

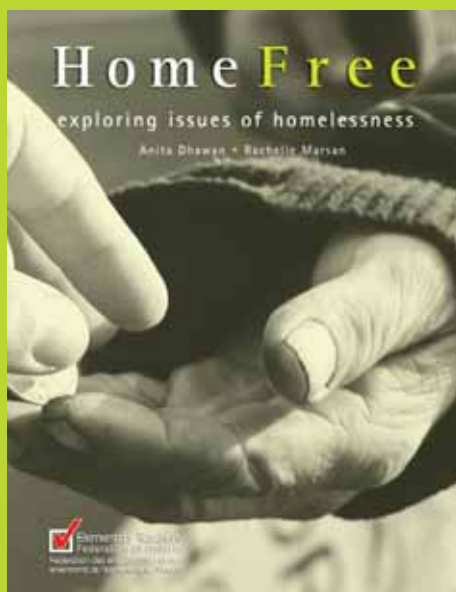
HomeFree

exploring issues of homelessness

Anita Dhawan • Rachelle Marsan



Elementary Teachers'
Federation of Ontario
Fédération des enseignantes et des
enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario



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“I ask you and myself, can we morally, ethically and economically allow homelessness to become the “norm” in Canadian life?”

Christopher Bognat in Homelessness, A message for working Canadians.

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of him/herself and of his/her family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his/her control.
2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25,
Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.*

A House is a House for All!

The first time I met a child who was homeless was when the child's mother brought her to the local community health centre to see me for a sore throat and fever. I realized they were in an emergency shelter when the mother explained to me that she needed a nurse's note so the child could get extra apple juice between meals at the shelter. So this situation made me think:

- Where was their home before they ended up at the shelter?
- How did they lose their home?
- Does the little girl have any of her favorite toys with her?
- Is she still able to go to her school?
- Can her mom afford the usual cough medicines and lozenges that I take for granted when my daughter is sick?
- How long will they be living at the shelter before they can find a place to live?

That was perhaps my first eye-opening experience of homelessness. I had never really thought about it before. I'd grown up in a small community where new homes were going up in subdivisions and kids spent a lot of time watching TV shows about seemingly perfect homes and families: "Leave it to Beaver", "Father Knows Best", "Ozzie and Harriett", etc. Like other kids I was fascinated with the concept of 'home' and played 'house' a lot – mostly decorating doll houses made out of cardboard boxes in my backyard or building 'forts' in the nearby woods.

Today I think about homelessness all the time and I think about the solutions.

I've been a street nurse for over 15 years. My patients are homeless. I can truthfully say that every day I am both astonished and appalled by what I see – people from all walks of life who are forced to use emergency shelters for months, sometimes years; thousands of families and children 'housed' in motel rooms for emergency shelter; disease outbreaks like tuberculosis; and communities that attack the notion of 'social' housing in their neighbourhood.

The only thing in common among people who are homeless is that they have lost their homes. I still remember the night in the 'Homelessness in Canadian Society' course that I taught at Ryerson. A young nursing student arrived in class with a knapsack and sleeping bag and quietly explained to me, at the end of class, that she had become homeless and would be sleeping at the armouries that night.

Homelessness has worsened across the country, in large part because senior levels of government cancelled social housing programs. Children have noticed and thankfully so have their teachers. I began to receive invitations from teachers to speak in classrooms about the issue. Sometimes classes would visit the homeless memorial in downtown Toronto or attend a housing rally. Teachers began asking what kind of learning opportunities they could create for students. Teachers also became involved in trying to ease the transition of homeless students into their own classrooms.

Speaking to children really gave me a lot of hope. Kids are so open to learning and do not automatically accept the negative stereotypes about homelessness that have allowed adults to be paralyzed. Grade 4 students quickly understood, for example, that a housing program would make sense as a strategy to end homelessness. It's no wonder that the story 'A House is a House for Me' remains so popular. Children everywhere know the comfort of home, be it for a turtle, a bird, or themselves.

I sensed a 'tipping point' – a readiness for schools to engage in this issue. Yet, everywhere I looked including university nursing and social work programs, there was very little curriculum material on homelessness. The next logical step was to approach our friends at the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I want to thank teachers Anita Dhawan and Rachelle Marsan for their passion and enthusiasm developing this work.

Cathy Crowe,
Street Nurse
Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

Note to Teachers

Dear Teacher,

According to sociologist C. Wright Mills, when a social phenomenon affects a significant segment of a population, it is no longer a personal trouble but instead becomes a social issue.

Thank you for teaching your students about this important Canadian social issue of homelessness.

You and your students along with their friends and family will find homelessness unacceptable. Let us use our skills, knowledge, and privileges to demand that our leaders, from community to national level, mobilize our resources to turn homelessness into hopefulness.

Homelessness is a growing concern across Canada in both large and small cities. Although the number of people without homes might be difficult to determine, it is safe to say that at least 250,000 people per year across the country experience homelessness. Also, a large number of people are under-housed or at risk for homelessness because of abusive living situations, financial insecurity, immigration or refugee status, disability or health status, and many other factors like fire, flood, war, domestic violence, unemployment, underemployment, lack of benefits, high rents, unaffordable housing, low wages, etc.

In urban centers, homelessness is often very visible. People are seen sleeping on the sidewalks, huddled up on a park bench, or panhandling for spare change from passers-by. Others live in shelters or motels, trying to survive day-to-day. In rural communities, homelessness tends to be more hidden, but is equally pervasive. People stay with friends for a while. Due to lack of access to shelters, people come to the nearest city. Homelessness affects our First Nations Communities as well.

Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a group of well intentioned people can change the world – as a matter of fact, it is the only thing that ever has.”

We hope this curriculum resource moves you to help change the world.

Actions We Can Take to Eliminate Homelessness

- Acknowledge homelessness as an important social issue
- Educate yourself and others by reading research literature
- Attend meetings, vigils and special events arranged by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) and other community groups
- Interact with homeless people on the street
- Volunteer in a shelter or agency working to end homelessness
- Write letters demanding politicians’ commitment to the issues
- Challenge stereotypes wherever you encounter them
- Participate in National Housing Day, November 22. For school wide activities, go to www.tdrc.net
- Talk to your students about homelessness. Use picture books in the Bibliography of Picture Books and Novels on pages 32 to 33. They will serve as a springboard for initial discussion on homelessness issues. These books can be used from kindergarten to grade 8. One of the ways might be to use these books as a read-aloud and have open discussion, accepting all answers. Be vigilant of stereotypes and myths and take those teachable moments to provide facts.

Some of us will have students in our classrooms who are homeless. As you discuss homelessness with your students be aware of this and be sensitive to the effect you might be having on them. Although we have listed some resources, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee has an extensive list of books, websites, videos, research facts, and articles, plus a list of speakers available on their website, www.tdrc.net.



Objectives

- To understand “Homelessness in Canada” is a serious problem
- To develop the skills to reach a well-informed opinion about the issue
- To use the acquired skills and knowledge towards action for elimination of homelessness in Canada

The Ministry of Education’s Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, History, and Geography

The Ministry of Education’s curriculum expectations emphasize the importance of incorporating teaching of social issues like homelessness.

“ – they must learn to evaluate different points of view and examine information critically to solve problems and make decisions on a variety of issues

- Social studies seeks to examine and understand communities, from the local to the global – the study of history helps prepare students to be contributing and responsible citizens in a complex society - characterized by rapid technological, economical, political, and social changes.
- Geography examines how people and environments affect each other.
- The study of current events forms an integral component of the social studies, history, and geography curriculum. Discussion of current events not only stimulates student interest and curiosity, but helps students to make the connection between what they are learning in class and past and present-day world events or situations.”



