

Class



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The episodes in this section are the stories of Minnesotans on the negative end of socioeconomic disparities. The introduction highlights the Itasca Project and the Brookings Institution's *Mind the Gap* report. The Itasca project is a group of business leaders and policy-makers who are concerned about the future business vitality and competitiveness of the region. According to the report, class is one of the three major sets of disparities in the Twin Cities, the other two being race and place.

Class and race disparities often overlap because income disparities disproportionately affect minorities, but the overall gap between "haves" and "have-nots" is growing, endangering the prosperity and economic competitiveness of the region in the future. As the baby boomers are preparing to retire, the region will need as many or more educated and skilled workers to replace them. Yet, current trends suggest that economic disparities will stand in the way of obtaining a quality workforce. Addressing these disparities will require joint efforts on behalf of the government, civic organizations, businesses and community leaders. The Itasca project hopes to engage communities around the region in understanding and eliminating these disparities.

The stories in this section focus on different aspects of class disparities such as welfare support, access to healthcare, housing, etc. Through a look at immigrant labor union members, a welfare mother's efforts to get out of poverty, and a student mother's struggles with balancing work, school, and home commitments while facing homelessness, we see the pervasive challenges of class. The stories also show that these class challenges are not inescapable, and highlight efforts, ideas, organizations and individuals working for a brighter future of Minnesota.

Story: “Not Those People”

Julia Dinsmore, a writer, mother, and activist, knows first hand about life below the poverty line in the U.S. Julia describes the struggle to overcome “systemic barriers” and break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and welfare. Despite her circumstances, Julia refuses to be a passive victim in a system that penalizes initiative. Early in her life, she found her voice as a poet and a storyteller, and realized that one person can make a difference. Julia’s poem, “I am not those people,” was once read on the Senate floor and epitomizes the struggle of the human spirit against despair and economic injustices.

Key Terms

Class	Classism
Economic Justice	Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	Minimum Wage
Poverty Tax	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
Welfare	White Privilege
Victim	Survival Skills

Survey 1: "Not Those People"

True or False

1. The gap between the rich and poor is growing, making class distinctions ever more visible.

- True
- False

2. In the US, wealth is highly concentrated.

- True
- False
- True
- False

4. Poor households often have to pay higher prices for goods and services.

- True
- False

5. It is often difficult for low-wage workers to improve their skills and get better paying jobs.

- True
- False

Answers:

1. The gap between high- and low-educated and high- and low-income people is growing. In 1989-1999, the average household income of the wealthiest 20% of Twin Cities households rose 24%. At the same time, the average household income for the poorest 20% rose just 16%. In 1989 the wealthiest households earned 9.8 times as much as the poorest. By 1999 this number had increased to 10.4 times.
2. A large portion of total wealth in the U.S. economy is concentrated in the richest fraction of the population: the top 1% holds one third and the richest 5% holds more than half of the country's total wealth. In contrast, a significant fraction of the population holds little or no wealth at all.
3. In today's economy, education is the key to a good job.
3. Only 26% of Twin Cities' adults who earn less than \$17,500 a year have a college or higher degree. Ninety-seven percent of Twin Cities' adults earning between \$35, 000 and \$79,999 have a high school degree, but only 81 percent of low-income adults do.
4. A rough estimate suggests that there are almost 63,000 low-income unbanked (lacking savings or checking account) households in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. These households are more likely to use alternative financial services which are more expensive. A 2000 U.S. Treasury Department study shows that an unbanked worker earning \$12,000 a year spends \$250 just cashing paychecks.
5. Low-wage workers are often caught in a vicious cycle. They don't have the necessary skills to secure a better-paying job, which relegates them to jobs that offer little in terms of pay, skills training or advancement. Education and training would be a means to increase wage, but because they have limited means of increasing their skills on the job, they are stuck in low-wage work.

This survey is based on the following documents:

Mind the Gap: Disparities and Competitiveness in the Twin Cities developed by the Brookings Institution. Full report is available at http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer.aspx

"Wealth Inequality: Data and Models" [PDF], Marco Cagetti and Mariacristina De Nardi, 17 Aug 2005.

Before Viewing

What is class? What are the indicators that help determine an individual's class (e.g., clothing, housing, income)? What do you think are the main causes of poverty in the Twin Cities?

What does "below the poverty line" mean? How would you define poverty?

From where do your ideas about poverty come? What are the sources of your information?

