

Plan a Homeless Simulation Night



What is it?

A simulation night is aimed to get participants to immerse themselves into a situation that is most likely foreign to them in order to become educated about homelessness. It forces people connect with the reality of homelessness and the struggles these people face on a daily basis through a number of activities and discussions during the evening, and then spending the night outside.

What's the purpose?

The foremost purpose of a simulation night is to raise awareness within your community about the growing problem of homelessness. Because homelessness is such a broad issue, each simulation can have a different set of points or objectives to impart on its participants. These objectives may focus on the statistics and facts of homelessness, relaying the scope of the problem in your own community or in the United States, or on the more personal aspects of the issue that will help participants understand what it means to live without a home.

Objectives

“Hunger”: “A person who has food has many problems. A person who has no food has one problem.” These activities are designed to make participants think about the amount of food they consume on a daily basis and what it would feel like to live off of the small and often very basic meals provided by food banks.

“The System”: It is extremely difficult for many individuals who are homeless to obtain adequate housing, employment, benefits and other basic necessities. “The system” objective gives participants perspective about the challenges of getting out of homelessness.

“Emotional/Personal”: The activities give participants a very small taste of how emotionally and physically trying living and sleeping on the streets, or even in a shelter, can be. It also deals with the characteristics and stereotypes of victims of homelessness.

“Size/Scope”: Designed to relay the size and scope of the problem in the United States and in our community, these activities are based on facts and statistics.

Getting Started

1. Set your goals and determine a plan.

Who is your target audience?

What is the primary purpose for your simulation night?

- To raise awareness and educate your community?
- To raise money for a local organization?

2. Get approval from your organization leaders (school principal, youth group leaders etc.)

3. Secure a date and location for the event.

Make alternate rain arrangements such as a different date or an inside location close by

4. Partner with a local organization.

Local homeless shelters are great resources for information about poverty and homelessness in your area, speakers, volunteer opportunities and ideas for your event. Also, if you add a service component to your event the shelter can let you know what the needs of the community are and how you can help to meet them!

5. Participation.

Advertise your event to your target community, set a maximum number of participants and if necessary, in the case of a school, have participant's parents sign permission slips.

On the permission slips, include a letter the parents/guardians explaining who you are, what you are doing, date/time, why you are doing it and a brief outline of the night. Also include chaperones names/ contact information if they have any questions, a date by which the permission slip needs to be returned and a place for signatures.

See an example on the next page.

Dear HB parents/ guardians,

Our names are Jenn Blumer and Alyssa Furth and we are in the sophomore class here at HB. As part of a project for our Community Based Learning class, and as a way to raise awareness about homelessness, we are hosting a "homeless night" on Thursday May 26, 2011. In order to simulate what it feels like to be a homeless teenager on the streets, we will be spending the night on the HB field (weather permitting). We hope to create an experience similar to that of someone who is on the streets and deprived of the basic luxuries such as a shower or a bed, to educate and raise awareness within the HB community about this growing problem.

The night will begin promptly at 5:30 pm and will start off with a speaker who was formerly living on the streets, but is now living a successful life in a new home. We will also be putting together toiletry packages to donate to the West Side Catholic Center and doing a number of other awareness activities throughout the night. A light, pre packaged dinner will be provided as well as breakfast in the morning.

There will be scheduled bathroom breaks throughout the night unless there is an

emergency. We ask that the girls leave all electronics and other extra items they had the next day locked in a classroom and bring only a toothbrush, toothpaste and sleeping bag. They should wear appropriate clothes for participating in the activities, sleeping in, and wearing the next day.

There will be three adult chaperones, including Ms. Heidemann our CBL teacher (email info here), and a security guard on duty all night to ensure our safety. We ask that each girl spend \$5-\$10 on small travel sized toiletries to contribute to the packages we will be donating.

Please return the signed permission form below by Monday May 23

Thanks,
Alyssa Furth and Jenn Blumer

_____ has permission to participate in the homeless night on Thursday May 26.

Parent signature

6. Chaperones.

Adult chaperones are necessary (and required by most organizations) to ensure the safety of the participants. Make sure you give your chaperones enough notice to plan and explain to them exactly what is happening at the event so they can be prepared.

7. Plan.

Have the entire night planned out a few days in advance to give you time to prepare any materials you may need. When planning your event, make sure to fill the time with activities to keep participants engaged and focused on why they are there. Also, type up a schedule with detailed notes about each of the activities and discussion topics for you to use throughout the night.

8. Communicate.

Stay in touch with your chaperones, participants and the leaders of your school, youth group, church etc. It is important that everybody involved understands what is expected of them during this process and what they should expect from you.

