

HOME LESS NESS

A teacher's guide



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A special thanks to Bridge Communities in Glen Ellyn, Illinois for permission to reuse the *What Would You Take?* and *Figure It Out!* activities from their homelessness curriculum kit.

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About this lesson guide

The materials and activities in this lesson guide are the product of a collaborative effort by representatives from the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, Ethos Strategy Group, the British Columbia Federation of Teachers, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

The guide was inspired by a desire to engage teachers and students in learning and activities related to Homelessness Action Week, growing out of the successful experience of some teachers during the first Homelessness Action Week in 2006. The information and materials in this guide are designed for senior elementary students – Grades 6 and 7 – but elements can be adapted for both younger and older students.

This lesson plan can be thought of in modules. We suggest the teacher begin by leading a discussion with students about what they know about homelessness. As a tool for discussion, students can begin by filling out the true/false worksheet. An answer key is provided to assist teachers in addressing myths and misconceptions about people who are homeless. Following this, teachers can make choices from among the suggested activities.



What is Homelessness Action Week?

October 10 – 16, 2010 is the fifth annual Homelessness Action Week. In Metro Vancouver it is organized by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH). In at least seven other B.C. communities, local committees are organizing their own Homelessness Action Weeks. This year also marks the first year of world Homeless Day on October 10.

The RSCH was formed in 2000 to coordinate homelessness initiatives in the Metro Vancouver area. It has over 40 members drawn from a broad range of community-based organizations and all levels of government. The RSCH's action plan to end homelessness, called "3 Ways to Home," spells out three things needed to end homelessness. These are: adequate income, affordable housing and support services.

Through Homelessness Action Week, the RSCH seeks to:

- Increase participation in solving homelessness by the public, governments, and private sector
- Increase public support for affordable housing, support services and adequate income
- Promote projects and initiatives having a positive effect

Many events scheduled for Homelessness Action Week are designed to help people who are homeless. Others are a way for the public to obtain information and learn about ways to solve homelessness. All events are listed on www.stophomelessness.ca.

Information about
Homelessness Action
Week is available at
www.stophomelessness.ca

Learning Objectives

This lesson guide is intended to provide information and materials that will allow students to:

- list some major causes of homelessness
- separate some myths about people who are homeless from the facts
- identify some challenges that people who are homeless face in their daily lives
- understand some of the solutions to homelessness
- discuss what they have learned about homelessness with their families and friends

Curriculum Links

This lesson guide is linked to British Columbia's Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes for Grades 6 and 7 in the subject areas of Social Studies and Health and Career.

Specifically, this lesson will give students in Grades 6 and 7 an opportunity to explore all the skills and processes of Social Studies, let Grade 6s examine identity, society and culture, and allow both grades to understand healthy relationships by applying appropriate strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping and bullying (Health and Career).

Issue Background

Much of the background and statistical material in this guide comes from the work of the RSCH, including their 2003 report, *Three Ways to Home – A Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*. The RSCH also sponsored three homeless counts on March 15, 2002, March 15, 2005 and March 11, 2008. A fourth count will take place in the Spring of 2011. Other material, including information about homelessness in other countries is available on the www.stophomelessness.ca website.



A Canada-wide study on homelessness released in May 2007¹ reports that poverty (lack of income and affordable housing) has replaced mental illness as the reason most people are homeless.

Why are people homeless?

Everyone who is homeless has their own story, but it is usually linked to one or more of the following three causes:

- They don't have enough income
- They can't find affordable housing
- They don't have access to health care or social support services

Not having enough income means that person does not have enough money to pay for the basic necessities of life.

The 2008 Metro Vancouver homeless count found that while more than half the people surveyed had a predictable source of income from either social assistance or employment, the funds they received were insufficient to pay for housing. For example, maximum housing allowance available to a single person on social assistance is \$375/month.

Affordable housing means housing that costs a reasonable amount compared to a person's income. In Metro Vancouver, the average rental cost for a one bedroom apartment is more than \$800 per month. This is over half of what a person working 40 hours a week at \$10/hr earns before any taxes or deductions. A widely accepted measure of affordability is housing that costs no more than 30% of the pre-tax income of someone earning a modest income.

