

“Through DrawBridge the children can have a totally pure experience. They won’t be judged, and there is no right or wrong way to create art. With DrawBridge, kids are free to be children and are treated with respect.”
– DrawBridge parent

Facts About Homelessness

Homeless Families with Children

There is a common misconception that homelessness is an issue that only pertains to single men and women, but in reality there are 2.5 million children in the U.S. who experienced homelessness in 2013, an increase of 8% over the previous year (*Newsweek*). Homelessness is a devastating experience for families. It disrupts virtually every aspect of family life, damaging the physical and emotional health of family members, interfering with children's education and development, and frequently resulting in the separation of family members.

One of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children. Recent evidence illustrates that homelessness among families is increasing. Nearly 270,000 students experienced homelessness in California, representing 21% of the homeless students in the U.S. (*U.S. Dept. of Education*).

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

- Low wages and unstable employment
- Decline in public assistance
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of affordable health care
- Poverty
- Domestic violence
- Mental illness
- Addiction disorders

How Many of the Homeless are Children? What Are the Effects?

- California has the largest population of homeless students in the country and twice the rate of homeless students as the national average (CA has 4% and the U.S. has 2%) (*kidsdata.org*).

- Right now there are more homeless children in the United States than at any other time since the Great Depression.
- Homeless children are sick and hungry twice as often as non-homeless children (*Bay Area Foundation to End Homelessness*).
- Nearly 70% of homeless children suffer from chronic illness. Almost 50% have emotional problems such as anxiety and depression (*Better Homes Fund-Kellogg Foundation*).
- Homeless children are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school, and are significantly less likely to finish high school. (*Institute for Children and Poverty*).

Homeless children are severely impacted by circumstances beyond their control. They share family concerns for survival, and are often prematurely forced to assume adult responsibilities, cutting short the developmental experiences inherent in childhood. They have severe unmet emotional needs and commonly experience loss, anger and depression.

Shelter Boy Video

Please watch this news clip about a boy struggling with the harsh reality of suddenly being homeless. [SHELTER BOY ON YOUTUBE](#)

In response to this video please do a drawing using the art materials you prefer. Express any thoughts or feelings it brought up for you. While reflecting on the film please ask yourself: what are my thoughts on homelessness and homeless children?

Issues and Feelings Shared by Homeless Children (As observed by DrawBridge Staff)

1. Fear, anger, extreme, isolation, shame, stress, guilt and anxiety
2. A need to take care of parents and younger siblings
3. A need to present a strong and "normal" image
4. Issues of survival including obtaining food and clothing
5. Lack of availability of personal space (for instance, to do homework)
6. Quality of wanting to be invisible. They become very quiet so that no one approaches them
7. Tendency to hoard art supplies that stems from lack of trust that they will see them again
8. Difficulty in trusting adults because their primary caretakers may have proven incapable of providing the very basics
9. Low self-esteem (a sense of lack of deserving)
10. A sense of humiliation and lack of dignity
11. Lack of restful, uninterrupted sleep
12. Absence of appropriate facility for maintaining personal hygiene, including washing of clothes and bathing
13. Lack of stylish clothes (depending on hand-outs)

14. Inability to maintain healthy friendships with children outside of the shelter
15. Uncomfortable with discussing their home situations with school peers
16. Becoming very private
17. Homeless children have lost almost everything, including: pets, personal items, neighborhood play areas, friends, teachers and a routine that helped them feel safe
18. Feelings of being numb – (emotionally)
19. They are traumatized; experience fight or flight tendencies (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders)
20. Feelings of being responsible; their fault for being homeless
21. Sensitive to being out of control and having no choices in their lives
22. Oversensitivity to loud noises, closed spaces, and being touched
23. Distrust that their art will be kept safely and that adults will bring art supplies that they have asked for in their art groups

How DrawBridge Mitigates the Destructive Effects of Homelessness on Children

Art and Expression:

Art is a bridge to self-expression and to a healthy relationship with an adult.

"A child can, in art, develop autonomy and independence, taking responsibility for both process and product. They can learn to choose, to make, to act, to revise decisions, to appraise and evaluate, and to learn from past experiences. In art a child can experiment symbolically, may try out, in both process and product, feelings and ideas that may eventually become possible in reality. They can discover, develop and define their uniqueness, creating in and through their art a sense of themselves as special. They can experience the pleasure of an aesthetically fine product, the joy of sharing it with a loved one, the pride in affirmation of another." –Judith Aron Rubin

Clarity of Purpose:

Our highly skilled Facilitators and Volunteers show up consistently and form healthy relationships with the children, while consciously seeking to achieve the following goals in specific response to the issues many homeless children face:

- Foster stability in the lives of the children
- Deepen their sense of trust
- Help them develop a sense of group cohesiveness
- Give them opportunities to be a valuable part of a team
- Help children develop compassion, self-discipline, and a sense of self-worth

Consistency:

Consistently showing up and being present for a homeless child can be monumental for them in their world. At first the children may not express how much they like having you in the art group. But as soon as you miss a group they will notice and want to know why you were not there. Being consistent and dependable is vital to building the relationships with children that are the cornerstone of DrawBridge's effectiveness. The relationships you develop with the children of DrawBridge will also be your reward for faithfully showing up.