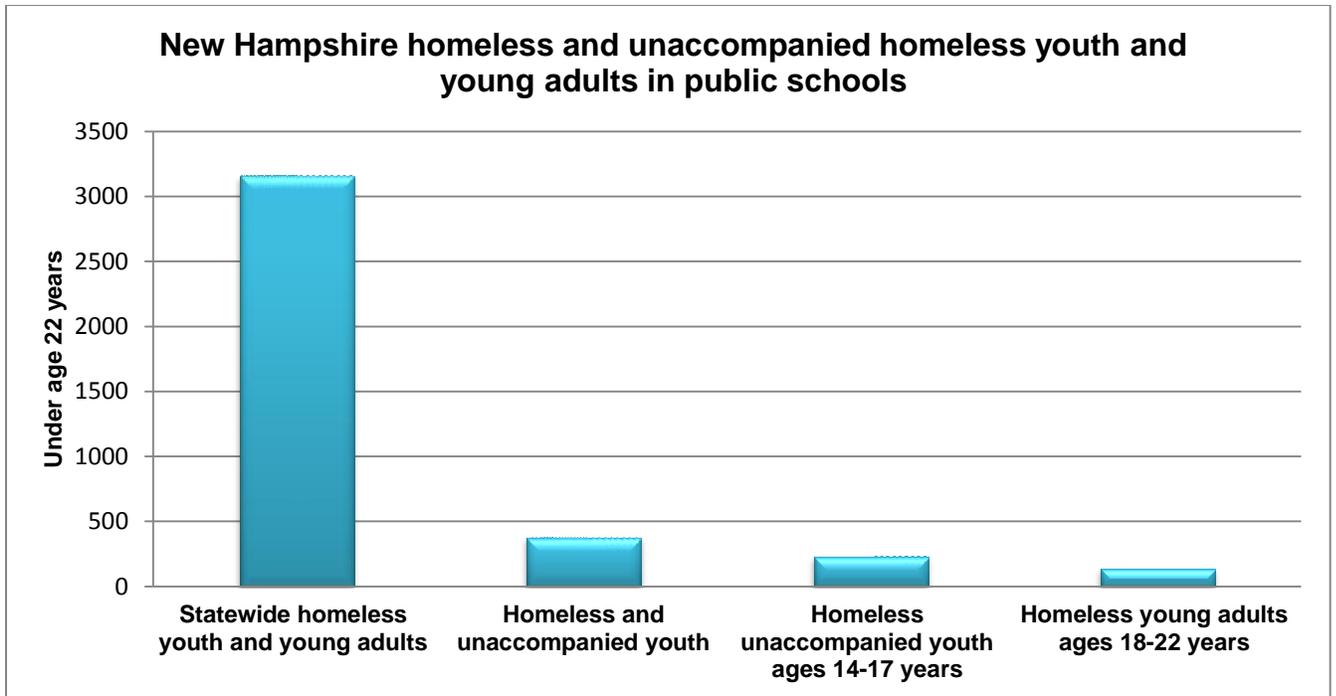


Figure 3: During the 2010-2011 school year data, there were 3,164 homeless youth and young adults identified in New Hampshire. From September, 2011 to February, 2012 there were 381 unaccompanied homeless youth (ages birth to 17) with 234 of those only ages 14-17 years old. During this period 143 unaccompanied homeless young adults were also identified in New Hampshire public schools.

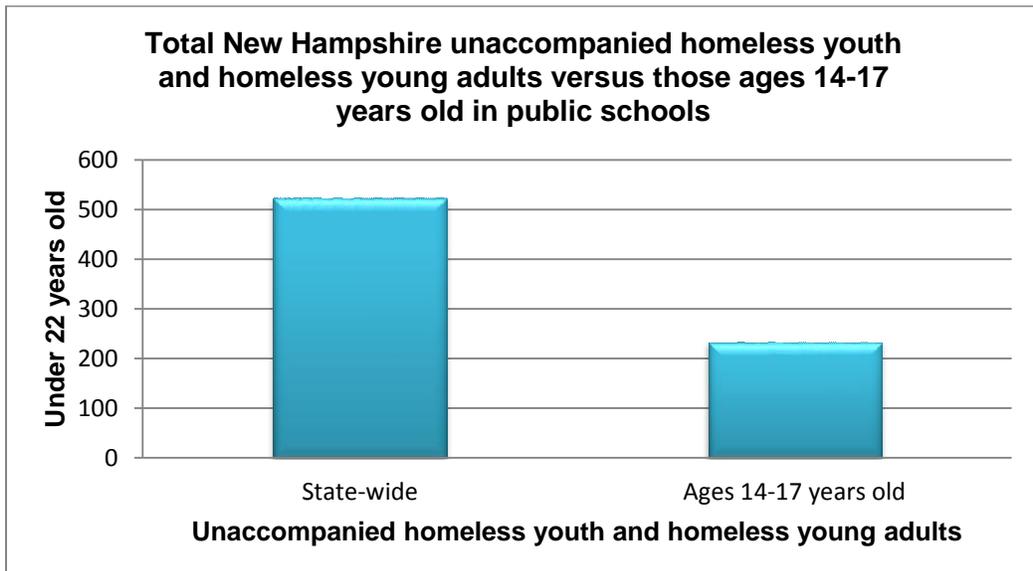


Figure 4: From September, 2011 to February, 2012, among ages 14-17 years, 234 were unaccompanied homeless youth compared to the statewide preliminary finding of 524 unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults during this period.

