

Introductory Materials

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Overview of Education Packet

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless (GCCH) is a unified social action group with over 45 member organizations. Our mission is to eradicate homelessness with respect for the dignity and diversity of our membership, the homeless, and the community. We perform three areas of work: coordination of area services, public education, and advocacy.

GCCH commissioned the writing of this teacher's guide as part of a learning unit designed to teach high school students about the issue of homelessness. The unit grew out of a collaborative project with Mother of Mercy High School students and the Homeless Coalition in 2003, as well as our connections to several other secondary schools in Cincinnati who wanted to teach about homelessness.

The unit features these items:

1. *Voices Unheard*, a 38-minute video about homelessness in Cincinnati
2. *Through Our Eyes*, a 79-page book written by students at Mother of Mercy High School about their personal encounters with local homeless people
3. *Homeless in Cincinnati*, an 82-page statistical report on homelessness in Cincinnati
4. *Streetvibes*, a monthly newspaper published by GCCH for the homeless community
5. Classroom visit by a guest speaker
6. Teacher's guide with five lessons and supplemental materials

The target audience for this unit on homelessness is secondary level students in courses such as modern American history, government and civics, political science, economics, social justice, and religion. Because the lessons are standards-based, correlated to Ohio Social Studies Standards and those of the National Council for the Social Studies, the lessons can easily be used in classes to meet various curriculum requirements, even though "homelessness" may not be standard content. Yet the timeliness of this unit could not be more fitting.

This unit is being introduced to schools at a time when homelessness continues to rise in America, as it has for the past 20-25 years. The subject has been the source of heated debate in the last few years in Cincinnati, as citizens and government and private agencies struggle over how to cope with the growing numbers of homeless individuals appearing on our streets. Many regard homelessness as one of the most pressing societal problems facing the United States, yet it remains a subject mired in myth and stereotype, with the homeless themselves invisible to or ignored by the majority. By educating young people with this unit, GCCH hopes to change attitudes, strengthen resolve, and inspire action.

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How to Use This Guide

The Table of Contents clearly outlines the content of each section of this guide.

- Among the Introductory Materials in **Section A** is a short essay on the history of the problem of homelessness in the United States as it has developed over time. Reading this essay will provide historical context for the lessons, which focus on the present situation. Homelessness as a problem did not just spring up in recent years; rather, it has been escalating for decades as a result of various economic and governmental policies.
- **Section B** contains the five lessons, the general natures of which were suggested by the staff of GCCH. Each lesson stands alone and they do not have to be followed in order, though there is a natural progression in content. The lessons offer far more material than most classes will be able to use in the suggested time frames, so teachers are encouraged to choose those activities that best fit their needs and students.
- **Section C** holds a variety of resources from the media, including recent newspaper articles, editorial cartoons from local and national newspapers, and photographic images. Lesson activities specify when and how to incorporate these items.
- **Section D** features graphic organizers, handouts, and tips for using each of the other resources that accompany this guide.
- **Section E** is the Appendix, containing a detailed glossary of relevant terms; a bibliography of web sites, videos, books, and WebQuests related to homelessness; and contact information for local agencies that serve the homeless population.

Lessons are activity-based, utilizing a number of teaching strategies that actively involve students in gathering and assimilating information. Techniques include role-play, a mock town hall meeting, journal writing, group work, discussion, brainstorming, active viewing and listening, guest speakers, graphic organizers, and self-reflective activities.

Each of the five lessons in this guide follows the same format.

- **Target Audience:** lessons are targeted to grades 10-12
- **Summary Description of Lesson:** a brief paragraph highlighting the key content and instructional strategies used
- **Time Needed:** each lesson suggests one class period of 45-60 minutes, with the five lessons comprising a one-week unit. How much can be accomplished in one period varies from class to class. Typically, to complete each lesson in one period, a teacher must be selective about what activities to use among the multiple ones offered. To complete all lesson activities may take several class periods.
- **Objectives:** specifies the learning goals for students in the cognitive and affective domains
- **Curriculum Standards:** listings of the specific content standards by grade level and strand that each lesson addresses. Ohio Social Studies Standards and National Council for the Social Studies Standards are referenced.
- **Topics/Concepts Addressed:** presented as words or phrases for easy identification

