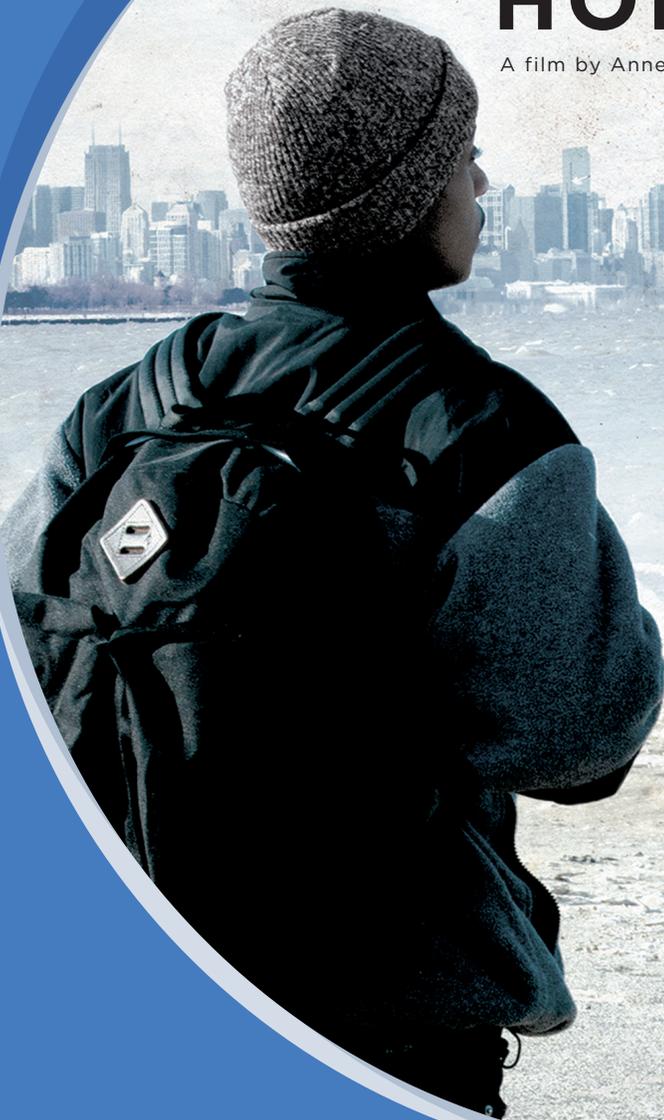


YOUTH ACTION GUIDE

THE HOMESTRETCH

A film by Anne de Mare and Kirsten Kelly



www.pbs.org/independentlens/homestretch



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Part I: Getting Started

About the Film



The Homestretch follows three youths experiencing homelessness as they fight to stay in school, graduate, and build a better future. Each of these resilient teenagers works to complete his or her education while facing the trauma of being alone and abandoned at an early age.

Gaining unprecedented access into the Chicago Public School system, the Night Ministry’s “Crib” Emergency Youth Shelter, and Teen Living Programs, the filmmakers follow these young people as they move through the milestones of high school while searching for a warm place to sleep, a quiet place to study, the privacy to shower. The film goes beyond high school to focus on the crucial transition after graduation, when the structure of school vanishes, a time when youth who experience homelessness usually struggle to find the support and community they need to survive and be independent.

The film portrays the personal and policy issues these young people face, including poverty, immigration, foster care, child custody, and LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, questioning, intersex, asexual) rights. The personal stories of Roque, Kasey, and Anthony bring homelessness and its associated challenges into clear focus.



From the Filmmakers



Anne de Mare

Director/Producer, *The Homestretch*

Five years ago, a high school student that Kirsten was working with on a theater project revealed to her that he was homeless and completely on his own. It was one of those moments in life when everything just stopped—how could this be? He was bright, talented, funny, and ambitious. He was going to school and attending rehearsals. No one would ever guess from the outside that he was homeless. He was facing huge challenges—each night, he didn't know where he was going to go, and he had no one to look after him. He made us really look at what it meant to be a homeless youth and challenge our own preconceived ideas of homelessness in general.

We started talking to teachers and principals and learned that Kirsten's student wasn't alone. At that time, back in 2009, there were almost 15,000 students registered as homeless in the Chicago Public Schools. This was a huge crisis, and no one was talking about it.

