

UNIT 1

What Is Homelessness?

What is a home?

Who has a right to a home?

What does it mean to experience homelessness?

How do we react to and think about homelessness relative to other disasters or crises?

High School

UNIT 1: Compassion Fatigue & the Stigma of Homelessness

Essential Questions

1. What is a home?
2. Who has a right to a home?
3. What does it mean to experience homelessness?
4. How do we react to and think about homelessness relative to other disasters or crises?

Overview

- Students will build an understanding of the housing and homelessness crisis, and define both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and their impact on individuals.
 - Students will use data analysis skills to understand who is impacted by homelessness in L.A. County.
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Materials

Impact Statistics Graphics sheets (printed or projected)

Prep

Read through procedure to determine which of the provided materials will be most helpful in framing the lesson based on the needs of your student group, making sure to be sensitive to any of your students who have or are experiencing homelessness.

Procedure

Explain to your students that you will be spending some time thinking and talking about the housing and homelessness crisis and how it impacts the individuals who are forced to live outside.

Homelessness can be a sad and difficult topic for people of any age. Some of your students may have even experienced homelessness themselves or know someone who has, and it's important to be sensitive to their emotions as you talk together. Allow time throughout the lesson to pause and allow your students to react or express anything that it surfaces for them.

In future lessons, they will learn about the root causes of homelessness and how each one of us can do something to help people in our communities who are living without a stable home.

UNIT 1: Everyone Deserves a Home

Procedure (cont'd)

1. Ask your students to write down what it means to experience homelessness on a sheet of paper and then divide them into groups of 3-4 students.
 - a. Have your students read aloud to their groups what they wrote down.
 - b. Now have the groups brainstorm all the places they have seen someone sleeping other than a home and write those answers down.
 - c. Ask your students whether these are all similar types of places, or whether some are better than others. The idea here is to get them to arrive at their own conclusion about whether these sleeping places all fall into the same category of homelessness. See if the students arrived on their own at the idea of unsheltered vs. sheltered homelessness then present their definitions.

Unsheltered homelessness: when someone is staying in a place where people are not meant to live, such as a car, a park bench, a sidewalk, or an abandoned building.

Sheltered homelessness: when someone is staying in a place that is inside but it isn't their home and they may not be able to stay there long- somewhere like a shelter, or a friend or relative's house.

2. Ask your students to write down their ideas of what impact sheltered or unsheltered homelessness might have on a person without a stable place to stay. You may choose to have students discuss their answers with a partner or share them aloud with the group. Some examples may include:
 - a. Worsened mental and physical health
 - b. Stress and anxiety
 - c. Difficulty accessing essentials like food, laundry services, healthcare, and bathrooms/showers
 - d. Feeling unsafe, having trouble sleeping
 - e. Feeling like people might be judging them
 - f. Having trouble getting a job, signing up for school, registering to vote, or receiving mail without a permanent address
 - g. Difficulty storing personal belongings
 - h. Trouble doing homework without stable internet access or electricity

UNIT 1: Compassion Fatigue & the Stigma of Homelessness

Procedure (cont'd)

3. Tell your students that all of these reasons (and more!) make it very difficult for people of any age to experience homelessness, and the majority of the time, when someone has to live outside or in a shelter it's because they don't have another choice. Share with your students that over the next few lessons you'll all learn together about what causes this problem (as well as how each one of us can help and advocate for people experiencing homelessness in very real ways). But first, you'll learn more about who is impacted by the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles County and across the United States, as well as how we respond to those people.
4. Distribute or display the Impact Statistics Graphics Sheet included in this lesson and ask your students to take a look at the graphics and share their observations. You can also have them discuss in groups.
5. Ask your student groups to write down 2-3 pieces of information they are able to pull from the data and 3 observations or questions that these pieces of information bring to mind, have them share out at least one of these.
6. Ask your student groups how they feel when they see or hear about people experiencing homelessness? What are the words or phrases that come to mind? It may be helpful to create a list or word web on the board as students respond.
7. Hang up FOUR pieces of giant paper around the room. They will have the following titles:
 - HOMELESSNESS DEFINITIONS
 - PLACES PEOPLE SLEEP THAT AREN'T A HOME
 - OBSERVATIONS FROM IMPACT STATISTICS
 - REACTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS (words or phrases that come to mind when students see/hear people experiencing homelessness)

Have your groups each select a member. Have that member go around to each of these sheets of paper and copy down what their groups had written throughout the class. Once everyone has finished writing, have the groups walk around the classroom and read what the other groups have written down. Take a moment to reflect with the class.