After Viewing

1. What motivated Julia Dinsmore to challenge her situation and become an activist? How did learning about storytelling traditions from different cultures help Julia?
2. How did she challenge her church and what did she achieve as a result?
3. What systemic barriers does she refer to when she talks about a system that "penalizes initiative and reinforces victim's behavior"?
4. Who are the people Julia describes in her poem, *My name is "Not Those People"*.
5. What does Julia mean when she speaks of a "community's self-sufficiency"?
6. What is white privilege? In what way do you think Julia is privileged?
7. What was the role of the church in establishing the Legislative Committee to End Poverty by 2020? Do you know of any other faith-based organizations that are trying to address poverty, homelessness, and other societal issues in their communities?
8. What are the goals of the Legislative Committee to End Poverty by 2020? What recommendations would you make to the committee members?

1. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Introduce the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/b2esc.htm>

Match the conditions described in Julia's poem to articles in the ICESCR. Identify social and economic rights found in the ICESCR but not mentioned in the essay or the poem.

Discuss:

- For which social and economic rights does the U.S. appear to be doing well? For which social and economic rights there is a need for substantial improvement?
- What is the responsibility of the government to ensure that everyone achieves these human rights as fully as possible? Are there some conditions, such as inadequate nutrition of children, which the government should address? Are there other conditions, such as homelessness of adults, which it should not address? What actions should the government take?
- Are there some areas in which the USA is doing as well as expected and others in which we should expect better results? Do you think the U.S. can do better? What makes you think the way you do?
- Who besides government should assume responsibilities for addressing human rights problems? What can businesses and community organizations do? What can individuals do? What can you personally do?

2. Resources

Contact Julia Dinsmore at dinsmorejk@comcast.net to invite her to your screening event and panel.

Encourage participants to explore the "A Minnesota Without Poverty" website at www.mnwithoutpoverty.org

In 2004, 35 religious leaders in Minnesota committed themselves to the principles outlined in "A Common Foundation: Shared Principles for Work on Overcoming Poverty." The principles in this document informed the creation of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota, which was established by the 2006 Minnesota Legislature. Invite participants to add their names in support of the principles of the Common Foundation at

http://mnwithoutpoverty.org/index.php?option=com_signfoundation&task=signFoundation&Itemid=51

An additional resource for this section is the interactive online calculator at the Service Employee's International Union (SEIU): http://www.seiu.org/issues/good_jobs/notebook.cfm

Participants can enter their monthly expenses, such as rent, food, etc. to calculate if they could make it on the minimum wage. They can then "Get the Facts" about minimum wage and other statistics at: http://www.seiu.org/issues/good_jobs/minwage_factsheet.cfm

Other useful sites:

Twin Cities Compass www.tccompass.org

Mind the Gap Report

www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer/20051027_mindthegap.pdf

Story: Justice for Janitors

This story highlights the struggle and recent victory of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 26, a Union of over 5,000 janitors, security guards, and window cleaners. In 2006 the Union won a historic new contract that includes affordable family health insurance for the first time. Historically, the union movement is a movement of immigrants. Thus, in addition to livable wages and healthcare insurance, the union is advocating for immigration reform. The president of the Union, Javier Morillo-Alicea, is convinced that this victory is important for everyone because reducing disparities and educating new workers is important for the future of a competitive workforce.

Key Terms

Health Insurance

ICCPR

Union

Union Movement

Collective bargaining

Strike

Health Care

Survey 2: Justice for Janitors

True or False

1. The number of uninsured of Hispanic origin is decreasing.

True

False

2. Whether or not a person has health insurance is correlated to his or her income.

True

False

3. Undocumented immigrants do not contribute to our economy.

True

False

4. Undocumented immigrants come to the U.S. to live on welfare.

True

False

5. The number of uninsured children is growing.

True

False

6. Undocumented immigrants pay no taxes.

True

False

Answers:

1. The percentage and the number of uninsured Hispanics increased to 34.1% and 15.3 million in 2006.

2. In 2006, over 75% of people in households with annual incomes of less than \$25,000 had health insurance coverage. Comparatively, over 91.5% of people in households with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more had health insurance.

3. Undocumented workers contribute more than \$300 billion to our economy annually and each new immigrant generates a positive contribution to our economy of roughly \$1800.
4. Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and most other public benefits. Most undocumented immigrants come here to work. In fact, in 2003, more than 90% of undocumented men worked-a rate higher than that for U.S. citizens and legal immigrants.
5. The percentage and the number of children under 18 years old without health insurance increased to 11.7% and 8.7 million in 2006 (from 10.9% and 8.0 million respectively, in 2005).
6. Undocumented immigrants pay the same property, sales, and other consumption taxes as everyone else-which fund the majority of state and local costs of schooling and other services. Nearly three-fourths of undocumented workers pay payroll taxes-contributing \$6-7 billion in Social Security funds they are unable to claim.

