Teacher Information Resource:
The Specifics, Services and Stereotypes of Homelessness

Information package for older primary school students.

Updated August 2019

About Us

Launch Housing

Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency formed in July 2015. Our mission is to end homelessness. We believe housing is a basic human right that affords people dignity. Everyone has a right to a home and it is our job to make this happen. With a combined history of over 75 years serving Melbourne's community, we provide high quality housing, support, education and employment services to over 18,000 people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. We also drive social policy change, advocacy, research and innovation.

Launch Housing provides affordable housing and homelessness support services. The housing component includes crisis accommodation, medium-term and long-term housing options, as well as access to private rental through brokerage. The support component varies from generalist to specialist, such as crisis intervention, medium-term/long-term case management, family violence assistance, access to education and employment, access to health services, and living skills support (budgeting, cooking, personal hygiene, cleaning etc.).

For more information, visit www.launchhousing.org.au

HomeGround Real Estate

HomeGround Real Estate, a non-profit real estate agency, was founded in 2014 and now manages hundreds of properties, with revenues going back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate, a social enterprise of Launch Housing, is an innovative option to help end homelessness. There is also a HomeGround Real Estate in Sydney and Canberra.

For lower income earners the lack of affordable housing can lead to stress, with the pressure of unsustainable rental payments and the uncertainty of temporary living arrangements. There are a few ways landlords work with us to increase the availability of affordable housing in Melbourne. Landlords can list their properties at full market rent, and the property management fees go back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate also gives socially conscious landlords the opportunity to offer a discount on the market rent to low income households while receiving professional property management services. People interested in learning more can contact HomeGround Real Estate at 9288 9600, realestate@homeground.org.au or see www.homegroundrealestate.com.au.

Our Annual Reports and Newsletters provide updated information on Launch Housing's initiatives, achievements and the latest research in the homelessness sector. It has a wealth of information and is a great starting point to learning about homelessness in Australia.

Need Help?

Free call. 24 hour. Opening Doors on 1800 825 955

If you're experiencing homelessness, at risk of losing your home, or you need to escape family violence, call Opening Doors on 1800 825 955 (free call, open 24/7).

Launch Housing takes referrals from Opening Doors, a state wide program which coordinates support to people experiencing homelessness.

Domestic Violence Call 1800 015 188

If you are experiencing domestic violence call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service 24/7 on (03) 9373 0123 or toll-free 1800 015 188.

Launch Housing Entry Points

Launch Housing has three homelessness entry points providing support services in the Melbourne Metropolitan area. You can drop into any of these 3 sites in person Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

Entry points are located at:

- 68 Oxford St, Collingwood

- 11 Chesterville Rd, Cheltenham; and

- 122 Chapel St, St Kilda.

When accessing our entry points an individual, couple or family will start an Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) process to help us find the right support program or services.

Contents

Teaching Resource

The Launch Housing Student Information Resource was created to raise awareness of homelessness in Australia. Suggested tasks have been created to give teachers and students the opportunity and confidence to learn about and interact with different aspects of homelessness. We have tailored this resource for students to discover the variety of homelessness experiences and the services available to the people in need. This all works towards breaking down the negative stereotypes surrounding them.

This resource is also intended to empower youths to take action towards preventing and ending homelessness. We encourage you to include open discussions with students about what they already know about homelessness, what they'd like to know and any questions they may have.

To help break down stereotypes against those experiencing homelessness, we ask you to address any that arise in the classroom. Perhaps ask the student why they make those assumptions and provide them with factual information. This in turn will assist students in understanding that homelessness isn't an illness. No one chooses homelessness. Experiencing homelessness may be the result of a number of difficulties in someone's life, combined with many systemic factors outside their control.

To Consider:

Some of the prevalent themes are sensitive and may be difficult to discuss. These topics include family violence, mental health challenges and substance misuse. Therefore, while discussing the connection between these topics and homelessness is encouraged, it is completely up to the teacher's discretion.

There may be students in your class who have or are experiencing homelessness or any of the other adversities discussed. Setting ground rules is an important step to create a safe space for the class to interact with the topics sensitively, and develop mutual respect and understanding between your students.

Some ground rules may include:

- Be respectful of everyone's beliefs and values.

