

Take Action: Casting Light on Youth Homelessness in Fredericton, NB

By: Kristy Leslie and Sheena Pick

When faced with an issue, one which moves you to the point of action, it's best to adopt a set of steps to maintain momentum and encourage forward movement. Such steps are found in "Take Action – Make a Difference", a handbook on engaging in a cause.'

Identify Your Concern

There exists, in our own city of Fredericton, an entire demographic of youth that are stuck in limbo. These youth, who cannot go home for myriad reasons, are too young for social assistance, but too old for foster care. They have few options and fewer avenues of help.

The two of us, individually, had experiences that led us to this topic. Here are our stories:

Sheena – "One day, I was in the Methods and Resource department at my school and I saw a girl who was walking home in flip flops, a thin t-shirt and shorts. Knowing that it was a brisk, fall day, I asked the M&R teacher if the girl had a jacket. I was saddened to find out that she didn't because she likely gave it to one of her many brothers and sisters. This girl took care of her siblings, but who takes care of her?"

Kristy – "I was working with another teacher one day and we were talking about the foster care system in New Brunswick. She revealed to me that when the children turn 16, they are technically no longer supported by the province's foster care system. At the end of this, they might have to leave their foster home and are left to find a home by themselves. I knew something had to be done."

As pre-service teachers, we recognize that there is a group of youth that carry a heavier burden than their form can bear. They must find their own homes, raise their own family and often discard other needs in the process. We wanted to help these children in limbo, especially since many of these children cease going to school as a sacrifice.

Our hope was to raise awareness for youth homelessness in Fredericton, as many people who live here are not aware that there are children who do not have homes, who live under the Westmorland Bridge.

Upon finding that there is a home for these at risk youth, a home for girls called Chrysalis House; we decided that we needed to raise awareness for a similar house for boys.

Lastly, we hoped to help raise regular funds for Chrysalis House so that they could continue to help girls in that critical age group of 16-19 so that they might be given a chance to do what they want to do.

Research Your Concern

Our next step was to find out more information about Youth Homelessness and how it affects the students we teach.

According to the Toronto anti-homelessness campaign Raising the Roof (www.raisingtheroof.org), approximately **one-third of Canada's homeless persons are youth between the ages of 16-24**. Fredericton is certainly not an exception from this statistic. Because of the smaller population in Fredericton, studies of Canada-wide homeless often focus on Halifax or St. John's as the East Coast representation. Studies done in Fredericton on homelessness tends to group youth and adult homelessness together. The fact is that there are Fredericton youth who have known what it is like to spend a night under the bridge, and their stories are not being told.

Much of what we know about youth homelessness is obtained from other sources such as American or other Canadian sources.

Studies in the United States state that family breakdown, poverty and alienation are often causes of youth homelessness.¹ Once on their own, the youth find it difficult to maintain their studies at school. A report from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty from 2001 stated that **as many as 54% of Homeless Youth in America have a learning disability or impairment to their learning**.² Resources for these children will not be found on the streets. A report from the National Secretariat on Homelessness of the Government of Canada outlined the issues that perpetuate Youth Homelessness. They stated that youth that are homeless require counseling for the reasons why they became homeless; they need a sense of home, access to training on life skills and stability in order to further their education or work.³ Of the 40 youth interviewed for the study **as little as one-fifth had completed High School**. The reasons they cited included a lack of connection to the curriculum, in that they did not see the relevance on how this would help them in life, being ostracized by their peers for being homeless, truancy issues because of incarceration or having to miss school because of a rough night. A few of the youth who were interviewed described that they had learning disabilities or impairments

¹ Karabanow, J., Hughes, J., Ticknor, J., Kidd, S., & Patterson, D. (2010). Economics of Being Young and Poor: How Homeless Youth Survive in Neo-liberal Times. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 37 (4), 39-63.

² (2001). *Applying Rehabilitation Act Section 504 to the Education of Homeless Children and Youth*. National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

³ Serge, L., Eberle, M., Goldberg, M., Sullivan, S., & Dudding, P. (2002). *Pilot Study: The Child Welfare System and Homelessness Among Canadian Youth*. National Secretariat on Homelessness of the Government of Canada.

that required extra help and that they just were not going to get it on the streets. It was a sacrifice; work to survive or struggle to get an education.

