



GIRL SCOUTS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

# HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS

GS NORCAL COUNCIL'S OWN PATCH PROGRAM

BROWNIES, JUNIORS, CADETTES, SENIORS & AMBASSADORS

TO EDUCATE GIRLS ON THE REALITIES OF HOMELESSNESS  
AND TO EXPLORE WAYS IN WHICH THEY CAN HELP THOSE  
WHO ARE AFFECTED.



## PURPOSE

To educate girls on the realities of homelessness and to explore ways in which they can help those affected and possibly eliminate the problem.

## BACKGROUND: WHY ARE THERE SO MANY PEOPLE?

There is no single reason for the increase in homelessness in the last decade. At any given shelter, each individual's or family's story illustrates a different cause. However, it is well documented that poverty and the lack of affordable housing are major factors in the rise of homelessness. During recent years, families have been affected by the following issues:

- ◆ A rapid increase in households below the poverty level.
- ◆ Several recessions and federal cuts in eligibility for welfare and disability benefits recipients.
- ◆ A national shortage of affordable rental units for low-income people.
- ◆ A reduction in federal support for low-income housing.
- ◆ The number of poor households became much greater than the number of low-income housing units.
- ◆ An increasing number of poor, where wages of the employed family member are not adequate to bring the family above the poverty level.
- ◆ Increasing numbers of single mothers who need job training and affordable child care.
- ◆ Rising health costs which deplete a family's entire savings when a medical problem arises.
- ◆ Language barriers.
- ◆ The escalating problems of domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse contribute to the increase in homelessness.

## ORDER INFORMATION

To order the Homelessness Awareness Patch Program, please visit [www.girlscoutsnorcal.org](http://www.girlscoutsnorcal.org) and purchase the items online. Please note that shipping and handling will be added to all online orders.

Members of Girl Scouts of Northern California will not be charged for shipping and handling if they use the GS NorCal Council's Own Order Form and have badges shipped to the closest GS NorCal store in their area for members to pick up.

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# HOMELESSNESS PATCH FOR BROWNIE GIRL SCOUTS

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** This program contains background resource materials. Please review this information with your troop. Other suggestions for presenting this program are listed below.

- ❖ Be in touch with your own attitudes and feelings regarding homeless people on the street and in shelters before educating girls. The experience of homelessness should be understood as a problem, not as a characteristic of an individual or a family.
- ❖ Provide factual information to girls in terms they can understand. Be careful not to overwhelm girls with the issues of homelessness and the obstacles to eliminating it.
- ❖ Encourage hope and optimism by developing projects that offer opportunities to help.

Help girls to be adequately prepared for the shelter experience by utilizing resource materials and presentations from shelter staff.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Complete at least 4 of the following activities.

1. Describe your own house. Tell about who lives there and what people do there. What are your favorite things to do at home?
2. Take a hike around the troop meeting place and observe types of homes. Talk about similarities and differences.

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Make an individual or troop collage of different kinds of homes in your neighborhood, in our Council, in different parts of the world.

3. All animals, including people, have a habitat. A habitat is a place that provides food, water, and shelter. These three things are necessary for survival. In your habitat, your home, you receive food, water, shelter, and many other special things. Make a list or draw a picture of the other special things your home provides.

❖ *(Leader Tip: In a discussion, compare the girls' lists with one that a person in a shelter may have.)*

4. Talk about how a person or family might lose a home. Discuss how this is different from an animal losing its home. Learn about where homeless people go to get help.
5. Act out activities you do at home every day- take a bath, eat dinner, do homework, etc. Now try and act out how you would do those same activities in a homeless shelter.
6. Make a list of some of the different problems a homeless child might have- like having no place to do homework and changing schools frequently. Make a list of things he or she might need.
7. With your troop, decide on a service project you would like to do to help homeless people. Make a list of all of your ideas. Talk about each idea. Come to an agreement about what you will do and how best to put your plan into action. (See Service Project Ideas)
8. Visit emergency food resources, such as a food bank or soup kitchen. (See "Service Project Ideas" on pg. 7)

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## HOMELESSNESS PATCH FOR JUNIOR GIRL SCOUTS

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** This program contains background resource materials. Please review this information with your troop. Other suggestions for presenting this program are listed below.