So we started spending time with lots and lots of kids who were experiencing homelessness, talking with them about their lives and their dreams and their struggles. Often, they had been thrown out of the house because of their sexual orientation, or were abandoned by parents who were unable emotionally or financially to care for them, or chose to leave because of physical or sexual abuse at home. They opened up a world to us of couch hopping, emergency youth shelters, transitional living homes, and street communities, and we started to understand that school was often the closest thing these kids had to a home.

Each one of the many kids we spent time with is part of this film—their experiences, stories, insight, struggles, and humor are woven deeply into the fabric of *The Homestretch*. But when we found Kasey, Anthony, and Roque, we were blown away by their powerful journeys and knew we had found the center of our film. And they, we soon learned, were eager for the chance to be heard, to let others who are dealing with the incredible obstacles of homelessness know that they aren't alone.



Kirsten Kelly

Director/Producer, *The Homestretch*

Through making this film, we discovered that the number one reason there is not more support for these youth in crisis is the pervasive negative stereotype that the words homeless youth conjure up—that image of the troubled runaway or drug-addicted kid sleeping under the bridge. An image that puts immediate blame on that young person. It's no wonder that young people hide their homelessness and often don't ask for the help they need.

But in reality, we were meeting kids who were on a very different path and who painted a very different picture of what youth homelessness means. We wanted to bring their stories front and center and erase these harmful images, replacing them with something different—something that shows the hard work, resiliency, mad survival skills, smarts, dedication, and struggles the majority of everyday youth face when they try to build a future while being homeless and on their own.

We are honored to be able to tell these stories, and we hope you will walk away from *The Homestretch* with a deeper understanding of youth who are experiencing homelessness and of how we, as a society, can better help support them in their search for a future. We saw how all the kids we met fought hard against harmful stereotypes of homelessness, and as we listened and spent time in their worlds, we saw the surprising ways that they created temporary homes and fly-by-night communities and reached out for support. We were inspired by their search for relationships and deep drive to build a future. We wanted to share their stories and hope you will be moved to help create safe spaces in your school and community for youth to reach out for the support they need.



Featured in the Film



Roque

Roque was brought to the United States by his parents from Mexico at the age of 5. Due to immigration complications, Roque was forced to separate from his family and fend for himself on and off, beginning in his sophomore year of high school. With an unstable family and housing situation, Roque spent several years bouncing around, which took a toll on his grades. After one of his teachers introduced him to Shakespeare and acting, he became inspired to finish high school and apply to college. He has lived with this teacher, Maria Rivera, as part of her family, and with her support, he has enrolled in college. Roque hopes to go into theater and psychology and help others through some of the same challenges he has faced.



Anthony

Anthony spent his childhood in foster homes and had an adoptive father who was physically abusive. He left home at the age of 14. Unable to concentrate on schoolwork, distracted by worries about where he would sleep or whether he would eat, Anthony committed crimes to get what he needed to live and ended up serving some time in a juvenile detention facility. Afterward, he was accepted into the TLP independent living program Clustered and Scattered Site Apartments (CaSSA). He passed his GED test and was accepted into the Year Up Chicago program, where he learned business skills and technical computer skills. He holds on to his dreams and goals and hopes to get legal custody of his young son. A talented poet and rapper and an ambitious young man, Anthony never stops planning and working for success.



Kasey

Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, Kasey experienced episodes of homelessness with her family as a child. After she came out as a lesbian, her family forced her out on her own. Kasey spent more than a year bouncing around between friends and family members and sleeping on the street, ultimately dropping out of high school her senior year. Kasey found a new transitional home—Belfort House, part of Teen Living Programs' (TLP) housing support—and reenrolled in school. But in her new living situation, Kasey still felt her mother's rejection. A talented poet and painter, Kasey continues to receive counseling for her mental health challenges. She has moved into an apartment that is part of a new program for youth experiencing homelessness, and although she continues to look for work, Kasey hopes to go to college.



