

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT FOR ADULTS

EVERYBODY COUNTS CHARLOTTE | 2018 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. Whether we are aware, we see 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.

Here are some quick facts and reflection questions to think about together. These can be done at the dinner table, during a lunch break, or part of small group discussions. At the end is a way for you to take action to help with the 2018 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 they don't have a place of their own to sleep, eat or shower. The 2018 Point-in-Time Count has a specific definition that is used to ensure that the way people are counted stays the same each year so that year over year comparisons can be made.

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 (\$7.75/hour) to afford a 2-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent, they would have to work 96 hours per week.

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 can include firefighters, teachers, security guards and people who work at restaurants.

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 \$17.44, which is about \$10/hour higher than the minimum wage. Do you think everyone in Charlotte-Mecklenburg should be paid a 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 hard. Imagine having to do all the normal things you must do 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 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 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 whether 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 1,476. Does that seem like a lot of people who are homeless? Why or why not?
- 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. The most important thing you can do is to develop empathy for people who experience homelessness by learning how homelessness is caused and why it matters for all of us.

You can also help by collecting items for toiletry kits that will be distributed during the Point-in-Time Count. These toiletry kits are important for adults and children who usually do not have all their belongings and must get ready – just like anyone of us – for bed at night and for work and school in the morning.

As you collect items and assemble them, you can reflect on the questions above as a family, at work or in small groups in various settings. You can also write notes of encouragement to include in the bags. This is another reminder that we are all connected and need to support one another, especially during a difficult experience like homelessness.

TOILETRY KIT INSTRUCTIONS

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Below are instructions to create and deliver toiletry kits for the 2018 Point-in-Time Count. These kits will be distributed during the count to people in our community who are experiencing homelessness. We will collect items until January 29, 2018.

STEP 1: COLLECT THESE ITEMS

All Bags

- 1) Deodorant
- 2) Toothbrush
- 3) Travel sized Toothpaste
- 4) Floss
- 5) Washcloths
- 6) Travel sized Shampoo
- 7) Travel sized Conditioner
- 8) Travel sized Soap or Body Wash
- 9) Travel Pack of Wipes

Optional

To make gender specific bags, you can add these items for women and men:

For Women:

- 1) Feminine products
- 2) Disposable razors

For Men:

- 1) Shaving Cream
- 2) Disposable razors

STEP 2: ASSEMBLE ITEMS

- 1) Place all items into clear, sealable plastic bags. Label "men" or "women" on the bag where it is visible if the bag includes the gender specific items.
- 2) If possible, include in the bag a brief note of encouragement. Experiencing homelessness is scary and lonely. Including a note of encouragement that you are thinking of the person that receives the bag is a small and easy way to instill hope and help that person know that they are connected.

STEP 3: DELIVER ITEMS NOW UNTIL JANUARY 29

- 1) Group completed kits and label grouped kits with "2018 Point-in-Time Count".
- 2) Deliver to Urban Ministry Center (945 North College St, Charlotte, NC 28206) between 8:30am and 4pm on Monday through Friday or on Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 12:30pm.

If you have any questions about the toiletry kits, email Allison Winston, who leads the Unsheltered Count, at Awinston@urbanministrycenter.org