

# Homelessness should have a human face...



Sooner or later someone you encounter in your office, classroom, clinic or workplace will be at risk of homelessness.

In that moment, you can make the difference between a temporary crisis and a human tragedy.

You know their stories: management sweeps, relationship breakdowns, young people in conflict or fleeing abuse, addiction, illness, emotional distress ...

Today, the spiral from stability to distress can start in the space of a five-minute meeting.

Here are some facts that can help you. No one needs to feel helpless in the face of homelessness. Often, all it takes is knowing who to call.

As someone who works with people, your network already includes a wide range of resources that can help you prevent another family or individual from hitting the streets. And, your network can be expanded.

- TAKE the challenge.
- COMMIT to finding the people with the resources your residents, clients, patients, students or employees need to prevent their own homelessness.
- LEARN about the issue.
- TALK with your colleagues.
- SPREAD the word.
- GET INVOLVED TODAY!

Chances are that organizations in your community are helping people face the issue of homelessness with human solutions that really work.

Why not join them?  
Short of time this year?

Your donation to Raising the Roof supports community-based programs with the goal of finding long-term solutions for Canada's homeless.

Take homelessness personally.  
Your support makes a difference.



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**J**n the last decade, homelessness has escalated dramatically. The reasons are complex, but high unemployment levels play a significant role. Add these disturbing statistics to a labour market that's shifting from industrial work to service- and knowledge-based business, and factor in restrained government spending. You get a formula for marginalizing whole sectors of the population. The truth is that, without employment income, most Canadians are at risk of homelessness.

As jobs have become less secure, more and more of society's work is performed by consultants, part-timers and shift workers. Secure housing is no longer an expected part of adult life; for many it is an increasingly unrealistic dream.

Raising the Roof 's website ([www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org)) offers 25 examples illustrating how community-based and market-based employers contribute to creating more skilled workers, training them, and helping individuals who are at risk gain and maintain secure jobs. You will find details on the goals, funding and delivery agencies of these innovative practices, along with more sources of information, including a library of the best print and electronic information sources on employers' imaginative solutions for homelessness prevention.

*understand the issue*

*know and watch for the warning signs*

**W**hen it comes to homelessness, there is no single test to determine who is "at risk". Whether you're providing workplace training, counseling or recruiting, you know how many of your employees are at risk of homelessness. But people won't want to readily volunteer information about private issues – past or threatened job loss, health problems, poverty, family conflict, substance abuse, domestic violence or abuse – for fear you'll question their employability. Yet, in the course of your conversations, you're bound to encounter these realities.

Watch for these warning signs: no fixed address or phone number, poor performance or attendance, lack of stable employment history, poor or uneven credit ratings, past experiences with the criminal justice system, and unstable or low income. You can make a difference by offering training, counseling and jobs, and by referring people to appropriate local agencies to get other assistance. Remember, once people are homeless, their ability to find employment plummets and the effort required to reconnect them to the labour market increases astronomically.

You can help. Provide appropriate training and employment opportunities. Partner with other organizations to develop creative approaches that link skills training with real employment opportunities. Don't assume that poor people or people emerging from personal crisis can't perform well. Finally, your voice can have a powerful impact. Become an advocate for people at risk of homelessness in your community.

## connect with or create the homelessness prevention team in your community

**N**o one can prevent homelessness alone. Growing awareness of the relationship between homelessness, and the need for employment, skills training and counseling has created networks of service providers coming together to shape an effective community response – from employment and education services, to private businesses and landlords, to service, financial and housing groups, to government and policy people, to city planners.

If no such group exists in your community, consider taking the lead to form your own network. Initiate discussions on the impact of homelessness, and on how you can expand the supply of skilled labour, job training and job opportunities in your community – preventing homelessness at the same time. Your community's legal aid, health and social services agencies are valuable support resources. Take steps today so you'll know who to call when you need solutions at your workplace.

Organize to research, create and support homelessness prevention strategies. Share your strategies and the lessons learned widely to help everyone act together to prevent homelessness. Sometimes your collective work will lead to innovative community practices, like those available on the Raising the Roof website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org). (You'll find many ideas here for reference and inspiration.)

**E**mployment trainers, counselors and employers know the human costs of rising unemployment and rising homelessness. The costs for communities are high, too. Ending homelessness takes more than just turning out skilled individuals or recruiting and maintaining the workers you need. Ultimately, it's about creating viable communities. That's why trainers and employers are speaking out. Write, discuss the issue and make your voice heard. Tell your elected officials what you see and what you want done about it. Become an advocate for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Support the development, funding and protection of affordable housing in your community. Your commitment lends credibility to the arguments for training, counseling and employment development programs. Actively support programs and initiatives in other sectors aimed at preventing the root causes of homelessness – locally, provincially and federally.

you know homelessness has a major impact on your community  
make sure others know, too

