

# HOMELESS AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## EXERCISES MENU

*Below is a menu of exercises that can be used with participants at your professional developments. These activities are meant to help your participants understand the events that can lead to homelessness, the realities of not having a permanent home, and the importance of sensitivity when working with these families.*

### **Choose It or Lose It**

Imagine you and your family were just told that you have 10 minutes to vacate your home. You can take only whatever you can fit into a backpack. What things would you take with you? What things would be hard to leave behind?

Discussion Questions:

Why did you choose the items you took and left behind?

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?

Adopted from "What Would You Take?" in *What's It Like to be Homeless? An Educational Curriculum Guide for Children and Youth*, Bridge Communications, Glen Ellyn, IL, 2004.

### **What's In Your Backpack?**

Share a backpack that could belong to a homeless student. In small groups, study the items in the backpack. Discuss possible reasons why the student would carry these items with him. Possible items to include in backpack: empty beer can, toothbrush, spray paint, small stuffed animal, toy police car, ketchup packets, clothing items, flashlight, pencil, makeup, baby bottle.

Discussion Questions:

Would you be surprised to find these items in a student's backpack?

Did others in your group think of reasons you did not?

How might a homeless student's backpack be different from the backpacks of their housed peers?

### **Have and Have-nots**

Before the training begins place bowls of candy or other treats on some of the tables. Invite participants at the tables with bowls, to enjoy the treats throughout the training, but to keep them at their own table.

Discussion Questions:

How did you feel about the way in which the candy was distributed?

Were you treated fairly?

Did some people give their candy away to a table without? Why or why not? How did this feel?

How does this relate to wealth in our society?

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### EXERCISES MENU (CONTINUED)

#### **Toothpaste Activity**

Give each participant one trial size tube of toothpaste and a piece of paper with lines drawn on it (8 lines, 10 inches each). Explain to participants that they have one minute to completely cover the lines with toothpaste. Next, pass out a plastic knife to each of the participants and tell them they have 30 seconds to see how much of the toothpaste they can fit back into their toothpaste tubes.

#### Discussion Questions:

How difficult was it to cover the lines?

How much toothpaste were you able to get back in the tube?

Why was it difficult to get the toothpaste back in the tube?

What would you do differently if this activity were repeated?

If we compare words to toothpaste, how hard is it for us to take back something we said?

Have you ever discussed a student's situation around other people (colleagues, student workers, support staff, other parents, etc.)?

How can we as adults, help to keep our students' living situations confidential?

Adopted from "He Said...She Said" in *Activities That Teach Family Values: Helping Families Move From Lecturing to Sharing*, Red Rock Publishing, Tom Jackson, 1998.

#### **How Vulnerable Are You?**

The following survey illustrates some of the factors that can lead to homelessness. When several of these exist, and there isn't strong family support, people are at risk of becoming homeless. Have participants consider the following questions:

1. Could you ever become involved in a flood, fire, tornado or other natural disaster?
2. Do you work in an area of the job market where your job might become obsolete?
3. Could you ever suffer a long-term illness or accident without proper health benefits or other compensations?
4. Could a down turn in the economy or a change in your local economy cause you or your family to lose a job(s)?
5. Do you live in a household with only one full time wage earner?
6. Are you behind in monthly bills, have high credit card debt or have a home in foreclosure?
7. Are housing costs in your area increasing faster than wages are increasing?
8. Does anyone in your family struggle with alcohol, drug, or other addictions?
9. Has there ever been any form of domestic violence or abuse in your family?
10. Do you have money in savings/life insurance to cover living expenses should your spouse die unexpectedly?

*Adapted from Iowa Finance Authority. [iowafinanceauthority.gov](http://iowafinanceauthority.gov)*

## HOMELESS AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### EXERCISES MENU (CONTINUED)

#### **Locked Out**

Midway through the training, give participants a 5 minute break. Encourage them to get up, stretch, and walk around the building. Once the participants have left the room, lock the door so that they are not able to get back into the room after the break. Leave the participants outside for an additional 5-10 minutes, before finally letting them back in.

#### Discussion Questions:

How did it feel to be locked out?

What caused those feelings?

What items did you leave inside that you wish you had taken with you?

#### **Popcorn**

While participants are working on a group activity or discussion, pop a bag of microwavable popcorn and eat it in front of everybody. If there is more than one presenter, share it between yourselves, but do not share it with any of the participants.

