



THE HOUSING REALITY GAME THAT WILL OPEN YOUR EYES

Users' Guide

The "Tag Line" for Home Sweet Homelessness is
"The Housing Reality Game that will Open Your Eyes".

Funny thing about *seeing*. For those of us with sight, seeing is *simple*...but we miss so much, don't we? And while Home Sweet Homelessness is *simple* to play, this Users' Guide will help you who have hopes for this game to help players *really* play, and by doing so, to *really* open their eyes, and their hearts, and their minds.

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The story of Home Sweet Homelessness...

...and why it's simple to use

“Keep it simple”, Kateri said. She was one of the Goodwill Inn guests in my class. I was the teacher, retired after a lifetime at a catholic university in Detroit. But Kateri was teaching me. And this game is simple because of Kateri’s wisdom.

Six months earlier, as I began my volunteer work at this emergency shelter in northern Michigan, I had been struck by the “students” who came to my class. Having trained and taught leadership classes to college students, I’d expected to simplify my exercises and materials to teach “homeless people”. But I found right from the start that my class at the Inn was filled week after week with people who had sharp minds and profound insights and passion to survive. They blew me away. And they made me aware that even though I’d worked with people experiencing homelessness for years, I was still expecting less of them than I should. I was seeing them as “homeless people.”

So I asked them to design a “simulator”, a board game for people like me who have never been homeless, who like me expect less of them, or worse, find ways to justify ignoring or avoiding them.

The first classes that designed games showed great creativity and determination and focus, and their results were inspiring but complex. When I began the exercise with Kateri’s class, I did so by sharing thoughts from the earlier games. I watched Kateri naturally bring the group together and focus on the task. As she was leaving at the end of class, I asked her if we could talk. When we sat down, I began feeding her ideas from the first games. She looked at me with a calm, kind, firm gaze and said “We need to keep it simple.”

So week after week, the game board – a pizza box – began to take shape. Kateri moved from the Inn to an apartment, and said that she wanted to move on, and let go of the game. There were others she trusted to continue with it, and she wanted to go on with her life. I felt like the last day of class with a good teacher that you’d never have again. I was losing this wise teacher. And I feared for the future of the game. My fears were unfounded. Liz C. a quiet and very bright member of the class fell naturally into leading the group. The game was making a buzz in the shelter, and we began to play it with other shelter guests in the dining room after class. Lynn C. was not in class, and had not been in on the design of the game. Week after week she’d sit across the room knitting...and watching.

Eventually Lynn had joined in playing, and after the class moved on to other exercises, Liz and Lynn began to play the game with other guests during the week. Every Tuesday when I came in to serve dinner before class, I'd hand them their dinner and they would hand me my homework – design changes to make on the board, which I was doing on my computer at home. So each Tuesday I'd bring in the revised board, and each week they'd play with the other guests there in the dining room. But they remembered that the purpose of the game was to be a simulator of the experience of homelessness for people like me who didn't understand it – and didn't understand them. So the players said "When are you going to bring in some people to try it out with us? We're ready!"

And that's when we discovered the power of the game. It was more than a simulator. It was a connector. Game after game, we found that people never homeless who played the game were impacted in two ways. In their heads, they understood the experience of homelessness much more – how easy it was to fall into and how difficult it was to get out. But they also felt the surprise at the character and humanity of those at the table who had experienced homelessness. Like me, these community members had expected less of the people who lived in a homeless shelter.

Again and again, when the community players stood up after the game and approached me, they said the same single word. "Wow!" And often, I noticed, they had a hand on their chest. The "wow" came from their heart.

We learned that the game, which by now had been named "Home Sweet Homelessness", worked best when it was played by a small group of people, at least one whom was experiencing or had very recently experienced homelessness. Everybody left the table less isolated, less afraid.

We learned that the game required no preparation except reading the one-page instructions, that within minutes, people who had come to the little tables from very different situations were ... *playing*.

We learned that people from the community and people from the shelter played it again and again, finding it an opportunity not just to learn, but to relate.

Kateri was right. Keeping it simple frees people to *play...together*, focusing on each other, rather than figuring out how to play the game. Liz and Lynn continue to participate in training and hosting the game, and yes, in suggesting improvements right up to production.

The Essentials:

ways to make better use of the game experience

Essential #1: Bring people together

The game is meant to be played by people who have *not* experienced homelessness and people who *have... together*. We have played it by inviting people from the community into the shelter to play with those living there. We have played it by bringing people who had experienced into community gatherings and professional workshops.

Essential #2: Play the game before leading it

As you will see, the game plays easily. But like driving to a place you've never been before, it's easier and more comfortable after the first time. If in playing it there are things that are unclear, see our FAQ link on our website, www.HomeSweetHomeless.org. But this is a simulation of homelessness, in which at times things are imprecise. So if things seem unclear, decide what works best for you. That's what the designers did, around their tables at the Inn. By playing it and feeling comfortable with it as *play*, you'll be free to observe play when you use it, and be capable of providing any guidance that would be helpful.

