
Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company &
HighWater Theatre

Who Owns Me Today

HOMELESSNESS:
Facts, Discussion Starters,
Activities



An Australian Government Initiative

Partly funded under a grant from the Australian Government

Homelessness

TEACHER FACT SHEET:

Did you know?

- 90% of the young people who have been in the HighWater Theatre program have experienced homelessness.
- Youth homelessness in Australia has more than doubled in the past 15 years
- The majority of homeless people in Victoria are under the age of 35.
- On any given night in Victoria there are 6400 young people aged between 12 and 25 with no place to call home.¹
- Close to half of Australia's homeless population is under the age of 25.²
- Approximately 100,000 young people aged 12 -24 years experience homelessness every year in Australia. Between 82% and 90% of homeless young people have their first experience of homelessness whilst under 15 years and still at school.³ N.B. Many young people, who are homeless, stay with friends and family members, camp out or live in squats & don't go to agencies for help so these figures are an under-estimate.
- More women experience homelessness than men. Domestic violence is the major cause of homelessness for women.
- Over 60% of homeless Victorian young people under 18 years of age are female.
- Only 51% of homeless youths stay within the Victorian school system.⁴
- A recent national report declared that more than five hundred people were turned away *EVERY DAY* by accommodation support programs including two hundred children and young people!⁵
- At least 105,000 people are homeless in Australia on any given night. This includes people living in:
 - Rooming houses
 - Caravans
 - Refuges
 - Crisis accommodation facilities
 - Friend's homes on a temporary basis

Definition of Homeless

There has been and continues to be much debate about the definition of homelessness.

The Council of Homeless Persons Victoria defines a homeless person as being 'without a conventional home and lacking most of the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. She/he is often cut off from the support of family and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and in some cases, little future prospect of self-support.'⁶

Hanover Welfare Services – Melbourne states

"Homelessness isn't merely a lack of shelter. People living on the streets is just one aspect of homelessness. Thousands of men, women and children in Victoria live in unsafe and inappropriate housing, with no cooking facilities, inadequate shared bathrooms and no security of tenure. They have a roof but not a home."

1 CHP Council of Homeless Persons 2011

2 <http://www.news4us.com/youth-homelessness-matters-day-part-of-national-youth-week/> accessed 10/05/11

3 Chamberlain & McKenzie: Youth Homelessness 2001 p.5

4 Council to Homeless Persons – Youth Homelessness Fact Sheet 04

5 Australian Institute Of Health And Welfare - Media Release 28/10/2003

6 Wesley Mission 'Wesley Mission Homeless Persons Services, Definitions of Homelessness <http://www.wesleymission.org.au/centres/homelss/defn.asp>

Homelessness is a key theme in Who Owns Me Today Here's two scenes/songs from the play- Couch Surfing and Foster Family. Teachers may wish to get students to read this aloud.

EXCERPTS FROM *Who Owns Me Today*

COUCH SURFING:

J: Hey buddy.
X: J what are you doing here?
J: Looking up an old mate. You said when I get out you'd hook me up.
X: Can't- the bedrooms taken.
J: That's ok- I'll sleep on the couch.
X: One night only

Y: J! It's been a while. How's things buddy?
J: Shit. I need to somewhere to sleep.
Y: Got any dope on yer?
J: Nah, but I know where I can get some.
Y: Well go get it.
J: Aren't you even going to let me-in?
Y: When you come back with the dope come over.
J: Hey-
Z: Sorry no can do
J: But you don't even know what I'm gunna say
Z: You want my couch
J: Not even-I'll sleep on the floor
Z: No room-tides in.
J: Come on. I'll hang 5.
Z: A coupla nights that's all.
K: You look dreadful
J: Have to wait for everyone else to go to bed. Please?
K: I already have a child- don't need another one to look after.
J: Just a coupla nights?
K: 1 Night only. There's the couch.
J: Oh thanks I'm so tired.
K: Good morning! Good-bye!
K: *(calls)* Hey xxx expect a knock at your door. J's couch - surfing.
L: No wonder I haven't seen him he's been-
ALL: *(ENTERING SINGING)* Surfing got no place to stay. Surfing, he knows the games to play.
K: There's only so long you can ride that wave before
ALL: *WIPEOUT!*

