



Homelessness & Hunger Awareness

Lesson Overview: Because many homeless people also experience hunger, the Massachusetts 4-H Food Drive

Curriculum is including this separate page from the National Coalition for the Homeless.

Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 20-25 years: a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty.

Various segments of our population nationwide experience homelessness. There are many myths surrounding this tragic circumstance. Many would be surprised to learn that seniors, veterans, children and families, and many employed workers experience homelessness, as well as those who are mentally impaired and those who are experiencing addiction disorders. This is a growing problem! As the largest youth organization, 4-H clubs and members need to be aware that families with children are among the fastest growing segments of the homeless population. In its 2007 survey of 23 American cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that families with children comprised 23% of the homeless population (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007). These proportions are likely to be higher in rural areas, where the majority of our youth live. Research also found that families, single mothers, and children make up the largest group of people who are homeless in rural areas (Vissing, 1996).

The National Coalition for the Homeless (<http://www.nationalhomeless.org>) has created a whole page of activities to create awareness. Any of the following activities would be excellent for our active 4-H clubs! While some are more appropriate for older groups, many can be adapted for any age group.

Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week takes place from November 15-21, 2009, right before the end of the 2009 Massachusetts 4-H Food Drive.

Please get involved!

Suggested Activities



- Organize a “One Night Without a Home” awareness sleep out in front of city hall or on a nearby college campus.
- Organize Oxfam America’s *Fast for a World Harvest* in your community to take place during Awareness Week. Check out : www.oxfamamerica.org/ to see what you can do.
- Designate one day for community members to skip a meal. Instead of purchasing lunch that day, they can donate the money that they would have spent to hungry people in your community.
- Host educational forums on hunger and homelessness. Invite speakers, such as homeless persons to share their experiences, service providers and community speakers. Show videos and distribute fact sheets or other informational material (refer to the National Coalition for the Homeless’ website: www.nationalhomeless.org).
- Organize a movie night and show one of the movies listed in the Education section on the above website. Have a local business or group donate popcorn.
- Organize a book reading and discussion group. See listed books in the Education section on the above website. Arrange to go into an elementary school and read one of the children’s books and have the teacher facilitate an age-appropriate discussion.
- Register homeless and low-income people to vote.
- Have a booth where people can write to their Congressional representatives about the importance of programs for homeless persons. (See <http://www.offeringofletters.org/> for letter descriptions and samples)
- Organize a drive to collect non-perishable items such as certain foods, hygiene products, clothing, blankets, books, and toys. Involve the community organizations in a competition to see which group can collect the most donations.
- Organize a potluck dinner in which community members bring in a dish for themselves and three other persons. Invite homeless persons as guests in order to encourage community interaction. Remember to choose a neutral site for the dinner — a convenient place with no religious affiliation.
- Sponsor a bake sale. Donate collected money to a local shelter.

- Sponsor a benefit concert with local musicians. Donate collected money to a local shelter.
- Arrange a walk or a run. Have each participant collect sponsorship money; set a minimum, such as \$20 per participant. Donate collected money to a local shelter. Encourage local businesses to donate food and drinks. Encourage local bands to provide entertainment.
- Arrange a Community Service Day where people can volunteer at different local organizations and learn about their activities. Suggested contacts: food pantries, homeless shelters, and soup kitchens.
- Think Globally, Act Locally- Washington, D.C. isn't the only place that lobbying is possible! Gather a group of students and homeless/formerly homeless individuals and visit your city hall, county commission, state legislature and/or a local office of your Congressional representative or Senator. Focus on educating your audience on homelessness issues and what ideas you have to better the situation. Lobbying doesn't have to have a negative connotation; think about what you are doing as merely an educational, hopeful conversation.

All of these ideas leave plenty of room for ingenuity. Take one of these ideas and change it as you see fit, or combine components of multiple ideas, such as:

- Organize a carnival: charge a couple of dollars for admission and/or collect canned foods as admission. Have local businesses donate food, drinks, and other goods or services. Charge very little for each, and donate all proceeds from the event to a local shelter. Have homeless or formerly homeless people attend and speak briefly. Have local bands perform. Have a booth to write letters to Congressional representatives.

A truly successful Awareness Week will inspire people to become further involved with the issues of hunger and homelessness!