This survey is based on the following documents:

Mind the Gap: Disparities and Competitiveness in the Twin Cities developed by the Brookings Institution. Full report is available at http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer.aspx

Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006 <http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-233.pdf>

Before Viewing

Why do you think unions were created? What working conditions do unions usually negotiate with employers? What do you think is the role of unions today?

After Viewing

1. For what results were union members fighting? Why?
2. Why is healthcare one of the most important issues?
3. How does income influence one's healthcare insurance? Is it fair?
4. How does the immigrant labor force change labor unions' concerns?
5. When Javier Morillo-Alicea says "it's more than just janitors," what does he mean?
6. How does the situation of immigrant workers affect you today? How will it affect you and your family in the future?

Suggested Activities

1. Going Deeper: Economic and Social Rights

Divide the participants into discussion teams to explore one of these human rights issues: homelessness, hunger, lack of adequate healthcare, inadequate working wages and conditions. Each team should assign a note-taker to report back on the group discussion to the larger group.

First invite the small groups to consider general questions related to human rights violations, then turn their attention to more issue-specific questions. Explain that they are not expected to know all the answers, but that the questions are there to stimulate discussion rather than provide facts.

Invite participants to conclude their discussion with the planning for change questions. When the groups are ready, invite volunteer note-takers to share a few points about their group discussion, and focus on their group's response to the planning for change questions.

Common Interview Questions (For All Issues)

General Questions

- What policies and practices contribute to the violation or denial of this human right?
- How are these four human rights issues (e.g., homelessness, hunger, lack of adequate health care, and inadequate working wages and conditions) interrelated?
- Are there some who benefit and others who suffer, directly or indirectly, as a result of the situation that presently exists?
- How do people justify or explain that certain people have this basic need met (and much more!) while others do not? Do you find these explanations convincing? Explain.
- Do you consider _____(insert topic) to be a human right to which everyone is entitled?
- Do you think it is appropriate and/or fair that some in the community enjoy this right while others do not?

Issue-Specific Interview Questions.

Homelessness

- Are there homeless people in this community? How many?
- How many are served by shelters? How many are not?
- How accurate are these numbers? How are they determined?
- Have the numbers of homeless been going up or down? Explain
- Are there characteristics that many homeless people have in common? Is there a typical age? Gender? Racial or ethnic group? How do they become homeless?
- Has the composition of the homeless population been changing? Explain.
- What effect have government policies had on creating homelessness?
- What is the likelihood that those who are homeless also share other characteristics (e.g., have been deinstitutionalized, have substance abuse problems, have experienced domestic violence, have a mental or physical disability, are unemployed, and/or are under 18 years of age)?
- What affordable permanent housing is available? What factors help them find housing?
- Is the housing adequate (e.g., number of units, conditions)? Are there people on waiting lists for housing?
- Are conditions in this housing healthy and safe (e.g., free of pests, lead paint, structural damage, environmental pollution, electrical/fire hazards, gang/drug related violence)?
- Are services provided in a respectful way to those in need?

Hunger

- Are people in this community experiencing hunger on a regular basis? Who are they?
- How accurate are these numbers? How are they determined?
- Has the number of people experiencing hunger been going up or down? Explain.
- Are there characteristics that many people experiencing hunger have in common? Is there a typical age? Gender? Racial or ethnic group?
- Has the composition of the hungry population been changing? Explain.
- Are there people who hold full-time employment but whose family is still hungry and malnourished? How is this possible?
- What factors have contributed to their lacking food?
- What services are available to help hungry people in our community?
- Who offers these services? Are they funded by the government, private institutions, or agencies?
- Are services provided in a respectful way to those in need?

- Have the numbers needing food assistance increased or decreased recently? Explain.
- Have food assistance programs been expanding or contracting recently? Explain.

Lack of Adequate Health Care

- Are people in this community in need of health care but are unable to get it?
- Are people denied health care or insurance? What do these people do when they are sick or injured?
- Are there people who receive inadequate care?
- How accurate are these numbers? How are they determined?
- Have the numbers of those with inadequate health care been going up or down? Explain.
- Are there characteristics that those lacking adequate health care have in common? Is there a typical age? Gender? Racial or ethnic group? How do they become lacking in health care?
- Has the composition of the population lacking adequate health care been changing? Explain.
- What services are available for people who cannot afford to pay for health care? Are they funded by the government or private institutions or agencies?
- What pre- and post-natal services are available for low income mothers? Are services provided in a respectful way to those in need?
- Has the number of people lacking health care and insurance increased or decreased recently?