UNIT 1: Compassion Fatigue & the Stigma of Homelessness

Procedure (cont'd)

8. Ask your students to think about a time they've experienced or read about a natural disaster or crisis such as a fire or a flood. What thoughts and emotions did they have? Did they want to help? Did they see other people pitching in to help those impacted? Write or display the following prompt and give your students time to think about, write, and/or discuss their answers with each other:

When a crisis or natural disaster like a fire or flood causes someone to lose their home, the public response tends to be swift and decided. People pitch in to raise money, collect food and supplies, and provide support however they can—even if they don't live close by or know the people affected.

The housing and homelessness crisis puts thousands of people out on the streets of L.A. County each year, and yet the public response tends to be very different. Whether people lose their home because of a fire, emergency medical bills, a lost job, or a rent increase, it's always a crisis. Why do you think we treat these situations differently?

9. Ask students to share out their answers or use them to kick off the discussion in the next lesson.

Supplementary Materials

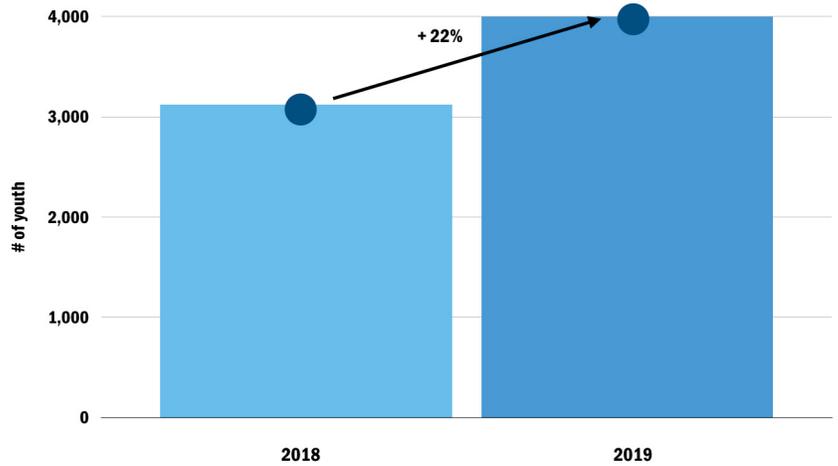
- Impact Statistics Graphics sheets
- Books
 - *Where I Live* by Brenda Rufener
 - *Winterfolk* by Janel Kolby
 - *Sleeping in my Jeans* by Connie King Leonard
 - *What I Want You to See* by Catherine Linka

Sources

- [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [National Center for Homeless Education](#)
- [Young Homeless People Are Struggling to Stay Safe During the Pandemic](#), Teen Vogue
- [Youth Count 2019 CoC Data Summary](#), Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
- [Youth Homelessness](#), My Friend's Place

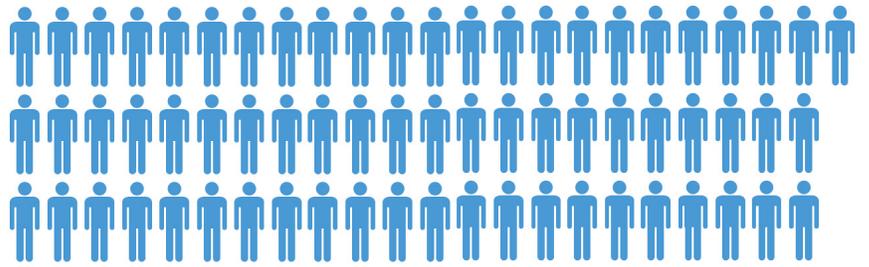
UNIT 1: Statistics

Average Number of Youth (18-24 yrs. old) Experiencing Homelessness Each Night by Year