Appropriate items to bring to the event:

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Sleeping bag OR one blanket

ONE outfit. This outfit is to be worn throughout the evening, overnight and the next morning, so it participants need to make sure to dress comfortably.

Journal and writing utensils (unless one is already being provided)

Prohibited items:

Cell phones

Drugs or alcohol

iPods/ mp3s

Food

Portable radios

Extra clothes

Laptops

Extra blankets

Pillow

In the Beginning

As participants arrive, have them drop their cell phones into a bucket. This way, you can be sure that nobody has their cell phones during the event, the participants know they are safe, and they are easy to retrieve in the morning.

Explain the purpose. Start off the event by sitting in a circle and explaining to the participants why they are here, why you chose to host the event and what you hope they gain from this experience. This need not be a long, and can include a discussion or time to ask and answer questions if desired.

Have a speaker come talk to your group. If you partner with a local organization, they may have people who were formerly homeless who can speak about their experience. Shelter directors can also give insight into homelessness in your area,

Hunger

One Man's Trash is Another Man's Treasure

Ask participants to each bring in a can of soup to donate to the local food bank and collect them at the beginning as you would if they were to be donated.

When it is time for dinner, pass out the cans and share with the participants that their meal will actually be the soup that they brought in to be donated.

Emphasize that their donations are actually being consumed everyday by real people in the your community.

You can either have one of the leaders cook the soup inside on a stove or microwave and then bring it out to eat, or have each participant cook their soup on a small portable stove.

Backpack for Kids

The backpack for kids program provides children with a backpack filled with six child friendly meals to last them the weekend.

“These packages may include a variety of items such as cereal, a protein source such as tuna, peanut butter, or beef stew, canned vegetables and fruit, soup, pasta and sauce, juice boxes and a snack such as peanut butter crackers or yogurt snacks”
(clevelandfoodbank.org)

For your meal, give participants a pre-packaged bag that contains food along the lines of what would be found in one of these backpacks. There should be enough food for dinner, a snack, and breakfast the next morning – but the portions should be minimal, as they would be in the backpacks or a food bank

Tell the participants that this is the only food they will get for the rest of the event. They can choose to eat it all for dinner, or save it for a snack later and breakfast.

Challenge yourselves to spend \$4 per participant, as that is the cost of a backpack for the food bank.

Food typically found in the backpacks:

Peanut Butter

Granola bars/ breakfast bars

Single serving boxes of cereal

Juice boxes

Crackers (individual serving packages)

6oz cans of meat (tuna, chicken)

Canned soup

Other meal ideas:

Peanut butter and jelly sandwich

Bag of chips

Yogurt

Animal crackers

What's Fair?

You can choose to do this activity either with dinner, or with a snack later in the evening

Have the participants line up to receive their meal/snack.

Give some participants larger amounts of food than others

Example: for snack, give one participant 1 nutrigrain bar, give another 3 and another 0

Or for dinner: pack the meals with uneven amounts of food so when the participants are all eating together and pull the food out of their bags, they see the differences in their portions.

Discuss how each person feels upon comparing their portion to others and how this activity is relevant

Pop It

During a group discussion or reflection after an activity, pop a bag of popcorn and eat it in front of everybody. If there is more than one student facilitator, share it between yourselves, but do not share with any of the participants.

Discuss what this simulates.
How does this make them feel?

The System, Size and Scope

Fast Facts

Present to your participants facts about homelessness in your community and in the United States

Provide participants with fact sheets at the beginning, which they can reference throughout the night

Have participants design posters to hang around your school/church/ organization building to raise awareness

Show a video
Make a PowerPoint

Or come up with your own creative way to share your facts and statistics!

True or False?

Have the participants fill out a true or false worksheet with facts about homelessness in your area

Imagine That

Ask participants to imagine that they dropped out of high school today. Then ask them to imagine that they are looking for a job to support their family ten years from now.

Have them look through the classified ads to find a job that they could obtain with their skill and education level.

Also have them look for a home/apartment they could afford with their income from this job, keeping in mind other living expenses

Service Component

It is important to set aside some time in the night to do some sort of service. Fun and easy service projects that will make a big impact include:

Making tie blankets. Have participants bring in five or ten dollars each to cover the costs and to give them a chance to give back to their community. Get enough fabric so that only a two or three people are working on a blanket at a time. This is a simple activity, but is a lot of fun and will make a huge difference to the person who is keeping warm because of it.

