

End Homelessness!

WHAT is homelessness?

Someone who lives on the street, or in an abandoned building, or in any place not meant for human habitation—or someone who has no regular place to live—is often called homeless.

In the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the federal government defines as “homeless” someone who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence or an individual whose primary residence is one of the following:

- a temporary place for people about to be institutionalized;
- any place not meant for regular sleeping accommodation by humans; or
- a supervised temporary shelter.

This definition of homeless also extends to those people who are at serious risk of losing their housing because they are being evicted from a private housing unit or because they are being discharged

from institutions and have nowhere else to go. People who are doubled up with relatives or friends are also homeless.



What does “home” mean to you?

HOW big is the problem?

- **Every night in the United States, about 750,000 people experience homelessness.**

That’s more people than the entire population of our nation’s capital, Washington DC! In a year, between 2.5 and 3.5 million people experience homelessness for some period of time (days to months).

- **Over the course of a year, families with children make up about half of the homeless population.**

Nationally, a typical family without a home consists of a young unmarried mother with 2 or 3 small children. Many of these young women are fleeing domestic violence, and most lack the work skills needed to secure jobs to support their families.

Nevertheless, most families do not stay homeless for very long. About 80% of people exit the homeless service system quickly.

- **Nationally, there are about 150,000 chronically homeless people.**

It is estimated that many of the people who live on the streets are homeless for years, as opposed to days or months. Many of these people require medical and mental health services in addition to help finding a home.

Most people who lose their homes temporarily stay in shelters, motels and cars. Many others are overcrowded living with family or friends.

Prepared by:



National Alliance
to
End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness educates young people — ages 5 to 25 — about issues surrounding homelessness in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The project also distributes information and materials for educating young people about homelessness through their website at www.endhomelessness.org.

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The main thing that all homeless people need is a home. It is important to find appropriate, safe and permanent places to live for everyone.

Sources:
A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years, National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2000.

Out of Reach: The Gap Between Housing Costs and Income of Poor People in the United States, National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2000.

WHY are people homeless?

The following reasons are known as systemic, or underlying factors which cause homelessness:

There is not enough affordable housing. The federal definition of “affordable housing” is paying no more than 30% of a household’s income for housing costs. However, there are about 5.4 million families who pay more than half of their incomes for rent. In 1995, the number of low-income renters exceeded the number of low-cost housing units by 4.4 million – a trend that continues today. Consequently, fewer people can afford a place to live and homelessness has emerged as a major problem.

Many people’s incomes are too low

to pay for basic living expenses.

Work is one of the chief sources of income for people without homes. Increases in work wages and public benefits have not kept pace with increases in living expenses over the last several decades. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult for low-income people to afford housing.

There are many people who work **every day** of the week who do not make enough money to pay for rent and bills, let alone food, healthcare, work clothes, school supplies and other necessities. In Washington, DC, a minimum wage worker would have to work **92 hours each week** to afford a 1-bedroom apartment at 30% of his/her income. Think about this: there are only 168 hours in a

week! Put another way, a full-time worker would need to earn **\$14 an hour** in order to afford that apartment!

It is difficult for people to access the services that would allow them live independently. People with lower incomes often rely on overburdened public systems to get the services they need. Some people just need help earning money to pay rent, but others may require treatment for mental illnesses or substance abuse illnesses. Many people need child care so they can work or search for a job, or legal assistance to help them escape from domestic violence. A lot of people would also benefit from free adult education or job training programs.

SOLUTIONS to homelessness

- **People who do not have homes must be able to obtain housing.**

More affordable housing must be made available to low-income people.

- **People must have incomes adequate to meet their basic needs.**

Incomes must be increased through 1) living wages, 2) employment training & job development and 3) expanded public benefits.

The next time you see a homeless person out on the street, don't pass them by. Say hello, ask them how they're doing. —Mitch Snyder

- **Many people need help to overcome the problems which interfere with their independent living.**

Even if there were enough affordable housing and every job paid a living wage, many people would still need help to overcome their impairing personal challenges.



Housing is the key!

HOW can I help?

- **Young people can do a lot to help people who are without homes.**

There are hundreds of organizations and agencies in the United States that work every day to implement these solutions to homelessness and support people without homes in their daily lives. Many of these organizations rely on volunteers to

help provide quality services. Here are some examples of how you can help people with their basic, **daily** needs:

****Read on for ideas on how you can help end homelessness!****

- ◆ Decorate/fix up a homeless program.



Many places could use help with landscaping and renovation.

- ◆ Plan a holiday party for a shelter or child care center.
- ◆ Prepare or serve a meal at a soup kitchen.
- ◆ Organize a clothes/toiletries drive.
- ◆ Tutor an individual or teach a basic skills class.
- ◆ Set up a library at a shelter.

