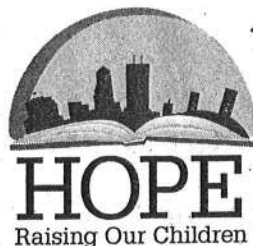


A safe, welcome place is needed

In 2009, more than 70,500 children and young adults in Florida found themselves out on the streets.

That won't improve without more coordination and commitment from all sectors of the state.



IN FLORIDA

- During the 2005-2006 school year, there were 49,886 homeless children and youth in Florida
- By 2009, that number soared to 70,500
- The state's 11.5 percent unemployment rate, coupled with high foreclosure rates are putting more families at risk of becoming homeless

NATIONALLY

- 60 percent of homeless children are school-aged and 40 percent are younger than 6
- Homeless children suffer from high rates of chronic and acute illnesses, go hungry twice as often and have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems.

Source: "America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness," The National Center on Family Homelessness.

Recently, a campaign made up of homeless service providers, advocates, community leaders and other officials from around the state released the Florida Plan to End Child Homelessness.

The group called for coordination between the state's political, social service, advocacy, nonprofit, business and philanthropic sectors.

The plan also lists specific actions, such as finding ways to prevent children and youth who age out of foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 from becoming homeless.

In Jacksonville, that approach is already working at Touchstone Village, a Youth Crisis Center program that provides apartments to youths as they finish school, get work and master independent living skills.

It will take more programs like that to make a dent in youth homelessness.

But with Florida ranking 43 out of the 50 states for its numbers of homeless children, such a campaign is needed.

Because children should only have to focus on school, and not worry about whether they'll have a place to do their homework afterward.

For more information: www.fchonline.org or www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org.