Essential #3: Finishing is not essential (but don't announce that)

We've learned that timed play works well. In testing, in a group of ten games, two might finish in an hour of play. While the *desire* to finish is part of what drives *play*, the impact of the game is in the play itself, and not in the finish. Some of the players in 50-minute testing expressed the desire to continue playing, but rated the impact high nonetheless

Essential #4: The Elements of the game – using them to encourage

interaction

Every word on the board and on the cards came from the guests at Goodwill Inn. The situations are *their* situations. The Challenges are those they faced, the Opportunities those they experienced of hoped for. The Questions are those they would like to have asked those who refused to understand their homeless condition. The five credentials and the waiting are the frustrations that they felt. Here's a look at each element, and some tips for encouraging their best use.

The Board

1. **It's large and the writing small – by design.** We learned that these “problems” encouraged people to help each other; whoever is closest reads, and moves the pawn. Some real

individualists choose to reach over and do it themselves, and that's OK too. But *play* seems to happen more interactively because of these factors.

2. **It starts in the middle. It's a simulator, remember?** We start in the middle too, most of us. We have hopes of our own place, and for most of us, that works out. But we know recently how even professional people can end up homeless.
3. **GUIDING ITS USE:** Encourage the players to read out loud what the space says, and not to rush into the next roll, or overlap the rolls out of haste. Encourage communication and conversation at tables that seem to be rushing through.

The WAIT Spaces and White Credential Cards

1. **Why wait?** Remember that this game was designed by people experiencing homelessness. The first name that they gave this game was "Ups and Downs, the Waiting Game." Again and again, they found their determination undermined by the helplessness of *waiting* for someone in control to make a decision or take action. To call the person too often could put them on the bottom of the pile. To not follow up could lead them to be forgotten.
2. **GUIDING THEIR USE:** We've learned that players who are stuck on the WAIT space for a long time are often forgotten by the other players, who are busy getting on with things – just like life. If you are facilitating, you might watch for this, and encourage the players to reflect on this. The frustration of the waiting player can be the most impactful experience of the game. It hurts, just like the real thing.

The Opportunity and Challenge Cards

1. **Why?** While the board spaces provide some ups and downs, these cards provide more detailed situations. They also provide an additional element of just plain luck – landing on Opportunity spaces or Challenge spaces. Finally, especially in the case of Challenge Cards, they give the player who has *never* been homeless a sense of the negative realities that others at the table *have* experienced.
2. **GUIDING THEIR USE:** Encourage players to read the card out loud *to the other players*, as they should with the writing on the spaces on which they land. Players often find opportunities to share their own experiences, empathy, etc., in these exchanges.

The Question Cards

1. **Why?** When we took the game to a professional graphic designer, we were looking at the possibility of the game being played by families or social groups, not including people who had been homeless. We wondered...where would the heartbreak and empathy come from, if there is not a person there who has been homeless? The game is not intended to be merely entertaining, but eye-opening. Rick suggested Question Cards, and they have become one of

the most effective elements of the game. After his suggestion, I went to my next class at the Inn, and asked them to think of one person dear to them who just doesn't understand or appreciate their situation, who writes them off or fails to accept their dignity. Then I asked them to frame questions that they would like to pose to that person, asking them to imagine themselves to be homeless. This was the source of the questions on the cards.

2. **GUIDING THEIR USE:** The instructions direct players to read the card out loud when they pick it up, but not to answer it until the beginning of their next turn, before they roll the die. AS with other cards, they should read it *to the other players*, as they will address their answer to the other players, as well. If the player is imagining her/himself as homeless, this can be very impactful. The purpose of waiting until the next turn to respond is twofold. First, it gives the player time to reflect and respond authentically, rather than make a defensively hurried, perhaps even flippant response. Secondly, their question when read aloud naturally prompts other players to consider it too. Thus response often turns out to be discussion. Homeless players end up informing or encouraging non-homeless players. This can be a gold mine of self disclosure and empathy. Sometimes just by chance questions are drawn continuously. This is done intentionally, because it encourages interaction on a deeper and deeper level.

Using Your Extra (Blank) Cards

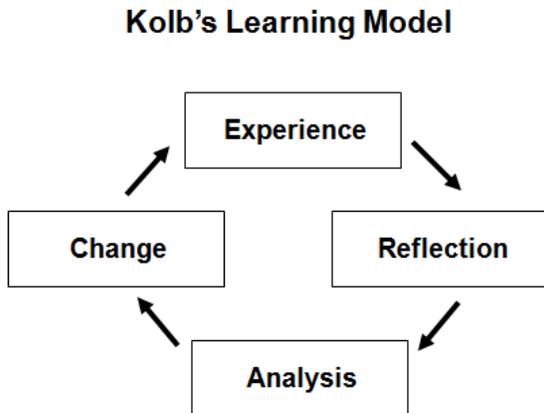
1. **Why** – Continuous improvement and local adaptation. When we were refining the game, the content on the Opportunity, Challenge, and Question Cards kept getting better and better, based on ideas that came up during play with *our* homeless players. As *you* make use of the game, you may find these cards as opportunities to improve the game for *your* play. Secondly, if you are working with youth or other special populations, these extra cards can be a way of adapting the game to your particular needs.