A CALL FOR ACTION!
 Here's what you can do today
 to help end homelessness!

True story!

A congregation in Mississippi organized a letter-writing campaign on behalf of affordable housing legislation. The administrative assistant of their US Congressman then called the pastor to tell him the office was "overwhelmed" by the concerns expressed by his congregants. The pastor was gratified, but also curious, so he asked how many letters were received. The answer: "four or five." Your 33-cent stamp goes a long way!

—from *54 Ways you Can Help the Homeless* by Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff



Letters, phone calls and personal visits are an **effective** means of influencing your elected officials: you **can** make a difference! Write to your mayor, city or county councilperson, state Representatives and Senators. Find their addresses and phone numbers in the government blue pages. The US Capitol's switchboard number is (202) 224-3121. Here is a sample outline:

Dear (public official):

- State your name and city you live in.
- Tell them you are disturbed that there are people without homes and you want to know what they are doing about this problem.
- Explain:
 - that you have been learning about homelessness
 - how you find this to be an important issue
 - where you have performed service projects—a soup kitchen, shelter, etc.
- Insert a fact or two for the person to ponder. (Are you aware that...? Did you know that...?) Ask what s/he thinks about this and how s/he plans to react to this fact.
- Ask the person to please write to you and tell you what s/he will be doing to change the situation.

An overview of some major federal programs that address homelessness:

Section 8/Public Housing: The Federal Government provides housing assistance to low-income families primarily through the Section 8 and public housing programs. The Section 8 program provides rental assistance for tenants who live in privately owned units, while public housing does the same for those living in units owned by the federal government. Tenants pay 30% of their income for housing, with the government making up the difference between that amount and the rent.

HUD Homeless Assistance Grants: Since the passage of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds programs specifically targeted to address homelessness. HUD currently provides funds for permanent & supportive housing, shelters, transitional housing and services.

Welfare Reform: On 8/22/96, President Clinton signed the new welfare bill. This bill has meant major changes for low-income people. Many former public assistance recipients have left the welfare rolls, but some studies suggest that half of those leaving find no legitimate employment. Only a limited supply of federal housing assistance is available, leaving many welfare recipients vulnerable to homelessness. As a result of welfare reform, the earning potential of low-income people may decrease faster than their affordable housing opportunities will increase.

Health Care for the Homeless: This is the only federally funded program specifically designed to meet the complex health care needs of people without homes. Health Care for the Homeless projects all over the country offer an integrated, community-based approach to make sure people without homes receive the health care services they need.

SOME ADDITIONAL TERMS TO RESEARCH:

Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

The Voting Rights of Homeless Citizens Act of 1997

PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) program

supportive housing

transitional housing

permanent housing



SNAPSHOTS: a closer look

THE WEB EFFECT

Often homelessness is not caused by one factor alone but results from a series of events. Sometimes homelessness is also caused by concurrent unbearable conditions or situations, referred to in this exercise as “sticky threads.” Therefore, many seemingly unrelated issues are actually interconnected: they weave a *web* from which escape can be difficult. The challenges can be overwhelming.

YOUR CHALLENGE: READ THROUGH ALL FOUR OF THESE SCENARIOS. *CHOOSE ONE* OF THEM AND IMMERSE YOURSELF IN IT: THIS IS YOUR REALITY. **RESEARCH** SOME IMMEDIATE OPTIONS YOU COULD PURSUE, DEPENDING ON YOUR SITUATION. **CALL** THE RESOURCES YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED AND FIND OUT HOW TO FOLLOW THROUGH. **HOW DO YOU FEEL? IS IT EASY? FRUSTRATING? FRIGHTENING?**

NOTE: There are no “correct” answers...only possibilities.

PROFILE

THE STICKY THREADS

VETERANS: I’m a Vietnam vet. I’ve tried to put it all behind me, but sometimes I just break down. I’ve been fired from jobs several times. I wish there was someone I could turn to. The friend I was staying with recently got back together with his wife, so I can’t sleep there anymore. I have nowhere to stay and no one will hire me because of my history. I’ve only got about \$200 in savings.

YOU NEED THE FOLLOWING:

- A place to stay (at least temporarily)
- Mental health counseling
- A job of some sort

Use these lines to jot down names and phone numbers of agencies or organizations your research yields.

- ◆ PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)
- ◆ Inaccessibility of veteran services
- ◆ Lack of awareness of veteran services
- ◆ Employment
- ◆
- ◆

WOMEN WITH CHILDREN (FAMILIES):

I just loaded everything in my car and drove 600 miles to escape from my abusive ex-boyfriend. I’m pregnant with our 2nd child and my doctor instructed me to work no more than 4 hours a day because I’ve been having some health problems. My son and I have been sleeping in the car for 2 weeks because the shelters are full, and no one will hire me part-time because I don’t have daycare for my 3-year old.