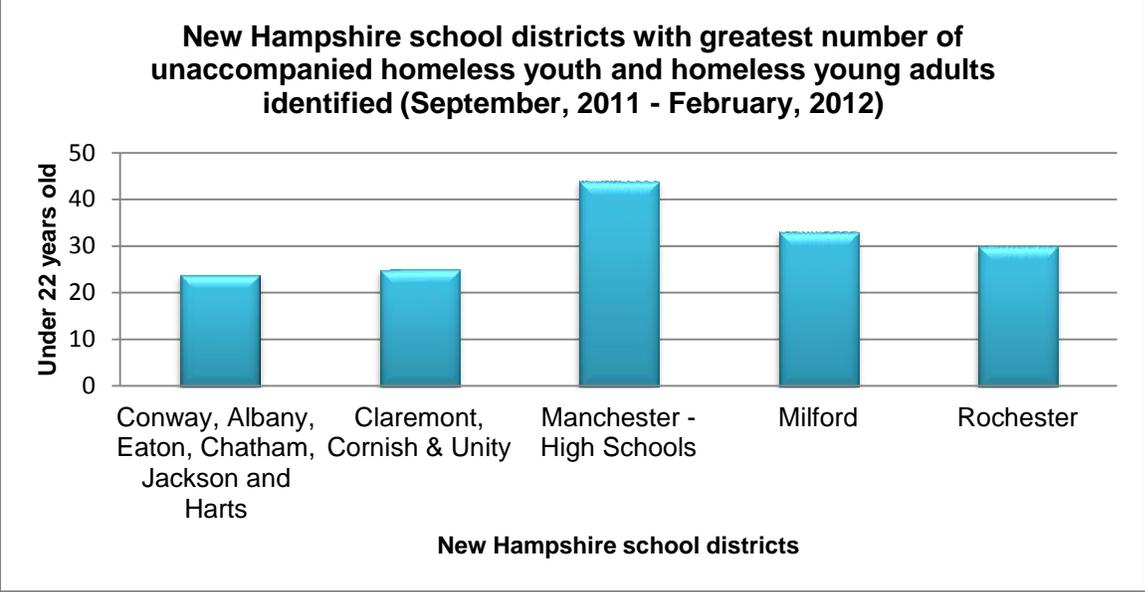


Figure 5: From September, 2011 to February, 2012 the following school districts had the greatest number of unaccompanied homeless youth: Conway, Albany, Eaton, Chatham, Jackson and Harts (24 students), Claremont, Cornish and Unity (25 students), Manchester (44 students), Milford (33 students) and Rochester (30 students).

