

ACTIVITY **BUST SOME MYTHS!**

Ask the students 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**

OLIVIA AND DARREN'S STORY



For single dad Darren, the costs of rent, utilities, food and healthcare became impossible to keep up with. He and his daughter, Olivia, became one of the 122,000 Australians without a permanent, safe place to sleep. Darren had no steady work and no previous rental references. He felt hopeless.

They spent many months moving from couch to floor, uncle to aunty, looking for somewhere safe to stay. Olivia would cling tightly to her dad as he called on every favour and begged every friend for help.

"I just kept doing what I had to do every day for her" said Darren "My little girl was worried every day. She used to ask me where we were going, what we were going to eat, where would we stay." he explained.

The routine tasks parents take for granted, like cooking dinner or running a bath, became a daily challenge or a luxury. Finally, Darren turned to Vinnies for help. With the assistance of Danielle, a homelessness support worker, Darren was able to access financial counselling, parenting support, and most importantly, a home.

He told us about the moment he and Olivia walked in the door...

"When we got the place, the look on Olivia's face was just priceless. She couldn't stop smiling. She just ran around the house, jumping up and down saying, 'This is ours; this is ours!'"

Reflection:

- Re-read the story and label the types of feelings you would feel at each stage if you were Olivia
- What basic resources do you and your family have that Olivia and Darren lacked?
- How will Olivia's life change now that she has a home?

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 emergency accommodation and food when people need it most, on-going support to help with different concerns along the way, as well as domestic violence help and more. These services try to prevent the cycle of homelessness. This means helping people through tough times, to keep them from falling into homelessness.

For people that are experiencing homelessness, Vinnies tries to help find permanent, safe accommodation as soon as possible.

Vinnies Vans are another service of Vinnies NSW that provide meals and snacks, blankets, toiletries, hot beverages, and, most importantly, companionship and referrals where needed to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

For more information, visit:
vinnies.org.au/nsw/find-help/vinnies-vans

“Housing is a human right, and it is simply not good enough that in a country such as Australia that prides itself on a ‘fair go’, we are allowing so many Australians to live without a home”

- Mark Gaetani, St Vincent de Paul Society National President.

VINNIES CAMPAIGNS

Vinnies tries to get the government to see these bigger issues and find solutions to prevent more people from experiencing homelessness. There are different Vinnies campaigns running all the time online which your school can get involved in – sometimes the campaign might ask you to collect signatures for a petition, speak with your local Mayor, or call the Prime Minister.

Check out the current campaigns at socialjustice.vinnies.org.au to get involved or to start your own local campaign.

ACTIVITY

Have small groups of students make a list of things that they would do in a normal day. The list could include activities they would do from when they wake up in the morning to when they go to sleep at night. Common things like brushing their teeth, having cereal, choosing what to wear, talking to their families and friends, watching tv, having a shower etc.

After a collective list is developed, go through each activity with the students and discuss whether you could still do this same activity if you were experiencing homelessness, and how would you manage it. How would this activity be different if you were experiencing homelessness?

Encourage students to think about how each activity would feel e.g. how would it feel to brush your teeth in a public toilet, how would it feel to have nowhere to cook dinner, how would it feel to go to sleep outside, in a park or on the street?

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

BE ADVOCATES

Talk to your family, friends, classmates, and community to help raise awareness of the issues facing people experiencing homelessness, and bust those myths!

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!

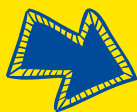
CREATE A SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

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

Run a fundraising activity at school. Get in touch with a local Vinnies service to check what donations are needed most.

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