How Is This Resource Set Up?

Although suggested activities are divided into primary, junior and intermediate divisions, all lesson plans can be adapted and modified to accommodate your student diversity.

The activities are independent AND complementary to each other. Assessment tools can be used with one or all activities.

For teaching current issues in social studies from grades 1 to 8, you may use the two *Toronto Star* articles by Andrea Gordon and the *Streets of Iqaluit* article by Gordon Laird.

‘NAPO Quick Facts’ and ‘Seventeen Quick Facts About Housing and Homelessness’ can be used as introductory lessons to open the topic or statistics for research projects.

This resource includes overall curriculum expectations for each grade level. These are included only for guidance. You may find other expectations that are met by the suggested activities.

Suggested Activities - Kindergarten to Grade 3

Synopsis

This topic focuses on the concept of home. Students begin to explore shelter as a basic need of humans and animals. They explore the many different types of homes in which both animals and people live. They consider what their home means to them. They are then introduced to the topic of homelessness and begin to consider what can be done to help others who do not have a home.

Materials

LM At-A-Glance, chart paper, markers, paper, oil or chalk pastels

Book: Hoberman, Mary Ann and Betty Fraser (illustrator). (1982). *A House is a House for Me*. New York: Puffin. P/J/I

Curriculum Expectations

Choices into Action (Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools)

Interpersonal development

in grades 1 to 6, students will learn to:

- self-management
 - demonstrate their understanding of socially acceptable responses to a variety of situations in school
- getting along with others
 - identify the variety of characteristics, skills, competencies, qualities, and talents of others
 - demonstrate their understanding of using skills to build positive relationships at school (e.g., cooperating with others)
- social responsibility
 - demonstrate their understanding of “being a responsible citizen” in the classroom and the school

Career development

in grades 1 to 6, students will learn to:

- self-assessment
 - identify their personal interests, strengths, competencies, and accomplishments

Grade 1 students will:

The Arts

Drama and Dance

- interpret the meaning of stories, poems, and other material drawn from a variety of sources and cultures, using some basic drama and dance techniques (e.g., role playing, movement sequences)

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes

Science and Technology

Life Systems

- demonstrate an understanding of the basic needs of animals and plants (e.g., the need for food, air, and water)
- demonstrate awareness that animals and plants depend on their environment to meet their basic needs, and describe the requirements for good health for humans

Social Studies

Canada and World Connections

- recognize that communities consist of various physical features and community facilities that meet human needs

Language

Oral Communication

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes

Grade 2 students will:

The Arts

Drama and Dance

- interpret the meaning of stories, poems, and other material drawn from a variety of sources and cultures, using several basic drama and dance techniques (e.g., tableaux)

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes

Science and Technology

Life Systems

- demonstrate an understanding of the similarities and differences among various types of animals and the ways in which animals adapt to different environmental conditions

Social Studies

Canada and World Connections

- explain how the environment affects people's lives and the ways in which their needs are met

Language

Oral Communication

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes

Grade 3 students will:

The Arts

Drama and Dance

- interpret the meaning of stories, poems, and other material drawn from a variety of sources and cultures, using several basic drama and dance techniques (e.g., writing in role)
- compare their own work with the work of others in drama and dance through discussion, writing, movement, and visual art work

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes

Social Studies

Canada and World Connection

- explain how communities interact with each other and the environment to meet human needs

Language

Oral Communication

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes

Source: Ministry of Education. *The Ontario Curriculum. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario Science and Technology, Grades 1–8. (2007). The Arts, Grades 1–8. (2006). Language, Grades 1–8. (1997). Social Studies, Grade 1–6. (2004).*

Lesson Outline

1 Ask the students

To share what they think the basic needs of animals are. Once they have identified water, food, and shelter as basic needs, ask them if they think that shelter really is a basic need, and why.

2 Ask the students

To brainstorm with a partner all the different types of homes that animals live in (nest, burrow, den, etc.), and then have them list all the different types of homes that humans live in (apartment, condo, igloo, hut, etc.).

3 Ask the students

What is a home? Are all homes the same? Point out that homes are different because of different needs (environment, climate, family size, etc.). Why are homes important? What makes a home? Homes are places where people feel safe and loved. What do people do in a home? Create a list together.

4 Home Tableau

In a large space have the students move around slowly to music. Ask the students to freeze when the music stops and make a picture when you call out a scene. Explain that they must freeze, find a focal point, and breathe through their nose. Call out various “pictures” each time you stop the music. Examples are, “a day at the beach”, “a hockey game”, “eating ice cream”, “running a race”. When you are confident that the students understand that they must freeze to show the scene, distribute magazine scenes of families at home, and have them recreate the scene in small groups. Be careful to include scenes of non-traditional families. Allow the students to present their “photographs” to the rest of the class.

5 Call the class together

Discussion questions include:

- What was happening in your group’s photograph?
- Did the family look like they were enjoying themselves?
- What were they doing?
- Did your group have any difficulties? How did you solve them?

6 Read the book

“*A House is a House for Me*” to the class.

- Where do homeless people live?
- Refer back to the list of things that people do in a house. Ask the students to cross out everything that homeless people wouldn’t be able to do.

7 Chant

On chart paper, show the text of “*A House is a House for Me*” to the class. As a class, have the children chant the words chorally. Divide the class into small groups to rehearse the text and present it to the class.

Encourage the groups to experiment with the elements of music: pitch (high/low), dynamics (loud/soft), tempo (fast/slow), to create different moods.

8 Have the students draw a picture

Of their own home using oil or chalk pastels.

9 Invite the students to share their pictures

Ask the students to imagine what it would be like if they didn’t have a home. Ask them if they have ever seen a homeless person. Recognize that there may be students in your class who are homeless.

10 Why might someone become homeless?

- Not enough money
- No job
- Mental illness
- Natural disaster (i.e. fire)
- Family violence
- Alcohol and drug addiction

11 Musical Homes

Play the game Musical Chairs, but ask the students to imagine that the chairs are homes. There should be enough chairs for each child. Then remove a few chairs and continue the game. No one should be “out”, and they can re-enter the game with the next round. Discuss how it felt not to get a chair. Let the students play again, but this time they can share chairs.

12 Hope

How can we help others who do not have a home? Brainstorm ideas. Encourage the students to make a plan to help the homeless. This may include organizing a coin drive or a clothing drive or making posters to educate others. Have the students keep a journal of the project or create a class book.

Assessment

Teachers may choose to use the LM1 At-a-Glance (page 8) provided which includes some “Hints for Teachers” to guide observations and help to determine appropriate student responses based on the lesson expectations.

Support for Every Learner

Provide frequent opportunities for students to meet individually with the teacher to help them formulate their ideas. For those students who need additional support, partner reading opportunities could be made available.

Home Connections

Ask the students to bring in three objects that represent what home means to them. Share these with the class.

LM At-A-Glance

Hints for Teachers – As you observe, consider:

Did the students willingly take part in the large group activities or was encouragement necessary?

Did the students take an active part in the drama tableau activity?

Did the students communicate an understanding of the basic concept of similarities and differences in homes?

Suggested Activities – Grade 4 to Grade 6

Synopsis

This topic focuses on the concept of homelessness. The students will imagine themselves without a home and begin to explore what the immediate and long-term needs of the homeless might be. They will consider and challenge stereotypes of homelessness and look toward solutions.