All of the reports agreed that a transition home for the youth that were no longer able to benefit from the child social programs and were too young for the adult social programs was necessary in order to attend to the problem.



Find Out Who Supports You

The following are the major organizations in Canada that raise awareness for Youth Homelessness:

- Raising the Roof – YouthWorks
- United Way
- Covenant House
- Virgin Mobile's National Youth Homelessness Awareness Day (November 17th)
- Red Cross

This list is, by no means, inclusive. There are many church groups and interest groups who donate time and money to Youth Homelessness.

In Fredericton, New Brunswick, the local chapter of the United Way (Central New Brunswick) has within its supported causes;

- The Boys and Girls Club of Fredericton
- John Howard Society
- Youth in Transition – Chrysalis House
- Fredericton Association for Community Living
- Fredericton Residential Youth Services

All of which contribute in some way to helping the homeless youth in Fredericton.

However, there is still a need to raise awareness. As a preservice teacher, Sheena had the honour of participating in our school's team for the 12 Hours for the Homeless, a fundraising and awareness-raising campaign for Chrysalis House. She was inspired by the donations that were gathered, but was surprised at how many of the students didn't know what they were raising money for.

It became clear to us that we needed to bring to light the fact that there are youth in Fredericton who are homeless.

When we came up with our game plan, we spoke with the teacher-advisor for the School Council at our school to engage the council and the senior-level leadership class. Although our cause was supported by the teacher, she explained to us that it was not feasible to dedicate efforts to our cause on account of the lateness of the semester.

We approached our classmates at the University of New Brunswick's Faculty of Education and asked them for their help and were met with overwhelming support. Our

classmates, no doubt recognizing the issues involved in our cause, expressed to us that they wanted to help us with our fundraising in some way.

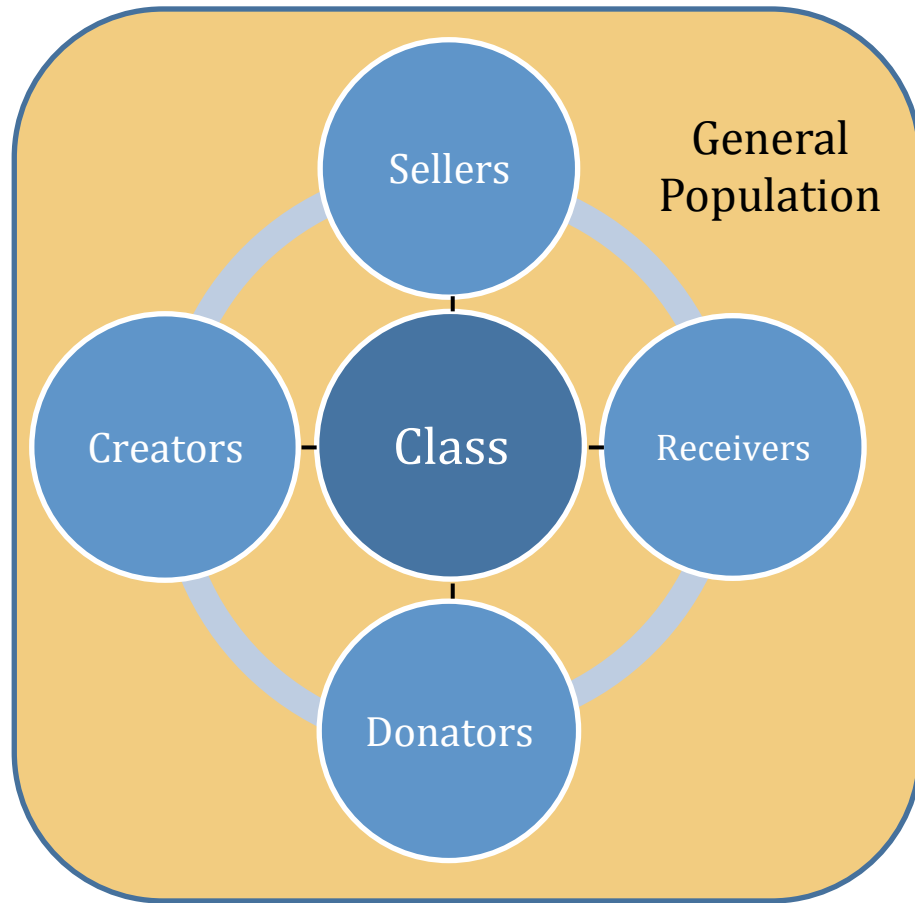
We were encouraged by the support of our colleagues and community for our take action plan.

