

Part 5: Connecting the Dots

This is Part 5 in a five-part integrated data report exploring the connections and gaps in services used by children and youth currently or previously experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. Part 5 synthesizes information from the previous report components and provides analysis on what this information can mean for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. For more background on the integrated data report, read Part 1.

Research indicates that there are immediate, negative impacts for children and youth who experience homelessness including family separation, poor physical and mental health outcomes and lower social-emotional and academic well-being. Children who experience homelessness are more likely to miss school, score lower in math and reading tests, and are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school. In addition, there are negative long-term effects for children, impacting mental and emotional health, employability, and later housing sustainability.

By using integrated data, this report describes child and youth homelessness as well as service utilization patterns across systems that can support a household immediately before, during, or after a housing crisis. Understanding the how services are used, or not, can help communities identify gaps and opportunities for coordination and collaboration across multiple sectors.

Linking data from the Homeless Services Information System (HMIS) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), there were 6,558 total children and youth experiencing housing instability, homelessness, or were recently homeless in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the 2016-2017 academic year.

While students experiencing homelessness are eligible for educational services through the McKinney-Vento Act, 41% (or 241 CMS students) staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing in 2016-2017 were not connected to those services. This finding was slightly larger than the gap identified (38%) in 2014-2015. As a result of the 2014-2015 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Family Homelessness Snapshot, CMS placed an additional social worker at Salvation Army Center of Hope. This change was implemented in 2017; therefore, any improvements due to this change would not be reflected in the data used for this report.

In addition, the integrated data report underscores the importance of safety net services for households experiencing housing instability and homelessness. During the 2016-2017 academic year, 73% (or 4,800) children and youth receiving services from an agency in HMIS or who were identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento services in CMS also accessed food and nutrition services from Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services.

To effectively address child and youth homelessness as well as reduce its negative impact requires that communities link housing solutions with other service sectors, including education and health and human services. Charlotte-Mecklenburg can use this integrated data report to identify additional steps to support families through a housing crisis by leveraging existing resources. For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg can focus efforts on closing the gap in service utilization for families at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. This can facilitate access to resources to support educational attainment as well as housing stability. Using data to align resources and coordinate efforts can strengthen complementary systems and sectors, which can have a positive impact on all families.

Definitions

Children and youth experiencing homelessness can be classified as unaccompanied or as part of a family. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines children and youth experiencing homelessness in the following groups:

- **Family (households with adult(s) and children)**- A household that has at least one adult (age 18 or older) and one child under the age of 18.
- **Child Only Household**- A household in which all member(s) under the age of 18.
- **Unaccompanied youth**- An individual who is not part of a family during their episode of homelessness and is between the ages of 18 and 24.
- **Parenting Youth**- an individual (under age 25) who identifies as the parent or legal guardian of one or more children who are present with or sleeping in the same place as that youth parent.
- **McKinney-Vento Student**- a student identified by CMS as eligible for McKinney-Vento services. To be eligible, a student must be experiencing homelessness. Under the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless, this includes students who are literally homeless (sleeping unsheltered or in a shelter) or unstably housed (doubled up with friends or in a hotel).

For more definitions, see: [\[https://mecklenburghousingdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Charlotte-Mecklenburg-Housing-Homelessness-Dashboard-Definitions.pdf\]](https://mecklenburghousingdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Charlotte-Mecklenburg-Housing-Homelessness-Dashboard-Definitions.pdf)

About the Data

The Institute for Social Capital (ISC) is a comprehensive set of administrative data collected from governmental and nonprofit agencies in the region. Data is collected at the individual level and then linked and de-identified to create an integrated data set. By combining data across agencies, the ISC gains a fuller picture of how individuals utilize the social service sector.

Data used for this project comes from the Homeless Management Information System, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services. These data sources have sharing agreements with the ISC and provide data on relevant services for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

Methodology

Children (ages 0-17) and youth (ages 18-24) identified as receiving services from an HMIS agency and/or identified as McKinney-Vento by CMS between August 1, 2016 and July 31, 2017 were matched at the individual level with selective supportive services utilized during the same time frame. These services are Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services Food and Nutrition Services, Foster Care, and Children's Protective Services Investigations of Abuse and Neglect. The overlap between homeless status and services used was examined by age group and race/ethnicity. A secondary analysis matched children and youth identified as literally homeless (in Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing) between August 1, 2016 and July 31, 2017 at the individual level with McKinney-Vento services utilized during the same time frame.