Materials

LM Home Free/Si j'avais un foyer, LM Emergency Backpack/Urgence sac à dos, LM Home Free/Si j'avais un foyer, paper, tempera paint, brushes, strips of paper, chart paper, markers

Curriculum Expectations

Choices into Action (Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools)

Interpersonal development	in grades 1 to 6, students will learn to:
• self-management	– demonstrate their understanding of socially acceptable responses to a variety of situations in school
• getting along with others	– identify the variety of characteristics, skills, competencies, qualities, and talents of others – demonstrate their understanding of using skills to build positive relationships at school (e.g., cooperating with others)
• social responsibility	– demonstrate their understanding of “being a responsible citizen” in the classroom and the school
Career development	in grades 1 to 6, students will learn to:
• self-assessment	– identify their personal interests, strengths, competencies, and accomplishments

Grade 4 students will:

The Arts

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences

Language

Oral Communications

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes
- use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes

Writing

- generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Grade 5 students will:

The Arts

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences

Language

Oral Communications

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes
- use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes

Writing

- generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Grade 6 students will:

The Arts

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences, using a variety of familiar art tools, materials, and techniques

Language

Oral Communications

- listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes
- use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes

Writing

- generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Source: Ministry of Education. *The Ontario Curriculum. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario Science and Technology, Grades 1–8. (2007). The Arts, Grades 1–8. (2006). Language, Grades 1–8. (1997). Social Studies, Grade 1–6. (2004). History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8. (2004).*

Lesson Outline

1 Show students

A backpack and tell them that they should imagine that they have five minutes to pack everything they would need if they were suddenly homeless. With a partner they should make a list of the necessities. Only items that fit in a backpack can be included.

2 Have the students record

All the activities they do at home after they leave school until they return the next day. The next day they will share their lists with a partner. Ask the students to decide which of these activities would be difficult or impossible without a home. Then ask the students to imagine that they are a homeless child. Discuss with a partner what kinds of problems they might have. Examples are: they wouldn't have a phone so they could not call friends or be reached easily; they could not invite their friends over; it might be difficult to be clean because they would not have a shower; they may not have enough to eat, no school supplies, enough sleep, etc.

3 Have the students write

A journal entry about what it would be like not to have a home: "Without a home...." The students should consider where they would go, how it would feel, what they would miss.

4 Hand out strips of paper

And ask students to write three different sentences about the homeless: "Homeless people are...." Discuss the meaning of the word stereotype. Have students share their sentences and decide whether the sentences are true or stereotypes.

5 Introduce students

To opinion papers. Each student will complete an opinion paper on the topic, "Homeless people should not be allowed to sleep/live in public places." Have students formulate their thoughts (introduction, opinion, evidence to support the opinion, and conclusion) and prepare arguments.

6 Debate

Separate the students into small groups based on whether they agree or disagree and have them debate the topic, "Homeless people should not be allowed to sleep/live in public places."

7 Read the poem

"Home Free/Si j'avais un foyer" LM2. Discuss as a class whether those things would really help the homeless. Discuss that though these things are necessary in the short term, they do not address the long-term needs of the homeless.

8 Divide the class into groups

Allow each group to read the poem and practice one verse. Read the poem together, with each group presenting their verse.

9 Ask students

To provide a definition of the word "stereotype". A stereotype is an overly generalized image of a particular person or group. It may be positive or negative. Stereotyping assumes uniformity within the group.

What stereotypes exist about the homeless? Ask students to brainstorm the reasons for homelessness. Share these as a class and compare with the list provided.

Why might someone become homeless?

- Not enough money
- No job
- Mental illness
- Natural disaster (i.e. fire)
- Family violence
- Alcohol and drug addiction

10 Think/Pair/Share

Make a list of things that could be done to help the homeless in the long-term. Share ideas with a partner. As a class, create an action plan. Encourage the students to make a plan to help the homeless. This may include organizing a coin drive or a clothing drive.

11 Create posters to educate others

Display these throughout the school.

Assessment

Teachers may choose to use the LM1 At-a-Glance (page 8) provided which includes some "Hints for Teachers" to guide observations and help to determine appropriate student responses based on the lesson expectations.

Support for Every Learner

Teachers should consider, when forming the groups, that student strengths be promoted.

Home Connection

Students will complete lists of activities that are carried out at home.

LM Emergency Backpack

Emergency Backpack

Quick!

You have five minutes to pack everything
you need to survive without a home.

WHAT WOULD YOU BRING?

WHAT WOULD YOU LEAVE BEHIND?

WHAT'S MISSING?

R. Marsan/A. Dhawan



Urgence sac à dos

Urgence

Tu as cinq minutes pour ramasser tout ce qu'il te faut pour survivre sans domicile

QU'EST-CE QUE TU PRENDRAIS ?

QU'EST-CE QUE TU DEVRAS LAISSER ?

QU'EST-CE QUI TE MANQUE ?

R. Marsan/A. Dhawan



LM Home Free

If I had a home and you did not
I would look for you when winter came
I would look in all the places you might go

If I found you
I would wrap you up
In thick, clean blankets
That smell like Spring
And bring you tea

If you wanted me to
I would help you find a place where you felt safe
If you were afraid I would stay with you

I wouldn't tell you anything
Of what to do
Or where to go

I would listen
I would look at you
Past what others see
I would look at you
The wonder
That is you
And I would let you tell me how to help you
But I do not have a home

Rachelle Marsan

LM Si j'avais un foyer

Si j'avais un foyer
Et toi sans foyer
Je te chercherais dès l'hiver venu
J'te chercherais partout où tu pourrais te trouver

Et si je te trouvais
Je t'envelopperais d'épaisseurs de chaleur
Au parfum printanier
Je t'apporterais du thé

Si tu le souhaitais
Je t'aiderais à trouver un endroit
Où tu serais en sécurité
Si tu avais peur je serais restée avec toi

Je ne te dirais rien
Ni quoi faire
Ni où aller

Je t'écouterais
Je te regarderais
Je verrais en toi
Ce que les autres ne voient pas
Je verrais en toi
La merveille qui est toi
Je te demanderais
De me dire comment t'aider

Si j'avais un foyer
Mais je n'en ai pas

*Rachelle Marsan
Translated by Kathy Wazana*

Suggested Activities – Grade 7 to Grade 8

Synopsis

Students will explore the concept of privilege. They will calculate the amount of money required for living in their own community and consider how people sometimes have to make difficult choices when there is insufficient income to cover their basic needs. They will look at causes of homelessness and research local support for the homeless. They will create a brochure for homeless teens that lists local programs that are available.