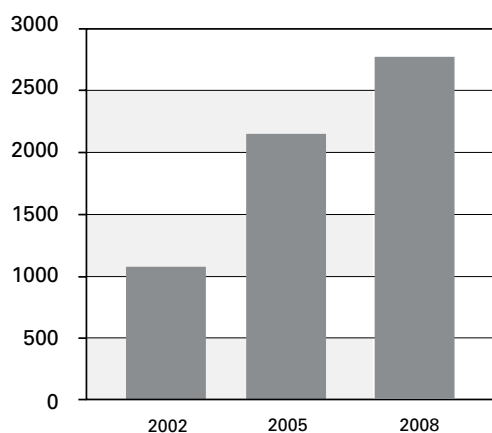
Support services are the health and social services that some people need in order to find and keep housing. Support services can include drug and alcohol treatment, mental health services, counseling, and assistance with daily living. Sometimes these support services are delivered as part of a housing service (e.g., a nurse on-site around the clock) and sometimes they are provided in the community (e.g., a community mental health centre).

¹ See Gordon Laird, *Shelter - Homelessness in a Growth Economy: Canada's 21st Century Paradox*, a report for the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, May 2007, available with permission on www.stophomelessness.ca

How many people are homeless?

On March 15, 2008, a count sponsored by the RSCH and carried out by the Social Planning and Research Council found 2,647 homeless people in Metro Vancouver. More than half of the individuals were identified at day-time locations, meaning they slept outdoors or couch-surfed (i.e., slept on the couch of a friend or relative) on the night of March 15th. The rest were counted at overnight shelters. It should be noted that this type of count usually underestimates total numbers. The following are findings from the count:

Homeless Numbers



There are homeless people in all Canadian cities and many towns. There are even people without homes in Iqualuit, Nunavut. Toronto, the largest city in Canada, has the largest number of people who are homeless.

- There has been significant growth in the number of people who are homeless, more than twice the 1,121 persons counted in 2002, and approximately 20% more than the 2,174 counted in 2005.
- People with Aboriginal identity were significantly over-represented among the region's homeless compared to their share of the total population (32% compared to 2%). The proportion was higher for women, with aboriginal women making up 43% of the total number of women who were counted.
- 270 unaccompanied youth (people under the age of 25 years, without a parent) were enumerated on count day.
- There were 84 children accompanied by a parent or guardian enumerated on homeless count day. Most stayed in a shelter or transition house (transition houses are usually for women and children fleeing violence),
- There were 1,574 street homeless on March 11th, representing 60% of the total homeless population in the region. The number of sheltered homeless remained fairly constant.
- 19% of the street homeless group had tried to stay in a shelter the night before, but were turned away.
- Less than half of the homeless population (43%) had a steady income source such as income assistance, pension or disability benefits, though 13% of the sheltered homeless reported having income from full-time employment.
- Health conditions were very common among the homeless, with an 81% increase since 2005 of people having two or more health conditions (i.e., addiction, medical condition, mental illness, and/or physical disability).
- The proportion of the homeless population aged 45 years and over increased significantly between 2005 and 2008. The number of people between the ages of 45 and 54 years increased by 49%. The median age of the homeless population increased from 38 to 41 years between 2005 and 2008.

- Homelessness is a regional issue. There has been significant growth in the number of homeless people found in Metro Vancouver municipalities outside of the City of Vancouver on the day of the count. In 2008, 43% of the region's homeless population was found in Metro Vancouver's municipalities outside of the City of Vancouver, compared to 37% in 2005.
- Almost half (46%) of the homeless population enumerated on count day said they had lived in the municipality where they were found for at least ten years before their current episode of homelessness.

Solutions to homelessness

Just as we identified that there are three major reasons that people become homeless, there are three solutions as well. These are:

- ensuring people have enough income to pay for their basic needs
- ensuring there are enough affordable places available for people to live
- ensuring that people who need help managing their health and daily living needs have access to those services

Increasing the income of the poorest Canadians is a key solution to homelessness

From 1993 to 2007, people in BC who could not work and received government income assistance (e.g., welfare) had their housing allowance frozen at \$325/month (for an individual). On April 1, 2007 the amount was raised to \$375.

Because most market rental housing (even to rent a room) costs more than the housing allowance for people on income assistance, some people use the money they have for food to pay for their rent. Some give up their housing in order to pay for food.

Increasing the supply of both subsidized and affordable market rental housing is a key solution to solving homelessness

Before 1993, there was a national affordable housing strategy led by the federal government. By 1993, this strategy had created more than 650,000 housing units in which over 2 million Canadians still live.

Since 1993, only a few subsidized housing units have been built in Canada; mostly by charitable or not-for-profit groups with some assistance from provincial and/or municipal governments. Many more people are eligible to live in subsidized housing than there are places available. The current waiting list for subsidized housing in Metro Vancouver has over 10,000 names (this list is managed by BC Housing).

Furthermore, there has been very little new construction of market rental housing (market housing is housing that is not subsidized, but where the cost rises and falls with supply and demand). Tax incentives that led to the construction of many apartment buildings during the 1960s and 70s ended and since then developers and lending organizations have favoured condominium construction.



