

Homelessness Awareness Week

Highlighting the plight of homeless teens

[Graduate Psychology & Counseling](#) | Posted on June 1, 2016



By: Ali Reiner & Student Movement Staff

In April, students and faculty from Andrews University spent an evening eating a simple soup supper, doing a privilege walk across campus in below freezing temperatures and watching and discussing a documentary about the nearly 20,000 unaccompanied homeless teens each year in the Chicago school system (who are in unstable living situations—and finding a place to sleep everywhere from couches to temporary housing or—for as many 2,000 a night in Chicago—living on the street.

“The idea behind this activity was to allow students to begin to understand the life of someone with no other options,” said Ed Brennan, participant and co-organizer of the event.

Although the weather was not as cooperative as participants and organizers hoped for, and the turnout was 17 rather than the original 75 that signed up, Brennan remained positive.

“I think that God wanted us to see what people really deal with when they live on the streets,” says Brennan. “The event provided a great lesson for those in attendance.”

Leading up to the planned cardboard campout was a whole week dedicated to raising awareness across the Andrews campus. Couches were set up to symbolize “couch surfing,” which is what

many homeless people—youth, especially—find themselves doing. They rotate sleeping on couches belonging to friends and even strangers who offer them a place to stay.

“College students often don’t realize how many people their age are homeless,” said Curt VanderWaal, chair of the Teen Homelessness Taskforce on campus. “They imagine a skid-row alcoholic or a Vietnam veteran who’s down on his luck—it’s a lot harder to visualize a 17-year-old immigrant kid who sleeps on a friend’s couch because his parents can’t afford to take care of him.”

Other activities were a co-curricular program that educated students about homelessness, a showing of “The Homestretch,” a documentary portraying homeless youth in Chicago, and a panel discussion.

This project was organized by Nancy Carbonell, a professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology & Counseling, along with AUUNICEF, BSCF, AU114One, POWER and graduate students in Carbonell’s department.

“I’ve become more aware of homelessness in the last few years,” says Carbonell. “Some of the students we’ve had at Andrews in the past have made me aware that 40 to 50 percent of the homeless youth tend to be LGBTQ young people and have been kicked out of their homes.”

Carbonell added that about half of the other homeless young people come from homes where the parents are substance or alcohol abusers, do not want to pay for their children anymore or may be illegal immigrants who cannot afford to support their children, driving them to the streets. In Berrien Springs alone there are almost 20 homeless high-school-aged youths.

“It’s important for all of us to become more aware of this issue so we can do something about it,” said Carbonell.

Homelessness Awareness Week was just the first step to becoming more proactive about the great impact homelessness has on our nation.

“I am grateful that our students felt moved enough to want to help out in this event,” says Carbonell. “I think that speaks well of our students.”

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