Materials:

Book: Ellis Deborah. (2001). *Looking for X*. Toronto: HarperCollins Canada. P/J materials for a collage, paper, glue, scissors,

LM Privilege Pass/Passe–partout privilège, LM The Math of Homelessness/La table de soustraction, LM Sidewalk/Le Trottoir

Curriculum Expectations

Choices into Action (Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools)

Interpersonal development

in grades 7 and 8, students will learn to:

- self-management
 - demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to manage their own behaviour (e.g., self-control, the role of emotions, anger management)
 - use personal skills appropriately to encourage responsible behaviour in others in a wide range of situations

- getting along with others
 - describe the many aspects of relationships, and explain and demonstrate how skills (e.g., conflict-resolution, peer helping, and leadership skills) are used to interact positively with others in diverse settings at school and in the community

- social responsibility
 - demonstrate social responsibility both at school and in the community (e.g., participating in student elections; acting as reading buddies)

Career development

in grades 7 and 8, students will learn to:

- self-assessment
 - apply their knowledge of their personal interests, strengths, abilities, and accomplishments to planning and decision making

Grade 7 students will:

The Arts

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences, using appropriate art forms

Language

Writing

- generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience
- use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively

Mathematics

Measurement

- report on research into real-life applications of measurements

Data Management and Probability

- make and evaluate convincing arguments, based on analysis of data

Grade 8 students will:

The Arts

Visual Arts

- produce two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences, using a variety of art forms

Language

Writing

- generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience
- use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively

Source: Ministry of Education. *The Ontario Curriculum. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario Science and Technology, Grades 1–8. (2007). The Arts, Grades 1–8. (2006). Language, Grades 1–8. (1997). Social Studies, Grade 1–6. (2004). History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8. (2004). Mathematics, Grades 1–8 (2005).*

Lesson Outline

1 As the students enter the classroom

Distribute pieces of paper randomly. Eighty percent of the students will receive a Privilege Pass. They are entitled to a seat. The others must sit on the floor. After everyone is seated, ask how it felt to be privileged. How did it feel to be unprivileged? Stress that it is like being homeless. It is not something that people choose.

2 The Math of Homelessness

On the board, write the current minimum wage in Ontario (\$8.75/hr). Have students calculate what a person who worked 40 hours a week would make in a month.

3 Distribute local papers

Or photocopies of the local classifieds and ask students to decide what a typical apartment would cost per month. Have the students subtract this from the salary. How much money is left over for the other necessities of life such as food and water?

4 Read the novel

“Looking for X” to the class.

5 As a class discuss

What different factors could cause a person to become homeless? Think/Pair/Share Brainstorm with a partner and make a list as a class. Why do you think X is homeless?

6 Homeless Help

In small groups have the students design an information brochure for homeless teens in your community. The brochure should answer the questions:

- Where can I go when it is cold?
- Where can I sleep?
- Where can I get medical care?
- How can I earn money?
- Where can I get free food?
- Where can I have a shower? Use the washroom?
- Where can I get clothes?
- How will I get around?

7 Shelter Living

In 5 minutes, list all the problems of living in a shelter. Measure out how much space you would have in a shelter, use tape on the floor, have students discuss what it would feel like – share ideas.

8 Map of our community

Where are the shelters and places for people to turn? Have students create a map of their community.

9 Researching Homelessness

Ask students to research homelessness in other parts of the world, comparing it to homelessness in Canada.

10 Using recycled items

Students can create collages based on the concept of home or homelessness.

11 Have students construct

Their own bulletin board about homelessness.

12 Action Plan

Encourage students to get involved. Contact a local homeless shelter to find out which supplies are most needed and then collect these as a class. Write letters to politicians, asking them to better support the homeless in our communities.

13 Invite students to write poetry and music from the perspective of a homeless person. Create a performance piece where students recite their poems in role. Look for opportunities at your school and in your community to share their work. Woven together these poems can relay a powerful message.

Assessment

Teachers may choose to use the LM1 At-a-Glance (page 8) provided which includes some “Hints for Teachers” to guide observations and help to determine appropriate student responses based on the lesson expectations.

Support for Every Learner

The teacher should provide learning partners for those students who require extra support.

LM Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass



Privilege Pass

LM Passe-partout privilège



**Passe-partout
privilège**



**Passe-partout
privilège**



**Passe-partout
privilège**



**Passe-partout
privilège**



**Passe-partout
privilège**



**Passe-partout
privilège**

The Math of Homelessness

How it all adds up

MINIMUM WAGE:

X 40/hours a week =

X 4 weeks per month =

Monthly Income:

Subtract Rent:

How much is left for food, utilities,
and other costs?

Can you afford to live here?

R. Marsan/A. Dhawan



La table de soustraction

SALAIRE MINIMUM

X 40 heures par semaine =

X 4 semaines par mois =

Revenu mensuel :

Soustraire le loyer :

Combien reste-t-il pour la nourriture, la
lumière et le chauffage, les autres frais ?

As-tu les moyens de vivre ici ?

R. Marsan/A. Dhawan



It's not a fun day outside
with people walking on your face
I'm a person too
I don't deserve to be out of place
Mother keeps crying
and I'm crying too
We're both a lot less privileged than you
The only thing we have is each other
How can you walk by me and my mother?

Chorus:

It's not bank accounts we need
It's not dollar bills
It's support from privileged people
and medicine when we're ill
It's not stuff and it's not fashion
It's not limousines
It's a home with beds and food
we want to be members of society
Mother stop crying
we're not dying
We can do this as long as we're trying
We're not outcasts
everyone was lying
But mother first let's stop our crying

Carmen, Age 13

Ma journée est bien trop dure
Le monde marche sur ma figure
Je suis une personne moi aussi
Ne mérite pas d'être seule ici

Maman pleure sans cesse
Me remplit de tristesse
Nous sommes moins privilégiée que toi

Le Trottoir
Nous sommes seules au monde elle et moi
Tu marches tu nous dépasses
Sans nous voir Maman et moi

Refrain :
Gardez vos comptes en banque
Et gardez vos dollars
Donnez-nous le soutien
des gens privilégiés
Et des médicaments
Qui pourront nous aider
Gardez vos richesses
Vos choses et votre mode
Vos limousines aussi
N'ont rien à faire ici

C'est une maison, des lits, et de la nourriture
Nous voulons faire partie de toute la société
Maman cesse de pleurer
On ne va pas mourir
On ne va pas partir
On n'est pas des rejetées
Tout le monde nous mentais
Maman les pleurs doivent arrêter

Carmen, Age 13

The streets of Iqaluit

Story and Photography by Gordon Laird

At the edge of the Arctic Circle, local Inuit line up at a soup kitchen for their next meal. It's a striking scene, one that has received scant national attention: hunters who can expertly navigate pack ice and track polar bears now jockey for bunk beds at an over-booked homeless shelter.

Inusiq Shoo has been wandering the streets for months. He passes his days traversing Iqaluit's small downtown core, from the Arctic College cafeteria to the local hunter's lodge and several indoor shopping centres scattered across the former Hudson's Bay Company settlement. It is winter in Nunavut and Shoo has been homeless for a year. Despite the bitter cold and an uncertain future, it's polar bear, ring seal and caribou that fill his imagination. Shoo was born on the land north of Iqaluit, and hunting is how he wants to set things straight. "I'm pure Inuk—I hunt animals. We learned hunting from our parents," he explains, a homeless man yearning for the open ice.

All around us are the telltale signs of a boomtown: shiny new trucks, luxury hotels. A construction binge has kept many locals flush with cash, following Nunavut's 1999 launch into self-government. But the new capital has strained to keep up with the influx of people imported from the south to help run the new territory, and northerners who've moved here from other parts of the Arctic, looking for opportunity as traditional hunting pursuits founder. And if Iqaluit's population keeps growing at a rate three times the national average, say local officials, it will reach one million by 2075. For now, the town of 6,000 wrestles with a more immediate problem, partly fuelled by its own tremendous growth: according to local estimates, up to 1,000 residents are without adequate shelter of their own.