#### Discussion Questions:

Did the popcorn affect your concentration?

How does it feel to want something but not be able to attain it?

How does this relate to the disparity of some having resources while others do not?

*Adopted from WMU Volunteer Connection Project HELP: Poverty Awareness Activities.*

*[http://www.wmu.com/VolunteerConnection/Project\\_HELP/Poverty%20Awareness%20Activities.pdf](http://www.wmu.com/VolunteerConnection/Project_HELP/Poverty%20Awareness%20Activities.pdf)*

#### **The Run-around**

When participants arrive at the training have them move from checkpoint to checkpoint in order to complete the check-in process. Here are some possible checkpoints:

Checkpoint #1: Sign in

Checkpoint #2: Pick up nametag

Checkpoint #3: Pick up handouts

Checkpoint #4: Pick up posters & pamphlets

Checkpoints should be scattered around and require participants to walk back and forth past the same area with little rhyme or reason. Randomly close a checkpoint for a couple of minutes at a time. Turn participants away if they have not visited the checkpoints in the correct order or skipped a checkpoint. Consider adding additional checkpoints to participants that arrive without proper identification.

#### Discussion Questions:

How did it feel to have to visit multiple sites to complete the check-in process?

What was particularly frustrating for you?

How does this relate to families trying to register at our schools or access assistance from local agencies?

## HOMELESS AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### EXERCISES MENU (CONTINUED)

#### **Imagine If**

While the general impression is that the homeless are primarily the chronic and episodic, those individuals often seen living on the streets, fact is more than half the homeless are families with children. The vast majority of these have been thrust into homelessness by a life altering event or series of events that were unexpected and unplanned.

Homelessness is caused by tragic life occurrences like the loss of loved ones, job loss, domestic violence, natural disasters, divorce and family disputes. For those living in poverty or close to the poverty line, an "everyday" life issue that may be manageable for individuals with a higher income can be the final factor in placing them on the street.

Share with participants a story from your community that shows how a family became homeless. Making the story real and relatable will cause your participants to imagine themselves in that scenario, making your participants more empathetic to the homeless families they will be serving.

#### Discussion Questions

What if this happened to you? How would you survive?

Would you become homeless too? What would happen to your family?

#### **SPENT**

This online game about homelessness was created for Urban Ministries of Durham in 2011 and its ad agency McKinney. SPENT went mobile in 2014 and continues to be played by millions of people in hundreds of countries.

Players accepting the challenge imagine that they are one of the 14 million Americans unemployed. Their savings are gone and they have lost their homes. They are down to their last \$1,000. Players are forced to make the same difficult decisions about money and resources that families and individuals served by UMD must make every single day.

[www.umdurham.org](http://www.umdurham.org)

<http://playspent.org>

<http://mckinney.com>

#### **Move It**

After about 20 minutes of your professional development, ask participants to check under their chairs for a colored dot. Instruct those with a red dot to exchange seats with each other. After another 20 minutes instruct those same participants to change seats with someone with a blue dot. After another 20 minutes instruct those same participants to move their chair to a table already full.

#### Discussion Questions:

How did it feel to having to keep moving seats?

When were you glad to move? When were you unhappy to move? Why?

How did you feel when others were able to remain at their seats while you had to move?

What was it like when you had to add to an already full table? How did it make you feel?

## HOMELESS AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES MENU

*Below is a menu of interactive activities that can be used with participants at your professional developments. These activities get your participants actively involved so that they may see through the eyes of families experiencing homelessness.*

#### **Home Sweet Homelessness: The Housing Reality Game That Will Open Your Eyes**

Homeless is a situation, not a person. Job loss, foreclosure, and family tragedy...homelessness is not always due to poor choices. Home, Sweet...HOMELESSNESS is a game that invites you to have a small taste of what it is like to become homeless and to try to return to life in society with income and home and self-respect. Sometimes things just go wrong with family, job or health and down we go. The bright, talented people who designed this game were homeless. They want you to know that people like you can fall into homelessness too, and that people like *them* are a lot more like *you* than you might think.

The game is a tool designed to provide a safe, enjoyable, and insightful way to narrow the social distance between those with homes and those without them. The game's very nature will increase awareness about homelessness, thus provoking the insight necessary to understand and correct the divides in our own society as well as those abroad.

The game was created by John Daniels, General Organizer, with co-inventors Lynn Cifka and Liz Coon, who themselves have experienced homelessness.

