

## LESSON PLAN X

Grade Level 4 - 6

Time Needed 40 minutes

Skill Areas Language Arts, Critical Thinking, note taking

Objective Students will understand that homelessness exists not only in urban areas but also in suburban and rural areas.

Materials Copies of Rural Homelessness handout

Teacher Preparation Read Rural Homelessness and have copies ready for distribution. Read section on rural homelessness in Teacher Background.

Activity Students will read the Rural Homelessness handout and be prepared for a discussion. If students are familiar with note taking this would be an opportunity to use that skill.

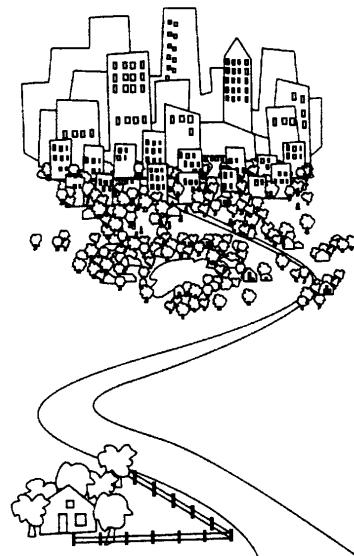
Discuss rural homelessness as a large group.

Teacher will direct the discussion to cover these topics:

- 1) Do all homeless people live in urban areas?
- 2) Why are homeless people in rural areas referred to as “invisible homeless?”
- 3) Give three reasons people become homeless in rural areas.
- 4) Share two options people have if they become homeless in a rural area.
- 5) Three ways rural communities can help prevent and end homelessness.

Other options Read the handout aloud as a large group and then conduct a discussion,  
or

Students can be given the Rural Homelessness handout and a list of questions can be written on the blackboard for them to answer.



## **Rural homelessness**

When we think of homeless people, we often think of them as living in urban areas.

In reality, homelessness occurs, across the country, in rural communities. In Minnesota, surveys have shown that not all homelessness occurs in metro areas. Although nearly 46 percent of homelessness did occur in Minneapolis and about 18 percent in Saint Paul, almost 17 percent of homeless people were found in Twin Cities suburbs. Thirty-five percent of people facing homelessness were found in outstate areas. These numbers include people in emergency shelters, put up for the night in hotels by social service agencies, or who are in transitional housing programs.<sup>1</sup>

Homeless people in rural areas are often referred to as the invisible homeless. Because of the smaller number of homeless people in any one rural community and the geographic spread of rural areas, homeless people are not as visible as they may be in urban areas.

There are many reasons people become homeless in rural areas. Economic changes, such as mine closings, farm foreclosures, and business failures or relocations, cause rural people to lose their source of income and thus become unable to afford housing. The lack of enough affordable housing for low-income people, as well as the deteriorating condition of some of the housing, causes many low-income rural people to live in unsafe dwellings. Discrimination against people of color can also create rural homelessness, when local landlords will not rent to minorities.

Seasonal farm laborers, sometimes referred to as migrant workers, also face the possibility of becoming homeless. Jobs that they are told will be available may not be; fields may become flooded; a poor harvest may occur. Not being paid until the job is completed, as well as the lack of affordable housing while they are working in a community, can cause seasonal farm workers to become homeless.

Rural homelessness also occurs when metro areas continue to grow and take over rural communities through urban sprawl. Metropolitan developers purchase rural properties hoping they will increase in value as the metro area grows. The metro developer will often work with local politicians to rezone land so mobile homes have to be located in trailer courts, thus forcing local residents to build a home on their land (which many are unable to afford to do) or move their mobile homes to the nearest trailer court.

Developers also encourage zoning changes that require new homes to be on lots of at least one acre, and even up to ten acres in size, or that require new homes to be at least \$100,000 in value. This makes it almost impossible for low-income people to build a home in their own community. The zoning changes, as well as the purchase of hobby farms and other rental property, typically increase rents in the area and reduce the affordable housing available. As these developers take property off the market it becomes impossible for low-income people in those communities to afford living there.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Report On the Minnesota Department of Jobs and Training Quarterly Shelter Surveys*, (MN Department of Economic Security, St. Paul, April, 1998)

Also, when the community brings a new business in it may not have planned for the housing needs of the new workers, and a housing shortage may occur. Workers may end up sleeping in their cars, camping out, or doubling up with other families; or they may have to find housing in a different community and travel up to 70 miles to work each day.

Very few rural communities have an emergency shelter. For someone who becomes homeless and needs shelter, the closest shelter could be 100 to 200 miles away. Often times, to stay in their community, an individual may try to double up with another family. While the host families are willing to do this to help the person facing homelessness, it often puts both families in danger of becoming homeless. Most rental units have a cap on the number of people who can live in the unit, especially in low-income or subsidized units. A family may decide to take the risk of eviction for having extra people living in their unit beyond the time allowed in their lease, because there is no other place for the homeless person or family to go. Other homeless people have no other option but to move out of the rural area and try to find shelter or transitional housing in a regional city.

What needs to be done?

First, each community must recognize that a part of being a healthy community means that everyone has a safe, decent, and affordable place to call home. The community needs to work together in providing for the housing needs of all people in their community.

Second, the community must work together to prevent homelessness. The community can find ways to get affordable housing built, find ways to keep the current housing in good condition, make it easier for people to buy homes, and assist people to keep their housing when they face emergency situations.

Third, communities can provide emergency and support services such as a temporary safe home or a church providing space in their building to shelter people during a crisis. Often two or more counties will work together to develop and provide an ongoing safety net of transitional housing programs and emergency shelters to help homeless people in their area.

Finally, communities need to create livable income jobs; provide income supports for those unable to work or unemployed; provide affordable, accessible health care, child care and transportation; and protect the civil rights of everyone.

## **What programs are out there that help? What can I do?**

- Young people can do a lot to help people who experience homelessness-
- Some examples of programs that help people experiencing homelessness are: Shelters- a safe place for people to sleep. Soup Kitchens- places where people can get meals. There are also places to go to see a doctor or to help adults find jobs.
- Some examples of what young people can do: Treat people who do not have a home the same way that you would like to be treated; serve a meal at a soup kitchen; collect blankets, hats, gloves and jackets for people who are living in the street; write a letter or visit your elected officials and let them know how you feel about homelessness; share what you have learned about homelessness with your family and friends.