SONG: FOSTER FAMILY

The lady walked up to the gate
And said mum had to have a break
Thought we'd go together by and by
But no she said you come with me
It's just the way it has to be
You're going on a holiday... to a foster family

Mum's had a break, it's getting late
She should be coming soon
Family's nice, but I think twice
It's not what I would choose
Don't want to talk, just want to leave
'Will you drive me home please' she said,
"You are at home my dear"... with your foster family

I just begin to settle in
Revolving doors swings round again
Another worker, another house
Life's a game of cat and mouse
If I run away, will you miss me?
I tell my story, but are you listening?
When we go away, please tell me why, don't lie?

It's not my pillow it's not my bed
I shouldn't have to listen to a word you've said
What makes a happy family, anyway?
Don't make me talk just let me be
Your family's complete without me
I don't want a holiday... with a foster family

I don't care if mum's unstable,
I don't want to eat at your fancy table
I'd rather be at home with my broken family
The chores you ask, the smallest task,
They grate my nerves and make me ask

STUDENT QUESTIONS

Stereotypes

Individually, answer the following:

1. What kind of mental image does the term 'homeless person' conjure up?
 - a. Think of a number of single words or phrases that come to mind. Note them down.
 - b. Do a quick sketch of him/her. Don't think too much, just do it.
2. Do you think more young men or young women (18 years and under) are homeless in Victoria? Why?
3. Do you think homelessness is more of a city problem than a country problem? Why?
4. What do you think are the major causes of youth homelessness?
5. Has your perception of homelessness changed through viewing this play?
6. Share your responses as a group.

Questions (to be done in groups, pairs or individually)

1. There has been and continues to be much debate about the definition of homelessness. How would you define homeless? Write your definition.
2. What do you think 'home' means to the characters like Tyler and Chloe in *Who Owns Me Today*? What does 'home' mean to you?
3. What are the pros & cons of being a couch surfer? List them.
4. From the play RESI UNITS:

DE: You know I get the term 'foster care' because you nurture outside the original home but where did the term 'residential care' come from, Residential unit- who thought of that- and what about 'placement' like you place a piece of furniture or cup. I had a 13 year old in the other day and she knew all the jargon.

Placement. Duty of care. It was so sad. She'd been to 10 Placements - Picked up plopped down.

JOY: Residential care what about... 'my other home'? Or just 'home'?

DE: Yeah but Tyler would argue its not home. Anywhere you have to ask for cutlery or to have your aerosol deodorant- can never be a 'home.'

JOY: For some it is - It's the best home they've ever had.

DE: Anyway, for so many kids out on the streets home is a concept.

JOY: It's about being safe.

What is a 'resi unit' for youth? Why do people in the play end up in a resi unit?

What do you think of the term "Residential Care". Would 'another home' be a better term - why or why not?

5. What are some of the issues raised in the play about the difficulties of looking after young people who do not have a safe home? Are there better ways than foster homes and refuges and resi units? What do you think?
6. What could be done to support young homeless people or those at risk of homelessness in your area?
7. What could be done to support young people who are living independently but want to remain at school?
8. If you are living at home and attending school, think of a normal school week. Jot down all the things that are done for you, or partly for you, by your parents or other adults at your place. Think of everything from when you wake up in the morning. For example, who wakes you up? Who makes breakfast, makes lunch, does the washing, ironing, cooks tea, does housework, drives you places, helps with homework, etc, etc
 - a. Make a **comprehensive list** of all those things done for you.
 - b. Now imagine, you are like one of the homeless characters from Who Owns Me Today. Look at your list made in a) and then mark those things you think would **NOT** happen in this situation. How does it compare to your living circumstances?

