

LESSON PLAN XII

Grade Level 6th grade

Time Needed 35 minutes

Skill Areas Language Arts, advocacy

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

Materials Copies of "Kids Who Can't Go Home" for distribution to class.

Teacher Preparation Preview "Kids Who Can't Go Home."

Activity Instruct the students to read the hand out to themselves or read aloud as a class with students taking turns.

Conduct a discussion on the reading. The following questions may be helpful.

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

Extension Have the students write letters to government officials addressing this issue and the need for support for homeless youth. Internet email is a possible way to contact these officials.

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

*This lesson plan and "Kids Who Can't Go Home" was originally published in *On the Street Where You Live* , Minnesota Coalition For The Homeless, November 1996.

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.”² 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.³

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 environments 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 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.

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

³ Wilder Research, 1998

ADDITIONAL SERVICE IDEAS

- Students can make others aware of the causes of homelessness by creating the “faces of homelessness.” Students may use newspaper articles, magazines articles, illustrations, and personal stories to depict the issues of homelessness and create these faces. Present this material to other classes in the school by displaying it on school walls. The “I can help homeless people by...” worksheet in Lesson Plan V may be used here.
- Write an article for the local or school newspaper describing the issues of homelessness and asking others to become involved. Older students could also capture their experiences via videotape and present this work on the student school network or public access channel.
- Classes will “adopt a homeless service provider.” Students will draw pictures and write letters to people in the homeless facility. Students will also collect and donate necessary items to their adopted homeless service provider.
- Students could facilitate a book drive and create a library for a homeless service provider. Students could also collect new/used toys to donate to a homeless service provider.
- Students will initiate a “penny drive” and collect coins over a period of time. The money will be donated to a homeless service provider.

Critical Questions 4-6

- Think about how you would feel if you had to switch schools twice during the year. How would you feel about moving away from your friends? Getting a new teacher?
- Think about getting ready for school in the morning and all of the things you do to get ready. Now imagine that you have to do those things with a lot of other kids in a shelter. Imagine that you have to get ready for school but your family is living in their car. How would it feel to get ready for school in these situations?
- Think about trying to do your homework in your parent's car or on the street. Do you think that it would be hard to concentrate?
- Think about your favorite things at our house. Like rooms, toys, pets, hiding spots. Now imagine that your family became homeless, think about how you would feel having to move away from your favorite things.