"Why don't you go home to your parents?"

Often having personal experiences of homes that we can go back to when things get bad, it is easy to wonder why young people don’t go home. *If things are really that bad, why don’t you make up with your parents, go back to your home city/state, or just stick it out with them until you’re on your feet?*

Take some time to discuss with your group and think about what might influence someone’s ability or desire to go home.

Questions to get help you started: What might be difficult about going back to a family situation? What may influence someone's ability to go home?
Thanks for taking the time to imagine/discuss with us. Below are some reflections from our work as well as some data to help give context to the questions asked above.

- Many young people are coming from families who have experienced generational poverty. Their parents may be homeless or very low income, which means they may not have their own place to share with their child and/or may not have financial ability to support a kid coming home.
- 32% of unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness under the age of 25 have a history of being in foster care. Many young people tell stories of bouncing around from home to home throughout their childhood and eventually aging out of the foster system into homelessness and/or very unstable housing. *
- 34% of unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+. We hear from many young people that their families have disowned them or kicked them out for “coming out” or wanting to transition. This makes going home pretty impossible when the reason for being kicked out is due to their gender or sexual identity. *
- 24% of youth & young adults experiencing homelessness because homeless because of an argument with family or friends who asked them to leave OR had family or friends who wouldn’t let them stay. Many times, young people come through our doors with histories of family conflict, and too often, of abuse and neglect from the homes they had been staying in. *
- Sometimes, we may hear young people saying they chose to leave home. Theoretically, this could be considered a choice. Yet, if we think about what would make someone choose to forgo their warm home inside to stay out in the cold on their own, we can guess that the option of being at home must not feel that safe.

"You just need to work harder; pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

American society has lived by the phrase “pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” implying that if you just work hard enough, you can get to the same place as everyone else in society. It is easy to believe that a young person's experience of homelessness is ultimately due only to their choices. This type of thinking tends to lead toward a view that people experiencing homelessness are lazy or deficient.

Take some time to discuss with your group and think about why working harder might not be enough given different societal factors?

Questions to get help you started:
What are some factors that make the playing field not so level? Why might it be more difficult for some people to get a job or get housing?
Thanks for taking the time to imagine/discuss with us. Below are a couple reflections from recent data about systemic impacts on homelessness.

- There are many barriers for young people experiencing homelessness that go beyond their personal choices, including institutional racism, classism, and homophobia.
- In 2019, the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness in Seattle/King County identified as people of color. When compared to the racial demographics of the county’s general population, the largest disparities were observed among those identifying as Black or African American (32% in the Point-in-Time Count compared to 6% in the general King County population), Hispanic or Latino (15% compared to 10%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (10% compared to <1%). *
- Minority renters are told about and shown fewer homes and apartments than equally qualified whites. Black renters who contact agents about recently advertised housing units learn about 11.4 percent fewer available units than equally qualified whites and are shown 4.2 percent fewer units. Hispanic renters learn about 12.5 percent fewer available units than equally qualified whites and are shown 7.5 percent fewer units. Asian renters learn about 9.8 percent fewer available units than equally qualified whites and are shown 6.6 percent fewer units. ***
- African American youth are especially overrepresented in homeless populations, with an 83% increased risk of having experienced homelessness over youth of other races. Disproportionality of homelessness experiences among black youth mirrors racial disparities documented elsewhere, for example in school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement. **
- Hispanic youth compromised 33% of 18-25-year-olds reporting homelessness, compared to 25% of young adults not experiencing homelessness. **
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth had a 120% increased risk of experiencing homelessness compared to youth who identified as heterosexual and cisgender. **
- When applying for housing, factors such as the following can mean that landlords will not rent to you: eviction history, lack of rental history (if you are 18 and first applying for housing), criminal history (black and brown folks are overrepresented in jails), low credit score (you may not have had loans or a credit card), lack of a social security number (if you are here legally, but still in immigration proceedings). These factors particularly impact people of color and those who are already poor, making it very difficult to get back into housing once you lose it.