Featured in the Film



Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) identified more than 22,000 homeless children and youth in the 2013-2014 school year. All public schools in the United States are required to designate a liaison for homeless students, to carry out educational protections and services. Not every school district has a liaison at every school site. However, because of the widespread nature of the crisis, CPS has been driven to take this federal mandate one step further by designating homeless liaisons at every school building. CPS's homeless education program is called "Students in Temporary Living Situations" to decrease the stigma associated with the word homeless and increase the willingness of families and youth to disclose their situations and receive help.



The Crib Emergency Youth Shelter

The Night Ministry has been a national leader in providing housing and conducting street outreach to Chicago's youth experiencing homelessness. It opened the Crib in January 2011 to provide 20 overnight emergency shelter beds for young people aged 18 to 24. During the four-month pilot period, the Crib provided shelter to 138 young people. Encouraged by the Crib's success at building relationships with Chicago's street-based youth, the city of Chicago provided funding for the Night Ministry to operate the program seasonally until 2013, when funding from the city of Chicago and private funders made it possible to operate the program year-round.



Teen Living Programs

Teen Living Programs builds community, hope, and opportunity for youth who are homeless by addressing their immediate needs and helping them transition to adulthood and achieve independence and stable housing. TLP intensively serves more than 500 young people a year through a variety of services that include outreach, prevention, and supportive services, along with three housing programs: a four-bed emergency shelter for minors; the 24-bed Belfort House for transitional living; and CaSSA, 10 apartments for independent living.



How to Use this Guide



Throughout the country, young people are organizing and fighting for better schools, social justice, and the rights of many different communities. These young change makers are partnering with adults, leaders, and organizations to act upon issues that are important to them. They are standing up to policies, laws, and conditions that limit their aspirations and opportunities. Through the power of youth action, communities are changing for the better, and young people are gaining valuable skills and tools to take command of their own futures.

The Homestretch Youth Action Guide is a collection of discussion questions, resources, and activities that will guide and empower you throughout the process of addressing the challenge of youth homelessness. The guide is designed to help you put your ideas into action, so scribble down notes, have discussions with others, and document your journey along the way. Whether you are an individual who feels called to action around the issue of youth homelessness or you are part of a school- or community-based organization, this guide will equip you with the tools you need to be an agent of change.

You and your peers can decide which actions to try and in what order and what you want to share with a wider audience. There are five short film modules that will help you connect to the major themes raised in the film and a lot of additional resources to help you deepen your knowledge on the issue of youth homelessness. From mentoring to digital storytelling and activism, there are suggested actions that draw from common community organizing strategies that have been proven to affect real change.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



RESOURCES



ACTIVITIES



Organizing Strategies Overview

Use the graphic organizer below as a reference for the types of strategies you may wish to employ as you organize around youth homelessness. You can evaluate the goals for your group, decide which strategies are the “best fit,” and plan how you want to use the modules with your peers. Feel free to mix it up!

If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a support system • Connect with positive influences • Gain skills and experience • Network with others
Use this Strategy	Community Collaboration
You will...	Identify and engage with key adults, community members, and organizations that support your cause/well-being.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit programs • Mentors/role models • Positive peer influence • Internships and job experience

If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate others and raise awareness • Create a consistent image and message • Communicate easily digestible information • Establish a visual presence for your cause
Use this Strategy	Informational and Promotional Media
You will...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets, pamphlets, leaflets, flyers, handbills, posters, banners • Stickers, buttons, T-shirts • Slogans, logos, graphics
Examples	Use a variety of tools to design promotional materials to spread the word about the issue.

If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread the word online/establish a web presence • Present information and raise awareness in a dynamic way
Use this Strategy	Digital Activism
You will...	Use digital technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, email, and online petitions to deliver information to a large audience.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online content: infographics, presentations, websites, videos • Using smartphones and other devices • Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram • Change.org



If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness • Inspire • Showcase talent and creativity • Highlight different voices
Use this Strategy	Creative Expression
You will...	Identify and engage with key adults, community members, and organizations that support your cause/well-being.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit programs • Mentors/role models • Positive peer influence • Internships and job experience

If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct outreach to the community • Establish a physical presence • Bring people together • Raise awareness • Educate
Use this Strategy	Community Gathering
You will...	Use creativity and self-expression to record and present voices and perspectives on an issue.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational tabling/booths • Film screenings • Panel discussions • Gallery shows • Trips/tours • Performances • Speeches • Fund-raising events

If you want to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out which politicians and community leaders care about issues that affect young people • Understand what laws already exist to support homeless youth, and what new laws could make a difference
Use this Strategy	Awareness and Action
You will...	Find out what government is doing about the crisis and the changes and legislation that are happening around it.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out who your representatives are on the school board or city council • Learn about how to effectively interact with elected officials with these tips from the National League of Cities • Write an opinion piece for your local newspaper • Have a conversation with your family, friends, teachers, and other people in your life about what you want to change.



