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**HEADLINE:** Many kids here have no place to call home

# HOMELESS CHILDREN

# Many kids

## High homeless rates don't include toddlers

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Times Herald-Record

A record number of more than 2,000 children in Orange, Sullivan and Ulster County schools are homeless — an increase of 500 in just one year, according to state figures compiled from each school. These kids, from kindergartners barely out of diapers

to teens who can't afford basics like feminine hygiene products, are crammed into packed shelters, grimy motels and crumbling bungalows. They sleep on the bare mattresses and lumpy couches of friends and relatives. Some even crash in cars.

What's even more shocking about this increase that's "risen like a tower," says John Harper, director of Middletown's Emergency Housing, is that it doesn't include the littlest victims, preschoolers. They aren't counted by the homeless liaisons in each district.

"There could easily be twice that number with all the little ones," says Anne McKenna, supervisor

of case management for Emergency Housing, who sees babies born homeless.

No matter where they try to sleep, no matter what canned food or TV dinners they try to eat, whether they're from inner-city Newburgh or suburban Monroe, all of these children without permanent shelter share several disturbing characteristics.

Two-thirds of them spend much of their days worrying where their next meal will come from, according to a national study, "The Economic Crisis Hits Home: The Unfolding Increase in Child and Youth Homelessness." Not only do homeless kids get lower grades than their classmates, their chances of graduating are 50 percent less. Plus, they're twice as likely as children with

homes to suffer chronic health problems like asthma.

### Putting a face on it

These children — the victims of record high unemployment, the loss of their parents' homes and the lack of a financial safety net for things like apartment security deposits — aren't faceless statistics. They're kids who cry when they should be laughing, whose stomachs growl when they should be eating.

They're a 6-year-old girl in Orange County who wanted to invite her little friends to her motel room for a birthday party. But there wasn't any space in the room where she and her parents have lived for months, with her bed crammed next to theirs.

"So my little girl started sobbing," says the mother, who, like many family members of homeless children, is embarrassed to be named.

Homeless children include a Sullivan County girl who came "home" to her motel in tears because a boy at school — a second-grader — taunted her with the words many children now hear: "You don't have a home; you don't have a home."

Then there's the Middletown boy who had to stand on the street, a victim of eviction, while his possessions — a baseball glove, his bicycle, his school books — were piled on the side-