Access to appropriate mental health and other support services is a key solution to solving homelessness

During the 1980s, governments closed down many residential psychiatric facilities in favour of providing community based mental health services. While most patient advocates supported this move, the consensus was that the supply of community based mental health services was not adequate to meet the need. Without support, many mentally ill individuals were unable to make healthy choices. This sometimes led to people being evicted with nowhere to go and no ability to care for themselves.

Mental health treatment is not the only type of support service needed. Some people need access to education and training, life-skills, addiction counseling and general health care. Depending on the circumstances of the individual, some of these needs are on-going and some are transitional.

People coming off the street after being homeless for a long time can frequently benefit from a type of housing called transitional housing (note: transitional housing is not the same as a transition house – a transition house is for women fleeing violence) . This housing usually provides up to two years accommodation with support services built into the housing. During this time people learn the skills they need to become more independent.

The high cost of homelessness

“The high cost of homelessness in Canada results from the role of homelessness as a proven multiplier of societal ills: malnutrition, unemployment, addiction, mental illness, family strife and lack of income security are all intensified when an individual or household becomes homeless.”

– Gordon Laird

In recent years, researchers have begun to wonder whether there might be a higher cost to homelessness than most people imagine. A number of studies in both Canada and the US quantifying police, ambulance, hospital, and justice system costs have demonstrated that on average, it costs more to leave a person on the street than to house them in supportive housing.

The recent study by Gordon Laird, entitled *Shelter – Homelessness in a Growth Economy* concluded that “supporting a Canada-wide homeless population of 150,000 people costs Canadian taxpayers between \$4.5 to \$6-billion each year.”

A 2008 study carried out by a team of researchers at Simon Fraser University, estimated that the average cost of health, emergency and other services used by people suffering from mental illness, addictions and homelessness came to \$55,000 or more on an annual basis. These costs included such services as emergencies shelter use, ambulance and other emergency response services, hospitalization, and the justice system. By contrast the cost of providing adequate housing and support services (counseling, treatment, etc.) was estimated at \$37,000.

This study backs up a 2001 study released by the Government of British Columbia² that calculated the difference in costs as being from \$40,000 on the street to \$28,000 in supportive housing.

²Housing and Support for Persons with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia,” Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, 2008

³Homelessness – Causes and Effects: The Costs of Homelessness in BC, British Columbia, 2001.



What people can do

Identifying the cost of homelessness is making a difference in the way many decision-makers are starting to think about the needs of people who are homeless. Many ordinary citizens, as well, want to see change.

Some of the solutions require government leadership, but there are ways that everyone can help make life better for people who are homeless.

Learn about the causes of homelessness and the Regional Homelessness Plan (www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness).

Support projects in your neighbourhood providing homes for people who need them.

Write a letter to the elected officials that represent your area. Personal letters that describe how homelessness affects you and your community are generally more effective than form letters.

To locate your Member of Parliament (MP) visit:
www.canada.gc.ca/directories/direct_e.html#mp
(Letters to federal MPs can be sent free of charge.)

To locate your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) visit:
www.leg.bc.ca/mla/

Be respectful and courteous to homeless people.

Volunteer your time and skills – contact local organizations and ask how you can help.

Donate to local organizations that are making a difference:
In Metro Vancouver, donate items to *Gather and Give*, an organization that works with more than 50 front-line agencies to collect and distribute blankets, sleeping bags, pillows, sheets, kitchenware, towels, men's and women's socks, underwear, winter jackets and gloves, toques and scarves.

Talk to your family, friends and colleagues about the causes and solutions for homelessness.

Give to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank www.foodbank.bc.ca

Myth Busting Worksheet

1. All people who are homeless live on the street.

True / False

2. People who are homeless are lazy and don't want to get a job.

True / False

3. People who are homeless sometimes have pets for companionship.

True / False

4. It would be cool to be homeless because you could go anywhere you want.

True / False

5. All people who are homeless are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

True / False

6. Mental illness is the main reason people are homeless.

True / False

7. There are no homeless children.

True / False

8. All panhandlers (people who ask for money) are homeless.

True / False

9. Homeless people are in all communities not just big cities.

True / False

10. Homelessness is just a fact of life; there is nothing we can do about it.

True / False



Myth Busting Answer Sheet



1. All people who are homeless live on the street.

False - Visible homelessness (the people we see on the street) is just part of the problem. Researchers estimate that three out of four people who are homeless don't sleep on the street, but use shelters, sleep in their cars, or on someone's couch.

