

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT FOR ADULTS

EVERYBODY COUNTS CHARLOTTE | 2021 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

This toolkit is designed to help you find ways to talk about the housing and homelessness issues in Charlotte-Mecklenburg with family, friends and colleagues. Although we may not always be aware of it, we likely see or encounter people every day who experience homelessness or are at risk of experiencing it. Housing intersects with all other parts of our lives - education, healthcare, transportation, economic mobility, and overall health and wellbeing.

It is important to talk honestly with each other about housing and homelessness while also showing compassion. Together, knowledge and compassion will help us as we continue to wrestle with complicated social issues like housing and homelessness. It also serves as the foundation to propel us into action, becoming advocates for housing and positive change in the community.

Below are several facts and reflection questions that can be reviewed and discussed individually or in small group settings. These can be done at the dinner table, during a virtual lunch break, or even part of other existing small group discussions. The final section outlines meaningful ways that you can take action to help support the work of the Point-in-Time Count.

1) Definition of homelessness

In its simplest definition, homelessness means that a person does not have a home. This means that individuals experiencing homelessness do not have a place of their own to sleep, eat or shower. The Point-in-Time Count activities have a specific definition set by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development or HUD, which is used to ensure that the way each community counts is consistent across settings and from year to year. The HUD definition we use includes sheltered homelessness, which means an individual or family is residing overnight in an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility. It also includes unsheltered homelessness, which means that an individual or family is residing overnight in a place considered unfit for human habitation such as a park, street corner or encampment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Can you think about a time you saw someone that might have been homeless? What did they look like? How did you know they were homeless? What did you think when you saw them?
- Do you know anyone that has lost their home before? Imagine how it might have felt to lose their home? How would you feel? What would you do?
- What stigmas are attached to homelessness?

2) Why people are homeless

Most people are homeless because they cannot find a home they can afford. The cost of housing in Charlotte-Mecklenburg has increased at a much higher rate than wages. This means that housing is out of reach for even people who are working. For a minimum wage earner (\$7.25/hour) to afford a 2-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent (\$1,063), they would have to work 113 hours per week. The most that a household earning minimum wage working a typical 40-hour work week can afford is \$377 in rental and utilities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Make a list of your income and expenses. Group all the items that you consider to be needs together. Can you afford all your needs? What about the items that you don't need? Do you have money left over to save?
- Imagine you could not pay for everything on the list and you had to choose 2 things to take off from your needs list - what would you choose and why? What happens if you take those 2 things off? Do you have to change anything else (such as using public transportation; changing childcare facilities)?

3) Why people cannot afford their home

Some adults don't have enough money to afford their home because they do not have a job. It can be very hard to get a job especially if you do not have a way to get there, friends to help you get ready, or a shower to look nice for your interview. One of the most critical factors that separate people who become homeless from those who remain precariously housed is social capital.

There are also lots of adults who have a job and still cannot afford their home. This is because living in a house or apartment costs a lot of money - sometimes, a lot more money than they can make at their job. There are many people where we live who work in jobs that do not pay enough for their housing. This includes firefighters, teachers, security guards and retail and food industry workers.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think it might be hard for a person who is homeless to find a job?
- Do you know someone who works in a job listed above and cannot afford their housing? Were you surprised by this information?
- The hourly wage in Mecklenburg County to afford a 2-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent is \$20.44, which is over \$13/hour higher than the minimum wage. Do you think everyone in Charlotte-Mecklenburg should be paid a living and/or housing wage? Why or why not?

4) School and work can be hard for people experiencing homeless

For adults and children who are homeless, school and work can be especially difficult. Imagine having to do all the normal things you must do and then also worrying about where you will eat and sleep at night when you leave. If you are a parent, imagine having to worry about this not only for yourself but also for your children.

This means that adults, children and youth who are homeless can have a tough time trying to focus and complete work even if they are the best student in the class or the greatest employee in the building. They might also be late to school or work, miss classes or meetings or get in trouble / written up more often. For adults (and for children and youth), this might also lead to substance use, depression and other health problems.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Imagine you don't know where you will eat or sleep tonight. What does that feel like? Would that change how you behave at work, etc.?
- What other challenges do you think adults, children and youth who are homeless face while in school and at work? What about after school and work like clubs and sports for their children, PTA meetings, errands like running to the grocery store, and evening work commitments?

5) Why we do the Point-in-Time Count

Think about things that you count that are important to you. The number of dollars in your bank account. The number of steps you completed during a day. The number of friends who like your social media post. We also count the number of people who are homeless in our community because they matter to us. When we count people every year, we can monitor if that number is going up or down to tell us if we are doing better or worse at helping people get into housing. Counting people also reminds us that we need to think about the people who are homeless, the struggles that they are going through, and the things we need to do differently to help everyone find a home.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- The number of people last year that we counted was 1,604, which includes 214 people sleeping in unsheltered locations. Does that seem like a lot of people who are homeless? Why or why not?
- What impact do you think COVID-19 has had on housing instability and homelessness?
- Do you think it might be possible that we cannot count everybody? Why do you think that might be and why do you think that matters?
- How can you help others learn more about housing and homelessness?
- What do you think is needed in to speed up the pace of finding everyone a home?

I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE | #EverybodyCountsCLT

You can help make a difference in ending and preventing homelessness. One of the most important things you can do is to raise awareness about the need for more permanent, affordable housing in the community and why this matters.

In addition, you can help make a difference at the federal level. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) has called for a national eviction moratorium until the pandemic is over, in combination with at least \$100 billion in federal emergency rental assistance to both tenants and landlords. Without significant financial assistance from the federal government to help renters (and those who are renting to them), the eviction moratorium merely postpones the inevitable. It is estimated that there is over \$70 billion in back owed rent, utilities, and other housing expenses as of January 2021. With only 1 in 4 renters being eligible to receive federal housing assistance pre-pandemic, it is vital that more resources be deployed so that every household who needs assistance can have access to it. To learn more about how to advocate for additional housing resources including templates for you to use to contact your legislators, click [here](#).

Finally, you can help by supporting the 15 homeless service organizations who will shoulder most of the 2021 Point-in-Time Count work. In response to COVID-19, these organizations have already had to pivot multiple times, adjusting how they operate and in some cases, their physical structure in order to ensure that individuals have a safe place to spend the night. To learn more about how you can support these organizations, click [here](#).