Making toiletry bags. Ask participants to bring in a few travel size toiletry items to include. You should also provide some yourself to ensure that there will be enough. Pack the toiletries in plastic Ziploc bags so they are easy to transport and carry around.

Volunteer. Serve meals at you local food bank or volunteer at a homeless shelter.

Discussion

Talk about what it takes apply for a job, buy a car, arrange other transportation options, secure housing

What do you need to do these things? What qualifications?

How might it be different if you were homeless?

What about if you have kids?

Stereotypes

Ask participants to describe a
“homeless person”

What they look like
Certain characteristics this
person might have

Then pass out pictures of people who
have stayed in shelters or eaten in
soup kitchen and have them describe
these people

Compare the lists of adjectives and
discuss how we tend to stereotype
people who are homeless and what
these stereotypes might be.

Emotional/
Personal

Evicted

Enter the participants' classrooms during the day and hand them an eviction notice in front of the whole class

Make sure the paper that you hand them has EVICTED clearly written on it

When handing them the notice explain that they are to be moved out of their home by the end of day

Get permission from teachers and administrators before pursuing the activity

Identities

This activity gives each participant a new identity for the night. They should keep this person in mind throughout each of the activities and try to think about how their character would react or be affected.

Its purpose is to help participants step out of their mindsets and connect with a situation that is most likely very distant to them. It is also to break down the stereotypes of “who is homeless” and remind them that anybody can become homeless at any time.

After introducing the purpose event, this should be the first activity you do. Hand out the new identities to each participant and once everybody has their card, explain the activity.

You may consider putting each of the identities onto their own card so they are easy to pass out. Participants can either hand them back at the end of the activity (as long as they remember their new identity for the night) or you can put the cards on a string and have them where their new identities all night.

Then have the participants journal in the perspective of this person by answering some of the following questions.

1. How is this profile similar or different from you?
2. Am I homeless? What caused my homelessness?
3. Where do I live if I'm not homeless? What does it look like?
4. Do I need help? What kind of help? How can I receive this help?
5. What are my hopes or dreams for the future?
6. What was my childhood like? What did my home look like? What kinds of games did I play? What were my parents like?
7. What is my daily life like? Where do I live?
8. How much money do I have at my disposal each month?
9. Other thoughts

Allow them to share, afterwards, what they have written. Encourage them to discuss their profiles with others and ask questions.

Example Identities:

(Note: There may be duplicates of profiles in your group and the identities below may be changed to fit your event.)

You are 15 years old and live with your parents and seven brothers in a small house in downtown Cleveland. Your mother works as a cashier in a supermarket and your father is unemployed.

You are a 17-year-old refugee from Russia who just recently arrived in America. Your parents were murdered over there so you don't want to go back. You can hardly read or write and know nobody.

You are a 50-year-old well-trained engineer from Iraq who has been granted asylum in America. You hardly speak English and earn your living as a newspaper vendor.

You are a 32-year-old mother of 4 young children who recently miscarried her daughter. You were molested, raped and physically and verbally abused as a child. You had your first kid at 18 and your second at 21. You finished high school when you were 21 but never went to college. Never really drank or did drugs. You left home with your kids to get away from your ex (their

father) who beat you. You have two siblings in Cleveland; both have issues as well.

You are a 20-year-old artist addicted to heroin. You're male and your parents live in Michigan. You moved out when you were 16 and haven't spoken to them since. You never finished high school.

You are 22 and a student. You finance your studies by working as a waiter and other part-time jobs. You are from Cleveland, but your parents moved to Nashville when you went to college.

You are a disabled 30 year old man who is wheel chair bound and lives with his mother.

You are 53 and your wife owned a small dry cleaning business that has just gone bankrupt. You are unemployed.

You are 83 years old; your husband passed away 6 years ago and your kids live in California, England and Florida. You live alone in an apartment in downtown Cleveland.

You are a young single mother with three children. You work the graveyard shift at the diner on the corner.

After each activity, or after a few of the activities, have the participants take a few minutes to journal about what they just experience. In these journal entries they should write their thoughts and feelings about the activities. If you choose to do the “Identities” activity, they should also try to write about how their new identity would feel/ react/ be affected in the situation as well.

Poverty Game: Poverty and Social Inequality

Hand out role cards to each participant and ask them to keep what is on their card private. Have them sit down, read their role card and answer some of the following questions to themselves to better understand their new identity.

1. What was your childhood like? What kinds of games did you play/ what did you do for fun?
2. What were your parents like? What did they do for a living?
3. Where did you live? Where do you live now?
4. What is your everyday life like now? Who are your friends?
5. How much money do you have at your disposal each month?
6. How do you spend your leisure time?
7. What do you enjoy doing?