- ❖ Be in touch with your own attitudes and feelings regarding homeless people on the street and in shelters before educating girls. The experience of homelessness should be understood as a problem, not as a characteristic of an individual or a family.
- ❖ Provide factual information to girls in terms they can understand. Be careful not to overwhelm girls with the issues of homelessness and the obstacles to eliminating it.
- ❖ Encourage hope and optimism by developing projects that offer opportunities to help.

Help girls to be adequately prepared for the shelter experience by utilizing resource materials and presentations from shelter staff.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Complete at least 5 of the following activities.

1. All animals, including people have a habitat. A habitat is a place that provides food, water, and shelter. These three things are necessary to survive. In your habitat (home), You receive these things, but there are many other special things that your home provides. (*Leader tip: In a discussion, compare the girls' lists with what someone in a shelter would have.*)
2. Invite someone from a speaker's resource list who knows about homelessness to speak with your troop. Write down two questions that you would feel comfortable asking about homeless people's lives.
3. Imagine what it would be like if you were a homeless child. How might your feelings be different? What would your day be like? Do a skit illustrating some of the ideas or write a journal for two weeks.
4. Bring in articles, headlines, or photographs from newspapers or magazines for a troop scrapbook about the homeless. Choose one item to report on at a troop meeting. Try to find answers to the following questions: Who are the homeless in your community? Where do they stay? Who is helping homeless people?
5. Use what you have learned to educate others about homeless people. Be creative. You might want to make posters or a library display, write a report, or give a presentation to groups, such as other troops, your class at school, Sunday School classes at your church or synagogue, troop parents, etc.
6. Obtain a map of your community. Plot the locations of homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Select one of the locations and get permission to visit it.
7. With your troop, decide on a service project you would like to do to help homeless people. Make a list of all of your ideas. Talk about each idea. Come to an agreement about what you will do and how best to put your plan into action. (See Service Project Ideas)
8. Visit emergency food resources, such as a food bank or soup kitchen. (See "Service Project Ideas" on pg. 7)

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## HOMELESSNESS PATCH FOR CADETTES, SENIORS & AMBASSADORS

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** This program contains background resource materials. Please review this information with your troop. Other suggestions for presenting this program are listed below.

- ❖ Be in touch with your own attitudes and feelings regarding homeless people on the street and in shelters before educating girls. The experience of homelessness should be understood as a problem, not as a characteristic of an individual or a family.
- ❖ Provide factual information to girls in terms they can understand. Be careful not to overwhelm girls with the issues of homelessness and the obstacles to eliminating it.
- ❖ Encourage hope and optimism by developing projects that offer opportunities to help.

Help girls to be adequately prepared for the shelter experience by utilizing resource materials and presentations from shelter staff.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Complete at least 6 of the following activities.

1. Make a scrapbook of articles about homeless people. Keep a list of the organizations that are helping in the area. Find out: Who is homeless in your community? Where do homeless people go? Where do they stay? How do they get help.

2. Keep a time log for 24 hours. Record all of your activities.

Example:                      8:00 A.M. woke-up  
   8:15 A.M. brushed teeth

Discuss with a group the comforts of home and compare this with the life of a homeless person.

3. Become an investigative reporter. Contact an agency for an interview with someone who works with homeless people. Brainstorm questions your troop will ask. Write an article as a troop and submit it to your local newspaper.

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Interview someone in your council to find out what Girls Scouts are doing locally and/or nationally to help.

4. Invite a social services/ human services worker to your troop meeting. What is his/ her background? What are the various types of careers in social services/ human services and what kind of training do you need for them?

5. Survey your family, friends, and classmates about who they think homeless people are. What are the stereotypes? How can these be overcome? Develop a presentation to increase awareness about homeless people.

6. Advocates are people who act on behalf of others. They present facts and opinions to those who have the power to make important decisions. One way you can be an advocate is to write to your elected representatives. Find out who represents your community at the city, state, and national levels of government. Write either an individual or troop letter to your legislator about homelessness. (Tip: The League of Women Voters and National Organization for Women can help you identify your legislators..