- **Materials Needed/Used:** a list of what items are needed to complete each lesson
- **Teacher Preparation:** things that the teacher needs to do before the lesson starts
- **Warm-Up:** presents one or more strategies for beginning the lesson and introducing the key concepts to students. Most Warm-Ups include more than one activity, so teachers can choose what will work best with their students.
- **Developing the Lesson:** step-by-step procedures that focus on major content development and strategies that build on what was presented in the Warm-Up
- **Wrap-Up:** suggests effective ways to conclude the lesson. May refer back to material covered earlier in the lesson or unit.
- **Lesson Extensions:** additional suggested strategies for classes that have the time to follow-up in more depth. Extensions can become homework assignments or topics for research or service learning projects in the community.
- **Additional Resources:** lists of web sites, videos, or books that relate to the topic of the lesson
- **Handouts:** each lesson includes one or more handouts used to implement the lesson strategies. Handouts can be copied as needed. Many handouts function as graphic organizers to help students organize and analyze information.

A goal of this learning unit is to build awareness and create a positive change in attitude toward the homeless. To that end, an informal assessment through use of a pre- and post-test is included. The pre-test is Handout 1B and the post-test is Handout 5B.

Throughout the lessons, URLs to web sites are provided. All URLs were current as of the date of publication of this guide. Do keep in mind that URLs change and web sites disappear, so some of the web sites may become inaccessible over time.

Introduction to the Issue of Homelessness

Since the day the United States became a nation, people have been living homeless within its borders. Yet the size and characteristics of the nation's homeless population have not always been the same.

The Great Depression was responsible for the largest homeless population this country has ever witnessed. After the Depression, when World War II began, many homeless individuals joined the armed forces or obtained jobs in the booming war economy. Levels of homelessness dropped and remained relatively low through the financially strong decades that followed. It wasn't until the early 1980s that the homeless population again saw rapid growth.

A number of economic forces and governmental policies triggered the growth of homelessness in the 1980s and continue to affect the homeless population to this day. The declining value of minimum wage, the loss of jobs to overseas markets, and the declining availability and value of public assistance have affected much of the public's ability to maintain a livable income. At the same time, housing costs in general have been rising steadily and many low-income housing units have disappeared from the market due to urban renewal programs and government cuts. The lack of affordable housing is widely considered the main barrier to ending homelessness in the United States today.

While the years since the early 80s have, in general, been economically difficult for low-income individuals and families, there was a brighter time in the late 1990s when the nation saw low unemployment rates, a jump in incomes, and a sharp decline in poverty. Some economists at the time referred to it as a "productivity miracle." Unfortunately, the miracle was short-lived. The 2001 recession and the "jobless recovery" that followed halted and even reversed much of the economic gains that were made at the end of the 90s. Lawrence Mishel, co-author of *The State of Working America 2004/2005*, stated in 2005, "Prolonged weakness in the labor market has left the nation with over a million fewer jobs than when the recession began. This is a worse position, in terms of recouping lost jobs, than any business cycle since the 1930s."

Tonight, 800,000 people will experience homelessness in our country. 3.5 million people will experience homelessness at some point during this year. As the numbers have risen, the face of homelessness has changed. Families have become the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population. The proportion of women and children in the homeless population is now the largest it has been since the Civil War. Nationally, 39% of the homeless population is made up of children.

Unfortunately, many people still believe the myths that surround homelessness: that homeless people are mostly men, that they don't want to work, that they have chosen their lifestyle, or that they are all criminals, substance abusers, or mentally ill. The reality is that most homeless people would like to have steady employment, and while substance abuse and mental illness are significant problems in the homeless population, they are not qualities that the majority of homeless people possess. To believe such myths often leads to the further misunderstanding that homelessness is too difficult of a problem to be solved, that homeless people are beyond help, or worse, that they are undeserving of help.

Homelessness can be solved, but we have to start by working on its root causes. There are many reasons that people become homeless. In addition to the causes mentioned above, people can become homeless as a result of divorce, domestic violence, release from prison, health problems and more. Currently, homeless advocates across the nation are working on programs that will help stop homelessness at its sources.

This teacher's guide and the materials that supplement it are part of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless' effort to end homelessness through education. We aim to combat myths with factual information and personal accounts of homelessness. This guide and its supplemental materials will help you provide your students with both.

We invite you to contact GCCH if you have any questions or comments about this guide. We are always open to suggestions to help make this a better product.

Thank you for your attention to the issue of homelessness.

Andy Freeze
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