Homelessness: Facts/Fiction

Facts:

1. On any given night in America, anywhere from 700,000 to 2 million people are homeless.
2. On average, one out every fifty students is homeless.
3. Statistics are lower than actuality because they cannot account for ‘the hidden homeless.’
4. Single men comprise 44 percent of the homeless population.
5. Single women comprise 13 percent of the homeless population.
6. Families with children comprise 36 percent of the homeless population.
7. Unaccompanied minors comprise 7 percent of the homeless population.
8. Most statistics on homelessness are low because of the ‘hidden homeless.’
9. Homelessness can happen to everyday people.
10. Being ‘doubled-up’ with family/friends because a family lost their housing is homelessness.
11. Federal and state law override school and district policies where homeless children are concerned.
12. The McKinney-Vento Act requires States to implement a number of measures to eliminate enrollment barriers faced by homeless children and youth.
13. The right to choose to go to the school of origin (where students attended prior to homelessness or student last attended) or to the school where student is now staying is up to the homeless family/youth.
14. Homeless students have the right to remain in their school of choice for the length of homelessness and may finish the school year at that school even if they become permanently housed for before the end of the school year.
15. Transportation to the school of origin must be provided if needed. Cross-district transportation arrangements and cost are arranged between involved districts.
16. “Immediate enrollment” means enrolled and attending without delay. Schools are responsible for acquiring school records/IEP plans, or for referring the student to free/low cost physicals. Fees are automatically waived and homeless students qualify for school lunch/breakfast programs.
17. Requiring proof of residency, a barrier for homeless students’ enrollment, is illegal. The school may not require leases, bills, or other proofs often required for ordinary enrollment.
18. “Unaccompanied youth” in homeless situations (teens not if physical custody of a parent or guardian, including runaway youth) have all the rights of other homeless students, and the right to be immediately enrolled on their own without proof of guardianship or signatures/permission of parents, of proof of ‘emancipated minor’ status.
19. All youth have a right to enroll in or attend school beyond age 18 if they will be able to graduate by the age of 21.
20. Homeless pre-school age children have the right to be assessed for the need for preschool programs.
21. Homeless preschoolers have the same rights as other homeless children.
22. Until the 1980s, the American homeless population was comprised mainly of older males.
23. A 25-city survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1987 found that families with children constitute the fastest growing segment of the homeless population (House of Representatives, 1987).
24. Recently, foreclosures have increased the number of people who experience homelessness.
25. Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.
26. Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many workers: in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.
27. In the 2008 report, eleven out of nineteen cities reported an increased in employed homeless people.

Myths:

1. Only ‘experts’ in the field (i.e. social workers) can help those who are homeless.
2. Most people who are homeless are in this situation because they are lazy or lack job skills.
3. By working for minimum wage, one will be living above the poverty line.
4. One only needs to get a job in order to avoid homelessness.
5. Most homeless people suffer from some sort of mental disability or drug addiction.
6. There are plenty of beds and shelters available to help those without a home.
7. Statistics on the number of people who are homeless are very accurate.
8. There is no way to end homelessness.
9. Homeless people look different than other people because they are always dirty, tired, and hungry.
10. Homelessness is only a problem in urban communities.
11. There are a substantial number of ‘low income’ rental units available for those who cannot to purchase a home or pay higher rent.
12. Nobody ever has to be homeless; people are homeless by choice
13. Homeless people are dangerous.
14. Providing food and shelter only enables people to remain homeless.
15. Homelessness will never happen to me.
16. Homelessness exists because of poor choices made by the people who are in that situation.
17. Only money, food, shelter, or clothing can help a homeless person.