

## Homelessness – Building Strong Families Conference 2006 – L. Fisher

### What is homelessness?

*Stewart B. McKinney Act:* Someone who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or an individual whose primary residence is one of the following:

- Temporary place for people about to be institutionalized
- Any place not meant for regular sleeping accommodation by humans
- A supervised temporary shelter

The definition also applies to people who are at risk of homelessness because they are being evicted or discharged from institutions with no place to go and people who are doubled up with relatives or friends.

*National Alliance to End Homelessness:* Someone who lives on the street, or in an abandoned building, or in any place not meant for human habitation – or someone who has no regular place to live.

### How many people are homeless?

- ✓ There is a general trend that there are more people who are homeless than services that can accommodate them. It seems that the number of people who are homeless is growing.
- ✓ Best estimates are that 3.5 million people (1.35 million are children or about 39% of all homeless people are children) which is about 1% of the population.
- ✓ The numbers of families who are homeless has been increasing over the past decade (40% of the entire homeless population) and even more so in rural areas.

### Why are they homeless?

- ✓ Poverty is going up and housing is getting less affordable.
- ✓ Federal definition of affordable housing: paying no more than 30% of household income for housing costs.
- ✓ Other factors: lack of affordable health care, domestic violence, mental illness, addiction disorders

### What about rural homelessness?

- ✓ There is often no or limited shelters in rural areas.
- ✓ Definitions can sometimes leave out people in rural areas b/c there are no shelters and it is difficult to assess numbers in rural areas.
- ✓ Families, especially single mothers and children, are the largest group of people who are homeless in rural areas (Vissing, 1996).
- ✓ People who are homeless in rural areas are more likely to be white, female, married, currently working, homeless for the first time, and homeless for a shorter period of time (Fisher, 2005).

#### Sources:

Fisher, M. (2005). Why is US poverty higher in nonmetropolitan than metropolitan areas? Rural Poverty Research Center. Available from [www.rprconline.org](http://www.rprconline.org)

National Alliance to End Homelessness – <http://www.endhomelessness.org>

National Coalition for the Homeless – <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

Vissing, Y. (1996). *Out of sight, out of mind: Homeless children and families in small-town America*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.