Hidden Homelessness

Lesson Ideas
December 2019
Introduction

The overall aim of this lesson idea is to raise awareness of human rights and to be an educational resource for use in a post primary setting in Northern Ireland. Use of the lesson ideas is at the discretion of the education provider.

It is important at the outset to prepare students to discuss sensitive or controversial issues. A safe and positive learning environment which enables students to participate with confidence can be empowering. Agree strategies to use to ensure respectful yet challenging discussions:

See sheffield.ac.uk/lets/toolkit/teaching/sensitive for more ideas and guidance on creating good learning environments for teaching about sensitive and controversial issues when dealing with mental health issues provide guidance on safety, confidentiality and where to get additional and professional help whilst following your schools guidance and policies relating to child protection.

NI Curriculum Links:

LLW Strands
Human rights and social responsibility, Equality and Social justice

Local and Global Citizenship
Identify and exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local issues.

Develop their understanding of the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights.

Some of your students may have personal experience of the issue under discussion and may find participation in these discussions difficult. Create a safe and positive environment. Agree strategies in advance. See notes on teaching sensitive issues.
Hidden Rights: Homelessness

This section gives you a breakdown of the relevant human rights, and any laws associated with this particular human rights issue. It also provides background information you may find useful.

Relevant Rights:
The Right to Housing is recognized by the United Nations Article 25 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UN has been active in highlighting homelessness as a violation of human rights.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 11 recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

There is no specific right to housing under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, public authorities providing housing, such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, must comply with the ECHR. If a social housing association carries out ‘public functions’ in providing housing, it must also comply.

Teachers’ Notes and Background Information
Watch ‘Hidden Rights’. This is a short video by Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Simon Community.

[link to video]

Many people like 18-year-old Stephen in the video clip who become ‘homeless’ do not show up in official figures. The hidden homeless includes people who become homeless but find a temporary solution by staying with family and friends, living in squats or other insecure accommodation for e.g. sleeping in cars, tents and night shelters. Women and children staying in domestic abuse refuges are not included in homeless figures.

Our homes should be a safe and secure place where you can truly be yourself. Home is a place where we eat, sleep, feel safe and somewhere to spend time with loved ones.

We often take having a home for granted. But imagine if you woke up tomorrow to the news that you’d lost your home. Imagine not having a say in when you’d like to go to sleep. Imagine not having cooking facilities. When you don’t have a home, every mundane, routine aspect of your day becomes another hurdle to overcome. And now imagine you have a young family to look after, and you’re in nightmare territory.

Homelessness arises due to a combination of factors. The primary reasons cited are ‘relationship breakdown/family dispute/domestic abuse; landlords taking back their rented properties; and those returning to society from prison or service’. Financial hardship; debt; mental health and addiction can also have an impact.
What we do

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s job is to make sure government and public authorities protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We advocate that Northern Ireland should maintain the highest standard of human rights.

We also consider the policies and plans that government and other organisations develop and tell them if we think there could be a problem and we try to help them improve it. We are experts in human rights law, we monitor international treaties and listen to discussions in places like the United Nations.

We promote awareness of human rights through education, training and research.

In its Annual Statement to Government each year the NIHRC may raise issues relating to the protection of the right to an adequate standard of living. We also report on this issue to the United Nations including to the UN Human Rights Committee in relation to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
Activities

Learning Intentions: to know and understand

- That having somewhere to live is a human right (Article 25 UDHR and Article 11 ICESCR, as above)
- That there is both official and hidden homelessness
- Homelessness isn’t just a housing issue. It is a complex issue needing a range of solutions
- The role of NIHRC in promoting and safeguarding our Human Rights

Activity One - Making a House a Home

What does home mean to you? Our homes should be our refuge – a place where we eat, sleep, wash, feel safe and somewhere to spend time with loved ones.

Aim: To brainstorm what home means to us

What’s needed: Post-it notes, pens, paper.

15mins

Pose the question, what does home mean to you?

1. Invite responses and record answers on post-it notes. For each ask their reason for choosing it, and record this
2. Take the top 10 items and remove the others
3. In small groups ask students to arrange these cards into a diamond shape – with the most important at the top
4. Ask one member of each group to record all the pupils’ comments whilst their decisions are being made.

Examples

**A home is a place to** - Eat, sleep, relax, cook, clean, entertain, read, play, work, feel safe, spend time with loved ones, friends and neighbours, pets etc.

**Stuff we have at home may include** - Furniture, heating, light, toilet/bath/shower, appliances (washing machine/cooker etc) entertainment devices (TV, laptop, game consoles) books, religious objects, musical instruments, locks and keys, mobile phone, garden, clothes/shoes, art pictures/photos

Discuss: Look at the choices made. Do they recognise that the right to housing also fulfils several other articles? But being homeless also contributes to the loss of other rights as well for e.g. article 12 the right to privacy.

**Basic Needs (17, 25 UDHR)***
Sleep, eat, keep warm, wash

**Safety and privacy (12 UDHR)***
Feel safe with doors, locks and keys

**Cognitive Needs (18,19,26 UDHR)***
Read, entertain, access online

**Social Needs (16,24 UDHR)***
Interact with family, friends and neighbours

**Need for Self-fulfilment (24,26,27 UDHR)***
Garden, play musical instruments, develop hobbies, display pictures/art

Debrief: deliberate the reasons and justifications pupils have given for their choices and note to what extent pupils are aware of the similarities of people's needs all over the world and the lack of access some people have to their basic needs.