2. People who are homeless are lazy and don't want to get a job.

False - People who are homeless face many challenges in getting and keeping a job. Without an address or phone it is impossible to apply for work and many employers require certain equipment or clothing (e.g. work boots, hard hat etc.) In addition, without money it is really hard for a person who is homeless to get to work.

3. People who are homeless sometimes have pets for companionship.

True - Pets provide people with friendship, comfort and loyalty.

4. It would be cool to be homeless because you could go anywhere you want.

False - People who are homeless are often not welcome in stores and restaurants. People who are homeless are often not able to access washrooms or use phones. Without income, they cannot pay for bus fare and often have to walk long distances to get from place to place.

5. All people who are homeless are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

False - While some people who are homeless do have addiction problems, studies show that less than half suffer from addictions.

6. Mental illness is the main reason people are homeless.

False - While some people who are homeless do suffer from mental illness, a recent study of homelessness in Canada has found the main reason for homelessness is poverty (lack of money).

7. There are no homeless children.

False - The 2008 count of homeless people in the Metro Vancouver area found there were 84 children among families who were homeless.

8. All panhandlers (people who ask for money) are homeless.

False - Some panhandlers are homeless but some have housing and panhandle to supplement their income.

9. Homeless people are in all communities not just big cities.

True - Homelessness is not just a big city issue. For many years now, homelessness has been an increasingly visible part of life in suburban areas and in smaller communities.

10. Homelessness is just a fact of life; there is nothing we can do about it.

False - It takes three things to end homelessness: adequate income, affordable housing and support services for those who need them. We can solve homelessness.

Suggested Questions for Class Discussion

What are the causes of homelessness?

What does it mean to be homeless?

Why do you think someone might become homeless?

What are some of the health problems people who are homeless might have?

Have you ever met a person who is homeless?

What are the solutions for homelessness?

What are some of the solutions to homelessness?

What could government do to help solve homelessness?

What can businesses do to help solve homelessness?

What can average people do to help solve homelessness?

Lesson Activities

Before lesson activities have students write a response to the question:

“When I think of people who are homeless I think of _____.”

After lesson activities ask students: “After participating in these activities

when I think of people who are homeless I think of _____.”

Students can finish the sentence or write a paragraph.



Activity 1: **Homeless: It's No Game**

Grade Level:
Grades 5,6,7,8

Duration:
45 minutes to 1.5 hours

Context

Homeless: It's No Game is a web-based video game aimed at raising awareness about the challenges a street homeless person faces on a day-to-day basis. The player receives empathy points by navigating through the day and taking care of personal basic necessities: use of a washroom, access to a meal, a safe place to sleep, etc.

The game was designed by Terry Lavender, a graduate student at Simon Fraser University.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and plays *Homeless: It's No Game* prior to activity and students complete myth busting worksheet and discuss what they know/think about homelessness.

Activity Description

Depending on the number of computer stations available, divide students into groups of 2 or 3. Place a time limit on the activity. Have students begin by going to http://www.stophomelessness.ca/learn_videos.html Once on the website, have students find the link to *Homeless: It's No Game*. Before beginning to play the game, have one student in each group read aloud the introductory screen about homelessness and how the game works. Taking turns, students should all be given the chance to play through the game one or two times depending on time constraints. Encourage students to try different choices as they play in order to fully reveal the game's features.

Tip Girls often concede to boys when playing video games. If appropriate, base groupings by gender to ensure all children have a chance to play.

After everyone has played the game bring the students together for a discussion about what they learned. Ask lead questions to start and manage the discussion.

Sample Questions

- What did you think about the game?
- Do you think the game showed what it would be like to be street homeless?
- What was the biggest surprise for you as you played the game?
- What would you change about the game?

Tip Sometimes what the student perceives as a limitation of the game's features is actually them learning about homelessness (e.g.: "the store should be open all night so you can return bottles anytime", "you should be able to use a washroom anytime you want.") These types of comments provide a great opportunity to ask whether this may be the real experience of street homelessness.



Activity 2: Figure it out! Budget Worksheet

Grade Level:
Grades 4-8

Duration:
15-30 minutes

Context

In Metro Vancouver the average cost of a one bedroom apartment is approximately \$800 per month. The minimum wage is \$8.00 per hour.

This activity aims to help students understand the economic realities involved in living and working in B.C. The activity will also show how a working person could have trouble paying rent along with other basic expenses.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and prints math worksheet handouts, students complete myth busting worksheet and discuss what they know/think about homelessness.

Activity Description

Using the template provided, create a household expense budget based on earning B.C.'s minimum wage and paying the average amount in rent. Next, have students fill out the second column based on a higher hourly wage.

- Discuss how much a typical person needs to make in order to maintain a modest lifestyle in the Metro Vancouver area.
- Prompt students to think about additional monthly expenses not mentioned.
- Ask students to think about what they would do if they didn't earn enough money to pay their expenses.