Create a Plan

Our first step was to contact the local, city-run, youth shelter to ask them if they needed any help. They explained to us that because of their government funding, they had to be very careful with what help they received as it could affect their future funding. They suggested we contact Chrysalis House, a local house for young girls who are 'in transition', that is that they are too old for foster care, but too young to be self-sufficient adults.

We quickly got in touch with the co-coordinator of Chrysalis House and offered our services. We discovered that Chrysalis House receives many donations, but they are sporadic and are seasonal-dependent. That is to say, most people contribute for the 12-Hours-for-the-Homeless event in October and at Christmas, but the house needs other funding throughout the year. We discussed what we might do to help generate regular funds for the house.

We brainstormed different ideas for items we could sell with a very low overhead. A suggestion of rubber bracelets came up but we soon found out that the cost of making the rubber bracelets would put them at a price point which would not be possible to sell. Finally, we decided that we could make friendship bracelets and sell them across the city. By marketing them as bracelets made by people in Fredericton, we would be sending a message of friendship, awareness and community with our product. In addition, the cost to make the bracelets was low. The bracelets would provide a connection with us, the school, the university and the community as we band together to raise awareness for Youth Homelessness and money for the Chrysalis House.



Take Action

We created a bracelet making kit with pre-measured embroidery floss of varying colours, a safety pin and an instruction sheet with links to YouTube videos on how to make the friendship bracelets. We handed these packages out to our friends, family, colleagues, students, professors, teachers and community members.

We engaged the local Brownie troupe to help us create the bracelets. We were met with enthusiasm.

In our positions as preservice teachers in art classes, we engaged our art class and our art club to make bracelets for us and spread the word. Kristy presented information on youth homelessness and our project to her grade ten art classes and enlisted their help in making bracelets for our cause. A few of the students were motivated by the presentation; so much that they brought in extra bracelets that they had made on their own time.

We felt that as the bracelets were being made, we started a dialogue between the bracelet maker and the observer. The people who were making the bracelets became aware of what our cause was and when they were seen making the bracelets, they would, hopefully, pass on the word.

Others took our cause to their community. One of our classmates at the Faculty of Education brought the cause to their church and raised money and goods for Chrysalis House.

We took our idea to the high school that we teach at, where we were told that we were too late to do anything school-wide for this year, but there was certainly potential to bring awareness in the fall. We sketched out a plan to increase awareness for youth homelessness around the time of the 12 Hours for the Homeless. As our school often put in two teams which, on their own, raise sufficient funds for the cause, we felt that we could provide information to the staff-advisors for the Student Council and leadership groups to facilitate raising awareness. We agreed that we would use this Take Action project to generate data on fundraising to help them increase their fundraising for next year.

We brought our bracelets to a 2 day showing of The Vagina Monologues in partnership with the V Day awareness surrounding women's issues and abuse sponsored by the University Women Centre. We were not only successful in selling bracelets, but also in spreading our message on youth homelessness.

Our city connection was found in a psychologist's office in Fredericton. We have placed a box with our bracelets and information about Chrysalis House at a psychologist's office in hopes that people might feel inspired to become involved.



Evaluate the Plan

Here are the numbers for the project:

We had 268 bracelets donated by a member of UNB alumni connected to our partnership. These bracelets were made by people in Peru and sold very well due to their high quality.

From the Brownies, our classmates, ourselves and our students, 110 bracelets were made. We are grateful for their participation and are elated that we are surrounded by such supporters.