Number of Youth That Started Experiencing Homelessness

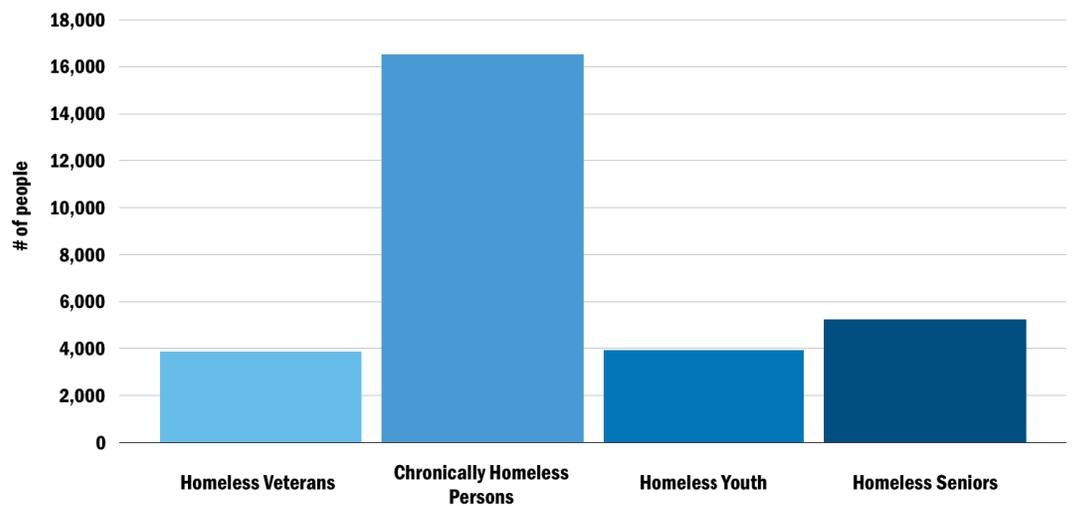
 = 100 youth



January 2018

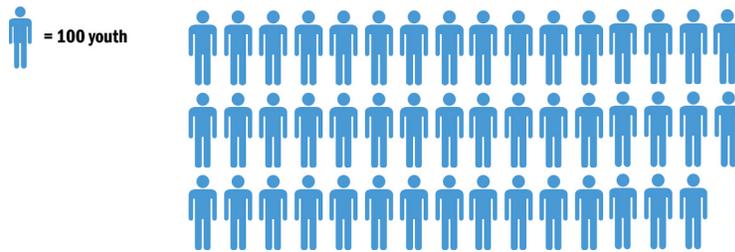
December 2018

People Experiencing Homelessness (2019)

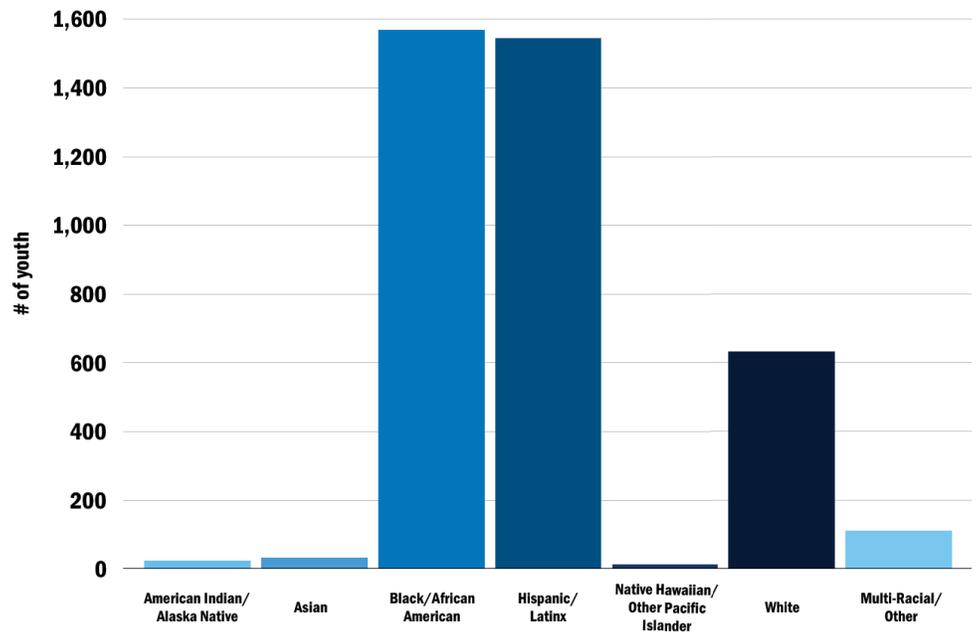


UNIT 1: Statistics

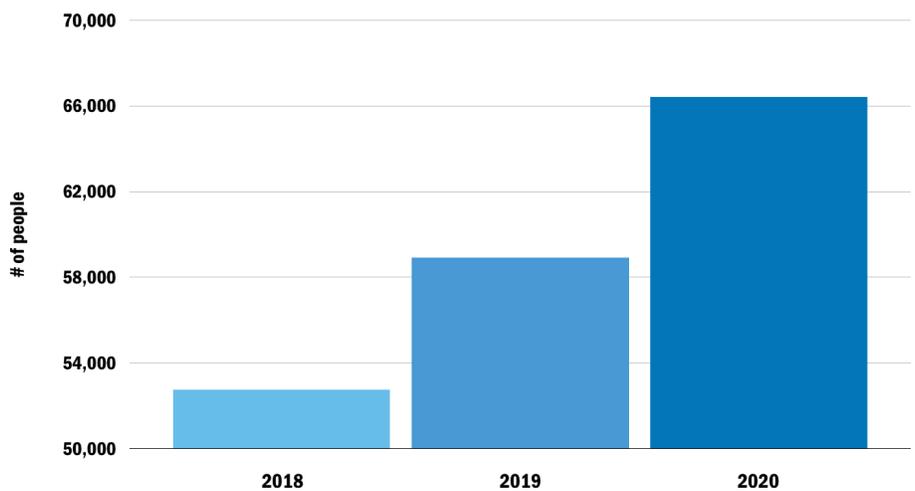
Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness (2020)



