

FACTSHEET: HOMELESSNESS



ACTIVITY **BUST SOME MYTHS!**

Ask the group to stand in the middle of the room. When you share the following statements, get them to run to the front of the room (if they think it's a fact) or the back (if they think it's a myth). Then share the answers.



- People experiencing homelessness always live on the street. **myth**
- More than 120,000 people experience homelessness in Australia today. **fact**
- It's mainly older men who are homeless. **myth**
- Being homeless is a choice. **myth**



KELLY'S STORY

Kelly and her family have been doing it tough following COVID-19 lockdowns and now, economic pressures are adding to her already desperate situation.

"The bills have now gone up so much.

We're doing everything we can from not using lights, taking the shortest possible showers, eating only pasta because it's cheap, but nothing ever seems to be enough," she says.

The cost of housing, food, energy, and petrol have seen some of the sharpest inflationary pressures and there's only so much you can do to cut back on the necessities of life.

"My husband works. My eldest daughter works. But, with everything going up, we just can't keep up. It gives me so much anxiety – it's crippling," Kelly says.

Kelly's husband works in the hospitality industry and lost his job due to the pandemic. He was rehired as a kitchenhand but is now earning a lot less money. The cost of rent for Kelly and her husband exceeds more than half of their combined income, placing them in acute housing stress. More than half of people who approach Vinnies NSW are experiencing housing stress. Housing stress is defined as a household which spends more than 30% of its income – before taxes – on housing. This leaves very little left over to manage other bills and expenses.

"When our electricity bill came in, I dropped. I literally dropped. There's just no way we could pay it. The roof is leaking, and it's destroyed our microwave. We can't afford to fix it, and we can't afford to replace the microwave. What do we do? I get so much anxiety. There's always another bill. There's always something to be fixed, or things we need, like clothes." Kelly says.

Vinnies NSW has provided the family with assistance, including rent, utilities, food and school expenses, as well as bedding for Kelly's daughters.

"To get some help, it really changes everything. I just started seeing a counsellor thanks to Vinnies," Kelly says.

REFLECTION:

Thinking about the type of injustice that was experienced by Kelly and her family, identify one policy or community commitment that would make a significant difference to the lives of people experiencing this type of disadvantage.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Ask the group questions then discuss the facts.

WHAT DOES HOMELESSNESS MEAN?

What does 'safe' mean to you? What about 'secure' and 'adequate'?

A person experiencing homelessness does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing.

Only 6% of people experiencing homelessness stay in improvised dwellings, tents or sleep out.

The others, who are the majority, are staying at:

- In severely overcrowded dwellings 39%
- In supported accommodation for the homeless 20%
- With other households 17%
- With boarding houses 18%

WHO IS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

**OVER 122,000
PEOPLE EVERY NIGHT
IN AUSTRALIA**

Male 56% Female 44%
Indigenous 20%
Under 12 years of age 14%
Aged between 25-34 years 21%
Aged 55+ years 16%

These statistics don't capture the even greater number of people who are at risk of homelessness in Australia through economic and social disadvantage.

WHY DO YOU THINK SOMEONE MAY BE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

- Issues with housing or finances e.g. affordability of rent or cost of living: 52%
- Domestic and Family Violence: 28%
- Other family or relationship issues: 5%
- Other issues: 15%

WHAT VINNIES DOES

VINNIES HOMELESS SERVICES

Includes crisis and/or transitional accommodation, case management support, domestic violence services, meals, and more. These services focus on preventing the cycle of homelessness, to support people with housing, cost of living and other pressures to keep them from falling into homelessness. If they do experience homelessness, the focus is to help find permanent accommodation as soon as possible.

VINNIES CAMPAIGNS

Vinnies strongly advocates for government to take action on these issues at a National and State level. Check out the current campaigns at socialjustice.vinnies.org.au to get involved or to start your own local campaign.

ACTIVITY

Watch the video 'Vinnies NSW CEO Sleepout 2023 - Night Patrol': www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1vzZBtuiko&t=6s

Reflect on the following questions:

- Who does Vinnies Vans serve?
- What do Vinnies Vans volunteers offer?
- What is meant by 'a human being, not a problem'?
- How can you, as an individual and as a school community, help support people experiencing homelessness?

"The rising cost of living and housing crisis further exacerbates the conditions that push people into homelessness... The reality is that many people are now faced with the difficult choice of putting food on the table or having a roof over their heads. This has sadly become an all-too-familiar story that our Members witness every day."

- Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

BE ADVOCATES

Talk to your family, friends, classmates, and community to help raise awareness about homelessness and fight negative stereotypes. Research the topic; see what Vinnies is doing in your local area and how they're advocating to government. Collect signatures for a Vinnies petition, start your own or invite a local MP or Mayor to your group meeting or event so you can share your concerns with them – and let us know about it!

CREATE A SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

Visit the **Vinnies Key Event Calendar** and create a **Social Justice Action Plan** to help support minority groups: youthnsw.vinnies.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YOUTH_KEY-EVENTS_CALENDAR_2024.pdf

BE GENEROUS

Get on board with the Winter Appeal or Christmas Appeal to collect money, clothing or food donations. Run a Sleepout to raise awareness and much needed funds to directly support people who are sleeping rough.

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- Check the helpful guides on how to do this online: fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au
- Volunteer at a local Vinnies: youthnsw.vinnies.org.au/bethechange

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