

THE HOMELESS: SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION

Group Activity (5 Minutes)

Ask students to name what they think are characteristics of homeless people, negative or positive. Welcome all comments, which may range from "lazy" to "victims." Write the characteristics on the board. Don't allow students to debate; just try to get as many impressions as you can in five minutes.

SHOW THE VIDEO (18 Minutes)

Small Group Questions (10 Minutes - 5 per group, assign 3 or 4 questions)

1. How did Ruben, who had a family close by, end up homeless?
2. How do you think most homeless people become homeless?
3. How do you feel when a homeless person asks you for money, or when you see someone with a sign asking for money or work?
4. In what ways does your local community provide help for the homeless?
5. What do you think most homeless people need to get off the street?
6. Who is responsible for caring for the homeless and why? Government? Churches? Non-Profit shelters? Individuals?
7. How can your community help the homeless without making them dependant on the help (which might perpetuate their homeless state)?
8. What positive things can you do if a homeless person asks you for money?
9. What would you do if you became homeless?

Group Activity (10 Minutes)

Compare the answers to #9. Ask students where would they sleep, would they beg for money, could they live in their clothes for a week or two at a time? Then, discuss #6. It comes down to this: if you care, you must be a part of the solution in some way. Compare answers to #8. Before class, make a list of community groups involved in helping the homeless and pass it out at the end of class.

THE HOMELESS: WRAP-UP

MOST HOMELESS PEOPLE STARTED OUT JUST LIKE YOU.

- But they may have lost their job, gotten involved in drugs or alcohol, or some other bad turn of events in their life which they couldn't overcome.
- Few of them want to be homeless. They remember what it was like to live in a home and have the comforts we enjoy every day.

NOT ALL HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE ON THE STREETS FOR THE SAME REASONS.

- Some are addicted to drugs, others are mentally ill, and some are con artists looking for a free hand out.
- Many, however, are just going through hard times and are hoping for a chance to get back on their feet again.

NO MATTER WHY THEY ARE HOMELESS, THEY NEED AND DESERVE OUR COMPASSION AND OUR HELP.

- Homeless people are people, just like you and me. Everyone deserves help, so do for them what you'd want someone to do for you in that situation.
- You may never know the real story of any homeless person, but just do your part and help them. Don't let it be someone else's problem.

BE WISE IN HOW YOU HELP THE HOMELESS.

- Know which groups in your town help the homeless, and what they provide. Carry their cards in your purse or wallet so you can give it out when asked for help.
- Carry McDonald's gift certificates or fruit in you book bag or car, so you can give out food if the homeless person is asking for food.

GET INVOLVED LIKE TINA DID AND SEE FOR YOURSELF.

- Volunteer to help out any group in your town who is helping the homeless.
- Getting to know the homeless is the best way to understand them.

HOMEWORK: THE HOMELESS

HOMEWORK Project: How Can I Help?

Take a survey of your community to see which groups are helping the homeless. Call your local police department. They should be able to give you a list of places that are helping. Check your local Salvation Army, Red Cross, churches and synagogues. Once you find one group that is helping, ask them for names and numbers of other groups. Ask each group if they provide:

1. Free meals and/or clothing? When and how often?
2. A place to stay or sleep? What are the requirements or rules?
3. Counseling for emotional, financial or work needs?
4. Opportunities for employment?

List the name, address, and phone number of each organization that helps the homeless, and the services each provides. Write or print it on a 3 x 5 card, or write it on a full sheet of paper and photocopy it to a smaller size. Make copies and carry several in your purse or wallet to be able to give to homeless people. Conclude by writing a one or two page paper evaluating how your community is providing for the homeless. How could teenagers be involved in any of these groups? What else would you like to see provided, and how could that become a reality?

HOMEWORK Project: Getting Involved

Find a local organization that is helping the homeless through food, clothing, shelter, or any other means. Volunteer to work in their program where you can see and interact with homeless people. Do this at least four different times. Try to get to know one or two people. Ask them a few questions, like:

1. How did you become homeless?
2. What was your life like before?
3. What do you need to get off the streets?

Sit down with the director of the program and ask him or her the same questions about the homeless people. Write a paper based on your experiences and conversations, and cover at least the following points:

1. What is your opinion on how people become homeless?
2. What do they need most to get off the streets?
3. What more can be done to help the homeless in your community?
4. What is encouraging and frustrating about working with the homeless? How can young people make a difference in your community?