

Shelter Seekers Activity

*It is the middle of winter. Snow is on the ground. Below you will find a list of 26 people that are experiencing homelessness and seeking shelter. They are in need of a total of 25 beds. Your group's role is to act as shelter staff. It will be your job to determine who will get a bed for the night. Note the reality that many shelters do not have enough beds for demand, so they must have some system in place to determine who can stay. Your shelter has **14 free beds** with the following rules:*

- Families and couples are not willing to be split up.
- The rule is one bed per person, however a parent can stay in a bed with up to two children.
- Couples cannot share beds.

*Several people will get left out. You will have **15 minutes** to determine who will get to stay at the shelter. Each group should have a **Recorder and a Presenter**. The Recorder will keep notes on the selection process, who got chosen, and other observations. At the end of the activity, the Presenter will share with everyone who your group chose and why. Some shelters operate on a first-come, first-serve basis, but many others have strict rules governing the intake process. For example, some shelters will not accept couples, children, or people currently using drugs or alcohol. Some might require that residents take a breathalyzer exam in order to stay. Others give those people preference who have never stayed in the shelter before. Still others will serve only very specific populations, like survivors of domestic violence or male veterans.*

1. Bob and Janice - 2 Beds

A married couple who recently lost everything in a house fire. Have no relatives in town and have exhausted the goodwill of friends after staying with them for two weeks. Had no insurance because they could not afford it, though Bob works a fulltime low-wage job.

2. Jerry - 1 Bed

Early 50s, male, Appalachian heritage. Been homeless since his divorce and loss of job and home many years ago. Lives in encampment under the interstate. Suffers depression and anxiety. Works temporary jobs several days a week because he can't find work elsewhere.

3. Sam - 1 Bed

Single 25-year-old male high school dropout. Works minimum wage or day labor jobs but can't afford an apartment. Sometimes sleeps in his car. Health is poor; fears he may have pneumonia (which is not contagious). Wants to stay in a shelter until he feels better.

4. Mrs. Green - 1 Bed

An elderly senile woman who can't remember how old she is. She is schizophrenic and has been in and out of mental hospitals. She hears voices in her head and has threatened suicide. She can't afford medication for her illness.

5. Charlie and Denise - 2 Beds

He has low-wage job with no benefits. She is disabled. They have one child with severe health problems and needs medicine they can't afford. They are behind in their payments with utility companies and have been evicted from an apartment. Have no car.

6. Ryan (and his mother) - 1 Bed

7-year-boy who spends many nights in shelters with his unemployed mother. Often hungry and misses school a lot. Has not learned to read. Only possesses some extra clothes and a teddy bear. Teddy comforts him when he stays in the shelter.

7. Vivian -1 Bed

32 year-old woman who lost her home and everything she owned to a recent hurricane in the south. She was evacuated from home and came to Cincinnati seeking employment. She has no family or friends here. In her home town, she was a teacher. She is uncomfortable with her new status as homeless. She doesn't really want to sleep in the shelter, but she doesn't feel as though she has any other options.

8. Tom - 1 Bed

47-year-old Gulf War veteran. Has post-traumatic stress disorder from war experiences and has recently become alcohol dependent. Has been on the streets for years. Seeking shelter because of the cold weather.

9. Suzie -1 Bed

A 28-year-old mother of two small children. Fleeing from an abusive husband. Her children, ages 8 and 10, are with her. Has no relatives to turn to.



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10. Tyrone and Cynthia - 2 Beds

Married couple in mid 40s. Home on riverfront destroyed in a flood and they didn't have insurance. Lost everything but some clothes and their car, which they have been living out of. Seeking shelter for a few nights and chance to bathe. Hope to be back on feet soon.

11. Lizzie -1 Bed

Is 21 years old and pregnant. Both parents died when she was a teenager. Lived on the streets for awhile until she met her boyfriend who was a drug dealer and abusive. Now she is addicted to drugs and she is leaving her boyfriend. She needs help for her addiction before it harms her baby.

12. Domingo and Rosa - 2 Beds

Happily married for 20 years. Domingo was employed at a factory for 15 years with no health benefits. Rosa was a stay at home mom until their daughter went off to college on an academic scholarship. Domingo was diagnosed with Cancer a year ago, and as a result lost his job. The high medical bills made it impossible for them to pay their mortgage and they have been recently foreclosed on.