Homelessness and overcrowding are now common among Iqaluit's Inuit, many of whom have parents who lived independently on Arctic tundra until the 1960s. It's a striking scene, one that has received scant national attention: Inuit hunters who can expertly navigate pack ice and track polar bears now jockey for bunk beds at an over-booked homeless shelter. With upwards of 10% of Nunavut's population waiting for social housing, according to one 1999 government source, it is believed that thousands more live in transient, sub-standard conditions. The few statistics that exist suggest a hidden crisis: across Canada, 1.7% of households report having more than one resident per room. But in Nunavut, this figure skyrockets to 25%.

"The demand for housing grows every year," explains Susan Spring of the Iqaluit Housing Authority. "But the number of homeless is hard to define." Much of Iqaluit's new housing – condos and suburban-style homes – goes to newly arrived professionals and government employees. Ever since the federal Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation stopped funding social housing in 1993, demand for affordable housing across the north – as in many Canadian cities – has exploded. Nunavut is now so far behind that it would need to build 300 new units each year in order to shelter the growing number who lack permanent housing. This year, just two new units of social housing are confirmed for Iqaluit; 61 different families and individuals are competing for residency.

As with Inusiq Shoo, many are homeless simply because things like overcrowding and violence make it almost impossible to hold a fixed address. Despite the pristine tundra and ice that surrounds us, Iqaluit is no paradise: drugs flow freely from the south, the crime rate is exploding and paid work is scarce for those without education. According to local RCMP, the number of reported robberies almost doubled between 1999 and 2000, as did break-and-enters, spousal abuse and car theft. Even compared to troubled Indian reserves in the south, the level of violence in Nunavut comes as a shock: a few weeks before I arrived, a delivery driver from "The Snack" restaurant was beaten with a hammer and robbed on the doorstep of a nearby home.

Up here, even poverty is expensive. One Inuit family, until recently, lived in a plywood shed near the beach, warmed only by an electric space heater that cost them \$1,000 a month in utilities. And those Inuk who still pursue hunting – a hedge against expensive city food and southern vices – increasingly run up against gun control laws, a fur market damaged by animal rights activists, expensive gas and rising living costs.

"Sometimes it is cheaper for them to buy food from the Northmart," says David Audlakiak, manager of the local Hunters and Trappers Organization, or HTO. "After 2,000 years of surviving on the land, this is what happens."

I first met Inusiq Shoo at the Iqaluit HTO, a one-room hut in the middle of town that serves as a meeting place for local hunters. A few days earlier, one of the first polar bear kills of the season was celebrated up and down Frobisher Bay. The Inuit-run lodge was gearing up for another bear hunt: hunters poured over maps, filled out paperwork. Others sipped coffee and planned their next trip onto the ice.

Shoo was filling out a form with the help of Audlakiak, an Inuk from Cambridge Bay. After some jail time in Yellowknife and several years in and out of Iqaluit's drunk tank, Shoo was trying to cobble together enough money for his own snowmobile. He quit drugs and drinking several years ago. But if he wanted to hunt independently again – to be a real hunter – he'd have to finish filling out the Northern Affairs assistance application. And he needed Audlakiak's help because he was still learning how to read, a skill he failed to pick up in residential school.

The paperwork was the least of his worries. It was winter in Iqaluit and Shoo was still homeless. Permanent housing, thanks to lengthy waiting lists for social housing, was still months away. So he would spend another winter at the shelter, wandering the streets by day.

"It was so hard to quit, a lot of lost time," he says of the decade he spent drinking, glue sniffing and in prison. En route to check Shoo's email at Nunavut's Arctic College, we walk headway into a polar gale that whips through Iqaluit's downtown core. "When I went back out hunting and I listened to the wind, something calling you," he says, as

snow blows horizontal across the sky. “I know I am happy out on the ice. Because I don’t worry about anything.”

After a few days at the HTO, I discover that several more hunters I’ve been chatting with over coffee are either homeless or on welfare. Others live two or three to a room with relatives and some get by with a meagre income and social housing. “There’s not one person in this room who hasn’t had to go to social services for help,” says Audlakiak. He used to work at the Oqota Emergency Shelter, Iqaluit’s only homeless facility, and admits he was homeless himself for a short spell.

He’s angry that many Inuk, though resourceful, are faced with a dwindling set of options as they become dependent on city food, shelter and government assistance. As HTO manager, Audlakiak is witnessing what he believes to be the slow collapse of the Inuit hunting economy. Between social problems and rising costs, many hunters no longer work the floes. Some have even forgotten how. “Snowmobiles can cost \$10,000 up here,” he says. “Why do you think so many of us are on welfare? Animal hunting couldn’t support our lifestyle, so we become totally dependent on welfare. This has devastated us.”

All this is at a time when disturbing levels of mercury and DDT continue to move up the food chain and the effects of climate change wreak havoc with ice floes and polar bear hunts. “One thinks the land to be very plain, not much to harvest: but my kin learned to exist in this hard kind of climate,” Audlakiak says. “But there are contaminants being discovered in our ocean. Governments make it hard for us to hunt. What’s next?”

Hunters nevertheless struggle to stay working. For months, Shoo has been sleeping at the Oqota shelter and taking literacy courses during the day. He’s determined to get his own snowmobile so he isn’t dependent on handouts. “My dream is to have a big freezer and hunt seal and caribou – and give food to elders. That’s what I want, to be out on the ice...”

In minus 35° darkness, homeless Inuit line up outside the Oqota Emergency Shelter for bunk beds and a warm meal. Every day at 5:50 p.m., it is the same thing: as night sets in, anyone who can’t find space with friends or relatives arrives here on the doorstep. Gordon Barnes, director of Oqota, says he turns people away almost every other evening: the 14 beds of Iqaluit’s tiny homeless shelter usually fill quickly, especially during the long cold months of winter. A southerner who first came north 20 years ago, Barnes settled in Iqaluit to pursue his dream of becoming a social worker. He married into a local Inuk family and helped found the Oqota shelter in 1998, after Iqaluit’s existing shelter closed its doors due to underfunding. Since 1999, Barnes has seen his occupancy rate jump 75%, something that underlines his conviction that as many as 1,000 people in Iqaluit lack proper shelter. The number of chronically under-housed is closer to 300: these are the ones who are most likely to cycle through the bunks of Oqota.

“Here in this town, no matter how resourceful you are, it sometimes doesn’t pan out,” he says, cradling his infant son in one of the shelter’s bunkrooms. He’s seen houses where people sleep in shifts, too crowded for everyone to sleep at once. Other people sleep in furnace rooms, between doorways, covered porches and even inside the RCMP entrance. His own house would be cramped by southern standards: three bedrooms for six people. “Sometimes people wait a year – up to two years – for social housing. We even have a staff member who doesn’t have a place of his own.”

Barnes figures that he could fill a second building with people – especially women and children, who are often the first to suffer the consequences of poverty and under-housing. There are unused buildings, an armed forces barracks and a Coast Guard bunkhouse, that could easily be converted into temporary shelter. “We’re paying millions for the upkeep of empty buildings,” he says. “We need double the space.”

Lack of funding is the main barrier: Oqota itself almost shut its doors twice in 2001 because its cash flow dried up. There’s talk of new funding from the federal government, but no immediate relief. “We’re living day to day – and don’t know if we’re going to have a paycheque sometimes,” says Barnes, who still drives a taxi part-time.

He explains that Iqaluit’s strong community is the main reason why more people don’t freeze to death on the streets of Nunavut’s capital. “When you come here, you want to make something happen,” he says. “Here, people take a chance on you.”

