



Homelessness

“A person who is homeless may face violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to privacy, the right to social security, the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to vote, and many more.”

– Australian Human Rights Commission

■ STATISTICS

ABS gathers statistics 4 times a year on tourism however only gathers statistics on homelessness every 5 years. A Census will be completed in 2011 with statistics available in 2012. Do you think the frequency of statistics gathered reflects the importance of these issues to the Australian Government?

On Census night 2006, 105,000 people were homeless in Australia. This is equivalent to filling the Sydney Football Stadium more than twice over.

Most homeless people were sheltered somewhere on Census night, with 45% staying temporarily with friends or relatives, 21% staying in boarding houses, and 19% staying in supported accommodation, such as hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges.

The majority of homeless people were single (20,704 people or 55%) while 20% were couples without accompanying children (10,160 couples) and 26% were homeless families with children (26,790 people or 7,483 families)

More than two-thirds (67%) of the homeless population were adults over 18 years of age, with 21% from 12 to 18 years of age, and 12% under 12 years old. Just less than half (44%) of homeless people were female. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

■ WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS?

A person experiencing homelessness "...does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access results in any of the following:"

- Damages, or is likely to damage, their health
- Threatens their safety
- Marginalises them through failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities; or the economic and social supports that a home normally affords
- Places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing
- No security of tenure - that is, no legal right to continued occupation of their home.
- Is couch surfing, sleeping in cars or refuges or
- If he or she is living in accommodation provided by a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.
– Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act 1994



■ WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING HOMELESS?

“Being so young with no home, I had no money, no bed, no clothes, wasn't able to bathe or eat and drink.”

– Formerly homeless young person at 13, now aged 16 years.

“I was left out in the cold not having any warm clothes/shoes to wear.”

– Young person who became homeless aged 17 years.

“Nowhere to go to sleep. No privacy. Not able to carry any belongings that are valued because you don't know where you will put [them].”

– Young homeless man aged 25 years.

“The feeling of hopelessness, like you're not worth anything, you feel like giving up, like it's not worth it.”

– Homeless girl, aged 17 years.



ACTIVITY 1

There are many factors that result in someone experiencing homelessness. In small groups come up with a list of at least 10 factors that may contribute to someone experiencing homelessness.

IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO:

You're 15 and your dad loses his job and decides to move the family to the country to save money. You refuse to move with them.

- What would you do if you became homeless?
- Where would you go immediately?
- What would you do long term?
- What if you had no other family or support?
- Where would you store your most valuable and treasured possession?
- What effect would this situation have on your self esteem and behaviour?

■ HOW PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS

People who become homeless often don't just need a house. There can be a range of problems they may need assistance with including substance abuse, family breakdown, mental health problems, and employment assistance.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics the most common causes of homelessness in NSW were:

- Domestic and family violence (22%)
- Financial difficulty (8%)
- Relationship/family breakdown (10%)
- From the information gathered in 2006, we know that 62% of people experiencing homelessness were female and 38% were male.

(ABS- Family, community and social cohesion 2008-09)

"[Just] because they are tough kids doesn't mean we should put them in the too hard basket and believe that nothing can ever change."

Captain Paul Moulds, Director of the Salvation Army's Oasis Youth Refuge

■ ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY'S OZANAM LEARNING CENTRE (OLC)

The Society also has a range of hostel, refuges, addiction and family services which provide accommodation for short to medium timeframes.

Each weekday about 130 men and women use the education and activities centre at the OLC. Basic and advanced computer programs assist clients in their search for work with resume preparation and interview skills.

There are opportunities for recreation, self-expression, self-esteem and social interaction, as well as activities including video production, music, recording, and fabric and art therapy. These programs are available to clients and the local community to build skills and resilience of the participants.

■ WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

THE FACTS

- Homelessness can happen to anyone, and often unexpectedly.
- Homelessness isn't just being without a home it also involves social isolation. We can do something to help.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Winter/Christmas Appeal: These are Vinnies two main appeals during the year. You could make a donation! Monetary donations are invested in the direct support of those in need. Or you might consider an in-kind donation of blankets, clothing. Or you can organise your own community fundraising event to raise money for the Appeal.
- Night Patrol: Volunteers aged 16 years and over can go out in the Vinnies Van and serve tea, coffee and sandwiches to those in need
- Advocacy: Talk to your family, friends, classmates, and community members to help raise awareness about homelessness and break down stereotypes. Advocacy can also take the form of letter writing. You can write to your local MP to ask them what they are doing about homelessness, and let them know you want to see change.

ACTIVITY 2

In pairs discuss your feelings and possible responses to the following stereotypes.

1. "It's their choice to be homeless"
2. "There is no point giving them money, they will just spend it on drugs"
3. "Their families should take responsibility"
4. "Nothing can change for these kids"
5. "It's drugs and alcohol that are the real problem, we just need to control that"

These stereotypes should act as a discussion point around the community's view of this issue and the people who experience homelessness. These stereotypes simplify the issues and generally blame the individual rather than looking at society's contribution and individual circumstances.



For more information

St Vincent de Paul Society
www.vinnies.org.au (Navigate to the Social Justice tab for more resources)

Homelessness NSW
www.homelessnessnsw.org.au

City of Sydney Council
www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Homeless Community Online
www.homeless.org.au