It costs about \$800 per month to rent a 1-bedroom apartment in Greater Vancouver.

Person 1		Person 2	
<p>The wage for a job at a fast food restaurant is \$8 per hour. How much will you earn if you work a 37-hour week?</p>		<p>Suppose you have a better paying job and make \$14 per hour. How much will you earn if you work a 37-hour week?</p>	
<p>How much will you earn in a month?</p>		<p>How much will you earn in a month?</p>	
<p>How much will you have left over after you pay your rent for food, clothing, child care costs, medical insurance premiums, dentist bills, car payment or bus pass, etc.</p>		<p>How much will you have left over after you pay your rent for food, clothing, child care costs, medical insurance premiums, dentist bills, car payment or bus pass, etc.</p>	
<p>If you do not have enough money left over to pay your bills, what will you do? List your choices.</p>			

Activity 3:

What would you take? Backpack Activity

Grade Level:

5 - 8

Duration:

30 minutes – 1 hour

Context

People who are homeless generally have few possessions. If they are on the street, people who are homeless are often victims of theft and what few possessions they may have disappear after a short time. People who “couch surf” must often reduce personal belongings to the barest necessities. This activity is aimed at building understanding about the hardships people who are homeless face and the challenge to stay connected to memories of family and home.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and students complete myth busting worksheet and discuss what they know/think about homelessness. On the day before the activity, ask students to bring backpacks to school. If backpacks are not available use grocery bags.

Activity Description

Students are divided into groups of 3 or 4 and given paper and pencils. Present the following problem to the group:

- You and your family must vacate/leave your home.
- You have only 15 minutes to choose what to take with you.
- What you choose must fit into your backpack.
- Start timing and have participants write down what they would choose. After 15 minutes elapse, discuss as a group.

Sample Questions

- What did you choose to take? Why?
- What did you leave behind? Why?
- How did it feel to make your choices?
- How will you do without the things you left behind?
- Where will you get the things you need but no longer have?



Activity 4:

What does home mean to you?

Writing Activity

Grade Level

4 - 7

Duration

45 minutes – 1.5 hours

Context

Preparation and Materials: Teacher reviews background material, students complete myth busting worksheet (optional) and discuss what they know/think about homelessness.

Class or Group Activity

- Starting with the word 'home' have students list words they associate with home.
- Create a map of the word 'home.' Begin with 'home' as the center of the map.
- Brainstorm words connected with home and write them on lines radiating from the center.
- Have students justify their choice of words by explaining why certain words come to mind when they think of 'home'.

Individual Activity

- Have students write a short story about how a person might become homeless.
- Prompt students to think about what 'home' means from the perspective of their main character.
- Students can illustrate their stories.

Sample Questions

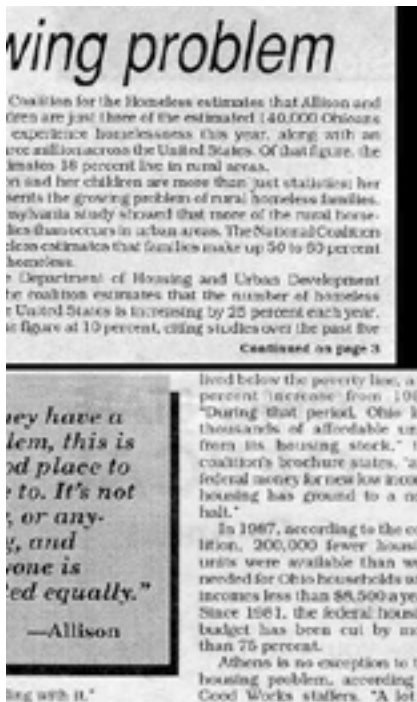
- What do you need in order to "feel at home"?
- Why might someone become homeless?
- If you were homeless, where would you sleep?
- What would you miss most about your own home?



Activity 5: Media and Awareness

Grade Level:
6– 8

Duration:
Several Weeks



Context

People who are homeless are often portrayed as stereotypes in the media. In both news and fiction, people who are homeless are often blamed for their own condition. In contrast to this, factual information about how people become homeless and the barriers they face in accessing housing and employment increases public understanding and support for long-term solutions.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and prints the "Have you ever met a person who is homeless?" and "Have you ever met a person who was homeless?" posters, students complete myth busting worksheet (optional) and discuss what they know/think about homelessness. Access to newspapers and magazines will be necessary.

Activity Description

Begin by having students read the 6 campaign stories about homelessness. Discuss how people become homeless ('is' homeless) and the solutions ('was' homeless).