It’s not unusual for Oqota residents to make good for themselves. Inusiq Shoo recently qualified for social housing – after almost a two-year wait and launched Iqaluit’s only food bank, a homegrown operation that raises money and distributes food as quickly as donations arrive. Rumours of a United Way chapter opening in Iqaluit are hopeful.

By 6:30 p.m., Oqota is full for another evening. A local hotel has sent over extra food from the restaurant and residents dig into a hot meal as an African wildlife documentary blares on cable TV. Outside, the temperature drops again as Barnes is called out for a pick-up. But it’s no taxi run: we arrive at a nearby house to meet a woman, sobbing and wrapped in blankets. We rush her to the hospital, no questions asked. And we return to the shelter in silence. “The big issue in my life now is homelessness,” says Barnes, simply, as we drive through the darkness. “Things are not moving fast enough.”

photo essay continued overleaf



Top left: Homeless hunter Inusiq Shoo presents his status Indian card at the Nunavut Arctic College cafeteria. “It was so hard to quit, a lot of lost time,” he says of the decade he spent with drinking, glue sniffing and prison. “When I went back out hunting and I listened to the wind, something calling you.”

Lower left: Shoo circles Iqaluit daily in search of warm shelter and food.

Top centre: Hunter Niaulaq Inookie (left) and others plan their next polar bear hunt at Iqaluit’s Hunters and Trappers Organization lodge.

Lower centre: Inookie’s daughter.

Top right: David Audlakiak, HTO manager, sees poverty and homelessness every day. “Our families have limited supplies to share – only hot coffee and bannock sometimes,” he says. “We feel like we are unwanted children.”

Lower right: Leeveena Turqtuq takes her children to visit the John Howard Society (JHS) drop-in and soup kitchen. The kitchen fed three meals to 90 adults and children daily until underfunding and a condemnation order closed the building mid-2001. A temporary kitchen run by a local philanthropist now offers a single daily meal.

Reprinted from THIS March/April 2002 with permission of the author.

No cozy answers

The Toronto Star, Saturday, November 19, 2005

No cozy answers; If children are to learn compassion, they need the truth about homelessness. But parents wrestle with their own uneasiness and fears.

By Andrea Gordon

The children are watching. They see the man on the corner with holes in his shoes and hunger in his eyes, even if you tug their hands and pull them quickly past. You might think they don't notice, but they do.

The children are listening. They hear the silence when the street kid shivering under the sleeping bag asks for change and the adults don't reply.

The children are wondering: Why is that person out here in the cold? Where is their home and their family? Can't we stop and help them?

Encountering the homeless is part of urban living. Explaining it to kids can be a challenge. When you pass by the regulars who sleep in the park, or you emerge from the subway to a row of panhandlers, it might be tempting to grab the children and look the other way. But as any parent knows, in an awkward situation you can always count on the smallest people for the toughest questions and the loudest observations. And they have a way of making you reconsider your own reactions and attitudes.

How parents respond is important, say community workers and educators, because that's where the young ones take their cues. For many, seeing a homeless person on the street can be the first time they've come face-to-face with someone in need, and when poverty and hunger are suddenly made real. Some will insist on giving money, others may be upset. But it presents an opportunity to instill an attitude of care and concern.

It doesn't have to be complicated, says Margaret Stephenson, a Toronto housing and community worker with the homeless. "You just have to tell your kids, 'This is another human being and I do not judge them,' that you don't know the life they've had to bring them to this place."

Stephenson knows what it's like to be in trouble and feel judged by others who don't understand. Eight years ago, as a single parent struggling to make ends meet, she fell behind in the rent. One cold December evening, she and her children, then ages 13, 6 and 4, found themselves out on the street with their suitcases. They ended up in a shelter for eight months – a roach-infested motel – until Stephenson could save enough to get them an apartment, go back to school and find a job.

Like the vast majority of homeless, who live in shelters, motels, cars or bunk in temporarily with friends or family, they never had to live on the street. But still, Stephenson's children remember what it was like to be the "shelter kids" going to a school where no one else talked to them. Stephenson recalls being the mother that other parents avoided.

Now when they go downtown, her kids stop and talk to the homeless people they see. They empty their pockets of money. And she doesn't try to stop them.

Stephenson believes kids need to be educated about homelessness, not shielded from it, and that it should start with parents.

"This can happen to anyone," she says. "I don't think some people in society want to deal with this situation, but it is not going to go away just because you want to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. We need to keep advocating and talking about it."

But Mary Gordon, renowned Toronto educator, warns that kids need to know it's not their responsibility to solve it. It's the job of the adults.

"It's not up to us to raise activists, but it's up to us to raise compassionate people," she says. "To me, this is finding the humanity in the other person."

Gordon is founder of Roots of Empathy, an internationally recognized classroom program that brings babies and students together to foster empathy in children. She has spent a career studying the way children develop emotional intelligence and compassion and has also worked with families living in poverty.

Gordon says a parent who ignores a homeless person or looks on them with scorn passes along the message "my mommy thinks this person is yucky." But a parent who directly acknowledges someone on the street and speaks to their child about them with concern sends the message that every person has rights and dignity.

Parents' words and actions are indelible, she adds. Young children soak up the values that surround them and have internalized them by the time they reach the age of 6.

They can also remind adults of what's important. Just ask Colleen Taylor.

Four years ago, she and her daughter Hannah, then age 5, were driving through an alley in downtown Winnipeg when they passed a dishevelled man rooting through a garbage bin, his mouth full.

"Mommy! What is that man doing?" Hannah piped up.

"It took all of 20 seconds," Colleen recalls in an interview from her Winnipeg home. She remembers feeling caught completely off-guard. "And then I, her mom, who had said to all her kids that we need to always help others ... drove right by."

For months afterward, Hannah persisted with questions and her parents answered her as honestly as they could. Hannah noticed other street people, insisting on giving them change and small items, and was so preoccupied for the next year that Colleen consulted the family's pediatrician. Then one bedtime after the usual queries, she told Hannah, "If you do something to help homeless people, maybe that will make your heart feel better."

Four years later, at age 9, Hannah has gone from running a Grade 1 bake sale for her cause to becoming an advocate known across the country. She is founder of the Ladybug Foundation (www.ladybugfoundation.ca), a grassroots organization that has raised more than \$200,000 for food and shelter for the homeless. She has inspired audiences ranging from elementary school students to the blue-chip Empire Club of Canada.

But what will resonate with parents most about Hannah's story isn't her rare accomplishment. It's the childhood traits she shares with so many kids and that deserve our attention – curiosity, a powerful instinct for right and wrong, and the ability to see people without judging them. Hannah has inspired action from kids and adults alike, mostly because she sees the human face of homelessness. Her message is simple: we need to be kind and decent. And as she explains over the phone, "If everybody did a little thing, then that would make it into a big thing that helps."

The story she tells about Carey is a telling example of the way kids are. Hannah met him on the street near her Toronto hotel during a visit to the city. She dropped some change into his cup and they started chatting. And then in the way that children do, she asked "What's your name?" He told her, then paused and added, "No one ever asks me that."

Hannah has advice for parents when talking to their children about homelessness, "Tell them the truth," she says. "Tell it gently and slowly and let them ask questions."

Gordon adds a caveat: Don't give them more information than they ask for or what you think they can handle. "The sensitivity of individual children and their degree of empathy is something we have to be really careful of....You don't want to disable kids by getting them too distraught."

