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National Alliance  
to  
End Homelessness

PREPARED BY THE  
NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO  
END HOMELESSNESS

The National Alliance to End Homelessness educates young people — ages 5 to 25 — about issues surrounding homelessness. The Alliance also distributes information and materials for educating young people about homelessness through their website at [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org).

Want to  
Know more?

Visit The Alliance's web-  
site at

[www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)

Read and discuss :

- ▶ *The Runaways*, by Kristen Butcher
- ▶ *My Fabulous New Life*, by Sheila Greenwald
- ▶ *Homelessness*, by Sara Dixon Criswell
- ▶ "No Place to Call Home," *Scholastic News*, Vol. 67, No. 12

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# End Homelessness!

A Fact sheet  
for Middle  
School  
Students

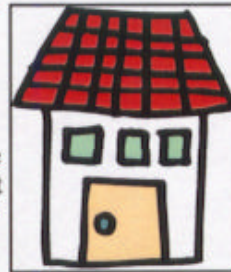
Volume 2, Number 1

## WHAT is

Someone who has no regular place to live lives is often called homeless. People without homes may live on the street, in an abandoned building or in any other place not meant for human living.

In the United States, there are many people who do not have homes. Most people who lose their homes are only homeless for a short period of time—maybe one or two weeks. Other people are without homes for a longer time—many months or years.

In the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the federal government defines people as "homeless" if they don't have a permanent and adequate nighttime residence. People are also consid-



What does home mean to you?

ered homeless if they live in one of the following:

- A temporary place for people about to be placed in a mental institution or prison;
- Any place not meant for regular sleeping by humans; or
- A supervised temporary shelter.

This definition of homeless also includes people who lose their housing because they are evicted or because they are discharged from institutions, such as hospitals and jails, and have nowhere else to go. People who are temporarily doubled up with relatives or friends are also homeless.

## HOW big is the

Every night in the United States, about **750,000** people experience homelessness.

That's more than the entire population of the nation's capital, Washington, DC! Over the course of a year, **about 3 million** people don't have homes for some period of time.

Every year, families make up about half of the homeless population.

There is a growing number of women and children who find themselves without a place to live. Most families do not

stay homeless for long. They usually find a new place to live pretty quickly. It's very important to find everyone a safe, permanent home!

*Most people without homes never actually live on the street.*

Many people who do not have homes are staying in shelters, motels, cars and in campgrounds. Many others are overcrowded living with family or friends. You see, not every person who does not have a home lives on the street!

Source: *A Plan, Not Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2000.

# Why are people homeless?

There are many different reasons why people are without homes. The following are the **three main factors** which often lead to homelessness:

1. People are without homes because **there is not enough affordable housing**. It costs a lot of money to pay for a place to live. There are not enough places to live for everyone who needs them.

2. People are without homes because **they don't make enough money to pay for their basic living expenses**. There are many people who work every day and bring home less than \$1000 each month. If a two-bedroom apartment costs about \$900 a month in a city like Washington, DC, that doesn't leave much money to pay for bills, food, clothes and transportation, especially for families with children.\*



3. Some people don't have homes because **it is hard for them to get the services and help they need to overcome personal challenges**. A personal challenge could be needing treatment for a long-term disability, mental illness or substance abuse illness. Or it could be needing reliable transportation, child care, job training, or legal help.



Just like the game of dominoes, people often find themselves without a home because one bad thing happens and then other bad things follow. It can be really hard to pick up the pieces when lots of bad things pile up.

\*source: *Out of Reach: Rental Housing at What Cost?*  
National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2000.

## Solutions: How can I

Young people can do a lot to help people who are without homes. There are hundreds of organizations and agencies in the United States that work every day to solve this problem and support people who are without homes in their daily lives.

Think about it: what are daily needs? What do you need on a day when you don't feel well? What do you do on a day when it's really cold outside? What do you need when you are hungry? Your answers to these questions are the same as the answers a person without a home might give.

*Here are some ways you can help people who do not have homes meet their daily needs:*

- ▶ Prepare or serve a meal at a soup kitchen.
- ▶ Decorate/fix up a homeless program's building. Many places could use help with landscaping and renovation.
- ▶ Collect blankets, hats and gloves for people who are living on the street and deliver these warm items to them.
- ▶ Organize a toiletries/clothing drive.

People need certain things to get through each day, but it's also very important to solve the problem of homelessness. Young people can be a part of the solution!



*Young people can be a part of the solution!*

- ▶ Tutor a child.
- ▶ Organize a professional clothing drive for adults who are searching for a job. Collect suits, ties, pants, dresses, blouses, skirts and shoes. Take what you have collected to an organization that helps people find jobs.
- ▶ Write, call or visit your elected officials: your mayor, city councilperson and members of Congress want to know your opinion on important issues. You can make a difference! Their contact info is in the government blue pages.