Talking About Youth Homelessness: A Few Guidelines



Youth homelessness is a very sensitive issue. Some of your classmates and peers may have been personally affected by this issue, and you will want to make sure that you are being sensitive, aware, and inclusive as you engage with others around this topic.

In partnership with the youth publication [Represent, The New York Times Learning Network](#) provides the following guidelines for talking about youth homelessness, all informed by young people who have been in foster care. Many of them have also been homeless.

- Don't pity children living in shelters or in foster care. They want to fit in, like all kids, not be set apart.
- Don't expect them to represent the entire population of foster youth or children experiencing homelessness. Let each of them be his or her full self.
- Don't make assumptions about their lives. Don't ask questions unless they volunteer that they'd like to share. If you do ask questions, make them open-ended, respectful, and not prying.
- Don't criticize their parents. If you are encouraging homeless children or youth in care to strive for a better life, you don't need to contrast them with their families; you can just emphasize their strengths.

In this guide, you will find the phrase “youth who are experiencing homelessness” instead of “homeless youth.” This choice of words is intentional, as it helps us affirm the humanity of people first, before describing their circumstance. In addition, each individual's experience with homelessness is unique. Rather than conceptualizing youth experiencing homelessness as a homogeneous group, remain sensitive to differences in age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.





Part II: The Issues

Introduction:

Who are Youth Experiencing Homelessness?



For most people, the word *homeless* conjures up an image of a dirty, unkempt person panhandling on a city street or living in a homeless shelter. Although that may describe one category of homeless individuals, the people actually experiencing homelessness often don't fit the urban stereotype and come from many different geographical areas and in all age ranges, from the very youngest to the very old.

DISCUSS:

- What images, words, and/or ideas come to mind when you think of the word homeless? Where do you think these ideas come from?
- What does “home” mean to you? Is it just a shelter? Or does it include people and a feeling of safety?
- What factors do you think lead to a young person becoming homeless?

VIEW:

Film Module 1: The Homestretch: Schools on the Front Lines of Youth Homelessness (TRT: 15 minutes)

Note: This short module has been adapted from material included in the full length documentary *The Homestretch*. For information on how to see the full film, please visit homestretchdoc.com

DISCUSS:

- How are the young people featured in this film module different from your initial perceptions of a “homeless” person?
- How might our perceptions of homelessness impact our willingness to take action? What are some actions you can take to expand your perspective?
- What kinds of services/shelters are available for the young people in the film who are experiencing homelessness? In what ways will those services support youth experiencing homelessness? What seems to be missing, even with those supports?
- What are some challenges, in and out of school, faced by youth who are experiencing homelessness?
- What questions would you ask these young people if you had the opportunity to speak with them about their journeys?
- What do we know about youth homelessness in our school/community? Where can we go to find out more?

LEARN MORE

FURTHER READING:

- **“Invisible Child: Dasani’s Homeless Life”**: In 2013, *The New York Times* featured this powerful five-part series on youth homelessness that seeks to raise awareness about and bring an end to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth experiencing homelessness. Written by Andrea Elliott; photographs by Ruth Fremson.
- **Represent, The New York Times Learning Network**: a blog that captures students’ conversations about the feature article “Invisible Child: Dasani’s Homeless Life”
- **Tyrell, by Coe Booth**: Fifteen-year-old Tyrell, who is living in a Bronx homeless shelter with his spaced-out mother and his younger brother, tries to avoid temptation so he does not end up in jail like his father.
- **The Homestretch Discussion Guide**: a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in the film *The Homestretch*.