Activities

Choose **one** of the following activities:

1. Develop your own PowerPoint Story about being homeless. Your Starting Point is you find yourself out of your home & unable to return - then what do you do? Each PowerPoint slide is to represent a decision you would need to make or major action you would take in the next 7 days to get a roof over your head and still go to school.
2. If you or someone you knew was in danger of being homeless for whatever reason, where would you go for help and support in your suburb/town? Find out all the agencies and organisations in your area that could offer help and list them and their contact details. Present this information in a way you think you and your friends would find useful. (e.g design some kind of info card; design a small poster.)
3. Go and visit an agency or organisation in your area which helps young people to find accommodation or else, invite them to come to your class/group.

Interview them about the issues facing local young people and the difficulties in finding accommodation. Either film or record (audio) or write up your interview. Present to the class.

4. Design a webpage to be uploaded that young people might use about the reality of being homeless in your area. (Once completed can negotiate with various site providers to get the page up and running.)
5. Develop a survey to find out public opinion on youth homelessness in your area. Do they believe it exists? What do they think are the causes? What should be done? Etc.
6. If you know someone who has experienced homelessness, ask them whether they would be prepared to be interviewed on their experience. Again, either film, record or write up your interview.
7. "Couch surfing" – just how common is it? Find out what you can. Design your own investigation. How will you present your findings?
8. Develop a digital story about homelessness in Albury/Wodonga. The story is to have photos and an audio soundtrack.
9. On the 10th of October, 2011 millions of people around the world will mark **World Homeless Day** in many varied ways and change the lives of homeless people in their local community. What will you do?



Where Do I Go? What Do I Do?

As a group, or in pairs discuss each of the following scenarios and fill in the table according to what you know/decide. Invite a worker from a local youth service to come and listen to your responses and fill in 'any gaps' as to what is available.

| The Home Front | Where do you go immediately? | Where do you go for longer term help & support? |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| 1. You are fourteen and have dropped out of school. Your parents are angry about this and there is constant fighting. You walk out one day. | | |
| 2. Your mum's boyfriend is a heavy drinker and becomes violent and abusive to her and to you. After a really bad incident you decide anywhere's better than home. | | |
| 3. One of your parents has lost their job and as they are unable to pay the rent, they have decided to move to a country town. You're not prepared to do this so you leave home and school. | | |
| 4. There are so many people living on and off in your house that you have no privacy or space and there are constant arguments and fights. You leave. | | |
| 5. To support a drug habit you start stealing from your family and they kick you out. | | |
| 6. You become pregnant when you are fifteen. Your parents want you to have a termination but you are determined to have the baby. They make it clear you're not welcome at home because of the shame you've brought the family. | | |

Adapted From the Oasis Study Guide⁷

SOME RESOURCES:

1. Somebody's Daughter and HighWater theatre have just finished a DVD on Out of Home Care and homelessness. Check out their website under Resources for a glimpse and order details.

<http://www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/>

2. The following website has a lot of resources including some great fact sheets.

<http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/issues.php>

3. The Oasis – Documentary Film and Study Guide. The documentary is available for purchase for \$29.95 through Shark Island Productions. Go to

www.sharkisland.com.au

The Oasis Study Guide Version 2 has been written by the Inspire Foundation available at

<http://teachers.reachoutpro.com.au>

4. Hanover Welfare Service is Melbourne-based agency which provides services to people experiencing homelessness or housing crisis.

<http://www.hanover.org.au>

5. Beyond the Homeless Myth. People who don't have shelter are houseless - not homeless! Homelessness has nothing to do with a lack of shelter according to. Read more:

<http://www.homeless.org.au/>

6. Six Cities, Six Stories, Six Lives. Go to

<http://www.abc.net.au/homeless/>

7. National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse

<http://www.homelessnessinfo.net.au/>

8. More than a Bed – Wesley Mission. Watch the Katie's story video.

<http://www.wesleymission.org.au/News/research/Homeless/default.asp>

9. Youth Homelessness Matters: "On any given night in Australia 105,000 people are homeless and nearly half of these are under the age of 25"

<http://www.youthhomelessnessmatters.net/>

10. Y foundation – creating a future without youth homelessness.

<http://www.yaa.com.au/>