Youth Experiencing Homelessness by Race (2019)

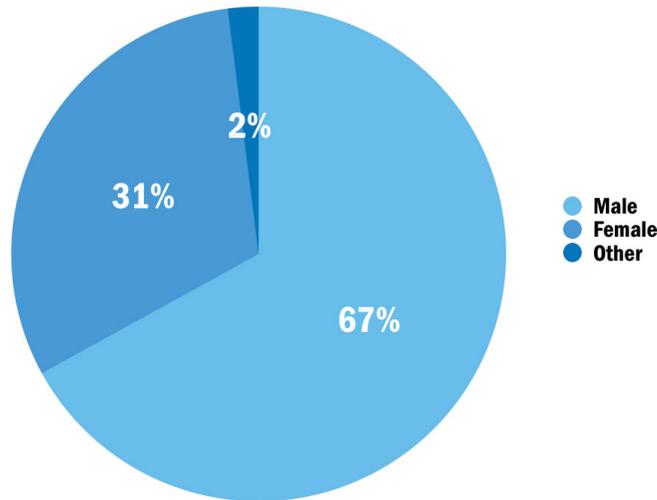


People Experiencing Homelessness by Year

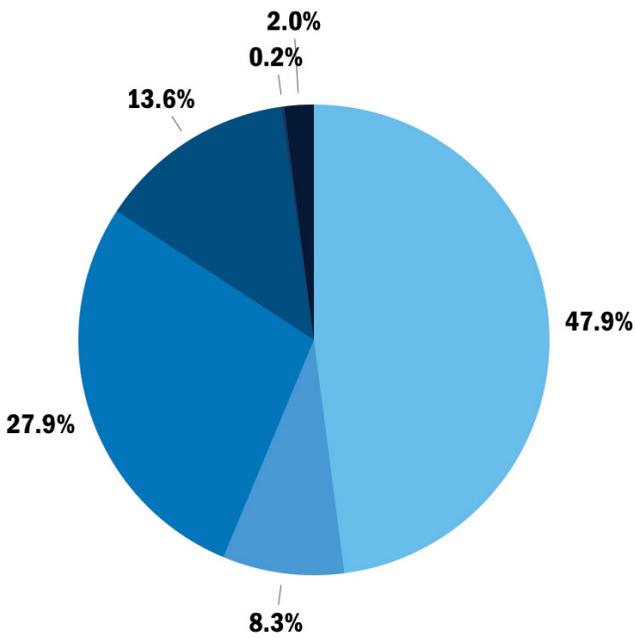


UNIT 1: Statistics

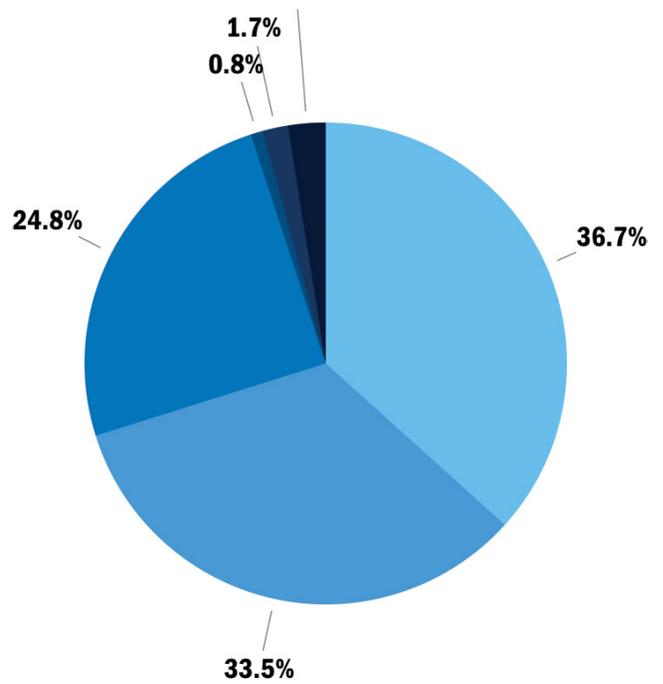
Population in L.A. County Experiencing Homelessness by Gender



Male Population in L.A. County Experiencing Homelessness by Race



Female Population in L.A. County Experiencing Homelessness by Race



● Latino/Hispanic
 ● Black/African American
 ● White
 ● Asian
● Native American
 ● Multi-Racial

● Latino/Hispanic
 ● Black/African American
 ● White
 ● Asian
● Native American
 ● Multi-Racial