

## Activity for 6th Grade and Younger

### **I. Discussion questions for group:**

- Close your eyes and think of the word “homeless” – what are some of the first images that come to your mind when you think of the word “homeless”?
- Who can be homeless?
- Are adults the only ones who are homeless, or can children be homeless?

### **II. Ana’s Story**

My name is Ana. I am 11 years old, in the 6th grade, and I attend Lake Anne Elementary School. In 2002, changes in my family when my dad left caused my mom, younger sister, and me to become homeless. After my father left, I was confused, disappointed in myself, embarrassed, and angry at my mom.

In the 3rd grade, my family moved around a lot. We lived with friends and with relatives. Sometimes, we lived in hotels. I lived in 2 states and attended 3 different elementary schools in one year.

Moving around was so hard, I couldn’t concentrate on school work. I was helping my mom and I never knew where I was going to sleep at night. With the little free time I had, I hid behind my friends, and didn’t show my true feelings.

- *Talking point: What do you think Ana meant by saying “hid behind my friends?”*

Instead of showing the real me, I hid behind my “tough girl” image. I bullied younger kids to make myself feel and look better. In the classroom, I was a class clown.

- *Talking point: Why did Ana act like the class clown?*

I used to be an excellent learner, but then my behavior became horrible. Most of my actions were related to being frustrated with my living situation. I was confused. I didn’t know what to do. I cried at night.

- *Talking point: Why do you think Ana started to behave poorly in school?*

In the beginning, it seemed like a game. It became real when my family and I were living in the shelter, and I had a friend who wanted to come over to my house to play. I didn’t know what to tell her.

- *Talking point: Why do you think Ana didn’t know what to tell her friend who wanted to come over and play with her?*

The next day her mom told her the truth about where I lived. I realized how painful the truth can be. I didn't want my friends to know because I didn't want their pity. I admit that I have lots of pride and do not like to accept charity.

- *Talking point: Do you think it would be hard for your friends to know if you were living in a shelter? Why/why not?*

How I overcame the situation was with my family, my love of music, and my faith. Right now, in my life, I am closer with my mom and I am still getting closer with my dad.

After living in the shelter, we were lucky enough to get into transitional housing. From there, we moved into affordable housing. We are working on saving to buy our own house, and our plan is to move next summer.

- *Talking point: What is transitional housing? What is affordable housing?*

I am doing well in school. I placed second in the Fairfax County regional science fair. I was a safety patrol monitor and received perfect attendance awards. I am active in drama and enjoy singing.

My career goals are to get a Ph.D. in zoology, and a master's degree in the performing arts. I know I will meet these goals because of all the obstacles my family has overcome.

I have one last thing I want the world to know about homelessness is that it is not the person's fault – it was not my fault and it was not my mom's fault. It's taken me a while to realize, but it's not my dad's fault either. No one person can be blamed for us becoming homeless.

- *Talking point: What are some reasons Ana's family may have become homeless? What are some reasons people can become homeless?*

It is not a choice. It can happen to anyone. If we work together, we can overcome homelessness.

- *Talking point: Do you think homelessness can be prevented as a community? What can we do? What can kids do? Do you think kids can make a difference?*

### **III. Homelessness Activity**

In small groups, discuss the following questions. Hand out paper and markers/crayons to each group.

As a small group, discuss what you would all need to bring with you if you were told you had to leave your home tomorrow and could only take with you one backpack full of stuff? Why?

- a. Discuss what items each individual would want to take.
- b. What would parents/caretakers need and want to take?

Draw on individual pieces of paper what the group has decided to bring in the backpack and what individuals would be bringing with them.

Discuss:

- ◆ What would you be leaving behind?
- ◆ How would you feel?
- ◆ How would your parents/caretakers feel?
- ◆ What could be some causes for needing to leave your home?
- ◆ Where would your family go?
- ◆ How would this change your life as you know it?
- ◆ How would this affect your parents/caretakers?

#### **IV. Group Discussion**

- As a large group, share the pictures and the reasons the youth decided on the necessary items to bring.
- What services do homeless and working class families in our community need?
  - Brainstorm possible services that would help families meet their needs; use this as a lead-in to explanation of Reston Interfaith programs and services.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

- Reston Interfaith does not just give a check...we resolve the problem
- How you can help solve the problem
  - Hand out "Youth Volunteer Opportunities"