2. **GUIDING THEIR USE:** There are endless possibilities, but here are a few ideas. Take some time to play the game a few times before deciding what to try.

- **Ask players after playing the game what cards they would add.** Remember that all content on the board and cards is currently from people who have been homeless, and at least *consider* limiting new content to *their* ideas.
- **As you develop your own group of users who host and coordinate the game,** consider using the opportunity to add content as a facilitator for their own learning, as in the Kolb model below. *Reflect* on the experience of play, *analyze* the thoughts that emerge in reflection (especially storytelling) and *change* the game by adding new content on these cards...and repeat the process again and again.
- **We will, as our website develops, ask you to share what you've learned** to be good additions. Watch for it.

Beyond the essentials:

Using Home Sweet Homelessness as a *Learning Tool*



1. **Experience:** Home Sweet

Homelessness, when played as described here, has consistently provided a powerful *experience*. But as we know from our own lives, we often fail to learn from experience alone. At University of Detroit Mercy's Leadership Development Institute, David Kolb's Learning Model has served as a powerful guide to use experience as a first step in an effective model of learning and change. The following is a guide to going beyond the essentials of guiding the game, to using the game to guide growth,

development, improvement, and change.

2. **Reflection** (How did I feel? What did I notice?)

b. **Evaluation of the game.** While the game was in the intensive testing and evaluation phase, we discovered that evaluation of *the game* provided a natural reflection on the players' experiences. When groups were asked to agree on rating the effectiveness of various aspects of the game, what ensued was a reflective sharing by the players of what the experience was like *for them*. For that reason, an evaluation form is provided on Appendix i of this guide, and is also available by e-mailing us at HomeSweetHomeless@gmail.com.

- i. The instructions are on the form. Give *one* evaluation to each play group, and ask them to agree on evaluation input.
- ii. If you have more than one group playing, consider whether to have the groups report to the assembly on the items that you (or they) find most appropriate or interesting.
- iii. Follow the return instructions on the evaluations to participate in our ongoing Home Sweet Homelessness Learning Community. More on this at the end.

c. **Design your own reflection exercises that suit your time and format constraints** to help the players stop and internalize their experience. Resources are available on our website, www.HomeSweetHomelessness.org.

3. **Analysis** (What meaning do I find in this regarding homelessness? What other sources of information can I find to understand it better?) This is an opportunity to provide information. The players are concerned and curious. They are aching about this, and want to know more.

- a. One ready source of information is the people already gathered. Think of pairing small groups, or even forming as a whole for some Q&A among participants. If your group is large enough, it will include enough people who have been homeless able to share their knowledge.
 - b. Another simple and organic approach is to include a panel of local providers, advocates, and leaders for Q&A and discussion. If they had joined in the game, even better!
4. **Change** (How can we take what we have learned and try to improve things?) This step is something that enables you to engage the players in the work of your agency, school, or community. They are already formed as a team. They have shared their hearts and their thoughts. They have established trust and, in the evaluation (2a above) have even learned to work together toward a result. **Perhaps an example would help here:**
- a. We worked with a District Court staff in a half-day workshop. We brought Liz and Lynn, the other two inventors of the game, and ten current guests of the Goodwill Inn who had played the game together once. Each of these ten sat at a table, and was joined by four members of the Court Staff – from secretaries to judges.
 - b. After playing the game for 50 minutes and evaluating it as in step 2.a.i. above, we paired the groups of five into groups of ten and gave them a worksheet with two questions for their group to answer together.
 - i. “Given the experience that you just shared playing Home Sweet Homeless together, what improvements would you make in the Court to help it meet its mission?”
 - ii. “Given the experience that you just shared playing Home Sweet Homeless together, what improvements would you make in your personal lives to be more human?”

Home Sweet Homelessness Learning Community

We’re in this together. We’ll make meaningful change by coming together and sharing every step of the learning model. Social networking makes this easier. As the game goes into production and is used across the country and beyond, you’ll have opportunities on our website to share experiences, reflections, analytical information, and ways that you have facilitated change. We will appreciate your input on this!

It starts by sending us your evaluations. ***Please scan them and e-mail them as attachments to HomeSweetHomelessness@gmail.com***

Thanks for all you do to open our eyes and hearts to the humanity of those facing homelessness.