LEARN MORE

WEBSITES:

- familyhomelessness.org: The National Center on Family Homelessness website shows how to access “America’s Youngest Outcasts,” a report that ranks the 50 states on how they are addressing child homelessness, from best (1) to worst (50).
- dosomething.org’s **11 Facts about Homeless Teens**: A collection of statistics about youth homelessness from a variety of sources.
- **The National Network for Youth (nn4y.org)**: The nation’s leading organization advocating at the federal level to educate policy makers and the public about the needs of homeless and disconnected youth.
- **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)**: A national organization dedicated to meeting the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- **True Colors Fund**: An organization that seeks to raise awareness about and bring an end to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth experiencing homelessness.

FURTHER VIEWING:

- ***Invisible: Diaries of New York’s Homeless Youth***: This mini-documentary provides an inside look at five American youths who are homeless, but fall outside standard definitions of homelessness.
- ***The Break***: This MTV documentary shines a spotlight on youth homelessness through the stories of three young people who refuse to give in to the despair and overwhelming weight that landing on the outskirts of society has placed on them.
- **Rethink Homelessness – Cardboard Stories**: An advocacy campaign that asked individuals experiencing homelessness to write down a fact about themselves that other people wouldn’t know just by walking past them. Their answers may surprise you!
- **The Homestretch Discussion Guide**: a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in the film ***The Homestretch***, including background on undocumented and unaccompanied homeless youth.



Immigration Issues

For some youth, homelessness occurs when an undocumented parent is deported and the remaining parent is unable to provide housing or there is no remaining parent. As with Roque in *The Homestretch*, parents and children often separate in the hope that being apart will help one or the other (usually the parent) to avoid deportation. As a consequence, the unaccompanied youth is left on his or her own, with nowhere to live. Roque's story illustrates that youth who experience homelessness and who lack lawful immigration status endure particular pressures, including challenges in enrolling in college and navigating financial aid.

VIEW:

Film Module 2: The Homestretch: Introducing Roque (5 minutes)

Note: This short module has been adapted from material included in the full length documentary *The Homestretch*. For information on how to see the full film, please visit homestretchdoc.com

DISCUSS:

- What personal strengths do you see in Roque that could help him become a successful adult?
- Maria Rivera, Roque's teacher, said she couldn't just sit back and do nothing when she saw behavior from Roque that suggested he was experiencing homelessness. What influenced her to act? What factors did she consider before helping? Why might some people hesitate to reach out to youth who they see are experiencing difficulties?
- What are some ways we can show support for our peers who we think are experiencing difficulties that may be sensitive and personal?
- How did having the support of an adult help Roque in his final year of high school? What were the emotional and tangible supports he received?
- What role should the government play in caring for undocumented youth experiencing homelessness?

LEARN MORE

FURTHER READING:

- **"Far from Family, Alone, Homeless and Still Just 18":** *This New York Times* article tells the story of Jorge and Oscar, both 18, who met in a homeless shelter on Chicago's Northwest Side after escaping turmoil in their home countries.
- **"Homeless Students Exist in Every School. Is This the Year We Support Them?":** An article contributed to The Huffington Post by Roque's teacher and advocate, Maria Rivera.

WEBSITES:

Immigrant Services Directory: Public Resources for Intake Referrals: This guide from the American Civil Liberties Union outlines available resources, contact information, and referral processes for those seeking assistance for immigrant children and youth. The guide is organized by state.

FURTHER VIEWING:

- ***Inocente*:** This short documentary film tells the story of a talented 15-year-old Latina who, as an undocumented homeless immigrant, fiercely pursues her dream of becoming an artist.
- ***Living Undocumented*:** This documentary, directed by Tatyana Kleyn, explores the lives of diverse undocumented immigrant youth to illustrate the realities, challenges, and opportunities they face through high school, college, and beyond.
- ***The Graduates*:** This documentary portrays the challenges faced by six young Latinos struggling to graduate from high school. This youth action guide includes a module that features Gustavo, an undocumented student who overcomes legal barriers to make it to college.