To Rick Tobias, executive director of the Yonge Street Mission in Toronto, the best thing parents can do is model compassion. That can be the difference between raising a generation that cares or kids who look the other way. "I think there's a direct tie between acts of compassion and the world we leave our kids," he says. He says those actions, whether it's a smile, a greeting, or dropping a few coins into a can, are important because you never know where they will lead. Sometimes it's that human connection that paves the way to bigger deeds down the road.

"We don't need a world full of professional caregivers, or every child to grow up to be a social worker," he says. "We need a world of average people doing a little bit more."

Andrea Gordon is the Star's family issues reporter.

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KidLit with a message

The Toronto Star, Monday, February 20, 2006

KidLit with a message; Youth worker's book for children helps parents explain homelessness.

By Andrea Gordon

Tim Huff has been hanging out with street kids for 19 years. He has listened quietly to their stories, watched them cry beneath the overpasses where they sleep, brought them coffee and sandwiches. He has been spit on and called names while sitting with them as they panhandle from the sidewalk.

But when his own daughter, at age 8, fixed him with her gaze one day as they strolled below the Gardiner Expressway and demanded to know why there was a mattress on the ground, he struggled for words to explain that someone slept there and why.

"I thought, 'I'm having a hard time answering these questions,'" says Huff, 41, who works for Youth Unlimited, a faith-based charity aimed at helping teens and young adults.

"I thought, 'If I am, I wonder how the average urban parent is managing to answer this.'"

A few years later, Huff, a Toronto father of two, has come up with something he hopes will help other parents facing the same dilemma.

He has written and illustrated a picture book that lays the groundwork for parents and teachers to start talking about homelessness with children.

The book, in draft form and ready to be shopped to publishers, is called *The Cardboard Shack Beneath the Bridge*. Written in 16 stanzas, each accompanied by a colourful drawing, it gently raises questions in language a preschooler can understand and leaves it to the adult to decide where to take the discussion.

The cardboard shack beneath the bridge

Is hard to understand

Who lives, who is inside of it?

A woman? Child? A man?

While Huff says he targeted kids ages 4 to 8, it could be read and talked about at any age.

His hope is that he can put a face on homelessness, and that children will never walk by a freezing teenager asking for change or an old woman curled up on a heating grate without recognizing they are each people with their own reasons for how and why they ended up there.

Like many others who work on the streets, in missions or shelters, Huff believes that kind of compassion is the first step to taking action and searching for solutions. "However we deal with (the homeless issue), if we forget it's actually people with stories, lives, souls, we're in trouble," he says. "Or if we start thinking of it as just cleaning up a mess."

The *Cardboard Shack Beneath the Bridge* was a labour of love that took Huff about two years to complete, but drew on his nearly two decades of observations and experiences.

He is the director of Lighthouse Patrol and homelessness initiatives at Youth Unlimited. Light Patrol (www.lightpatrol.ca) operates from a mobile home that sends trained youth counsellors, nurses and volunteers to do outreach work with street youth living in alleys, parks and under bridges.

Its aim is to build trusting relationships with kids whose shattering circumstances with adults have left them fearful and distrustful. These workers hope to act as a bridge between the kids and safe sources of food, shelter, health care, school or a job.

In creating his new book, Huff also relied on his training in Sheridan College's animation program, in which he was enrolled before deciding on a career as an outreach worker and activist. One illustration shows a teenage girl with a nose ring and streaks of pink and green in her hair. Her clothes are dishevelled and she carries a bag in one hand, another slung over her shoulder. She's alone.

This girl is only on paper. But she's also everywhere, at least the streets and alleys that Huff knows so well. Two men illustrated on a blanket with a dog were based on two people he knew, who have since died.

But the real incentive for the book came from Huff's perspective as a parent – of Sarah Jane, now 12, and Jake, 8 – one who has to reconcile the tragic lives he sees daily with his other role of taking kids to piano lessons and hockey games, and reading them bedtime stories.

Sometimes, when you're so immersed in a subject, it's hard to step back and explain the basics.

"I know the root causes so well, and it's so overwhelming to talk about mental illness, sexual abuse, drug addiction ... I just wanted to start with everybody just seeing each other as human beings," he says.

Huff has a lot of respect for stories. And for the fact that everyone has their own, whether we know what it is or not. He'd be happy if that's something children could take from this book.

"It think it might help them say, 'Wow, something went wrong that I don't understand.'"

Patti Kirk, co-owner of Parentbooks in Toronto, says she's always on the lookout for issue-oriented books that help teachers and parents talk about topics that can be daunting for kids.

Issue-oriented storybooks and novels for youth have exploded in the past decade or so, and her store carries ones that deal with everything from post-9/11 fears to depression and alcoholism, bullying and racism.

"The world is a lot more confusing than it used to be," says Kirk. "There are lots of things kids see that they don't understand."

The act of reading aloud is so often associated with comfort and nurturing that it's a way for kids to feel safe and express their thoughts about scary or confusing topics, she says.

A good story can provoke questions, fuel discussions and in a group, give kids a chance to hear a variety of opinions and reactions, says Sheila Koffman, owner of Another Story Bookshop in Toronto. About half the store's sales are kids books and Koffman says she actively seeks books dealing with diversity and social issues.

While Another Story carries a number of picture books dealing with homelessness by British and American writers, Hoffman says she's not aware of a Canadian book that deals with the issue of homelessness in this country.

A few years ago, when Huff started going into Sarah Jane's classroom to talk about the homeless, he noticed it really clicked when he told the students that the people they see on the street were once in Grade 4 too, just like them.

No matter what you see or hear

This is always true

One, some, and all out there

Were children just like you

Huff has shown his draft to educators, people who work with the homeless, parents, youth counsellors and street kids themselves. The kids' message: Let people know we are not all "losers."

Jennine Loewen, a Parry Sound counsellor, child therapist and mother of four, read it to her oldest kids, ages 7, 5 and 3, and says she looks forward to doing so many more times.

"It's an important topic, and I would hope as parents we don't dismiss it," she says in a phone interview. The book treats its subject and readers with respect and dignity and tells kids the truth in ways they can handle it, she says.

Huff doesn't tell people what to do. And he doesn't candy-coat things. There's a brown paper bag tucked beside two men sitting on the street laughing. There's nothing pretty about his image of the cardboard shack. Or his depiction of the man sleeping in a puddle under a blanket.

Huff recalls coming out of the U2 concert last summer, where the audience had cheered Bono's impassioned pleas to fight poverty. As the crowds streamed out of the Air Canada Centre, nobody even looked over to acknowledge the panhandlers they passed.

"I think people just don't know what to do," says Huff. "Or they're frightened, or they're worried they're enabling."

But *The Cardboard Shack* is "not a point your finger book, which, I tell you, I could have written," he says. "I think it's an invitation."

Andrea Gordon is the Star's family issues reporter.

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The Face of Poverty in Canada: NAPO Quick Facts

The National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2003

The Good News

- Poverty rate for lone parent families is below 50% for the first time in 20 years (due in part to higher incomes and increased government transfers)
- Poverty rate for seniors has dropped from 20% to 17% (due to recent full CPP benefit payments from the government to eligible seniors)
- Poverty rate for seniors living alone has dropped from 65% in 1980 to 40% in 2000

The Bad News

The last decade has seen one of Canada's strongest economic performances. However, all Canadians have not shared this economic prosperity.