- Listen carefully and politely to others.

- Use the 'Before you speak, T.H.I.N.K' rule.

- Value diversity.

- Be brave in sharing ideas, opinions and experiences.

- Understand people's right to privacy.

Before you speak:
THINK

T = Is it True?
H = Is it Helpful?
I = Is it Inspiring?
N = Is it Necessary?
K = Is it Kind?
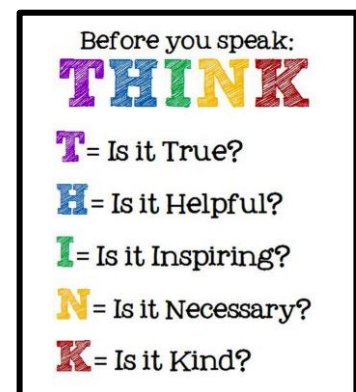
We also encourage you to allow students time after each session for personal reflection and an opportunity to speak among themselves or with you privately about the content covered.

What is Homelessness?

Homelessness affects more than 116,000 Australians every day of the year.
In Victoria, more than 24,800 Victorians were found as homeless in the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. We have seen an increase in demand on our services as rising rents and shrinking affordable and social housing stock force people into homelessness.

Only 1 in 14 people experiencing homelessness sleep rough. While rough sleepers are the most visible in our community, the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness live in rooming houses, crisis accommodation, or couch-surf with friends and family.

The ABS definition of homelessness has six operational groups:

1. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (rough sleeping)
2. Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
3. Persons staying temporarily with other households
4. Persons living in boarding houses
5. Persons in other temporary lodgings, and
6. Persons living in severely crowded dwellings.

Facts and Figures

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW):
  - 288,800 Australians sought assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services in 2017-2018. This is an increase of 34,800 people from the 2013-14 data.
  - The main causes of homelessness are domestic and family violence, unaffordable housing, and financial difficulties.

- ABS 2016 Census:
  - On any given night in Australia, 1 in 200 people are homeless.
  - 60% of people experiencing homelessness are under 35 years old.
  - The number of older people experiencing homelessness has increased 28% in four years, making it the fastest growing demographic.

- Australian Homelessness Monitor:
  - Australia has skyrocketing housing costs and a lack of social and affordable housing. Over 200,000 Australians are on housing waiting lists; 24% experiencing homelessness are affected by this housing crisis.
  - 613,000 people have fallen below the poverty line due to high housing costs, 229,000 of whom are children.
  - Policy inaction on housing affordability is responsible for increasing homelessness. There has been a 29% increase in spending on homelessness services but a 7% drop in investment in affordable and social housing from 2011-2016.

- To end homelessness, we need more affordable housing. Full stop.

Talking About Homelessness

Do:

- ✓ Refer to 'people experiencing homelessness' not 'homeless people'

- ✓ Take into account the broader social and economic causes of homelessness

- ✓ Give a balanced view of the range of homelessness experiences, not just rough sleeping

Don't:

- ✗ Blame the individual for systematic failures

- ✗ Use imagery that reinforces stereotypes or inaccurate opinions of homelessness

- ✗ Perpetuate fear of people who are experiencing homelessness; they are 11 times more likely to be the victim of violence than the perpetrator

Source: Council to Homeless Persons

Housing is a human right

Housing is a human right, recognised under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Every person has 'the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity', which takes into account indictors such as tenure and affordability. The ICESCR also states that forced evictions are a violation of their covenant and should not leave a person homeless.

Public housing is not free. The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services states that "rent is…25% of your total household income, for household member 18 years of age of over". Public housing is a safety net for people on low incomes who cannot afford to pay full, market-priced rent and are most in need of secure, affordable housing. In Victoria there is a chronic shortage of public housing and wait lists are long.

The importance of support in resolving homelessness

Support needs to be tailored as experiences of homelessness are diverse, but housing, safety, health and income are paramount. Once we engage with a person for a while, we may work with them more on long-term goals like engagement with education or employment, community participation, and relationships.

