

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

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 children and youth. Children and youth have probably encountered or seen at least one person experiencing homelessness in their lifetime. They might have even asked questions about what they see out of genuine curiosity. Realizing that a person might not have a home can also be unsettling.

It is important to talk honestly with children and youth about the issues facing people experiencing homelessness while also showing compassion. Together, knowledge and compassion will help them throughout their lives as they wrestle with complicated social issues like housing and homelessness. It can also form an early foundation to help them become advocates for positive change in their community.

Below are several quick facts and reflection questions that families, schools and/or other small groups can be reviewed and discussed together. At the end are opportunities for children and youth to take action to support the work of the Point-in-Time Count.

1) Definition of homelessness

Homelessness means that a person does not have a home. This means that they don't have a place of their own to sleep, eat or even take a shower.

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?

2) Why people are homeless

Most people are homeless because they cannot find a home they can afford. Adults must pay for their home as well as other things they need like their food, a car, and going to the doctor if someone gets sick. Some adults have jobs that do not pay enough wages to cover all of the expenses. This means that they have to make choices about which expenses they will cover and which they will go without.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Can you name all the things your family needs? Make a list together and write down the cost. Did anything surprise you? How much does all the things you need cost?

- Imagine you could not pay for everything on the list and you had to choose 2 things to take off - what would you choose and why? What happens if you take those 2 things off? Do you have to change anything else?

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 to the job location, friends to help you get ready, or a shower to look nice for your interview. 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, even when working 40 hours a week. There are many people where we live that who work in jobs that do not pay enough for their housing. This can include firefighters, teachers, security guards and people who work at restaurants.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Did you know that you can work and not make enough to pay for housing?
- Why do you think some jobs pay more money than others?
- Why do you think it might be hard for a person who is homeless to find a job?

4) Kids can be homeless, too

Some kids become homeless when their family loses their home and they must go to a shelter, lodge temporarily with family or friends, or even stay in a hotel. Sometimes, children and youth might be homeless and also on their own; there are some teens who are even kicked out by their parents. There are special shelters for children and youth who are homeless and on their own. Learn more about one of them by clicking this link: [The Relatives](#).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you know any other children or youth who have been homeless?
- Imagine your best friend loses their house and they must move to a shelter. What do you think your friend might be feeling? What might they need at school to help them while they are homeless?
- Did you know that there are children and youth who are homeless in your school right now but they look just like you? Would you treat a child or youth differently if you knew they were homeless? Would you want to be treated differently?

5) School can be hard for a child or youth that is homeless

For children and youth who are homeless, school can be especially hard. Imagine having to do all the normal things you must do at school and then also worrying about where you will eat and sleep at night when you leave school. This means that children and youth who are homeless can have a tough time trying to focus in class and complete their work even if they are the best student in the class. They might also be late to school, miss classes or get in trouble more often.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Imagine you are sitting in class and you don't know where you will eat or sleep when you leave school. What does that feel like? Would that change how you behave in class?
- What other challenges do you think children and youth who are homeless face while in school? What about after school like clubs and sports?

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

Think about things that you count that are important to you. The number of coins in your piggy bank. The number of stuffed animals on your bed. 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 keep track of 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 were counted in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Continuum of Care was 1,604 (this includes 214 individuals who slept outside). Does that seem like a lot of people who are homeless?
- What impact do you think COVID-19 has had on people experiencing 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?

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](#).