



Quick Facts About Family Homelessness

Homelessness adversely affects individuals and families, but leaves a particular mark on children.

The County of Orange's 2019 Point in Time Count found that 466 families with a total of 966 children are currently experiencing homelessness – meaning they slept last night either in a shelter or a place unfit for human habitat.

The true number of homeless families is likely even greater than this data reveals. Many homeless families, fearing their children will be taken from them and placed into the child welfare system, closely guard their privacy.

The negative impacts from homelessness on children's mental and physical health, as well as their developmental status and academic achievement, are well-documented. There is strong evidence that this kind of toxic-stress exposure at a young age undermines health, brain development and long-term functioning.

The silver lining is that children are remarkably resilient – and if we come together and take bold action to change their situations, hope will not be lost for our county's homeless children. The traumatic effects of homelessness can be countered by connecting families to needed support services and permanent housing, bolstering the child's developmental trajectory.

Why You Should Care

- Living on the streets is traumatic. Studies have shown that childhood trauma affects the way neural pathways form or don't form. If not addressed quickly and comprehensively, the long-term effects can be devastating on the child's health, development and ability to succeed.
- Research indicates that children experiencing homelessness have higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems, increased risk of serious health issues, low academic performance and high numbers of missed school days, poor nutrition and limited access to physical activity, and for infants, lower birth weights and lack of essential immunizations.
- Without prevention, intervention and connection to stable and supportive housing, child homelessness turns into a costly long-term problem as these children grow into adults and all too often end up in the criminal justice system and social services programs.

First 5 Orange County Position Statement

Families need stable housing for their young children to thrive. First 5 Orange County is committed to reducing the number of young children experiencing homelessness and increasing the percentage of families that find permanent housing.

For more than a decade, First 5 Orange County has invested more than \$30 million into Homeless Prevention Programs that help families keep or find a safe and stable home environment. These programs fund prevention of homelessness, development of transitional and emergency shelters, access to needed support services including basic needs such as food and clothing, staff to help families navigate the shelter system, and system-wide evaluation work to strengthen and improve the family shelter network.

Action Steps

Our action steps are aimed first at preventing family homelessness, reducing the length of stay in shelters for families who are homeless, and improving and expanding the system of homeless prevention in Orange County.

We are working to achieve this by:

- Investing in Homeless Diversion Programs that use short-term intervention and personalized case management to help families at high risk of homelessness avoid entering the shelter system all together.
- Developing a Housing Navigation Program with dedicated Housing Navigators to help identify permanent supportive housing options available for homeless families, including working with case managers and prospective property owners to get families into permanent housing faster and more efficiently.
- Funding Orange County's Family Shelter Network and Family Response System evaluation, in partnership with HomeAid Orange County, to strengthen the effectiveness of the family shelter system and improve the quality, consistency and program alignment among all Orange County shelters to ensure shelter beds don't go unused.
- Continuing to provide financial support to homeless providers to support the creation of additional transitional, interim and emergency bed nights and providing basic needs for pregnant women and families with children ages 0-5.