13. Deborah -1 Bed

Age 24, high school dropout, single mother of two children, with no child support from the father. Exhausted welfare benefits. Has some computer training. Lost job as a manager at fast food restaurant due to child-care emergency when she closed restaurant to go get child.



14. Jose -1 Bed

Mid-50s, high school graduate, Army veteran. Picked up drug and alcohol habits in the service overseas. Drifted around country for years in odd jobs. Spends money earned on alcohol. Gets meals at shelters. Hasn't succeeded in rehab programs.

15. Saundra -1 Bed

Saundra is 28 and recently lost her job at a department store due to lay-offs. She has been living with her boyfriend of 5 years, but he recently kicked her out of the apartment and her name is not on the lease. She doesn't have any family in town. She is 5 months pregnant. She doesn't use drugs or alcohol.

16. Tiffany -1 Bed

35 years old and has been married for 10 years, has no children. She recently left her abusive husband. Her husband is actively looking for her. She is afraid for her life and refuses to go to her job because her husband knows where to find her. She also refuse to go to friends or family for the same reasons.

17. James and Jesse - 2 Beds

James is a 25 year old man with a 30 year old mentally disabled brother named Jesse who he takes care of. Both parents are deceased. He lost his apartment when the landlord was foreclosed on. He lost his security deposit and the only spare money he had was used to put all of their possessions in storage. He works but his wages are not enough for him to ever get ahead, and all extra money goes to caring for his brother. He is not able to come up with a new deposit for another apartment at the moment. Their parents are deceased and they have no extended family.

18. Delilah -1 Bed

Delilah is a 16 year old girl. She fled her sexually and emotionally abusive home life when she was 14 and has been sleeping on the streets for 2 years. She is not in school. She recently got caught up in drug use. She is looking for a few nights off the streets to shower and eat. Drug dealers are threatening her.

19. Greg -1 Bed

Greg is 45 and has no drug or alcohol problems. He lost his home to his wife during his divorce. He spent his savings hiring a divorce attorney. He works full-time but a large portion of his pay is garnished for child support and alimony and he is trying to save up for a security deposit and first and last month's rent.

20. Louisa -1 Bed

She is 68 and disabled in a wheelchair. She receives \$460 a month in Social Security disability. She sells Streetvibes (a newspaper) on the street for extra income, but she doesn't sell very many because it's difficult for her to get around. For the last 15 years she

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has lived in a single occupancy hotel room, however, a developer bought the landlord out and all the tenants had to move so that the developer can renovate the building into a boutique hotel for the tourists. Its two weeks until she gets her next check and she doesn't have a savings. Needs shelter until she can save up for her security deposit and first month's rent.

Shelter Seekers Activity Instructions

Learning Objective:

Participants will learn about a variety of potential causes of homelessness and have to decide why to help certain individuals with housing and not others. Potential extension: understanding bias, stereotype, and worldview, and the personal stories behind homelessness.

Materials Needed:

"Shelter Seekers" Activity

Instructions:

1. Break students into small groups of 3-4.
2. **Explain that they are serving as the social work team at your city's largest shelter for people experiencing homelessness.**
3. It is the middle of winter. Snow is on the ground. On the handout in front of their social work team, they will find a list of 26 people who are experiencing homelessness and seeking shelter. They are in need of a total of 25 beds.
4. Your group's role is to act as shelter staff. It will be your job to determine who will get a bed for the night. Note the reality that many shelters do not have enough beds for demand, so they must have some system in place to determine who can stay.
5. **Your shelter has 14 free beds with the following rules:**
 - Families and couples are not willing to be split up.
 - The rule is one bed per person, however a parent can stay in a bed with up to two children.
 - Couples cannot share beds.

Several people will get left out. You will have 15 minutes to determine who will get to stay at the shelter.

Ask students to identify a Recorder and a Presenter.

- The Recorder will keep notes on the selection process, who got chosen, and other observations.
- At the end of the activity, the Presenter will share with everyone who your group chose and why.

Note to the students that some shelters operate on a first-come, first-serve basis, but many others have strict rules governing the intake process. For example, some shelters will not accept couples, children, or people currently using drugs or alcohol. Some might require that residents take a breathalyzer exam in order to stay. Others give those people preference who have never stayed in the shelter before. Still others will serve only very specific populations, like battered women or male veterans.

It would be helpful to note some local homeless shelters' intake processes so the students have a local understanding of the social services network in your city.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the causes of homelessness that we observed?

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- What “rules” developed within your group; either explicitly or implicitly? What lead this?