

Homelessness increasing rapidly in Colorado

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The state of Colorado has been experiencing a rapid rise in homelessness. The homeless rate in the city of Pueblo has ballooned by 75 percent since January 2014. Before January 2014, there were 1,720 homeless people; as of August 21, more than 3,000 people are reported homeless.

The massive influx has caused a non-profit group named Posada to seek assistance from the City Council, suggesting that free bus tickets be given out to send newly arrived homeless people to any destination they desire. Anne Stattelmann, executive director of Posada, told a local news organization about the enormous increase in new homeless. “We see about 100 folks per day,” she said. “Generally we’ve been seeing six new families a day.”

Individuals and families alike have been moving into the city because it has the second-lowest cost of living in the state, and workers have been led to believe there will be jobs in Pueblo in the newly legalized marijuana industry.

However, according to Stattelmann, there is not any housing available for the people coming to live there. “They come for opportunity,” she said. “They don’t just come for a handout but they don’t find it here and they’re stuck. All of the transitional housing has waiting lists. Essentially we’re full!”

The Pueblo Rescue Mission, for instance, has 16 beds for females and 26 for males, but has to add an additional 14 cots to house people. The shelter has been full every night for almost two years.

Homelessness has actually been increasing statewide as people move in Colorado looking for jobs. Many homeless shelters have reported an increase in younger adults.

Tom Lehrs, executive director of St. Francis Center, a daytime homeless shelter, told the *Denver Post* that his research has shown that a majority of homeless people have come to Denver to find work, adding, “The

economy is not supporting them. There are not enough jobs.”

The number of homeless children has also skyrocketed. There are about 23,000 homeless children in Colorado who attend schools, in addition to homeless preschoolers and babies. This number has tripled in a decade, with most homeless living in campgrounds, shelters or cheap motels, or doubling up with another family.

Barbara Duffield, policy director at the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth in Washington, D.C. told the *Denver Post*, “It’s a much more hidden and invisible population, and it’s challenging for schools to identify them. The general public may not even see them or consider them to be homeless because they are not on a street corner like a single homeless adult.” Housing experts have said that the surge is in part to the lack of affordable housing in the state.

The number of homeless children nationwide has increased by 72 percent since 2006, while federal funds for homeless students’ services and transportation have stayed the same. Colorado has no state funding to help homeless children, relying solely on federal funds. As a result, per-student funding has plummeted from \$64 per year in 2003 to \$28 last year.

These children may experience learning disabilities, fall behind in school, and have social and behavioral problems from having to frequently switch schools and forgo a stable environment. Some schools have refused to provide or pay for transportation costs for homeless students who have moved outside the school district, and some bluntly decline to enroll them because they fear that these students will bring down scores on the standardized tests the Obama administration has made mandatory, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty.

Lisa Curtis, an attorney for this watchdog group, said

it tries to push schools to spend more money on these children, because education is one avenue where it can break “the cycle of intergenerational homelessness.” “More recently,” she explained, “we are seeing that homelessness is becoming generational. That’s scary, and that’s tragic. And that shouldn’t happen in our country.”



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