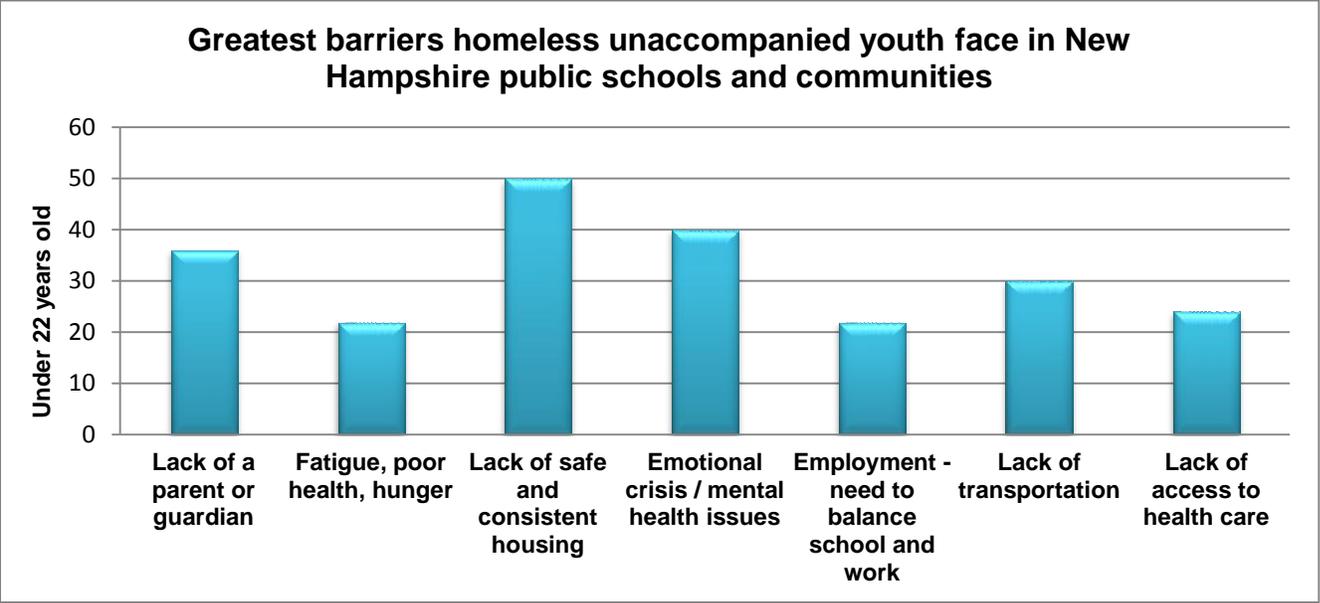


Figure 6: The local homeless education liaison survey identified the following prominent barriers unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults in New Hampshire encounter: lack of safe and consistent housing, emotional crisis and/or mental health, lack of parent or guardian, lack of transportation, lack of access to health care, balancing employment, as well as, fatigue, poor health and hunger.

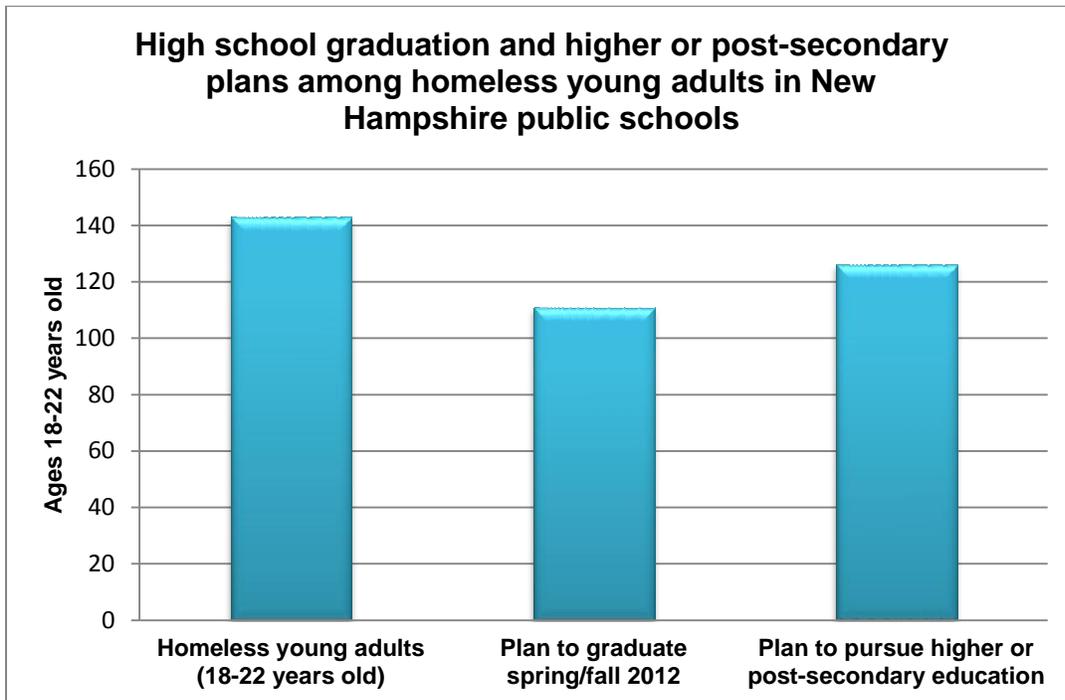


Figure 7: Among homeless young adults (18-22 years old) in high school, 111 young adults are on track to graduate from high school or complete the equivalency of high school in the fall or spring of 2012.

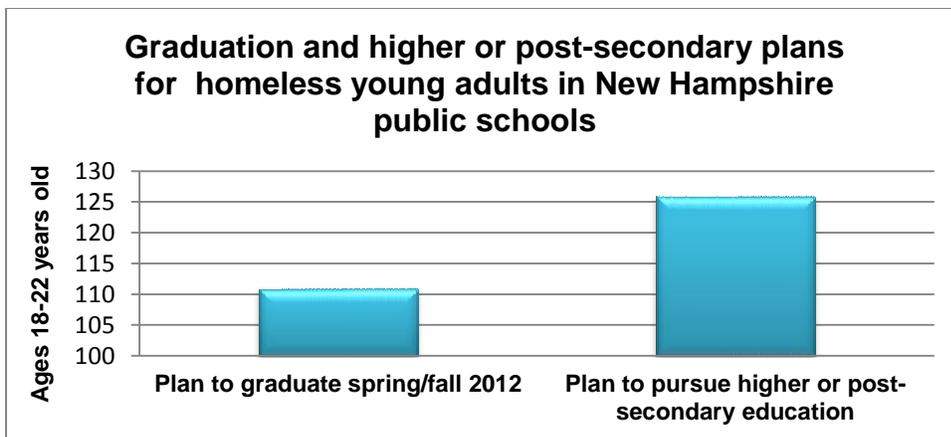


Figure 8: In New Hampshire of the 143 identified homeless young adults (18-22 years old), 126 young adults plan to pursue higher or post-secondary education. Usually lacking connections and support from adults homeless young adults have no one who can guide them in the process of preparing for and gaining admission into college.

References:

National Center for Homeless Education. March, 2012. <<http://center.serve.org/nche/search.php>>.