In total, for the entire month of February, by means of passive fundraising, we raised \$220. We have not yet had our totals back from the psychologist's office. That is just from selling at various locations.

We sold 77 bracelets.

In addition to this, we heard of 2 other take action pursuits that spawned from this, where the individuals took the cause of Chrysalis House to their own communities. We also have a movement plan in place at one of the Fredericton high schools to increase awareness for Youth Homelessness in Fredericton for the 2012-2013 school year.

By the end of the month, everyone at UNB's Marshall D'Avray Hall knew what the bracelets were for and why we were doing it. Word of mouth travels quickly, who knows what kind of awareness this has caused.

What Worked?

The making of the bracelets was done with very little overhead. We had a number of individuals who were interested in helping us out by making the bracelets. Our students were interested in helping as well, not only for the making of the bracelets but also for spreading the word about the cause.

We found passive fundraising to be responsive. With so many charitable events going on at once, we found the approach of making a product available when people wanted it was a good approach. We coined this "Passive Fundraising". This way, we could extend the period of fundraising, lessen the chance of fatigue and perhaps increase awareness by the presence of the product.

What didn't work?

The bracelets from Peru sold very well. A number of people who bought the bracelets that were made in Fredericton bought them because they were made by Frederictonians with the cause in mind. Some of the handmade bracelets that we had returned to us were unsellable.

It was quite hard to keep tabs on the material. The momentum of the project did not allow for much in the way of pre-planning. That is, our partnership had to develop policies for handing out materials, receiving materials, recording data on the fly. As a result, a few of our willing volunteers have yet to return their materials to us, and it is possible that there are others have materials that went unrecorded. In future, we would suggest better control on materials and strict record keeping.

Time is a factor for all people. In our situations, jobs, family and school work meant that there was only so much time that we could devote to our project. Our enthusiasm, we confess, often made the project a priority over other things. More individuals to break up the work would have facilitated the project and removing the time crunch of a project

deadline would have allowed for long term planning. Although, it is entirely possible that we bit off a bite that was a little too big to chew.

With more people on the project, we might have been able to hit other areas of the community. We didn't get a chance to place our boxes in businesses because our schedules often conflicted with those of the businesses. With more people, we could have designated an external liaison that would be in charge of developing relationships with business owners in the community.

There is only so much people can give. In the high school that we teach in, there was a staff meeting about the phenomenon coined "Donor Fatigue". With so many projects on the go at the same time, the people in the high school were just overwhelmed with the number of charities that were being advocated at the school. We found a similar situation here in the Fredericton community. With two full classes of students taking action in their communities, there were a number of causes being championed at once.

What Would We Change?

Making the Bracelets

Perhaps we might suggest engaging the local Girl Guides or Pathfinders for the bracelet making rather than the brownies. It is possible that the Brownies were a little young for such a task. The Guides and Pathfinders might be at a more targetable age range because they are close to the age range of the homeless youth.

We might suggest engaging church groups to get them involved. They can often ask the congregation to fundraise and that is an entire demographic that is virtually unavailable to the university community.

It would be effective to start sooner with the schools. If we had the information we have now in September, we might have been able to encourage Awareness days in the schools with segments on the morning announcements. We will certainly be fixing this first.

Selling Bracelets

- Community locations – engage local businesses to place the boxes in their establishments with literature about Youth Homelessness
- Events – appear to sell bracelets at events in the area, like Winter Carnival or at play nights at the Playhouse.
- 12 Hours for the Homeless – sell bracelets at this year's 12 Hours for the Homeless
- Rubber Bracelets – get better quality bracelets that aren't so dependent on labour – last longer, more visible, like the I <3 boobies campaign
- Or more bracelets with complex designs, as evident from the quick selling of the Peruvian made bracelets.
- More people to sell – engage more people to sell the bracelets in periphery communities
- Publicize more – place our poster in places like the mall, King's Square, on the street.

What We Would Keep

- Bracelets – the idea of selling bracelets encourages the idea of friendship. Homeless youth often feel like they are a separate part of society, making bracelets as a sign of friendship encourages a more positive look on homeless youth.
- Passive Fundraising – making a product available when it is wanted allows the product to stay out in the open longer therefore people are not tired of seeing them.