### THREE SOLUTIONS TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS:

1. Provide homes that aren't so expensive.
2. Pay people enough money so they can pay their rent, buy food and pay their bills.
3. Give people the information and help they need to keep a home or get special services.

**The next time you see a homeless person on the street, don't pass them by. Say hello, ask them how they're doing. -Mitch Snyder**

# Thinking work. . .

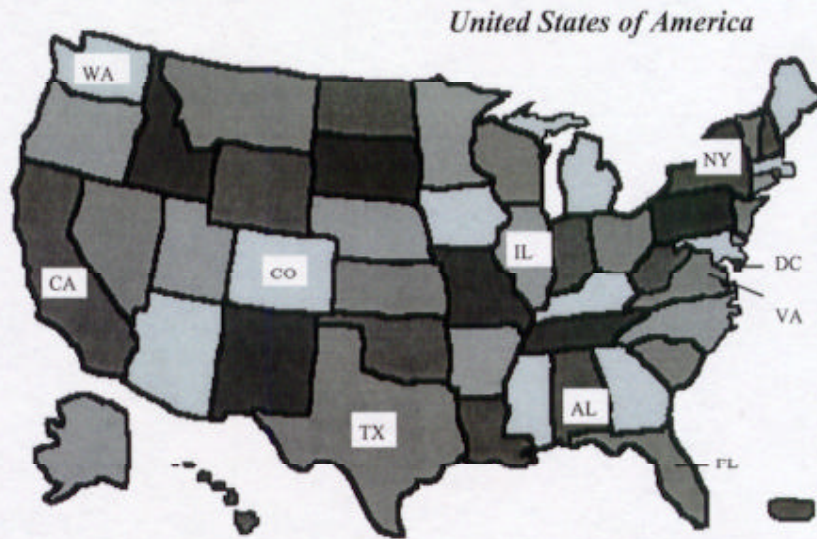
This activity will allow you to gain an even deeper understanding of homelessness and explore your feelings about the issue.

## Real living costs!

What is the typical monthly cost of a 2-bedroom apartment? It depends on where you live!\*

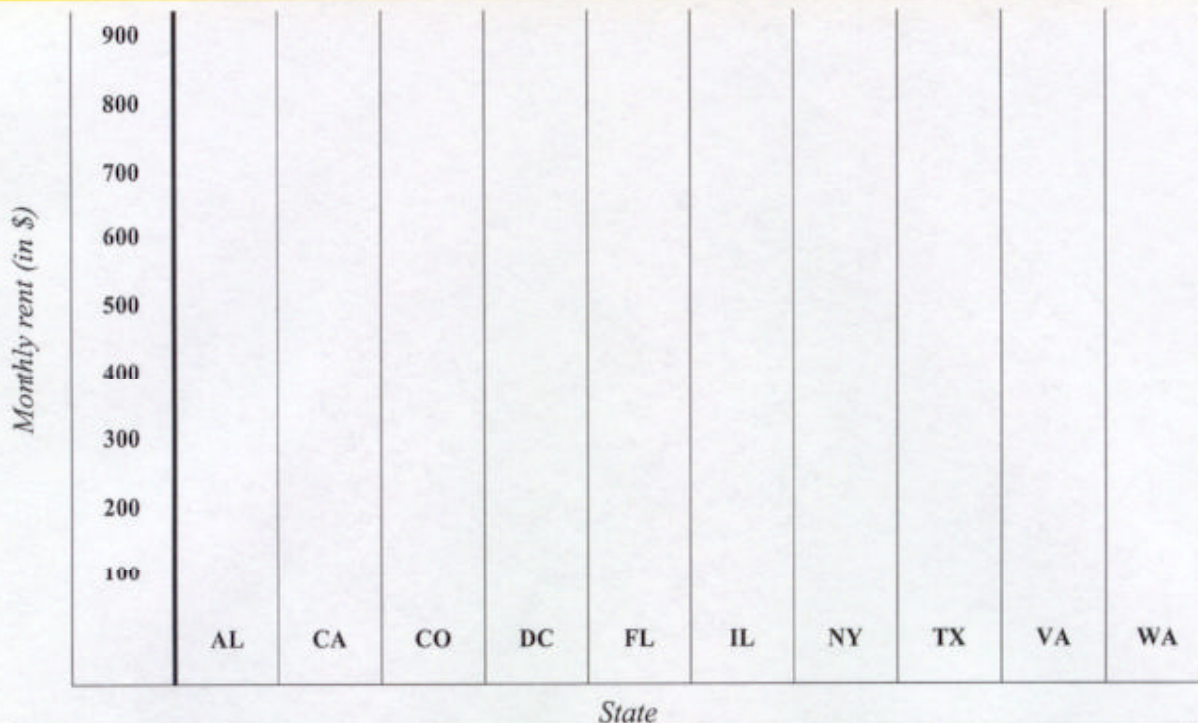
Remember what average means: Depending on where you live—even within the same city or state—you can find housing that costs more and housing that costs less than average.

