

HANNAH HELPS THE HOMELESS

*Family
Discussion
Guide*

McKenzie Connelly

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello! I am McKenzie Connelly, author of *Hannah Helps the Homeless*, I am so glad you enjoyed my book and are interested in getting more involved with helping people experiencing homeless as a family. This Family Discussion Guide will dive further into the topic of familial homelessness in the United States, provides discussion questions for you to explore, and resources to serve as a starting place for where you can serve or donate.

More than 2.5 million American children experience homelessness each year, and more than 5% of all children under the age of 6 will experience homelessness at some point in their lifetime. There is no town that remains untouched by the Housing Crisis, and no city that has not seen severe poverty and homelessness. I wrote *Hannah Helps the Homeless* because I noticed a lack of books available for children that explains homelessness with sufficient detail. I hope you and your family were able to learn that the homeless are not scary, but they are our friends, our neighbors; they are truly **just like us**.

I hope your family enjoys this discussion guide and thank you so much for taking the first steps towards supporting our homeless population.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- **Homeless people choose to be homeless** - MYTH; Most homeless people are situationally homeless due to a traumatic experience such as losing their job, natural disaster, or fleeing domestic violence.
- **Less than half of homeless people suffer from substance abuse** - TRUTH; Approximately 38% of homeless individuals suffer from substance abuse and less than 30% have an alcohol dependency.
- **More than 5% of children under the age of 6 are or will be homeless** - TRUTH; 1 in 19 children under the age of 6 will experience homelessness
- **The average age of a homeless person is 21 years old** - MYTH; The Chapman Partnership Homeless Service found the average age of a homeless person in the United States is only 11 years old as of 2015.
- **Many homeless people have criminal records** - TRUTH; Many of the activities chronic homeless people **must** do to survive are criminalized thus resulting in criminal charges (sleeping outside, loitering, or trespassing).
- **30% of the homeless population are families with children** - TRUTH; A 2019 study found 30% of the American homeless population is families with children - around 170,000 people.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- **Nearly all homeless people don't have jobs** - MYTH; Many homeless people (who are old enough to work) DO have jobs, they just do not make enough money to pay rent
- **If a person has clean clothes or a phone, then they cannot be homeless** - MYTH; A phone is one of the most necessary tools in today's society. It is almost impossible to keep a job without one. Also, remember in the story, Harry did not "look" homeless, but that did not mean he wasn't. This is why it is so important to be kind to everyone you meet because you never know what is going on outside of school.
- **The United States has the highest number of homeless people among industrialized countries** - TRUTH ; According to a 2015 study by The Bassuk Center on Homeless and Vulnerable Children & Youth there are more than 500,000 homeless children in the United States - the most of any industrialized country.
- **Unaccompanied children are not a significant portion of the homeless population** -MYTH; Around 700,000 unaccompanied minors experience homelessness each year, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Have we ever seen people sleeping outside?**
 - What did we think when we saw that?
 - Has our perception of people experiencing homelessness changed since reading *Hannah Helps the Homeless*?
 - What are some things we can do as a family to help homeless families we may see outside?
- **What does it mean to be homeless?**
 - Do we know anyone who may have ever been homeless?
 - Remember this includes "doubling up" or staying at a motel/hotel according to the US Department of Education
 - Did you know they were homeless at the time?
 - Should we treat people any differently if we know that they are homeless?
 - What should we do if one of our friends becomes homeless?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **What is the difference between chronic and situational homeless?**
 - How do we prevent people who are experiencing situational homelessness from becoming chronically homeless?
 - What are some things you think people who are experiencing homelessness may want or need?
 - *For younger kids: What is the difference between a want and a need?*
- **What is an eviction?**
 - What are some things that might be affected in our lives if we were evicted? (sports, extra-curricular activities, storage issues, relationships, etc.)
- **What is the percentage of poverty in our school? In our school district?**
 - Do you think there might be homeless students at your school? (Private schools also often have homeless students!)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **What parts of school might make it a favorite place for homeless students?**
 - What is your favorite part about school?
- **Do we volunteer for any community groups or charities?**
 - How can we get involved with helping the homeless?
 - Could our community group do a special project to help?
- **What did Hannah do with her Mommy to volunteer for people experiencing homelessness in Baton Rouge?**
 - Is there a community center or soup kitchen near us?
 - What kind of services does the nearest soup kitchen or community center provide?
 - *Look this up, it's usually more than you think!*
- **What is a donation?**
 - Have we ever donated anything?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If we held a donation drive, what are some of the items we think might be helpful for people experiencing homelessness?
 - *Check this list with a leading national or local homeless charity. Some items might be discouraged, like hand sanitizer or products containing peanuts!*
- **What did we learn from reading *Hannah Helps the Homeless*?**
 - How could we teach this new information to other people?
 - What do we want to do to get involved with homelessness relief?
 - *Hint: There are several pages on "How to Get Involved" adapted from the National Coalition for the Homeless and Resources for your family to create a plan to get involved!*