We recommend taking a look at some of the blog posts from our website. The stories are shared by people who have accessed our services. They can be quite revealing and offer a unique perspective on what it's like to be at risk of or experience homelessness:

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/blog/

Length of time experiencing homelessness

It really depends on the person and the challenges they are facing. Some people experience chronic homelessness, and may cycle in and out of the homelessness service sector for some years due to complex histories of trauma, family violence, challenging behaviours, social isolation and/or poverty. In other cases, a person or household may need a short period of support and/or funding (such as first month's rent) to transition into private rental, where they can live independently.

Homelessness throughout Australia

As we are still expanding our national reach, most of our research is founded in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria. Our Australian Homelessness Monitor provides an in-depth analysis of homelessness on a national scale with state and territory breakdown of statistics.

We do know that across Australia, homelessness in increasingly concentrated in our capital cities, where nearly two in every three people experiencing homelessness are now found. You can read more about how this is driven by rising inequality since 2001 in an article authored by our own Deb Batterham.

The University of New South Wales, in association with the Homelessness Monitor, has also created a map visualisation that allows users to zoom into specific areas of Australia to view local statistics:

https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/cityviz/australian-homelessness-monitor/

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016 found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

Homelessness can happen to anyone

No-one chooses homelessness but it can happen to anyone. As demonstrated in the Australian Homelessness Monitor, those in low income, vulnerable households are the most at risk of experiencing homelessness. Launch Housing supports thousands of people of all genders, all ages, individuals and families every year, from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and living situations.

Many people who experience homelessness have had serious disadvantages throughout their lives, including long-term unemployment, poor education, violence, mental health problems, disability and substance use problems. Homelessness can also occur due to a specific event, such as losing a job, domestic violence, being evicted from stable accommodation, suffering a major health condition or experiencing a high level of financial stress. Perhaps most important to note, is homelessness is not an individual failing. Government policies, housing affordability and other systemic factors all influence the dire state of homelessness in Australia.

Homelessness and Children

Across Australia 65,236 children accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in 2016-17, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Of those accessing support 47,325 children were under 9 years old.

Studies into families and homelessness have revealed a variety of detrimental effects on a child's health, education, and future socioeconomic status, which can perpetuate the cycle of homelessness in adulthood.

Launch Housing has been actively involved in studying children and homelessness for 25 years. We commissioned the first Australian research into family homelessness in 1992, undertaken by Jean McCaughey (from the Australian Institute of Family Studies).

This study found that preventing homelessness is better than trying to find a cure, and a lack of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness.

Nearly three decades later, these facts about children and homelessness unfortunately remain clear, consistent and unequivocally alarming.

Why do children experience homelessness?

There are a range of reasons children experience homelessness and the latest statistics reveal a continuing rise. In the past five years, the AIHW revealed a startling 67.8% increase in children experiencing homelessness in Victoria. The AIHW recorded 19,847 children under 14 years old accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in 2016-17.

The reasons why children experience homelessness are varied and can include domestic and family violence, a housing crisis, financial crisis, poverty, and mental health challenges. However, the primary reason women and children experience a housing crisis is due to domestic and family violence. Childhood homelessness can adversely affect health, education, family relationships and community connectedness.

The first 1,000 days

Research by [The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne](#) revealed that what happens during the first 1,000 days of a child's life, when the majority of critical development occurs, affects the whole body with profound lifelong implications.

Children need green space, opportunities to learn and play, nutritious food, and safe and supportive families and communities to thrive. Compared to those in stable housing situations, children experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of experiencing disadvantage over their lifetime.

Health and wellbeing

It's challenging to find housing, maintain health, a routine, education and manage medical needs when families experience homelessness. An experience of homelessness is highly destabilising and traumatising and the impact can continue even after moving into stable housing. It can make children feel unsafe, sad and angry. Family routines provide children with stability, control and a sense of security.

Studies show that the [impact of childhood homelessness](#) means children are more likely to require clinical care for health issues such as:

- Ear infections

- Gastrointestinal problems

- Asthma

- Dental problems

- Nutritional deficits

- Emergency room use and hospitalisation

- Developmental delays

- Mental health diagnoses

(Image by Unsplash)

However, they are less likely to have access to health services to address these issues—usually as a result of increased mobility, lack of transport, and financial difficulties.

Prevention through education

A child's learning and development is integral to their overall health and wellbeing, as well as ensures stable, happy, and productive lives. There is a strong [connection between intergenerational poverty, and educational attainment](#). It's also widely recognised that low levels of academic achievement is common in Australia's most disadvantaged communities.

