

# 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.



#200-263 Eglinton Ave. West  
Toronto (ON) M4R 1B1  
tel: 416.481.1838  
fax: 416.481.1872  
email: [info@raisingtheroof.org](mailto:info@raisingtheroof.org)  
[www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org)  
Charitable #139744569RR0001

**H**omelessness is often a cause and an effect of interactions with the criminal justice system. For some, being homeless leads to criminal activity; for others, criminal activity leads to unemployment and/or incarceration, and ultimately homelessness. Addressing homelessness is a key crime prevention strategy in any healthy community.

Raising the Roof's website ([www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org)) offers more than 25 innovative examples of how criminal justice professionals have prevented homelessness in their communities.

You'll 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 legal and criminal justice systems and 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 work in a legal clinic, private practice, courtroom, penal institution, or as a parole officer, police officer or public trustee, the people you deal with may be reluctant to volunteer information about issues like job loss, chronic health problems, poverty, family conflict, substance abuse, eviction, domestic violence and other trauma – even if one of these has triggered your contact. If you suspect these risk factors may apply, please ask discreetly about them.

Watch for these warning signs: no fixed address or phone number, extremely low income, visible health problems or disability, no secure income, and past experiences with the criminal justice system. Those seeking aid with questions around evictions, social assistance appeals, or stabilizing their housing are more obviously at risk of homelessness. Once people are homeless, their need for administrative assistance grows. Imagine, for example, the difficulty of accessing health care without a fixed address, let alone secure employment or a stable place to live.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable: youth with difficult family relationships; newcomers who've just moved to the community with no secure housing or network of family and friends; and those who've recently been in long-term health care facilities, half-way houses, foster care, or served time.

You can help. Make inquiries about housing status as part of your routine interview. Learn to recognize the cues. Above all, become an advocate for your client and for others 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 – neither legal practitioners nor individuals at risk. Growing awareness of the cause-and-effect relationship between homelessness and legal intervention has resulted in the creation of networks of service providers coming together to shape a 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 such a group does not exist in your community, consider taking the lead to form your own network. Talk to peers in legal clinics and firms known for handling administrative law cases. Your community's legal aid, community health, and social services agencies will be valuable resources, bringing knowledge of available supports from health and social services. Taking steps now will make it easy to know who to call when you need solutions for your clients.

Collectively, you can research, create and support existing homelessness prevention strategies in your community. Ensure that strategies tried in your community and the lessons learned are shared widely to help everyone work together to prevent homelessness among your clients. 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 lots of ideas here for reference and inspiration.)

**W**hen you represent people searching for legal redress or working on re-integrating into the community after incarceration, be mindful of rising homelessness. Canadians who have been assisted by alternative dispute resolution, mediation or diversion from criminal justice systems have rebuilt stability more easily than is possible after incarceration. People given appropriate support during reintegration are more likely to end up with stable housing and secure incomes.

Your opinions matter. Write, speak out and 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. Your voice lends credibility to the arguments for adequate income and social supports, and for policies and programs which support the development, funding and protection of affordable housing. Actively support legal programs and initiatives in other sectors that can prevent the root causes of homelessness – locally, provincially and federally.

you know homelessness is a major legal issue  
make sure others know, too

