



ABOUT THIS LESSON GUIDE

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for choosing to incorporate this unit of lessons into your teaching program. Homelessness is a growing concern across Canada with at least 250,000 people per year experiencing homelessness. The materials and activities in this lesson guide were inspired by a desire to engage teachers and students in learning about homelessness specifically in the local community. One of the end results of this unit of work is for your class to assemble a collection of gifts in the form of Shoeboxes to be delivered to a local women's shelter. We ask that you please keep in contact with us at The Shoebox Project for Shelters and let us know how many shoeboxes you will be able to complete so that we can find an appropriate shelter to send them to. Alternatively if you have a shelter in mind, please let us know so that we can communicate with them and give them more information about our program.

The information and materials in this guide are designed for senior elementary students – Grades 7 and 8 – but elements can be adapted for both younger and older students. The goal of this guide is to not only educate students about homelessness in their local community, but also to help involve them in being a part of the solution. We hope that this guide will help to engage students in becoming involved in helping members of their community specifically by working with The Shoebox Project for Shelters to create Shoeboxes, but also going beyond that and using this unit of work as a starting point for further aspects of volunteerism. We hope that this unit of work will inspire you and your students and your school community, to make a difference in your community.

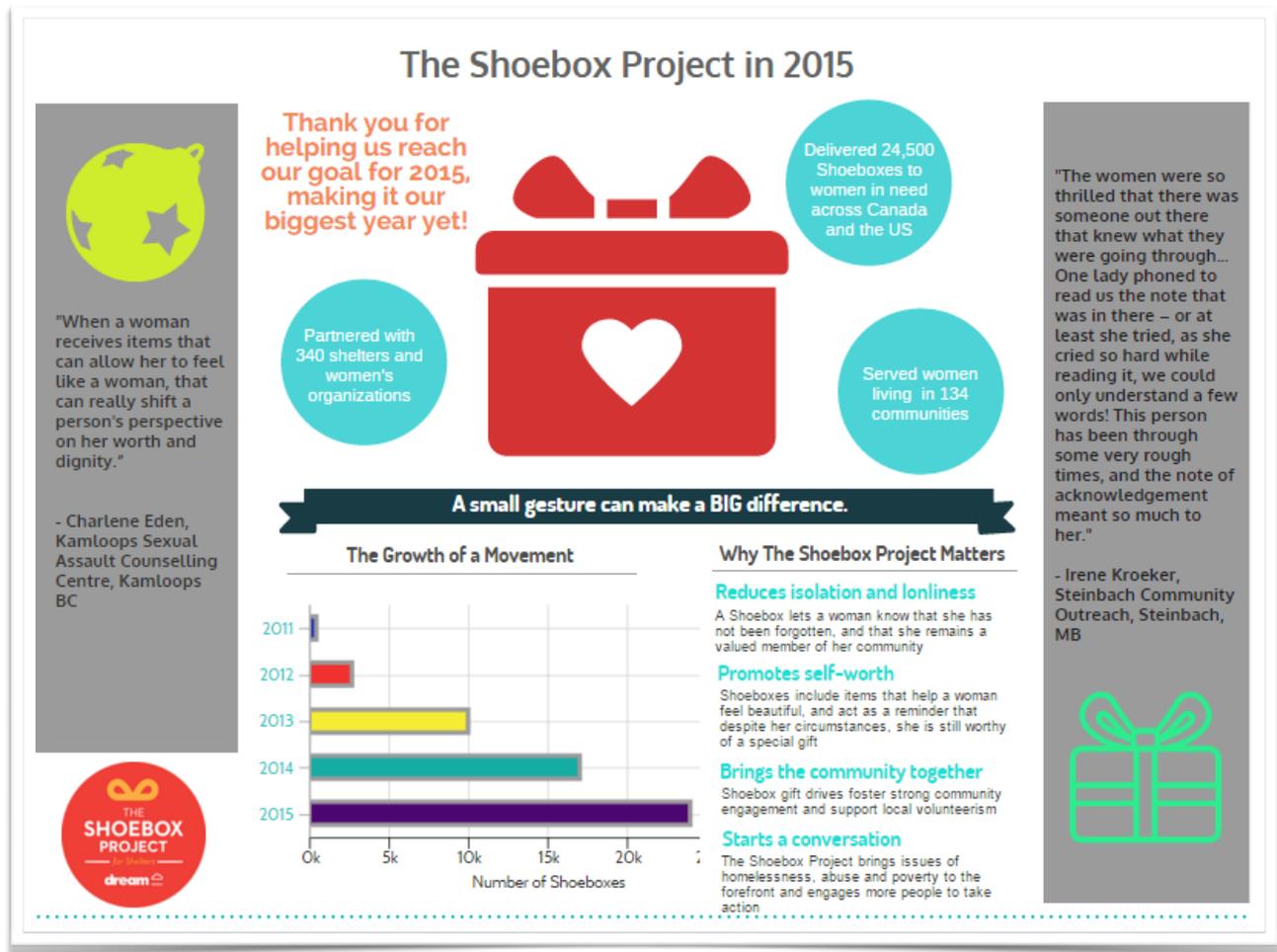
THE SHOEBOX PROJECT

The Shoebox Project For Shelters, supported by Dream, collects and distributes gifts in the form of Shoeboxes to women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in communities across Canada and the US. In our founding year, 2011, we delivered 400 Shoeboxes to residents of four Toronto women's shelters. Through word of mouth and the support of some loyal sponsors, the initiative grew very quickly. In 2015, our network of dedicated volunteers delivered nearly 25,000 gifts to women in 134 communities.



WHY IT MATTERS

Often, women feel disconnected from society, invisible and alone. Reducing the feelings of isolation and loneliness faced by women living in shelters is one of the most important outcomes of The Shoebox Project. A Shoebox gift is a powerful reminder for a woman that she has not been forgotten and that she remains a valued and respected member of the community. understand the importance of mathematics in everyday life.



