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Facts About Nebraska's Children

Last year, CEDARS....

- provided 382 children and youth with emergency shelter services
- served nearly 200 children through foster care services (including some who received both emergency shelter and foster care services.)
- Connected with 359 homeless and runaway youth through Street Outreach Services

This project will serve approximately 400 children and youth annually, ages birth to 18, including those who have been removed from home and family of origin due to abuse or neglect, unaccompanied homeless and runaway youth, and children privately referred in an effort to prevent loss of parental custody.

Abused and Neglected Children in Lincoln and in Nebraska

Nebraska – and Lancaster County in particular – has a recognized need to improve services to abused, neglected and homeless children.

In 2006, Lancaster County had the highest substantiated rate of abuse/neglect of all counties in Nebraska, 17.8 per 10,000, or a total of 1,343 cases.

Each day:

- An average of 13 Nebraska children and youth are removed from their family of origin, primarily due to abuse or neglect.¹
- Nebraska's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline receives about 77 calls.

Each week:

- An average of 59 cases of child abuse and neglect are substantiated by Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services involving about 87 children.²

¹ Nebraska Foster Care Review Board 2006 Annual Report, "Working Together to Improve the Lives of Nebraska's Children in Foster Care." by Carolyn K. Stitt, MSW, page 39.

² KidsCount In Nebraska 2007 Report, created by Voices for Children in Nebraska, page 12.



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- The Nebraska Department of HHS establishes 243 new investigations of child abuse and neglect.

Each year:

- There were 24,173 reports of child abuse through the Department of Health and Human Services' Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline in 2006.
- 12,629 of these calls were investigated, resulting in 3,065 substantiations involving 4,501 children.
- 4,768 children were removed from their homes/families of origin in 2006.³

In Nebraska,

- Physical neglect is the most frequently-cited cause of a child's removal from home and family of origin, followed by parental substance abuse. (Each case of removal can cite multiple causes.)
- The number of children living in poverty in Nebraska increased by 50 percent between 2000 and 2005.⁴ Several studies have found that living in poverty is a predictor for involvement with the child welfare system.
- There are more children, per capita, living in out-of-home placements due to abuse or neglect than in any other state.

Child abuse has been called the number one public health crisis because of its potential for lasting and harmful repercussions. According to the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board's 2006 Annual Report, abused and neglected children:

- Are often in special education
- Have an increased likelihood of current and future drug and alcohol abuse
- Are more likely to have mental health needs
- Are more likely to be homeless
- Are more likely to enter the prison population, and
- May perpetuate the cycle of abuse as adults when they have children of their own.⁵

3 Nebraska Foster Care Review Board 2006 Annual Report, page 39.

4 KidsCount In Nebraska, "Facts about Children in 2007," page 1.

5 Nebraska Foster Care Review Board 2006 Annual Report, page 5.



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Living in the Child Welfare System

Beyond a child's direct experiences of abuse or neglect, *the experience of living in the child welfare system can have negative repercussions.*

In Nebraska, 55% of children in foster care have moved to a new home at least four times; 36% of children have experienced six or more placements in their lifetimes.⁶

Several studies have indicated that instability in placements and multiple broken attachments to caregivers:

- Hinders brain development in preschool-age children.
- Predicts high mental health service use.
- Leads to exaggerated behavior problems, regressive behaviors, mood swings, learning difficulties, sleep disruptions and often causes children to relive earlier trauma.

Thus, instability can become self-perpetuating, causing the behaviors that predict another unsuccessful placement.

Minority children and youth tend to be over-represented in Nebraska's child welfare system. Among children who have been removed from home, approximately 34 % are considered to be a racial or ethnic minority, while only 15 % of Nebraska's child population is considered minority.⁷ Among those served by CEDARS, approximately 36 % are from minority groups.

Homeless and Runaway Youth

This project also will serve youth who are runaway or homeless. Studies suggest that:

- Nearly half (46 %) of homeless or runaway youth have been physically abused,
- Nearly 20 % have been sexually abused by a family or household member.
- Children who are in foster care are more likely to become homeless, and at an earlier age and for a longer period of time.

6 Nebraska Foster Care Review Board 2006 Annual Report, page 50.

7 "KidsCount in Nebraska 2007 Report," page 50.



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- Incidents of depression, severe anxiety, poor health, low self-esteem, conduct disorder and post-traumatic stress syndrome are very prevalent among homeless teens.⁸

CEDARS' Street Outreach program seeks to connect homeless and run-away youth in Lincoln to shelter and supportive services. Last year, Street Outreach served 359 youth.

How will this project help?

This project will:

- Allow CEDARS to update its **orphanage-style shelter** with a facility that will accommodate today's accepted best-practice methods for serving children who have been abused, neglected or homeless.
- **Improve the resources available** to care for children who have been removed from unsafe environments.
- **Increase CEDARS' emergency shelter capacity** from 16 (current capacity) to 27.
- Enable a new and innovative method of case management designed to **reduce the negative effects of children living in the child welfare system** by improving stability in case management and family placements.
- Maximize the elements of child welfare services that have been shown to **increase a child's likelihood of finding a permanent home and family**, including (1) affective and accurate assessment of each child; (2) on-site and more frequent family visitation with families of origin, other family members, and prospective foster families; (3) and a stable case management team of CEDARS' child-caring professionals throughout their time with any CEDARS program.

⁸ "Homeless Youth," National Coalition for the Homeless, Fact Sheet #13, August 2007.

