



National Coalition for the Homeless

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Fact Sheet for Ninth-Twelfth Grade Students

What is the Definition of Homelessness?

The McKinney Act, a bill that was introduced to Congress in 1994, came up with the criteria that a person must meet in order for them to be considered homeless by the government. According to the Act, a person is considered homeless if they do not have a permanent residence and/or if their nighttime residence is a shelter or a government run facility.

Statistics:

According to a study done by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty done in 2007, 3.5 million people (1.35 million of them children) are likely to experience homelessness in a given year.

A study done by the US Conference of Mayors in 2007 reported that the homeless population is estimated to be comprised of 42% African American, 39% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 4% Native American, and 2% Asian.

A 2004 study done by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty showed that in almost every city surveyed (there were about 50 in the study) the number of homeless people exceeded the available amount of emergency shelter and transitional housing facilities.

What Are The Causes of Homelessness?

There are so many reasons why a person becomes homeless, and every person's story is different. However, there are some general causes that are common among the homeless population in the United States.

1. Unable to Pay Rent

Often times a homeless person works one or two minimum wage jobs full time and still doesn't make enough money to pay rent. A Fact Sheet put out by the National Coalition reports: "Declining wages, in turn, have put housing out of reach for many workers: in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.¹ A recent U.S. Conference of Mayors report stated that in every state more than the minimum-wage is required to afford a one or two-bedroom apartment at 30% of his or her income, which is the federal definition of affordable housing. In 2001, five million rental households had "worst case housing needs," which means that they paid more than half their incomes for rent, living in severely substandard housing, or both (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). The primary source of income for 80% of these households was earnings from jobs" (U.S. Housing and Urban Development, 2001).

2. Mental Illness

Some homeless people have mental illnesses or disabilities, and they also struggle with finding housing. According to a study by the US Conference of Mayors in 2005, approximately 16% of the homeless population suffers from a mental illness. A report put out by the National Coalition for the Homeless says that in 2006 the amount of money it cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment was \$715 a month, which is 113.1% of a person on Supplemental Security Income. In 1999, in over 125 housing markets throughout the country, the cost of a one bedroom apartment was more than a person's total monthly SSI income. In 2006, the national average rent for a studio apartment became higher than the income of a person who relies solely on SSI income. Only 9% of people not in mental hospitals or facilities receiving SSI have housing assistance.

There are also other factors that lead a person to homelessness, such as domestic violence, unaffordable health care, and addictions to drugs and alcohol.

What Is The Government Doing to End Homelessness?

There are some federal programs that address the issue of homelessness and work to get homeless people off the streets and into a home of their own. There are three main services that the government offers that help homeless people find housing.

1. Section 8/Public Housing: The Section 8 program provides assistance to people living in privately owned apartments by allowing the person to pay 30% of their income towards the rent and have the government pay the rest.

¹ FMRs are the monthly amounts "needed to rent privately owned, decent, safe, and sanitary rental housing of a modest (non-luxury) nature with suitable amenities." Federal Register. HUD determines FMRs for localities in all 50 states.

Public Housing does the same thing except it's for people living in housing provided for by the government.

2. HUD Homeless Assistance Grants: The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) helps to fund programs that work towards ending homelessness. They also provide money for shelters, transitional housing, and other services that homeless people need.
3. Health Care for the Homeless: A program that provides the health care services to the homeless in an affordable way so that the person can receive care that they would otherwise not be able to get because they can't afford it.

How Can I Help?

There are so many ways that you can help the homeless. Just reading this fact sheet is a start because it provides you with additional information that you can use to educate your friends and families about this issue. In addition to this resource, you and your communities can:

1. Volunteer at a soup kitchen
2. Organize a clothing drive and donate the clothing to a shelter
3. Host a Speakers Panel (The National coalition for the Homeless has a Speakers Bureau that consists of homeless or formerly homeless individuals that go around to different groups and speak about their experiences. Contact Michael O'Neill, the Speakers Bureau Director at 202-462-4822 ext. 223 or email him at moneill@nationalhomeless.org)
4. Write your congressman and representatives urging them to support legislation that benefits homeless people.

Activities for Teachers/Leaders

1. Test Your Knowledge

Give students the attached short quiz and have them see how much they know about homelessness. After they take it, go over the answers and talk about their reactions and whether they were surprised by some of their findings.

2. Organize a Clothing Drive

Have students bring in clothing and school supplies, books and toiletry items to donate to a local shelter.

3. Host a Speaker's Panel (see above for information)

Additional Lesson Plans can be found at:

http://staffweb.esc12.net/~mbooth/homeless_education_service/homeless_education_service_homepage.htm

Additional Information

For more information about the issues of homelessness please visit www.nationalhomeless.org, the National Coalition for the Homeless website. There are additional fact sheets about a variety of issues and statistics that can be used as other resources.

Sources: National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet, Why Are People Homeless, www.nationalhomeless.org

National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet, Who Is Homeless?
www.nationalhomeless.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness, Homelessness Fact Sheet for Middle School Students, www.endhomelessness.org