'What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence?' found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource examines the range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected by homelessness and/ or family/domestic violence.

Childhood homelessness makes it difficult to maintain attendance and academic levels in school, and transiency has lasting implications. The consequence of each school change can result in a dramatic six-month learning gap, which can contribute to fewer employment opportunities in future.

This can perpetuate the cycle of intergenerational poverty, leading to an experience of homelessness later in life. Youth can also face a range of other difficulties including:

- Instability and emotional isolation

- Difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships

- Discrimination and stigma in the schoolyard or playground

- Stress and reduced concentration skills

- Learning delays

- Increased likelihood to leave school early

A child cannot be expected to thrive if they are transient, which is why early intervention is imperative.

What can we do to help?

The service system has not been adequately designed to respond to families experiencing homelessness. Families with children have extreme difficulties accessing Specialist Homelessness Services. Studies have shown that children need coordinated prevention, early intervention, and better crisis support.

Launch Housing offers a range of programs and supports to prevent homelessness for families. We intervene early to stabilise housing and offer crisis support

The Children's Specialist Support Service (CSSS) at Launch Housing's South Melbourne office supports children (up to 18 years old) and their families who are experiencing homelessness and/or dealing with family violence. CSSS is a broad service which aims to help children reconnect with education, overcome trauma, build resilience and improve their long term outcomes. CSSS includes access to education pathways, educational assessments, access to psychologists, intensive case management, case planning and a group work program.

Already, CSSS's philanthropically funded Education Pathways Program has supported 260 children to re-engage with their education.

The Empty Lunchbox Report found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource provides further understanding of homelessness in schooling communities and offers advice in terms of detecting children at risk of homelessness, providing safer environments, and services/organisations schools can contact for support.

The Causes

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2017), the top three reasons for clients seeking assistance across Victoria are:

1. Domestic and family violence (44%)
2. Housing crisis (40%)
3. Financial difficulties (39%)

The causes of homelessness are complex, with no single trigger. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows the overall changing level of homelessness is an outcome of socio-economic and housing market trends.

The Impact

Homelessness is a traumatic experience. It puts extra strain on people's relationships and on their mental and emotional health. Many who experience homelessness have already endured significant stress in addition to their homelessness – this may be long running financial hardship, domestic violence, the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship.

For many people the first point of call is family or friends. They move in with a family member who wants to help but may be struggling themselves. Overcrowding and relationship breakdowns can often result, leading to further trauma and heartache.

To gain understanding of the impact of homelessness on children, please read through the handout provided with this resource.

The Solutions

Homelessness is not inevitable, and we believe it can be solved. The solutions are common sense, practical and cost effective. Trauma can be averted and lives can be transformed with the right combination of housing and support.

The best solution to homelessness is to address its causes and prevent people from experiencing homelessness in the first place. This involves ensuring sufficient affordable housing, providing people with access to education, training and employment opportunities, preventing ill health and ensuring everyone has someone they can turn to in times of need.

We must see a shared effort from the Australian Government, the states and territories to address housing affordability. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows us there has been a period of inaction that has led to increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

Housing, welfare and employment support policy and homelessness programs represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness, and improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

The Australian Homelessness Monitor found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource provides a holistic picture of the changes in scale and nature of homelessness in Australia and is a great resource for information and statistics.

Teaching the Specifics, Services & Stereotypes

Different Types of Homelessness

While rough sleepers are the most visible in our society, they represent only 7% of those experiencing homelessness. To gain a richer understanding of Australian homelessness, it's important to know the different types of homelessness people experience.

- Explain to students the types of homelessness found in the ABS's definition.

- Test student's knowledge with a game of 'True or False'. For example, ask students, "Someone who is living on a friend's couch is homeless: true or false". The answer is 'True'.

Homelessness Support Services

As a class, watch the "We are Launch Housing" video to hear first-hand accounts and engage with the topic of homelessness. Discuss whether students know of services supporting those experiencing homelessness and if so, what are they?

To be advised: this video discusses attempted suicide. If you or your students are affected by this video, please call Lifeline at 13 11 14 or message the team at Beyond Blue.