Alabama (AL)	\$448
California (CA)	\$791
Colorado (CO)	\$642
District of Columbia (DC)	\$863
Florida (FL)	\$634
Illinois (IL)	\$665
New York (NY)	\$834
Texas (TX)	\$580
Virginia (VA)	\$626
Washington (WA)	\$656



\*source: *Out of Reach: Rental Housing at What Cost?* National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2000.

Make a bar graph comparing the above housing costs.



# More thinking work

*You've completed the graph! Now think about and answer these questions:*

- Which state has the most expensive rental costs? The least expensive? Why do you think there is such a large difference in rent?
- Pick one of the states on the chart. Research what the main industries are for that state (hint: check an encyclopedia, the Internet or the library). What types of jobs do you think are available in that state? Do you think some states have more, or better-paying jobs than others?
- Do you think it costs more to live in a city or out in the country? Why do you think that?

## Can you afford to live here?

The federal government defines "affordable housing" as paying **no more than 30%** of your income on housing, including utilities.

30% of WHAT? Figure it out!

\$834 is 30% of what number? \_\_\_\_\_ (NY)

\$791 is 30% of what number? \_\_\_\_\_ (CA)

\$580 is 30% of what number? \_\_\_\_\_ (TX)

So, in order to really "afford" the average cost of a 2-bedroom apartment, you'd have to earn at least three times more than the cost of rent each month...



## More questions!

- What are some examples of *jobs that pay minimum wage*?
- If you earned minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour) and worked full time (40 hours per week), *how much money would you have left over after you paid rent*, if you lived...
  - In New York?
  - In California?
  - In Texas?
- *What are some examples of living expenses* other than rent?
- *Would you have enough money* to pay for these living expenses? *If not, how would you get by?*

# Reference List for Middle School

National Alliance to  
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(202) 638-4664 fax

Age appropriate books, websites, videos, songs, articles and teaching guides about homelessness

## Books

- ♦ Barck, Judith & Robert Coles. *No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1992.
- ♦ Butcher, Kristen. *The Runaways*. Kids Can Press, 1998.
- ♦ Criswell, Sara Dixon. *Homelessness*. Lucent Books, 1998.
- ♦ Greenwald, Sheila. *My Fabulous New Life*. Browndeer Press, 1993.
- ♦ Hubbard, Jim. *Lives Turned Upside Down: Homeless Children in Their Own Words and Photographs*. Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- ♦ National Alliance to End Homelessness, ed. *The Way Home: Ending Homelessness in America*. Henry N. Abrams, 1999.
- ♦ Neufeld, John. *Almost a Hero*. Athenium, 1995.
- ♦ Rozakis, Laurie & Jeanne Vestals. *Homelessness: Can We Solve the Problem*. Twenty-first Century Books, 1995.
- ♦ Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown & Company, 1990.

## Videos



- ♦ "Even You" - Project ACT (216)574-8203 or [www.projectact.com](http://www.projectact.com)
- ♦ "Shelter Boy" - Fox Television, 1990

## Songs



- ♦ "Another Day" by Phil Collins (from *But Seriously*)
- ♦ "Mr. Wendal" by Arrested Development (from *3 Years, 5 Months, and 2 Days in the Life of...*)

## Articles



- ♦ "No Place to Call Home," *Scholastic News*, Vol. 67, No. 12, December 14, 1998.

## Teaching Guides



- ♦ *Homeless Resource Guide K-12*: [www.wmpenn.edu/PennWeb/LTP/Reference/Teach/ResGuideK-12.html](http://www.wmpenn.edu/PennWeb/LTP/Reference/Teach/ResGuideK-12.html)
- ♦ *Kidstart: Kids Can Care!* Largo, FL: Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Service, 1989.
- ♦ *Learning About Homeless Children, Youth and Families*. Seattle, WA: Center for Creative Education, 1995.
- ♦ *Unsheltered Lives*. Montpelier, VT: Department of Education, 1991.

## Websites



- ♦ [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)  
National Alliance to End Homelessness
- ♦ [www.earthsystems.org/ways/](http://www.earthsystems.org/ways/)  
*54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless*
- ♦ <http://nch.ari.net>  
National Coalition for the Homeless