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- The **National Coalition for the Homeless** provides a helpful guide for "How YOU Can Help End Homelessness" through the Acronym **CARE**-
 - **Contribute**
 - **Advocate**
 - **Reach Out**
 - **Educate**
- **Contribute**- Contribute goods and services, money, or food through food drives as some simple, easy ways to give back to the homeless in your community.
 - **Clean Clothing** - especially business professional clothes for job interviews
 - **Services** - Transportation, Copying, Printing, Electrical Work, Plumbing, Employment Training or Scouting, etc.
 - **Household Goods and Computers**
 - **Homeless "Survival Bags"** - These can include things like a toothbrush, toothpaste, a few bottles of water, a snack (without peanuts to be careful of allergies), soap, socks, and a washcloth are all great! Check out @mckenzie.connolly on Instagram to see a video tutorial on how to pack these.
 - **Phone Services** - Sponsor long-distance phone calls
 - **Raise funds for a Homelessness Charity** - This allows the charities working to meet the needs of the homeless in your area to use the funds according to their discretion.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- **Advocate** -This includes lobbying for legislative changes on the federal, state, and local level. But, for most families this just means making small changes to change your behaviors and attitudes towards homeless children and families.
 - **Stop** - Stop saying words like "hobo," "bum," or dehumanizing terms when referring to people experiencing homelessness
 - **Look**- Look at the story in *Hannah Helps the Homeless*, we know that homelessness can happen to anyone -even our friends and even in "nice" neighborhoods.
 - **Listen** - Listen to the people experiencing homelessness when you encounter them either out volunteering or when you run into them in town. If you are unable to go volunteer in person as a family, then try finding good media online that allows for homeless individuals to tell their stories. Listen to those stories and reflect as a family.
- **Reach Out** - Go out and directly volunteer! This is one of the best ways to not only change attitudes about homelessness (be sure to invite your friends and other family members to come volunteer with you!), but it can also be some of the most impactful work you can do.
 - **Volunteer at a local shelter or with a family-focused organization like Family Promise**
 - **Help build homes** through organizations like Habitat for Humanity
 - **Tutor or Mentor** children staying in your local shelter

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- **Educate** - You've taken a great first step in reading *Hannah Helps the Homeless* and taken a **really great** second step by working through this Family Discussion Guide! Now, look into how you can further your education into homelessness relief.
 - **Learn** - Research more information about the realities and root causes of homelessness in your area. The National Coalition for the Homeless provides helpful "Fact Sheets" that are written like high-level academic papers (don't worry Mom and Dad, they're relatively easy to break down into simpler parts) and cover basic information as well as more "special topics" if you're interested in learning more about a specific area of homelessness like education and homelessness, Homeless Families & Children, as well as additional lesson plans and "Fact Sheets" broken down by grade level.
 - **Organize** - "Organize a "Faces of Homelessness" panel. Through NCH's "Faces of Homelessness" panel presentations, the voices and faces of those who have experienced homelessness personalize the issue, dispel stereotypes, inspire involvement, and serve as a training, skill building, and empowerment tool for those who have experienced homelessness." To organize a "panel" in your community visit nationalhomeless.org for help!
- National Coalition of the Homeless
 - **Invite** - You can also invite the author of *Hannah Helps the Homeless* to speak at your community event or school to give a fun, family-oriented presentation. Email: mckenzie.connelly@icloud.com

RESOURCES

- **National Coalition for the Homeless** - www.nationalhomeless.org
- **Family Promise** - www.familypromise.org
- **The Salvation Army** - www.salvationarmyusa.org
- **Habitat for Humanity** - www.habitat.org
- **National Alliance to End Homelessness** - www.endhomelessness.org
- **National Homelessness Law Center** - www.homelesslaw.org
- **Feeding America** - www.feedingamerica.org
- **United Way** - www.unitedway.org
- **Volunteers of America** - www.voa.org
- **Be sure to check out LOCAL organizations!** There are some smaller groups doing AMAZING work around the country that need as much help as they can get!
 - Some locations with HousingFirst groups:
 - Warren Village - Denver, CO
 - Carpenter's Shelter - Northern Virginia
 - Mobile Loaves & Fishes - Austin, TX
 - CommonBond Communities - Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa
 - Beyond Housing - St. Louis, MO
 - Downtown Emergency Service Center - Seattle, WA
 - New Path Community Housing - Boise, ID
 - Step Up - Southern CA, GA, FL, & TN