Breaking the Stereotypes

Ask students to brainstorm words and phrases that come to mind when they think of someone experiencing homelessness. Write their responses on the board. While recording, divide them into three descriptor columns: 'good', 'bad' and 'neutral'.

As a class, discuss where the students may have developed these stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness. The following questions may help to stimulate the conversation:

- How are people who are experiencing homelessness portrayed in TV shows and movies?

- What about on the news? How does our media portray people experiencing homelessness?

- Given what we have learnt about the different types of homelessness, do you think these depictions are accurate or appropriate? Why or why not?

Incorporating a Lived Experience

As a class, read 'Charlie's Story' handout document.

- Discuss the challenges Charlie faced and what he did to overcome them.

- Ask if students had made any assumptions about Charlie when reading the story – if so, what stereotype did that assumption come from?

Extra Resources

Act like an Activist!

Below is a list of examples in which staff, students and entire schools can get involved in raising awareness and encouraging action towards ending homelessness in Australia.

Launch Housing Donation Drives

Launch Housing hold three donation drives a year; one for Easter, winter and the festive season in December. Our Easter drive collects chocolate donations to give to families and children experiencing homelessness who would otherwise miss out. Our winter drive is focused on delivering blankets and other warm provisions to those experiencing homelessness on the cold winter nights in Melbourne. Our festive drive aims to deliver toys to the children who are experiencing homelessness and whose parents are unable to provide gifts from 'Santa'.

If your school is interested in getting involved in one or all of these drives, contact us for more information. You can call the Fundraising and Business Development team on 1800 720 660 or email supporters@launchhousing.org.au.

Write to your local Member of Parliament

Encourage your school and/or class to write a letter to a local MP. Activism is the best way to create change and by having mass groups of people highlighting homelessness as a concern, politicians will need to respond. The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) provides resources for contacting your state MP and an example letter at http://chp.org.au/take-action/resources-for-visiting-your-state-mp/

Create a Petition

Similar to writing to a local MP, a petition is a simple way that a community can come together to raise their concern towards homelessness and demand the government help those experiencing homelessness. If you would instead prefer to sign one already created, the 'Everybody's Home' petition can be found at https://everybodyshome.com.au/petition/

National Days of Awareness

Get involved in national awareness events such as Youth Homelessness Matters Day (April) and Homelessness Week (August). As homelessness is particularly topical during these times, it may be the best time for your school to raise awareness and become an activist in ending homelessness.

A Day in Their Shoes

Organise a day at school where the students give up something in solidarity with those experiencing homelessness. This allows students to empathise and understand the meaning of losing something dear to them. An example of what they could give up include:

- Furniture and technology such as desks, chairs and computers
- Food (with exceptions),
- Indoor activities (i.e. the school day spent outside the classroom)

Publications on Homelessness

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

The AIHW has provided several reports and publications on the situation of homelessness in Australia and the services which support these communities.

https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview

Australian Homelessness Monitor

Launch Housing has commissioned the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018, for this first-of-its-kind authoritative insight into the current state of homelessness in Australia. The monitor is an in-depth, independent longitudinal analysis examining the changes in the scale and nature of homelessness in Australia, as well as how social, economic and policy drivers influence these changes

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/australianhomelessnessmonitor/

Empty Lunchbox Report

This exploratory study is the first time that the point of view of primary schools and their day-to-day experiences of dealing with student homelessness have been investigated. The findings make an important contribution to the broader evidence base on the detrimental impact of homelessness on children's education. Engagement and wellbeing are fundamental to learning. Given that homelessness can interfere with school engagement and wellbeing, it poses a major obstacle to learning.

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Research_The-Empty-Lunchbox-report_Final.pdf

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016

This study examined the changing geography of homelessness. It outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/313

What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence?

This report examines the range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected by homelessness and/or family/domestic violence.

https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/icps/_docs/part1_literaturesynthesis_march2013.pdf?la=en&hash=BD2594BD402017EF7C5FC13C6DC4C6AA

'How to' Guides

Fundraising

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/fundraising

Petition Writing

Legislative Assembly – Parliament of Australia

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/assembly/petitions

Volunteering

Volunteering Australia

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/australian-curriculum/