7. Plan and carry out a service project that will benefit homeless people. You may want to consult "Service

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# A F F E C T S   O F   H O M E L E S S N E S S

Problems facing homeless children include emotional, developmental, health and nutritional difficulties. In some shelters, children suffer due to unsanitary conditions, lack of heat, food, and weather-appropriate clothing. Homeless children are twice as likely as poor children who have homes to suffer from chronic health problems like cardiac disease and respiratory infections.

## ❖ EMOTIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL

- ◆ Eating and sleeping problems
- ◆ Learning disabilities
- ◆ Difficulty paying attention
- ◆ “Parentified” behavior from having too much responsibility

## ❖ HEALTH PROBLEMS

Health problems are prevalent in this population. Homeless families are less likely to seek and use preventive health care than other low-income families. The Stanford Studies note: “The acute illness of homeless children include respiratory diseases, trauma, nutritional problems, and skin diseases....Homeless children who have lived in inappropriate places- such as garages, outdoors, cars, and empty public buildings- have more chronic illness.... The chronic illnesses associated with living in such places included eye, ear, muscosketetal, and urogenital problems.... Homeless and formerly homeless parents agreed that their children’s health had suffered as a result of homelessness.

## ❖ HEALTHCARE ISSUES INCLUDE

- ◆ Lack of consistent health care
- ◆ Lack of health insurance
- ◆ Fewer medical services
- ◆ Unmet special needs
- ◆ Lack of dental care
- ◆ Lack of prenatal care
- ◆ Lead poisoning
- ◆ High rates of abuse and neglect

## ❖ PROBLEMS OF A HOMELESS CHILD

Young children are powerless to protect themselves against homelessness, and it is their plight which is of particular concern to the Girl Scouts. We know how early experiences affect a child’s self-image and sense of responsibility. We have seen how difficult it is to reach a teenage girl who has never been able to see beyond the welfare system into a life she can control. It is difficult to conceive how we will cope with the problems presented by a child who has grown into adolescence moving from relatives to have room, to shelters, to cars, to motels rooms, and the streets.

## ❖ NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

- ◆ Inadequate food
- ◆ Inappropriate feeding of babies
- ◆ Allergies
- ◆ Diarrhea

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE IN A SHELTER?

There is little privacy, much noise, institutional rules that limit family relationships, no cooking privileges, limited phone access, shared common space and televisions, strict schedules and curfews, no storage space, and staff monitoring (room inspections). Shelters often do not have a system for parents to be part of the decision-making process. Children, confused by the enforced changes in their parents' style of discipline, may act out to test limits. Shelter residents often complain that their children are seeing and hearing things from other families that they should not be expected to, such as violence and drug use. It is important to know however, that all shelters are structures differently and serve different populations.

Education is one way for a child to climb out of poverty and powerlessness. Yet how can a child do well in school when she or he has not slept the night before because of a chaotic shelter or no shelter at all. Although some school systems are making improvements, others are making it difficult for homeless children to attend school. The lack of coordination between social services agencies, shelters, and schools makes it difficult to serve the children effectively. Schools require immunization records before allowing a child to enroll and often require proof of residence. What does that mean for the homeless family that has lost records in innumerable moves?

## WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT HOMELESSNESS?

Homelessness is not just a problem of a lack of affordable housing, although housing is desperately needed. Many of the families who are living in shelters now are "multi-problem" families. They have lost their place to live because their lives are already troubled by family violence, drug/alcohol dependence, financial crisis, job turnover, unemployment, medical crisis, natural disaster, or history of family poverty. Just providing these families with an apartment is no guarantee the the same problems that brought them to s shelter will not surface again. They need access to supportive services, such as drug/alcohol counseling, job training, and day care, in addition to safe, affordable housing, financial benefits, and health care.

Solutions to the homeless problem are long-term and must occur at the city, state, and Federal levels of government. The gap between income and affordable housing must be addressed, more housing units constructed, and supportive services expanded.

## SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- ✿ Organize animal petting day at a shelter.
- ✿ Collect shoes to donate to shelter residents.
- ✿ Collect household items for housewarming baskets for families moving into permanent housing and donate to local agencies which help homeless people.
- ✿ Donate food or volunteer at a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter kitchen or a food bank.
- ✿ Give an unbirthday party for children at a shelter.
- ✿ Sponsor a non-holiday program event for a shelter and a troop.
- ✿ Assemble kits of school supplies for children at a shelter.
- ✿ Organize Service Unit sponsorship of children for summer camp, including provision of necessary camp gear and transportation. Donate to Community Kids to Camp to help a homeless child go to camp.

## SERVICE PROJECT CHECKLIST

- Be certain of your group's ability to fulfill any commitments it makes. Consider the age of your troop's members and what would be appropriate for them.
- Obtain parental permission for any trip to a shelter. It might be useful to have a parent meeting to have the girls explain their project.
- Identify a responsible, cooperative person at the shelter to serve as your contact.
- Learn about the shelter: sizes, ages, schedules, meal times, whom it serves and why. It can be chaotic and frequently crisis-oriented. The families are in a state of transition and turmoil.
- Understand that parents, as well as children, are in need. You may want to think in terms of the family if planning donations.
- Ask a shelter staff person what is needed because some items are in great demand.
- A leader should visit the shelter before taking the girls.

# YOUNGER GIRL BIBLIOGRAPHY

## FAMILIES AND HOMES: AN AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOK LIST

Selected for use with young Girl Scouts (Brownies and Juniors), most of the books on this list are short, with many pictures. Often the girls' ability to listen may be sharpened by asking them a few leading questions. For instance, before reading Jafta's Mother by Hugh Lewin, ask the girls to notice ways that Jafta's family and home are the same or different from their own. Then, after reading the story aloud, go back through the book a second time, focusing on the pictures and asking the girls to tell you what is the same (i.e. Jafta's mother washes the clothes) and what is different (she washes them in the river).

### NONFICTION BOOKS

J728	Bowyer, Carol	Houses and Homes
J909.827	Bowyer, Carol	Children Are Children; An Activity Approach to Exploring Brazil, France, Iran, Japan, Nigeria, and the USSR.
J728	Devlin, Harry	To Grandfather's House We Go: A Roadside Tour of American Homes
J690	Dugan, William	All About Houses
J690	Fisher, Timothy	Huts,hovels and Houses
J643	Floethe, Louise	Houses Around the world
J643	Foster, Joanna	Homes: Shelter and Living Space
J808.8		Free to Bee.You and Me (Collection: The leader can select)
J728	Huntington, Lee	Simple shelters
J306.84	Leiner, Katherine	Both My parents Work
J643	Morey, Joan	Let's Look at Houses and Homes
J392	Simon, Norma	All Kinds of Families
JE306.8	Tax, Meredith	Families
J392.36	Weiss, Harvey	Shelters, from Teepee to Igloo

### PICTURE BOOKS

Abbott, Sarah	Where I began
Berenstain, Stan	The Berenstain Bears and Mama's New Job
Burton, Virginia	The Little House
Caines, Jeannette	Abby (adoption)
Cameron, Ann	Stories Julian Tells (African-American family)
Feelings, Muriel	Jambo Means Hello; Swahili Alphabet Book
Feelings, Muriel	Moja Means One; Swahili Counting Book
Flournoy, Valerie	Patchwork Quilt (African-American)
Friedman, Ina	How my parents Learned to Eat (Chinese-American)
Gauch, Patricia	Christina Katerina and the Time She Quit the Family
Gray, Genevieve	Send Wedell (African-American)
Havill, Juanita	Jamaica's Find (African-American)
Havill, Juanita	Jamaica Tag-Along (African-American)

OLDER GIRL BIBLIOGRAPHY  
FAMILIES AND HOMES: AN AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOK LIST

NONFICTION BOOKS

Kozol, Jonathan

Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America

Homeless Information Exchange  
1830 Connecticut Ave.  
NW 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington DC 20009

Helping the Homeless in Your Community

Homeless Information Exchange  
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Washington DC 20009

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