

# FACES OF HOMELESSNESS PANEL

## WHAT IS A FACES PANEL?

A Faces Panel provides an opportunity for dialogue between individuals who have experienced homelessness with those who want to learn more about homelessness. The Panel members speak about their experiences and answer questions from the audience. <http://nationalhomeless.org/about-us/projects/faces/>

## WHY HOST A FACES PANEL?

The Faces Panel makes a very powerful impact on those who attend. People are provided with a personal connection to the homeless statistics that they have heard. Myths can be dispelled and stereotypes can be broken down as the audience gets a chance to interact with homeless people. Audience members can listen to the perspectives and stories of those who are homeless and hear their ideas for solutions to hunger and homelessness issues.

## TIPS FOR RECRUITING HOMELESS PEOPLE AS SPEAKERS

- If you know homeless people who would like to speak, ask them directly.
- Send letters to/call your local shelters asking them if someone from their shelter would like to speak.
- Make sure to arrange transportation for your speakers; this can include giving them bus/cab fare or simply picking them up. Sometimes the shelter will assign a staff member/volunteer to transport the client to and from the event.
- Make sure to contact the shelter and inform them that a resident will be speaking on your campus, and ensure that the speaker(s) will not lose their beds for the night if they return late.
- Be sure to compensate the speakers with an honorarium: \$50 is a suggested amount for local speakers, but feel free to give more.
- Invite the speakers to eat in your school cafeteria before the event.

## OTHER

- Make sure to get the community and campus media to cover the event. Consider videotaping the panel.
- To get the speakers started, meet with them beforehand and ask that they address the following in their presentations: if they are formerly homeless — what their life was like before homelessness, what their life was like while they were homeless, what brought them out of homelessness, and what their life is currently like. If the speakers are currently homeless, have them share what their life was like before homelessness, what it is like to be homeless, and what their hopes and dreams are for the future. Ideally, each speaker should talk for 10-15 minutes.

- Take questions from the floor. Let the audience know that there is no question that is off-limits. You should mention that some speakers may get a little emotional if posed with certain questions. Expect tears when people are asked about their contact/relationships with family. Francine, a speaker for the National Coalition for the Homeless, invited a student to give her a hug after the student said, with tears running down her face, that she was sorry that her mother gave her the wrong perception of homeless people. Another speaker, John, wrote a song about being homeless and not one eye in a room was dry after it was performed.
- Obtain a moderator to introduce the speakers. This moderator should be someone that knows about homelessness on a local or national level. It can be a student homeless activist. It is sometimes hard for homeless people to relate to people with homes, and vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary for the moderator to act as a bridge between the two. The moderator can also interject statistics and other important information in between the stories of the speakers. Generally, the moderator is a local advocate/student who is working on homelessness issues.
- It's good to get a few "success stories" of people who are no longer homeless, as well as stories of people who are currently homeless. If you contact the shelter, you need to make follow-up calls to make sure the speakers will come. Sometimes shelters are not willing to let their clients speak. Shelters that house women fleeing domestic abuse, families, or youth, often want their clients to concentrate on their own problems and are sometimes protective. If possible, organize a diverse group of speakers (age, race, sex, homeless/formerly homeless).

For more information, contact with the National Coalition for the Homeless at (202) 462-4822 or [speakersbureau@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:speakersbureau@nationalhomeless.org).