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Grayslake North Students Sleep Outside to Raise Homeless Awareness

Prior to the kick-off of their school food drive this week, nearly 40 GNHS Juniors and seniors spent the cold and rainy night of Oct. 25 sleeping outside to raise awareness of homelessness in Lake County.

Posted by [Angela Sykora](#) (Editor) , November 04, 2012 at 09:47 PM

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Only hours before 37 Grayslake North High School students spent the night of Oct. 25 sleeping in cardboard boxes or on garbage bags on the ground, the temperature was in the 70s.

By nightfall, however, conditions were cold and wet from spotty rain showers and the temperature had plunged at least 30 degrees.

"You're not going to get a good night's sleep," teacher Chris Kubic advised his students.

It was for the best, though, said senior Emily Pahl. "We were expecting the night to be warm, but it's better this way because it will make the experience more real."

For the sixth year, students enrolled in the Public Service Practicum classes of teachers Chris Kubic, Courtney Meyer and Emily Weiss slept outdoors overnight to experience what it might be like to be homeless, even for one long night, and to raise awareness of homelessness in the city and the suburbs.

"It is a valuable experience for students to challenge their own perceptions of what it means to not have stable housing," said teacher Emily Weiss.

In Lake County, over 50,000 people are living in poverty. This includes 7 percent of Lake County's children, according to statistics from the [Heartland Alliance](#) and the [Northern Illinois Food Bank](#).

"Our students see this as an opportunity to take a walk in someone else's shoes, even if it is just for one night," said Weiss. "It is their hope that it will bring more attention to the hardships that people are facing today and the importance of working together to help those most in need in our community."

'She could be me'

Senior Sunny Muehleman, who spent last summer aiding the homeless in Atlanta and helps her church feed and shelter the homeless, said she is always affected by seeing homeless her own age.

"It's hard to see someone who looks like you and could go to your school."

Before their homeless experiment, the students met in a classroom to share information and statistics about homelessness, particularly in Lake County.

"I was incredibly surprised that most homeless in Lake County are children," said Pahl.

Senior Sam Meehan said it made him sad to know approximately 19 percent of homeless people in Chicago and the suburbs (according to the [Regional Roundtable on Homelessness](#) and the Homeless Needs Assessment Project. See attached PDF) are military veterans.

"It's not right when they served our country," he said.

Meehan chose not to sleep in a cardboard box for the students' homeless project. Being a Boy Scout, he said he would be warmer right on the ground.

"All I have are garbage bags," he said.

Senior Andrew Cantor and some of his friends also chose not to use a box, to make the experience as authentic as they could.

"You assume homeless people always have boxes (or something else to sleep on). We thought, why not face the hardest conditions we can?"

Junior Caitlin Sesko, who is deaf, communicated through sign language that she was prepared for "a difficult night without much sleep."

To be deaf and homeless, she said, would make things even harder.

"It would be more dangerous because you wouldn't know what's going on around you."

To add to the realism of the experiment, Kubic said Grayslake Police would come by in the early morning hours, when the students were asleep, to rouse them, ask for identification and tell them they had to move to the other side of the courtyard.

Patch asked participating students to share their reflections on the homeless experiment after it was over. Here's what they had to say:

"After spending the night in the cold and miserable box, I realized that actual homeless people go through a lot and we take what we have for granted. I am thankful that I have a snuggie to curl up with in the cold harsh winters," said **Danielle Wolter**.

"I have more respect for people that are homeless because they have to go through a lot and they must be really strong. It was a really eye-opening experience and I would never want to be in that situation," said **Hayley Mack**.

"I feel like it is an experience that everyone should have once in their life just to see what other people have to go through. I feel like I came out a better person. It was definitely eye-opening and I didn't think that I would be that bad but once you're out there you realize that it's pretty cold," **Tommy Nettleton**.

"This was my second time doing it and I still feel thankful for what I have. It really taught me both times to never take anything that I have for granted because it could all be taken away in the snap of a finger. I don't wish homelessness upon anyone and I hope that we can make a big impact in the lives of the homeless in our community," said **Hailey Friedle**.

"Even though the conditions were tough, we never will actually understand what homeless people go through because it was only one night. I can't even imagine what they go through because even with my North Face jacket and five blankets, I was still freezing and woke up almost every twenty minutes," said **Jaelyn Brennan**.

"After sleeping outside in a cardboard box, it opened my eyes to what homeless people endure on a daily basis. It exposed me to the difficulties and the harsh weather conditions that homeless people must face. One thing I learned is that people have a mental image of what a homeless person is. People assume that all homeless people use drugs, sleep outside in boxes and don't have jobs. In reality, every homeless person has their own story and it is PSP's goal to eliminate the stereotypes," said **Jenny Sparks**.

"It was really cold and I'm really thankful for everything I have," said **Kaila Wren**.

"That night, I realized the true importance of all of the people working to eliminate homelessness. As I slept outside, it was a good feeling to know that other homeless people had a warm place to stay at the PADS shelters. What I didn't realize before was how helpful the PADS shelters are to people in need," said **Sunny Muehleman**.

"I slept without a box on the ground because not all homeless people have boxes to sleep in. Not everyone realizes how lucky they are to have a roof over their heads. A lot of people say they understand, but no one truly understands until they actually experience being homeless," said **Danny Mateling**.

Food Drive

Students at Grayslake North kick off their annual food drive this week. Inspired by their night in a box, they hope to set a new record for the amount of food collected this year, said Weiss.

This week, donation bags will be dropped off at every household in the district.

Non-perishable food item donations may also be made by contacting teacher Emily Weiss at (847) 986-3100 ext. 5526.

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