IS THERE A PATTERN?

Homelessness and Temporary Shelters in NYC
New York City must, by court order, provide temporary shelter to every person who asks. Currently, NYC spends about $1.8 billion a year on shelters, apartments, hotel rooms, and programs.

What is homelessness?
How does the shelter system work?
How does homelessness impact the City?
What is the City’s responsibility?

In the spring of 2019, CUP collaborated with Teaching Artist Gabriella Coll and public high school students at Knowledge and Power Preparatory Academy (KAPPA) International High School in the Bronx to dig deep into the issue of homelessness. To investigate, students wove textiles to depict the cycle of homelessness, surveyed community members, visited a shelter, and interviewed key stakeholders working on the issue. This booklet is a guide to what students learned about homelessness in NYC and their ideas for shaping a different future.
What is homelessness?

“You have street homeless, you have shelter homeless, and you have people that are ‘housing insecure’ because your name is not on a lease and technically you are homeless.”

– Jermain Abdullah, Organizer, Picture the Homeless

“The state of homelessness in NYC is currently at record levels. We are experiencing the worst homelessness crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.”

– Jacquelyn Simone, Policy Analyst, Coalition for the Homeless

“Homelessness is not just the obvious stuff like seeing someone on the train. It’s people couch surfing, people who are going from place to place every night. Maybe they do have a roof over their head but it’s not theirs.”

– John Sentigar, Director of Development and Communications, Covenant House

Facts about Homelessness in NYC (2018)

63,000
Number of homeless New Yorkers sleeping in shelters every night

23,000
Number of New York children sleeping in shelters every night

114,659
Number of NYC public school students that lived in temporary housing during the 2017-2018 school year
How do people become homeless?

There are many reasons why people become homeless. However, many experts agree that the lack of affordable housing is a major underlying cause.

“We know that the primary drivers of homelessness are eviction, domestic violence ... severely overcrowded housing, or job loss. Those are all contributing factors. For a lot of people it’s that they have one shock and that causes them to fall behind on their rent and lose their housing.”

– Jacquelyn Simone

“We were in the system because of Hurricane Sandy... We really need a safety net for those that come on hard times... There should be a mechanism to pick people up. You shouldn’t have to be in the system for six years.”

– Charmel Lucas, Organizer, Picture the Homeless

“The main driver of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. Simply put, the gap between incomes and rents has grown, and we see that there’s not really any neighborhood in NYC with a sufficient supply of affordable housing.”

– Jacquelyn Simone

“[The City] says it’s a homeless crisis. But it’s not a homeless crisis. It’s a housing crisis.”

– Jermain Abdullah
Black and Latinx People
Black and Latinx New Yorkers are disproportionately affected by homelessness.

LGBTQ Youth
“Being LGBTQ makes you 120% more likely to be a homeless young person than people who do not identify as LGBTQ. In fact, many of the youth that stay at [Covenant House] identify as LGBTQ. [Over] 40% of our entire homeless youth population [are LGBTQ].”
— John Sentigar

Who is most at risk?
People who face multiple forms of discrimination are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Formerly Incarcerated People
“[Formerly incarcerated people] come home and if they live in an [area] with a high crime rate, their parole officer [may] tell them they cannot live at that residence even though they have nowhere else to go.”
— Jermain Abdullah

Low Income Individuals
“If you are living paycheck to paycheck, at any time you can become homeless again... It’s more than getting a job – it’s about getting a decent job.”
— Jermain Abdullah
Who is in charge of the shelter system?

MAYOR
“The Mayor oversees City agencies and also sets the policy direction for the city.”

DHS & DSS
“City agencies oversee the shelter system, specifically the Department of Homeless Services and the Department of Social Services.”

CITY COUNCIL
“City council members have constituents that are coming to them affected by homelessness or other constituents that might be saying they don’t want shelters in their neighborhood.”

NON-PROFITS
“Some shelters are run directly by the City agency, DHS, and then there are other shelters that contract with a non-profit provider.”