Foster Care and Juvenile Justice



VIEW:

- [Film Module 3: The Homestretch: Introducing Anthony](#) (5 minutes)

Note: This short module has been adapted from material included in the full length documentary *The Homestretch*. For information on how to see the full film, please visit homestretchdoc.com

DISCUSS:

- What personal strengths do you see in Anthony that could help him become a successful adult?
- What societal issues have contributed to Anthony's circumstance? What might have been done to mitigate situation? Did the system fail Anthony? If so, how?
- How have Anthony's experiences with the juvenile justice system affected his schooling and stability in life?
- How well does our juvenile justice system handle youth experiencing homelessness? Are there alternatives to a punitive juvenile justice system?
- Up to one-third of youth aging out of foster care experience homelessness. What characteristics and supports might help a young person as they age out of foster care?
- What types of services and programs do you think Anthony needs in order to prepare for independence and custody of his son? Do these kinds of services exist in our community?

LEARN MORE

FURTHER READING:

- ["Sliding into Homelessness": A Student Essay and Teaching Resources:](#) These learning resources from *The New York Times* Learning Network feature an essay by a student, Zakkiaya Bowen, detailing her experiences with homelessness after leaving foster care.
- [Represent:](#) The youth-written stories in this magazine provide inspiration and information to teens in foster care while offering insight into those teens' struggles.
- [The Homestretch Discussion Guide:](#) a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in the film *The Homestretch*, including background on foster care and homelessness.

WEBSITES:

- [FosterClub:](#) FosterClub empowers young people to share their stories, which leads to policy changes that improve educational opportunities and stability for foster youth.
- [Coalition for Juvenile Justice:](#) The Coalition for Juvenile Justice places a high priority on youth involvement in juvenile justice reform. The youth voice is vital to CJJ's mission and the organization has several events, projects, resources, and opportunities that aim to engage youth.

FURTHER VIEWING:

- [Aging Out:](#) This PBS documentary highlights the challenges faced by youth who must go out on their own after aging out of foster care.

Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity: Family Rejection of LGBT Youth



VIEW:

- [Film Module 4: The Homestretch: Introducing Kasey](#) (5 minutes)
- [Film Module 5: The Homestretch: Focus on LGBT Issues and Youth Homelessness](#) (15 minutes)

Note: These short modules have been adapted from material filmed for the full length documentary *The Homestretch*. Film Module 4 is a brief introduction to Kasey and some of the issues she faces as an LGBT youth experiencing homelessness. Film Module 5 examines why there is a disproportionate number of LGBT youth who are homeless (and includes Kasey's story along with several other's stories). For information on how to see the full film, please visit www.homestretchdoc.com.

DISCUSS:

- Kasey has a unique experience with homelessness. Both her mother and her grandmother kicked her out of her home for being a lesbian. What additional issues might Kasey face while she searches for homelessness services and independent housing and also attends school?
- What personal strengths do you see in Kasey that could help her become a successful adult? What supports may be provided for Kasey to achieve these successes?
- What challenges did Kasey face with finishing school? Why is it important to ensure that students in these situations are able to stay in school?
- What makes a family? Is a family strictly biological or can a family be "chosen"? What kind of support can a "chosen family" provide to young people rejected by their biological family because of their sexuality?
- Is homelessness just a matter of not having a place to live? Based on what you saw in *The Homestretch*, which other issues need to be addressed in order to adequately care for youth like Kasey who are experiencing homelessness?
- Is our school/community a safe place for students who identify as homeless?

LEARN MORE

FURTHER READING:

- [Young, Gay, and Homeless: Fighting for Resources](#): This NPR segment follows staff of New York City's Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project as they go to the Christopher Street Pier to distribute snacks and information to some of the city's 3,800 youth experiencing homelessness.
- [Serving Our Youth](#): This 2012 survey assesses the experiences of organizations that provide services to LGBT youth experiencing homelessness.
- [The Homestretch Discussion Guide](#): a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in the film *The Homestretch*.

WEBSITES:

- [Ali Forney Center](#): This organization's mission is to protect LGBTQ youth from the harms of homelessness and to empower them with the tools needed to live independently. They provide LGBTQ young people with housing and a continuum of supportive services to help them thrive and prepare for independent living.
- [Transgender Housing Network](#): Online clearinghouse of available housing options throughout the United States, including couches, apartments, shelters, and other resources.
- [True Colors Fund](#): Seeks to raise awareness about and bring an end to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth experiencing homelessness.