- Deep and persistent poverty continues in Canada
- The national pre-tax poverty rate has increased over the last 13 years
- Rate and depth of poverty has deepened for many groups
- Young families are more likely to be poor
- Vulnerability of children and lone-parent families remains high
- The poverty gap for working-age households is increasing

(Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000 - CCSD)

National Numbers

(based on 2001 Census data)

Comparisons of rates are for the years 1990 and 2000 unless otherwise noted (CCSD Analysis)

- Total number of Canadians who are poor increased from 4.39 million to 4.72 million from 1990-2000
- Total number of children living in poverty increased to 1,245,700 - 40,000 more children live in poverty now than in 1990
- Income inequality grew with the income of the richest 10% of Canadians increasing by 14.6% and the income of the poorest 10% of Canadians rising by less than 1%
- Income of many working families declined
- Earnings of the 20% of low income working Canadians who are just below the median wage actually decreased



Who is poor in Canada?

Women

Trend: The poverty rate for immigrant women is increasing dramatically.

- Women raising families by themselves – 45.4% are poor (24% male lone-parent households are poor)
- Single, divorced, widowed women over 65 – 45.6% are poor
- Unattached women under 65 – 40% are poor
- Women with disabilities – n/a
- Aboriginal women – average income is \$13,300 compared to \$18,200 for Aboriginal men and \$19,350 for non-Aboriginal women
- Visible minority women – 37% are poor (compared to 19% for all women)
- Immigrant women
- Female minimum wage earners – women and youth make up 83% of Canada's minimum wage workers – they earn wages well below the poverty line. 37% of lone mothers with paid work must raise their families on less than \$10/hour

Minimum wage earners (low income earners)

Trend: The average income has increased only slightly from 1990-2000.

- Average income for low income earners in 2000 was \$10,341 – only \$80 higher than 10 years earlier
- In same time period (1990-2000) the top 10% of wealthiest Canadians incomes grew by over 14%
- Statistics Canada pre-tax LICO in 2000 was \$18,731 for a single person in a large city. To reach this poverty line a person must work 35 hours per week at \$10/hour

Note: Incomes of working families who are just below the median income bracket dropped from 1990-2000.

Working-age households:

- Poverty gap grew by 106% from 1981 to 1997

Children and their families

Trend: The total number of children living in poverty declined from 1996-2000 but rose from 1990-2000.

- 40,000 more children under the age of 18 now live in poverty than in 1990 (number for 1990 was 14.4%)
- 1,139,000 = total number of children living in poor families in 2000 (16% of all children)
- 300,000 children rely on food banks
- From 1984-1999 net wealth of the top 20% of couples with children increased by 43%. Net wealth for couples with children who were below the poverty line decreased by 51%

Children and immigrant families

Trend: There have been dramatic increases in poverty rates for both of these groups.

- The percentage of children in poor families of recent immigrants (arrived in the last 10 years) with two parents rose from 33% in 1990 to 39% in 2000 – double the national average
- Children in families where one parent is a recent immigrant rose from 27% to 33% (1990-2000)
- 231,000 children with at least one parent who is a recent immigrant live in poverty

New Immigrants

Trend: There has been a dramatic increase in the poverty rate for this group.

- Immigrants in Canada less than five years have a poverty rate of 35.8% (year 2000)
- In Canada 6-10 years = poverty rate of 28.3% (up from 18.7% in 1980)
- In Canada 11-15 years = poverty rate of 22.7% (up from 14.4% in 1980)
- In Canada more than 20 years = poverty rate of 19.1% (up from 14.7% in 1980)

Visible minority groups

- 36% are poor (1996 Census data) likely increased since then

Seniors

Note: The number of women 65 and older in economic families who are poor increased from 5.4% in 2000 to 5.9% in 2001.

- 40% of all seniors living alone are poor
- 45.6% of senior women living alone are poor
- 32.8% of senior men living alone are poor

Aboriginal adults and youth (1996 Census data)

- 55.6% of Aboriginal people in Canadian cities were poor in 1995
- 52.1% Aboriginal children are poor
- 43.4% of Aboriginal people are poor (1996 Census data)
- 44% of Aboriginal people living off reserves are poor while 47% living on reserves are below the poverty line (CRIAOW fact sheet 2002)
- In 2003, Canada's Aboriginal people would rank 78th on the UNDP's Human Development Index. Canada consistently places in the top three countries on the same scale.

People with disabilities

- 25% of people with disabilities were poor in 1998 (report from office of Disability issues -HRDC 2002)
- The households of First Nations and Métis people with disabilities take in about half the income of non-Aboriginal households in Canada, and about three quarters of the household income of Aboriginal people without disabilities (from census data 1996)

Social assistance recipients

Trend: Poverty is increasing for this group.

- Welfare rates for all territories and provinces are well below the national and regional poverty lines
- Most recipients in Canada saw a decrease in welfare income in 2002
- The poverty gap between welfare rates and low income cut-offs increased for most households in all provinces except Quebec between 2001 and 2002

Young families

Trend: Poverty is increasing dramatically in this group.

- Poverty rate for a family where the youngest adult is under age 25 was 46.% in 1997 compared to almost 22% in 1981
- Poverty rate for families with the youngest adult between the ages of 25-34 was 18.9% in 1997 up from 12.0% in 1981

Rural Poverty Definitions: The OECD defines a region as "predominantly rural" if more than 50% of the population lives in rural communities. A "community" is defined as rural if the population density is less than 150 individuals per square kilometre.

Urban: Defined as "predominantly urban" if less than 15% of the individuals live in rural communities.



Sources and Resources

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Seventeen Quick Facts About Housing and Homelessness

What is child poverty?

- Child poverty is a significant lack of the basic needs required for healthy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development.
- Child poverty is characterized by a lack of access to basic education, a healthy diet, and adequate health care.
- Child poverty is also defined as a lack of opportunities (capability deprivation), a lack of control over one's life, as social isolation, and as discriminatory treatment at the hands of others.

Groups at risk for poverty

- Women and children are among the most vulnerable for increased poverty and homelessness.
- Children of aboriginal descent are also at an increased risk for poverty. Either on or off reserves, 45% – almost one in two – live in poverty.
- 390,000 Ontario children live in poverty, an increase of 41% since 1989.
- 81% of single mothers with children under the age of 7 live in poverty.
- Children of full-time working parents make up almost 30% of poor children in Canada.

Canada's role in child poverty

- A United Nations Committee criticized Canada for adopting policies that have increased poverty and homelessness among many vulnerable groups (such as children and women).
- UNICEF's report on child poverty in developed countries ranks Canada near the bottom for children's well-being, at 17 out of 23 countries.
- Canada is one of the richest countries in the world. However, about 1,400,000 of its children live in poverty.
- The number of food banks in Canada grew from 75 in 1984 to 625 by 1998. (UN Human Rights Committee)
- The federal government says that its Child Tax Benefit helps poor children, but the benefits are far too low and even the poorest children are disqualified from receiving it.

What can you do?

- Write to the Prime Minister or your MP and explain how the provincial government must keep its promise to kids by taking actions to end child poverty now.
- Arrange a meeting with your MP and ask him or her to make ending child poverty their top priority. Ask them in detail what they plan to do.
- Speak up for children. Let your voice be heard. Insist that your government end child poverty.
- Become more informed on child poverty issues, and the ways to help confront the issue by conducting research and raising awareness.

“Action may not always bring happiness; but there is no happiness without action.”

– Benjamin Disraeli

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A user friendly and informative website.

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www.napo-onap.ca

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www.streethealth.ca

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480 University Avenue, Suite 1000
Toronto Ontario
M5G 1V2

Phone: 416-962-3836
Toll-free: 1-888-838-3836

www.etfo.ca