$364 million
Amount the City spent to house homeless New Yorkers in commercial hotels in 2016

$1.62 billion
The 2018 budget for the Department of Homeless Services
Encounters with the Shelter System

“If you’re a homeless [adult] you go to an intake center... You get placed where there’s an available bed. And that could mean that if you have a job in the Bronx where you’re from [but] you’re placed in a shelter in Far Rockaway.”

— John Sentigar

“There is] the right to shelter for homeless people in New York City... The City can’t turn you away if the shelter is full – they have to find a shelter bed for you.”

— Jacquelyn Simone

Spotlight: The Bowery Mission

In Spring 2019, students met with James Macklin, Director of Outreach for The Bowery Mission.

Students reflected on their conversation with James and created artwork in order to process their experience.

They toured the facility and met the staff.

James Macklin
Students took to the streets of the Bronx to survey the community on the state of homelessness in NYC.

56% of people surveyed believe NYC should spend money on building permanent housing for the homeless.
90% of people surveyed believe the City is not doing enough to help people experiencing homelessness.

Surveys

Students studied the data they collected and used it to create infographic designs.
To process and empathize with the topic of homelessness, students created a collaborative weaving in which they **Weaved with Intention** — a method in which materials and techniques are mindfully chosen in order to communicate complex emotions through textile art.

Students worked in groups to select a theme that they associated with the concept of home.
Using fabric, yarn, paper, and found objects, groups chose colors, textures, and patterns to represent their ideas through weaving.

Every design decision was intentional and helped convey a certain meaning.

Students collaboratively decided on how to connect their work based on the way their themes relate to one another.
Create Community Land Trusts

“One [solution] is something called a ‘Community Land Trust.’ The city owns a lot of property. Some of these buildings have been vacant for 50 years or more. If this land is given to a nonprofit they can come and build housing and the rents stay low for the people that need it.”

– Jermain Abdullah

View Housing as a Human Right

“We [need to] stop thinking about housing as a commodity or as a source of revenue and ... start thinking about it as a fundamental human right.”

– Jacquelyn Simone

Create More Affordable Housing

“There needs to be more of a push on the government level, on the city and state level, to mandate that affordable housing be created. Truly affordable housing meaning you pay [up to] 30% of whatever your income is and you get to live in a clean, safe apartment that fits you and your family[].”

– John Sentiger
be different?

**Rehab Vacant Buildings**

“Turn [vacant buildings] into housing and also bring in jobs for homeless folks [such as] electricians, plumbers, carpenters.”

— Charmel Lucas

**Provide Permanent Housing for all People**

“We really need to be thinking past shelter. We need to be thinking about how do we move people out of shelters faster, so that we don’t have a system that’s bursting at the seams and how do we move those people into permanent housing.”

— Jacquelyn Simone

**Center Homeless People**

“Speak to the people [who experience homelessness] before you make decisions for us. We are in the struggle... We know what we want. We know what we need.”

— Seth Stewart, Organizer, Picture the Homeless
“I would place more money into creating liveable, affordable homes.”
- Praisia Ortiz, Student

“Homelessness is a terrible cycle that people struggle to get out of.”
- Brianna Douglas, Student

“[In my opinion] the government isn't doing much to help solve homelessness.”
- Amanda Rapha, Student

“People are suffering from being in the shelter system. More action needs to be taken.”
- Hildaleez Pizzini, Student

What do
"Homelessness is perpetual and has many root causes."
– Jaylyn Brown, Student

"NYC’s temporary shelter system is only a temporary solution with limited beds and no helpful options to homeless people after they leave the shelter."
– Brandon Downer, Student

"I learned that homelessness has been an enduring issue for over 50 years and has gotten worse in the last 10."
– Nasser Troché, Student

"I would change things by giving people jobs so they could contribute to their community. If the money stays in the community, people will thrive."
– Jaime Fowler, Student
The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities.

This project is one of CUP’s Urban Investigations – project based afterschool programs in which high school students explore fundamental questions about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP and Teaching Artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of arts and social justice. To learn more about CUP, visit welcometoCUP.org.

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