Note: whether pupils mention any other criteria for what makes a good home and whether they can discuss, share ideas and agree or disagree respectfully.
Activities (continued)

Activity Two - Home Time

Aim: To explore what hidden homelessness is and what the factors are that lead to it both at home and worldwide.

What’s needed:

Write each of the types of accommodation listed below onto separate sheets of A3 paper and scatter around the floor. The groups now walk around until you shout, ‘home time’! at which point everyone must jump on the nicest home they can.

Explain to them, that a max of two are allowed on each one. Anyone who doesn’t make it onto a piece of paper is sleeping rough.

At this point remove one home and using the ‘Why you must lose your home’ list below explain to those standing on it the reason why. Repeat until all the pieces of paper, except for the last three are gone – temporary hotel/ B&B, hostel and night shelter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Why you must lose your home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 1</td>
<td>Argument with family members – you’re kicked out!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 2</td>
<td>You lose your job. You can’t afford the mortgage or rent and house is repossessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 3</td>
<td>You get divorced and have to leave the family home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 4</td>
<td>You are exposed to domestic abuse and have to flee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 5</td>
<td>Your property is flooded and is destroyed, you lose everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 6</td>
<td>You live with your grandmother. She becomes frail and moves into care. Her house has to be sold to pay for her care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home 7</td>
<td>Your Mum dies. You go to live with your Dad. Things don’t work out and you leave. You have nowhere to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented House 1</td>
<td>Your landlord can make more money on Airbnb, you are evicted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented House 2</td>
<td>Your rent is increased – you can’t pay the increase and are evicted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented Apartment 1</td>
<td>You lose your job; your landlord won’t accept housing benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented Apartment 2</td>
<td>You suffer from poor mental health – you miss some rent payments and are evicted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends Sofa/Floor</td>
<td>You outstay your welcome. Friend needs their space back – out you go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Care Home</td>
<td>You turn 18. Time to fend for yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offenders Centre</td>
<td>You’ve served your time, you’re free to leave – but where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squat</td>
<td>Is being demolished. Security staff evict all squatters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foyer</td>
<td>Supported housing in NI for under 25s. You turn 26. Time to leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary hotel/B&amp;B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Hostel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Night Shelter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities (continued)

Activity Two - Continued

Discuss: at what point did you become homeless? For those who had to sleep rough - what does this mean to them? What are the realities of this? Do you have to sleep rough to be homeless? Why are the hotel/B&B, hostel and night shelter referred to as temporary? What factors lead to homelessness? Could it happen to you?

Debrief
1. Using an Issue Tree highlight the root causes, problems, effects and solutions for homelessness.
2. Do different factors lead to homelessness here and around the world?

Watch the video clip:
youtu.be/awhSeLLjy6c

Think about Stephen’s story. How might it feel to find yourself in his position? What might have helped Stephen to cope with his situation? Is enough support available for young people?

• Why are NIHRC highlighting the issue of hidden homelessness?

Homelessness isn’t just a housing issue (it’s much more complex). Families declare themselves homeless in NI every day.

Did you know?
• People who are homeless don’t always sleep on the streets.
• Most of us are only two pay packets away from homelessness.
• 10th Oct marks World Homeless Day and World Mental Health day.
Activities (continued)

Activity Three - Key to the Future

**Aim:** To support students through the complexity of Homelessness in NI, and to promote discussion, debate and critical thinking.

**What’s needed:** 4 sets of images (see attached)

- Divide the class into groups of four
- Give each group a copy of possible solutions to homelessness with associated budget (provided. (see additional info. on some solutions in box below)
- Imagine you are the NI Minister for Communities (responsible for housing in NI). You have an annual budget of £15 million (fictional) specifically for housing. You want to address the issue of homelessness. Choose what measures you want to spend your budget on. Remember you have a total spend of £15m - you cannot go over this budget!

**Additional information on possible solutions**

**Mental Health Services** – provides help to those suffering from mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

**Family Reconciliation Services** – family network support to prevent family breakdowns particularly youth homelessness.

**Rehabilitation Centre** – a rehab centre is a place away from home and from someone’s drug-using environment.

**Social Housing** - Social housing is affordable housing. A key function of social housing is to provide accommodation that is affordable to people on low incomes. Limits to rent increases set by law mean that rents are kept affordable.

**Hostels** - Hostels offer temporary basic housing. They may provide at least one meal a day – usually breakfast or dinner. You get a furnished bedroom, which may be shared with someone of the same sex. If the hostel is for both men and women, they’re usually housed in separate areas.

**Note:** some of these solutions fall under different government departments for e.g. Departments of Health and Economy so you will have to persuade fellow ministers to fund your plans as well as their own.

**Can you foresee any problems with this?**

**Discuss:** Which solutions did you choose and why? Are your solutions short or long term? Which ones are preventative? And which are reactive? Did all the groups recognise that homelessness is a complex problem with complex solutions? Is an integrated approach to solving issues like homelessness achievable or even realistic? Have any countries around the world combated this issue?

**Additional activities:**

- Generate empathy, compassion and understanding of homelessness by watching the 2018 the Roddy Doyle film – ‘Rosie’. The Roddy Doyle film ‘Rosie’ – tells the story of a mother trying to protect her family after their landlord sells their rented house and they become homeless (2018/86mins/Irish drama)

- Make a collage of homelessness billboards to highlight the issue and display in school.

- Invite a homelessness charity to speak in school about their work. Organise an awareness campaign to highlight the issues raised.

- Contact your local representative to urge them to invest in preventative measures.