FURTHER VIEWING:

[Lost in the Crowd](#): This documentary follows a group of LGBT (mostly transgender) youth living homeless on the streets of New York City. Shot over eight years, the film reveals not only the many trials they must face in their fight to survive in a world that is hostile to their very existence, but also the dreams and desires that keep them going.



**Part III:
Take Action!**

Take Action!



You've watched the modules, discussed thought-provoking questions, and deepened your understanding of the complex issues raised in **The Homestretch**. Are you ready to take action? Try one or more of these actions to support young people experiencing homelessness in your own school and community:

Action	Partner with your school's or school district's homeless liaison.
Organizing Strategy	Community Collaboration
You could...	Make contact with your school's or school district's homeless liaison, and inquire if there is anything your group/school can do to be of service to youth experiencing homelessness.
Resources	Many states have online tools for locating homeless liaisons. Conduct a Google search that contains "name of your state" + "homeless liaison."

Action	Map youth homelessness in your community.
Organizing Strategy	Digital Activism
You could...	Use the Map Your World platform as a tool to learn more about and document issues of youth homelessness in your own community. You can use the Map Your World Guidebooks to design surveys to learn more about the resources (or the lack of resources) for youth experiencing homelessness, then map the data to create an action plan to bring about change and awareness.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map Your World platform • Map Your World Guidebook • Map Your World Curriculum

Action	Help to improve your school climate for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression
Organizing Strategy	Community Collaboration
You could...	Start a gay-straight alliance (GSA) to help make your school safer and more inclusive for all students. Also consider partnering with your school's/school district's homeless liaison to refer LGBTQ-identified young people who are experiencing homelessness to the GSA so that they have a safe space to talk about the various issues they face.
Resources	Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

Action	Volunteer!
Organizing Strategy	Community Collaboration
You could...	Locate organizations in your community that serve youth experiencing homelessness and offer your time or talents to help their cause.
Resources	To find a local program in your area, visit acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/grants/fysb-grantees .

Action	Host a drive
Organizing Strategy	Community Collaboration
You could...	Find out which items young people experiencing homelessness need most (they might not be what you think!) and take up a collection. Work with your school or a local organization to distribute the items.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Care: Host a Drive to Collect Critical Supplies • DoSomething.org: Teens for Jeans

Action	Post flyers throughout your community.
Organizing Strategy	Informational and Promotional Media
You could...	Design and post flyers with information on where and how youth experiencing homelessness can get help.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoSomething.org Flyer Away campaign • Canva Flyer Maker

Action	Capture the voices of youth experiencing homelessness
Organizing Strategy	Creative Expression, Community Collaboration
You could...	<p>Using StoryCorps U pieces as inspiration, design a project that captures the voices of young people experiencing homelessness in your community and their adult mentors. After spending time engaging around the questions and discussions in this youth action guide, you may discover stories about youth homelessness right in your community that need to be told!</p> <p>Have young people write stories for your school newspaper about gender identity/sexual orientation as well as homelessness. Contact your local PBS station and ask if there are opportunities to share these stories with their viewers.</p>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aaron and Celeste Davis-Carr • Other stories about homelessness • WNYC's Radio Rookie stories about youth experiencing homelessness • 40 of the Forty: Stories of 40 LGBT-identified youth who have experiences with homelessness • StoryCorps App • PBS Station Finder

Action	Share the film with your school or community.
Organizing Strategy	Community Gathering
You could...	Host a screening at your school or at a community center and invite speakers, panelists, or discussion leaders who would be willing to talk about the issues raised in the film.
Resources	The Homestretch Community Cinema Discussion Guide Request a screening of <i>The Homestretch</i> via homestretch@kartemquin.com .

Action	Publish an article.
Organizing Strategy	Informational and Promotional Media
You could...	Research youth homelessness in your community and write an article for your school or local newspaper.
Resources	Read Write Think Printing Press

Action	Learn more about the issues.
Organizing Strategy	Awareness and Action
You could...	Research where your federal representatives stand on advocating for housing and services for youth experiencing homelessness. Learn more about how you can get involved in letting them know these issues are a priority in your community.
Resources	The National Network for Youth Action Center



Gather inspiration from these young people who are working together to donate their time, resources, and supplies to make an impact.

