

INTRODUCTION:



In April, 2017, Samantha (left, 19) and Tricia (right, 18) agreed to be interviewed for the film project “*What Does ‘Homeless’ Look Like?*,” an 18-minute documentary that sheds light on the issue of children and youth experiencing homelessness across the Granite State.

The interview went extremely well, with their articulate, astute answers offering insights into lives of students experiencing homelessness from the viewpoint of their own experiences.

The original project was expanded to a professional development package, which includes:

- “*I’m Not Just a Homeless Kid*,” a 4-minute video featuring Sam and Tricia,
- a 50-minute **podcast** of their interview (with minor edits for clarity), and
- this **discussion guide** on the little-understood topic of students experiencing homelessness.

Because of Samantha and Tricia’s willingness to participate in this unique venture, educators in New Hampshire and beyond will undoubtedly become more aware of and sensitive to the plight and promise of students whose homelessness often renders them invisible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both Sam and Tricia reveal family dynamics that led to their homelessness.
 - What impact did their parents’ disabilities have on the family’s high mobility?
 - What factor did their early experiences have on their eventual lives on their own?
2. Sam admits that she missed about 70 days of school in one year.
 - What caused her high absenteeism?
 - What may have prevented it?
3. Tricia reflects back on younger years when her family moved around a lot.
 - What were the conflicts of this mobility?
 - What impact did high mobility have on her development, adjustment and coping mechanisms at school?
4. Tricia describes the challenges of being the new kid in school.
 - What did she (and many in the same situation) find comforting? Difficult?
 - What did this seemingly endless mobility do to her psyche?
5. Sam contemplates the role of possessions in her life.
 - What changed in her outlook about her possessions?
 - What challenges would a highly mobile student have in managing possessions?
6. Sam exhibits an uncanny sense of what’s important.
 - What shaped her attitude about ordinary things most take for granted?
 - What insecurities did she have to face in the process of coming to her understanding?
7. Tricia observes that she had to “be an adult as a kid,” making her feel powerless.
 - What logistical obstacles do minors face when addressing everyday activities?
 - What would help students in these situations?

8. Sam laments that she had no one to talk to; no one understood what she was experiencing.
 - What school activities helped her cope?
 - What kept her from becoming fully engaged in her school experience?
9. Tricia expresses a love for school, yet is conflicted about finishing high school.
 - What realities does she grapple with that threaten her plans to finish high school?
 - What resources exist in your district to help students in this situation?
10. Sam says that despite knowing that college is vital, she may have to opt out.
 - What would keep her from pursuing post-secondary education?
 - What help is available for students like Sam?
11. Sam lays out the painful aspects of being homeless, saying “it messes with you.”
 - What everyday struggles does homelessness create?
 - What supports are available for unaccompanied youth in your school/community?
12. Tricia describes the process of “getting stuff” in school, with accompanying embarrassment.
 - What creates her distress about receiving help?
 - What would reduce the stigma?
13. Tricia bristles about being “that homeless girl,” her perception of school officials’ assessment.
 - What might support her opinion?
 - What can be done to avoid conveying this label?
14. Sam unloads her exasperation about feeling stuck, admitting to often breaking down crying.
 - What does her perception of what others think contribute to her anxiety?
 - What experiences in her childhood and teen years affect her outlook?
15. Tricia shares her sense of how people perceive homeless youth.
 - What does she say that captures the general perception of youth on their own?
 - What are the lesser-known reasons that youth might leave home or be kicked out?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

16. What resonated with you as you listened to these sisters share their observations?
17. What happens in your district when dealing with students experiencing homelessness?
18. What can be done in your district to improve supports for students without homes?
19. What is your district doing well to support these students?
20. What conditions in your community contribute to homelessness? To addressing needs?
21. What can be done in classrooms to reduce the stigma and peer pressure on students?
22. What “out of the box” suggestions can you offer to make school better for students without homes?
23. What policy/practice in your school could be changed to accommodate homeless students?
24. What surprised you or otherwise had an impact as you listened to Sam/Tricia?
25. What would you say to Sam and Tricia, or what would you like to ask them?

CREDITS:

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