Media Analysis

Have students clip newspaper and magazine articles related to homelessness over a period of several weeks. Have students look for news articles (rather than letters to the editor and editorials). Encourage students to look for television news stories as well.

Ask students to discuss how the article or story depicts the issue of homelessness. Prompt students to think back to the 6 stories of homelessness and compare them to the news stories they have read.

Sample Discussion Questions

- Are the news stories clear?
- Do they include more than one opinion or 'side' of the story?
- Does the story appear to be biased – in favour of one 'side'?
- Does the headline accurately reflect the story's content?
- Are there technical terms or acronyms the students do not understand?
- If there are pictures, does the visual present a stereotype about people who are homeless?
- Does the picture support the message(s) of the story?
- Does the story influence the student – how does it change their thoughts about people who are homeless?



Reaching the Media

Consider having students create a plan to raise awareness about homelessness through the media. Have students write a media release – a template is provided. If appropriate, students can send their release to a local newspaper.

Tip Preparing and distributing a media release complements a follow-up class or school activity such as a food drive.



About Media Releases

Media releases have a distinct format and we have provided a sample here.

For Immediate Release
Date Here

Headline Here:

Think of this as a one sentence summary of your story.

(City Location Here) – The Lede (yes this is the right spelling!): This first paragraph should describe the who, what, why and when of your story. This is the paragraph that ‘hooks’ the reporter/editor. If you interest them here, they’ll keep reading.

Second Paragraph – In this paragraph you can provide interesting facts or context for your story. In this case, facts about homelessness in your area would be appropriate.

Third Paragraph – This paragraph often contains a quote from one of your spokespeople. Quotes are a good way to communicate an important message. The quote should be very clear and written in plain language. Example:

“We all have to work together to solve homelessness. That’s why our school held a food drive and wrote letters. We hope other schools will organize drives too,” commented Sue Brown, a student organizer.

Fourth and Fifth Paragraphs – You can give more detail or background information here about your school or why this activity is important.

In the case of an event make sure to give all the important information.

You can also include a website address to direct journalists to reports or more information. *Feel free to include the Homelessness Action Week website address (stophomelessness.ca) in your media releases.*

-30- (-30- is a convention that indicates the end of the release.)

Closing –

For additional information or interview please contact:

Activity 6: Music Listening Activity

Grade Level:

5 – 8

Duration:

1 – 1.5 hours

**Context**

The song, *Another Day in Paradise*, was written by singer/musician Phil Collins. The song was a number-one hit in the U.S., and was featured on the 1998 album - *But Seriously*. At the time, over 3 million people were homeless in the United States.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and students complete myth busting worksheet (optional) and discuss what they know/think about homelessness. If a recording of the song is not available, two versions of the song can be heard/viewed on YouTube.

Versions of *Another Day in Paradise*:

Original Phil Collins Music Video (1989)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftiYLcEW_I4

Brandy and Ray J - Paradise Stargate Remix (2001)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9-wxGFjva8>

Activity Description

Have students watch (YouTube) or listen (CD) to the song. Lead a discussion with students about the song's message.

Sample Questions

- What does the songwriter mean by “it’s another day for you and me in paradise”?
- What does the songwriter want us to “think twice” about?
- Why would the man in the song seem embarrassed to see a homeless woman?
- What do you think the songwriter wants us to understand about homelessness?

Next, have students write song lyrics about homelessness. This activity can be done individually or in groups. Prompt students to think about the messages they would like to convey about homelessness.

Activity 7: Health and Wellness

Grade Level:

5 – 7

Duration:

1 – 3 hours

**Context**

People who are homeless, particularly youth, sometimes have a pet. Pets provide unconditional friendship and daily companionship. Outreach workers often educate youth who are homeless about nutrition and health care needs by discussing the needs of their pet.

Promoting understanding about the difficulty of caring for a pet on the street expands the student's knowledge about the health and wellness of all living creatures.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material, students complete myth busting worksheet (optional) and discuss what they know/think about homelessness.

Activity Description

- Begin by having students write down the things they need to be healthy and happy (e.g.: friendship, family, enough food, shelter, warmth, baths, dental care).
- Then, have the students list what a dog needs to stay healthy and happy (e.g.: friendship, enough food, shelter, warmth).
- Next, ask the students to list the things that both people and pets need to be healthy and happy.
- Discuss the challenges a person who is homeless would face to ensure that his/her pet stayed happy and healthy.

Tip This activity can be a discussion, written exercise or documented through an art activity like a poster or drawing.

Sample Questions

- Imagine you were spending a day with a dog outside. What kinds of activities would you do with the dog?
- Is there anything you would need to help care for the dog?
- How will you get water and food for the dog?
- How will you clean up after your dog?