For more information or to purchase the game, please visit [homesweethomelessness.org](http://homesweethomelessness.org).

#### **Priorities: A Discussion About Choices**

Small groups of participants are given a set of cards with different labels, such as:

clothing, food, shelter, flexibility, spirituality, honesty, problem solving, no addictions, cell phone, hygiene, retirement, significant other, insurance, education, transportation, health

As a group of district employees, they must organize the priorities in order from most important priority to least important. Although the group may have different opinions, they must come to a consensus and record their top and bottom three.

Next, they will reevaluate the items and prioritize them as if they were middle school students living without permanent housing. Again, the group must come to a consensus and record their top and bottom three.

Discussion afterward will focus on how the two lists were similar and how they were different and the reasons for those similarities/differences.

## HOMELESS AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### VIDEOS MENU

*Below is a menu of videos that can be used with participants at your professional developments. These videos outline the many struggles that homeless families and unaccompanied youth are experiencing today.*

#### **Hard Times Generation on “60 Minutes” Originally Aired on March 6, 2011 at 7:00 PM ET on CBS**

Unemployment's been over nine percent for twenty-one months and as a result, American families are falling out of the middle class in record numbers. The combination of lost jobs and millions of foreclosures means a lot of folks are homeless and hungry for the first time in their lives.

One of the consequences of the recession that you don't hear a lot about is the record number of children descending into poverty. The government considers a family of four to be impoverished if they take in less than twenty-two thousand dollars a year. Based on that standard, and government projections of unemployment, it's estimated that the poverty rate for kids in this country will soon hit twenty-five percent.

For some children, socializing and learning are being cruelly complicated by homelessness, as Scott Pelley reports from Florida, where school buses now stop at motels for children who've lost their homes.

*Hard Times Generation. CBS News Archives, 2011. DVD.*

#### **Hard Times Generation: Families Living in Cars on “60 Minutes” Originally aired on November 27, 2011 at 7:00 PM ET on CBS**

More than 16 million children are now living in poverty and, for many of them, a proper home is elusive. Some cash-strapped families stay with relatives; others move into motels or homeless shelters. But, as Scott Pelley reports, sometimes those options run out, leaving an even more desperate choice: living in their cars. 60 Minutes returns to Florida, home to one third of America's homeless families living without shelter, to find out what life is like for the epidemic's youngest survivors.

In a follow up to a March 6, 2011 story, Scott Pelley returns back to central Florida to interview homeless families who are forced to live in cars.

*Hard Times Generation: Families Living in Cars. CBS News Archives, 2011. DVD.*

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### VIDEOS MENU (CONTINUED)

#### **Teens In Trouble: Chris Cuomo Reports on “20/20” Originally aired on Friday, January 28, 2011, at 10:00 PM ET ON ABC**

They started out like any kids, full of hope and dreams – but now they are homeless and in terrible danger of slipping between the cracks. These kids are not living under a bridge, but under the radar — part of a new under-reported type of homelessness — surfing from couch to couch, from the beds of friends to the beds of strangers. For over a year, Chris Cuomo and his team have chronicled the terrors and triumphs of four such teenagers, all surviving largely on their own.

These children are part of a huge, largely unrecognized national problem. Among industrialized nations, the United States has the largest number of homeless women and children. Among those are nearly two million homeless teens. ABC News “20/20” heads to the northwest to find this new generation of teens in trouble in an area of the country that has the highest percentage of homelessness, including a town where one third of its youth are without homes.

*Teens in Trouble: Chris Cuomo Repots.* ABC NEWS, 2011. DVD.

#### **American Winter: In the Richest Country on Earth, Millions of Families Have Been Left Out in the Cold**

Produced and directed by Emmy award-winning filmmakers, Joe and Harry Gantz, *American Winter* is a documentary feature film that follows the personal stories of families struggling in the aftermath of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Years after the recession began, millions of families are struggling to meet their basic needs, and many formerly middle class families are finding themselves in financial crisis, and needing assistance for the first time in their lives. Meanwhile, the social safety net that was created to help people in difficult times has been weakened by massive budget cuts, creating a perfect storm of greater need and fewer resources to help families in trouble.

Filmed over the course of one winter in Portland, Oregon, *American Winter* presents an intimate and emotionally evocative snapshot of the state of our economy as it is playing out in many American families.

*American Winter: In the Richest country on Earth, Millions of Families Have Been Left Out in the Cold.* HBO Documentary Films, 2013. DVD.