

HOUSING INSTABILITY



APS reports 224 homeless students in 2017-18.

CONTEXT

Arlington County uses a “Housing First” approach in tackling homelessness and housing instability. This strategy first provides people with housing as quickly as possible and then provides needed services. Starting in 2015, Arlington launched a Centralized Access System (CAS) to improve access to services. The first step is to help maintain current housing when possible, or to identify natural supports, such as family members or friends, who can provide assistance. Other interventions include helping with deposits or rent when a family is facing a crisis, or assisting individuals with disabilities or those who are chronically homeless, to find specialized housing solutions.

Understanding the issues of families and youth facing homelessness is difficult, particularly for youth, as they often do not present in ways similar to Arlington’s adult homeless population. Youth may bounce from couch to couch, or live in overcrowded circumstances. Due in part to limitations in measuring and understanding this population, Arlington convened a Task Force on Youth Homelessness in 2015. This group focuses on better ways to quantify the number of homeless youth and identify their needs, as well as building capacity and identifying solutions to youth homelessness.

Arlington Public Schools (APS) provides services to homeless youth, including ensuring that they are able to stay at the school they currently attend. Research has shown that housing instability can negatively impact a child’s academic and social well-being. Youth experiencing instability, for example, may have lower vocabulary skills, behavioral problems, and higher high school dropout rates.¹

The homeless students that APS works with are defined by McKinny-Vento as children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Additional information can be found online: <https://www.apsva.us/student-services/homeless/definition/>.

FINDINGS

The Homeless Youth Task Force is working to understand the scope of youth homelessness in Arlington. The indicators in the table below provide a snapshot of families and youth who were known to have experienced housing instability. As the APS student population has increased, the number of youth who are homeless has remained an average of 210 for the past 5 years. However, the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in 2018 was 22 and 25 in 2017, nearly double the number in 2011-2014, which was an average of 10 youth each year. Affordable housing is an important factor in this discussion and is further discussed on page 18 of the Community Report.

MEASURES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY	
High School students self-reported housing instability in 2017 ²	1.5% (~102 students)
2017-2018 APS count of homeless youth ³	224 homeless students
Youth age 18-25 served in emergency shelters (FY18) ³	15 individuals
Families with children under age 25 served in family shelters (FY18) ⁴	12 families
Families served through Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supporting Housing options (FY18) ⁴	104 families (322 persons) housed