Activity 8: Art Activity

Grade Level:
5 – 8

Duration:
1.5 – 3 hours



Context

Education and awareness are the first steps to solving homelessness. While some people know about the issue, many others need to understand so that society-at-large can undertake projects to solve homelessness.

Preparation and Materials

Teacher reviews background material and prints the “Have you ever met a person who is homeless?” and “Have you ever met a person who was homeless?” posters, students complete myth busting worksheet (optional) and discuss what they know/think about homelessness. Have art materials available for creating posters.

Activity Description

Review the poster campaigns with students. Discuss how the “Have you ever met a person who is homeless?” posters raise awareness about the causes of homelessness and how the “Have you ever met a person who was homeless?” posters talk about the solutions to homelessness.

Have students select a theme (causes or solutions or both) and create a poster that will raise awareness about homelessness in their school community.

Ask students to think about:

- Who will view their poster?
- What messages should the poster convey?
- How will they know if viewers understood their message?

Post students' work in a prominent location in the school. Have students talk to their peers about the posters and what they have learned about homelessness.

Next Steps



Evaluation Guide

The following criteria can be used to assess student learning about homelessness.

After completing this lesson, the student is able to:

1. state several reasons why a person could become homeless

5 4 3 2 1 0

2. name several challenges a person who is homeless faces on a daily basis

5 4 3 2 1 0

3. demonstrate knowledge about some solutions to homelessness

5 4 3 2 1 0

4. list several things individuals and groups can do to improve the quality of life for people who are homeless

5 4 3 2 1 0

5. state several myths or stereotypes about people who are homeless

5 4 3 2 1 0

6. state some facts about people who are homeless

5 4 3 2 1 0

Follow-up Activities for schools and classrooms

After completing classroom activities about homelessness, students may want to take further action to help with solutions to homelessness. Here is a list of possible follow-up activities for classrooms and schools to undertake:

- Write letters to elected officials that represent your area including mayors and councilors, MLAs and MPs.
- Fundraise for local projects and programs. In Metro Vancouver money can be donated to local shelters.
- Hold a non-perishable food drive and deliver donations to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank.
- Donate items to a local shelter or to *Gather and Give*. Items that are frequently needed include blankets, sleeping bags, pillows, men's and women's socks, winter jackets and gloves, toques and scarves. (If giving to a shelter, call first to find out what the shelter needs.)
- Encourage students and staff to talk to family, friends and colleagues about the causes and solutions of homelessness.

Fact Sheet for Parents & Guardians



Sample Handout to Send Home with Students

Dear Parent or Guardian,
Recently your child participated in a lesson on homelessness. More than 20 communities in British Columbia have activities planned for Homelessness Action Week, October 10 - 16, 2010.

The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness sponsored the development of appropriate learning materials about homelessness for use in schools. To find out more about homelessness and the Regional Steering Committee please visit: www.stophomelessness.ca

Why are people homeless?

Everyone who is homeless has their own story, but it is usually linked to one or more of the following three causes:

- They don't have enough income
- They can't find affordable housing
- They don't have access to health or social support services

Not having enough income means that person does not have enough money to pay for the basic necessities of life.

The 2008 Metro Vancouver homeless count found that only about half the people surveyed had a predictable source of income. Welfare payments and other government income assistance help some people pay for housing costs, but the maximum housing allowance available to a single person on welfare is \$375/month.

Affordable housing means housing that costs a reasonable amount compared to a person's income.

In Metro Vancouver, the average rental cost for a one bedroom apartment is more than \$800 per month. This is over half of what a person working 40 hours a week at \$10/hr earns before any taxes or deductions. A widely accepted measure of affordability is housing that costs no more than 30% of the pre-tax income of someone earning a modest income.



Increasing the income of the poorest Canadians is a key solution to homelessness

Increasing the supply of both subsidized and affordable market rental housing is a key solution to solving homelessness

Access to appropriate mental health and other support services is a key solution to solving homelessness



Support services are the health and social services that some people need in order to find and keep housing. Support services can include drug and alcohol treatment, mental health services, counseling, and assistance with daily living. Sometimes these support services are delivered as part of a housing service (e.g., a nurse on-site around the clock) and sometimes they are provided in the community (e.g., a community mental health centre).

What can I do?

Learn about the causes of homelessness. Learn about the Regional Homelessness Plan (www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/) or visit www.stophomelessness.ca

Support local projects that provide homes for people who need them.

Write a letter to the elected officials that represent your area. Personal letters that describe how homelessness affects you and your community are generally more effective than form letters.