Inadequate Employment Wages and Conditions

- How would you define a living wage?
- Are people employed in this community who do not receive a living wage?
- Are people forced to work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions?
- Are working conditions fair for all (male/female, black/white)?
- Is there equal pay for equal work?
- Are there people who are denied the right to organize at their place of work?
- Are there people who are denied opportunities for advancement and professional development?
- Are people forced to work to obtain public assistance benefits?
- What are the child care concerns of low wage earners? Are they being addressed? If so, how? If not, why?

Planning for Change

- Identify policies, practices, and/or attitudes that need to be modified, strengthened, or eliminated, as well as new ones that need to be initiated.
- What might the participants do to help promote these human rights in their community?

2. Resources

Have participants read and discuss the article: *Janitors' Victory Brings Hope to Cincinnati Families, Creates New Model for Ensuring Good Jobs with Health Care for Region's Low-Wage Workers* http://www.seiu.org/media/pressreleases.cfm?pr_id=1460

Useful sites for local statistics:

Twin Cities Compass www.tccompass.org

Mind the Gap Report

www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer/20051027_mindthegap.pdf

STORY: Diversity at Food Shelves

For over one hundred years, Neighborhood House has served immigrant and working class communities on the West Side of St. Paul. As demand for food shelf access increased over the last decade, Neighborhood House has contributed to meeting that demand. Families, like Xai Neng's, visit the food shelf regularly to pick up items to which they otherwise might not have access. One challenge that Neighborhood House has faced has been matching its food stock with the cultural practices of its clients in order to give comfort in the midst of new and often unfamiliar surroundings. In this vein, the Neighborhood House tries to offer ethnically appropriate food as much as possible, because the poundage of food is limited for each family, so that the proportion of food that is used increases. Neighborhood House also offers immigrants assistance in areas of clothing, housing, transportation, employment, and language.

Key Terms

Food Shelves	Food insecurity
Immigration	Survival Skills
Resources	Self-Sufficiency

Survey 3: Diversity at Food Shelves

Agree or Disagree

1. Everyone has a right to food.
2. Many hard-working people do not make enough money to feed their families.
3. I think local government should be more involved in eliminating food insecurities.
4. Poverty is the main cause for food insecurity in Minnesota.
5. Food insecurities can only be eliminated if large socio-economic issues are resolved.
6. Charities and other organizations discourage people from working when they provide food for free.
7. When charities provide food, they should ensure that their food items are in line with cultural practices of their clients.
8. A healthy and prosperous community is the one where everybody gets to eat.
9. I am glad organizations exist to help the new immigrants with food, clothing, language, and jobs.
10. I would like to welcome and help new immigrants in my community.

Before Viewing

What are food insecurities? Do you know of anyone experiencing food insecurities?

After Viewing

1. What is Neighborhood House? What kind of services does it provide?
2. Why do you think the demand for food shelves has increased over the last decade? What socio-economic factors contribute to people's use of food shelves?
3. Why do people use food shelves? What kind of circumstances lead to it?
4. What has been one of Neighborhood House's challenges in providing food to new immigrants? How is it responding?
5. Why is it important to provide culturally appropriate food?

6. What connection does this story have to your life? How will improving lives of one segment of society improve all of our lives?

Suggested Activities

1. Got Food?

This activity will help students to learn about food and hunger issues in their local context. By exploring the data and engaging in a group discussion, the students will develop a better understanding of food insecurities, and empathy for those who experience them.

1. Introduce the activity

Ask students to think about what comes to mind when you say “food insecurities.” Write the phrase on the board or flipchart sheet, and ask students to brainstorm ideas. Do not stop to discuss or challenge the ideas; all ideas should be accepted and recorded during brainstorming. When all ideas have been recorded ask students if they want to add, remove, or modify anything on the board. Work with students to develop a working definition of food insecurities. When the definition has been created, explain that students will work in groups to learn about food insecurities in Minnesota.

2. Divide students into groups

Divide students into groups of 3-5, depending on class size. Give each student a copy of Handout 1: Food Insecurities in Minnesota.