Next have them line up shoulder to shoulder on a “starting line” and explain to them the following:

You will read aloud a list of situations. Each time they can answer “yes” to the statement, they should take a step forward. Otherwise, they should stay where they are.

As you read each situation out, pause for a moment afterwards to allow the participants time to move forward and look around to notice the positions of others.

At the end ask the participants to look around and notice where they are standing. How far have they moved? Where are they in relation to others? Starting with the person who moved furthest, ask each participant to read their roles out loud.

Have the participants sit in a circle afterwards for a discussion. Ask them to share any thoughts or feelings they have about the activity? A few questions to think about

How did it feel being able to step forward? Having to stay in the same spot?

Did anyone feel that they were deprived of their basic human rights? What are some examples? How did it feel?

Was it difficult to play a new role?

Does the activity reflect our real society? Why or why not?

Give participants a few minutes to journal and reflect on the activity.

Examples of Roles:

(Note: these roles may be adapted to fit your particular event)

You are 15 and live with your parents and seven brothers and sisters in a small apartment in Cleveland. Your mother works as a cashier in a supermarket, your father is unemployed.

You are a 17-year-old girl of Russian origin. You are a refugee and recently arrived in America; you can hardly read or write.

You are a well-trained engineer from Iraq and have been granted asylum in America. You hardly speak English and earn your living as a newspaper vendor.

You are a single mother with three children. You work in a dry cleaner.

You are a 32-year-old mother of 4 young children who recently miscarried her daughter. You were molested, raped and physically and verbally abused as a child. You had your first kid at 18 and your second at 21. You finished high school when you were 21 but never went to college. Never really drank or did drugs. You left home with your kids to get away from your ex (their father) who beat you. You have two siblings in Cleveland, both have issues as well.

You are chairman of your BBYO chapter. Your parents own a medium-sized textile factory.

You are the daughter of the English ambassador in Washington D.C.

You are retired and married. You used to work in a shoe factory.

You are 83 years old and live on minimum pension

You are a 27 year old homeless man

You are a disabled young man who is wheel chair bound and living with his elderly mother

You are 16 and a car mechanic apprentice

You are a 20 year old student who finances your studies by working as a waiter and other part-time jobs.

You are the daughter of a bank director. You are currently studying at Harvard

You are an illegal immigrant from Mexico

You are the son of a Chinese immigrant who owns a successful fast-food chain

You are 53. You and your wife owned a small carpenter's workshop that has just gone bankrupt

You are a young artist addicted to heroin

You have just completed your training at Cornell's school for hotel management and are looking for a job.

You are the 19 year old son of a corn farmer in Iowa

You are a schoolteacher at an all girls private school with a husband and a newborn girl.

Situations:

You have never encountered any serious financial difficulty

You have decent housing with telephone, internet and cable tv

You feel your language, religions and culture are respected in America

You feel that your opinion on social and political issues matters, and your views are listened to

Other people consult you about different issues

You are not afraid of being stopped by the police

You know where to turn for advice and help if you need it

You have never felt discriminated again
because of your origin

You are well protected should you become ill
or have an accident

You can go way on holiday in a foreign
country once a year

You can always invite friends to your home
for dinner

You are happy with the life you lead

You feel you can study and follow the
profession of your choice

You are not afraid of being attacked or
harassed on the streets

If you want, you have a good opportunity of
holding an important political position one
day

You can participate in international seminars
abroad

You can afford to go out to dinner once a
week

You are not afraid for the future of your children

You can buy new clothes at least once every three months

You feel that your knowledge and skills are respected

You can use the Internet when necessary

You can vote in national and local elections

You are positive when you think about your future

(adapted from Fit for Gender Mainstreaming;
Angelika Blickhäuser and Henning von
Bargen, Berlin 2007)

Night Under the Stars

Have participants make their own shelters to sleep with cardboard boxes and newspapers .

They can sleep in sleeping bags or with one blanket as well, but no pillows .

Participants can only use the supplies provided, or what they find on their own in the area.

Wake Up!

Many times people who are sleeping on the streets are forced to move from place to place by the police.

Wake up the participants (or a few of the participants) in the middle of the night pretending you are the police and tell them they cannot sleep where they currently are and have to move to another location.

Reflection

It is important for participants to reflect on their experience at the event. This reflection can be either in the morning or in the evening, but it should include both a discussion and journaling. You can give participants a chance to reflect in their journals and then read them aloud if they feel comfortable or just have an open discussion, but reflection is a key part of the experience to help the participants understand and digest the meaning of the event.