This unit of work is currently in its preliminary stages and as a result we would greatly appreciate any feedback from you and your students as you work through it. We would be interested to know if there are certain aspects of the lesson that you feel could be improved. We thank you again for taking the time to inform your students about this social issue.



CURRICULUM LINKS

This lesson guide is linked to Ontario's Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes for Grades 7 and 8 in the subject areas of Language (Oral, Writing, Reading and Media), Mathematics (Number Sense and Numerations/Budgeting) and Health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health). Specifically, this unit will give students in Grades 7 and 8 an opportunity to explore issues surrounding homelessness and work collaboratively to plan and implement a fundraising project. They will also look critically at the presentation of key community issues in the media and look at media technique to create persuasive text. Throughout the unit, students will also focus on skills associated with researching, organizing, planning, editing and drafting a final piece of work. The unit also allows for opportunities for self-reflection and assessment of their own learning throughout this process. Specific curriculum expectations will be outlined at the beginning of each lesson.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson guide is intended to provide information and materials that will allow students to:

- list some major causes of homelessness
- separate some myths about people who are homeless from the facts
- identify some challenges that people who are homeless face in their daily lives
- understand some of the solutions to homelessness
- discuss what they have learned about homelessness with their families and friends
- understand the difficulty surrounding affordable housing in their community
- raise funds to create a Shoebox for a woman in need



BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Homelessness is an epidemic that is spreading across Canada, affecting both urban cities and rural populations. Nearly 35,000 Canadians are homeless on a given night and nearly 250,000 people experience homelessness in a given year. That breaks down to approximately 5,000 people unsheltered, 180,000 people staying in emergency shelters and only 50,000 provisionally accommodated. (The majority of statistics and information in this section comes from www.homelesshub.ca)

WHY ARE PEOPLE HOMELESS?

