

## **Lesson Plan 7 – Homeless Youth**

**Objective:** Students will understand the problem of homeless youth and why some kids can't go home.

**Skill Area:** Language Arts, Advocacy, Community Service.

**Materials Needed:** Reading on homeless youth.

**Student Preparation:** Read *Kids Who Can't Go Home*

**Teacher Preparation:** None

**Activities:** Discussion on homeless youth.

- a) In your own words, how would you define "homeless youth"?
- b) Identify three reasons why youth become homeless.
- c) What barriers do homeless youth face in obtaining a place to live?
- d) What options do homeless youth have when they don't have a friend they can stay with?
- e) What social service agencies in your area provide services to homeless youth?

Write letters to your government officials addressing this issue, how it affected you, and the need for adequate support for homeless youth?

As a class, role-play what you would do if a friend ran away or was kicked out of their home.

Collect clothes and deliver them to an agency that serves homeless youth.

## Kids Who Can't Go Home

There is a segment of the homeless population that is often ignored. This is not surprising, for only in recent years have these people been recognized as “homeless”. It would be extremely difficult, however, for you to overlook these people. You may see them everyday. You may have crossed their path without realizing they are without a permanent place to live. In the past they were referred to under the label “runaway”. Today it is known that this broad label is misleading.

“Homeless youth – youth who are under the age of twenty-one, surviving on their own, and without a safe home environment – exist in nearly every U.S. city and in many rural communities.”<sup>2</sup> They live in a wide variety of settings. The fortunate are able to find temporary asylum in the home of a friend or in a shelter. Those who are less lucky may find refuge under bridges, in cars, or in abandoned buildings. Any day or night, 730 Minnesota kids are on their own, homeless, trying to survive on the streets. 10,000 youth are homeless in Minnesota during the course of one year.<sup>3</sup>

Homeless youth leave their families for many reasons. Some have left their homes to escape their parents’ rules and control; some are kicked out of the house by parents who are unwilling to accept them for being “different”; many are fleeing family environment in which they have been physically or sexually abused. Regardless of the cause, homeless youth are often not able to return to their families. When parents are called they frequently state that they do not want their child back in the house.

Homeless teens find themselves in an almost impossible situation. Due to their age and their incomplete education, it is very difficult for them to find a job in which will pay enough to get by. If they are able to obtain such a job, they must then locate a landlord who will rent to a teenager. Few are able to make it past these enormous barriers.

Without a job, homeless youth are left with few options to make money. Many panhandle, begging for money from people on the streets. Some end up selling their belongings. These methods seldom bring in enough money to survive. It is then common for teenagers to resort to more dangerous activities to get by. Some are forced to join gangs for money and protection. Others are taken advantage of by adults who pressure them into prostitution. Their situation becomes increasingly bleak.

Due to efforts of a growing group of people, the options available for homeless youth are increasing. Ventures are being made to provide safe and affordable housing for teenagers as well as vocational training to help teens find work. Other support services are offering family reunification assistance, counseling, temporary family-placements, meals, clothing and health care services.

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Cwayna, *Knowing Where the Fountains Are: Stories and Stark Readings of Homeless Youth* (Minneapolis: Deaconess Press, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> Wilder Research, 1998