To locate your Member of Parliament (MP) visit:
www.canada.gc.ca/directories/direct_e.html#mp

To locate your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) visit:
www.leg.bc.ca/mla/

Be respectful and courteous to homeless people.

Volunteer your time and skills – contact local organizations and ask how you can help.

Donate funds to local organizations that are making a difference. Give to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank.

Talk to your family, friends and colleagues about the causes and solutions for homelessness.

Additional Resources

Have you ever met a person who is homeless? Campaign 2006

Have you ever met
**a person
who is homeless?**



Meet Sarah. Sarah is 19 years old and no longer in foster care. She has a couple of part-time jobs and takes an evening class at a local college. Sarah's looked hard for housing, but can't find anything she can afford to rent. For the past month she's slept on a coworker's sofa. She's not sure what will happen next.

Fact: The majority of people who are homeless do not live on the street.

Homelessness, together we can solve it.
Visit: stophomelessness.ca

**HOME
LESS
NESS
AWARE
NESS
WEEK
2006**
Oct 16-22

3WAYS TO HOME **straight**

Have you ever met
**a person
who is homeless?**



Meet Susan. When Susan's hours were cut back at work she got behind on her rent and was evicted. Unable to find a place she can afford, Susan and her teenage daughter have been staying at an emergency shelter in New Westminster.

Fact: A shelter bed costs the public up to \$80 per night – this works out to more than double the rent for an average two-bedroom apartment.

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Have you ever met
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who is homeless?**



Meet Larry. Larry has a physical disability and struggles with alcoholism. His health has declined since his hotel apartment in Surrey was closed. Last year, he was taken to hospital emergency 24 times.

Fact: On average, being homeless doubles a person's annual cost of health care.

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Have you ever met a person who was homeless? Campaign 2007

Have you ever met
**a person who
was homeless?**



Anna had nowhere to go when her husband threw her out. Community centre staff referred her to a shelter for abused women. With the help of an outreach worker, Anna sorted out her finances, received counseling, and is now living safely in a senior's housing complex.

For Anna, support services, an adequate income and affordable housing made the difference between homelessness and a home.

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**HOME
LESS
NESS
ACTION
WEEK
2007**
Oct 15-21

3WAYS TO HOME Direct Support Program **straight**

Have you ever met
**a person who
was homeless?**



Dolores could not find a place she could afford. Homeless, she turned to an aboriginal women's organization. A staff member worked with Dolores to secure an income, enroll in community college and find permanent housing. Two years later Dolores and her son are living in a family housing complex.

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**HOME
LESS
NESS
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WEEK
2007**
Oct 15-21

3WAYS TO HOME Direct Support Program **straight**

Have you ever met
**a person who
was homeless?**



At 19, John was homeless and living in a tent. An outreach worker connected him to a job program. There, John found a place to live and received training, life skills counseling and work boots donated by a local employer. Now working, John has enough income to rent an apartment.

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**HOME
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3WAYS TO HOME Direct Support Program **straight**

**We can do better than this.
Campaign 2008**

Downtown living?
We can do better than this.



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HOME
LESS
NESS
ACTION
WEEK
2008
Oct 12-19

City living?
We can do better than this.



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HOME
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Oct 12-19

BC living?
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HOME
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WEEK
2008
Oct 12-19

**Did you know?
Campaign 2009**

Did you know?
Canada is the only G8 country without a national housing strategy.

Add your voice to the call for a national affordable housing strategy and an end to homelessness.

Speak Up For Affordable Housing

Visit: stophomelessness.ca

HOME
LESS
NESS
ACTION
WEEK
2009
Oct 11-17




Did you know?
Poverty is now the leading cause of homelessness in Canada.

Add your voice to the call for a national affordable housing strategy and an end to homelessness.

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HOME
LESS
NESS
ACTION
WEEK
2009
Oct 11-17



Did you know?
The United Nations says homelessness and housing in Canada is a national emergency.

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HOME
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WEEK
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For a current list of additional resources including websites, book and videos please visit the www.stophomelessness.ca website.

Have you ever met
**a person
who is homeless?**



Character is portrayed by a model

MMeet Sarah. Sarah is 19 years old and no longer in foster care. She has a couple of part-time jobs and takes an evening class at a local college. Sarah's looked hard for housing, but can't find anything she can afford to rent. For the past month she's slept on a co-worker's sofa. She's not sure what will happen next.

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Greater Vancouver Regional
Steering Committee on
Homelessness

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Downtown living?

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HOME
LESS
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WEEK

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HOME
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WEEK

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Affordable
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Canada

Vancity

BC Housing

CITY OF
VANCOUVER

fraserhealth
Better health. Best in health care.

Vancouver
CoastalHealth

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