3. Work in small groups

Ask students to take 1-3 minutes to read the handout individually. Next, ask students to discuss it in small groups. Ask each group to choose one or more spokespersons who will later present to the larger group. Allow 20-25 minutes for the small group discussions. Instruct the spokespersons to record major points and run the summary by the group before presenting.

Possible questions for discussion:

1. List three new things that you did not know about food insecurities in Minnesota which excited, surprised, or upset you.
2. What are positive and negative facts about Minnesota’s handling of food insecurities?
3. Who are the people who use food shelves?
4. What are the reasons for using food shelves?
5. Why do you think reliance on food shelves has increased in the past few years?
6. What do food insecurities have to do with housing or minimum wage?
7. Why do you think women, children, and people of color are disproportionately affected by food insecurities?
8. Who do you think should address the issue? What factors contribute to a successful solution?
9. How can you be a part of this solution?

4. Discuss and Debrief

Ask the spokesperson/s for each group to present their summaries. Allow a couple of questions after each presentation, but ask participants to hold their comments and discussion until all groups have presented. When all groups have presented, discuss in plenary:

- How did you feel about this activity?
- What have you learned from other groups? What do you strongly agree or disagree with?

2. The Right to Food

Continue the discussion about food and food insecurities within the human rights framework. Introduce the “right to food” as contained in international human rights documents below.

Discuss: What is the right to food? What does the right to food entail (e.g., availability, adequateness, accessibility, etc.)?

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 25: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food...”

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 11: “States Parties... recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living... adequate food... States Parties... recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall... improve methods of production... and distribution of food... by... reforming agrarian systems... ensure... equitable distribution of...food supplies.”

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Articles 24 & 27:

“States Parties... shall... in case of need provide... nutrition, clothing and housing. States Parties... shall... in case of need provide... nutrition, clothing and housing.”

3. Resources

Participants can also take the Right to Food Quiz and then review the Right to Food in Minnesota and the United States Fact Sheet.

Right to Food Quiz:

<http://discoverhumanrights.org/98d2b0ef-8ffa-4a5e-92b1-89978975d232.html?nextId=15ac31f5-6909-4d04-93daed22ab98f729>

Right to Food in Minnesota and U.S. Fact Sheet:

<http://discoverhumanrights.org/6d8e33f1-5716-4ead-a96a-d59358bae00b.html?NodeId=>

Participants can also review *The State of Hunger in Minnesota. Survey of Food Shelf and On-site Meal Program Recipients in 2005* prepared by Wilder Research to gain more information about food insecurities in the state.

Other useful sites:

Twin Cities Compass www.tccompass.org

Mind the Gap Report

www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer/20051027_mindthegap.pdf

STORY: Hope and Homelessness

Rebecca Nathan, a young woman who experienced homelessness during her pregnancy, received help from Hope Community. Rebecca first moved into Hope in 1999 when she came to Minneapolis as a transfer student. Due to a problem with a landlord, Rebecca became homeless, and Hope Community provided her with affordable housing, which allowed her to finish her degree and become an advocate for herself. Rebecca is now involved with Hope Community's outreach efforts.

Key Terms

Affordable housing
Homeless
Predatory lending
Racial steering

Survey 4: Hope and Homelessness

True or False

1. Domestic violence is one of the reasons women become homeless.

- True
 False

2. The main reason for becoming homeless is inability to afford rent.

- True
 False

3. There are approximately 500-1000 homeless people on any given night in Minnesota.

- True
 False

4. Homelessness disproportionately affects African Americans and American Indians.

- True
 False

5. Most unemployed men reported criminal history as the main problem they face in trying to get a job.

- True
 False

6. Homelessness mostly affects middle-aged and elderly men and women.

- True
 False

Answers:

1. As in previous years, approximately one of every three homeless women (32%) was homeless at least in part because of domestic abuse. This proportion was higher in Greater Minnesota (35%) than the Twin Cities area (30%).
2. A recent study by Wilder Research found that 39% of homeless survey participants cited an inability to pay rent as one of the main reasons they had to abandon their previous housing. This number has increased from 33% in 2003. Other reasons (in order of importance) include eviction, lost job or cut hours, breakup with spouse or partner, drinking or drug problem, relationship problems, being abused, entering jail or treatment, drinking or drug problem of someone else living there, substandard or unsafe housing, behavioral problems of visitors or guests, and violence in the neighborhood.
3. Between 9,200 and 9,300 individuals are homeless on any given night in Minnesota.
4. Almost half of all homeless persons in the Twin Cities metro area are African American and nearly one out of five of those in Greater Minnesota are American Indian. These disparities are especially apparent in a state that is more than 80% white.
5. A recent study found that 34% of unemployed homeless adults cited lack of transportation as one of the main problems, followed by lack of housing (27%), physical health problems (26%), mental health problems (24%), criminal history (14%), job experience or history (13%), education (11%), and lack of child care (10% of all unemployed homeless adults, and 21% of unemployed women).
6. The average age of homeless adults (18 and older) was 41 for men and 33 for women. Most children, who were homeless and with their parents, were age 12 or younger (84%) and about half (49%) of this 84% group were age 5 or younger.

