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Report 1.5M children homeless

Written by Ayana Jones
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One in 50 children or 1.5 million in the United States are facing homelessness.

PCEH executive director Phyllis Ryan Jackson, left, and PCEH housing advocate Ruth Holland, right, hold a check from Impact100 Philadelphia. — HIROKO TANAKA/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



The startling statistic was a key finding in a new report, titled “America’s Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness.” Released by the National Center on Family Homelessness, the report provides a comprehensive snapshot of the plight of the nation’s homeless children and recommends strategies for changing their lives.

“We are witnessing the emergence of a third world in our backyard,” said Ellen Bassuk, president of the National Center on Family Homelessness, as she spoke during a forum that focused on addressing the crisis.

“This current crisis demands our immediate and steadfast commitment. It is unacceptable for any child in the United States to be homeless for even one night.”

The upsurge in homeless children is being driven by factors such as economic trauma, domestic violence and trauma.

According to the report, of the 1.5 million or one in 50 children who are homeless, approximately 650,000 children are under the age of six. The report also indicates that African-American and Native American children are disproportionately represented among homeless children.

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The report notes that homeless children are living in circumstances where health care and school attendance is erratic and they are exposed to violence and their relationship with family and caregivers is disrupted.

The report ranks states on the basis of four domains, including the extent of child homelessness, child well-being, risk for child homelessness and state policy and planning efforts. Pennsylvania came in at 14. According to the report, there are more than 43,000 children who are homeless in Pennsylvania and one out of 34 children don't know where their next meal is coming from.

Gloria Guard, president of the People's Emergency Center, says that report is the first comprehensive study that focuses on homeless children.

"What we have in this country and in this city is babies being born into shelters, spending their most critical years inside of a shelter. What this report has done is it has finally put a face on that," Guard said.

Guard said there are about 5,000 children homeless in Philadelphia over the course of year. They account for about 750 to 1,200 children who stay in the shelters at night.

"Of those kids, two out of three of them are under 5 years old," Guard said.

During the forum, national researchers, providers and city officials presented solutions to end child homelessness in Philadelphia.

Other presenters included Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell; Philadelphia Health Commissioner, Dr. Donald Schwartz; Anne Marie Collins, executive director of the Drueding Center/Project Rainbow; and Al B. Quarles, regional director of the Philadelphia Homeless Initiative.

The National Center on Family Homelessness has rolled out a campaign to end child homelessness. The campaign is geared toward increasing public awareness about the issue, strengthening public and state policy to better address the needs of homeless children and improving program design and service delivery to meet the needs of homeless children and their families.

For information about the campaign, visit www.familyhomelessness.org.