



## the visible child

children • family • community

### Key Family Homelessness Facts<sup>2</sup>

Over 9,600 people are homeless on a given night in Minnesota.

Family homelessness increased by 19% between 2006 and 2009.

Nearly 4,500 children are homeless on any given night.

Half of Minnesota homeless children are 5 or younger—including nearly 1 in 10 who are under one year old.

One-third of homeless parents have themselves experienced homelessness as a child.

Half (54%) of homeless pre-schoolers had a major developmental delay (language, gross motor, fine motor, social); and delays in more than one area compared to other children.<sup>4</sup>

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### The Visible Child Advocacy Group

The following organizations came together with the goal of ending child homelessness by elevating the visibility of homeless children in public policy.

Affirmative Options  
Children's Defense Fund—Minnesota  
Family Housing Fund/  
Visible Child Initiative

Heading Home Minnesota  
Hearth Connection  
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota  
Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless  
Simpson Housing  
Twin Cities United Way

## The Visible Child Act: Improving the Well-Being of Homeless Children

Young children who have been homeless face dramatically reduced opportunities for healthy development. Toddlers living in homeless families begin to demonstrate significant developmental delays after 18 months of age, and the risk for poor social, emotional, and cognitive developmental outcomes increase as children progress from early childhood to school age.<sup>1</sup>

### Background: Minnesota's Homeless Young Children

- Half of Minnesota's children in shelters and temporary housing are under five or younger.<sup>2</sup>
- Homelessness and its resulting trauma impact a child throughout his or her lifespan.
- Homeless children enter kindergarten less prepared for success.

### Minnesota's future prosperity depends on all of our children growing up healthy

Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.<sup>3</sup>

### Proposed Legislation: 2012

The Visible Child Act seeks to improve the well-being of homeless children and formerly homeless children by:

- Requiring school districts to actively seek out children who are homeless or formerly homeless to determine if they are eligible for early intervention services. Ensure that service providers receive training about the special needs of and issues affecting homeless infants and toddlers.
- Directing the Interagency Coordination on Homelessness to develop a strategic plan for improving the well-being of homeless children.
- Requiring the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, in collaboration with the Commissioners of DHS, Housing, Health, and Education, to submit an annual report (providing data and identifying best practices and gaps) to the legislature on homeless children and child well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia Coll, Buckner, Brooks, Weinreb, and Bassuk. *The Developmental Status and Adaptive Behavior of Low-Income Housed Infants and Toddlers*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Wilder Research, *Homelessness in Minnesota 2009*, October 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children*, 2007. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

<sup>4</sup> *Child Trends*, February 2012.

For more information on the Visible Child Act, please contact Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Legislative Affairs and Advocacy Director, Children's Defense Fund—Minnesota at [fitzsimmons@cdf-mn.org](mailto:fitzsimmons@cdf-mn.org) or 651-855-1178. To learn more about the needs of homeless children, please contact Sharon Henry-Blythe, Visible Child Initiative Director, Family Housing Fund at [sharon@fhfund.org](mailto:sharon@fhfund.org) or 612-375-9644, ext. 19 or visit [www.visiblechild.org](http://www.visiblechild.org).