



# NO PLACE TO GROW:

The Unsafe and Unstable Housing Conditions of Illinois  
Pregnant and Parenting Youth and Their Children

**Helene M. Marcy**  
CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH

JUNE 2003

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an attempt to determine the number of pregnant and parenting youth in need of alternative living arrangements throughout Illinois, the Center for Impact Research (CIR)—in collaboration with its working group members—conducted a statewide needs assessment to obtain more information about the housing needs of pregnant and parenting youth in Illinois. CIR developed and conducted a survey of organizations that provide services to pregnant and parenting youth throughout Illinois. CIR's findings demonstrate the urgent need for a statewide focus on providing alternative living arrangements for this population.

## **Findings**

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The survey asked organizations to estimate the numbers of pregnant and parenting youth in their caseloads who were in unsafe or unstable living situations during the three-month period from September 1, through November 30, 2002.

The organizations surveyed served a total of 665 pregnant youth (with no other children) aged 21 or younger and 2,238 parents (who may or may not also be pregnant) aged 21 or younger —**or a total of 2,903 pregnant or parenting youth**—during the three-month period.

### **Number of Youth in Unsafe/Unstable Living Conditions**

Service providers reported that there were 761 youth living in unsafe or unstable conditions, or **over 26%** of the pregnant and parenting youth that were served.

### **Number of Youth in Need of Alternative Living Arrangements**

Service providers reported that 466 (61%) of the 761 youth who were living in unsafe or unstable living situations were in need of alternative living arrangements, or **over 16%** of all pregnant and parenting youth served by these organizations.

### **Those in Need of Alternative Living Arrangements: Where Did They Live?**

Forty-six percent of the pregnant and parenting youth who were in need of alternative living arrangements were living with their family in a house or apartment. A significant number were also transient (at least 21%), with most of the transient youth staying at two or three addresses during the three-month period.

### **How Was Their Situation Unsafe/Unstable?**

Overcrowding seemed to be the biggest problem, with respondents reporting that 226 (48%) of the youth in need of alternative living arrangements were living in such situations. Unsafe or terrible physical conditions were also a major problem, with 133

(29%) of those needing alternative living arrangements living in those conditions. Respondents reported that 151 (28%) of the youth needing alternative living arrangements had a household member who abused drugs or alcohol. Sixteen percent were also in households in which there was a mental health problem in the family. Respondents noted that many of the youth's situations were unsafe or unstable in several respects at one time.

### **Where Were They Placed?**

Respondents reported that they had been able to place 24% of the youth in the home of a friend or relative, and some youth were placed in emergency shelters (shelters that can house homeless youth for less than 120 days) or transitional living programs (geared toward longer stays).

### **Obstacles to Placing Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Appropriate Housing**

Respondents reported that the most serious obstacles to placing pregnant and parenting youth in appropriate housing were the youth's lack of income, lack of affordable housing, lack of long-term supportive housing, limited availability or lack of transitional living programs, and the youth's lack of credit. Service providers reported that the limited availability or lack of transitional living programs was more of a problem for minors than for adults.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

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Although CIR's survey results represent an undercount of the actual number of pregnant and parenting youth in need of alternative living arrangements, they clearly establish the need for a statewide response to the issue. On May 14, 2003, CIR held a summit on the housing needs of pregnant and parenting youth in Illinois in order to discuss the findings and to develop potential recommendations.

Based on the survey findings and upon the input received from the many service providers and advocacy organizations that attended the summit, CIR's working group recommends the following:

1. The State of Illinois should increase the state budget line item for homeless youth and designate a portion of this funding for pregnant and parenting youth.
2. Governor Blagojevich should sign HB 0556 that would allow community-based organizations to provide more transitional living services to minors (those under 18).
3. The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) should target a portion of state and federal affordable housing dollars in Illinois towards housing for pregnant and parenting youth.

4. Advocacy and direct-service organizations should form a coalition that will address the housing needs of pregnant and parenting youth and their children.

This coalition should:

- a. form an action plan to coordinate advocacy around this issue;
  - b. direct a public education campaign to educate communities about the housing needs of pregnant and parenting youth;
  - c. advocate for increased funding and explore alternative public and private funding sources to provide housing for pregnant and parenting youth; and
  - d. work with state and local agencies and funders to establish a pilot program that provides housing for pregnant and parenting youth.
5. The Illinois Department of Human Services should work with this coalition to enhance and improve the “Help-Me-Grow” hotline in order to establish a comprehensive centralized referral system that can educate pregnant and parenting youth and youth service providers about available supportive services and housing programs.
  6. The Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services should work with the coalition to provide a mechanism for providing technical assistance to groups/organizations interested in establishing housing for pregnant and parenting youth.
  7. Members of the coalition should participate in the Youth Task Group of the Chicago Continuum of Care to ensure that a portion of funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are designated for pregnant and parenting youth, especially minors.
  8. The State of Illinois should provide funding for local communities so that they can determine the extent of the need in their area and determine appropriate courses of action.