TEENS FOR JEANS

For the seventh year, clothing store Aéropostale and DoSomething.org, the largest not-for-profit organization for young people and social change, have hosted their **Teens for Jeans** campaign, collecting pairs of jeans for youth experiencing homelessness. The store teams work with their local communities and the more than 10,000 schools that register to hold jeans drives.

According to DoSomething.org, “Members in more than 13,000 schools ran gently used jeans drives and dropped the jeans at their local Aéropostale store. Store employees then delivered the jeans to a nearby charity or homeless shelter. Over the past seven years, Teens for Jeans has collected more than 4.3 million pairs of jeans for young people in need.” All jeans collected were donated directly to more than 1,000 homeless shelters and charities in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

MILEY CYRUS URGES LAWMAKERS TO GRANT MORE FUNDS FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

In March 2015, 22-year-old singer Miley Cyrus wrote a [letter](#) to New York’s Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie urging them to increase funding to help youth experiencing homelessness.

In the letter, Cyrus endorses a proposal initiated by Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan), the political advocacy group Empire State Pride Agenda, and the nonprofit organization Coalition for Homeless Youth, which calls for \$4.75 million for youth experiencing homelessness in the state’s budget.

In the letter, she writes, “These young people are homeless through no fault of their own. They’ve been kicked out of their homes or are fleeing abusive parents. And too often they’re forced into dangerous situations just to find a place to sleep.

“But it doesn’t have to be like this, and there’s a clear way to make an impact right now: more funding for homeless youth shelter beds.”

Senator Hoylman [voiced his thanks](#) for Cyrus’s support via Twitter.

DECATUR HIGH SCHOOL GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE

Working in collaboration with the Atlanta Coalition for LGBTQ Youth, the Decatur High School GSA developed an LGBTQ Homeless Youth fact sheet and created the first queer prom open to high school students in Atlanta.

In 2014, the group was nominated for LogoTV’s Young Trailblazers Youth Group award, which honors youth groups that are making major strides in their hometowns and communities. You can watch the 2014 [Logo Trailblazers awards show here](#).



Planning Guide¹

Use or adapt these planning guides for step-by-step support for your action.

OUR ACTION PLAN

Having a plan in place will increase your chances of executing a successful action. Answer the questions below to clarify your action plan.

What component of homelessness do we want to address?	
How are other groups or organizations in our school or community working on issues of youth homelessness?	
How much time do we have to commit to this effort?	
What type of action do we want to accomplish? What is the goal of our action?	
What is our “ask”? What do we want people to do?	
What resources do we have?	
What resources do we need?	
Who supports us? How can we involve our allies in this action?	

¹Adapted from Legacy Youth Activism: A Toolkit for Fighting Tobacco Use in Schools and Communities

WHAT, WHEN, WHO, WHY, AND HOW

By breaking the project into smaller pieces and assigning and scheduling tasks, you can greatly increase your chances of achieving the goals you set for your action.

TASK	
What needs to be done?	
WHO	
Who will complete the task?	
WHEN	
When will the task be completed?	
RESOURCES	
What resources are needed?	
CHALLENGES	
What are the potential roadblocks?	
SOLUTIONS	
How can we address these challenges?	

ACTION EVALUATION

As your project wraps up, consider the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of your efforts. Reviewing what worked—and what didn't—can help your future efforts be even more successful.

How did your action change your community or school?	
Were there any unintended outcomes?	
What were the most successful elements of your action?	
What lessons did you learn? What would you do differently now?	
How can you build on the work you've done so far?	
What can you share with other groups and organizations to help their efforts?	

Share Your Action!

Remember, others can learn from your challenges as well as your successes! However you choose to take action, tell us about it at: homestretchdoc.com/youth-stories

Credits

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Tracee Worley is an instructional designer who loves to design student-centered learning experiences. Her work helps students and educators use the design process to develop tools and resources that promote innovation and creativity.

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Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds, presents, and promotes award-winning documentaries on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Monday nights at 10 pm on PBS. Mandated by Congress in 1988 and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, ITVS has brought thousands of independently produced programs to American audiences. Learn more at itvs.org.

INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10 pm. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation at facebook.com/independentlens and [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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