Everyone who is homeless has their own story, but it is usually linked to one or more of the following three causes:

1. They don't have enough income and therefore do not have enough money to pay for the basic necessities of life. Even when a predictable source of income from either social assistance or employment is available, the funds are often insufficient to pay for housing.
2. They can't find affordable housing. Affordable housing is considered housing that costs a reasonable amount compared to a person's income. A widely accepted measure of affordability is housing that does not cost more than 30% of the pre-tax income of someone earning a modest income. In Metro Toronto, the average rental cost for a one bedroom apartment is more than \$1,650 per month. With minimum wage being \$11.25 that's only \$1800 per month before taxes.
3. They don't have access to healthcare or social support services. Support services are the health and social services that some people need in order to find and keep housing. Support services can include drug and alcohol treatment, mental health services, counselling, and assistance with daily living.



WHY ARE WOMEN PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE?

2013 figures indicate that out of more than 200,000 people using emergency shelters and temporary housing annually, roughly half are women and girls: 31% are women in shelters for abused women; 18% are women in homeless shelters and 5% are young women, age 16-24, using homeless shelters. (www.ywca.ca) Female, lone-parent families are one of the demographics facing the highest rate of poverty in Canada and women face a unique set of challenges with regards to homelessness.

Housing and supports must be accessible to mothers. The presence of children can make it difficult for a woman to take any accommodation that comes available in their price bracket. There are many additional factors that they need to consider (safety, accessibility to schools, grocery stores, bus routes etc). Mothers with children who struggle with addictions may avoid entering drug treatment or emergency shelters for fear that their children will be removed from their care.

Women are more vulnerable to hidden homelessness. The Homelessness Hub's 2014 report on homelessness in Canada describes hidden homelessness as: "staying with a violent partner because she can't afford to leave; being bound to a pimp or a dealer; couch-surfing from one relative to another; or living in unhygienic and unsafe buildings and/or overcrowded conditions." This means women's struggle to gain and maintain housing is often not visible.

Women are most often homeless as the result of some form of abuse. In 2010, 71% of women staying in shelters across Canada reported abuse as their reason for seeking refuge. For many women, concerns for safety continue while homeless. It has been reported that as many as 91% of homeless women in Canada have experienced assault in their lifetime.

Multiple identities. Women of colour, in particular Black and Indigenous women, face sexism which intersects with racism, classism, and colonialism, resulting in a high risk of homelessness. This risk is again increased by refugee or immigration status.

"Women and girls end up in shelters for so many different reasons: some have fled an abusive situation, some are living with mental illness or addiction, and others have recently landed in Canada. Regardless of circumstance, our mission is to bring smiles to the faces of as many women as we can during an otherwise lonely time."

Lesley Hendry,
Executive Director



SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness costs the Canadian economy \$7 billion annually which includes the costs of emergency shelters, social services, health care and corrections. Over the past 25 years, Canada's population has increased by almost 30% but annual national investment in housing has decreased by over 46%. Just as we identified that there are three major reasons that people become homeless, there are three main solutions as well.

1. Ensuring people have enough income to pay for their basic needs.
2. Ensuring there are enough affordable places available for people to live.
3. Ensuring that people who need help managing their health and daily living needs have access to those services.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

Language plays an important role in shaping how we think about things and helps to form our opinions. How people think about things changes what they believe should be done about them. Some phrases or words that were used to talk about homelessness in the past are now considered outdated, even offensive. Many of these older phrases served to perpetuate stigmas and misconceptions. To help shift towards more supportive and respectful views we ask that you think critically about using supportive and respectful language regarding homelessness. Prioritize the person over any affiliated condition or circumstance. Avoid using terms that associate a person's condition or circumstance with his or her primary identity, they are not the disease or circumstance that they are living with. For example, homelessness is a temporary circumstance, not a permanent identity or state.

Use "people first" language:

Instead of homeless person/street person use **person experiencing homelessness**.

Instead of addict or substance abuser use **person with problematic substance use**.

Instead of the mentally ill use **person with a mental health issue**.

Instead of disable person use **person with a disability**.

Instead of high-risk person use **person in a high-risk situation**.