Going Forward

2 months is not enough time for such a project. We are going to continue to work on this project even after the assignment is submitted. We feel committed to the cause and hope that we can continue to raise awareness and bring our data to the school.

Apply Your Learning

Learned a new skill

Bracelet making is something that brings back memories of youth - sitting around with friends making bracelets and exchanging them as tokens of friendship. Drawing on those skills again, teaching them to other people helps carry on this experience.

Fundraising

It's not as easy as it looks. There is a lot involved in fundraising, even a passive campaign. It's arduous work, requiring many long hours and there is no reward except a feeling of self-fulfillment and citizenship action.

School Politics

Our final goal is to bring this project to the schools. In our attempt to do so, we found out about all of the rules, regulations and laws that surround fundraising and awareness raising in schools.

Bringing it to Your School

The project could be linked to five of the six conceptual strands found in the Social Studies curriculum: Citizenship, Power, and Governance; Individuals, Societies, and Economic Decisions; Culture and diversity, Interdependence; and Time, Continuity, and Change.

This can also be tied to other curricula, such as looking at the art of the homeless community in Art class, or bring in novels that focus on homelessness into the English class.

Citizenship action is something that can be incorporated into any part of the school curriculum. Students should be reminded that participation in their community opens doors to post-secondary scholarships. It's also something that we, as members of our community, should consider adding to our day to day routine. Every day we take from our

community in some way; we benefit from community events, we participate in community shows and we enjoy community art. It's time we opened our minds and take action.



Youth in Transition
Non-profit, charitable organization

**Be a Friend of
Chrysalis House!**

**Donation = Friendship Bracelet
Handmade in Fredericton ☺**

CHRYSLIS HOUSE IS A SAFE & CARING ENVIRONMENT
OF HEALING AND GROWTH FOR HOMELESS
AND AT-RISK FEMALE YOUTH IN FREDERICTON

***Suggested Donation, \$2
Thank You!***

Continuing Our Mission

Our project is not over. We wish to do more fundraising. Our goal for the project was \$300 and we intend to see that goal surpassed.

- We wish to find out more information about the advantages of passive fundraising. All of the data we compile will eventually be useful to the schools that we give this information to.
- We want to develop a program that is easily implemented in the schools. Using the research we've conducted, the data we've compiled and the strategies we've tried and tested, we would like to make a package that we can bring to the schools to facilitate increasing awareness for Youth Homelessness.
- We would like to see more small fundraisers for the cause. These ripples of awareness are encouraging to us as it makes us feel like we have been successful.
- We would like to cultivate ideas for Youth Homelessness awareness days. We would like to compile them into a brochure with cross-curricular ideas so that these awareness days can be easily tied to existing curriculum. This will encourage the teachers to get their classes involved in the cause.
- We would like to develop implementation ideas for middle schools and elementary schools so that we can increase the span of influence,
- We would like to get corporate sponsorships so that we can decrease the overhead that is required to maintain any kind of campaign.

Celebrate Your Success!

Every time we hear of someone doing a charitable event for a group that helps combat youth homelessness, we consider that a success. Every bracelet sold brings a smile to our face. Everyone that we speak to about the issue of youth homelessness provides us with the sense of knowing that our message will continue. We take pride in watching our community change and look forward to seeing Fredericton turn its ear to the youth left out in the cold.

We are also very happy to share a related success story: As a result of our awareness campaign, one of our classmates, Sarah-Lynn, took the initiative to engage her church in an additional fundraising campaign for the Chrysalis House. The Holy Rosary Parish has raised significant funds, which is expected to rise to over \$3,000, and has gathered many donations –in-kind. They also have a *penny sale* planned whose profits will also be donated to the Chrysalis House. These acts, as well as the help from all the BEd students, are a great show of teamwork towards a common goal.

From the time that we started this project to the submission of this report, we have caught wind that there are plans for a home for young homeless and at-risk men to be built. We are excited for this opportunity as we have seen the good that Chrysalis House does for young homeless and at-risk women.