YOU NEED THE FOLLOWING:

- A place to stay for you and your son
- Domestic abuse counseling
- A medical checkup
- Daycare for your son
- Job training (paid)

- ◆ Domestic violence
- ◆ Health care
- ◆ Economic instability



SNAPSHOTS: a closer look continued

PROFILE

THE STICKY THREADS

RUNAWAY YOUTH: I'm 14 years old. I ran away from home 4 months ago to get away from Dave, my stepdad. He used to hit me and he always yells. The first time I left, the social worker brought me back because Dave promised that things would change. The threats and beatings only got worse after that because Dave said he'd show me who's boss since I thought I was so tough. So I bought a bus ticket—they can't bring me back if they can't find me. It's hard being on the street, especially because I'm a minor, so they won't let me into the shelter. I've got pretty much nothing. I try to stay out of trouble, but I'm running out of cash, and my friends I met here say the easiest way to make money is to sell drugs—or myself.

- ◆ Child abuse by family member (sexual, physical, psychological)
- ◆ Delinquency
- ◆ Turning to prostitution (to support self)
- ◆
- ◆

YOU NEED THE FOLLOWING:

- A safe, stable place to sleep
- Legal counseling (for minors)
- Abuse counseling
- Education

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS: I suffer from major depression. My insurance doesn't cover mental health services, and I can't afford the counseling and medication I need. I was a bus driver for 12 years until I got fired last month because I missed so much work. Often it's just too hard to get out of bed, much less leave the house. My rent is a month overdue, so my landlord is angry. My only family is my ex-wife and kids in Florida, but I can't go to them for help. It's totally hopeless.

- ◆ High cost of prescription drugs and therapy
- ◆ Lack of proper follow-up after mental health treatments
- ◆ Employment
- ◆
- ◆

YOU NEED THE FOLLOWING:

- Counseling
- Medication
- (Mental) health insurance
- A job (income)
- A support system

Reference List for High School

National Alliance to
End Homelessness
1518 K St, NW Suite 206
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 638-1526
(202) 638-4664 fax

Age appropriate books, videos, teaching guides, websites and songs about homelessness

Books

- ◆ Baumohl, Jim. *Homeless in America*. Oryx Press, 1996.
- ◆ Kozol, Jonathan. *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*. Fawcett Books, 1989.
- ◆ National Alliance to End Homelessness, ed. *The Way Home: Ending Homelessness in America*. Henry N. Abrams, 1999.
- ◆ Pugh, Deborah and Jeanie Tietjen. *I Have Arrived Before My Words: Autobiographical Writings of Homeless Women*. Charles River Press, 1997.
- ◆ Roleff, Tamara L., ed. *The Homeless: Opposing Viewpoints*. Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1996.
- ◆ Stringer, Lee. *Grand Central Winter*. Washington Square Press, 1999.

Videos

- ◆ "Even You" - Project Act
www.projectact.com or (216) 574-8203
- ◆ "Bringing Justice Home" - Alliance for Justice, (202) 822-6070

Teaching Guides

- ◆ *Homeless Resource Guide K-12*:
www.wmpenn.edu/PennWeb/LTP/Reference/Teach/ResGuideK-12.html
- ◆ *Kidstart: Kids Can Care!* Largo, FL: Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Service, 1989.
- ◆ *Learning About Homeless Children, Youth and Families*. Seattle, WA: Center for Creative Education, 1995.
- ◆ *Unsheltered Lives*. Montpelier, VT: Department of Education, 1991.

Websites

- ◆ www.endhomelessness.org
National Alliance to End Homelessness
- ◆ www.urban.org
Urban Institute
- ◆ www.hud.gov
US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development
- ◆ www.dhhs.gov
US Dept. of Health and Human Services
- ◆ <http://nch.ari.net>
National Coalition for the Homeless
- ◆ www.nlchp.org
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
- ◆ www.prainc.com/nrc/biblio.htm
National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness
- ◆ csf.Colorado.edu/homeless/index.html
Interesting links
- ◆ www.earthsystems.org/ways/
54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless
- ◆ www.homeless.org
Resources for the homeless population
- ◆ www.speakeasy.org/nasna
North American Street Newspaper Association



Songs

- ◆ "Mr. Wendal" by Arrested Development (from *3 Years, 5 Months, and 2 Days in the Life of...*)
- ◆ "Another Day" by Phil Collins (from *But Seriously*)

