

# Child Homelessness in Weber County

## 2020 Report

Produced by Crossroads Urban Center  
[www.crossroadsurbancenter.org](http://www.crossroadsurbancenter.org)  
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## **Introduction and Summary**

This has been a challenging year for homeless children in Weber County. The COVID-19 pandemic has made many homeless families afraid to go to a shelter for fear of being infected with a potentially life threatening illness. This fear of getting help has led to many people staying in less safe situations and contributed to a surge in domestic violence.

The pandemic has also disrupted two school years. This disruption has particularly impacted homeless schoolchildren, and others, who lack the consistent internet access necessary to participate in remote learning. Given the fact that homeless children are already more likely to be held back for one or more grades, there will be a need for sustained efforts to help children who are homeless this year to catch up on what they have missed if they are going to graduate from high school.

This report is not focused on how to respond to COVID-19 because the pandemic is an unprecedented situation and so there is not data from similar events to analyze. Instead, we are focusing on ways the homeless services system in Weber County can better stabilize homeless families with children. The long term needs of children who are homeless this year will be significantly harder to mitigate in future years if their housing situation is not stabilized.

### **Key findings in this report:**

- Hundreds of families with children become homeless in Weber County each year.
- Many of the children who become homeless in Weber County are very young, aged six or younger.
- Some families with children have extended or repeated experiences of homelessness.
- Many homeless children have been exposed to domestic violence and other forms of trauma.
- Homelessness impacts children's performance in school.

### **Recommendations for improving outcomes for children experiencing homelessness in Weber County:**

- Produce 30 units of supportive housing for families with extended or repeated experiences of homelessness.
- Capitalize on full Medicaid expansion by connecting all parents and children who become homeless with medical services they need to move forward with their lives.
- Reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing pandemic rental assistance programs and being vigilant about identifying and assisting children who have fallen behind in school due to homelessness.

## Hundreds of families with children become homeless in Weber County each year

- 653 people from families with children received homeless services in Weber County in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

**1,568 people**  
in families with children  
received homeless services  
in Weber County  
during the years  
2017-2019.

- 1,568 people from families with children received homeless services in Weber County during the three-year period of 2017-2019.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has made some people afraid to use homeless services but, during the first six months of 2020, there were 237 people from families with children who received homeless services in Weber County.

- Research shows that homelessness is a traumatic event that can have long-term impacts in children's mental and physical health.<sup>2</sup>

## Many children who become homeless in Weber County are very young, aged six or younger

- 197 young children aged six years old or younger received homeless services in Weber County during 2019. During the first six months of 2020, 77 children aged six and under received homeless services.

- 461 young children aged six and younger received homeless services in Weber County during the three-year period of 2017-2019.

- Research shows that the most common time for a person in the United States to be homeless is during the first year of life and that the second most common time is between the ages one and six.<sup>3</sup>

- Research also shows that many of the negative impacts of homelessness are particularly severe for infants and young children.<sup>4</sup>

*The most common time for a person in the United States to be homeless is during the first year of life.*

## **Some families with children have extended or repeated experiences of homelessness**

- 15 people in families with children in Weber County were homeless for six months or longer during 2019.
- 54 people in families with children who were homeless in Weber County during 2019 had been homeless four or more times during the past three years.
- Research shows that the negative impacts of homelessness on infants and children are likely to become worse as the length of time they are homeless increases.<sup>5</sup> Children are resilient and can recover from trauma and crisis, but they cannot heal while the crisis is ongoing.

## **Many homeless children in Weber County have been exposed to domestic violence and other forms of trauma**

- On the night of the 2020 Point in Time Count of all homeless people in Weber and Morgan Counties, 23 children were living in a shelter for survivors of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>
- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, police departments across the state and country have seen increased reports of domestic violence.<sup>7</sup>
- Research shows that homelessness itself is traumatic for children and that it exposes children to other forms of trauma.<sup>8</sup>

## **Homelessness impacts children's performance in school**

- Schools use a more comprehensive definition of homelessness, and so they identify 277 percent more homeless children than those served by Utah's homeless service providers. Federal officials estimate there were an average of 13,838 homeless school children in Utah during the years 2017 and 2018<sup>9</sup>. During those same years, an average of 4,998 Utah children aged zero to seventeen received the homeless services tracked by the state.
- Research shows that children with an experience of homelessness are up to nine times more likely to be held back in school for at least one grade.<sup>10</sup> Disruption of two school years by the COVID-19 pandemic increase the chances children who are homeless this year will not graduate from high school.

## **Recommendations for improving outcomes for children experiencing homelessness in Weber County**

**•Produce 30 units of supportive housing for families with extended or repeated experiences of homelessness.** Parents and children with extensive histories of homelessness need a stable, child-centered, place to recover from the trauma they have endured. Weber County can spearhead efforts to produce housing that is safe for children with on-site, age-appropriate physical and mental health services, childcare services and a strong connection to local schools.

**•Capitalize on full Medicaid expansion by connecting all parents and children who become homeless with medical services they need to move forward with their lives.** Our state opting into full Medicaid expansion at the beginning of this year provides an opportunity to connect families that have become homeless with ongoing services that can help them avoid future instances of homelessness. Weber County should set the goal of enrolling all parents and children who become homeless in Medicaid, or another healthcare plan, and facilitating an initial meeting with a social worker from a family's managed care network who can refer parents and children to needed services. County leaders should also work with state officials to identify Medicaid services that would reduce child homelessness that are currently not included in Utah's Medicaid state plan that should be added to it.

**•Reduce impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing pandemic rental assistance programs and being vigilant about identifying and assisting children who have fallen behind in school due to homeless.** Remote learning is impossible for students who do not have wi-fi or a computer/tablet to participate. Not all parents have the technical expertise to help their children access remote learning. We need to identify children who are falling behind and make plans to help them catch up.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all state data in this report was obtained from the Utah Homelessness Dashboard that is hosted on the Utah Department of Workforce Services website.

<sup>2</sup> "Caring for the Health and Wellness of Children Experiencing Homelessness" National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness.

<sup>3</sup> "Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness" U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Education, October 31, 2016

<sup>4</sup> "Infants Exposed To Homelessness: Health, Health Care Use, And Health Spending From Birth To Age Six" Health Affairs, May, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> "Timing and Duration of Pre- and Postnatal Homelessness and the Health of Young Children" Pediatrics, October, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> State of Utah Annual Report on HOMELESSNESS 2020, Utah's Department of Workforce Services, Division of Housing and Community Development.

<sup>7</sup> "Uptick in Utah domestic violence cases tests a system stretched by the coronavirus" Deseret News, April 30, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> "Homelessness & Adverse Childhood Experiences: The health and behavioral health consequences of childhood trauma" National Health Care for the Homeless Council, February, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> "Federal Data Summary School Years 2015-16 Through 2017-18" National Center For Homeless Education, January 2020.

<sup>10</sup> "Ending Family Homelessness, Improving Outcomes for Children" U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016.