This survey is based on the following documents:

National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2001. A Plan Not a Dream. How to End Homelessness in Ten Years. Accessed August 2007 at <http://www.housingworks.org/aidsissues/pdf/NationalAlliance10yearplan.pdf>
Wilder Research Center Homelessness Research 2006, <http://www.wilder.org/homelessness.0.html>

Before Viewing

What effects does being homeless have on one's ability to get educated and employed?

After Viewing

1. What does Rebecca mean by a "harder landing"? How did it affect her?
2. What does she mean by "it was bigger than me"? Why does she not consider herself a victim?
3. Rebecca says "poverty is cyclical", do you agree? Discuss.
4. Rebecca says that a lot of "working class families do not have an advantage of being an advocate for themselves"? Why do you think that is? Why was Rebecca able to become an advocate and change her situation?
5. What does Hope Community do? How did they change their mission, and how did it affect Rebecca and other families?
6. How, if at all, does homelessness affect all of us?
7. Do you know of any other community organizations that are trying to help homeless individuals?
8. How can you help?

Suggested Activities

1. Ending Homelessness Locally and Nationally

This activity aims at familiarizing students with local and national efforts to end homelessness. The students will learn about two organizations, one acting locally and the other nationally. They will be

able to examine current social, legislative, and economic issues involved in the homelessness debate, and be inspired to act on behalf of poor and homeless people in their communities.

1. Introduce the activity: Students will research and present on homelessness issues locally and nationally. They will work in teams to learn about two organizations:

Minnesota Coalition of the Homeless: <http://www.mnhomeless.org>

The Coalition works to “generate policies, community support, and local resources for housing and services to end homelessness in Minnesota”.

The National Coalition of the Homeless:<http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

The National Coalition is a national network of people who are currently or formerly homeless, activists and advocates, community-based and faith-based service providers, and others committed to ending homelessness.

2. Divide students into teams of 3-5 people, and assign them to “local” or “national” projects. Depending on the number of people in your classroom, you may have 2-3 teams working on each project.
3. Explain that “local” teams will focus on learning about the Minnesota Coalition of the Homeless and “national” teams will focus on learning about National Coalition of the Homeless. Have teams come up with one homelessness issue they would like to explore (e.g., causes of homelessness, children and homelessness, domestic abuse and homelessness, affordable housing, etc). A good way to come up with issues may be a quick brainstorming exercise. Local and national teams should work on the same issues.
4. Students will work in teams for 30-45 minutes to examine their issue. They should come up with a 10-15 minute presentation based on their research. Prepare and hand out a list of questions:
 - What does the organization do to address the issue?
 - What was the most unsettling or surprising fact you found? Why?
 - What can you realistically do to address the issue?

Invite the teams back into the plenary for discussion and debriefing:

How is this issue addressed locally and nationally? Are there any national practices that should be adopted locally, or vice-versa?

2. Resources:

Participants can also take the Right to Housing in the United States Quiz and then review the Right to Housing in Minnesota Fact Sheet.

The Right to Housing in the United States Quiz:

<http://hrei.urbanplanet.com/94e5b074-e6a7-43da-be29-7166551acc36.html?NodeId=>

The Right to Housing in Minnesota Fact Sheet:

Additional resources include:

- Voices of the Street website-www.voicesofthestreets.org, contains stories of homeless people in Minnesota in the form of a multimedia documentary the Land of 10,000 Homeless, and other resources aimed at ending homelessness in Minnesota..
- The Online Community Action Planning Tool can provide a useful template for a Community Action Project: <http://www.hrusa.org/thisismyhome/project/tools.shtml>

Participants can also review Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2007 report prepared by Wilder Research to gain more information about homelessness and housing issues in the state.

Other useful sites:

Twin Cities Compass www.tccompass.org

Mind the Gap Report

www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10cities_sohmer/20051027_mindthegap.pdf